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8. The Case against Selection

'Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life thinking it is stupid.' Albert Einstein

'The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives' Robert Maynard Hutchins

'Likely as not, the child you can do least with will do the most to make you proud.' Mignon McLaughlin

In 2015, I was invited to contribute a chapter to a book being published by Civitas entitled *'The Ins and Outs of Selective Secondary Schools: A Debate'*. A number of well-known educationalists and writers including Geoff Barton, Alan Smithers, Joanna Williams, Fiona Miller and Peter Hitchens and the two MPs, Nic Dakin and Graham Brady who contributed to the publication, Launched in a Committee Room in the Palace of Westminster with speeches by David Davis and Tristram Hunt, it felt like the start of a serious debate about selection in our schools.

I felt very much an outsider in the debate, being neither English nor having taught in a UK secondary school. Indeed, I assumed I was asked to contribute based solely on an article I had written several years earlier entitled 'Unnatural Selection,' the same title I used for my chapter. Then as now, I started with an apology for writing on

one of education's sacred cows, acknowledging that what I wrote was 'mere rhetoric that . . . could never dent an immutable belief system' adding that ' . . . I make matters even worse by using examples from off-shore thereby breaking another cardinal rule, of presuming that other countries do things better than we do.'

The debate, after a spark of interest and an exchange of views, duly fizzled out and apart from plaintive bleating about grammar schools and the iniquity of the 11+ so it remains: Unresolved, put into the too hard basket, the property of lobby groups and theorists, politicians and teaching unions. In re-visiting it, I want to return to the premise I adhere to in everything I write on education, 'what is the best education we can give our children' – that is individually and collectively.

Naturally in what I write there will be caveats, the most significant being that we shouldn't confuse a failure of discipline with a lack of ability. Like a few other educationalists (Mary Myatt being one such voice), I have always seen our approach of dumbing down to children who struggle in class or who are subject to interventions and differentiation, or even withdrawal is wrong. Rather than being unable to cope, I am convinced that many, especially those who struggle with written communication are merely bored, bored by being pandered to, bored by the irrelevance of the curriculum, and bored by having to respond in a predetermined way. Seldom is it the complexity of the concept or information that holds back children from learning; rather it's frustration with the tedium allied to the lack of equity, understanding and opportunity for all children to flourish.

Second, I want to challenge the view that doing away with selective schools is an attack on excellence, on intellectual rigour, on catering for our brightest and most able children. Of course, that is what some people choose to see, for that is all they've ever seen. Sometimes, the alternative is incomprehensible. Yet rather than dumbing down, getting rid of selection in education can, and does, lead to a raising of standards. Children respond to challenge and to high expectations; we often fail to realise just how high we can aim and because of the paucity of our curriculum and methods of assessment, how to reach them. That is our country's loss.

I want to keep my argument to two main points. There is plenty written elsewhere on selection and I don't want to just go over well-trodden ground. Some assumptions have to be made, particularly on

the importance of discipline (preferably self-discipline) in learning, and that is much more achievable when education is seen as relevant and equitable. The second is that while this applies particularly to the debate in the state sector, particularly competitive entry to grammar schools, it is also relevant to independent schools that need to look at the merits of inclusivity and the breadth of the offering.

My first is that selective schooling is unfair and wasteful, primarily because it ignores the concept of readiness, but also because it fails to properly consider other factors, such as home background, language acquisition, other learning traits, ambition, aptitudes and specific learning needs. Despite new tests designed to level up other considerations, the system by which children are 'selected', usually based on a test or series of tests, is too narrow, favouring a conformist, traditional approach to learning, discriminating against those who learn differently or who have other abilities; and second, that selective schooling fails the education of those who are the beneficiaries and, as a consequence, denies us the opportunity to produce well-rounded and socially aware students from whom they have been separated and who have different backgrounds, different ways of learning and different abilities to share.

When we ignore the whole concept of readiness, as selection inevitably does (and the younger it occurs, the greater the social and personal cost) we fail a whole cohort of children. This is not only a casualty of selection into schools, but selection within schools which is applies to both state and independent schools that adhere to an inflexible system of streaming and setting. I have seen too many children of 10, 11 and 12 who were far from capable of passing a rigorous entrance examination yet who, five years later, achieved outstanding grades – and predictably so. No-one can teach us anything in life that we are not ready to learn. Sometimes, the lightbulb moment doesn't come until university or later in life. Closing doors on our young (for that is what we do with selection) is wasteful and unfair. By using such a rigid set of tests to measure academic ability at a fixed point in time along with some predictive test to measure 'potential' we ignore all that the test doesn't measure: work ethic; mindset; ambition; opportunity and incentive; abilities other than academic; creative thinking; and so on. Now we are beginning to see children with certain learning difficulties being sought out because of bespoke skills and aptitudes they offer, offering insights and a creative mindset that isn't part of

the mainstream, and essentially, conformist curriculum. What a pity we don't recognise these same abilities in our schools.

My second point is significant if we look at the other societal cost of selection, of rewarding conformity over creativity. In the Margaret Thatcher Lecture of 2013, Boris Johnson used the measure of IQ to assert that people were '*very far from equal in raw ability, if not in spiritual worth.*' The latter comment is problematic, especially if, as implied, it is linked to the first. Johnson's assertion betrays a belief in academic intelligence, that successful human beings are measurable, by their IQ which forms the basis for selection in schools. Yet it is disturbing to see how some 'intelligent' people, streamed from their peers at a very young age, become immured, believing that their academic ability entitles them to the spoils of influence and power, outside the normal conventions and values of society. We only have to look at the Bullingdon Club to see how remote many such people become. We can also look at the way intelligent people are often short on emotional intelligence and lack both common-sense and tolerance. Some leading politicians and public figures provide apt examples of people who try to intellectualise social problems. That is the way we have made them. That is the way we have indulged them. The reality is that you cannot know about people unless you are one of them and don't live in gated communities. A reliance on academic ability at the expense of other traits and experiences, and in isolation from a cross-section of other peers with all their views, behaviours and backgrounds fails them and so long as they run this country, fails us all

