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INTERVIEW

KATHRYN FOXFIELD

"My characters struggle deciding who to be"

DON'T PANIC!

Why AI won't replace you (yet)

ONE OF A KIND

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FROM THE EDITOR

"Welcome...

Now this might just be me, but since the widespread adoption of social media it feels like the lifecycle of new 'revolutionary technologies' (or 'novel software applications' in most cases) follow a common pattern.

First, breathless claims are made as to the technology's potential power and capacity to transform entire industries at a stroke. We'll then often see the launch of low-level, consumer-facing implementations of said technology, which only serve to get people even more excited about its future capabilities (never mind what it's actually capable of in the here and now).

Some companies might then form, or move into the space from elsewhere, and some may profit handsomely – right up until people's interest starts to wane and the next hot new technology appears on the horizon. I direct readers to NFTs/the blockchain, virtual reality, the broader concept of the metaverse and now – maybe – artificial intelligence.

Without wanting to rehash Gareth Sturdy's article on p14, it seems we're deep in the 'low level implementation' phase where AI is concerned, with ChatGPT and other large language model concept tools having been let loose in the wild and put to all manner of strange uses.

Impressive though some of these tools are (not least their ability to complete homework tasks to an acceptable standard on students' behalf – more on which next issue), we mustn't lose sight of what what it is they *actually do* – that is, process huge volumes of existing data (much of it drawn from existing, and often copyrighted original works) and then at the prompting of a human user, make that data seem new again by reformulating and re-presenting it to us in a way that we can readily comprehend and understand.

What they *don't* presently do is demonstrate much in the way of machine-sourced imagination or originality – and yet, how often have we heard claims that AI has the potential (there's that word again) to one day replace qualified teaching staff? That remains highly unlikely, for the simple reason that *teaching is a creative endeavour*.

Building schemes of work, charting new paths through the curriculum, analysing concepts from multiple angles, responding to questions with engaging answers; these all require quick-thinking and originality of thought, rather than simply drawing on what's gone before. If AI can assist for now with labour-intensive assessment tasks, that's great. But the actual teaching? The professionals have already got that one covered, thanks...

Enjoy the issue,

Callum Fauser
callum.fauser@theteachco.com

On board this issue:

Meera Chudasama is an English, media and film studies teacher

Matt MacGuire is an assistant headteacher

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Ed Carlin is a deputy headteacher

Jennifer Wozniak-Rush is an assistant headteacher

Rob Wraith is head of learning technology at NCG

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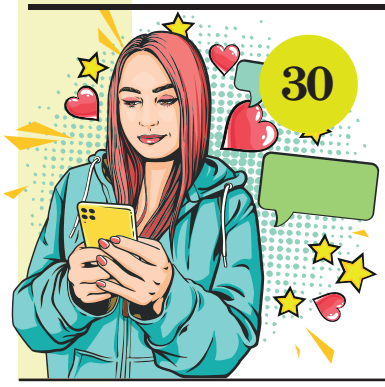
Sign up for the weekly TS newsletter at **teachwire.net/newsletter**

Essential reading:



JUL/AUG '23

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The newsletter

Grab a coffee and spend five minutes exploring the lighter side of CPD...

The UNINFORMED teacher's guide to...

APPLE VISION PRO

We all know how this dance goes, don't we? Apple announces a whizzy new product, and immediately the search begins for a justification as to why you need one. So how likely is it that you'll be spending a chunk of your departmental budget on its Vision Pro headset?

This is Apple's first foray into what it's calling the 'spatial computer' category. Once the chunky headgear is secured in place and switched on, users will gaze through dual ultra-high-res displays that initially show just their immediate surroundings, courtesy of a front-facing 3D camera.

The magic happens once they start 'overlaying' various virtual displays and readouts onto said surroundings. Watch a film on an enormous virtual screen that floats in front of you. Prepare for the next day's presentation by sorting through your slides in mid-air. It's the hand-wavy *Minority Report* operating system made real at long last.

Naturally, you'll need one to encourage students into STEM careers and prepare them for *jobs that don't exist yet*, won't you? Well, beside that justification on the expenses form will need to be a request for $3,499 when it goes on sale in the US early next year, and in all likelihood considerably more when it becomes available in other territories during the latter half of 2024...

DO SAY
"It's another paradigm shift!"

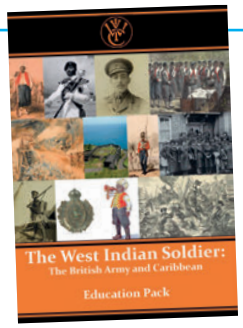
DON'T SAY
"Yes, you can walk while OW, THAT'S THE DESK"

BEAT THE BUDGET

What are we talking about?
Black History resources from the West India Committee

Who is it for?
KS3

What's on offer?
Two ebooks – 'The West Indian Soldier', which explores the role of British soldiers in the Caribbean and the formation of local armed forces between 1654 and 1945, and 'The Caribbean's Great War', examining the contributions of West Indian servicemen during WWI.



How might teachers use the resources?
Both ebooks are accompanied by education packs for students, containing glossaries, timelines and assorted activities, teacher's guides, posters and additional background materials for use in class

Where is it available?
bit.ly/ts125-WIC

DON'T QUOTE ME...

"The decline of English as a subject for study at university seems to me a healthy development. Literature is lovely stuff but it's not a way to earn your bread."

Emma Duncan, Times columnist and visiting fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford

Think of a number...

47,954

The number of full time equivalent teachers who joined English schools in 2022/23, making a total of 468,371 teachers currently in the workforce

43,997
The total number of full time equivalent teachers who left the teaching profession over the same time period
Source: School Workforce Census

£1,755.97
The minimum annual cost of sending a child to a state-funded secondary school (based on uniform, equipment, lunch, transport and enrichment trip expenses)
Source: Child Poverty Action Group

ONE FOR THE WALL

"Truth is the daughter of time, not of authority"

Francis Bacon

Ofsted evolves

Ofsted has announced a series of changes to its inspection processes and complaints procedure. The move comes amid fierce debate across the profession over the purpose and impact of school inspections, following the death of headteacher Ruth Perry in January of this year.

Inspectors will now return within three months to schools rated Inadequate only where safeguarding has been found to be Inadequate, but all other judgements found to be Good or better. The regulator is also running an open consultation on its proposals for a revised complaints system (see bit.ly/ts125-NL1), which it hopes will see complaints resolved more quickly and with greater transparency, while entailing a lower administrative burden for complainants.

School leaders will also be given greater clarity over the timing of upcoming inspections, further details of which will be outlined an updated inspection handbook that will be published in September. Another incoming change is that inspectors will be directed to 'de-personalise' the language used in reports, so that references are made by default to 'the school,' rather than named individuals.

Also announced were HMI-led advice seminars for Outstanding schools last inspected before September 2015 ahead of their impending re-inspections, and an expansion of the government's funding of wellbeing help for school leaders via the charity Education Support, which will now seek to support an extra 500 headteachers by March 2024.

SPEECHES AND CORRESPONDENCE

Forget the media-friendly soundbites – what else was in those announcements and letters you missed?

THE SPEECH:

Education Minister addresses London Tech Week

WHO? Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education
WHEN? 14th June 2023

Worldwide, there's a massive need for more software engineers. 40 million of them. That's equal to the entire population of Poland. If you think that sounds alarming, by 2030 this gap is expected to reach 85 million – bigger than Germany's current population.

This is why we have created the Digital and Computing Skills Education Taskforce. Its role will be to spot what computing and digital skills are needed for the economy, where the gaps are now, and what they're likely to be in the future and how technology may change these.

Most importantly, the taskforce will make it easier for students to choose computing and digital pathways at school, colleges, Institutes of Technology and universities, and we have invested over £100 million in the National Centre for Computing Education.

We have 12 Institutes of Technology across the country today with nine more in the pipeline. They are currently working with over a hundred employer partners, including Microsoft, Nissan, Bosch, Babcock, Fujitsu, Siemens and many, many more. This number will continue to grow, ensuring we deliver the STEM skills that the industry needs – now and for the future.

THE LETTER:

Office for Statistics Regulation queries DfE definition of 'fully funded'

FROM? Ed Humpherson, director general for regulation at the Office for Statistics Regulation
TO? Graham Archer, interim director general for families group at the DfE
WHEN? 10th May 2023

"It is our understanding that when used by the DfE, the term 'fully funded' refers to the national level, rather than at the individual school level. We consider that the DfE has evidenced its claim that the [teachers' pay offer] is fully funded in line with its definition.

However, we acknowledge that some users may interpret 'fully funded' to refer to the individual school level. In the light of this difference of interpretation, it is important that the DfE continues to support understanding by being clear about its use of the term 'fully funded'."

SAVE THE DATE

6-7 JULY 2023 Festival of Education | 3 OCTOBER 2023 DPPC2023 | 6 OCTOBER 2023 The National Education Show – Cardiff

6-7 JULY 2023

Festival of Education

Wellington College, Crowthorne

educationfest.co.uk

Following a triumphant return in 2022 after a pandemic-prompted hiatus, the organisers of the 13th Festival of Education are expecting to welcome some 5,500 attendees and an impressive 300 speakers to the leafy environs of Wellington College for two days of inspiring oratory, robust debate and plentiful networking opportunties

3 OCTOBER 2023

DPPC2023

Online

dppc23.orcula.co.uk

School staff and governors might want to make note of this free online conference organised by the Information Commissioner's Office. Participants will get to take part in practical workshops led by ICO staff, offering advice on subject access requests, data sharing and responding to Freedom of Information requests.

6 OCTOBER 2023

The National Education Show – Cardiff

City Hall, Cardiff

nationaleducationshow.com

The second of this year's National Education Show events rolls into Cardiff this October. Those making the trip will find over 40 CPD seminars, some great networking opportunities and the very latest products and services aimed at the education sector being demonstrated at the show's extensive exhibition area.

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*As reported by Futuresource; excludes China.
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TEACHER TALES

True stories from the education chalkface

Send in the bomb squad!

The day trip to France had always been a highlight of the European Studies course. One year, the plan was for students to travel by train to the coast, before crossing the Channel via Dover. Yet the night before the trip a 12-hour rail strike was called, meaning there would be no trains running between London and Oxford, where we were based.

Undaunted, an intrepid younger member of staff bundled the students into the back of the school's ancient minibus and headed off to Victoria Station. Arriving with barely minutes to spare, a helpful railway worker found space for the minibus to park on the station concourse, just yards away from the platform. The group duly grabbed their bags and leapt aboard the train.

Eight hours later, a considerably more tired, but otherwise content group of students disembarked from their return train at Victoria, to find a cordon of blue and white tape surrounding the minibus and several very stern-looking policemen keeping watch.

(At this point we should clarify that these events took place during the 1970s, at the height of the IRA's bombing campaign targeting the UK mainland).

It eventually emerged that in the morning's rush to board the train, the teacher had pulled out the ignition keys but failed to press a separate 'off' switch that would actually silence the vintage minibus' diesel engine. The subsequent discovery of an unattended vehicle conspicuously parked in a public place with its engine running had prompted authorities to close Victoria station for several hours and request a thorough search by the bomb squad.

When the attending officers finally accepted the teacher's story, the minibus was eventually released and the party returned safely to Oxford with tales to tell...

Find more true tales and amusing anecdotes at schoolhumour.co.uk

A FEW MINUTES OF DESIGN

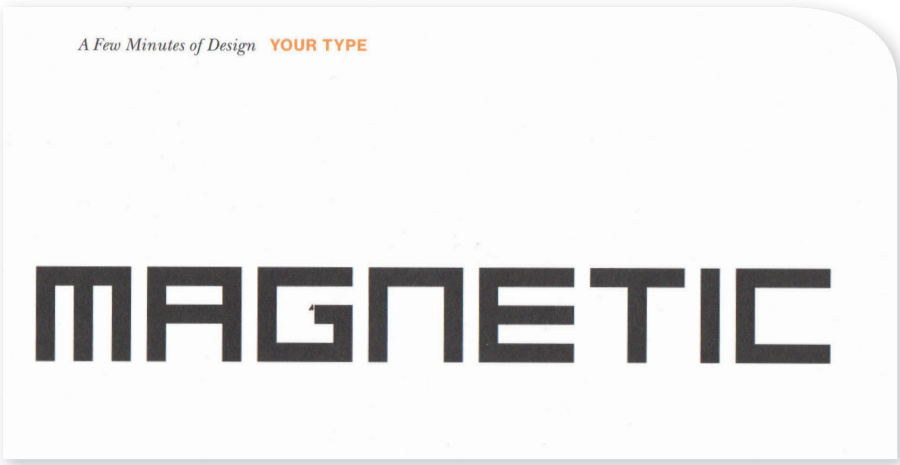
#27 YOUR TYPE

Look carefully at the word shown below. Write your name in the same typeface.

Are there clues to any letters that are in your name but not in the sample?

Practice drawing the common elements of the letters. What do the curves look like? The line thicknesses?

What gives the letters their unique character?



Get Into Film

Following on from Into Film's extensive work in celebration of International Women's Day, here is a short film suggestion to help illustrate some of the inspiring content we have available for schools:

IN A ROOM FULL OF SISTERS (2021, UNCLASSIFIED, 4 MINUTES, AGES 11+)

Curriculum Links: PSHE, citizenship

Clothes can tell a story and communicate much about a person's identity. They're effectively a statement that can be worn with pride, love and strength.

The Dirac is a colourful, loose-fitting Somali dress that's traditionally worn by women on special occasions, such as during Eid and at weddings. In this short film, the Dirac becomes a symbol of cultural heritage and diversity, as young Somali women model the wearing of their Diracs against the grey backdrops of several Cardiff neighbourhoods – Butetown, Grangetown and Cathays.

Photographer and writer-director Ashrah Suudy captures these striking scenes while recording the women reciting original poetry composed by Suudy herself, addressing the importance of celebrating one's culture unapologetically.

The end result is a three-way celebration of the strength of sisterhood, the power that fabric can have in enriching our lives and cultural pride.

Head online to intofilm.org to stream the film for free

Retweets

Who's been saying what on Twitter this month?

Debra Kidd @debrakidd
You might think that after a number of years where children's access to hearing a language has been slashed - fewer language assistants, less travel, no school trips etc - that the boards would go gently with the listening papers for GCSE. But no.

AR @llewelyn20
I think we need to be honest and say that schools are no longer just for education. We are a social service, providing food, clothes, mental health care, housing and financial advice, money for transport and childcare. We need a framework that reflects this reality, @Ofstednews

Follow us via @teachsecondary – and let us know what you're thinking

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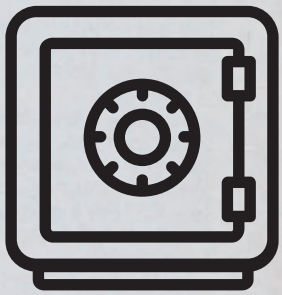
The Vocab Clinic

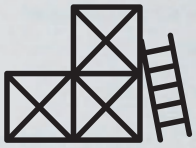
Support your students towards better language use, with the help of our resident word-wizard, **Alex Quigley...**

TRY THIS TODAY: 'SUBJECT VOCABULARY STORES'



With so many new academic terms to learn across the secondary school curriculum, it's no surprise that pupils routinely forget or misuse them.

'Subject vocabulary stores' can be a helpful record, and strategy, for remembering a vast range of vocabulary. Schools can go about creating subject vocabulary stores in different ways. Often, subject departments will create their own vocabulary store booklets or books. Over successive terms and even school years, this repository can become increasingly useful for providing definitions and examples, aiding quizzing and more besides.



Cracking the academic code

In most subjects – and especially during exams – pupils will be expected to offer arguments supported by evidence. For many, it's a task that can overload them, so they need simple scaffolds. We can support them in crafting well-organised arguments by utilising 'three-part arguments'.

Put simply, a three-part argument is a plan crafted with a common triplicate of discourse markers: *'Some people... However... In my personal view'*. These discourse markers can be easily adapted into different contexts (e.g. '*Many historians view... In contrast... Nevertheless'*) and will help pupils cohere a simple scaffold they can then build around, thereby increasing their confidence. Over time, more nuance can be added, but this three-part approach is a solid starting point for novice pupils.

DO THEY KNOW?

Avril Coxhead's *Academic Word List* compiles the 500 most frequently used academic terms in all university level texts

ONE FOR: RELIGIOUS STUDIES

ETHICS

Derives from: The word 'ethics' derives from the Greek '*ethikos*', referring to 'character or custom'
Means: Ethics is the study of human morality, with 'ethical behaviour' being considered 'good'
Related terms: *Philosophy, morality, principles, behaviour, ethos, ethical*
Note: Pupils often mistake the study of 'ethics' as being about only exploring *good* morality – not *all* morality

One word at a time

The French term 'entrepreneur' is commonly used in business studies (as well as being a common spelling error for school-age pupils). The word originates from a combination of two Latin words: '*entre*', meaning 'to swim out', and '*prendes*', meaning 'to grasp or understand'.

The history of the term indicates both the active nature of entrepreneurship and the positive connotations we associate with it. The term was first popularised in the 1800s and is commonly associated with the rise of capitalism. Pupils need to be able to spell the word(!), but also understand its complexity – and how it may, or may not carry positive connotations...

I DON'T THINK IT MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS...

DEMAND

In business studies

A consumer's desire to purchase goods and services at a specific price

In English language

An insistent request

Alex Quigley is a former teacher and the author of a number of books, most recently *Closing the Writing Gap*; he also works for the Education Endowment Foundation as National Content Manager

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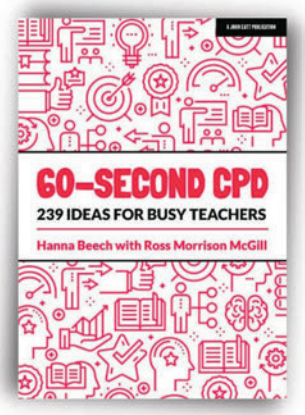
Recommended titles:

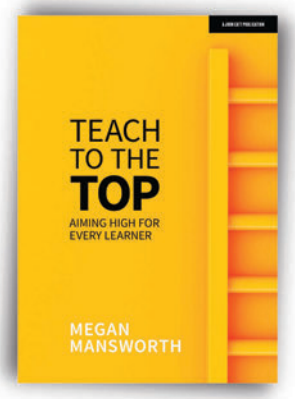
Teaching Essentials



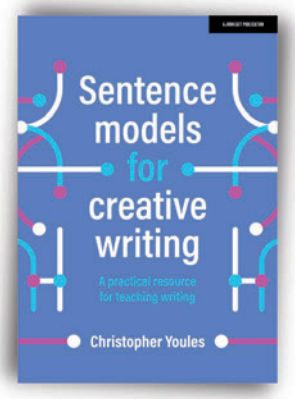
Teaching WalkThrus

Curriculum

Pastoral



Teaching & Learning



Behaviour

In Action series

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Neil Carmichael

Honorary Professor of Politics and Education at Nottingham University, former MP and chair of the Education Select Committee

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JOHN CATT
FROM HODDER EDUCATION

[MATHS PROBLEM]

PERIMETERS OF SECTORS

Colin Foster offers some advice for preventing confusion when your students are tasked with finding the perimeters of sectors

In this lesson, students are asked to come up with as many examples as they can of sectors with a perimeter of 24 cm.

THE DIFFICULTY

Can you calculate the perimeter of the sector in Fig 1?

Students may calculate just the arc length (13.96 cm), failing to include the two radii, or they may calculate the ***area*** instead (34.90 cm^2), possibly mistakenly adding twice the radius to ***that***.

The length of an arc of radius r and angle θ degrees is $\frac{\theta}{360} \times 2\pi r$, and the perimeter is the sum of the red arc length and the two blue radii shown in Fig 2 – so for this sector, the perimeter comes to

$2 \times 5 + \frac{160}{360} \times 2\pi \times 5$, which is equal to 23.96 cm (correct to 2 decimal places), or about 24 cm.

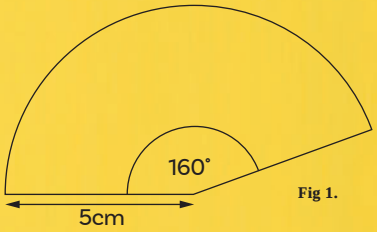


Fig 1.


Fig 2.

r (cm)	θ (°) correct to 1 decimal place
3	343.8
4	229.2
5	160.4
6	114.6
7	81.9
8	57.3
9	38.2
10	22.9
11	10.4

THE SOLUTION

Invent some other sectors with a perimeter of as close to 24 cm as you can.

This is not as straightforward as it might seem, since changing the radius changes both the length of the two straight line segments and the length of the arc at the same time. Students will probably work by trial and error, which will generate lots of useful practice. Some students might take an algebraic approach. If we write a formula for the perimeter P of a sector,

$$P = 2r + \frac{\pi r\theta}{180}$$

then we can rearrange this to make θ the subject:

$$\theta = \frac{180\,(P - 2r)}{\pi r}$$

This enables us to calculate the required value of θ for any value of r we choose. All the possible cases for integer r are shown in the table, and students could be asked to draw a graph of θ against r, as shown in Fig 3. (Students may need help seeing why the cases r = 1 and 2 do ***not*** give possible values of θ, and might argue about the r = 12 case!)

You could also ask students to explore the ***areas*** of these sectors, and to find the sector with perimeter 24 that has the ***largest*** area. It is possible to express the area A in terms of the perimeter and radius as $A = \frac{r(P - 2r)}{2}$.

Completing the square, $A = \frac{p^2}{16} - (r - \frac{p}{4})^2$, meaning that A is a maximum when $r = \frac{p}{4}$, which is when r = 6 cm and A = 36 cm^2.

Checking for understanding

To assess students' understanding, you could ask them to invent one sector with a ***perimeter of 12 cm*** and another sector with ***an area of 12 cm^2***.

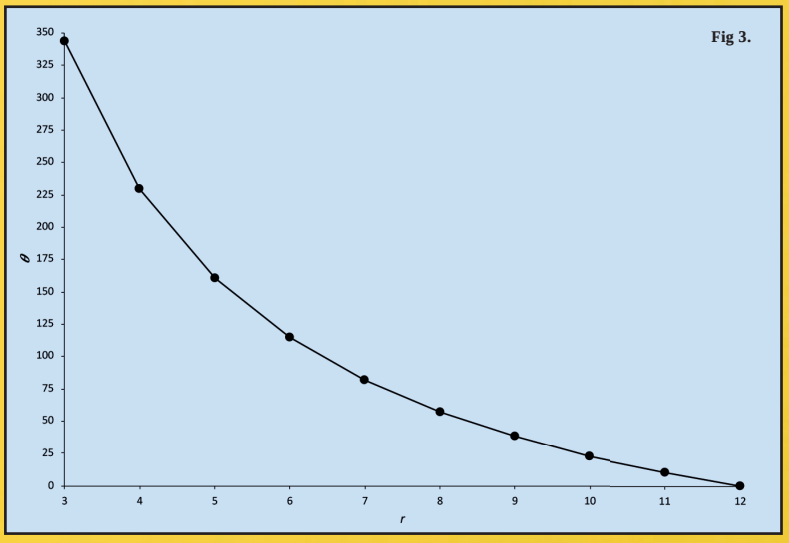


Fig 3.

Colin Foster (@colinfoster77) is a Reader in Mathematics Education in the Department of Mathematics Education at Loughborough University. He has written many books and articles for mathematics teachers. foster77.co.uk, blog.foster77.co.uk

Boasts in the machine

We keep hearing that AI has the potential to elevate or destroy us, observes **Gareth Sturdy** – but the reality is more prosaic than some would have you believe...

Have you heard about the school that let its Y5 students design its curriculum? The kids wrote schemes of work and individual lesson plans for their teachers by comparing information across lots of websites, but without any deep knowledge of, or personal engagement with the subjects involved.

Okay, I'm fibbing. That didn't happen. Y5s may well be capable of Googling and contrasting the results they find, but it would be absurd to see this as a substitute for the knowledge, informed reasoning and practical skills wielded by teachers when designing a curriculum.

And yet, this is how the artificial intelligence (AI) behind chatbots such as ChatGPT works in practice – with a mentality similar to that of a 10-year-old blankly surfing the net. So why are so many voices trying to persuade us that AI is the biggest thing to ever happen to schools, with the potential to fundamentally transform what they do?

Febrile climate

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak launched a £100m taskforce to exploit the use of AI across the UK, with education high among said taskforce's priorities.

At around the same time, however, some of the Silicon Valley moguls who have been instrumental in building AI platforms – including the likes of Elon Musk and Steve Wozniak – penned an open letter warning us all of the technology's potentially calamitous impacts, and even called for a temporary moratorium on further development.

The Oxford academic Toby Ord recently told *The Spectator* that similar fears of human extinction stemming from the use of AI are harboured by around half of all AI researchers. Indeed, one of AI's foremost pioneers, Geoffrey Hinton, went as far as quitting Google over his concerns regarding the existential risk that machine learning poses to humanity.

"All AI can presently do is identify patterns it has seen before and copy them"

What are teachers to make of this febrile climate, in which intelligent machines are heralded as both saviours of education and destroyers of civilisation?

The fearful response to AI seems of a piece with the apocalyptic mindset we've been encouraged to adopt in response to all contemporary global challenges, be they viral, climate-related, military or economic.

Myriad applications

Yet spending just a few minutes toying with ChatGPT or Google Bard should be sufficient to persuade even the most sceptical of how ingenious these tools are, and the myriad potential applications they can be put to in education.

There can be little doubt that AI is going to improve the standard of learning resources and free up valuable teacher time. Just as with any disruptive technological development, jobs could be at risk – but on balance, the future will be better with AI.

That said, let's not get carried away. AI is, at least for now, really, *really* dumb. John Warner, English teacher and author of *Why They Can't Write?*, has previously argued that we should be careful in how we talk about the data handling carried out by machine learning algorithms.

