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Research



THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

VIEWS FROM THE
CLASSROOM

Edited by
Edison Huynh

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CONTENTS

1. Civics education in an age of mobility by Will Kymlicka: Reflections by Jonathan Booth.....	3
2. Character education and the problems of morality by Emma Worley: Reflections by Daniel Miracapillo	5
3. Technology and creativity: Are you the maker or the tool? by Martin Robinson: Reflections by Jashu Vekaria.....	6
4. The rise of big data by Professor Sir Nigel Shadbolt, FRS FREng: Reflections by Sam Alner	7
5. Cognitive neuroscience and its implications for education by Fiona Walker: Reflections by Clare Sarson.....	9
6. The only way is forwards: The need for bold leadership in troubling times by Liz Robinson: Reflections by Heather Stannard	10
7. Success in the 21st century: The education of head, heart and hand by Peter Hyman: Reflections by Ian Latter	12
9. Education for a healthy democracy by Jeremy Gilbert: Reflections by Imran Iqbal	13
10. The Asian Century and the role of education in post-Brexit Britain by Dr Winnie King: Reflections by Julie Bloor	15

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1. CIVICS EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF MOBILITY

by Will Kymlicka

Reflections by JONATHAN BOOTH

While Professor Kymlicka raises valid criticisms of how citizenship education is envisaged, it is difficult to reconcile some of his ideas to classroom practice. Relying on ‘a cosmopolitan ethic of respect for humanity’ is too abstract for children. As a primary teacher in a socially and economically-deprived part of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, getting some of my children to think about life beyond a few local shops is difficult. They do, however, still form deep bonds of identity, and it is up to us as teachers to extend these bonds further.

Citizenship is not merely a module for articulate teenagers; it begins with babblers in a nursery and is the basics of social interaction – ‘getting along with one another’. It expands slowly, from classroom identity, then local identity, and beyond from tangible communities to imagined ones, from the neighbourhood to the nation-state. Throughout this process, children must be taught to think inclusively, while being rooted in an understanding of who *they* are.

In my class, we initially focussed on the class itself, explicitly teaching that out of 30 very different children, there is one unit that we all represent and want to do proud. From there, we can represent the school, and then our area. Gradually, this builds the foundations on which pupils can begin to tackle issues such as racism, and provides the prism through which to ask questions like: ‘How would you feel if someone didn’t want to come to our city because they thought Geordies were racist?’ We can discuss the varying values, shibboleths, and most importantly fluid plurality within such units, how these things came about and have changed over time, and focus on what joins us together, extending cultural norms and ensuring inclusivity.

In contrast, human rights as a concept is not tied to any concrete identity at all, nor one with any narrative for a child to latch onto, or a common culture for them to identify with. Throwing national identity asunder is difficult when children initially struggle to place themselves as even being from a particular city, never mind understanding themselves as world citizens.

In my experience, teaching inclusivity within communities is possible even with temporary visitors and refugees who arrive with no English. Teaching local and national identity is about saying to all those here that their neighbourhood is theirs, the local football team is theirs, the culture of this country is theirs. While we may differ to those from places near or far, we can still respect these differences and learn from one another.

Involving children as part of an imagined community, but one in which they can place themselves linguistically, culturally, and socially, gives them a sense of community cohesion and collective responsibility. It teaches them that values and beliefs aren’t plucked from thin air, but evolve slowly over time, hence the differences between cultures, both historically and internationally. How else can we explore abuses along lines of race, gender, or sexuality?

Teachers must begin with the immediately local and then extend to the national. To my mind, this is cosmopolitan and multicultural, but is also part of a narrative

that is meaningful to children. Ridding ‘membership’ doesn’t make children world citizens – it leaves them without a people or a home. Without a strong foundation of identity, children may grow up unable to understand themselves. Without that, they cannot learn to understand and respect others.

Jonathan Booth is a newly qualified teacher at Thomas Walling Primary School in Newcastle. He teaches year 5 pupils aged 9–10.