In my chapter of the book, I gave examples from my own teaching practice in New Zealand where schools are not selective and yet very able children did as well as children in selective schools elsewhere, referencing two of my history students who went from their New Zealand school to Cambridge and end up with 1st class honours degrees. How much better off they were, I thought, having been in schools with other student who had a range of abilities and talents, interests and views, and not all of them academic. How much better they understood their communities and the talent that abounds in their less well-achieving classmates. I have known far too many students who achieved through dint of hard work or in fields that were immeasurable; so many who changed dramatically when they got the bit between their teeth; so many whose attitude and ambition made a mockery of their IQ. Children who had their own high

expectations of themselves when their schools had told them otherwise.

We need to change. The system we have of winners and losers, of league tables, of acknowledging some talents and ignoring others; of catering one way of learning and failing to recognize its shortcomings, has to change. I'd love to see more independent schools take the lead and become properly non-selective. I'd love to see bursaries not being restricted to the brightest and the most talented students from local state schools, but the average student, even the struggling student. We have to stop placing a value on children and a level of expectation based on something we label as intelligence. Surely seeing who lines up under the banner of 'essential workers' tells us that. Selection denies both the opportunity for the vast majority of children while producing collateral damage on those who are the beneficiaries, limiting their relevance and voice. We don't have to look very far to see the consequences of seeing life as an academic exercise and people as data; we need to get the humanity and empathy back into our society and it is our schools that provide the gateway.

June 2020

7. A Sense of Entitlement

"When we replace a sense of service and gratitude with a sense of entitlement and expectation, we quickly see the demise of our relationships, society, and economy." Steve Maraboli

'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness' US Declaration of Independence

As the United States starts to unravel and governments around the world struggle to deal with Covid19 and its economic consequences, the cracks in the social fabric of society are becoming ever more pronounced. Some divisions, such as in education, social status and the distribution of wealth are transparent; others, such as gender discrimination, employment, health and white privilege, just as pernicious, are more subtle. But we should not be surprised. Entitlement, when one group of peoples or nations holds sway over

others and treats them differently, is embedded in history and underpins many of the problems that beset societies today.

Apart from its contractual meaning, that is where money is paid or services given in exchange for goods and services, entitlement is broadly understood to be the belief held by someone or some group that they are inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment. While not always visible, especially in race and gender issues where well-meaning people struggle to get it right, the whole concept of entitlement starts in early childhood and manifests itself in our schools and families. In addressing it, that is where we need to start.

This week, a group of 190 former students of independent schools in the United Kingdom wrote to the Independent Schools Council to highlight racism in independent schools and recounting the experiences of racism that they had experienced. Of course, racism is not restricted to any one section of society or school type, but what was pertinent was their implication that there was a responsibility on those who were endowed with the benefits of a good education and support in their careers to get it right. The degree to which a sense of entitlement can be used to explain some of the comments alluded to in the report is not made clear; nor does the letter address the implication that they are any worse than their state school counterparts. What was explicit, however, was the comment that ‘. . . *in a country where two-thirds of the cabinet attended private school, along with 65 per cent of Supreme Court judges and 26 per cent of FTSE 100 chief executives, independent schools have a clear responsibility to produce balanced, unbiased individuals*’

While independent schools may feel unfairly singled out, the message is, broadly, that the more advantages you have in life, the greater responsibility you have to use such privilege with tolerance and empathy. Sadly, entitlement is as alive and well in many of our schools as ever and despite promoting British values and starting, at last, to teach more of our history as a multi-racial nation, there is much more work to do with our children and adults to counter bias – not just racial, but personal, social and economic. And that for those with the most advantage, whatever the education, need to be taught to act with humility and balance and to acknowledge the advantages they have (and that applies to most of us in this country). After all, nothing is more cringeworthy than the comment ‘Do you know who I am?’ often reported in the press by entitled persons with its

implication that 'who you are' is more important than your abilities and what you have achieved.

At a grassroots level, entitlement shows itself in the way children treat each other. Young children are always more likely to interact with other children as innocents, not because of an accident of birth, family, nationality, wealth or religion. As with prejudice that has its origins in the bosom of the family, the same applies to a sense of entitlement that results from whatever messages, explicitly or implicitly are received by the child. Of course, as children grow up, personalities, temperament, interests all play a part in classroom interactions, but too often children growing up believing they are entitled to a life they have been gifted, one they haven't paid for, children who are made to feel they have a higher value than others and are therefore entitled to more – respect, protection, healthcare, lifestyle – than their peers and, as they get older, a greater right to be lead, to be noticed and listened to.

All schools need to challenge these presumptions for they lie at the heart of so much of the misery and division in our society, manifested in our schools through bullying, teasing and exclusion. There are various examples in the media that point out such inequalities and why the question to ask children and young adults is 'what is the difference between what you have been given and what you done for yourself.' Any sense of entitlement based on the family you were born into, inherited wealth or social rank, school attended, possessions owned, race, culture or religion, is no entitlement at all. Too many children, coming from stable homes and supportive families and who don't have to worry about food or material comforts need to learn why they shouldn't make disparaging comments about those who have less, the wrong clothes, the wrong accent or the wrong colour of skin. Children can be cruel as we know, but so is the workplace with job discrimination for anything from accent, height, perceived attractiveness or even tattoos.