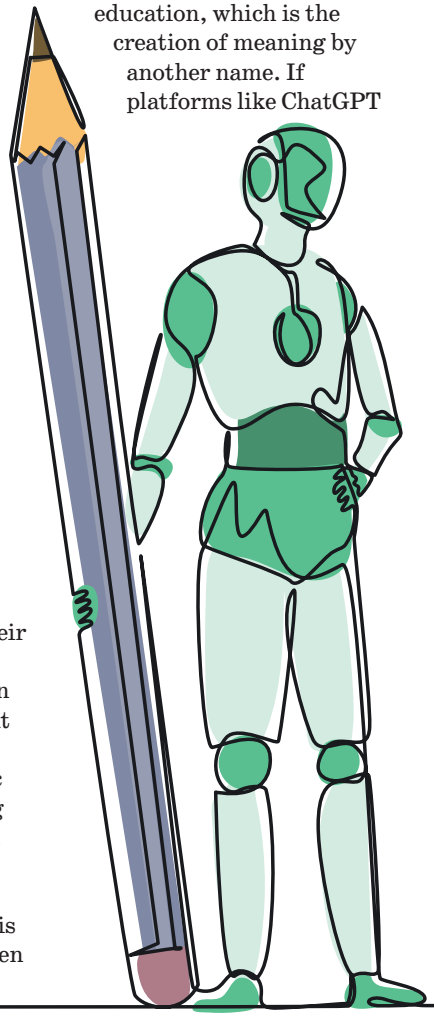
Warner makes the point that what we're seeing from them isn't genuine reading or writing. The so-called 'Large Language Models' that currently drive AI don't actually *know* anything. They've yet to experience any change in consciousness through their learning.

Elsewhere, the musician Nick Cave has written that AI, "Can't inhabit the true transcendent artistic experience. It has nothing to transcend! It feels such a mockery of what it is to be human."

All AI can presently do is identify patterns it has seen before and copy them. There is no imagination at work. No new ideas are being generated; only reworkings of what's already been. AI bots are mere plagiarists, a pastiche of intelligence. Or as the technology writer Andrew Orlowski memorably put it in *The Telegraph*, "ChatGPT – the parrot that has swallowed the internet and can burp it back up again."

Simulated understanding

AI cannot impart meaning to anything. Meaning can only ever reside in a human mind. This is crucial for education, which is the creation of meaning by another name. If platforms like ChatGPT



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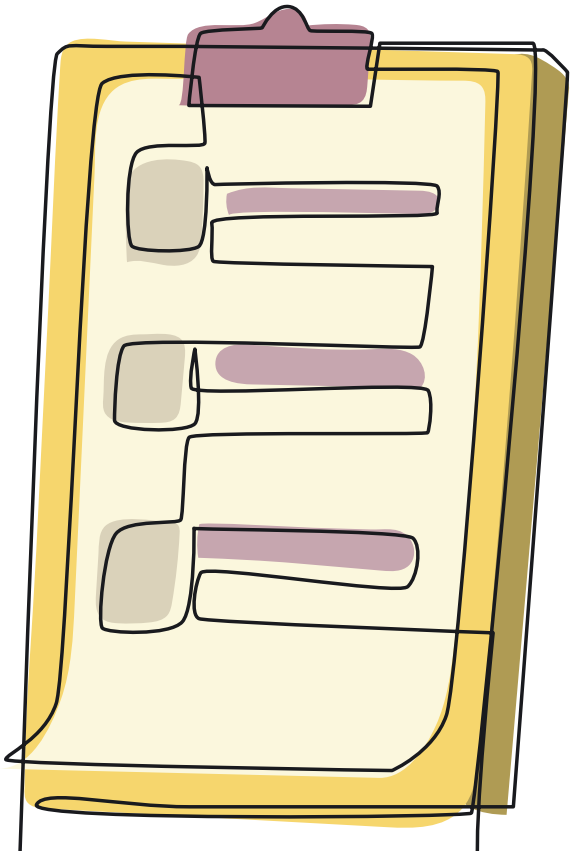
have any use at all, it's only because meaning has previously been assigned somewhere inside them by human beings.

The engineers currently fretting about how intelligent AI could become might be better off paying more attention to just how, well, *artificial* it still is. These issues have been hotly debated over many years, ever since Alan Turing first proposed the 'Turing Test' in his 1950 paper, 'Computing, Machines and Intelligence'. To answer the question of whether machines could think, he hypothesised a game played between a person and an unseen machine. If the player can't tell that their opponent isn't human, the machine passes the test.

30 years later, a paper titled 'Minds, Brains and Programs' by the philosopher John Searle boiled the question down to focus on whether a machine could ever truly understand a language – a situation he called 'Strong AI' – or merely simulate understanding, which he dubbed 'Weak AI'.

He concluded that machines of sufficient complexity could be devised to pass the Turing Test by manipulating symbols, just as the ELIZA project created by computer scientist and MIT professor Joseph Weizenbaum appeared to do, way back in 1966. As Searle noted, the machine wouldn't need to understand the symbols it was manipulating in order to provide an illusion of cognition sufficient to pass the Turing Test. Computers running software, on the other hand, wouldn't be able to achieve Strong AI.

To truly come to terms with the role of AI in schools, we need to invoke Searle's distinction between the *understanding*, and mere *simulation of understanding* needed to pass a test. He suggested that the difference between them lies in intentionality – the human quality which always directs mental states towards a transcendent end.



Demoting the teachers

What end are we seeking when we educate? What is a student's real intention when they learn? Do programs like ChatGPT produce knowledge, or a mere simulacrum of it, resulting from mindless rule-following? It's the answers to these kinds of questions that will ultimately determine the use of AI in education.

Machines aren't going to 'take over' our schools because they simply *can't* – regardless of whatever spooky stories their creators like to frighten themselves with. If kids are using ChatGPT to cheat on their assignments, that should just tell us that we're setting the wrong sorts of tests. Education isn't a Turing Test. AI is weak. Machines will always be dependent on humans for any supposed 'learning' they achieve.

There is, however, one genuine risk – that the more teachers come to rely on AI, the more likely it is that AI will reshape and define the meaning teachers give to their own role. If education ends up being reduced to a matter of machine learning, then it follows that teachers might begin to approach their vocation more mechanistically – almost as an automatic process of efficient information transfer perhaps best suited to a production line or call centre.

In such a milieu, the experience of becoming an educated mind, and the struggle and delight involved in that expansion of intellect, could start to seem increasingly irrelevant, rather than what they actually are: *the point of the whole exercise*.

The threat to education here isn't posed by machine intelligence superseding that of teachers. It will come from teachers demoting themselves into becoming mere machines themselves, cheapening the ideal of learning and undervaluing the meaning we assign to education itself.

IN BRIEF

What's the issue?
Teachers are hearing a range of exaggerated, and often alarmist messages regarding the future role of AI in education.

What's being said?
That AI represents a fundamental break with what's gone before, to the extent that what we think of as 'education' will be irrevocably transformed.

What's really happening?
Genuinely clever implementations of Large Language Models are causing some industry insiders and commentators to get a little carried away.

The takeaway
Modern AI technologies can, and likely will make a big difference to educators' working lives – but in an administrative, rather than philosophical capacity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Gareth Sturdy (@stickyphysics) is a former teacher now working in edtech.

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- How to engage parents using digital tools
- Using video games in secondary schools – what teachers can learn

Learning how to learn

Hannah Heron explains how developing students' metacognitive skills can be a boon for their attainment

Metacognition is about the way in which learners purposely direct their own learning through planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Being 'metacognitive' thus requires pupils to reflect on, and control their learning. The ability to draw on metacognitive strategies for planning and monitoring purposes can be especially important for older pupils who are revising for their exams.

Let's illustrate this with an example. Jade and Michael are both preparing for their upcoming exams. Michael is feeling motivated and confident. He's set himself a series of short-term goals and is monitoring his progress using a revision plan. He's also removed all devices from his study space to avoid distractions, but has made sure to plan in regular breaks.

These high utility study techniques ensure that Michael makes the most of his study time. As a result, he's on track to reach his goals and is making steady progress.

Jade, however, is feeling less confident and lacks motivation. Without a clear plan, she delayed the start of her revision and is now having to cram. She's attempting to use flashcards as a study tool, but with little guidance on how to use them she's making slow progress.

Making the implicit, explicit

Michael is a successful metacognitive learner. The evidence summarised in an EEF guidance report on metacognition and self-regulated learning tells us that for most pupils – and particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds – the process of becoming a successful independent learner isn't automatic, but one that requires high quality, explicit teaching.

For schools looking to implement metacognitive strategies, an important first step is to establish a shared model and definition for metacognition itself. An explainer animation viewable via the EEF blog (see bit.ly/ts125-EFF1) shows one such model that could be used to establish the foundations of a shared understanding.

If schools are to support pupils like Jade in becoming successful independent learners, teachers must explicitly model the implicit actions of expert learners. Weaving certain strategies into their practice could be a good place for teachers to start.

First, ask questions that prompt pupils to use their prior knowledge in planning a strategy, monitoring and reflect on their results. After this, explicitly teach the practice of high-utility learning techniques, such as using of flashcards for self-testing.

Model how to set goals and use revision plans effectively. Teach pupils how to take effective notes that will support future revision.

Finally, set up a model revision space at your next parents' evening to open up dialogue with pupils and parents around how physical spaces can be structured to support revision.

WHAT WE DO

"As a school, we engaged with research which told us that without revision support, pupils routinely engage in inefficient and ineffective revision strategies such as re-reading and highlighting.

As a result, we developed approaches to explicitly teach pupils more effective learning strategies from Y7 onwards, both in lessons and as part of home learning. Whereas previously we might have provided KS4 pupils with revision guides, we now build in support for how to use those revision guides effectively.

We also took any opportunity we could to work with parents on how they could support their child with effective routines for independent learning at home."

– Simon Cox is a secondary teacher based in the Northwest

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Hannah Heron is a content specialist at the Education Endowment Foundation

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Instead of wondering why the same well keeps running dry in terms of teacher recruitment, why don't we enlarge the pool of potential candidates?

Melissa Benn

Last month, I had the pleasure of interviewing Lucy Kellaway – the former *Financial Times* columnist who left journalism in her 50s to embark on an entirely new career as a classroom teacher.

You can listen to the interview in full via bit.ly/ts125-mb1. What's interesting about Kellaway is that she not only swapped one profession for another, but also set up an organisation called Now Teach (nowteach.org.uk) to help others make the same journey.

Intense pressure

Kellaway has frequently written about her experiences of working in state education for her old newspaper, using a series of *FT* columns to examine some of the key issues affecting state education – including that of unsustainable workload.

I spoke to her soon after the publication of a DfE report on that very topic. The department's 'Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders' study (see workinglivesofteachers.com) is long and detailed, but its findings can essentially be summarised as, '*Teachers and leaders are under great pressure.*'

A separate study published in April by the NEU, 'State of education: workload and wellbeing' (see bit.ly/ts125-mb2) similarly found that many in education are facing 'unmanageable' workloads.

This is hardly a new problem, of course – though it's striking to look back over the past decade and see just how little has changed, despite repeated efforts by both government and unions to reform working cultures.

Kellaway's experience provides an interesting frame through which to consider various issues raised in both reports. The first of these is simply financial. by the time she entered teaching, Kellaway had already paid off her mortgage and her children had left home.

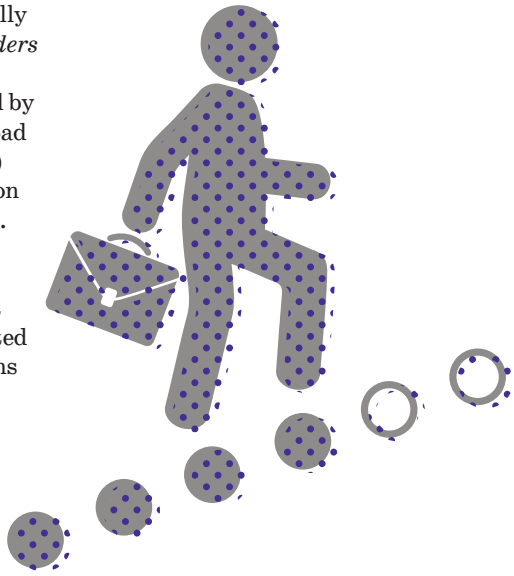
Observing her younger colleagues, she's seen the intense pressure they're under to meet the financial demands of setting up homes and raising families on middling salaries that haven't kept pace with inflation.

The lesson to be learnt here? That teaching simply doesn't pay enough for what it demands.

Enforcing limits

Kellaway's second key observation is that, to put it crudely, she had already met and satisfied certain 'status' ambitions well before she entered the teaching profession. Having been a national newspaper columnist for the past 30 years, by that point she had nothing left to prove.

Instead, she became increasingly motivated by her writing job feeling empty, compared to the value she saw in improving the next generation's life chances. Now aged 63, Kellaway has also come to understand and increasingly enforce her own limits, which has enabled her to keep the job both sustainable and highly enjoyable.



"I absolutely love being in the classroom," she says. "What could be (better) than spending your life with teenagers who are funny, and by definition, optimistic, because they're at the beginning of their lives?"

Again, however, she is acutely aware of how her younger colleagues lack such freedom of choice with respect to their careers, and have to contend with working days of 12 hours if they want to earn more or rise up the ladder.

Creating the conditions

The takeaway is perhaps that we need to create a larger pool of experienced classroom teachers who are properly paid and genuinely valued for their talent and experience.

At the same time, however, we also need to create the conditions that will allow them concentrate on their jobs, without having to take on additional administrative stress.

Finally, Kellaway highlights how the drive to get top marks and secure a place at a top university can create incredible stress not just for young people, but teachers and school leaders too.

Having worked in both hyper-ambitious schools with high staff turnovers, and more relaxed settings where greater emphasis is placed on cultivating good relationships, she's seen first-hand the great value of the latter.

It's still difficult to question the relentless prioritising of achievement within contemporary state education. It may be that the issues faced by today's overworked teachers can be traced back to a broader excessive emphasis on individual achievement across wider society – and not enough on the importance of social equity or harmony.

Melissa Benn (@Melissa_Benn) is a writer and campaigner, and visiting professor of education at York St John University

Choices at every step

Samantha Stanley and **Lindsey Geraghty** explain how they've gone about the task of inspiring students to be more ambitious about their career choices once they leave John Ferneley College...

Some of the most important and challenging decisions young people must make are those concerning their future careers. However, a concerning number of pupils aren't readily aware of what choices are available to them, and don't know how to go about achieving their goals.

A December 2022 study by City & Guilds (see bit.ly/ts125-c1) found that 30% of young people don't think they will ever meet their career ambitions – a proportion that only grows larger when we look at pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds specifically.

In other words, nearly a third of young people may not be – or at least, may not feel – supported to achieve their career goals. It's a statistic that we're working hard to address at John Ferneley College.

Overlapping challenges

The main goal with our careers framework has been to inspire pupils by broadening their horizons. We place our Trust's values of a holistic, whole-child approach at the centre of this, and ensure that all pupils are provided with access to a range of different experiences so they can make informed decisions for their futures. We also work to equip them with the relevant skillsets to help them succeed in whichever field they choose.

Careers education is complex and multifaceted. The challenges of implementing a comprehensive careers curriculum will inevitably overlap with the extent of teachers' existing knowledge, confidence and the resources available at school, trust, or even region level.

In our experience, teachers' first-hand knowledge of the careers available within a given sector will vary greatly depending on whether they have worked within that sector themselves before becoming a teacher. Consequently, some teachers may need additional support if they're to deliver robust lessons on the pathways available to their students, making investment in staff training an essential component of high-quality careers education.

Alongside this, we've worked hard on increasing pupils' awareness of the vast career options available to them by demonstrating how different school subjects relate to different career fields, and the nuances of the various roles within these.

Of course, there's no objective 'right' or 'wrong' path to follow – but we do believe there is a *right path for each pupil*, and that it's up to them, using the best knowledge and experience we can equip them with, to decide where it is that they'll most likely find fulfilment.

Further afield

Increasing awareness in this way is an excellent means of bolstering social mobility, since it can unveil possibilities that pupils themselves might not have arrived at otherwise.

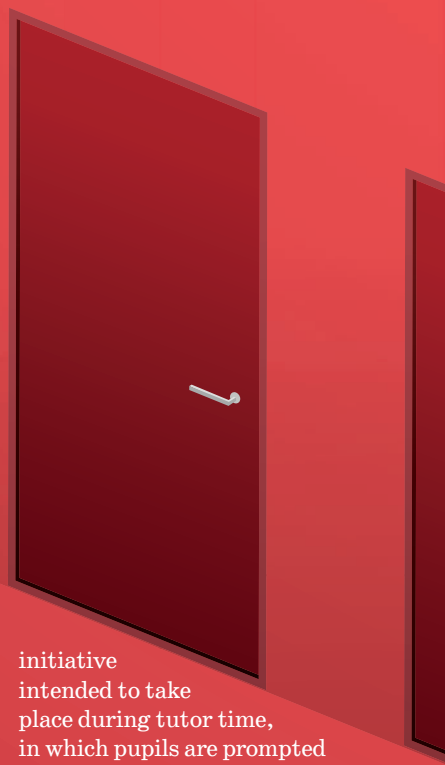
In our community in Melton Mowbray, for example, we encourage pupils to look both within and beyond their home town. While it's certainly the case that some pupils will benefit from staying close to home, others will only truly blossom by venturing further.

> **"30% of young people don't think they will ever meet their career ambitions"**

Yet what we find is that some young people from rural regions can feel as if they have to stay in the locality, because they're unsure of what else is out there. That's why we'll suggest that pupils also consider opportunities in more urban areas, where salaries are typically higher and the range of opportunities much wider.

Another important function of careers education is to break down the stereotypes surrounding certain sectors that can serve to discourage some young people – again, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds – from pursuing jobs within them. We want all of our pupils to know that any field that interests them is one that they should feel able to at least try and access – even more so if they belong to a demographic that's relatively under-represented in the sector(s) in question.

To assist in this mission, we'll try to actively break down any and all misconceptions surrounding frequently stereotyped job roles, such as doctors, engineers or chefs. One way in which we've attempted this has been with the launch of a 'think and discuss' initiative intended to take place during tutor time, in which pupils are prompted to discuss how stereotypes could be challenged in a number of different work sectors.



This 'challenging stereotypes' theme is also deeply woven into our school's National Careers Week programme, which sees us bring in local businesspeople from a range of backgrounds to present to our different year groups and discuss a

range of topics – including persistent stigmas within their respective industries.

Tailored activities

Our previous National Careers Week events have also included talks from local businesses with apprenticeship offers aimed at young people within our community. These representatives will typically give presentations on the roles available within their companies, while highlighting relevant entry-level positions and apprenticeship posts, and affording a glimpse into what each entails on a daily basis.

Some representatives have themselves been John Ferneley College alumni, happy to speak about their own experiences of transitioning from school to the workforce, which has proved to be particularly insightful for those pupils going through the same process themselves.

One standout was the guest speaker we welcomed who runs an ergonomics company, and who was able to highlight different entryways into the world of STEM, which proved to be a huge hit with a large proportion of our Y9 pupils.

Outside of Careers Week, our year-round provision is tailored to the needs of each year group, based on our main careers programme. The activities we offer include university visits for pupils so that they get to experience life inside higher education institutions, 'Enterprise Days' that see local employers run skills-based challenges and speed networking events, where pupils are given the chance to speak with local business representatives and ask questions.

Constant critique

While pupils have fed back to us that these provisions have been useful, our careers framework encourages constant critique of our methods from students, teachers and visitors in an effort to further improve our offering and continue growing our reach across sectors.

For example, we recently introduced a weekly newsletter aimed at pupils that features a 'Career of the Week', which regularly spotlights an interesting, aspirational career – most recently, the role of a research scientist. Pupils have told us that they enjoy these articles and are keen to see other careers included, such as retail assistant, mechanic and hairdresser.

We also frequently liaise with our local council and seek out other career offerings within the wider borough that we can highlight. Through consulting with both internal and external stakeholders, we've sought to strengthen our approach to careers education and ensure our methods and topics remain in keeping with current workforce needs.

It is only through broadening our pupils' awareness of the career paths available to them, breaking down stereotypes, offering immersive and exciting experiences and working with all parts of our community that we will effectively equip our pupils with the skills they need to carve out a successful and fulfilling career path. That means working together – as a school, as a trust and alongside different industry sectors – to offer as many choices as possible, while simultaneously reviewing, changing and adapting our approach so that our young people can reach their fullest potential.

EMPLOYMENT FIGURES

43%

of 18- to 24-year-olds in the UK don't believe that their education has adequately equipped them with the skills needed to get the job they want

64%

say that it is currently 'not easy' to secure a 'good job'

29%

say they have struggled to secure interviews

19%

say there are no jobs for them available in their local area

Source: Research conducted by Opinium Research on behalf of City & Guilds and published in the latter's 'Youth Misspent' report

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Samantha Stanley is KS3 futures lead, and Lindsey Geraghty head of futures for KS4, at John Ferneley College

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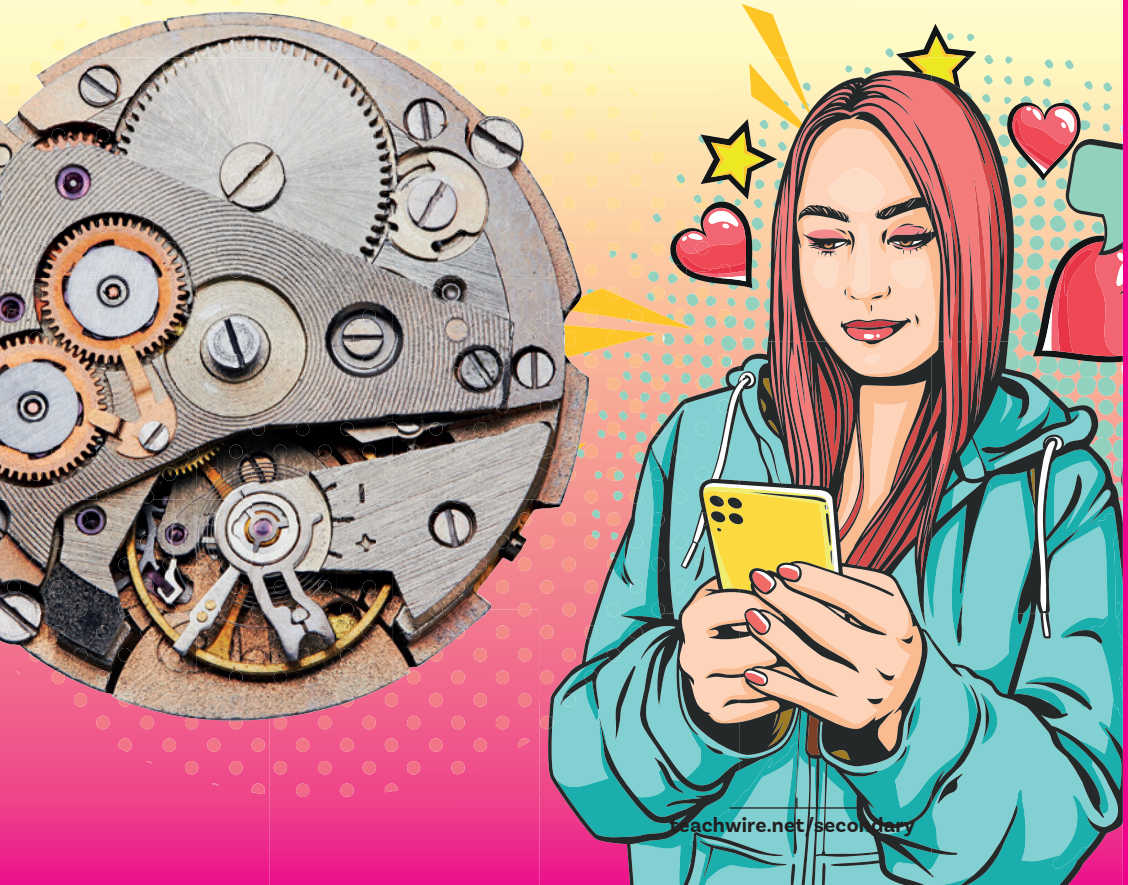
The TS guide to ... Literacy

This issue, we look at how the importance of literacy extends well beyond the English classroom...

IN THIS SECTION



IN FIGURES:

HOW OFTEN DO YOUNG PEOPLE READ (AND DO THEY WANT TO?)

47.8%
of children aged 8 to 18 said they enjoyed reading in 2022

34.3%
of girls aged 8 to 18 said that they read daily, compared to 26.5% of boys

58.3%
of 8- to 11-year-olds said that their parents had encouraged them to read, compared to 24.9% of 16- to 18-year-olds

Source: National Literacy Trust

The power of precision

The importance of subject-specific vocabulary is a given at this point, observes **Matt MacGuire** – but we neglect the crucial role of multi-purpose tier 2 vocabulary at our peril...

Consider the following sentence:
"The food dye will eventually turn all of the water blue, because the fluid molecules will continually move from areas of high concentration to areas of lower concentration, across the concentration gradient, until the fluid molecules are evenly distributed across the body of water."

And now consider this sentence:
"Through the process of diffusion, the food dye will turn all of the water blue."

The difference between these two sentences is that the latter uses the expert word 'diffusion'. This word, with its precise definition (the net movement of molecules from an area where they are at a higher concentration, to areas where they are at a lower concentration) obviates the need for a longer and clunkier explanation.

Of course, this second, much shorter sentence contains an element of assumed knowledge with its use of the word 'diffusion'. Words carry knowledge, which is drawn from the precise definition associated with the signifier.

Words are, essentially, shorthand for their respective definitions. The correct deployment of expert words demonstrates expert understanding.

A laborious struggle

Consider another pair of example sentences. This...
"The repetition of the consonant sound at the beginning of nearby words in the sentence, 'So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past' establishes the rhythmic and inescapable power of the tide and the past."

And then this...
"The alliteration in the sentence 'So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past' establishes the rhythmic and inescapable power of the tide and the past."

Once again, expert language allows for concision and precision – albeit with the shorter sentence relying upon shared understanding of expert vocabulary. It only works if everyone understands, and agrees upon, the definition of 'alliteration'.

In order to use expert vocabulary confidently, students must develop automaticity. If the process of writing involves a laborious struggle to call to mind the right words, then the student will have little remaining cognitive capacity to think about the bigger concepts they're exploring, or the exam question they're answering.

"Tier 2 words are the words that create the vocabulary gap"

Automatised actions

When you drive a car, you don't consciously think about performing the actions of changing gears, adjusting your foot on the clutch, holding the steering wheel in the right position or flicking the indicator switch *because you don't need to*. Those actions have become automatic for you, the expert driver.

Having these automatised actions at your disposal helps you enormously with the task of driving to work. If someone steps into the road unexpectedly, you can instantly respond with the correct, automatised action – namely hitting the brakes.

Similarly, we need our students to be able to quickly and effortlessly draw upon the best vocabulary for getting the job done. If they can't, their only recourse is to produce laborious, imprecise and long-winded sentences – for which there simply isn't the time in public examinations or academic university interviews.