2. CHARACTER EDUCATION AND THE PROBLEMS OF MORALITY *by Emma Worley*

Reflections by DANIEL MIRACAPILLO

In my experience of running Philosophical Enquiry (PhiE) lessons as a primary school teacher, I cannot fail to be amazed at the enjoyment and participation of children in discussing complex and delicate ethical issues, ranging from rights and responsibilities to identity and migration. Students are empowered to become thoughtful and responsible agents of choice, rather than passive receivers of beliefs. I have witnessed children learning to articulate their individual voice while respectfully – even during impassioned debates – allowing others to modulate it with theirs, creating an intimately personal yet plural, deeper understanding.

Crucial to this process is the ownership of insight – reached both individually and collectively through carefully constructed philosophical enquiries. The children respond with great enthusiasm when challenged to investigate thorny moral quandaries. They relish the opportunity to argue their personal view before their friends, having the chance to express their voice and feeling it valued by their immediate community of peers.

Children are generally not reluctant to problematise ethical dilemmas, as they enjoy presenting their point of view – an almost natural right and entitlement they feel they possess as human beings. We might see in this a budding moral imperative and duty to engage in exploring right and wrong, rules, values and choices.

The ownership of insight can be exhilarating for children, particularly when they end up changing their initial position as a result of the philosophical discussion, having been exposed to different perspectives or even refuted by counter-examples and opposing arguments. Changing their minds can be transformational as they learn to internalise values, beliefs and behaviours; the received tradition is being dialectically challenged, but also upheld and ultimately owned as they have deeply and genuinely engaged with it.

I agree with Emma's concern about the risk of children veering towards a simplistic and trivialised version of moral relativism as – in my experience – they sometimes fall into the mire of 'well, this is my opinion', getting stubbornly stuck in it. I think it is paramount to explore this issue further, challenging facile conclusions by emphasising the philosophical requirements of scrutiny, logical validity and cross-examination within the collective enquiry, so as to ground – albeit provisionally – any conclusion reached by the group.

As the future cannot be reliably predicted, the PhiE approach is both a method and a journey. It inducts children into joining the human conversation at a deeply individual and shared collective dimension.

Daniel Miracapillo is deputy headteacher at Westbourne Primary School in Sutton, south London.

3. TECHNOLOGY AND CREATIVITY: ARE YOU THE MAKER OR THE TOOL?

by Martin Robinson

Reflections by [JASHU VEKARIA](#)

As a practising primary school teacher, I am required to think all the time about the role of technology in my lessons. By its very nature, technology changes at a fast pace and making it current for children is an ongoing challenge.

When I first started to teach, Information Communications Technology (ICT) involved learning to touch-type on a keyboard and to use a mouse to control the cursor. Within a few years, this had moved to a laptop and the touchpad, then to 'swiping' on a portable device by touching a screen, to now using virtual reality headsets. All this in a decade. Technology is fluid and forever changing, adapting to society's needs. What I teach to a five-year-old in a computing lesson will be irrelevant for when that child is ready to enter the working world for the first time. Technology will have evolved beyond recognition.

That is why embracing and nurturing human creativity is of fundamental importance. The current buzzword is for children to have 'mastery' within the National Curriculum. This requires pupils to develop a deeper understanding of content, by having relevant experiences that give a subject added meaning. This, of course, goes beyond computing and into all subjects. For instance, mastery in maths means that we avoid the calculator for multiplication and teach the child 'arrays'; visual images that the child can always go back to when having to solve a numerical problem. This provides them with a lifelong skill that can be used beyond the classroom and alongside numerous technologies. I always say to the children, 'use your own human calculator – the brain – first, before you use your fingers to press buttons.' In short, it's all about the child learning not to rely on technology for creativity or any other desired learning outcome.

However, as Martin Robinson states, this does not mean we should be teaching the children not to use new technologies. It is my responsibility to make sure the children leave school ready for the wider world and are 'tech savvy'. At my school, computing lessons are extremely popular and the children love using digital appliances. Some parents can't afford to provide their children with access to certain digital technologies at home, giving us an added duty to ensure that they develop the necessary skills at school. But other children already have plenty of experience and knowledge in using digital technologies when they arrive at school, allowing the role of teacher and student to switch.