While this issue is societal, it is in schools that we can temper such bias. This is where children should learn that they are what they are by dint of their own personalities, character traits, labours, not from any hand me down entitlement. Too often people who have had a leg up, an advantageous internship, backing to pursue a particular interest, forget that without that support, they would not have succeeded. Children need to be taught that treating other students as

less worthy because of their own academic abilities or sporting prowess, again often the result of advantages they have inherited, is not only disingenuous, but wrong. Only by learning that lesson will they be able to weigh any imagined 'entitlement' they may feel in a global context, ie what is this lifestyle I aspire to and feel I deserve costing my fellow man or woman? They may come to realise that what they think they are entitled to is unsustainable and unrealistic, and that other factors such as the rights and freedoms of others, poverty, wide-scale mining, over-cropping, soil erosion come into the equation. Viewing people, or other races, critically or somehow inferior is even more unacceptable if you have achieved nothing more than a fortunate marriage or been born into a stable and supportive family. While we should encourage aspiration in our young, we should ensure it doesn't trip over into expectation. The old adages that 'life doesn't owe you anything' and 'life isn't always fair' are important for children in order to build resilience and to help them become more empathetic adults. Realising that a sense of entitlement reinforces social division, in schools and in the workplace and leads to bullying between individuals as well as amongst nations, is a very important lesson to learn.

We need a systematic approach in our schools to counter entitlement at a grass roots level, by teaching children to look at the contributing factors that make successful lives and to show empathy towards those not so advantaged - selflessness rather than self. We need a little more modesty and humility from parents and children. We need to teach our children to look at the way people or countries feel entitled, whether it is taking the resources they need to maintain their standard of living or by abusing privilege. Of course, we will still get celebrities or authors trying to distance themselves from their backgrounds (Dominic Cumberbatch is one such person) and we can sympathise with him. Julie Birchill once wrote that the answer was to be born working class as '*the struggle, prejudice and stupidity we have to face, only we are ever really sure of our own worth*' so you don't have to wonder whether you, '*could have made it if they had started from the same place as I did*', an argument that merely serves as another form of entitlement.

At a global level, many well-off countries accept as their right, the access to pursuing a certain standard of living and level of material comfort. The argument is that if we have the money then we should be able to have what we can afford, that spending benefits the

economy, regardless of whether our appetites and desires negatively affect the lives of others. Such an expectation which is present in most of our lives, often subconsciously fuels an almost insatiable demand for foods and transport, for products and services. Palm oil plantations in Central America, sweat shops in Bangladesh, landscapes laid waste by mining, oceans from over-fishing, all to provide a lifestyle we aspire to, but to which we are not entitled. Particularly now, knowing what we know of climate change and increasing social inequality, we need to pull our heads in and think more modestly and with a collective conscience about what is necessary and appropriate. At present, we consume significantly more than we consume and end up wasting large amounts of what we do produce. We even expect the waste of our extravagance and over-consumption will be collected from our doors and become someone else's problem – perhaps even another countries that buys our rubbish. We expect this. We even think it is our right. We may acknowledge how criminal is the whole idea of planned obsolescence just to keep the wheels of industry turning, but we're removed from the damage it causes elsewhere. Our desire to pursue a certain standard of living sometimes makes us forget that someone else is paying the cost. That while we can afford it, we are not entitled to it. That the earth's resources are for all of us, not just a selected few. That the entitlement to certain unalienable rights applies to us all equally – and to the planet. That is a lesson we need to teach our children. That is a lesson we all have to learn.

June 2020

6. Service or Self-Service: What we are teaching our Children

Each Thursday during lockdown the people of England have stood on their doorsteps and clapped for the NHS. What started as a heartfelt expression of appreciation to those on the front line in the fight against Covid19 has become a ritual, a weekly coming together. And yet, as I have clapped I have wondered at the injustice of it all, how poorly so many of these people we clap for are treated by our society.

I am not alone. Each week, it seems, more and more NHS workers are finding the occasion deeply ironic. How long since the pay rise for nurses was turned down by government? And how little do we pay carers? How little do we value those who look after us?

In the Low Pay Commission Report published on 21 May, 2020, it was reported that 420,000 workers were illegally paid below the

minimum wage last year – including in ‘sectors where the government is the primary source of funding.’ One of those sectors was that of social care where 40% were paid below the national living wage. Perhaps it is only when you have a parent in care and see the wonderful and heart-breaking work done by carers that we come to appreciate how poorly we care for our carers.

It is time we reflected on what we mean by essential or key workers, those we cannot operate without, and just how we see them and reward them as a society – not just in monetary terms, but in according them and their occupations, respect and appreciation other than at times of crisis. And to so, we need to return to the whole concept of service and how we promote it in our schools. Not just values. Whether in our vocational or career guidance, we ever distinguish between jobs that are about service and those that are more about self-service and projected income. For if so, we do a rather poor job of it.

Forgetting the idea, deeply entrenched and jealously protected, that academic ability has an entitlement to greater financial recognition, that profession is worth more than occupation. Forget the arcane idea that those who deal in money should be paid in money and those who deal in humanity get their thanks elsewhere. It is a serious issue that goes to the heart of every school, its ethos and its core values.

In referencing Eton College, I do so reluctantly because they are so often the public whipping boy and also because the School has just started on a new social mission driven by The Headmaster, Simon Henderson who takes his social responsibilities seriously as is evident by their new social agenda and the way that Eton has significantly contributed by helping the NHS in a number of practical ways during the crisis. So we should not echo the clamour stirred up by former Headmaster Tony Little, who criticised Tory Old Boys and ‘a certain bunch of people’ (appearing to single out David Cameron, Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg) for giving the school a bad name. Instead, we should be focusing on the culture of our schools, our alma mater, what they give back to society and how they nurture aspiration and define success. If we were to refer to the groups that Tony Little alluded to, we can see what some of our best educated and most privileged students from twenty or thirty years went on to do: Corporate lawyers (several), bankers, investment wealth managers, research analysts, venture capitalists, managing

directors of their own private equity companies, publishers and journalists, yacht brokers, entrepreneurs, an occasional artist or musician, actor or producer, dabbling in alternative life styles such as scuba instructing or running a meditation centre, working in the wine industry, army (via Sandhurst invariably), perhaps someone working for the Animal Health Trust and even, pray, a teacher in a comprehensive school.