Specialist language

As we strive to develop automaticity in our students' use of vocabulary, it's become popular in education to refer to the specialist language of academic subjects as 'tier 3 vocabulary' – these being the words most strongly associated with a particular discipline.

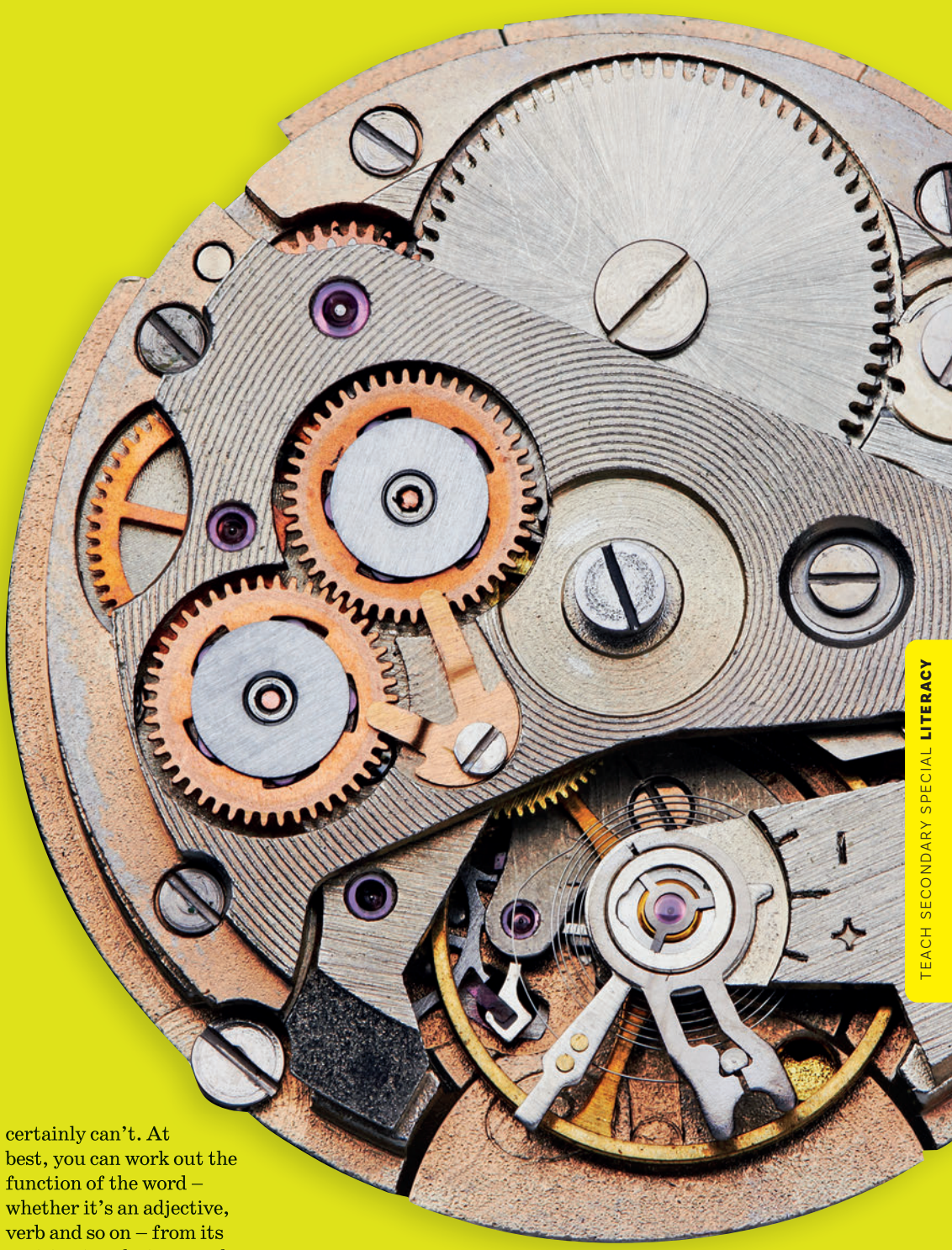
English, for example, has 'metaphor'. Geography has 'tectonic'; history has 'anachronistic'; biology has 'peristalsis'; ICT has 'algorithm'. These words amount to a subject's jargon, forming an 'in-language' for those in the know. Once you've internalised this secret code, you can better understand the subject and communicate your expertise much more efficiently.

The importance of tier 3 vocabulary is widely recognised, with teachers giving due emphasis to instructing students in its proper usage. It's long been obvious to secondary school teachers that students need these tier 3 words in order to succeed – but increasingly, teachers have also been turning their attention to tier 2 vocabulary.

The words in between

Tier 2 vocabulary isn't as specialist as tier 3 vocabulary, but nor is it as simplistic as tier 1 vocabulary. It's not 'cat', 'dog', 'mum' or 'keys', and isn't 'longshore drift', 'pathetic fallacy', 'nucleus', 'leverage' or 'ratio'. It's the language in between; the kind of intelligent and sophisticated vocabulary that's useful across all subject domains.

Tier 2 vocabulary consists of words like 'pragmatic', 'façade' and 'interconnected'. These are the words of *The Guardian*, BBC Radio 4 and educational



documentaries, and the words that some families will transmit to their children by osmosis when speaking at the dinner table or around the house.

These are the words that will be missing for some disadvantaged children – possibly because their parents don't have those words themselves, or lack the time to sit with them at mealtimes.

Tier 2 words are the words that create the vocabulary gap, leaving underprivileged students without the words they'll need to understand new content, or express their ideas convincingly and with nuance.

Consequently, these students fall further behind every year because words are sticky, just like knowledge itself. When a student knows the word 'implicit', it's easier for them to then learn 'imply', 'implied', 'implication', 'implicitly' and 'implicated'. From there, it's just a hop, skip and a jump to 'explicit', 'explicitly' and 'explication'.

Lazy assertions

Words work in family groups, and it's far easier to learn a new word if you already have a related word in your vocabulary. For more advantaged children, the massive web of more sophisticated vocabulary endowed upon them by their position of relative privilege makes language acquisition an almost automatic process.

For those with the most restricted vocabularies, on the other hand, learning new words is a hugely demanding task that impacts upon cognitive load. If you don't understand the words, you'll have little chance of grasping the meaning of the sentence.

Please don't believe the lazy, ill-informed assertion that you can work out the meaning of a word from the context of the sentence, because you can't. Disadvantaged students certainly can't. At best, you can work out the function of the word – whether it's an adjective, verb and so on – from its position in relation to other words. Beyond that, it's guesswork.

Combatting inequality

Our students deserve better than the mere opportunity to try and guess the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. They need proper, robust vocabulary instruction.

Words are power. When we build our students' tier 3 vocabulary, we're doing the bare minimum by equipping them with subject knowledge. Once we expand this into the realm of tier 2 vocabulary, we're suddenly doing much more. We're combatting inequality by bridging the vocabulary gap.

Teachers and subject leaders should give careful thought to the words that will be taught to students during each unit or scheme of work. Vocabulary acquisition in tier 2 and tier 3 should be carefully mapped out in advance, rather than left to chance. That way, all our students stand a better chance of understanding nuance and communicating with precision.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt MacGuire (@MacGrammar) is an assistant headteacher; this article is based on a post originally published at his blog, Ten Rules for Teaching (tenrulesforteaching.com)

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Cut the confusion

Sometimes it's best to put aside the reading interventions in favour of some subtle, yet powerful tweaks to your teaching, suggests **Adam Riches...**

At secondary school, young people who find reading difficult are often branded 'reluctant readers' and as such, much of the support put in place for them doesn't actually cut to the core of the issue.

Reading is a complex craft that we can't assume all learners will have mastered. Whether a learner has an additional need such as dyslexia (diagnosed or not), or more broadly struggles with comprehension or interpretation of concepts, teachers can support the effective development of reading via some simple pedagogical approaches.

Start with the sounds

At primary, there's a huge emphasis on what words should sound like. As learners get older, we'll often neglect this verbal aspect of reading. Time constraints are obviously a big factor here, but when it comes to helping learners develop their reading ability and confidence, there needs to be some aspect of verbal modelling involved.

Verbalisation of key words gives students the chance to articulate concepts correctly. After all, how can a student understand a concept if they've never had the opportunity to even say the key term? A quick way to do this is through choral response – which may seem like something secondary students will recoil from, but the value is huge.

Take the word 'stoic', for example. Few teenagers will have used the word in everyday conversation, but if you're expecting them to use it to describe a character, then they must be able to use it in context.

Choral response allows the saying of the word to be rehearsed in a controlled environment. That way, if they're called upon to refer to the word later on, a learner isn't being expected to say the word for the first time.

Selective and visible

Gone (hopefully) are the days of rigid vocabulary lists in lessons. Endless lists of 'key vocabulary' can be more of a hindrance than a help to struggling readers, due to the additional extraneous load that a decontextualised word list may add.

That said, however, a focused selection of words that allow access to learning can be of significant benefit to struggling readers. These should be directly linked to the topic (perhaps through a theme, motif or idea) and enable students to understand the building blocks of the lesson. It would be impossible for me to locate a recurring motif in a passage of text if I don't understand what a motif even is.

Reading support will often focuses learners' attention on how they're progressing through the text, when it can be more valuable to ensure learners are looking at the text *through the correct lens to begin with*. This will not only give the reader purpose, but also establish a cognitive link between the words and the lesson being taught.

Breadth of interpretation

Reading is a personal craft; our interpretations vary depending on our own experiences. Teaching learners how language works is an important part of getting them to understand how reading can benefit them. As well as increasing their ability to effectively engage with texts, this allows them to understand the process more holistically.

Teaching students the differences between semantics and pragmatics gifts them a powerful tool they can then use when looking at text. Seeing that a source in history or geography is *saying* one thing, but may be *implying* additional information is what differentiates the students who have some understanding from those with a much more in depth-understanding.

Teaching this simply requires teachers to model and scaffold the interpreting of words. If you can guide learners to read a passage and explain in a sentence what it says, that's great. If you can then encourage them to consider what it *means*, you quickly build habits of deep reading. Differentiating between 'said' and 'implied' is a great way to get struggling readers to see the layers of texts and effectively start reading between the lines.

Struggling readers will often receive huge, detached interventions – when what they really need is a bit of learning time that makes things a bit less hazy for them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Adam Riches is a senior leader for teaching and learning; follow him at @teachmrriches

Literacy for the likes

Smartphones and social media platforms aren't going anywhere – so let's at least use them to improve students' ability to read, suggests **Bhamika Bhudia**...

It's widely understood that reading and literacy play a pivotal role in student outcomes, both academically and beyond. Reading for pleasure has even been shown to have a greater impact on student outcomes than their socio-economic status (see bit.ly/ts125-LT).

Schools across the country have therefore introduced various strategies and programmes to help promote reading for pleasure, but social media usage is often seen as a barrier standing in the way of these efforts.

Students are typically seen as being disengaged from reading books, due in large part to how endlessly captivating their social media feeds are. As a result, their capacity to digest large volumes of information has become limited, due to the majority of what they *do* actually read consisting mostly of short posts and comments. What's more, this 'literature' they're being exposed to tends to be informal, grammatically incorrect and expressed using a low level vocabulary.

Social reading

However, that picture seems at odds with the 2023 'What Kids Are Reading' report from Renaissance Learning, based on a study of students in the UK and Ireland (see bit.ly/ts125-LT1). They found that the pupils surveyed read a combined total of 27,265,657 books in 2021-2022, marking an increase of 24% compared to the previous academic year.

Of particular note is how the report attributes this apparent increase in reading engagement to ... social media. Online trends such as #booktok and 'bookstagram' are cited as key factors driving the rapidly increasing popularity of titles by previously lesser-known authors, such as Alice Oseman.

> **"The students of today are actually doing more reading than previous generations"**

Of course, making reading a social activity is hardly a new concept. Book clubs have always been around; social media has simply enabled them to evolve. The conversations taking place under the #booktok TikTok tag can be helpful in encouraging students to read more books and discuss their own opinions and interpretations of them, and introduce them to book recommendations from people who aren't their parents or teachers.

Adapting to need

An important part of teaching is the requirement to identify and address your students' needs – not just the understanding and skills of those in different classes, but also trends that may be affecting your cohort as a whole.

This generation is already unique, due to the pandemic hitting when they were at different stages of their educational development, to say nothing of the wider societal impacts that will continue to affect them over time. It's just another need that we teachers will need to adapt to.

When looking at the impact of social media on this generation's reading, one could argue the students of today are actually doing *more* reading than previous generations, due to how much time they're spending on social media (even if it's not quite the kind of content we'd approve of).

If students are reading short posts online instead of longer texts, that could be a cue for us to give students greater exposure to moderate length, high quality texts that can enrich their vocabulary and help them build cultural capital.

Work with the trends

Alternatively, we could work *with* those trends, by

teaching some units via extracts to help build understanding of genre and increase their exposure to an array of different texts. Introducing students to a text via a sentence or short paragraph, rather than the whole thing at once can also help build their reading and writing stamina.

This approach may entail placing more emphasis on introductions and topic sentences to extract meaning, or writing at a sentence level and then building stamina by increasing in increments – all good reading and writing strategies.

If longer texts are proving hard to digest and follow, modelling by reading aloud could aid understanding. Shifting the focus to structure, and developing students' understanding of how stories are built up and held together can help build these skills yet further.

Beyond the exam hall

We teach to help students in life, not just in their exams. If social media content is what they're reading, then it's our job to help them navigate it. Students thus need to be taught digital literacy – that is, how to make sense of information in front of them, ascertain what's true, gauge the reliability of the source, and most importantly, the author's motivations.

If we need an entire GCSE paper to focus on the skills required to understand writers' viewpoints, then surely the same applies to students' lives outside of school? A National Literacy Trust study conducted in 2021 found that, "Compared with young people with low critical digital literacy engagement, nearly three times as many young people with high critical digital literacy had high mental wellbeing (11.6% vs 30.2%)."

We often talk about the dangers of social media on young people's mental health. Using such texts in lessons, and analysing their language and structure would not only equip students with a valuable academic skill, but more importantly, help keep them safe. Students will quickly learn to appreciate that 'textual analysis' isn't just something we do to a Shakespearean text, but can be a powerful lens though which to examine all the information they receive, and apply critical understanding to everything that they read.

Embrace the digital age

Technology has changed teaching for the better in many ways. Fighting against its use isn't just futile, but a waste of opportunities for improving practice and increasing efficacy. Take #EduTwitter, for example – it may have its flaws, but for now, at least, it still largely remains a buzzing hive of teaching strategies, ideas, resources and often excellent CPD.

Concerns regarding students' small vocabularies can be addressed with the help of assorted websites and apps. Some will automatically create activities based on difficult vocabulary sampled from a given text. Others will break down the etymology of key words to deepen understanding, and now there are even AI bots capable of generating student-level models, to help identify common errors and improve students' work – all of which can save teachers precious time.

For their part, students now have access to countless tools that can be used to aid learning, so lean into this. The aforementioned 2021 NLT study notes that, "More than half (54%) of young people say they find more to read that matches their interests online, but online activities inspire wider reading for around 3 in 5 (59%)."

Set them homework that they can do on their phones, such as self-checking quizzes or vocabulary tests. Using screen reader apps, they can have texts read aloud to them to support comprehension.

The true impact of social media and the wider internet on our students' development is, and should be a matter of real concern to us all. Putting our heads in the sand and hoping things will resolve themselves will only serve to exacerbate the potential harms.

We are currently in a position where we can give students the skills they need to navigate this new age of information – but we must do that by using all the tools available to us and to them.

REMEMBER THIS

- Harness positive social media discourse around reading (#booktok, #bookstagram) to encourage reading and build exposure to trending books.
- Identify students' needs and adapt your teaching strategies and the curriculum to meet them appropriately
- Counteract students' limited exposure to high quality literature by ensuring the curriculum covers a range of extracts and excellent models of literature that expose students to high quality writing and build on cultural capital
- Introduce texts at the level of sentences and paragraphs to avoid overwhelming students; build up reading stamina where needed
- Focus on structural features, such as introductions, topics and sentences, and show how narratives are woven to build understanding of the breadth that a text can cover
- Introducing slow writing strategies can further help to build writing stamina

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Bhamika Bhudia is Head of English at a mixed comprehensive school in London.

Help them find their voice

Our students will need to be confident speakers in their professional lives, so we teach oracy rigorously, yes? Alas no, writes **Jenny Hampton**...

Oracy is about talk. So why, as a secondary school English teacher, do I want to scream? Why does the Spoken Language Endorsement occur in a vacuum of education policy for talk?

Student: '*So it's really important, but not part of our overall GCSE grade?*'

English teacher: '*Yes. Presenting to an audience is a highly valuable life skill, and something that you may need to do in a whole range of education and workplace scenarios. It will not contribute to your English Language GCSE grade. You will receive it separately, and not as a numerical grade.*'

Student: '*Oh.*'

I (mostly) love teaching the Spoken Language Endorsement part of the course – that is, a presentation on a specific topic lasting no longer than 10 minutes, including questions from listeners. But there's always that point where we reach the conversation about it not being part of students' main GCSE grade.

While students do eventually buy in and work on their presentations, they know that come results day, no one will ask about it. And that when they get to further education, it will be the numerical grades – and not the pass, merit and distinction they received for their SLE presentation – that matter.

A downgraded skill

In 2015, this spoken language component replaced 'speaking and listening' in the new GCSE as part of the 'Govian' reforms; Ofqual told us that it wouldn't form part of the final grade. It therefore doesn't factor into a school's exam results profile which, in the current accountability structure of our schools, means it was spectacularly downgraded as a skill.

A 2021 report produced by The Centre of Education and Youth and Oxford University (see bit.ly/ts125-or1) told us that the term 'spoken language' is 'barely featured' on Ofsted's report recommendations. Their analysis highlighted that "Oracy does not feature prominently in Ofsted's reporting," but the issue extends beyond the regulator. The same report further found that only 23% of secondary teachers were confident in their understanding of the National Curriculum's 'spoken language' requirements.

A separate report by the Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry (see bit.ly/ts125-or2) meanwhile found that, "The status and provision of oracy education in England today falls significantly short" of the Group's vision that, "All children and young people should benefit from high-quality oracy education."

> **"Talk in all its forms is far from being at the heart of our educational culture"**

It's become increasingly clear that talk, in all its forms, is far from being at the heart of our educational culture.

Widening the gap

Secondary school teachers know that not all students attended, or consistently attended their online lessons. I won't forget how deeply uncomfortable and quiet some students visibly seemed from our side of screen in those sessions.

The aforementioned Oxford University report noted that, "Teachers working in state-funded settings were more than twice as likely as teachers working in private schools to

say online teaching had a 'significantly negative' impact on pupils' oracy."

This side of COVID 19, how often do all students get to readily contribute in groups, pairs or whole class discussions? Who is struggling the most? Is there a noticeable gender divide? How wide is the gap between those in receipt of Pupil Premium and their peers in terms of vocabulary and talk confidence?

A huge body of evidence tells us that as far as latter is concerned, the gap is wide – but what does it look like in your school? Can students effectively manage exploratory group talk? How many students talk about experiencing fear and anxiety in the run-up to delivering their spoken language GCSE presentation?

A devastating picture

In May 2020, my daughter turned 2 – a crucial time in her language development. We celebrated her birthday as an immediate family unit socially distanced from everyone else in a breezy park. We waved nervously to another family we knew who also happened to be there. She didn't see any members of her extended family, nor any peers from her childcare setting.

As I write these words, she is now in her final term of reception, and happily celebrated her fifth birthday last month with all of her classmates. However, much of the talk amongst parents there still dwelt on the impact of the pandemic on our lockdown toddlers.

And what about the students with SEND, pre-teens and EAL students? What impact did lockdown have on them? The CFEY and Oxford University report cites polling that paints, "A devastating picture regarding the pandemic's impact" on children's oracy skills.

We shouldn't be surprised. There's no reason to expect a positive outlook when our students stepped straight from social distancing and back into school cultures that don't put oracy on the same footing as literacy and numeracy.

What do we do?

After screaming in frustration at the ongoing policy vacuum, we can begin to take some meaningful steps towards improving matters as teachers, leaders and advocates for young people.

We can start by a developing a heightened awareness of talk opportunities in our classrooms. Who is speaking, and when can we increase those opportunities? Some strategies might include 'no hands up' time, think-pair-share activities and utilising group feedback.

Could your class' group work activities benefit from guidelines, modelling or sentence starters to facilitate discussion? We can also think about our curriculum. Could we build up students' confidence in presenting via the gradual introduction of shorter speaking tasks at KS3 – not just in English, but across our all subjects?

Another step we could take is to analyse the results of our spoken language components for yearly trends. We can probe how well our PP-eligible students are faring in this part of the course. We can demand CPD opportunities and research time, with support from the brilliant organisations and advocates of oracy that are among the biggest voices currently clamouring for change, such as Voice 21 and Oracy Cambridge.

We can start the conversation with our colleagues and senior leaders. We could seek to involve students more actively in assemblies, and explore other opportunities for public speaking. We can find out what our students think about their oracy development via class surveys, exit slips and questionnaires.

So let's give up on the idea of simply screaming. Let's instead get proactive about starting conversations with colleagues and students alike, and develop as many speaking opportunities as we can, step by step, to fill the vacuum.

ADDING TO THE DISCUSSION

VOICE21
Provides case studies, research, CPD opportunities and guidance – the latter of which includes Voice21's own 'Oracy Benchmarks'
voice21.org

ORACY CAMBRIDGE
A helpful source of downloadable resources, including self talk and peer reflection tools, as well exemplar discussion guidelines and The Oracy Skills Framework and Glossary
oracycambridge.org

EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION
Among the EEF's wide-ranging surveys and summaries of current education research can be found detailed impact reports pertaining to oracy studies and related projects in schools
educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk

THE ORACY ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
A useful destination for case studies detailing progress in oracy education development in primary and secondary schools
oracy.inparliament.uk

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Jenny Hampton (@brightonteacher) is an English teacher, literacy lead and former SLE (literacy)

REASONS TO TRY...

4 ESU oracy competitions

Help your students experience public speaking, debates and performance and watch their skills and confidence grow...

1 ORACY IS IMPORTANT

Developing oracy (speaking and listening) skills can support students across the curriculum, while also demonstrating the breadth and depth of your studies to Ofsted. Employers increasingly rate communication skills as the trait they most look for in staff too.

2 DEVELOP CONFIDENCE

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3 METACOGNITION

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Our competitions engage students with key topics of the day, build general knowledge and deepen understanding. They can also help students evaluate media sources, and present arguments in a more measured and respectful way, thus ensuring they enter the wider world with the critical thinking skills and cultural capital they need to thrive.

Contact:
esu.org/competitions
competitions@esu.org
020 7529 1565

At a glance

+ Oracy is vital for a broad and balanced curriculum

+ Competitions can help develop metacognitive skills and provide opportunities to practice them

+ These world-leading competitions build confidence – and are great fun!

WHY I LOVE...

How one trust makes novel use of the iPads supplied to it by Sync

ABOUT ME:

NAME:
Gwyn ap Harri

JOB ROLE:
CEO of XP School Trust

SCHOOL:
XP School

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They own it, and it's theirs. The cost to our school for the best kit in the world is absolutely minimal every year, and after three years it refreshes as well. So it just works brilliantly."

"Our kids learn through what we call learning expeditions.
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"The child going to university has the same equipment as one going for an apprenticeship, or a student with SEN.
They've got the same devices as each other, and therefore access to the same level of opportunity as each other. It's then up to them to see how high and how far they can reach."

"There are two sides to the educational battle – conformity versus creativity.
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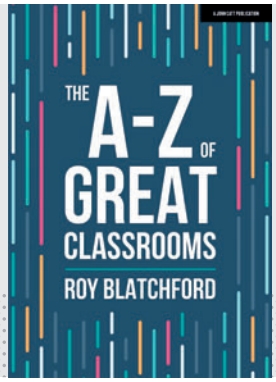
Off the Shelves

Brilliant titles for you and your students to explore



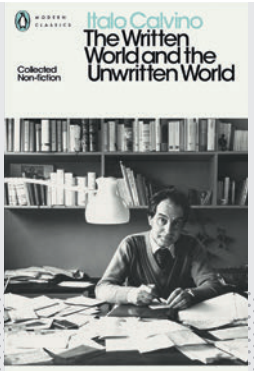
The A-Z of Great Classrooms

(Roy Blatchford, John Catt, £15)

Despite the title, this is actually a relatively slim book, but one dripping with ideas. The main section is organised under 26 headings, which is an approach that generally works well – though using 'Y' for 'Why?' and 'X' for 'Excellence' seems slightly forced. Section 2 focuses on SEND, teacher standards and other areas, offering suggestions grounded in Blatchford's first-hand experience of English schools and some overseas settings.

The end result is a tome that readers can easily pull new ideas from and feel enthusiastic about implementing. Not all ideas are equal, though, and I'm personally yet to be convinced by the benefits of dictation. Blatchford also floats the idea of teaching English via a cross-curricular approach, which, while a worthy goal, has been tried with less than satisfactory results. By and large, however, this particular A-Z would merit a place in any teacher's collection.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman



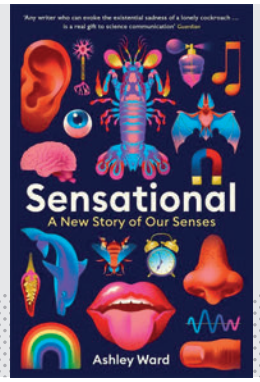
The Written World and the Unwritten World: Collected Non-fiction

(Italo Calvino, Penguin, £10.99)

This collection of diverse essays by the noted Italian writer and journalist contains a wealth of notes and commentary on translation, reading, writing and correspondence, making it a de facto masterclass in writing for a range of audiences. Calvino's writing itself tends to stand out more for how he goes about expressing his ideas in a very elegant and straightforward way, rather than for any stylistic flourishes.

Some of the essay topics may be a little dated – the failure of the Italian novel being one – but such is the clarity and variety of his work that the actual subject matter starts to feel immaterial. In one of the book's highlights, he sets out his reasons for writing, which include the memorable observation that it helps him learn something he doesn't yet know, or replace something he has written already.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman



Sensational: A new story of our senses

(Ashley Ward, Profile, £20)

Like most people, I'm confident in the knowledge that we humans possess five senses. Or rather, I was before I read *Sensational*. Research apparently that shows we may actually have up to 50, and even that figure isn't universally agreed upon. Ward discusses each sense in turn, and some of the recent findings he cites are indeed fascinating – such as the study which found that we're capable of detecting a trillion smells.