Robinson argues for teaching children 'to draw and paint before introducing the camera... before taking on the digital'. But given the vast number of responsibilities and requirements already placed on teachers within the current high-stakes accountability system, do we have the time and capacity as teachers? We should strive to create opportunities for children's creativity and talents to blossom, but with the range of demands facing teachers today, there's a question as to whether this is always possible. Perhaps less reliance on test scores can allow educators and children alike to find ways to ensure that they are always the maker rather than the tool.

Jashu Vekaria is deputy headteacher at Uxendon Manor Primary School in Kenton, north London.

4. THE RISE OF BIG DATA

by Professor Sir Nigel Shadbolt, FRS FREng

Reflections by SAM ALNER

Although the world around us has changed significantly during the ‘digital revolution’, the traditional classroom endures. Big data could result in personalised learning for students, or provide real-time analysis and statistics to target interventions. However, the current infrastructure within education is not sufficient for this to be enacted.

While ethical considerations around privacy and data protection are significant, it is more immediate factors such as budgets that prevent schools from realising the potential of big data. As Professor Shadbolt points out, fields such as sports, aerospace, retail and finance have benefited from big data, but these are driven by a pursuit of performance or profits through significant investment, where the cost is negated or can be justified. In contrast, school budgets are continuing to decrease and schools lack the funds to invest in digital technologies. While computer rooms or the use of tablets and laptops in schools are now commonplace, it is rare to see the implementation of digital devices on a one-to-one basis, in which students can – and are empowered to – use these devices throughout their school day and across the curriculum. The ability to continuously track student information and progress to exploit big data is not widespread.

There are also difficulties in embedding use of digital technologies. Many staff have limited digital skills, yet budget and time constraints make training opportunities limited, and planning time – to integrate analytics into the curriculum – is minimal. Additionally, having taught in a set way for a number of years or even decades, it is clearly visible that some staff are resistant to change, and question the effectiveness of digital technologies. There is also scepticism over the purpose of data tracking; is this to drive change and improvement for students, or to measure accountability for teachers? For example, while a system at my school called ‘Show my Homework’ provides a centralised view of all homework set, it was also seen as a way to monitor teachers as department heads had to report on the frequency with which homework was set. This dual objective risks undermining the use of homework as a learning tool.

The training of students themselves is also important. While often viewed as ‘digital natives’, many students lack the skills to be able to utilise digital technologies effectively, beyond social media – for instance, in the field of data analysis and application. However, the way that schools are currently organised does not help teach such skills. For example, the curriculum structure of compartmentalised subjects and skills does not mirror the inter-connected world outside the classroom. Furthermore, despite being a computer science teacher, school policy means that the use of personal devices and mobiles in lessons is prohibited. This seriously limits the opportunities to use technology to provide engagement, support learning, and monitor progress.

Budgets, the training of educators, and the skills of students themselves are just a few barriers to utilising big data effectively. However, there are already some examples of the use of data in education that can provide motivation. Unheard of a few decades ago, we can now easily compare progress and attainment data between schools across the country, and examine factors such

as ethnicity, socioeconomic background and gender. But to take that next step and truly transform education, teachers and students alike must be equipped with the resources and training to utilise big data to inform planning, teaching and learning. We must therefore ask ourselves, to what extent are we willing to overhaul education to achieve this?

Sam Alner is head of IT and computer science at Douay Martyrs Catholic School in Hillingdon, west London

5. COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

by Fiona Walker

Reflections by CLARE SARSON

One of the challenges facing teachers of English at the moment is how best to prepare students for the new GCSEs and A-levels, and insights from cognitive neuroscience can help with this task. The new literature exams require students to have a good knowledge and recall of a number of texts which, for some, is extremely challenging. The closed-book nature of these exams means that students have to memorise key aspects of each text, from plot and character details, to authorial methods, structural or genre conventions, and key quotations.