I am not suggesting these are not creditable careers on their own, but as a reflection of what our best educated contribute to our society, it is frightening. Until the end of the list there was little evidence of anyone looking to give make choices based on serving others, in medicine, in public health, in education or working with communities although some may have subsequently contributed to society through philanthropic or charitable work. It highlighted how far we have drifted from the belief of Thomas Arnold when he was Headmaster of Rugby School that education was not just about instilling learning, but forming character. This became the ethos behind schools such as Haileybury, Cheltenham and Wellington College, set up to provide cadets for the Indian Civil Service, full of integrity and the willingness to serve (those who were chosen to serve in India were known by the epithet, the 'Incorruptibles') in contrast to the shameful exploits of the East India Company. But as a society we have forgotten the value of service and how to acknowledge and promote it. How many schools teach civic responsibility, talk about paying your dues and self-sacrifice? How many schools teach the difference between what you should do and how that is not the same as what you can get legally away with; between a life in service and a life of self-service.

It is an indictment of where we are as a society that so many of our essential workers come from abroad, from countries far poorer and more in need than ours in order to staff our hospitals and social care. We need to increase the numbers of nurses, doctors and carers from within our own population and encourage them to do so by improving their conditions so they are not made to feel an afterthought in a list of government priorities, rather than relying on highly trained medical helpers from countries that can ill afford to educate them for our benefit. We need these people, for their skills and all they bring to our workforce so should not look to replace our current workforce who have served us so loyally and with great sacrifice, but simply because we should, given our resources. That

way we will be able to reciprocate with those countries abroad who have supported us, by providing more medical help or even by paying back the medical fees of doctors who have emigrated to the UK. Suspending tax rules on those NHS workers who have returned to serve during the crisis is one way of doing so, albeit even that move took far too long and, as yet, is only temporary. It is a sad reflection on our values that we are learning how to provide the love and care for our elderly not from family, but often from migrant workers who have often been treated shamefully.

Of course, there are many reasons for this state of affairs, some of which can be attributed to selective education and the stereotypes it creates. Yet a large part of the responsibility lies within the schools and the values and ethos they are instilling into their students. When we rank an institution by the number of bankers and lawyers it produces above one that produces nurses and carers, cleaners and drivers, we are not talking about academic apartheid, but social apartheid. Both groups need each other to learn from and to grow rounded citizens. In the same way that we should be asking if using Gross Domestic Product as a measure of a country's success instead of well-being is still appropriate, we need to teach children to think differently about their choices they make in our post-pandemic world so their journeys are not determined by the accumulation of wealth, but by having meaningful lives. In the meantime, as a government and as a society, we need to look after those who look after us rather better than we do.

5. Lessons from Lockdown

'Those old, derided classrooms, with ordered desks and a teacher at the front, now resemble for many the warm embrace of the familiar. Let's look forward to returning to what we know, and what our students value. Let's work tirelessly towards the day when the laptop is shut down, the face mask is taken off, to reveal a very human smile. Today, the personal is radical. The revolution can wait.' David James TES

The last six weeks have been an extraordinary period in our history, fraught with challenges and no more so than for children. As lockdown has continued, schools have been challenged like never before to find different ways to educate their pupils and students. What never seemed possible before, in terms of moving lessons from

the classroom, quickly became so with a remarkable increase in teacher (and parent) training, on-line programmes and curricula and a rapidly growing number of providers. The pity was it took a virus to force us to look at what is possible and how technology can make a difference to learning after twenty years tip-toeing round the edges.

Of course, it has not been straight-forward. There has been justifiable concern of growing inequality during the lockdown, especially for those who respond best to the discipline of a classroom and the presence of a teacher or whose home circumstances mitigate against learning. Schools up and down the country compelled to go on-line have been forced to re-invent the wheel or to choose from the smorgasbord of courses on line – or both. New courses like EtonX and an extended BBC bitesize (delivered through the Oak National Academy) have changed the landscape. Parents have struggled through their own limited knowledge of technology and especially when space and the number of children have restricted learning opportunities. And many students, no doubt, used to education being about push factors, about imposed structure and discipline, find they are rudderless without the means to motivate themselves. That said, I suspect that most parents and guardians have used the time locked up at home to consciously or unconsciously rethink what they understand by education and, in passing, will have developed a grudging admiration for their children's teachers. Possibly their children will be learning about getting on with parents and siblings or other family dynamics and be better able to discuss what's happening about them; VE day and Captain Moore, or climate change and the connectedness of the world. Or perhaps there will be making fresh observations from their daily walk, seeing old things anew – and all of that will have immeasurable benefits. Through all of this, there have been lessons we can learn, a few of which I touch on below:

1. Schools are, first and foremost, social communities where children grow up and experience that journey with their peers – and teachers. It is the social experience that dominates their day; in their minds, education is what is happening when they're making other plans – to paraphrase John Lennon.
2. The importance of education out of the classroom, through families or friendship groups, in growing values, attitudes, tastes, habits, passions has been more evident than ever before.

3. Schools are not just in the business of educating children, but their parents and communities also. By building better links with parents through technology, we have changed the relationship between home and school and the idea of schools being their for the whole family is something we should build on. Many parents are now much better connected to their children's schools and may even understand what their children are learning. Better communication and explanation can only help take this further so parents feel better informed and involved and don't just exist as critical outsiders.

4. Parents and children will have experienced the realisation that education isn't bound by four walls. Many children and families will have experienced education without the limits of a curriculum, whether by pursuing creative activities, through walks, banter, debates and a reappraisal of what they feel is important in their lives.