More importantly, he looks at how different senses combine, and makes the crucial point that perception is the result of what the brain makes of all these sensations. Also covered are the senses that certain animals possess, and how this knowledge can combine with technology to warn of impending earthquakes. Aside from being an interesting read in itself, *Sensational* would be a useful addition to any biology department's bookshelf.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman

ON THE RADAR

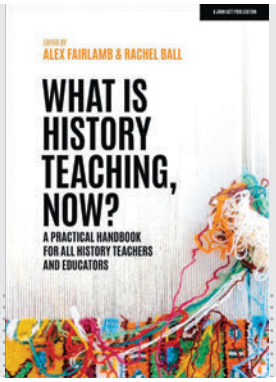
A handbook to harnessing human nature to create strong school teams

Building Culture
(Lekha Sharma, John Catt, £15) //pic01

For school leaders battling the numerous challenges presented by post-COVID emotional trauma and the pressures to meet high academic expectations, it's typically less the 'what' that's at the forefront of their minds and more the 'how'. A positive school culture makes for easier implementation of new systems and approaches at all levels – but how are such cultures actually built?

Building Culture sees Sharma attempt to answer that question at length, presenting her ideas and proposals in the manner of an exploratory conversation. The book is certainly no shrill manifesto, focused as it is on carefully exploring the social dynamics and personal narratives that shape leaders' daily lives and how leaders might be able to better reflect on and negotiate these, while getting staff to buy in to their plan and vision. Notable by their absence are any rigid formulas and hard and fast absolutes; Sharma even laudably includes some counterpoints to her own arguments via a series of challenges that appear in the page margins.

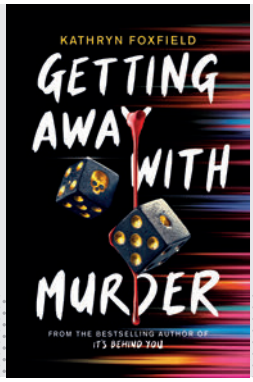
Also of note are the book's impeccable page layouts and supporting illustrations, courtesy of the ever-reliable Oliver Caviglioli. If you're a school leader who's open to creative, compassionate and potentially revolutionary suggestions for how to deal with the situations you're facing, look no further.



What is history teaching, now?
(Ed. Alex Fairlamb and Rachel Ball, John Catt, £18)

Every teacher will be familiar with demands of teaching an ever-changing and sometimes contentious curriculum, but perhaps none more so than history teachers – particularly in an era when conversations around what history schools should teach often generate considerable heat and little in the way of clear answers. With *What is History Teaching, Now?* history teachers Alex Fairlamb and Rachel Ball serve up a curated collection of writings by established practitioners that's impressive in its scope and ambition.

Beginning with some clear-eyed pointers regarding the business of curriculum development, the book opens up into a survey of everything from how to set meaningful homework, to practical ways of teaching key historical skills, incorporating oracy and multidisciplinary approaches into history lessons and, yes, dealing with 'difficult' eras and topics through more informed and culturally sensitive practice.



Getting Away with Murder
(Kathryn Foxfield, Scholastic, £8.99)

An unusual work experience placement finds 17-year-old, self-professed rebel Saffron monitoring the CCTV feeds at a newly built escape room complex, with only an advanced AI known as Lightman for company. After Saffron's straight-laced twin sister Georgia is tasked with investigating the the complex's shady owner by the local paper, the two find themselves trapped alongside several friends in a terrible recreation of the popular 'battle royale' video game *Soul Survivor*, with Lightman prodding the group to see which of them will make it through the night alive...

With its references to online gamer culture, modern leisure activities and latter-day tech paranoia, this pacey teen thriller speaks to a host of contemporary concerns. Foxfield adeptly uses the artificial environment the characters find themselves in to establish and then deconstruct a series of familiar tropes and archetypes in an entertaining way, making for a lively, thought-provoking (and often frequently sweary) read...

Meet the author
KATHRYN FOXFIELD

How did you arrive at the book's premise?
It was inspired by my 8-year-old daughter's love of a game called *Among Us*, which is like the TV series *The Traitors*, but set on a spaceship with one or more 'imposter' players trying to kill the others before they're discovered. I've also always loved books like *Battle Royale* by Koushun Takami and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, and wanted to write my own 'Which character has what it takes to survive?' book featuring recognisable stereotypes. Hopefully readers can have fun guessing who'll make it out alive...

How long did the book take you to write?
I began working on it in October 2022 and wrote it in about six months, against the backdrop of the many conversations that have been had around AI, which must have inspired me to some degree (although mostly I just love the 1980s film *War Games*). Something that really scares me is the use of AI chatbots for things like mental health support. Sounding like a human doesn't make something human.

Did you set out to explore any specific concerns or issues relating to contemporary youth culture?
Something I keep coming back to in my books is how we make assumptions about others based on surface level characteristics. If you 'fit the mould' you can get away with so much compared to someone who doesn't. I'm also interested in writing characters who struggle when they decide who they want to be, in the face of other people's assumptions and expectations. '*Who am I?*' is one of the big questions we all have to answer at some point. In my opinion, it would be simpler if everyone else in the world would stop trying to shove us into little boxes that we don't always fit.

If someone ever portrayed you in a work of fiction, what stereotype would they write you as?
I'm the anxious overachiever, like Georgia in *Getting Away with Murder*. I'd be the character panicking that my bookish lifestyle had in no way prepared me to deal with a crisis situation. And then I'd probably die.

Kathryn Foxfield is a research scientist turned YA author; her debut novel, *Good Girls Die First*, has been optioned for a TV adaptation by Amazon. For more information, visit kfoxfield.com

Seeing is believing

Rob Wraith considers how augmented reality has the potential to give students a more immersive, almost visceral experience of the topics they're exploring...

What is augmented reality, and what does it do? Can it help me with my delivery? Will it reduce my workload or add more? How much does it cost, what training do I need, and most important of all – will I see any actual impact from using it?

The answers to those questions ultimately depend on the nature of your classroom delivery and how you plan to expand on it. If you're not already aware, augmented reality (AR) refers to technology that's capable of creating interactive immersive experiences, whereby a user's view of their immediate surroundings is superimposed with computer-generated information.

These renderings of information can encompass both 2D and 3D objects – everything from flat images and photographs to detailed virtual models – as well as sounds. Imagine being able to occupy the same physical space as a dinosaur; observing the moon closer than it's ever been before from the school grounds; or positioning the enormous hardware components making up the 1944 Colossus computer around your classroom, to be better appreciate its size.

These use cases would be something to behold, and likely generate considerable amounts of interest and enthusiasm among students in our lessons, no?

Increasingly normalised

Advances in technology have been used to deliver education in new and evolving ways for decades of course – but the speed at which those technologies are being developed, refined and adopted has increased exponentially.

Back when I attended school, the only computers we had were BBC Micros. By the time I became a qualified teacher and began to teach computing, the BBC Micros had been replaced by much more powerful, cream-coloured PC base units and monitors that were cumbersome to move around.

> *"AR has the potential to revolutionise our classroom delivery"*

As the technologies we regularly access at home and in our classrooms have become ever more sophisticated and convenient, their place within our lives has been increasingly normalised. Where AR is concerned, one significant development has been its growing presence in the retail space– for example, to help customers see what a chair will actually look like in their living room before purchasing it.

Consumer-level AR has also been put to use in a number of mobile apps in recent years. Some let you view the night sky through your phone screen, with accompanying text labels showing the names of planets, stars and constellations. Others feature those wacky camera filters that are particularly popular with younger social media users.

Transformative impacts

Seen from a certain perspective, AR has the potential to revolutionise our classroom delivery and the ways in which we conduct formative and summative assessment. One could even argue that it already has.

Observe my own subject of computing, for example. AR has enabled us to take some of the more complex and, dare we say it, 'less interesting' areas of the curriculum and explore them in a much more visual and engaging way. This could involve turning a classroom into a room full of servers, or peeking inside a PC to see where the pieces should go without having to take any workstations apart. Pupils can be provided with the means to position items in a room to see how they might look, how much space they take up and where would best fit.

Needless to say, having access to this kind of functionality could save multiple industries significant costs at a later date if, for instance, the initial calculations for equipping and outfitting a room are incorrect.

AR could deliver similarly transformative impacts if applied to the curriculum as a whole. With any given subject, there's now the option to engage students in a whole new way, and potentially drive improvements to attendance, achievement and impact.

Ownership of learning

These kinds of interactions with technology can give pupils ownership of their learning, while also affording them opportunities to organically develop a range of soft skills,

such as communication, problem solving and leadership – all of which are highly prized by employers.

AR-assisted lessons can further facilitate learning opportunities at a fraction of the cost – and with far lower levels of risk – than taking student outside the classroom. Lessons that include an AR element can also make possible more individualised learning experiences that allow students to learn at their own pace. When appropriately monitored, this can then give teachers a way of identifying any key areas that need to be developed in either the group or specific individuals, and see to it that the right kind of support is provided.

Moreover, there are many flexible options when it comes to accessing AR. Rather than requiring the expensive headsets necessary for virtual reality, AR applications can simply be installed on smartphones, tablet devices and PCs, or even accessed via a web browser. Instantly, this opens up possibilities for setting homework, revision and independent study tasks that include AR-enabled immersive components, which can help students take ownership of their own individual immersive learning experiences.

AR has, and will likely continue to enhance and improve the education we can offer, allowing us to provide a more rounded, immersive experience for our pupils, heightening their engagement and sense of enjoyment, and leaving them with a thirst to know more.

Reuse, repurpose

With AR seeing increasing use in our social lives and lived experiences outside of school, it's surely just a matter of time before it becomes commonplace in our classrooms too. AR-powered software solutions are already delivering new forms of interaction and functionality in numerous commercial settings. Do we want our classrooms to be similarly engaging, inspiring and informative places? Well then, let's add some AR.

The means of creating our own digital classroom resources for use as part of an AR experience is already within our grasp – and once they're created, they can be revised, reused and shared over a number of years and potentially repurposed for teaching across multiple subjects. The same resource that helps students explore the development of Roman architecture in history could, for instance, be called upon to teach the principles of engineering, or provide inspiration to English students tasked with crafting a narrative that takes place in a period setting.

AR affords us the opportunity to be more engaging and effective in how we teach by providing students with a new and powerful means of interactivity. Beyond that, introducing students to the technology today can help us better prepare them for the workplaces of tomorrow, and provide a jumping off point for thoughtful class discussions of how it could and is being used (and also perhaps how it *shouldn't* be used).

Schools will need to engage in a significant amount of planning to ensure that their implementation of AR technology is both appropriate and suitable – but once this has been done, the rewards will follow.

AR development is far from being 'finished'. I believe there's still much more to come, which I'm sure can only be a good thing for educators.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Rob Wraith is head of learning technology and digital learning at NCG – a group of seven colleges across the UK; for more information, visit ncgrp.co.uk

Young V&A
Bethnal Green

Forum Hi Humanchives, Kerwin Frost for adidas, 2021

Creativity
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V&A

Teach the past, change the future

Reflecting on the increasingly fractious relationship between the profession and Ofsted, **Adrian Lyons** asks, '*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes…?*'

Lead inspectors have immense power and responsibility during inspections. Indeed, during my time as an HMI, an oft-discussed topic among my colleagues and I was the huge authority we had when in schools – yet this power isn't entirely unconstrained.

The key way in which inspectors are marshalled is via the inspection handbook, since grading must always be justified against the criteria it sets out. The first question to therefore ask when reading a report for quality assurance purposes is '*Does the text justify he grade?*'

Selective evidence

That said, it's possible to be highly selective in the evidence recorded, in order to justify the final grade. Ofsted is very hot on ensuring that reports meet a fixed set of writing requirements. In reality, however, for most inspections it's only the report writing that's checked, and not the actual gathering of evidence.

The main purpose of Ofsted's training is to disseminate central messages, so that consistency can be maintained in how inspections are carried out.

This results in enormous, centrally-produced slide packs. One very experienced HMI once described in-person Ofsted training to me as '*A long session where we're talked at non-stop from 9am to 4pm, with just a quick comfort break at lunchtime.*'

Quality assurance

Occasionally, inspections will receive a quality assurance visit from an HMI (or a more senior HMI if it's an HMI-led inspection) – usually to ensure that the lead inspector has followed the pre-inspection guidance set out in the inspection handbook.

A quality assurance inspector will check that the evidence base is evaluative, and closely follows the methodology for gathering and recording evidence, as set out in the inspection handbook.

They will judge this by looking at the evidence recorded by inspectors, speaking with inspection team members and interviewing the headteacher about the inspection's progress. They will also check that the prescribed methodology has been followed with the requisite number of 'deep dives'.

A judgement will then be made as to whether the lead inspector's '*Integrity, professionalism and thoroughness strongly reflect Ofsted's values and code of conduct.*' However, given that key strategic priority for Ofsted at the moment is for '*Lead inspectors [to] contribute to achieving the 2023/24 corporate volumes*', relatively few such quality assurance visits are actually taking place.

Culture of conformity

Then there are the contracted inspectors, whose work will be monitored by an HMI largely through checks of their reports and occasional on-site visits. Again, though, a contracted inspector's work will be largely assessed on the basis of their report writing alone – hence the somewhat formulaic nature of Ofsted's school reports.

If your continued allocation of work depends upon the conformity of your report writing, then there's little incentive to inject any personalisation. Ofsted inspectors are effectively on 'zero hour' contracts, so the easiest way of managing a given inspector's poor performance is to simply not allocate them any further work.

The primary incentive for inspectors is to thus play it safe – by deciding on your judgement, and then ensuring that your final report only mentions that which supports said judgement. There is no room for nuance.

Working relationships

Of course, the human factor of inspections produces a degree of subjectivity – which is where Ofsted's command and control approach comes in. Ofsted's priority is consistency, but professional relationships between inspectors and school staff can be difficult to control.

Ofsted's code of conduct states, "*It is important that inspectors establish and maintain a positive working relationship with providers, based on courteous and professional behaviour. Inspectors will take all reasonable steps to prevent undue anxiety and to minimise stress during the inspection or regulatory activity.*"

If that isn't happening, then filing a post-inspection complaint will be too late. Immediately raise any concerns with the lead inspector, and if you're still unsuccessful, contact your nearest Ofsted regional office.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adrian Lyons was one of Her Majesty's Inspectors between 2005 and 2021 and now works with MATs, teacher training providers and LAs to support education; find out more at adrianlyonsconsulting.com

From stress TO SUCCESS

Students' pre-exam anxiety can quickly become self-defeating – which is why schools should have their own GCSE preparation strategies in place and ready to go, says **Stephen Caldwell**...

With the 2023 exams now receding in the rear-view mirror, thousands of educators across England can feel some relief. The weeks and months leading up to examinations are filled with excitement and opportunity – but also anxiety, stress and fear.

Pupils ride this emotional rollercoaster several times in their schooling career, but teachers endure it year after year, as they enter one cohort of students after another for their GCSEs and A Levels.

As a teacher myself, I was always struck by the way anxiety would inhibit my students' ability to learn in the lead-up to exams. It becomes a self-fulfilling cycle – pupils are nervous about taking their exams and the anxiety consumes them, making it difficult to study and prepare, which serves to only intensify that fear even further.

Exam-related anxiety is rooted in uncertainty and fear of the unknown. By demystifying exams with an examiner's insight, and helping students replace their fear with self-belief, teachers can create calm, confident and capable students who are fully ready to tackle their examinations.

The examiner's mindset

It was once commonplace for examiners from various exam boards to visit schools and share their wisdom with both pupils and teachers, giving them the inside track on what examiners would be looking for.

> ***"I was always struck by the way anxiety would inhibit my students' ability to learn in the lead-up to exams"***

As this practice has gradually fallen out of fashion, so too has the proportion of teachers who, like myself, opt to also work as examiners. This is a natural consequence of the mounting pressure on the teaching workforce, and unfortunately means that this form of 'examiners' knowledge' has been steadily lost from schools.

Pupils benefit from hearing directly from examiners because they can dispel some of the mystery that shrouds exams. Pupils will be far less afraid to take their exams if they know exactly what skills are being tested in the questions, how the marking scheme works and how to utilise their knowledge to maximise their marks.

Being a GCSE English examiner enabled me to dispel these mysteries for my own class. Once I was able to explain to pupils how they could score 16 marks in the first seven sentences of their GCSE creative writing paper, their fear was quickly replaced by excitement and they became alive to the possibilities of what they could create, confident in the knowledge that success was perfectly achievable.

'Insider' insight

That same principle applies to all subjects. In maths, most students will grow impatient and disheartened when unable to arrive at an immediate answer and stop attempting the question. By unveiling the way in which marks are awarded, however, pupils will soon learn that the answer is actually just one small component of what the question is really asking.

The key to confidence in maths lies in beginning with what a student already knows – a process that can begin by, say, labelling a diagram and engaging with the material presented, without worrying about the question itself. With this first step complete, the path to the answer will eventually reveal itself. This is a far more comfortable approach for pupils to pursue than the 'all or nothing' alternative.

The priorities and practicalities at play within the education system may have changed, but it's still possible for schools to gain some level of 'insider' insight by inviting examiners to visit, or by seeking out specialist support with the

IN NUMBERS

2,000
The approximate number of exam-related counselling calls delivered by Childline in 2022

44%
of said counselling sessions took place in the months of April, May and June

80%
of headteachers and principals reported higher levels of exam-related stress and anxiety among students in 2022 compared to pre-pandemic years

Sources: Childline and the Association of School and College Leaders

aid of their National Tutoring Programme funding.

Strategic revision

Once the veil has been lifted, these exam preparation principles can be embedded in a strategic revision programme that teaches pupils how to apply their existing knowledge of the curriculum to meet the examiner's requirements.

Teachers can design this revision programme using data based on target grades, mock or weekly test data, and question level analysis, all grounded in forensic knowledge of the different exam boards.

Crucially, a school-designed revision programme should never include 'cramming'. The aim isn't to simply recall as many facts as possible, but rather gradually consolidate classroom learning, provide practice in applying this knowledge to an exam paper and address any anxieties head on.

Regular mock testing is an essential component of revision. Frequent testing will provide pupils with opportunities to learn how to maximise their chances of success. The experience will also allow them to develop resilience, learn how to persevere when a first attempt proves unsuccessful, and develop their own strategies for overcoming challenges.

Be a believer

Teachers can facilitate this process by sandwiching mock exams with pre- and post-assessment activities, while setting aside time for pupils to self-reflect and self-identify their needs, thereby making them partners in the revision process. This, above all, enables pupils to develop the self-confidence they'll need to harness feelings of stress towards positive ends, and potentially even thrive on being tested.

Mock testing also gives teachers valuable insights into pupils' strengths and areas for development, which can in turn help to identify problem areas across the cohort and support targeted intervention.

It's an unfortunate reality that as things currently stand, 'failure' is essentially baked into our education system. Without any GCSE papers having been taken by any students, we know that around a third of pupils will be awarded grades 1, 2 and 3 in English and maths. This means that every year a choice is made to fail a third, in order for two thirds to pass. It's a system that contributes to a cycle of low self-esteem that's particularly pernicious for disadvantaged pupils, who are overrepresented in that third who 'fail'.

One of the most powerful ways of supporting students is to demonstrate your total and unconditional faith in their ability to achieve success. Constant positive reinforcement over time, coupled with a clear structure for revision and techniques to aid effective study, can help to break down students' self-imposed barriers and enable them to unlock their true potential.

Success within reach

Over the years, my colleagues and I began making our classroom spaces available to students on exam days, so that they could have a place in which to chat and mentally prepare themselves.

Some pupils would use the time to ask us for advice, but our main role was to provide a smiling, positive presence. It was reassuring for students to simply know that we were 'in it with them', and that we'd be waiting for them on the other side to hear about their experiences.

There are many ways of providing this kind of support, but no matter what form it takes, demonstrating that you care and reinforcing that positive relationship, right up until the very end, is vital.

A calm, confident and capable student is one who will walk into an examination room knowing exactly what's needed from them and how to deliver it. No amount of cramming the week before an exam can create this mindset; in anything, that will only serve to hinder it.

Exam confidence is the product of constant practice, relentless support, hard-won self-belief and above all, a detailed knowledge of the examiner's mindset as they pick up their marking pen and open their first exam paper.

This confidence is within reach for each and every student – and with it, the ability to achieve and succeed in their exams and beyond.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Stephen Caldwell is a former teacher and GCSE examiner, and co-founder of Impress Education; for more information, visit impress.education

Emotional preparation

Colin Foster argues that being properly prepared for a class involves more than just having a brilliant lesson plan...

Imagine a teacher who is facing a demanding lesson the following day. It might be Friday afternoon with an often challenging class, and there may be rainy and windy weather forecast – which, as every teacher knows, is the worst possible combination.

On top of that, the content is something students always find challenging and, to be completely honest, not even the teacher's favourite topic.

Chances are, this teacher will spend their Thursday evening doing lots and lots of preparation. Despite what some politicians may say, it's extremely rare to find a lazy teacher. Teachers will habitually expend vast quantities of their supposedly free time on getting ready for school the following day – and thus, our teacher will stay up into the early hours, scouring the internet for the best resources they can find, thinking about, re-thinking (and perhaps overthinking) what they'll be doing, minute to minute.

This teacher will plan, and then re-plan, and then tweak and improve until they eventually have an all-singing, all-dancing lesson ready to meet the next day's challenges. One that's sure to make the lesson go smoothly and facilitate a positive, rather than negative learning experience.

Running on empty

What transpires the following day is an order of events that many of us will have gone through ourselves.

The teacher wakes up tired and grumpy from lack of sleep. Having spent their precious evening (and a hefty chunk of sleep time) hard at work on their preparation, they're simply not operating at their best come the following afternoon. Yes, the lesson is fully prepared. The teacher is not.

Oh, they know their stuff and they've done their homework, all right – but that's precisely the problem. An exhausted teacher is never best placed for handling a challenging lesson or class.

Our teacher finds it hard to think quickly. Their judgment calls aren't as good as they might be. They're slow to respond to difficulties, and the lesson ends up embodying all of the teacher's worst fears.

Teachers matter too

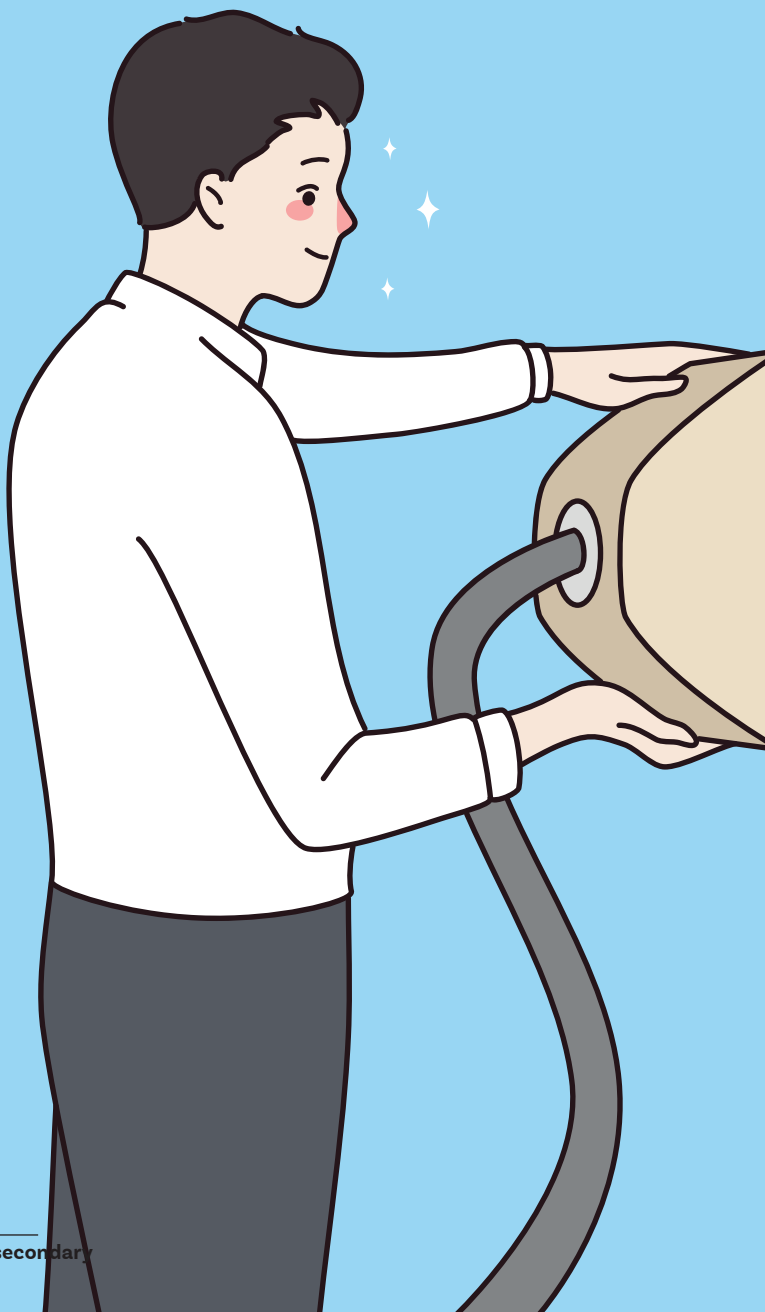
Teachers can be very selfless people. They know perfectly well that they could earn more money for less effort engaged in some other profession, but they care about young people and believe that education matters.

Teachers want students to get the best possible start in life, and are committed to giving something back by playing their part in that. Where the children are concerned, it can sometimes seem as though no sacrifice is too much. As we hear so often, children only get one chance at their education.

No teacher wants to be a hypocrite, challenging students during the day about the effort they're putting in and demanding punctual returns of homework, only to then not do those same things themselves as part of their job. Schools exist for students, not for teachers – ergo, we must put students at the centre of everything.

Yet while some of those sentiments might be true, they can combine to create a toxic work environment for teachers. Of course, schools should put students and their learning at the centre of all that they do – but teachers matter too.

Schools are more than just learning environments for students. They're also workplaces for both teaching and non-teaching staff, and their levels of wellbeing matter as well.



What's unhelpful is seeing 'teacher wellbeing' presented as being in competition with students' best interests. The question of '*Who matters more – the students or the teachers?*' presents a false choice, since exhausted, demoralised teachers are never going to be in students' best interests either.

Preparation in the round

In a sense, there was very much a lack of preparation ahead of that difficult lesson. The paperwork may have all been in order, and the lesson's technicalities expertly considered – but conspicuously absent was any form of emotional preparation on the part of the teacher.

