

YEARS THREE – YEAR SIX (age 8 – 11 years)

"The top three skills needed in 2020 are complex problem solving, critical thinking and creativity" Carl Robert TES IBCP in an article from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) Educating the Economic Future The World Economic Forum

'If children exceed your expectations, it almost certainly means your expectations weren't high enough'

'I quit school in the 5th grade because of pneumonia. Not that I had it, but I couldn't spell it.' Rocky Graziano

This period of a child's education (Key Stage Two of the National Curriculum) is when the most essential skills, particularly in literacy and numeracy, are developed to a level of functionality and when the habit of learning is properly embedded. At present, the primary curriculum, while more broad-reaching than its predecessors, is still conservative in its content and vision and defined, ultimately by tests. It is not the answer to the question *'what is the best education we can give our children'*, consigning children to the best of 'what is', rather than 'what could / should be.' There are other impediments, of course, including the resources needed to teach

(where teachers cling to well-resourced units of work for financial or convenience reasons) and the looming presence of SATs – more on which later.

In establishing the framework of a curriculum, we should consider the following:

That in the key areas of literacy and numeracy, the most effective way of teaching children may prove to be by using traditional methods of teaching including a simple methodology, clear outcomes, the use of memory, repetition, and practice, particularly in the core subjects, including a prescribed handwriting script, spelling levels and the memorization (i.e. of times tables, spelling rules / patterns) (i)

The education would be inclusive, differentiated only as necessary within the classroom, and focus on (a) the ability to read and write and (b) tables and the four operations (c) learning spelling rules (although slight to moderate spelling weaknesses should not be singled out for extra assistance). Inevitably, there would be different levels of attainment, but significantly less than we currently accept. It would be simple and one-dimensional in its methodology, though not in its differentiation – hence we should not become mired in debates about phonics, Singaporean mathematics or the numerous binary

debates about methodology and pedagogy that poison our schools, but instead, we should encourage our teachers to take a more intuitive and personalized approach to teaching. Whatever their ability, children respond to high expectations and clear standards and while teachers need to be mindful of readiness and avoid ranking children, there is no reason why a functional ability in both literacy and numeracy cannot be achieved by the vast majority of children by age 11 (as is the case already, but at a cost). This approach recognizes those children who have difficulties in accessing the curriculum, in reading, in growing memory, but rather than demanding more of our children by testing them in ways that are foreign to them, we need concurrently to develop different forms of measurement and assessment (and use less of both). At present, SATS are restricting creativity and are used in ways that alter the experience of teachers and children for no tangible benefit – in fact, the very opposite.

Why do I favour a traditional approach at this particular stage of a child's schooling? Because in all my years of teaching, I have yet to see any modern individualised approach method work as well as that achieved in a formal setting by good teaching. And

because this is an age where children are responsive to clear direction and structure. This approach would not be appropriate in all subjects but would be for the core lessons each day (9.30am – 12.30pm)

Some Key Points about the curriculum:

- Developing the Four Attitudes (to learning; to the world we live in; to people; and to ourselves) and talking about the learning process, and the relevance and transitory nature of knowledge, we need to keep working on changing the culture of education from something children have to do to something they want to do. To achieve this, we need to make it relevant and explain why we learn and how we re-engage with learning throughout our lives. Hence ethics and the interaction with environment, human and natural is a central platform.
- The School day and schools themselves (the physical environment) are not inviolate and should not determine the way we teach children (sadly, the wholesale selling off of playfields has had a significant deleterious legacy when physical fitness and health lie at the core of

- holistic education). We need to think more of schools without walls, of what education can be delivered electronically and in different environments (including the home).
- Technology can be a means to an end, but should not become a distraction to the learning process. Poor use of technology has resulted in a huge overspend in recent years with very little academic benefit. Technology should advance education, not just enhance it.
 - The curriculum should not be predicated on SATs tests in Year 6. Assessment should be invisible or used with the acknowledgement that (a) it ignores readiness and (b) it only measures part of ability (i.e. the ability to conform intellectually to a norm and a narrow definition of learning).
 - While the body of knowledge will include most of what we identify as core knowledge, including numeracy and literacy, it is the skills that will be important in facilitating learning, including exploration, questioning, memory, mnemonics, flow diagrams, coding and creative thinking, communication and accessing and validating knowledge (through Wikipedia or google search)

- A major focus of the curriculum would be on nurturing independence, on thinking globally, and life-long learning (and explaining what each concept means). As well, work habits (organization, self-discipline, goal setting etc) would be fostered.
- The environment, conservation and sustainability – the earth and its oceans water cycle, rivers, oceans, lakes, water conservation, climate change, regeneration and re-wilding would be an important part of the programme of Human, Physical and Earth Science (see below)
- Art and crafts as well as dance, music and drama would be encouraged and available to all.
- Learning support would stay in the classroom as part of a differentiated programme of teaching. Mixed-ability groups would be the norm, not just for social reasons, but because children learn best off a range of abilities and attitudes (presupposing that classroom management is secure)
- Developing good physical and mental health is a vital part of education and would be recognized

as such.