5. We have a curriculum that needs reforming which may involve changes to the way we teach. Lockdown as led to questions about why we teach the way we do and why do we teach what we do, ie who selects. The changes need be dramatic, but in the wake of the failures of national and international responses to the pandemic and the inevitable changes in our economic activity that will follow, we need to reassess what we teach children. This need for an appraisal of our curriculum is long overdue even before covid19, but debating the cost of human lives in when to end the lockdown (which is really what the debate is about) is focusing minds.

6. Eton College's pledge to raise £100 million to improve equality of opportunity was an initiative that received a lot of publicity and rightly so. However, we need to do more about challenging selective education and understand that students can become better rounded people as well as high achievers in non-selective schools (something we seem as a country to be set against despite it working well in many other countries). We need to weigh up what is gained and lost by selective schooling and not muddle the issue by factors such as poor discipline or class sizes.

7. We have found out that there are other ways of assessing students, even if not yet that reliable or desirable. But we shouldn't just revert to the norm. Simon Henderson made that point when he wrote, *'If teacher-assessed grades are broadly considered to have worked then we should look again at our national exams and see if they are really necessary.'* Maybe the time isn't right, but the school

closures have asked the question whether we are making any concessions to the way children live and learn and whether there is a better, more accurate and more inclusive way of assessing learning.

8. This has been an opportunity for schools to look at when they start teaching in the morning. Many schools in lockdown have shifted their school day; others realised that students were accessing lessons much later in the day and well into the evenings and have adapted their programmes so students can work to their own timetables. Some schools have indicated that they are going to keep to this when schools re-open. Evidence is growing that children would benefit from an hour of exercises / yoga , music or other cultural / sporting activity before starting formal lessons at 10.00am

9. Schools are run on the basis of minimum hours / days in class. Students learn at different paces / times and perhaps (another lesson from lockdown) so we should stop measuring time by the number of hours spent in a classroom rather than by the quality of learning. Three focused hours of core learning each day could be enough to allow time for a more diverse personalised curriculum, other on-line or on-site lessons, vocational training or a range of cultural and recreational activities.

10. As we begin using i-phones to track the spread of coronavirus, we should accept that i-phones are here to stay until they are replaced with even more sophisticated technology - and start to teach children to work with them, to use them as teaching aids and not set against them

11. Most children will be pleased to get back to school, even if only for social reasons. But there will be a significant number who will not welcome a return. There could be a variety of reasons, but three main ones I would suggest will be (a) social acceptance, bullying, learning difficulties, issues with mental health exacerbated by classmates, discipline issues and the camaraderie of the peers. (b) The relevance of the curriculum and what they are learning, especially for those who learn differently or have learning issues and (c) the feeling that they can achieve much better without classroom distractions and discipline issues. 'Disruptive learning' isn't a fad; it's a reality in many classrooms as group work is defined by the attitude and behaviour of the worst member of the group Some students have stated how they have enjoyed lessons from their teachers on google classroom more than the same lessons delivered by the same teacher in the

classroom. Many feel they can learn better without interruptions and at the best times for them. We cannot change classrooms just for the few, (and nor should we), but we can listen, learn and adapt.

12. We have learned a good deal more about how children learn when the content is relevant, interesting and personalised. So many children have been learning so many things, from learning a musical instrument to gardening woodcraft, astronomy and cooking skills - and enjoying it.

13. This is the time for other ideas such as Kate Raworth's economic doughnut, decolonising the curriculum and the recent activities of extinction rebellion to be considered. Our curriculum is overloaded – perhaps it is time to revert to cross-subject groupings such as sciences / social sciences / humanities, even a modified trivium? Whatever we choose, we may need to move away from some subject boxes (should Geography and History exist as separate entities without Economics, should Philosophy and Ethics play a more central role in schools? We have learned that schools can operate off-line and some very well indeed. Rather than throw this advantage away, we have the ideal situation for bringing in more blended learning, where a greater range of subjects can be offered in all schools. To say that *'teaching remotely is a pale imitation of what we do'* is to dismiss how useful distant learning has been for those who struggle with school. By using remote learning flexibly as an integral part of teaching, schools can be more inclusive – surely an important aim of education. The role of teachers has broadened with some showing they are better producing on-line lessons that they are in the classroom. This could be the time to allow teachers to become on-line providers and tutors, providing the personal support for on-line courses

14. We have learnt that there are many in the forefront of education who would choose to ignore all the above. They are ideologically resistant to change, using the club of professed excellence to snuff out new ideas often driven by self-interest. They do not welcome debate and speak in binaries. That is not how change will happen. Their bubbles have contracted the longer the lockdown has gone on.

15. Lurking beneath this pandemic is a far greater crisis with potentially far greater consequences: climate change. We need to change our behaviours, our ambitions, our idea of co-existence if we

are to survive this – and this needs to be reflected in our schools. We have to stop thinking about education as creaming off the top so schools can boast about their clutch of Oxbridge places and start teaching children to value jobs that have social worth: nurses, carers, cleaners, fire and ambulance workers, drivers, teachers and doctors. Schools need to be for all, not for a diminishing minority who profit from an out-dated curriculum and inadvertently contribute to growing inequality.

And, no, the revolution cannot wait. Despite the siren call of the classroom desperately awaited by many children and even more parents, we will be all the poorer if we have not learned some lessons from the lockdown. What is exciting is that a growing number of schools are changing. Despite all the debates and articles that deal with education only in binary terms, we have to accommodate new ideas for the sake of our children. Going back now to how we did things before would be both wasteful and retrograde.

4. Are we getting it right? Selective Entry and Measuring Intelligence *(published in the Spring edition of Angels and Urchins under the heading 'Measuring Intelligence')*

As the pressure for places at selective schools is ramped up year on year, ever more parents are questioning the wisdom, let alone the humanity, of casting their children into a machine driven by data and numbers. The mere suggestion of entry tests is enough to cause usually sane and sensible parents to panic, move house in search of a more helpful postcode or join a church simply in order to better their child's chances of securing a place. It is all rather desperate.