Teaching is an emotionally demanding, often draining occupation and virtually impossible to do well when running on empty. It's not a selfish act for a teacher to prioritise their own wellbeing and sanity, but rather something that should be viewed as beneficial for everyone. Preparing 'the teacher' is just as important – perhaps even more so – than what we might traditionally view as preparing 'the lesson'.

In practice, this 'teacher preparation' might involve visiting the gym, or relaxing with family and friends. Far from being trivial, spending time in this way contributes to important emotional preparation for the demands of the day ahead.

In an ideal world, all teachers would be able to complete the entirety of their paperwork by the end of the day, before then heading home and enjoying an evening of entertainment and/or restful social downtime.

In reality, this can seem an unrealistic aspiration for many, calling for some hard choices. Is it wise to go in with a 'good enough' lesson plan, after an evening spent relaxing and an early night? Or better to produce a stellar lesson plan that's then delivered by a stressed and worn-out teacher the following day?

"It's not a selfish act for a teacher to prioritise their own wellbeing"

There may be no right or wrong answers here – but seeing emotional preparation as being of equal importance to content preparation might at least start to redress a balance that's tipped too far in one direction.

If we continue to prioritise short-term goals (the quality of the next day's lesson) over long-term teacher wellbeing, then we shouldn't be surprised if the rate of teachers leaving the profession continues to rise, to the point that it becomes no no longer possible to provide 'schooling' in the sense we've become accustomed to.

Emotional preparedness

The process of teaching draws on a complex package of skills and requirements. Teachers are never just preparing for 'a lesson' or even several lessons; we're preparing to be around young people, with all the challenges and opportunities this presents.

Depending on our subject, some lesson content may also be emotionally charged and draining to teach. In some instances, we might need to work at being in an emotionally healthy place ourselves before being able to do a good job of that.

More broadly, however, we simply don't know when a student will suddenly come to us with a personal question or problem they want to talk about. We'll often say that teachers should always be available to be approached about anything – but do we perform the requisite work/rest on ourselves in order to prepare us for that?

Being as well-rested and refreshed as possible (even if that means making hard compromises with respect to lesson preparedness) will stand us in good stead to be maximally useful.

Even if it's just taking some common sense steps to look after our own emotional wellbeing, we'll be better role models and more supportive and helpful adults when students approach us – for whatever reason that may be.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Colin Foster (@colinfoster77) is a Reader in Mathematics Education in the Department of Mathematics Education at Loughborough University and has written numerous books and articles for mathematics teachers; for more information, visit foster77.co.uk

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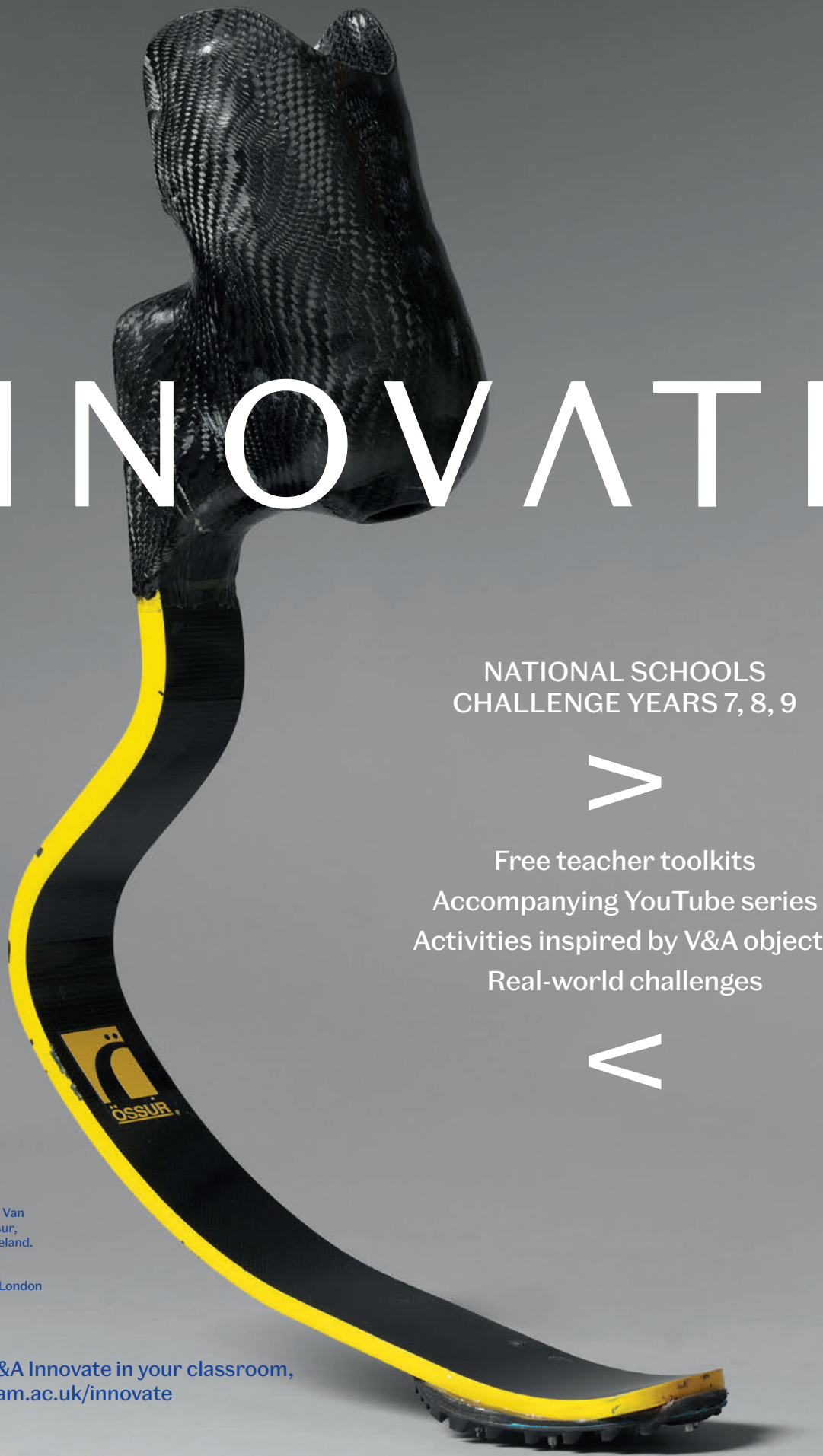
INNOVATE



NATIONAL SCHOOLS
CHALLENGE YEARS 7, 8, 9

>

Free teacher toolkits
Accompanying YouTube series
Activities inspired by V&A objects
Real-world challenges

<

Cheetah Xtreme, designed by Van Phillips, manufactured by Ossur, 1984 (manufactured 2012), Iceland. Donated by Ossur UK. Museum no. CD.152-2016.

Run V&A Innovate in your classroom,
visit vam.ac.uk/innovate

REASONS TO TRY...

5 V&A Innovate National Schools Challenge

Find out what creative heights your students are capable of by entering this free inter-schools competition organised by the V&A

30 SECOND BRIEFING

V&A Innovate is a National Schools Challenge created with teachers and designers to equip young people at KS3 with the confidence and skills to develop solutions for real-world issues. We're asking students to follow a human and planet-centred design process, and respond to one of three challenge themes inspired by V&A collections.

1 FREE TO ENTER

V&A Innovate National Schools Challenge is open to all students in years 7, 8 and 9 at state-funded schools, and is free to enter. This year's themes are: Restore, Play and Sense, inspired by objects in the V&A collection, and issues we are facing in the world today.

2 CURRICULUM-BASED

Innovate supports the delivery of the D&T curriculum and scaffolds skills towards the NEA component of the D&T GCSE.

The broad themes of the challenge encourage students to explore the role that design plays when it comes to tackling real-world issues. Modelled on the non-exam assessment specification of the D&T GCSE, V&A Innovate's challenge themes this year emphasise design thinking, problem solving and iteration.

Beyond this, the competition will further require entrants to demonstrate interdisciplinary skills, creativity, critical thinking, co-ordinated collaboration and effective communication.

3 SUPPORTING RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Check out the wide range of free online resources designed to support schools with delivering the challenge. Teacher and student toolkits will guide you through the design process step by step, and include contributions from teachers and designers. The student toolkit encourages creative thinking and collaboration through activities.

Be sure to also explore our series of films and animations containing advice from assorted designers and curators, which will bring real-world design lessons into your classroom in a lively and engaging way – and hopefully help to inspire your students' own design ideas. Visit **vam.ac.uk/info/va-innovate-challenge-resources** to find out more.

Contact:
vam.ac.uk/innovate
innovate@vam.ac.uk

4 REWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Every student who takes part will receive a participation certificate and feedback from our judging panel of industry experts.

The finalists' work will be displayed at the museum, and students will also have the chance to win prizes, including plaques, trophies and places on designer-led workshops. The whole experience encourages creative thinking.

5 ONLINE TEACHER EVENTS

Join our V&A Innovate online teacher sessions for a helpful introduction to the programme and this year's themes. The sessions will also afford a chance to pick up some top tips from other teachers who have taken part in previous years.

Places are entirely free of charge – for further details and to book your place, visit **vam.ac.uk/whatson/programmes/schools**.

What teachers say

"The whole experience has been absolutely wonderful, and incredibly inspiring!"

"This has given me greater confidence in my teaching, value and contribution within the school."

"It has been wonderful working Innovate into lesson plans, especially as the resources are so well thought-out, user-friendly and easy to access."

"Innovate is now embedded into our D&T curriculum throughout the academic year. It so enjoyable to deliver, enhancing and developing our teaching."

Where did all the students go?

Hannah Day looks at how schools can try to address the persistent student absence that seems to have been one of the most far-reaching impacts of the pandemic...

Attendance across schools is down, to the point where it's now become a major focus of government attention. Many students can remain stubbornly difficult to get into school, which the pandemic and its aftermath has only made worse.

The MIS provider ESS SIMS recently carried out a survey that found a worrying decline in post- COVID attendance, with around 80% of heads stating that absenteeism was presenting a problem for their schools (and those in urban environments rating the problem higher than their rural counterparts).

Only 53% of independent schools pointed to absenteeism as being an issue for them, suggesting that the links we've seen between economic inequality and absenteeism still remain. Judging by the survey's responses overall, it seems that urban schools with a high proportion of students on free school meals were those contending with the most difficult absenteeism challenges.

In January 2022, the DfE launched a consultation on four proposals for supporting schools, trusts and LA with attendance issues – including the introduction of statutory guidance for managing and improving attendance; setting standards for LA attendance services; issuing fixed penalty notices for incidents of absence; and bringing academy rules around granting leave of absence in line with those of maintained schools.

In a response issued last May (see bit.ly/ts125-ab1), the government indicated that it intends to proceed with all four.

Start with the person

Whatever form those new government measures take, now is the ideal time to review how your school currently approaches the issue of absence. Much of what we do is more about working with people, rather than the content of our subject. We can only teach meaningfully if we have engaged students present who are in a position to learn.

With many persistently absent students, the causes of their low attendance will be broadly known. Whether you have a grasp of those causes or not, though, make time for a review. I myself only recently discovered that one of my students, who had been struggling to attend classes and concentrate when present, had lost her father and told nobody. Needless to say, supporting a grieving teenager calls for a very different approach to supporting a lazy one.

The details in that case came to light during a careers meeting. Providing students with opportunities to consider their later lives in personal, non-threatening spaces can give you the chance to learn more about their unique situations.

If prior behaviour management strategies or school counselling have been unsuccessful, then support with a more practical focus can really help, since the active focus will be on real-world considerations, rather than emotional ones.

Lazy stereotypes

When addressing persistent absence among younger students, we've seen some success by getting them involved in after school groups, such as sports and drama clubs. These have allowed them to mix and make friends across year groups, and see themselves and others in a different light outside of the classroom.

"Families can provide insights you won't get directly from student themselves"

What the careers meeting and after-school club successes demonstrate is the important of connecting with students and what's important to them. By making attendance the sole focus of our interactions with students, we risk giving them a predominantly negative experience of conversing with staff, which could compound the situation even further.

At the same time, we must also consider practical issues – particularly given the increased costs of paying for food, travel and uniform compared to just a year ago. As the aforementioned research makes clear, the more disadvantaged a student's background is, the more likely it is that they'll be serially absent.

What we mustn't do, however, is fall back on lazy stereotypes of unengaged parents and disaffected young people. Such factors may well be involved in some cases – but what if they're not? What if there's a simple solution to be had by providing some form of practical support?

The Glasspool charity trust (glasspool.org.uk) operates an essential living fund, which is open to any legal resident anywhere in the UK.

There are also a number of community and religious groups who can offer support locally. Contact any such groups near you and see if they can be enlisted to help ensure that your pupils are having their basic needs meet. After all, if a young person isn't already warm, regularly fed and clothed at home, how readily will they apply themselves to the task of learning?

Another consideration in some urban areas is the targeting of vulnerable young people by organised gangs. If there's a risk of gang influence affecting students at your school, you may be able to seek help from the award-winning, anti-youth violence charity Power the Fight (powerthefight.org.uk).

Engage families

Don't forget that families can provide insights you won't get directly from students themselves. When approaching families, always do so with a warm, positive attitude. Let them know that you're interested in the whole person and how the school can help. It's vital to remove any sense of shame or judgement.

Many parents I've spoken to feel that schools have something of an 'us and them' approach when meeting them. Without open dialogue, it won't be possible to build a meaningful relationship – so however 'bad' you perceive someone's parenting to be, suspend judgement now.

Find out how a parent or carer sees their child. What do they love about them? What do they find frustrating? When did the current issues start? Was there a slow build-up, or some catalyst that suddenly made things worse?

What does the student do in their free time? When they're not at school, who are they? What do they love, and what are they good at? Conduct yourself as if you know nothing and want to know everything. You may be surprised at what you end up discovering.

When the time comes, discuss with home what might be considered 'positive attendance' as a starting point. A persistently late student could actually be achieving quite a lot just by getting to school at all. Acknowledge and verbalise this positively first; then seek to improve on it.

We can't accept absences from school, but we can mix the support and discipline we respond with. If a student responds to a firm hand, then by all means use it – but in my experience at least, many more will respond better to more personal approaches.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Hannah Day is head of art, media and film at Ludlow College

THE TEACHERS HAVEN'T TURNED UP!

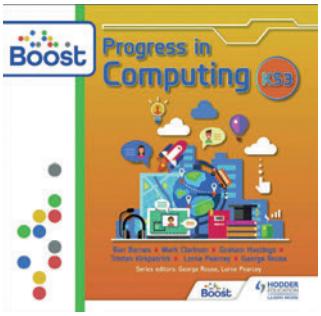
Absenteeism among teachers can have a similarly huge impact on a school's culture and continuity – here's how to tackle it...

- **MAKE YOUR SCHOOL A GREAT PLACE TO WORK**
  Be positive, welcoming and open. Publicly acknowledge staff achievements, encourage training, find out what progression aims staff have and find ways to help them. Make colleagues feel seen and valued.
- **FIND OUT WHY STAFF ARE OFF**
  For this, you need a confidential, 'tell all' system. In person, make it clear that you want to know what, besides illness, will affect staff attendance. Inviting everyone to then later use anonymised forms to comment freely may well prove quite the eye opener...
- **EMPLOY IN-HOUSE COVER**
  This is often cheaper than sourcing personnel from a supply agency, and will allow your supply staff to build relationships with students. Ensure their contracts allow you to redeploy them for different duties at times when no staff cover is needed.
- **HOW MANY SICK DAYS CAN YOU AFFORD TO COVER?**
  Compare your last three years of absence data – though you may need to control for lockdown-era irregularities. Is it a comfortable margin? If not, get insurance.

What's New?

Our pick of the latest solutions and innovations for secondary education

1 Digital know-how



Hodder Education has listened to how you teach computing at KS3 and designed a fantastic toolkit of digital and print resources around you, containing everything you'll need to confidently deliver the National Curriculum in computing and develop your students' ICT skills.

Progress in Computing: Key Stage 3 includes lesson plans, presentations, videos and animations, multimedia assets, interactive resources, quizzes and assessments, along with a Student Book.

Visit hoddereducation.co.uk/PiC to register for a free trial of Progress in Computing: Key Stage 3: Boost and request an eInspection copy of the Student Book. For more details, contact **computing@hoddereducation.co.uk**

2 Seamless mistakes

Between 4 and 11, children will acquire the skills of reading, writing, learning to count and performing increasingly complex operations. As they grow, they'll continue to express their vision of the world and emotions through writing, drawing and colouring. To be wrong is part of the learning process – but with FriXion writing pens and felt pens, there's no need for any crossing out.

Thanks to the pens' erasable ink, children can correct and improve their work without leaving any visible signs of having 'failed' or done something wrong. The FriXion heat-sensitive ink pens also allow you to easily write and annotate documents, and take notes in meetings, in class or on the go. The erasable ink of Frixion pens disappears under the effect of heat, without any trace of paper damage – leaving just a clean result that's readable without any scratches. For more details, visit **pilot-frixion.uk**

3 Oracy for all

The English-Speaking Union believes every child should be able to make their voice heard. We work with teachers to improve oracy skills and cross-cultural understanding, so that all young people – regardless of background – can thrive.

Our resources, programmes and competitions help young people to better engage with the world, speak more confidently, listen attentively and understand different points of view. Acquiring these skills will improve young people's standards of attainment, emotional intelligence and social skills, helping them live their lives to the fullest. To find out more, visit **ESU.org** or email **education@esu.org**

Backing schools facing the toughest challenges

Teach First has been backing those schools facing the toughest challenges for nearly two decades. Society is failing too many children from disadvantaged backgrounds. They don't start with the same chances, producing an inequality persists throughout childhood. It's not their fault, and it isn't fair.

Schools and teachers can make the biggest difference. Teach First works with schools to upskill and support teachers and leaders at every level throughout their careers. Its specialist training and leadership programmes are specifically designed for schools serving disadvantaged communities, and help to build and sustain strong leadership. With a range of programmes and qualifications to choose from, Teach First can help accelerate your school's improvement journey by plugging teachers and leaders into strong networks of diverse expertise, and provide opportunities to create real change.

When it comes to finding new trainee teachers with great potential, Teach First can help you to recruit and develop people who'll make a sustainable impact in your school. Its rigorous selection process finds people with the spark, resilience and resourcefulness they need to succeed. Teach First trainees work as a teacher in your school for two years, while honing their craft and gaining a teaching and leadership qualification.

To find out more about how Teach First supports teachers and leaders throughout their careers, visit **teachfirst.org.uk/schools** – because when your whole team thrives, so do your pupils.

FOCUS ON: MFL

This issue, we examine the government assistance MFL has received as a subject – albeit with certain expectations attached – and consider whether the GCSE verbal assessment might need a rethink...

When we teach languages in schools, are we doing so in the right way and for the right reasons?

THE AGENDA:

Banish the STAGE FRIGHT

Make that final verbal assessment a less fearful prospect by focusing more speech and pronunciation throughout KS3, advises **Jennifer Wozniak-Rush**...

In MFL classrooms, speech and pronunciation play a vital role in developing pupils' language skills. Yet many pupils may find it challenging to practise these skills within a whole-class context, particularly if they're sensitive to making mistakes and easily embarrassed.

There's no greater joy in my teaching than hearing pupils speak spontaneously – but how can we instil that level of confidence?

By implementing a series of reliable and consistent strategies we can actively build up pupils' verbal confidence earlier, so that the final verbal assessment is transformed into something pupils can comfortably take in their stride, rather than something to fear.

Start early

The first step is to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that students can perceive from day one of Y7. We should be aiming for a supportive setting in which pupils readily know they'll never be judged when speaking in the target language.

Encourage your pupils to support and help each other, and emphasise that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process. Aim to promote a positive classroom culture where errors are viewed as learning opportunities, rather than sources of shame or embarrassment.

Ideally, students should be regularly speaking in the target language from the get go. In my experience, it's vital to create as many opportunities as possible for pupils to speak in each and every MFL lesson.

Begin by teaching pupils the basics of classroom language near the start of Y7, so that they can tell you when they've forgotten their book or need to go to the toilet. Start with phrases such as '*Can I have...?*' and high frequency core language that you can use with the class when doing the register and throughout the lesson.

Provide the opportunity

If we provide pupils with as many opportunities to speak as we can, they will enter KS4 feeling much more confident, making our job considerably easier.

Another way of getting there is to teach pupils chunks of vocabulary that they can reuse in different contexts. Think about those many situations that will crop up regularly and naturally within a typical classroom lesson, and find ways of exploiting these in the target language for linguistic purposes.

> **"Teach pupils chunks of vocabulary that they can reuse in different contexts"**

Plan opportunities for pupils to speak not only to you, but also their peers through the use of pair work activities and/or Kagan strategies such as 'quiz, quiz, trade', 'talking chips' and 'think pair share'. This way, pupils can practise saying both the language you're teaching them, as well as some degree of interaction language, which will do much to develop their spontaneity over time.

As teachers, we can monitor what pupils are saying, how language is being used and how pupils are developing their spoken language skills collaboratively. At the same time, we should be providing appropriate support when needed and correcting misconceptions as they arise.

From the start, it's crucial that pupils learn how to produce new sounds as accurately as possible, so try to begin each lesson with a brief, low-pressure speaking activity. As pupils become accustomed to this ritual, they'll start to feel more comfortable with the expectation of speaking every time – even if it's just as part of a short, low risk lesson starter.

Lower the pressure

Divide the class into smaller groups or pairs for any activities focusing on verbal communication. When introducing new vocabulary, I'll first have pupils repeat the words after me. After this, they will then practise said vocabulary with their peers via one of numerous pair work activities. For example:

- One pupil deliberately mumbles one of the new words, and their partner has to guess which one it is
- One pupil performs an action of what a word is referring to, and another pupil has to guess which word it is
- In pairs, pupils take turns saying the words; one writes each word in the air or on the table with their finger, and the other pupil has to identify the word in question

Working with fewer of their peers in immediate earshot reduces anxiety levels and will increase pupils' willingness to actively participate in activities such as role plays, discussions or language games that involve engaging in conversations.

Begin the process with relatively low-stakes speaking tasks, before gradually ramping up the level of complexity and challenge. Start with short, simple prompts, then progress to more extended dialogues or presentations over time.

Doing this lets pupils build their confidence gradually and develop their speaking skills at a manageable pace. We know that the principles of effective speaking practice are modelling

through listening; developing speed and accuracy of production through extensive practice; and moving from structured practice to spontaneity.

Establish the benchmark

For pupils to speak spontaneously, we need a lot of structured practice first, using target language as explained previously – but also by regularly using speaking activities with the different topics we teach.

Greg Horton's 'Group Talk progression chart' is a good illustration of how speaking might develop. The aim is for pupils to become more proficient at using the language over time via the following stages:

Stage 1: introducing and responding to simple opinions

Stage 2: taking part in a short discussion

Stage 3: exchanging reasons and preferences / talking across time frames

Stage 4: developing a line of thought / sharing points of view / balancing an argument

Demonstrate correct pronunciation, intonation, and fluency regularly so that pupils are provided with a clear benchmark. Encourage pupils to imitate your model and provide constructive feedback to help them refine their pronunciation.

Teaching phonics and practising it regularly will further help to improve pupils' confidence. How often do you teach phonics, and how often do you revisit it? How have you ensured progression in phonics within your schemes of work?

Celebrate success

Encourage pupils to provide constructive feedback to their peers, focusing on strengths and areas for improvement. I tend to always refer to the same success criteria, so that pupils know what to look for. Self-assessment will meanwhile allow pupils to reflect on their progress, track their development and take ownership of their learning journey.

Be sure to acknowledge and celebrate pupils' verbal communication achievements. Praise their efforts and any progress or improvements, highlighting specific instances where they have overcome challenges. Recognising pupils' accomplishments will boost their confidence yet further, and motivate them to continue working on their verbal skills.

If any pupils are still extremely reluctant to speak, props and learning aids may help. Interactive language learning apps, online language exchange platforms and voice recognition tools can all support additional practice outside the classroom, enabling students to build confidence at their own pace.

You could, for example, set a homework activity where pupils are tasked with using Snapchat to record themselves answering questions 'as' a dog or a broccoli. Alternatively, pupils could use Flipgrid, Padlet or Vocaroo to record their spoken answers to questions you've set, after which you could provide personalised feedback on their pronunciation and vocabulary use.

You could take this further by inviting students to create videos describing themselves, their town or school, which are then sent to partner schools abroad, thus giving the activity a real and easily recognised purpose.

By implementing these reliable and consistent methods throughout KS3, MFL teachers can empower pupils to take the final verbal assessment in their stride. Through the careful nurturing of pupils' verbal confidence, we can help them develop lifelong language skills.

8 STEPS TO MORE CONFIDENT SPEAKERS

1. Create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment
2. Encourage pupils to speak from day one of Y7
3. Make frequent use of small group and pair activities
4. Devise scaffolded speaking tasks
5. Model and demonstrate the kind of speaking proficiency you expect to see
6. Utilise peer feedback so that students can support each other, and self-assessment so that they can track their own progress over time
7. Maintain students' motivation to continue by regularly celebrating any successes and signs of genuine progress
8. Employ the use of various props and online learning sites to support any students who may be struggling

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
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Unleashing an Epic Summer!

Over the last two years, PET-Xi captivated schools nationwide with over 160 successful catch-up Summer School Programmes. The exceptional feedback from parents, learners, and senior leaders highlighted the positive impact of PET-Xi's high-energy training expertise.

PET-Xi is renowned for its multi-award-winning teams that tirelessly strive to transform lives through engaging and positive learning experiences. With a track record of assisting over 250,000 individuals in achieving their goals, PET-Xi's intensive, motivational, and inspirational interventions cater to learners from primary to GCSE levels.

Learner engagement is at the core of PET-Xi's approach, with a staggering 98% of learners reporting an improvement in their confidence. Graded as Good by Ofsted, PET-Xi's unique methodology, staffing structure, and programme delivery consistently deliver outstanding results.

Introducing the Epic Summer Programme, PET-Xi offers a tailored experience focused on growth mindset, confidence building, and student well-being. These carefully curated activities assist students in developing essential and transferable skills to ease their transition to the next academic year.

PET-Xi's success stories are plentiful, including Sprowston Community Academy in Norwich, The Duston School in Northampton, and The Westwood Academy in Coventry.

At Sprowston Community Academy, PET-Xi's fun-filled summer school experience supported learners in transitioning to their new school environment while ensuring they caught up academically. The programme's intensive and immersive lessons in maths and English, coupled with enrichment activities, boosted students' knowledge and confidence. Liz Wood, Head of School at Sprowston Community Academy, commended the team's energy and enthusiasm, emphasising the positive experience for students.