In order to help students to do this, we have planned an English Literature curriculum which ensures we revisit each text several times, based on the discoveries in neuroscience discussed by Fiona. This 'spaced learning' approach has allowed students to develop a deeper understanding of the literature texts. For GCSE English Language, we are interleaving the skills needed from Year 7 onwards. In every unit, students have opportunities to practise all of the skills they are tested on, from information retrieval to inference and from summary to evaluation.

At my school, we have also moved to a three-year GCSE model, which allows us to work on embedding knowledge and skills in the first two years, before deepening them in the final exam year. Regular quizzes and low-stakes tests make up starter activities, and students complete homework based on texts they have already studied to further enhance their memory. This 'call and response' style of learning key quotations is proving effective with some classes, as are visual reminders. Each classroom has a set of displays that support the memorisation of key quotations with visual cues. We are also using metacognitive strategies to prepare students for exams. Teachers use live feedback, visualisers and model writing to show students how to tackle questions in real time. Questions are unpicked with students so they know what each question is asking them to do and how best to do it.

As our understanding of the science of memory develops, a combination of low-stakes testing, spaced learning and interleaved content will be one of the keys to securing success for pupils. In addition to the implications of neuroscience, exposing our students to a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts is becoming increasingly necessary as many of them do not regularly read outside of school. From year 7, we will focus on vocabulary building and recognition, as we believe this will support our students' ability to access the texts they will encounter in their exams.

Ultimately, using insights from cognitive neuroscience gives our students an awareness of why particular teaching methods are used, and helps build memory capacity that will set them up for success, both at school and the wider world of higher education and employment. And if they leave us being able to remember the odd soliloquy from Macbeth or stanza of Browning, then that's a bonus too.

Clare Sarson is curriculum leader for English at St Julie's Catholic High School in Liverpool

6. THE ONLY WAY IS FORWARDS: THE NEED FOR BOLD LEADERSHIP IN TROUBLING TIMES

by Liz Robinson

Reflections by HEATHER STANNARD

As a teacher in my third year as an assistant head, I have three key reflections on the challenges to the teaching profession posed by Liz:

1. WHY DO WE EDUCATE?

I am struck by how little we consider this question as a profession. We are focused so closely on results that we rarely consider this most basic of questions. What are we trying to achieve? Good citizens? A reliable workforce? A population with a common core knowledge?

As a profession, we need to think about our purpose. It must surely go beyond achieving a narrow set of academic results, and also aim to develop students who leave school with aspirations, character, soft skills and social capital, who have an improved quality of life and future prospects due to their education. The Social Mobility Commission and Fair Education Alliance have both suggested that destination data would be a better way than exam results to measure school effectiveness. Given the consistent reports by employers, and educationalists such as Ken Robinson, that our current education system does not provide young people with the right mix of skills to be successful in the wider world, ideas involving longer-term life outcomes deserve more of a hearing.

2. WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE

Most would agree that 'factory farming' students through exams is not preparing them for life, yet the pressure of results is all consuming. I will never forget seeing in huge writing on a headteacher's wall: 'Every child is worth 0.43 per cent'. Shocking? Dehumanising? Inevitable? There is a constant battle between what is right and what you are held accountable for. Recent scandals involving cheating clearly show that the system has created behaviours that should have no place in our profession or among our students.

How do you balance the importance of results with ensuring a school system which generates long-term change and impact? Liz refers to becoming 'bilingual' – balancing the reality of the system with articulating other things that matter. However, until the system changes, this must be led by schools who are classified by Ofsted as 'good' or 'outstanding' as, despite the pressures they face, they have more freedom to take risks and innovate than those classified as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'.

3. CONTEXT MATTERS

Liz cites that 15 per cent of secondary schools with the highest proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) are rated inadequate by Ofsted, compared to one per cent of those with the lowest proportions of FSM pupils.

This is an unsurprising statistic but that doesn't make it any less horrifying. It is the reality of the system in which we operate. Is the government purposefully blind to this situation? The system clearly does not work for all pupils, and yet 'outstanding' schools in affluent areas and new academies with new buildings, staff and students are still held up as beacons for the rest to follow, however unrealistic this may be in practice.

SO, WHAT NOW?