The problem with entry tests is that they are designed for one purpose – to select and place children in rank order for the offer of places. Traditionally, the most reliable method was through a battery of entry tests with a focus on prior knowledge and rote learning based on a tightly prescribed curriculum. Today, while some schools still favour the traditional route, a much wider array of assessment tools are used, including more rigorous interviews, bespoke standardised tests and the measure of other talents and abilities. The issue, however, remains the same. In areas where demand outstrips supply, parents behave as parents do, striving to do the very best for

their children by encouraging extra-curricular pursuits and employing tutors to assist with learning, exam preparation and interview practice. And who can blame them? More than a quarter of children in England are now receiving some form of extra tutoring (in London that figure was 47% in 2018) and rising. The questions we should be asking might be 'are tutors being employed to help build understanding or just to help them pass tests?' and more specifically 'is this the best education we can give our children?'

Not surprisingly, in a world where politicians celebrate the international league tables produced by PISA, such tables still hold sway in measuring schools and children. This is what selective education does. It is not defined by the best interests of the child, which is why we hear of many schools 'hiding' students who threaten their profile come exam season. Measuring ability has long been a challenge in a country where the provision of education is anything but equal and where definitions and interpretations of intelligence and ability are constantly being skewed by politicians and academics. Many 'intelligent' children, often those with SEN or those whose particular talents are neglected, slip through the net. Others just think differently and struggle to meet the straitjacketed requirements of 'one size fits all' exams. The abilities of too many are unrecognized, their work ethic, attitude, ambition, creativity ignored and their individual learning needs placed in the too hard basket.

The mistake is to confuse tests with intelligence. Most tests are based on assessing a prescribed body of knowledge with all the associated bias. We should not confuse them with intelligence, simply defined as the ability to learn and apply knowledge and skills. If we take a wider definition to include the capacity for logic, understanding, self-awareness, learning, emotional knowledge, reasoning, planning, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving, even members of MENSA may be found wanting. And in a system designed to devote large swathes of time and energy to passing tests based on a single premise, that cannot be a surprise. IQ tests (and there are many different tests used to measure IQ) would never claim to be infallible or without bias, or to be the only measure of intelligence. It is others who make that claim for them.

The battery of tests and examinations that schools and children are subject to in order to advance through 'the system' that we call education are as rigorous and numerous as anywhere in the world.

Rote learning, constant testing and re-testing sits at the heart of SATS and 11+ particularly where there is a prescribed syllabus to cover. Common Entrance, for long the entry exam favoured by senior independent schools has now been overtaken by standardised pre-tests to measure ability and attainment two or three years before entry points although in many schools, the formal written examinations still hold sway.

Despite calls for GCSEs to be abandoned (St Edwards in Oxford and Bedales School, for instance, have already limited the number of GCSEs to allow for courses in practical disciplines or in the humanities), they are still the way schools are measured and how they measure themselves. More difficult exams and greater content in the exam prescriptions have resulted in schools starting preparation for GCSEs as early as Year Nine to the detriment of a broader education and, in particular the languages and arts. The results may provide more data by which to assess teachers and schools, but they also shape expectations and conceal an archaic and rigid system of education that does the young few favours by failing to develop the skills and knowledge they need for their futures.

While selective schooling remains at the heart of our school system, parents are in an invidious position, particular in the quest for places at grammar places or independent schools. We need to look anew at the purpose of education as we enter the second quintile of the 21st century with the job market, climate, and society undergoing a period of dramatic change. Schools should be able to offer a broader, more relevant curriculum; there should be a better understanding of the pros and cons of selective schooling; a more trusting and honest parent -teacher accord; more funding to lessen the gap between 'good schools' and 'bad schools'; a much wider definition and understanding of what is intelligence and a greater focus on how schools, even highly selective schools, can improve their decision making. The latter will possibly be achieved in the future through the better use of algorithms, making the process of selection more equitable and inclusive of other talents and characteristics. The argument will be that you cannot prepare for such tests, but where schools lead, parents will surely follow so long as selective entry tests are the only way into our most sought after schools.

3. The New Education: Where we are Heading

This follows on from the New Education: The First Five Years

In five years, education may well be dictated by factors other than academic and pastoral measures, including considerations of the environment, health, cultural and economic factors. Change will be exacerbated by the current pandemic that is altering the social and economic landscape as I write. And yet while it is hard to see education out of the shadow of Covid19, we must do so. What is paramount is that we change the culture so people think of community above self (as already happening) and we look at how to make education available to all, either as blended education or, as a default position, to all children via the internet. The list below is predictive and general, but looks to draw together some of the best thinking out there and to provide a basis for debate.

- o Schools will continue to visit and re-visit the central question: 'what is the best education we can give our children?'
- o The shape of the school day will be modified and compartmentalised according to societal / community need. School timetables will be more fluid and could be significantly different as may school terms and teaching spaces.
- o The role and function of educators will change to accommodate a greater degree of separation of roles into tutors, facilitators, classroom, assistants, auxiliary, specialists roles each with more specific defined roles.
- o Ofsted will be closed down and different measures used for employing worth based on human values / attitudes and behaviours and environmental as well as academic goals
- o The status and well-being of teachers to be raised / prioritised by Government thereby encouraging more teachers to train for, and remain in the profession.
- o All education curricula will be available remotely for all students. While the emphasis will be on classroom teaching, individual programmes will be the norm and all school programmes will be blended as required. Courses offered by schools will include courses offered by all sectors and all providers, as deemed appropriate