Similarly, The Duston School collaborated with PET-Xi to deliver a successful summer school that helped make up for lost classroom time due to the pandemic. The programme received high praise from Sam Strickland, Principal of The Duston School, who highlighted PET-Xi's knowledgeable staff and the students' remarkable progress.

The Westwood Academy in Coventry entrusted PET-Xi with delivering their Summer School, providing intensive lessons in maths and English, as well as engaging enrichment activities.

Students in Year 8 and 9 benefited from an enhanced knowledge base and increased confidence. Michael Irvine, Deputy Head at The Westwood Academy, commended PET-Xi's professionalism, skills, and approachability, underscoring the positive learning experience for all participants.

PET-Xi's Epic Summer Programme presents several advantages for schools:

- **Funding:** You can use any of your remaining catch-up funding from this year.
- **Hassle-free:** Allow hard-working staff a well-deserved break during the summer holidays.
- **Tailored to your needs:** PET-Xi designs bespoke content for maths and English, catering to specific subject areas, year groups, and ability levels.
- **Tried and tested:** The programme's well-organised model ensures high-impact learning and high-energy enrichment, fostering motivation and confidence.
- **Self-sufficient:** PET-Xi is self-sufficient, requiring minimal support from school staff during programme delivery. Alternatively, staff can work alongside PET-Xi, gaining valuable professional development opportunities.

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More than words

With many adults apparently regretting their inability to speak another language, let's use every means at our disposal to ensure today's young people engage positively with MFL lessons, urges **Rebecca Waker**

To most MFL teachers, the statistics contained within a recent Pearson study into language learning won't be surprising.

In a survey of 2,000 UK adults (see bit.ly/ts125-LR1), 86% of those able to speak another language said this had supported them in a multitude of ways. For some, it had helped them better understand other cultures and given them confidence to travel the world. For others, having an additional language had resulted in them making international friends, increasing their self-confidence and even living abroad.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the same research found that the majority of Britons who speak just one language regret not have learned another. Why is that? Are things any different for today's young people? And if so, what distinguishes the students currently in our classrooms from their parents and communities who now wish they had learnt another language at school?

Cultural capital

I think it comes down to accessibility. Spoken and written language examples are so much more accessible now than was the case previously. Long gone are the days when the best teachers could do was stock up on foreign language leaflets and newspapers when on their holidays.

In the present day, it's possible to bring numerous elements of a target language's culture right into the classroom. Those 'cultural capital' chasms can be bridged far more easily via a just few clicks of a mouse. By bringing real-world elements into our classrooms, we can help to build respect for other cultures and foster curiosity – essential for the ever-more global society in which we find ourselves.

If three quarters of monolingual adults wish they could speak another language, then we can perhaps hope that they'll encourage their children to study MFL Every teachers knows how important parental and community support can be, so this is a positive start.

There are different ways of harnessing this support – from sharing the benefits of language learning with them, to perhaps inviting them to join you and your students at after-school sessions.

Indeed, whether they be family, friends, acquaintances or even influencers, adults can be great role models for young people if they're willing to share their positive experiences, or give learning a language another go themselves, having made mistakes before.

Y9 and beyond

By the end of Y9, we'll want students who not only feel confident that they were able to give their best at KS3, but who are also eager to put their language learning to good use in future. We should want them to feel able to continue to GCSE, even if they wouldn't class themselves as linguists.

Yet if we're to show students that languages are relevant to them, then we need to carefully consider how inclusive we're being in the classroom – from the images we use, to the role models we cite.

We can teach students about gender neutral language, and how different people can express themselves in the language they're learning. By doing so, we'd be taking language learning beyond lists of words and grammar exercises, and closer to something that our young people can see as having relevance to their lives.

Naturally, we can also highlight the wider range of employment opportunities open to those able to speak multiple languages, and how far these extend beyond the obvious teacher and translator roles.

The accessibility of modern language learning gives me cause for optimism – that we can and will change the picture painted in the aforementioned survey, but also that we can excite those students wanting to study another language in ways that were never possible before.

The future needn't be one where people feel embarrassed at their lack of language skills; instead, there's the potential for it to be one where people feel empowered to travel, communicate with others and benefit from everything else that learning a language can offer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Rebecca Waker is Subject Advisor, Languages at Pearson and a former MFL teacher of nine years; the article drew on input from Fiona Pryce – MFL Product Manager at Pearson and herself a former MFL teacher of 23 years; for further details on Pearson's 'More Than Words' campaign and new language GCSEs, visit go.pearson.com/MFLGCSE24

Saving Languages

The government wants more students to learn foreign languages for the good of the economy, observes **Dr Shirley Lawes** – but setting such utilitarian goals sells the subject short...

The UCL Institute of Education was recently appointed to lead the National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE) – a new national initiative funded by the DfE that's set to run over the next three years, with the aim of increasing the uptake of language qualifications at KS4/5.

One might be inclined to think that this move comes not a moment too soon, since the proportion of young people taking languages at GCSE and A Level is declining at an alarming rate.

This latest attempt at regenerating language learning in English schools follows a number of prior initiatives that set out to improve the quality and participation rates of MFL provision in schools – not least the Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review, and the significant revisions we've seen to GCSE and A Level exams.

Daunting task

The new NCLE will have a daunting task ahead, though it does at least seem equipped with the knowledge, expertise and experience it'll need to perform its role of leading 25 'hub' schools across the country. These will in turn link with groups of local schools to provide inspiration and training for teachers around regenerating their languages curriculum and pedagogical approaches.

The government's agenda here has been made quite clear. As Nick Gibb, the Minister for School Standards, declared, "Our economy needs people who can communicate across the globe and trade with overseas businesses. This programme is about ensuring we have the next generation of young people with the languages needed to compete on the world stage."

The NCLE will find itself needing to address the implications of that professed objective, however. Because as anyone who has ever used multiple languages in a professional context knows, the level of knowledge and fluency attained at GCSE or even A Level won't be enough to enable anyone to 'Communicate across the globe and trade with overseas businesses'.

This instrumental view of MFL learning seems to be increasingly widespread and ought to be challenged. A narrow focus on improving exam results, or the promise of better job prospects won't be enough to make MFL learning more attractive to young people. Moreover, justifying foreign language learning in terms of what the economy needs is to ignore the essential educational value of foreign language learning to individuals.

Imagination and creativity

The act of studying a foreign language takes learners on a voyage of discovery, where they're invited to compare the familiar with the unknown in terms of communication and culture. This process challenges parochialism, and invites us to openly question ourselves and others.

MFL is a subject discipline in which discussions of language and culture can seamlessly interweave and upend received ideas and prejudices. MFL teachers can, in a very special way, broaden young peoples' cultural horizons and expand their knowledge of the best humankind has achieved beyond our parochial borders – regardless of whether or not they go on to become linguists or use a foreign language professionally. This is what teachers ought to value, over and above more instrumental pressures, if they want to develop their skills and become more confident at what they do.

> *"Discussions of language and culture can upend received ideas and prejudices"*

The route to successful language learning ultimately comes down to teachers applying their imagination and creativity appropriately. My own work with MFL teachers in recent years has confirmed for me that there's a sincere desire across the profession to re-evaluate priorities and develop better practice in relation to the changing aims and purposes of the MFL curriculum and the place of languages within education more broadly.

Already, there are aspirations on the part of teachers to create a rich language learning experience that extends to all pupils, and a collective desire to explore beyond the boundaries of prescribed content and exam specifications. Yet they've had few opportunities to even attempt developing their ideas in the classroom.

Outcomes-driven

In many schools and trusts, the scope MFL teachers have to work collaboratively, experiment and innovate has

been greatly diminished, while at the same time, a narrow focus on exam results has risen to become the dominant preoccupation for MFL practitioners.

We can see this in how ITT courses now feature far less emphasis on language learning pedagogy via practical experiences in the classroom. An apprenticeship model of learning to teach has also resulted in the exclusion of certain theoretical knowledge around how languages are learned effectively.

It's important to recognise that MFL teaching and learning doesn't fit comfortably into an 'outcomes'-driven curriculum – where short-term goals and superficial 'evidence-gathering' prevails, and where assessment shapes pedagogy.

Cultural content

That said, the NCLE initiative will undoubtedly have a strong focus on teacher development, and seek to build teachers' confidence around working both collaboratively and autonomously. We can hopefully expect to see teachers being encouraged to try out a range of different teaching approaches, and even experiment to a degree with subject content.

It's no secret that KS4 learners often find course content boring. That's partly down to the aforementioned narrow focus on GCSE preparation – but could KS3 curriculum content that's been built around the same topics for years and consistently failed to enthuse learners also be part of the problem?

If the end goal is to raise standards and attainment at GCSE, we can't ignore the wider context of both primary and KS3 learning. Any attempt at 'reviving' the role of MFL in the school curriculum must take account of the crucial relationship between language and culture, and consider what and how cultural content can be better represented. Without this, foreign language learning becomes a sterile activity.

Enhancing motivation

Some years ago I became involved in a KS3 curriculum development project with the British Film Institute, which encouraged the use of short foreign language films for teaching purposes in MFL classrooms.

The Screening Languages project built on a decade's work with student teachers on a PGCE Course at the UCL Institute of Education. The idea was to introduce learners to an accessible form of culture that would stimulate their interest and engagement, while also increasing their attainment and confidence in speaking and writing.

Around 800 learners and some 27 teachers from 19 schools took part in the project over a span of two years, and the results were very positive (see bit.ly/ts125-SL1). Teaching with short film is just one example of the kind of culturally-based language learning resources we can use to enrich the languages curriculum and enhance students' motivation.

When teachers can be persuaded to work together and break out of the tired, often unsuccessful content and practices that have been the norm for so long, the end result is likely to be a more dynamic and challenging form of MFL teaching which makes it clear that there are no 'quick fixes'.

MFL learning is a 'long game'. Reducing it, as a subject discipline, to simply the acquisition of 'language skills', undermines its status within the school curriculum. So too does the creeping tendency to justify foreign language learning instrumentally, in terms of what the economy requires, rather than presenting it as a rich educational experience in its own right.

The injection of financial and professional support that will accompany the new NCLE marks a golden opportunity to work with teachers in objectively re-evaluating what foreign languages are taught in schools and how.

Above all, it presents us with the chance to finally build a strong framework for professional development, pedagogical practice and successful MFL learning.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Dr Shirley Lawes is a lecturer in modern foreign languages at UCL Institute of Education

Let's talk about consent

We owe it to our students to openly discuss the complexities and sensitivities surrounding matters of consent, says **Luke Ramsden**

Helping our young people understand the issues surrounding consent and sexual relationships has never been more important.

The response we saw to the 2020 launch of the Everyone's Invited website brought out into the open the prevalence of sexual harassment and violence in schools. The appearance of story after story on the site concerning institutions ranging from the Army to the Police and the Fire Brigade have since shown that the issue certainly isn't limited to school-age children.

At the same time, however, the understandable concerns for the safety of girls and women prompted by the site's content has been met by a backlash. We've seen young men actively embrace the toxic masculinity of influencers like Andrew Tate. We've seen stories in the national press warning that innocent young men have themselves felt victimised by a 'climate of fear' around harassment.

Facts first

And all this, of course, is being put at the door of schools to try and solve, alongside an ever-growing list of responsibilities that includes maintaining academic standards, supporting families through the cost of living crisis and providing mental health support.

A growing number of schools are therefore turning to the Schools Consent Project as a starting point for educating their young people about consent. Our charity trains volunteers who work in law to lead sessions that talk to boys and girls about the legal realities of sex and consent. We then facilitate discussion within the group about how these apply to a series of different real-life scenarios.

The benefits of this approach are that students often find it easier to engage with someone other than their usual teacher, and will listen to someone with up-to-date legal expertise. Crucially, we approach the issue from the point of view of the facts, rather than with an overt moral message. This helps both boys and girls to approach the workshop with an open mind, whatever their pre-existing views.

Sessions are tailored to the age group of the students. Younger students look at issues relating to appropriate use of social media and sexting, while older students are invited to examine the kind of situations that may arise at house parties and when they start life at university.

Breaking the silence

Our aim is to empower young men and women to make informed and healthy choices about their own sexual relationships, while helping them to understand that sexual violence and harassment are never acceptable. At the same time, we also want to teach them how to communicate with their current and future partners about consent, and how to recognise and respect boundaries.

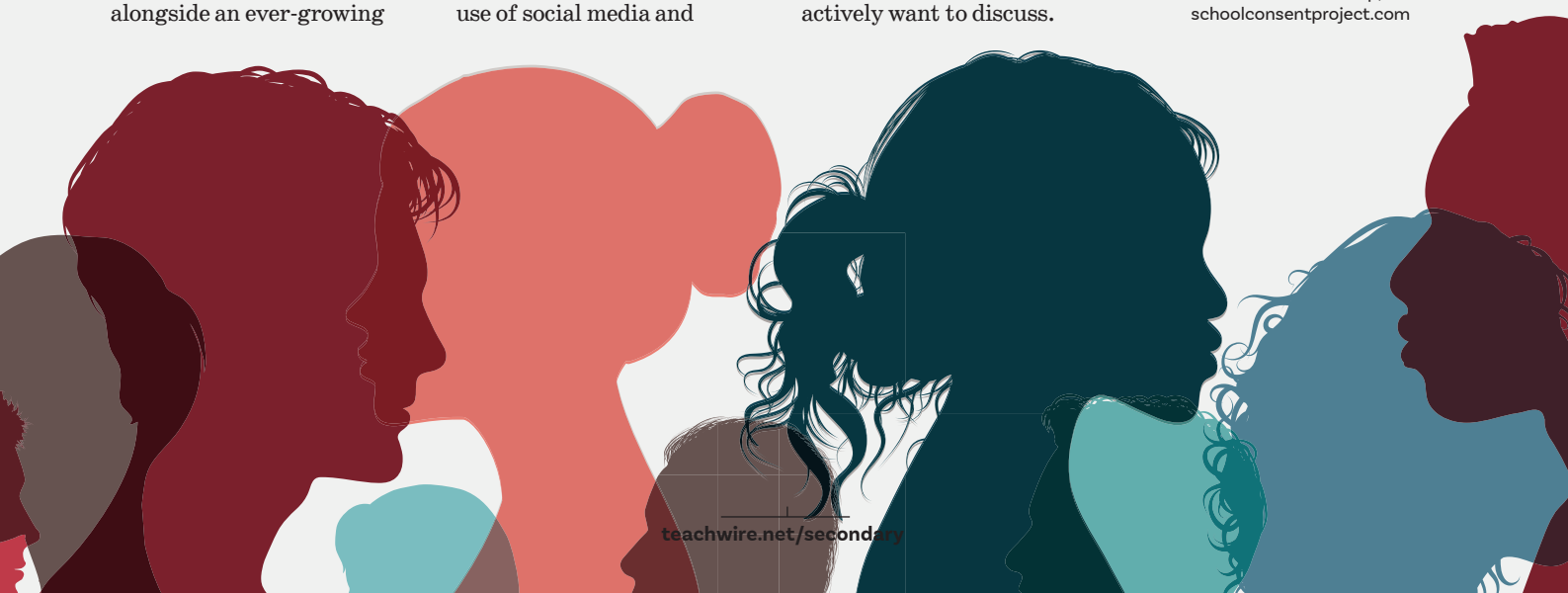
More generally, we seek to support young people in challenging misogyny and sexism, and recognising and reporting cases of sexual violence and harassment. Not knowing how to report such issues, or not understanding the importance of doing so, is what ultimately leads to a culture of silence and acceptance.

We hope that our workshops can be a springboard for schools to develop a broader culture of talking about consent. It's a topic that young people actively want to discuss. Teachers who attend our workshops often leave feeling much more confident about being able to continue the conversation with their students afterwards.

Of course, support is also available from a growing number of resources for teachers and PSHE leads – from ready-made RSE and PSHE lessons developed by specialist providers, such as Life Lessons (lifelessons.co.uk), to TV programmes that specifically address related issues, like the recently screened Channel 4 drama, *Consent*.

We've seen for ourselves the positive impact our workshops have had among boys and girls alike. Student surveys taken before and after sessions show that they feel far more confident in discussing and dealing with these issues after attending a Schools Consent Project workshop.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Luke Ramsden is senior deputy head at St Benedict's School and chair of trustees for the Schools Consent Project; for information and to book a workshop, visit schoolconsentproject.com



DEAR DIARY...

Could keeping a diary be an effective addition to your wellbeing and professional development toolkit? **Dr Lucy Kelly** shares her insights into using a diary for bespoke reflective practice...

When I say the word 'diary', what comes to mind? Is it something you use to record the various appointments you have over the coming weeks and months? Or perhaps it's a fluffy notebook with a tiny padlock in which you write down your deepest, darkest secrets?

As I've found out in my research over the years – and now documented in my book *Reimagining the Diary: Diary-keeping as a positive tool for teacher wellbeing* – a diary can mean different things to different people, but it's this flexibility that makes it such a fantastic tool for educators.

A diary can essentially help teachers get to know themselves better – which is gold dust, because the insights they receive as a result can support them in making better decisions both inside and outside the classroom.

In a profession where it can feel as if there's no end point or off button, we all need some means by which we can process our day, re-establish boundaries and identify what we need to sustain us in both the short and long term. A diary provides this safe space and, more importantly, can be tailored to the individual using it.

As highlighted in my research project and book, 'bespoke' approaches to wellbeing are vital, since one person's wellbeing essential could be another person's nightmare.

Zooming in and out

In the pages of a diary, you can ask questions and start to find answers. If you know that something isn't working for you, be it personally or professionally, you can use your diary to tease out exactly what that 'something' might be and how to rectify it.

Maybe you've lost sight of your values over time? Use your diary to find them again. It might be helpful to use it when considering your next steps as a teacher – what are your goals and how are you going to meet them?

> **"A diary can help you identify patterns and trends, and make changes where needed"**

At the same time, consider what's going well. There's always more we can work on, but it's important to also recognise and celebrate the positives, however small these might be. Recording the positives in the pages of a diary helps us to keep moving forward, by visibly showing us how we're evolving and growing as practitioners (which in turn will have a positive impact on our wellbeing).

A diary can help you identify patterns and trends, and make changes where needed. It will allow you to see where your blind spots are, both in terms of your wellbeing and your professional practice. We can join the dots together and see the bigger picture, but also zoom in on the minutiae and unpick it. In this sense, a diary can be a microscope *and* a telescope – both different, but equally important for our wellbeing and professional practice.

The abstract made concrete

In terms of your wellbeing, you might well be working late into the evening, which means you're finding it harder to sleep. You could use your diary to work out how you're going to rectify that. What can you do to change this pattern? You could commit to no work after 6pm, or take your diary use further and consider what 'work-free' time might look like for you in practice.

It could be that you arrange to meet a friend or family member; do some exercise; have a bath or watch your favourite programme/series curled up on the sofa. Again, it's a case of going with whatever works for you.

Your diary isn't there to berate you, but rather support you.

Its contents don't need to be shared with anyone, but can be if you think that might be helpful. Some of our research participants actually used their diary entries as a springboard for conversations with heads of department, colleagues, friends and family members. They found that rehearsing the conversation in the pages of their diary actually made the conversation itself easier.

We hold so much internally that unless we regularly 'download', we put ourselves at risk of burning out. This process of downloading makes the abstract more concrete, and thus easier to deal with. Seeing our fears and worries on the page means we can begin to deal with them, and through decluttering our mind in this way, ultimately make better decisions at home and at work.

Downloading also helps us to recharge. By 'parking' the day just gone, we free up mental space and energy for other aspects of our lives, including our relationships. We're not Duracell bunnies, able to just keep going and going, because if we try, we're just going to burn out.

The power to press pause

It can be really hard to prioritise ourselves and our needs, but we must. To do so, however, we have to be aware of what those needs are – and that's where keeping a diary can help.

At this point you may be thinking, '*That's all very well and good, but I don't have the time to keep a diary.*' Let me reassure you that your diary practice can take as much or as little time as you have available to you. You don't need to write pages and pages of prose to reap the benefits of diary-keeping – in fact, you don't even need to write at all!

To return to the question I posed at the start of this article, hopefully I've been able to show how a diary can be a tool to help teachers thrive. A diary gives teachers the power to press pause, take stock, zoom out (and zoom in), and really think about themselves and their needs for a moment. We're humans, not machines – and keeping a diary can be a great way to remind us of that.

BEYOND 'TODAY I DID...'

Keeping a diary doesn't have to involve just writing about your day...

VARY YOUR MODES OF WRITING

A diary could involve different types of writing. You might have started keeping a diary with a traditional account of your day, but you don't have stick with that. Writing out lists of bullet points, specific observations and summaries of how you're currently feeling can all be valuable.

USE DIFFERENT MEDIA

Using a laptop or mobile device, your diary could comprise a mixture of images and/or audio recordings. This is what's so exciting about the diary format – it can be unique to you, your needs and your interests, and change with you over time.

BUILD A TIMELINE

You might want to have a go at capturing your day in a single photograph, and then building up a scrapbook over the following week or month. You can then zoom out to see if there are any patterns that emerge from the photographs – what do they show you?

KEEP IT FRESH

The more experimental, playful and creative we can be with our diary-keeping practice, the better we'll get to know ourselves and what we need to flourish, both inside and outside the classroom.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Dr Lucy Kelly is an Associate Professor in Education at the University of Bristol and author of Reimagining the Diary: Diary-keeping as a positive tool for teacher wellbeing (£16, John Catt)

Do it yourself

Meera Chudasama sets out five steps for ensuring that your self-produced teaching resources hit the mark...

When creating resources for use in the classroom, you need to carefully consider your use of typography, layouts and colour palettes, while ensuring these all serve the key aim of making the resource accessible to all.

Irrespective of whether or not you have students with SEND in your classes, it's important that any resources you produce are engaging and succeed in drawing students in.

DOWNLOAD

A 7-page resource activity produced by Meera to support students' study of An Inspector Calls

bit.ly/ts125-RP1

1 Inspirations

What do you want students to actually do with your resource? How do you want them to engage with it? Could it be developed with long-term use in mind?

Decide on your intended purpose for resource. In what ways will it help students demonstrate their knowledge and skills? At first, it's generally best to keep things simple – perhaps by making an aid to warm-up activities or the creation of mind maps, or by giving students a way of annotating images to help stimulate their own ideas.

Later on, you can start thinking about how you might be able to develop their skills further with longer-form responses, and by getting students to craft their own questions and find ways of exploring topics more deeply. Note that building a resource around a specific task can and will enable that resource to be usable beyond just a single lesson.

Finally, it's worth setting aside space in your resource for students to recap, revise and perhaps even reinvent the information presented. This will allow students to consolidate their ideas and potentially apply them to different areas of the curriculum.

Getting the look

There are many great software applications and platforms out there that can assist you with your designs. Try using Canva (canva.com), VistaCreate (create.vista.com) and Desygner (desygner.com) – all are free to use, and offer templates that can be easily tweaked and reshaped for your own purposes.

Canva even offers a separate user licence for education professionals, which grants access to additional templates and allows for the creation of online collaboration spaces, so that colleagues can work on resources together.

Checklist

- What do you want students to be doing with your resource?
- How do you want students to engage with your resource?
- How can you make your resource last longer than a single use resource?

2 Layout

Next, think about how you'd like students to actually use the sheet(s) you'll be making. Do you plan on setting multiple 'mini tasks', or will they be used to guide students through lengthy assignments?

The layout of your resource will need to effectively direct students' focus, and hence their learning. There's a famous design and photography principle called the 'Rule of Thirds', which holds that if you divide your layout into three equally-sized horizontal sections and three equally sized vertical sections, the resulting 3 x 3 grid will provide an effective 'roadmap' for your page design.

This can be a useful support for students who tackle difficult tasks more slowly, and is a great way of presenting smaller, chunked tasks.

Think carefully about how you use headings, subheadings and numerical labels. Your resources should enable students to work independently or with others, without your input.

Checklist

- How do you intend for students to use the page?
- Do you plan to present students with multiple 'mini tasks'?
- Conversely, will the resource be used to outline a series of lengthy activities?
- Have you considered how to focus students' attention so that they can follow the resource

3 Content

So what should your resource actually cover? Try to strike a balance between disseminating knowledge and presenting engaging content. How much information do the students need to know about the relevant area or topic, and how much will they realistically be able to engage with, given the time available?

Calculate how long it will likely take for students to complete the task(s) set by the resource. It might be helpful to state these timings alongside each task's instructions, so that students are clear as to what's expected of them and how they should manage their time.

Checklist

- Balance the presentation of information with engagement activities
- Calculate your timing

4 Presentation

Choosing the correct font is vital for ensuring that a resource is properly accessible. Keep to sans serif fonts, as their lack of extending features on lettering makes them more easily legible. Some of my personal favourites include roboto, calibri and dotum.

Test out some fonts to see which work best and then stick to them. This way, you can start creating a consistent aesthetic or 'brand' that works well across different units and schemes of learning.

If you're not sure where to start when it comes to your resources' colour palettes, you can seek out some prepared colour swatches from sites such as Coolors (coolors.co) and (colorhunt.co). A good colour scheme will help to unify your design and create a clear, crisp look that should allow students to access it more easily.

If you include too many different colours, you run the risk of bombarding your students with a visually noisy layout. In this case, less is more.

Checklist

- Prioritise legibility when choosing between fonts
- Consider creating a 'consistent look' that you can draw on for future resources
- Don't go overboard when it comes to your colour selection

"Your resources should enable students to work independently or with others, without your input"

5 Distribution

Finally, how do you plan on getting your resources out to students, and which file formats should you use? It's worth noting that PDFs are ideal for both printing and distributing via email, and will prevent students from inadvertently editing a resource's content.

Creating resources in Word or Google Docs might entail certain design limitations, but it will be the best approach if you intend on uploading them to your school's VLE, and need a way for students to attach written responses.

Checklist

- Save your finished resource as a PDF if printing or emailing
- Take advantage of your school's VLE features

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Meera Chudasama is an English, media and film studies teacher with a passion for design and research, and has developed course content for the Charted College of Teaching.

Are you bothered?

We should focus on what education is for and who it should ultimately serve, observes **Hywel Roberts** – a process that can be neatly summarised by one word...

Okay. Three words that sum up education for you – *go!*

In order to unpick any approach to education – dry, normal, greasy, traditional, progressive, Jedi, old skool – one must settle on some unshakeables, some non-negotiables. Some values we can hang on to. These are the agreements we have with ourselves in our own heads – principles that inform our own practice.