We need to measure real outcomes – university graduations, career entry and progression, quality of life – not just exam results.

A headteacher once said to me that, within a school, teachers and school leaders have the opportunity and responsibility to create the community we want young people to live in. We need to regain this focus on the bigger picture. This must, however, also be tempered with realism. We need to challenge the system while meeting current expectations.

Most of all, we need a united voice on what matters, including a reclamation of teaching as a profession. A critical mass of leaders, teachers, unions and other interested parties must come together to progress this dialogue about the purpose of education and develop new, robust proposals on how we measure success.

Heather Stannard is assistant headteacher at Bower Park Academy in Essex

7. SUCCESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE EDUCATION OF HEAD, HEART AND HAND

by Peter Hyman

Reflections by IAN LATTER

There is little doubt that there needs to be a fundamental change within our education system. The current system is characterised by opportunities for some but not all, with cold spots of illiteracy and innumeracy existing across the country.

Addressing this is one of the biggest issues facing us as teachers and leaders. It is what should keep us awake at night, rather than high-stakes testing or even higher stakes lesson observations.

We cannot expect to continue to do the same and get different results. You'd be forgiven for thinking that you've heard all this before. But what if we truly changed what it means to be a teacher in the 21st century. What would that look and feel like?

Peter Hyman's vision of a 21st century curriculum that blends knowledge, skills and character attributes – what he calls an education of the head, heart and hand – could be an important way to deliver the change we need. So why not give this to our students? We should learn to be agnostic about the ongoing debate between the 'knowledge is king' camp and the 'project-based pioneers'. There is plenty of space on a curriculum for both.

Instead, we should be asking, 'what do most students need to get better at?'. A curriculum rich in quality opportunities for reading, writing and speaking wouldn't be so far from the mark.

As a former journalist, I share Peter's view that speaking should no longer be the poorer relation to reading and writing. Getting conversation into school culture is vital. Noisy classrooms are not naughty classrooms. As Myhill and Fisher (2010) describe, spoken language creates a ceiling, not only on our student's ability to comprehend what is actually going on in the classroom, but also on their ability to write. In short, if spoken language isn't up to scratch, nothing else will be either.

That's why we have also redesigned the curriculum at Hope Academy – an 11–18 school in one of the most deprived areas of England – to maximise ways to deliver high-quality oracy. More than 20 staff are Philosophy for Children (P4C) champions, helping to grow students as problem-solvers, agile thinkers and great communicators. Our students take this blend of knowledge and skills to public speaking competitions and debating chambers. They are given the opportunity to act as guides on GCSE options evenings, to deliver assemblies and to lead lessons through our *Hope Inspire* programme so that they can become confident and reflective people with a voice.

You'll notice that I have not mentioned the Department for Education or Ofsted once. If we are serious about delivering success in the 21st century, we need to look outward, not upward. We have never had more freedom to bring about lasting change. Let's use it.

Ian Latter is assistant principal at Hope Academy in St Helens, Merseyside

9. EDUCATION FOR A HEALTHY DEMOCRACY

by Jeremy Gilbert

Reflections by IMRAN IQBAL

While the need for collective decision making and school autonomy resonates with me as a teacher, a totally devolved educational system is not necessarily the best way to embed these features. Employers, higher education institutions and wider society require there to be at least some loose framework within which schools operate if they are to be able to gauge what success looks like and have confidence that minimum standards are being met.

While I disagree with Professor Gilbert's critiques of certain accountability structures, many of the other points he raises do resonate when reflecting on my own school context.

First, I agree that the current system has no real space for 'co-production' of educational roles and outcomes. Instead, new education policies are regularly disseminated in a top-down fashion. These include new initiatives and agendas – such as British Values, Prevent, and Careers Advice and Guidance – which have emerged without sustained collaboration with communities and service users (e.g. teachers and students).

Second, the current narrow and standardised curriculum model eradicates meaningful student choice. The impacts of this in some state schools, particularly in deprived areas, are greater levels of disengagement from education as students are funnelled into subjects deemed 'worthy' (through accountability mechanisms like the English Baccalaureate). Young people in academies like ours would benefit from choosing from a broader vocational and skills-based curriculum. Such a curriculum would allow them to develop the necessary knowledge and skills they require, while also considering the wider educational needs of young people in a holistic way.