- o A national virtual school that offers all academic and vocational courses will be established, particularly to promote marginal subjects (languages, etc)
- o Education will be geared to need and will be pared down to a required core before any specialisation (similar to the Trivium). Functional skills will be honed before specialisation
- o Creative subjects and general health will be prioritised
- o STEM subjects and digital learning will be implicit (cf explicit) parts of learning
- o Assessment will be on-line. By the use of better algorithms, summative assessment will be greatly reduced and national testing confined to the final years of school. Assessment will change from measuring learning peaks to assessing deeper understanding
- o The rationale of education will change from a level of academic achievement to a utilitarian measure and inclusion. Through acknowledging readiness and better data, doors to career choice will remain open longer.
- o At present around 15% of the population are diagnosed with special needs. By 2025, it will be accepted that all students have 'special needs' and that the delivery of education will be tailored accordingly, both in mainstream and on-line classes. Labelling of children will no longer mean removal from classrooms, but more remote teaching
- o The most important and fundamental change will be in the culture of education which will be a shift from a premise of education based on individual achievement to a much wider interpretation based on societal well-being and of what makes a good citizen and a fulfilled human being. This will mean a shift from a 'me' culture to a 'we' culture.
- o The doughnut economy will lie at the heart of our curriculum with its emphasis on regeneration, conservation, and a redefinition of economic value. The concept of schools as businesses will be rejected and that state will take more responsibility for the funding of schools

- o GDP will be widely discredited as THE tool to measure national prosperity and growth. Planned obsolescence will be seen as both redundant and wasteful.
- o Only external exams will be at the top of secondary schools (nb GCSEs will no longer exist)
- o Further curriculum development to ensure creativity and thinking is at the heart of learning and that curriculum subjects are stripped of the extraneous for initial level courses, ie mathematics would remove most algebra, calculus and some trigonometry up until age 14
- o An adherence to what has worked in education: rote-learning, memory work, communication skills (written and spoken) will still underpin education at set times and in set subjects, but learning for learning's sake will be reduced.
- o League tables will be banned along with any competitive cross-school advertising based on examination results
- o The curriculum will focus on key skill – oral and verbal communication, digital skills, reading and mathematics up until end of Year 6.
- o Broad subjects to be integrated into broad groups: Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences up until the end of Year 10.
- o Pathways from Year 11 onwards
- o End of selective schools
- o Funding heavily apportioned on decile point based on areas and intake (10 = best areas / schools / minimal funding) 1 = most deprived areas maximum funding)
- o No private funding of education. A focus on the integrity of schools, curriculum and purpose. Which means increased national funding.
- o Part of the cultural change (linked to careers and choices made at Age 16) is an emphasis on service occupations over self-service, value measured in other than monetary terms (a redefinition of value and worth)

- o There will be much more emphasis on community teaching and providing more assistance and courses for parents
- o There will be a change in the way education is perceived by the young: no longer adversarial, but useful, and having a purpose by being challenging, relevant and tailored to their needs

This is, of course, predictive and rather pie in the sky - and inevitably full of holes! But it is an attempt to add flesh to the words of all those that write 'time for change' or 'we cannot go back to how things were' etc. While these are sentiments I agree with wholeheartedly (and sad it has taken a world pandemic to get here), we cannot simply dismantle a system of education without proposing what can take its place. This involves looking anew at our system, and preferably from without rather than from within, with all its vested interests and roadblocks. This has been a significant part of my work on the curriculum page of my website at petertait.education.

Once again, I am aware many areas (pastoral and careers for instance) have only been alluded to, but rather than point out what's missing, help me fill in the gaps. I am happy to footnote any points and apologise for any omissions / errors that are herein.

2. Clearing out the Curriculum: Finding the Blank Page

You don't have to look far to find advice on reshaping the curriculum. Out there, in the edu-marketplace, are literally thousands of educationalists, academics and consultants explaining, interpreting and defining the national curriculum by delivering courses and workshops, each offering nuanced opinions about content, planning and delivery, resources and assessment. Behind them exists a subsidiary industry producing text-books, apps, journals and resources, tweaking pedagogy as they go. And that is before we move from the generic onto the specific, the subject domains, each undergoing its own process of revisionism and development as they

must, justifying change along the way. For defending your subject in the battleground of choice is no easy task. Sexing up your subject, at school, at university, is part of the game. Enter 'curriculum' into twitter and you will see how widespread the industry is. And it is an industry.

Curricula should always be dynamic, subject to discussion and change. But the problem with the plethora of new theories, research, vocabulary and advances in neuroscience is that they feed into our current paradigm that is, itself, increasingly redundant. It is this paradigm, after all, that acts as a huge anchor on the imagination, an impediment to the transformative thinking that is necessary. We can liken the curriculum to a pond that is struggling for food and oxygen as more and more subjects and ideas are added (so many lessons a week; so many hours in the timetable, so many different demands, pressure, distraction), by seeing both as finite spaces. So at the very time that more and more is being asked of schools and teachers by the curriculum, the pond is being choked by blanket weed and algae that are slowly suffocating the life out of it.

In looking at where we are going with education, we need to abandon this model. We need to forget about its premise and content and ignore what we have always done, even the building blocks and subject domains. We need to stop tinkering with a model that is at the whim of political and societal expectation and accept it is redundant. And for many reasons that is not easy.

Forgetting what we know of education we should ask a single question, 'what is the best education we can give our children in the here and now? What do they need to know? What should they know? Forget subject domains. Forget topics and material that are taught because they've always been taught and schools have the resources and the qualified staff to teach them. Forget the cries of industry who call for the primacy of vocational skills; forget the classicists and historians who argue that only by understanding the events of the past can we plot our onward journey; forget what we know of technology and traditional teaching pedagogy; forget grammarians who argue for the terms children need to know for KS2; ignore the mathematicians who feel algebra and calculus are necessary for all. Forget what schools look like and how they work. Ask that question 'What is the best education we can give our children in the here and now?' - and keep asking it. Put everything we think and know to one

side and ask what are the skills and knowledge, the values and ideas children need, now, today? Forget about assessment which for too long has drained the life from learning. Forget the adversarial nature of education, the role society has given it, the way children and parents view it. Forget about the idea of university being the natural outcome, towards which schools are skewered; forget all that.