When crazy Uncle Pete[1], who likes Stella Artois and can't hold down a relationship, corners you again at the next family event and challenges you on the ins and outs of state education, these are the words you may stutter back at him as he suggests that '*Being hit across the arse by a sweaty 50-something male as it never did him any harm.*' (He's an expert. Because he went to school.)

Uncover them, your three words, and use them to arm yourself against the uninformed, the ignorant and the powerful. Fight on the bridge of educational misinformation for these words. They're yours. They're what make you bothered.

Making it matter

I'll tell you my three words in a moment. But first I should explain the term (and title of my new book), *Botheredness*.

Let's say that in your class sits Maisie and she's a real sweetheart. You're starting a topic on Ancient Greece, and Maise's so excited because that's where she's going on holiday in the summer. And when you did Romans, it was cool because her family piled into their Volkswagen camper van and off they went to Hadrian's Wall for a weekend. She's buzzing and bothered. Her parents are ace, and fair play to them for being bothered.

Amber isn't that bothered, though. Amber hasn't got a bed, or a mum. She hasn't really got head space for Hadrian, walls or Romans. She's got enough on. Besides, these walls and ancients are just *so long ago*. They tell her nothing about her life.

> **"To exude botheredness, you have to be an authentic professional"**

They're a mirror that reflects nothing.

A challenge for you then, as Amber's teacher, is: *how are you going to get her bothered?* How are you going to make it all matter?

Carriers of warmth

'Botheredness' is a word I wrote about in my previous book *Oops!* to sum up the levels of authentic care and 'unconditional positive regard'[2] I witnessed whilst working at a social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) school in Barnsley, South Yorkshire. It's classroom/institution-level monkey-giving. And it's instilling it in the children. Giving it to them. Wrapping it up as a gift.

What it isn't is *soft*. To exude botheredness, you have to be an authentic professional. Basically, it's ensuring schooling is about children. That shouldn't sound weird, but as I write this, I feel it might come across as strange to some. I think it's strange I'm having to write it down.

If you've got botheredness then you're a teacher who will have impact beyond the subject coverage. You'll be the role model for the child, a significant adult, a carrier of warmth. It's the opposite of cold survivalist and defensive classroom approaches. It's why you became a teacher in the first place.

So, three words to offer to Uncle Pete. Well, here are mine, experience distilled like fine whiskey, into three cool words – '*Stories*', '*Stance*' and '*Pedagogy*'.

Word 1 – Stories

We're bombarded by stories all the time. They're an essential part of who we are. Stories, according to Daniel Willingham (2004), are 'psychologically privileged', meaning that they help us retain information.

I saw *Jaws* at the cinema when I was 5, going on 6, but grew up remembering the story until I got to see it again on TV years later.[3] I also vividly remember Aesop's Fables, as I had one of those card-backed Ladybird books[4] telling me the tales. I can picture the accompanying illustrations right now as I write this.

I also remember stories of my own schooling – stories Nainy would whisper me to sleep with[5], and the stories my dad would tell about his time doing National Service. And that time he borrowed a horse on his way home from the pub.

Stories are useful for us as educators. They can be our stimulus, our hook, our case study, our design brief as well as being our way of 'protecting' our pupils into complex thinking and learning[6]. Stories essentially build botheredness.

Word 2: Stance

Stance is where you stand as a teacher, both physically and mentally. It's how you are in a classroom.

We all know that you can have two degrees, a doctorate and a book deal, but if you cannot find a way to communicate all your hard-won knowledge to children, then as a teacher, you're screwed.

Well, maybe that's a bit strong. Essentially, you've a struggle on. If you can't protect yourself into working with children, the job becomes much harder. If you cannot muster some rapport with an individual or a class, it's all uphill. This is why stance is so important. Where do you stand? What are your values? How do you demonstrate your authentic professional care? And how would you sum up your teacher presence? Who do you model yourself on?

I had aspirations of being John Keating from *Dead Poets Society*, but I also wanted to be Dave Matthews, Marc Doyle, Elizabeth Gaughan, Russ Thornton and Allan Horne and those other ace teachers who helped shape my 'new

teacher' years[7].

I also wanted to be that teacher that children might remember fondly, in the same way I remember John Booth, Theresa Crowsdale, Chris Idle and Mrs Greenhalgh – teachers who supported me when I was a kid8. Real people with names and everything. Stance is botheredness, humanely and professionally enacted.

Word 3: Pedagogy

I couldn't say this word for a long time. It'd come out of my mouth as '*pedagorry*' and would get quieter as I made my way through its sound.

One day, after a high-powered SLT meeting I'd been seconded to, I asked the head how to say it and what it actually meant. Frankly, I had enough on with planning lessons and all that without having to namby-pamby about with academic words I couldn't pronounce.

My boss set me straight on the pronunciation and neatly summed up its meaning. It's how we teach. It's the human delivery of stuff that's been written down. I love this. It's the human delivery of agreed content. It's the *how* of curriculum, the implementation of the *should*, coupled with the protection of children into learning.

It's the holding back of the nettles on the footpath, so the children don't get stung. It's not dumbing stuff down; it's making it accessible. It's making the world of challenging content inductive, wonderful and necessary. It's the building of botheredness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Hywel Roberts has taught in secondary, primary and special settings for almost three decades, and is now an educational speaker, writer, author and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts

This article is based on an edited extract from his latest book, *Botheredness: Stories, Stance and Pedagogy* (£18.99, Independent Thinking Press)

THOSE FOOTNOTES...

1 This is a real person in real life and everything. If he were in a movie he'd be played by Steven Berkoff. He's a baddie.

2 Carl Rogers, the eminent humanistic psychologist, coined this beauty. Not to be confused with the other Carl Rogers who produced the movie *Blade Runner 2049*. For more information on unconditional positive regard, see Gobir (2021) and for a good article on its application in a school context, see Halliday (2018).

3 On ITV, 8 October 1981. I'd just turned 11.

4 Now selling for a mint on eBay! For many, Ladybird Books are a nostalgic reminder of childhood. Do you remember them?

5 'Nainy' is the Welsh version of a grandmother.

6 The idea of protecting children into learning and thinking is explored in my *Oops!* Book. Basically, it's about the ways in which a teacher can support a child (and a class) into caring about the topic being studied and, in a way, seeing themselves in it. If that makes sense?

7 This is a list of teachers who taught me when I was a probationary teacher. They taught me more than teaching. They were mighty oaks. Not weeping willows. As a new teacher, it's a good idea to spot these winners in your school and learn from them.

8 This is a list of teachers who taught me at Bury Church of England High School back in the 1980s. They left their fingerprints on my brain and my heart.

Asking the right QUESTIONS

Chris Griffths reflects on why critical thinking is the skill that today's students need the most if they're to thrive in a post-AI future...

In science fiction, humans and machines haven't always gotten along. Most media depictions of artificial intelligence tend to revolve around killer robots and dystopian futures – and yet, like it or not, real AI is already entering our everyday lives. And it will continue to do so at incredible speed.

The good news is that the AI we're currently dealing with in the real world isn't likely to come in the form of vengeful robots any time soon, but it certainly will change how teachers teach and learners learn.

Given the revolutionary shifts to come, it's important that we're able to think creatively and openly about what skills will best equip students for a future we can't quite fully imagine yet.

That means arriving at a balanced view of what AI actually is, as well as fostering the crucial human skills – particularly critical thinking and creativity – that will serve students best when it comes to working with these new technologies.

So without further ado, here's how we can teach students to question the machines, and develop the kind of critical thinking skills required to do so effectively.

The robots are coming

Without doubt, the AI technology that has generated most attention this past year is OpenAI's machine learning tool, ChatGPT – a chatbot trained on a vast amount of data, which enables it to answer queries, provide information and even spit out high level academic essays.

Given the latter point, it's hardly surprising that this particular manifestation of AI has caused quite the stir in education circles. While the issue of AI-enabled plagiarism is perhaps one for another day, from a big picture perspective we should not only look at what tools are available today, but also at what will be available in the near future.

In the absence of a crystal ball, no one can say definitively what will happen in the coming decades, but there are some aspects of AI which we can expect to progress rapidly. These include advanced machine learning tools, like ChatGPT and its ilk, becoming more accurate, efficient and increasingly context-aware.

Another area to watch is the development of 'hybrid AI', which seeks to blend two aspects of existing AI technology, resulting in tools that can aid queries requiring both data analytics and reasoning skills. In other words, an improved, even more in-depth version of what we already have.

Bespoke learning

However, the areas of AI development we should perhaps be paying most attention to are 'Neuromorphic Computing' (NC) and 'Reinforcement Learning' (RL).

NC will see a move towards a type of AI functioning that more closely mimics the human brain, allowing for increased efficiency and decreased power demands – something that will make AI integration ever more seamless and accessible.

RL, on the other hand, refers to AI that's specifically designed to be agile and adjustable when working with individuals, usually with a specific goal in

mind. There is a wide range of potential applications for this type of AI, given its scope. It could be used for recreational purposes, such as personalised video gaming, but also to help students learn.

With the AI able to identify areas of weakness and adjust accordingly, it would be well-equipped to offer a bespoke learning experience.

Being robot ready

So what does all this mean? In simple terms, that we will see AI get bigger, faster and more integrated within our daily lives. This might unfold in a way comparable to the adoption of mobile phones, or it may be even more dramatic. Some have even suggested that the ushering in of the AI era will be comparable to the invention of the steam engine.

Part of being ready for these changes means admitting that we can't know everything, which is one reason why lifelong learning will be crucial for the next generation. In a world where AI is becoming increasingly ubiquitous, the capability to demonstrate resilience and flexibility will be more essential than ever.

Those students who are aware they can never know everything, but who enjoy the pursuit of knowledge regardless`, are the ones who will flourish most.

Within that there will be specific areas we need to consider, ranging from digital literacy to the development of strong communication skills and empathetic faculties. Critical thinking is perhaps the most important of all these skills, though even that may change in a post-AI world.

"The next generation will benefit from working in collaboration with AI, rather than by trying to compete with it"

Speaking the language

At present, we can understand critical thinking, in simple terms at least, as the ability to evaluate, question and contextualise a concept in order to engage with it fully.

Given that AI is able to store vast quantities of data in ways humans aren't capable of, the emphasis of critical thinking in future will likely relate more to emotional perspectives, idea creation and decision making. All being well, the next generation will benefit from working in collaboration with AI, rather than by trying to compete with it.

That said, it's important to note that AI is certainly not infallible, and very much capable of making mistakes. In fact, there's evidence showing that it could replicate human biases.

There's also the possibility for AI to be used by bad actors for malign purposes, such as aiding the spread of misinformation.

In the here and now, however, educators can help to prepare pupils by talking frankly about AI in the classroom, highlighting both its benefits and limitations, and encouraging open discussion about the ethics that underpin it.

Debate, problem solving, and the stoking of curiosity – these will all be essential here. Indeed, we could witness a change in the very nature of pedagogy in our lifetimes, given that the attainment of information in itself won't be enough for success in future. Instead, it will be how a person engages with information that really matters.

Creative power

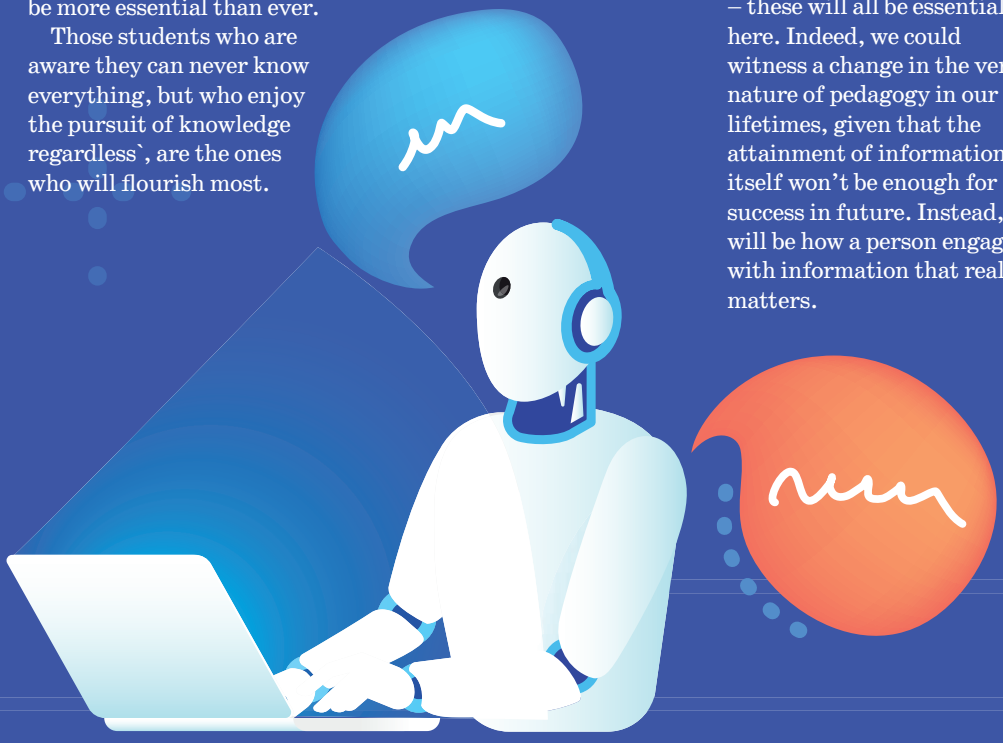
Critical thinking, as we understand it, will start to encompass modes of communication between AI and humans. Currently, the prompts a user inputs into a tool like ChatGPT will affect how helpful its output is. As AI gets increasingly smarter and more personal in terms of how it interfaces with us, this won't apply as much.

Instead, AI will learn how to adapt to us as individuals – which is why we must encourage students not to become complacent, but be active in their engagement with both AI and the world around them.

Pupils who grow to know their own values, and who come to believe in their own creative power, will be able to make the most of themselves in a world where AI as become much more dominant.

It can feel scary to be an educator at a time of great cultural upheaval, but their role has become more important than ever. The skills that today's pupils will need in this new era are the same ones that teachers themselves will need in order to nurture them.

That means moving beyond a black and white curriculum, and operating with greater flexibility, resilience and an open mind. We must learn to question the machines, but also remain curious and alert to their potential for augmenting – rather than eradicating – human ability.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Chris Griffths is founder of the AI-powered mind mapping app Ayoa (ayoa.com), a keynote speaker and co-author with Caragh Medlicott of The Creative Thinking Handbook (£16.99, Kogan Page)

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REASONS TO TRY...

5 a transition to secondary residential

The secondary transition is often a daunting time, but a dedicated residential can help ease the pressure...

30 SECOND BRIEFING

Have you ever considered organising a transition to secondary residential? Situated adjacent to the Menai Strait, within 169 acres of National Trust parkland, Conway Centres, Anglesey is the perfect venue for whole year secondary residential trips.

1 MEETING NEW FRIENDS

At the start of secondary school, many children will feel nervous about meeting new friends. Taking children away from their school setting and into a social environment will encourage them to feel more confident around their peers, while providing them with opportunities to make new friends and create friendships that will last a lifetime.

2 RESILIENCE AND CONFIDENCE

The transition courses are purposefully run between September and March, when the weather may be more challenging, to encourage children to learn and thrive in a new, potentially tough environment. The activities on offer are designed with the aim that students will continuously improve and develop on a deeper level. The centres will support you and your students in discovering a new sense of confidence and building resilience, while supporting their physical and mental wellbeing, so that they can look forward to their time at secondary school.

3 TEAM-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

All activities have been hand-picked to encourage students to work together as a team, with the same shared goals in mind. By focusing minds with unique teamwork activities in this way, students can be supported in making a positive contribution whilst developing their willingness to show initiative and sense of responsibility. Through working together, friendships will form and continue to grow over time.

4 GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

The course begins with a 'goal setting' session, where centre staff will look to understand, encourage and support your goals. At the end of the course, centre staff will then work with you to review and reflect on how students have achieved their goals during the trip. This is a great chance to understand what your students may be struggling with, and how you can support them back at school.

Contact:
01248 714 501
conwaycentres@edsential.co.uk
conwaycentres.co.uk

ConwayCentres

5 INCREASED FOCUS IN CLASS

Research has found that residential trips help young people appreciate that what they learn at school is important to them. Students will return to school with an increased appetite for learning and looking forward to the years ahead. Should you require any curriculum or learning outcomes specific to your school, the centre can adapt the course to meet your requirements.

Key Points

Whether you're looking for accommodation for 250 children or smaller private accommodation for a class of 30, Conway Centres has something for every school!

With its private dock on the Menai Strait, vast woodlands, spacious art spaces and fully accessible facilities, Conway Centres has activities and accommodation to suit every child – whatever their needs

We employ high calibre, qualified staff who possess experience and a thorough understanding of education, and are committed to improving outcomes for children

Education is at the heart of everything Conway Centres does; all residentials are organised with clear learning outcomes in mind, and can be tailored to suit your school's specific goals

Bring them ON BOARD

There's one key to unlocking your students' academic potential you might not have yet tried, says **Ed Carlin** – and that's parental engagement...

As we navigate our way through life, we're reliant on our five senses to interpret, process and understand one another and the environment around us. Our interactions with other people and sensory responses to our surroundings are what will determine whether our lived experiences are positive and inspiring, negative and dull, or anything in between.

So with that in mind, what approach does your school take when it comes to engaging your students' parents and carers, and encouraging them to become more active in their child's development and the wider school community?

Personally, if I see one more survey asking parents to rate their child's homework provision, the school's wider activity programme or the parents' evening experience, I think I might scream.

We know that the teaching profession is filled with highly creative and inspiring individuals. Yet when we turn our attention to parental engagement activities, why do we so often struggle to elicit a sustainable commitment from parents to become involved in all aspects of their child's development at school?

Beyond the expected

I was recently asked to run a parental engagement evening using the format of a traditional school open day. The criteria and main objective were as expected – get parents in, show the school in its best possible light and gather some feedback that could be used to potentially shape future developments.

However, I wanted to go beyond what was simply expected. Not only did the parental engagement event result in the desired outcome, I can honestly say that it also advanced our longer-term aim of building authentic and transparent relationships between the school, our parents and the local community.

As a parent, if you were to attend my evening you would have been greeted with the soft and soothing sound of a piano being played in the school foyer. Senior students would have been quick to ask if you'd like a tea or coffee before dropping you off for your first school tour – past a series of faculties throughout the school all buzzing with active learning and engaging student achievement stalls as far as the eye could see.

Downstairs, you would have seen senior leaders presenting on key school successes and future priorities, and gathering views and suggestions from groups of parents in the main assembly hall.

Pastoral support teams would have been ready and waiting to hear your concerns and discuss action plans that you and they could agree on, to break down whatever barriers might have been hindering your child's progress.

At the evening's conclusion, you would return home having witnessed impressive demonstrations by the school's performing arts and sporting ensembles, your pockets heavy with leaflets and contact details encouraging you to 'get involved' in your child's learning – the difference now being that you could put names to faces.

A place of service

Getting parents involved becomes a lot less complicated once you start asking the right questions. *What do they want to know? What do they need to understand? What support do they need? What can they bring to the table?*

Once we start approaching parental engagement from a place of service, we move a crucial step closer to creating a culture where parents are happy to be actively involved and consistently contributing to the school's forward trajectory.

Parents deserve to feel valued. They need to be prioritised beyond the basic legalities of their child's welfare and compliance with school procedure, expectations and protocols.

I once worked for a headteacher who advised his

staff that when speaking with students, they should imagine a parent stood over their shoulder listening to every word. This has stayed with me for many years as something we can all build upon.

What if we approached every aspect of school life – be it our learning and teaching, faculty meetings, CPD or indeed anything else – by intentionally stopping at precise moments and asking ourselves *'What would our parents think?'* It would be transformative.

We already know the impact that parent council collaborations can have in the development of our schools, but we need to start seeing every in-school operation and innovation as a platform for parents to have their say – or at the very least, provide them with opportunities to understand the direction in which the school is headed.

Collaboration culture

Every lesson, conversation and meeting must consider the views of parents and any potential contributions they may be willing to make. If we can get beyond the simplicity of ensuring that communications remain open, and move towards bringing about a more ambitious culture of collaboration, we will slowly start to see a rise in interest and involvement from parents throughout the community.

Anecdotally, one of the greatest barriers parents have raised with me is their feeling that they have nothing to contribute – or worse, that they'll be laughed at, should they make suggestions regarding school improvements.

If this kind of feedback sounds familiar, it could be that your school has a toxic culture when it comes to parental engagement. Every effort must be made to prevent point-scoring and guard against parents feeling patronised.

> **"Getting parents involved becomes less complicated once you start asking the right questions"**

School leaders will often present to parents over the course of an evening, only to later get on the defensive after someone raises a concern around school performance or behaviour issues. In this scenario, parents return home feeling chastised and berated, making the divide all the greater.

Opening doors

It all comes back to intentionality. School leaders must strategically plan open events that parents can attend, and which will foster a culture of collaboration, belief and belonging.

Don't assume that parents have no place in conversations around school improvement planning, priority setting, development and other such matters, because they do.

All being well, inviting parents to participate in such conversations can open doors to valuable contributions and lead to better partnership working. We've all heard the saying that it takes a village to raise a child. By failing to place parental support and needs at the heart of everything we do, we ultimately risk hindering the progress and achievements of our young people.

Once a school commits to an authentic desire to build positive relationships with parents and include them at every opportunity – that's when we start to witness the green shoots of transformational change. Parents can provide the key to unlocking their child's full potential, but only if they're given the encouragement and resources necessary to participate in their child's learning.

Simply updating the school website with more information, or sending out progress reports will never be enough to truly harness the capacity of so many parents to add value to the work we do. We should give them a voice in every school priority – because when a student experiences an effective partnership between their parents and their school, they'll be more inclined to trust us and take full advantage of the learning provision on offer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Ed Carlin is a deputy headteacher at a Scottish secondary school, having worked in education for 15 years and held teaching roles at schools in Northern Ireland and England

Fit for purpose?

Gordon Cairns looks at why the claims typically made for the benefits of school uniforms may be somewhat overstated, and serve to conceal a rather different purpose...

Like most people brought up in the UK, Dr Rachel Shanks' views on school uniform formed when she had to wear one herself. When starting at a sixth form college in Northern Ireland with a strict uniform policy, she needed to acquire a whole new wardrobe that was far more noticeable than the bland black and greys she'd needed to wear previously.

As she recalls, "A bright blue skirt, a jacket without a collar and a striped blue top, totally different from the rest of the uniform. I've always had a bit of a 'thing' about school uniform."

Now a senior lecturer in education at the University of Aberdeen, that 'bit of a thing' includes her concerns over how little today's uniforms have progressed since her own school days – despite the workplace dress codes that school uniforms were intended to replicate having become increasingly relaxed – the related cost and gender differences, and questions over who controls what clothing teenagers should wear to school.

Absence of proof

Dr Shanks recently authored a report, 'School Uniform Policy in Scottish Schools, Control and Consent' (see bit.ly/ts125-SU1), the findings of which could be equally applied to schools across the UK, where our almost universal adoption of uniform is at odds with most of Europe.

Dr Shanks and her co-authors analysed the school uniform policies at each of Scotland's 357 publicly funded secondary schools, almost all of which have a school uniform. They found that while school uniforms are supposed to foster a sense of belonging and raise achievement, there's little proof that they actually do. The report also reviews some recent research which found no connection between the wearing of uniforms and academic success, nor improved attainment – reasons often given to justify their use.

> *"Schools' strict enforcement of dress codes could be seen as a clear message about who is in charge"*

In fact, only one study is cited as having made a positive connection between wearing uniform and improved attainment, which found that uniformed students settled in class five minutes earlier than those who who weren't. Whether this advantage was down to uniform alone or other factors – such as a positive school ethos – wasn't remarked upon.

If there's no evidence of uniforms creating a sense of belonging, making schools more secure or improving learning, why do so many schools and academies still ardently adhere to retaining a school dress code?

The wielding of power

One reason might be a desire on the part of senior leaders to control a fundamental aspect of the students' lives by policing what they wear. One of the study's authors, Jasper Friedrich, identified a tension between the practice of enforcing strict uniform policies through punitive measures, and the justifications for such practices that highlighted pupil wellbeing.

As Fridrich puts it, "While almost all policies include highly detailed regulations and strict enforcement measures, the justifications tend to focus on 'soft' values, such as creating a sense of belonging and giving pupils self-confidence."

Dr Shanks believes that schools' strict enforcement of dress codes – where, as she describes, "Every infraction is pounced on," could be seen as a clear message to students and parents about who is in charge. She argues that one reason why schools are so rigorous in their measuring of skirt lengths, or demands that students don't come to school with their hair braided, is down to those in authority wielding power in the most visible, unsubtle manner possible.

In her view, "It's not about uniform. It's about saying who is in control – and this is saying the teachers are in control of everything that is to do with the young person while they are on the school premises."

Moreover, when a school switches governance or appoints a new headteacher, the most visible way of showing such change is to redesign the clothes the school's young people have to wear. "Uniform is sometimes used as a signalling mechanism by senior management," Dr Shanks notes. "The message is, '*We have new management in, and we're going to be strict on uniform.*'"

Gendered differences

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the team's report finds that schools' dress codes are much more restrictive for female students than their male peers, and often couched in frustratingly vague terms – such as not stating the precise length a skirt has to be for it to be deemed 'appropriate'.

As Dr Shanks points out, "Uniform is very gendered for girls and boys, with girls having to police themselves in terms of what they are wearing – even in the language used in the policies. '*A sense of decency*' or '*a sense of modesty*' when thinking about what length skirts should be. Some even talked about not 'causing offence'.

"Somehow, a girl's skirt can offence, but the only time boys were talked about in the same manner was when boys couldn't wear tight-fitting swimming trunks – though that was in the policy of only one school."

Then there's the anomaly of females still having to wear traditionally male items of clothing. "Why do we make girls wear ties? It's very much thinking about the schoolboy, and trying to replicate that onto girls."

Dr Shanks' sense is that these draconian policies mean schools are missing the chance to collaborate more productively with their young people. "This is a real opportunity to work with the young people about what they want to wear," she says. "With what is comfortable and practical – but zero tolerance policies are negating the possibility of young people being involved in decisions about them."

And yet, she still firmly believes that young people should continue to wear uniform – just not in their current, typically traditional form, observing how "There is a marked difference to what children wear to school in the UK and the rest of Europe."