My strongest sense of despair about the current system is that the underlying neoliberal assumptions in education not only produce a particular type of student (a 'consumer' of education and other services) but also impacts on teachers too. As a senior leader at George Salter Academy, I believe in the need for accountability but feel that the overall system is broken and not fit for purpose. The methods used for accountability – namely Ofsted, Department for Education regulations, the Office of the Regional Schools' Commissioner and performance tables – all generate (whether intentionally or not) unnecessary bureaucracy and hoops that teachers are required to jump through. Much of the time adds no value to student learning. It has become increasingly frustrating to see extremely talented young teachers join the profession with ideals and a desire to make a difference, but then walk away feeling unable to. The current recruitment crisis in education is evidence of this.

At a recent educational conference, National Schools Commissioner, Sir David Carter spoke about a more progressive academies model based on collaboration, joint progress and development. While his presentation was like a breath of fresh air, it will take more than just the Schools Commissioner's Office to drive and implement a cultural change on the scale that is needed. Echoing Jeremy in his closing paragraph, without a serious challenge against the assumptions which

underpin our current system, as well as a reversal of funding and recruitment crises, schools will struggle to develop empowered and conscientious citizens who play an active role in our society.

Imran Iqbal is head of sixth form at George Salter Academy in West Bromwich, West Midlands

10. THE ASIAN CENTURY AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN POST-BREXIT BRITAIN

by Dr Winnie King

Reflections by JULIE BLOOR

Any discussion about the UK's education system always seems to begin from the premise that we are currently failing and therefore, must look to other countries to see what they are doing better. Our PISA results are used by policymakers to give us a world view of what constitutes educational success. Consequently, the complexity of educating our young people is reduced to a score and a position in a league table. We have adopted numerous new policies based on the perceived successes of various other governments – free schools, a knowledge-based education system, and 'maths mastery' to name a few. However, cherry picking parts of other education approaches has added to the confused, ever changing and highly-accountable education system we have in England today.

That said, there is no doubt that China has made huge strides in relation to education. As Dr King suggests, if we had started with the concept that improving education is integral to a strong economy, we would be in a better place today.

However, perhaps we would do better to start the debate by looking at what are we getting right. As King mentions, we are the world's fifth largest economy, with a strong track record of innovation and scientific research (we are the third highest producer of scientific research with two of the world's top five pharmaceutical companies, despite having less than one per cent of the world's population). Is this not evidence that science education in the UK is thriving and highly successful? A similar argument could also be put forward for our creative industries, which grew by twice the rate of other sectors and contributed over £80 billion to the UK economy in 2015 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016). Is there not a strong case for saying we have been getting the education of our children right in these areas?

Dr King very rightly suggests that we should be looking at what works for the UK, as China has looked at what works for them. Such widely different cultural, historical, social and economic backgrounds mean that what works for China cannot necessarily work for us. For instance, China's one-child-policy has meant that passing the 'Gao Kao' exams is the means to success for a whole family, leading young people to put all their efforts into academic achievement. British society, however, is more diverse and success is not just built around academic achievement, but also innovation, creativity and entrepreneurial skills.

Dr King states that education policy should be about advancing national objectives and development. However, I believe that while we are stuck in a cycle of criticism of our educational outcomes and are unable to recognise the successes they have brought to our economy, this seems unlikely. I fear that politicians will remain wedded to the idea that if other economies, such as China, are doing better, we must in some way reproduce their education policies regardless of the cultural differences that may exist.

Julie Bloor is former headteacher at Shirebrook Academy in Derbyshire, and is now executive headteacher for Ormiston Academies

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A stack of colorful books is positioned on the right side of the page, extending from the top to the bottom. The books are in various colors including white, blue, beige, brown, teal, red, green, pink, orange, and light blue. The spines of the books are visible, and they are stacked in a slightly irregular manner, creating a sense of depth and texture. The background is a solid dark blue color.

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