- Revisiting the teacher's job description. This may involve the teacher taking on a secondary role as a tutor or facilitator and different training.
- Career and vocational advices: This would be about expanding the child's world view, by opening doors, not closing them. It would focus on possibility and opportunity.

Key Stage Two and SATs

In primary school, Year 6 marks a transition in the way children are taught. Having been working through a broad curriculum for five years, teachers and parents are on guard as the looming challenge of KS2 tests appear on the horizon. These are not to be sniffed at as they form a vital cog in the data that is used to 'measure' ability and the level of education. For parents, its importance is in the pursuit of a good next school and as a validation of primary school and the child's own talents. For teachers it is even more brutal as they are accountable for the results and whether there is any value added. For schools, likewise, measured on their SATs scores,

the pressure can be immense, contributing to the unfortunate spate of checking that occurs each year (although tutoring, having a supportive home environment is just the luck of the draw.

Accepting that SATS are an unnecessary evil, we need to look at what the tests are setting out to achieve and why bias, background, readiness, language and the narrowness of the measure make a mockery of the tests which, were they not used to nail children to the fabric of the future lives, would be facile.

What we need to achieve by the end of Year 6 can be best done by shaping attitudes, offering an interesting and relevant curriculum and focusing on skills and abilities, rather than learning and understanding, especially in such areas as grammar and tables.

In English what we need is for children to be able to communicate accurately and fluently, both orally and in writing and to be able to write (yes, still), spell and construct sentences and paragraphs. What they don't need is to learn grammar over and above the key parts of speech. Teaching children about modal verbs, subordinating conjunctions, subordinate clauses, relative clauses, determiners etc are not

necessary; it is arguable (and I would argue it) that in ensuring children have a functional ability to understand language, ie be able to read and write, that concepts such as active-passive, formal and informal can wait. Likewise, the emphasis we give to comprehension, rather than to writing (noting that comprehension is a high-level skill and linked with stages of development).

So a school day might look like:

8.45am School begins (assembly / cultural / oracy / health activity session)

9.30am – 12.30pm English, (Reading, writing, spelling, composition, comprehension, oracy);
Mathematics (tables, logic, four operations, geometry)

1.30pm – 4.00pm Set programmes which would include the following (and include sport, other forms of exercise, dance, vocational activities, etc). These would be delivered partly in-class and partly through technology.

There is a need for a whole new approach to History and Geography into a subject more akin to **Human Science** which would also include aspects of economics, psychology, anthropology and biology.

This is the pivotal subject for the new curriculum (ii)

This 'subject' would look at the issues facing us, their history and how we can make sense of them: climate change, war, human behaviours, racism and bias, evolution, conservation, regeneration, sustainability, the idea of community, what it means to be human, our shared past, lessons from history and geography

A rudimentary chronology of the country's history should have an emphasis on key events in the nation's story, but also place history into a much wider (i.e. global) context and teaching about what history is and how it is used.

Teaching the British narrative and mythology should be differentiated from the above (perhaps taught with British values).

Science should be a key part of the curriculum and would follow the definition of **Physical Science** (iii)

Art, music, design technology, sport, information technology, languages should be available through classroom and e-courses whereby children are able to select from a smorgasbord of subjects / topics to build their own programmes in the similar way as the international baccalaureate from Humanities, (iv) Human Science, Physical Science and Earth Science

(v) For this to work successfully, teachers need to adapt to the secondary roles of tutor or facilitator.

Footnotes:

(i) Some children enjoy using interesting methods or 'tricks' to learn, for instance, the Trachtenberg method of multiplication and simple rules such as the product of any number $\times 9 = 9$ (56, 81, 72 etc)

(ii) Human science studies the philosophical, biological, social, and cultural aspects of human life. Human Sciences aims to expand our understanding of the human world through a broad interdisciplinary approach.

(iii) Physical Science is the study of inanimate natural objects, including physics, chemistry, astronomy, and related subjects.

(iv) The Humanities can be described as the study of how people process and document the human experience. Since humans have been able, we have used philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history and language to understand and record our world. The field of humanities includes, but is not limited to, the following subjects:

- Modern languages.
- Classical languages.
- Linguistics.
- Literature.
- History.
- Jurisprudence.
- Philosophy.
- Archaeology.

(v) Earth Science has four major branches which are geology, meteorology, oceanography, and astronomy.

*This is a work in progress – as all frameworks should be.
Please look for regular updates and feel free to contribute and
offer suggestions*