And ask instead not only what could be done to make our curriculum more relevant, more applicable to a world that is dynamic yet increasingly rootless. Maybe some of the change will not be so drastic, that some blocks will remain, perhaps even knowledge and skills like rote learning and tables, but only by asking (and then answering) the question will we know.

Everyone has something to say on education. There is much good work that is going on in educational research telling us more about how children learn that is crucial in shaping our understanding. But teachers are in danger of not knowing where to turn as the pressures of their job are compounded by ambiguities including to fundamental questions like 'what is it we are trying to achieve through education' and 'what is the appropriate pedagogy to deliver it?' Within the current paradigm, ways have been found to clean the pond and restock it, but it's still a pond. Perhaps a better analogy would be that of an ox-bow lake, left behind as the river has passed by with its different channels and meanders. We need to get out of the stagnant waters and back into the river to make our curriculum more dynamic. I have suggested some thoughts for a transitional stage in a previous blog, but as to what happens after that it is difficult to predict other than change is likely to be slow and laborious – which could be calamitous, not only for children, but for society.

Nevertheless, predict and plan we must and turn our focus forwards, rather than holding true to the direction of travel taken so far. Self-interest, inertia, issues with funding will not be easily overcome. Nor will be the interests of an expansive and profitable education industry: the producers of teaching aids, books and resources; those who run conferences, sell CPD, organise subject associations, print journals and whose opinions on social media hold undue sway. They are not just going to step aside unless they buy into a new model. But they should pause, and take a step outside the pond, clear their heads and think more about what they are contributing to and whether they truly believe it is the best education we can provide. They will know that many of our children are not happy, nor are they

always well-provided for in terms of choice. If we ignore the need for change, we will be guilty of sacrificing our them for a curriculum that has less and less relevance to them, that has built-in pressures and is driven by often irrelevant outcomes, a system that ignores their personal needs, their mental health and well-being and even the need of society for good citizens. We owe them more than that

1. The New Education

Phase One: The Next Five Years

It is almost impossible to summarise what a changed education landscape should look without writing a book on the subject - which is no way to debate something as dynamic and ever-changing as education. We are mired down by educational research, dealing with theory and practice, through book and conference, without any discussion as to whether we're operating in the right paradigm - and what follows below suggests not. It may be that every point is a provocation, but perhaps that is the point because if we don't get the debate moving along, and discussion fired up we will continue losing teachers and fail our children.

Hence a list of bullet points:

- * The school day keeps its current shape
- * A change is instigated in school culture: behaviour, aspiration, ethics, expectations.
- * Children are taught to see the relevance of education –hence, ipso facto, it must be relevant
- * Music and physical education, drama and fitness/ sport activities, including pilates, dance etc are offered at the start of day music
- * Formal lessons of core subjects start at 10.00am
- * No external assessment until 11
- * Move away from selective education – some setting allowed within Years 11 – 13

- * Gradual move away from GCSEs
- * Use of external providers for remote learning to cater for a wide a range of interests and abilities as practicable (universities, vocational, freelance providers, sharing amongst schools)
- * Obstacles, such as excessive accountability for pupils' performance, classroom disruption, loss of teachers addressed with more focus on classroom management and pedagogy.
- * Gradual separation of societal and educative functions of schools (also be reflected in staffing)
- * Blended education offered between internal and external providers in the afternoon sessions including arts, music, sports, languages (on-line classrooms), etc
- * Staff to include teaching, tutors and facilitators with a commensurate reduction in the number of teacher assistants above Year 5
- * Core subjects (especially English and Mathematics) stripped down to utility value, ie less focus on peripheral grammatical terms, (determiners, fronted adverbial phrases, ellipsis), less emphasis on written comprehension, text analysis, more on interpretation, writing skills, accuracy of written language, oral language; in Mathematics, less focus on algebra and calculus in KS 1 - 3, more on practical mathematical skills, tables, measurement, money.
- * Significant curriculum change outside of the core subjects with less focus on teaching for assessment (more practical science, practical geography, ecology, more music, art)
- * Main homework up to Year 5 should be reading (only other homework should be retentive work, spelling, languages, tables, formulae)
- * Ethical underpinning of the curriculum - an understanding of the anthropocene, re-wilding, climate change, ecology and regeneration
- * Absorption of History and Geography into Social Studies up until age 14 years

- * A root and branch review of what a school should look like (including how to incorporate technology – and the mobile phone – into teaching)
- * An overhaul / reduction of PD / CPD and new terminology to provide a period of continuity with a focus on pedagogy.
- * Focus on classroom management, growing expectations, improving engagement with a focus on relevance and ownership.
- * Extra funding required, but schools should also work towards a reductionist approach to education to ensure the process of teaching and learning is not cluttered by distractions. Too often the tools used to deliver lessons get in the way.
- * Less focus on cognitive load theory, knowledge rich curriculum, learning and retrieval practice, modes of assessment etc. We need to ignore the trimmings, go back to the core
- * More focus on intellectual risk taking, innovation and problem solving.
- * Homogenising of school types (grammar, state, independent)
- * A re-evaluation of the impact the economic model and business aspect of schools is having on education
- * In all things, schools need to visit and re-visit the central question: ‘what is the best education we can give our children – here and now?’

This is to fuel discussion and debate. It can do little more. There will be glaring gaps so don't bother looking for they will be everywhere – for instance, there is nothing on careers, EYFS, phonics, pastoral care, vocational qualifications etc, (although they are covered in the debate on www.petertait.education). I am happy to footnote any points and to apologise for any serious omissions which will be both personal and numerous.