Equality and sustainability

Like many, Dr Shanks accepts that the wearing of school uniform is still necessary in this country, due to the gulf between rich and poor. She points to a study carried out in the North East, which found that attendance rates would fall during non-uniform days, when young people went to school wearing their own clothes. Some did still attend, but in uniform, pretending they had 'forgotten' about the event.

She accepts that wearing uniform doesn't create a completely level playing field, since students will still judge their peers by comparing jackets, bags and shoes – but that they do at least help reduce the stigma of poverty.

So what *should* school students wear? Shanks recommends that schools introduce uniforms comprising durable, comfortable and affordable clothes that could have a school badge attached, and allowing parents to buy generic outfits from supermarkets, rather than more expensive selected school suppliers.

It could also be possible to make uniform items recyclable, thus preventing uniforms that have been outgrown from heading for landfill. De-gendered clothing would further help to address equality issues around dress code and appearance and in place of the bright blues and stripes of her youth, Dr Shanks suggests specifying clothes in dark colours that wouldn't need to be washed as often.

She also suggests looking to the recent past for some instructive lessons on what the uniforms of the future could look like. "During COVID, young people were at home in their pyjamas or sweatpants. They were comfortable in what they were wearing, and still perfectly capable of doing their schoolwork – so why do they have to wear tight-fitting, uncomfortable and unsuitable clothes now?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Gordon Cairns is an English and forest school teacher who works in a unit for secondary pupils with ASD; he also writes about education, society, cycling and football for a number of publications

RESEARCH NOTES

Of the 357 Scottish schools Dr Shanks and her team looked at...

96%
require a uniform; only 14 schools do not

90%
mandate the wearing of school ties by both girls and boys

66%
require the wearing of blazers

56%
ban the wearing of jeans

LEARNING LAB

IN THIS ISSUE

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Thinking about ...

LGBT+ HISTORY

In 2021, Scotland became the first country in the world to embed LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching throughout the curriculum.

This marked a bold step forward in attempts at promoting equality, reducing homophobic and transphobic bullying and improving the experience of young LGBTQ+ people in education. It's also a move that is yet to be replicated by the other nations of the UK, where LGBTQ+ history is currently underrepresented in the curriculum.

An independent Facing History survey of 2,000 14- to 17-year-olds recently found that only 35% believe they're being taught a representative version of history. Yes, Pride Month is an important celebration of marginal communities, but LGBTQ+ history should be taught year round. The history curriculum could teach young people about the Stonewall Riots, for example, the historical oppression of LGBTQ+ communities, and the long history of campaigning by those communities for equal rights.

Art lessons could be used to study the experiences of influential LGBTQ+ artists, such as David Hockney, and discuss the visual representation of art that engages with LGBTQ+ themes. Maths lessons could include activities that relate to the discoveries and achievements of Alan Turing, while science lessons could highlight the achievements of astronaut and physicist Sally Ride, who was the first – and thus far only – LGBTQ+ astronaut.

Music and literature are both subjects that can provide particularly powerful learning experiences in the context of LGBTQ+ history. As mediums, books and music can establish direct and deep connections with audiences, in ways that can foster self-acceptance, build self-esteem and encourage greater acceptance of those who are different to us.

For schools keen to embrace LGBTQ+ history, but concerned about the implications for their workload and planning, Facing History's free 'LGBTQ+ History and Why It Matters' lesson (see bit.ly/ts125-LL6) covers two millennia of LGBTQ+ history. Facing History also has ready-to-use assemblies to mark LGBTQ+ History Month and International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia.

LGBTQ+ history lessons can boost students' sense of belonging, build empathy and ultimately normalise the fact that our sexual and gender identities are complex and diverse.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Aqsa Islam is programme associate at the charity Facing History and Ourselves; for more information, visit facinghistory.org

WHY NOT TRY ... POETRY BY HEART

10 years ago, Andrew Motion, then Poet Laureate, and I launched Poetry By Heart as a national poetry speaking competition for schools and colleges in England. At a June anniversary event held at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, there was much to celebrate. Watching the young people perform live on the Globe's main stage in front of 900 people, I was both moved and impressed by their ability to deliver their chosen poems with such intimacy and authority. The ceremony itself became a living, breathing anthology of poems old and new, familiar and unfamiliar, performed by phenomenally talented young people from every corner of the country and every type of school.

The poetry wasn't just lifted off the page – it was *blasted off*. The day was a triumphant affirmation of all we believed the competition would do when Andrew first proposed it.

Variety, agency, memory

Three strands of pedagogical thought shape Poetry by Heart's success: the variety of poems pupils can access; the agency of pupils to pick their own poems; and the focus on memory and deep learning.

In our 'Classic' category, young people choose and learn two poems featured anywhere on the Poetry By Heart website – one published in, or after 1914 and a second from before 1914 – which they'll then perform individually in a simple, classic style. In the 'Freestyle' category pretty much anything goes, with young people invited to learn a single poem of their choice from any time period (Though there are hundreds of poems specially selected for speaking aloud on the Poetry By Heart website for those needing a little inspiration).

When they enter the Poetry by Heart competition, pupils get to know a poem from the inside, enabling them to properly grapple with the nuances of a text and engage much more deeply with their chosen poem. Through the process of memorisation and a successful recital, they get to feel a real sense of achievement.

Schools have previously told us of their surprise at pupils' enthusiasm for learning and performing poems by heart. They speak of children choosing poems they didn't expect them to, relishing the challenge and embracing school poetry clubs and workshops set up to support Poetry by Heart entrants, fostering a new love of poetry in the process.

DR JULIE BLAKE FEA IS A FORMER ENGLISH TEACHER AND TEACHER EDUCATOR, RESEARCHES POETRY IN EDUCATION AND IS CO-DIRECTOR OF POETRY BY HEART; FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT POETRYBYHEART.ORG.UK

DO THIS

REVISIT RULES

EXERCISE BETTER CLASS CONTROL WITH THESE TIPS FROM ROBIN LAUNDER...

Revisit your rules frequently. It doesn't matter if student behaviour is currently good – you must still revisit your rules. In fact, this might actually be the *best* time to revisit your rules.

Why? Because the students will be receptive, rather than defensive, hence the experience will be positive rather than negative. And because being proactive is better than being reactive. How you revisit your rules is up to you. Just do so often, and in different ways (repetition and variation being key to embedding information in long term memory).

A simple yet powerful way of revisiting your rules can be to draw attention to them when they're being followed. Here's one example...

"Three, two, one...pens down. Thank you. And thank you for following rule 2, 'We follow instructions right away'..."

And another...

"I liked the way you said 'please' and 'thank you'. Politeness fits squarely with rule 4, 'We respect each other'. Good."

Robin Launder is a behaviour management consultant and speaker; find more tips in his weekly Better Behaviour online course – for more details, visit behaviourbuddy.co.uk

70%

of teaching assistants work extra hours ahead of impending Ofsted inspections, with 87% of said group doing so unpaid

Source: GMB London

A new exploratory evidence review published by the Education Endowment Foundation has found that financial incentives may hold the key to addressing teacher recruitment issues – particularly in economically disadvantaged areas.

A team of researchers from UCL's Institute of Education explored evidence on teacher recruitment and retention strategies from around the world to identify the most fruitful areas for further investigation. Financial incentives, including higher salaries and performance and recruitment bonuses, emerged as an effective way of attracting teachers to roles in challenging schools and keeping them in post, based on studies carried out in Chile and England.

Moreover, financial rewards given directly to teachers – as opposed to being allocated via the schools employing them – appeared to show especially promising results.

Further findings (which may come as little surprise to regular readers) were that strategies aimed at reducing workload and improving working conditions were often linked to better retention rates, while heavy workloads tended to be accompanied by higher levels of staff turnover.

Other factors resulting in better retention included access to CPD, high quality induction support and effective school leadership.

The full report can be read via bit.ly/ts125-LL7.

THE LATEST ON...

POST-PANDEMIC POVERTY

The ongoing COVID Social Mobility & Opportunities (COSMO) Study has issued a research briefing highlighting data that appears to indicate direct links between household poverty, mental health issues and GCSE outcomes.

Led by researchers based at University College London and The Sutton Trust, the COSMO study is currently tracking the households of 12,828 young people taking A Level exams and other qualifications in 2023, of whom 9,330 also had a parent complete the survey.

In the sixth COSMO study briefing, titled 'Financial inequalities and the pandemic', it's noted that many households have seen a decline in their financial situation since the pandemic, with 39% of those involved in the study reporting worse financial health; only 16% of households reported an improvement in their finances.

10% of the young people involved in the study were found to be living in households deemed 'food insecure', to the point of skipping meals and running out of food. Somewhat alarmingly, 57% of households where children went hungry were not eligible for free school meals, nor were 36% of the households found to be users of foodbanks.

The briefing goes on to detail how, during the pandemic, pupils from families who reported using food banks attained lower GCSE grades amounting to almost half a grade per subject, even after previous grades and their household's finances over time were taken into account.

Elsewhere, it's noted that rates of psychological distress appeared to be highest in households that began using foodbanks during the pandemic (53% among young people and 63% among parents) compared to 41% and 33% respectively for households not using foodbanks and existing 'long term' users of foodbanks – suggesting that short-term financial shocks have entailed a greater psychological impact on those families affected.

In the view of Rob Halkyard, executive director at Teach First,

"We're hearing of headteachers opening schools to pupils and parents so they have somewhere warm to go, somewhere to charge their phones and wash school uniforms. All before they've started a day of learning. We must urgently invest in schools and services in the poorest communities if we're to allow all young people to reach their full potential."

THE COSMO STUDY'S 'FINANCIAL INEQUALITIES AND THE PANDEMIC' BRIEFING CAN BE READ IN FULL VIA BIT.LY/TS125-LL8

66%

of secondary teachers believe the value of writing as a skill will be diminished by the use of generative AI tools

Source: 'Future ready education: Empowering secondary school students with digital skills' report produced by the Capgemini Research Institute

Need to know

The teacher insight specialists at Teacher Tapp recently carried out a study, with funding by the Gatsby Foundation, into the impact of the Early Career Framework (ECF) since its introduction in September 2021. The team canvassed the views of some 400 ECTs, 600 ECT mentors and 2,000 senior leaders at three different points – February 2022, August 2022 and February 2023 – the results of which were then compiled into a report, 'The First 18 Months: Teacher Views on the Early Career Framework.' So what did they find?

It turns out that 65% of ECTs still in their first two years of teaching see the ECF training as having added to their workload, and repeating knowledge already acquired over the course of their ITT studies. As such, 80% of ECTs expressed a wish to spend less time on it, or even opt out of certain areas altogether.

Based on the responses received, the report recommends a review of the external training ECTs receive; the use of more specialised materials tailored to specific subjects and ECTs, and a rethink of how ECF training is allocated to staff timetables.

The report can be read in full at **bit.ly/ts125-LL1**

HOW TO DO IT

MAXIMISE YOUR TECH'S LIFESPAN

Schools facing budget pressures are naturally eager to make their tech investments last. Gaining oversight of your school's devices and hardware should be the first step when embarking on a new IT transformation and developing your own bespoke digital strategy.

A tech audit will give you a full picture of your current assets, and help you determine where those precious resources should be allocated.

Find out who's using what and how often

Longevity should be built into your school's digital strategy. Ensuring that all laptops receive the latest software updates can feel like a Sisyphean challenge, but is crucial for maintaining functionality. Automating updates can alleviate this burden, with modern operating systems typically providing options for installing them at set times.

Some EdTech solution providers, such as NetSupport (netsupportdna.com) can provide real-time reports on the status of your hardware, underutilised programmes and applications, as well as at-a-glance views of any contract details, complete with expiry dates, vendor details and prices.

The more visibility you have over the usage of your devices, the more control you can wield.

Edtech that's built to last

Planned obsolescence is a lucrative strategy for hardware manufacturers, but edtech vendors should be offering the precise opposite – reliable solutions delivered via affordable devices, without forcing regular hardware updates on budget-conscious schools.

If your school is saddled with edtech that mandates device upgrades every few years, it may be cheaper to switch to a different provider altogether and continue using the devices you already have. Always question edtech providers about the hardware they initially specify and any planned changes that may impact these.

Be sure to also request evidence of past updates. If a vendor is revealed to have a track record of updates that require new hardware to run, look elsewhere.

Review your subscriptions and licenses

By taking stock of your school's software subscriptions and licenses, you might discover that unneeded subscriptions are still being paid for. Cancel these to free up some much-needed disk/server space and further extend your budget.

Some schools can also end up agreeing to multiple edtech solutions over time, when just one might meet all your needs simultaneously and affordably.

Taking the time to research and identify those solutions that meet more of your needs will make your edtech budget go further, whilst also making it easier to manage your devices.

AL KINGSLEY IS THE AUTHOR OF *MY SECRET #EDTECH DIARY*, CHAIR OF HAMPTONS ACADEMIES TRUST AND GROUP CEO OF NETSUPPORT

On the radar *GCSEs in BSL*

The DfE has launched a consultation seeking views and comments on the launch of a new GCSE course in British Sign Language. The proposed focus of the GCSE is currently language; students taking the subject will need to comprehend BSL, sign accurately, carry out interactions via BSL and demonstrate an understanding of BSL's history.

The efforts at developing GCSE in BSL go back to 2015, when Signature (an awarding body for deaf communication and language qualifications) carried out a pilot in six schools to see if and how a BSL GCSE might work in practice. Subsequent lobbying and campaigning by deaf charities in the years since – including a high-profile 2018 crowdfunding campaign launched by then 12-year-old student Daniel Jillings – eventually persuaded government officials to introduce the new qualification.

Said groups have welcomed the news, with Rebecca Mansell, chief executive of the British Deaf Association, commenting: "We now have an Act of Parliament, passed in 2022, in support of our language; we have the BSL Advisory Board, established to guide government action. There is a sense of real momentum and ambition to take BSL forward."

Daniel Jillings, now 17, in turn remarked: "Hopefully a GCSE in BSL will be ready by 2025. I will have finished my A Levels by then, but I will be happy to know deaf students will be able to access an exam in their own language in the future."

Details of how to take part in the DfE consultation can be found at bit.ly/ts125-LL2

TRENDING

Our pick of the recent resources and launches teachers might find useful...

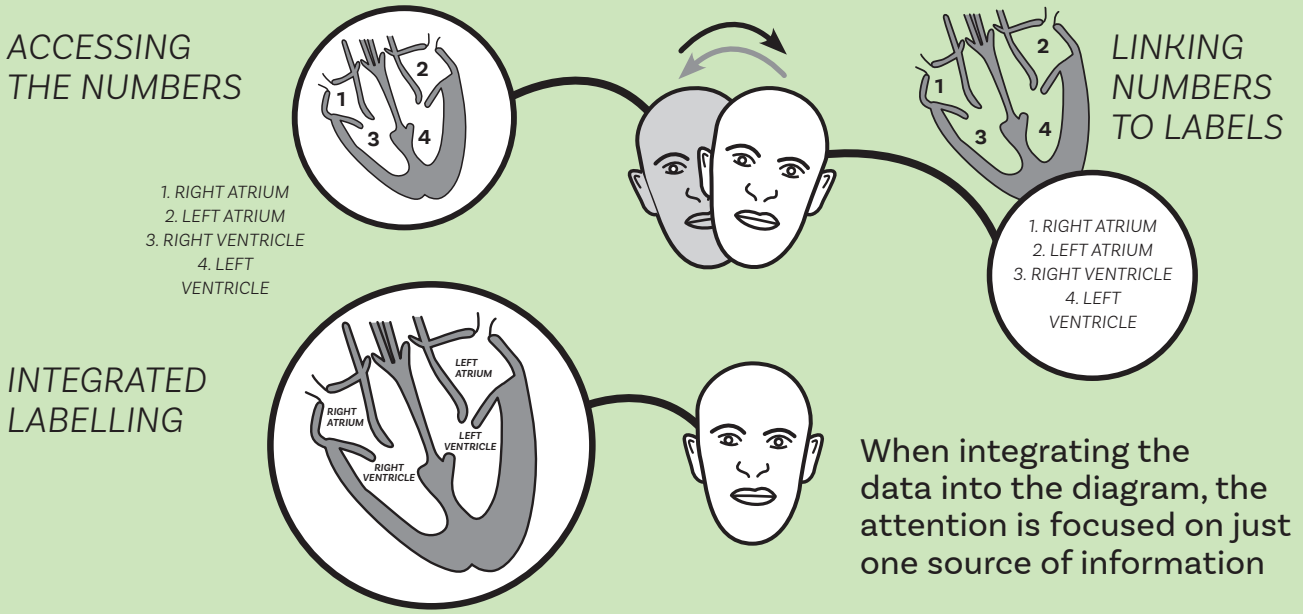
BACKSTAGE BUSINESS
Applications are now open for two free National Theatre technical training programmes aimed at 14- to 18-year-olds interested in learning about technical theatre. The 14-week Young Technicians Programme will run on Tuesday evenings between 5th September and 12th December 2023; the closing date for entries is Monday 17th July.
bit.ly/ts125-LL4

IN THE CLEAR?
Media and film studies teachers might want to look out for the Code of Fair Practice for Film Educators in the UK – a new resource developed by The British Universities and Colleges Film and Video Council, intended to help educators make more informed decisions regarding copyright and the legal use of audiovisual materials in the classroom.
bit.ly/ts125-LL57

1 MINUTE CPD

THE SPLIT ATTENTION EFFECT

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU HAVE TO FOCUS ON TWO SOURCES SIMULTANEOUSLY?



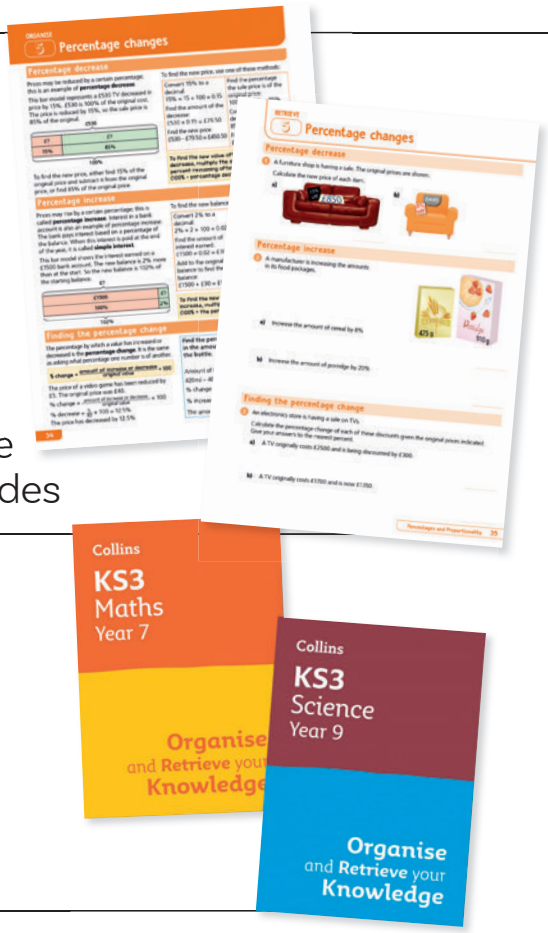
ZEPH BENNETT IS A PE TEACHER AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT LEADER WITH 25 YEARS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE; YOU CAN FIND MORE OF HIS EDUCATIONAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY FOLLOWING @PEGEEKSCORNER

Got a great learning idea? Email editor@teachsecondary.com or tweet us at @teachsecondary

MATHS/SCIENCE

Organise and Retrieve your Knowledge

Help your KS3 maths and science students retain those essential building blocks of knowledge with this thoughtfully crafted series of revision guides



AT A GLANCE

- **A series of six KS3 revision guides for maths and science**
- **Clear and simple revision guidance, packed with subject essentials**
- **Available as single volume, pocket-sized books for each year group**
- **Range includes knowledge organisers for each topic, along with matching retrieval tests**
- **Can be used in a range of different learning contexts**

REVIEW BY JOHN DABELL

There's a plethora of KS3 maths and science resources out there – though a sizeable proportion are distinctly run of the mill, somewhat pedestrian and not fully up to the task of helping students learn and retain what they need to know.

Those certainly aren't criticisms you can level at Collins' Organise and Retrieve your Knowledge series for KS3. Spanning six volumes (three for science and three for maths, each with one book per year group), they're specifically designed to maximise retrieval so that those core concepts and topics stick.

The books making up the series are pleasingly handy and compact, saving students the struggle of lugging around breezeblock-sized tomes. Yet small though they may be, these volumes pack an incredible amount into their 80 pages, and are positively bulging with the crucial parts of their studies that students will need to know.

Key to this is how the books are structured. Each topic is presented via a two-page spread showing explanations, and then retrieval practice. The first page gets straight down to business, with short, punchy explanations that ably cover the ground in question. Gimmicks, superfluous information, design clutter – all are very much absent, in favour of a focus on colourful imagery and diagrams that reliably provide support and clarity where they're needed.

Key points are all clearly highlighted and signposted, and therefore unlikely to be overlooked. Accompanying explanations are visibly boxed out, ensuring that the information they contain is easy to digest and can help students grasp the rudiments. There are also some short workout sections included for quick practice purposes.

After each topic page, students are then presented with a page of test material comprising a healthy mix of questions designed to challenge their recall (with answers at the back of the book to aid self-marking, as you'd expect). The layout of these pages is easy on the eye, and evidently the product of much refinement, given how user-friendly and visually engaging they are.

Mixed question tests towards the end of each book assist students with retrieval of key topics, alongside 'key facts' and vocabulary sections that can serve as mini-dictionaries for important terms, complete with accompanying examples.

Collins has produced here a set of extremely well-written books containing elegantly concise explanations and well-judged retrieval opportunities. The Organise and Retrieve your Knowledge series provides a solid foundation upon which to help students develop a detailed, connected and secure knowledge of maths and science, while affording them regular opportunities to revisit and build on that knowledge so that it's not forgotten.

teach SECONDARY

VERDICT

✓ Ideal for catch-up, retrieval and intervention
✓ Extensive use of no-nonsense explanations that are smart and succinct
✓ High standards of presentation, with accessible, colourful and engaging designs across the series
✓ The books are physically compact, making them easy to carry and read

PICK UP IF...

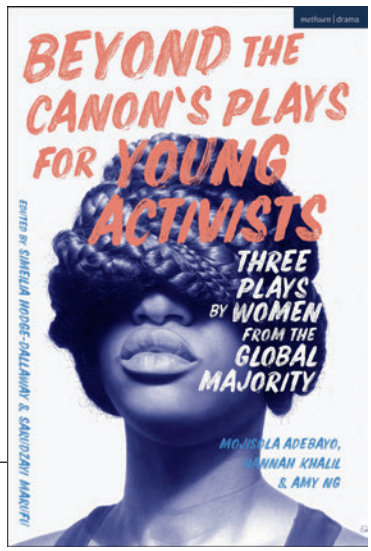
You're looking to embed the essentials across all topics in KS3 maths and science via a series of easy-to-use, straightforward organisers for boosting knowledge and cementing understanding

£3 per book; for more information, visit collins.co.uk

LITERATURE AND DRAMA

Beyond The Canon's Plays for Young Activists

Unlock your students' inner activist with this anthology of hard-hitting plays



AT A GLANCE

- **A collection of three revolutionary plays by female writers**
- **Contains interviews with all three writers, alongside research guides and activism test sheets**
- **Also included are tips on creating safe spaces and addressing practical drama challenges and supporting games**
- **Readers can gain access to an accompanying multimedia online learning resource**

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

This liberating new book is a genuine first – an anthology that seeks to showcase three award-winning plays by female writers and activists from the global majority, in a way that will hopefully inspire students to elevate their own activism and bring sustainable change to the world.

The plays comprise Muhammad Ali and Me by Mojisola Adebayo, A Museum in Baghdad by Hannah Khalil and Acceptance by Amy Ng. Each one invites audiences to take the themes and provocations they present, and consider the role that activism can play in forging a positive identity – as, say, an anti-racist ally, paradigm shifter or disruptor.

The book itself sets out to disrupt the mainstream narrative by moving marginal conversations firmly towards the centre, helping to create a new and better space for everyone, wherein students are encouraged to recognise the importance of decolonising thinking.

The book begins with two powerful introductions – one by the internationally acclaimed director, producer and dramaturg Simeilia Hodge-Dallaway, and a second by the actor, writer and director Sarudzayi Marufu. You can't help but be inspired by the drive, determination and dynamism shown in both essays.

These are then followed by 10 points of advice on how to approach the study of politically-charged plays, so that students can freely explore the often bold and provocative ideas presented by such works, and examine their connections and legacies.

We then move on to the plays themselves, each preceded by a biographical overview of, and interview with the respective playwrights, alongside some superb supporting resources that include practical challenges, quizzes and other activities.

All three plays are exceptional, powerful works that tackle a number of heavyweight issues and themes, including power in relation to race, the difficulties of foster care, child abuse, rape, colonialism and the nature of belonging. These are genuinely groundbreaking plays, full of provocations and rich sources of discussion, both in and out of the classroom.

The book's companion website (see bit.ly/ts124-beyond) goes further, by offering students plenty of extras for each play. These include 'Writer's Room' interviews with the authors, breakdowns of specific characters and scenes and more besides, all of which reveal these stories' additional layers of colour and texture.

What this anthology does is inspire young people to use their voices, dig deeper into important issues that affect them and others, and be active agents for change.

The watching, studying and reading of these plays can contribute to those aspirations being realised, encourage students to take a deeper and more clear-eyed view of our shared history and cultural assumptions, and ultimately help them step out of their comfort zones.

teach SECONDARY

VERDICT

✓ A powerful collection of writing centred on empowerment
✓ Provides opportunities for students to explore their understanding of politically-charged plays and wider issues relating to social justice
✓ Contains advice and encouragement directed to students on how to become effective activists and agents for change
✓ Inclusive in tone and approach, and accompanied by a range of well-curated online learning resources

PICK UP IF...

You're looking for a paradigm-shifting collection of revolutionary writing with which to inspire young people to recognise the value and past contributions of impassioned and effective activism.

Paperback £21.99, Ebook £19.79 – find out more at bloomsbury.com/9781350294998

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
John Lawson is a former secondary teacher, now serving as a foundation governor while running a tutoring service, and author of the book **The Successful (Less Stressful) Student** (Outskirts Press, £11.95); find out more at **prep4successnow.wordpress.com** or follow **@johninpompano**

THE LAST WORD

Send in Fraction Man!

By all means, have students study maths – but not to the exclusion of other subjects, says John Lawson...

So Rishi Sunak wants all UK teenagers to study maths until they leave school. With all due respect to the PM, I hope his 'benign advice' meets with widespread resistance from secondary leaders and maths teachers.

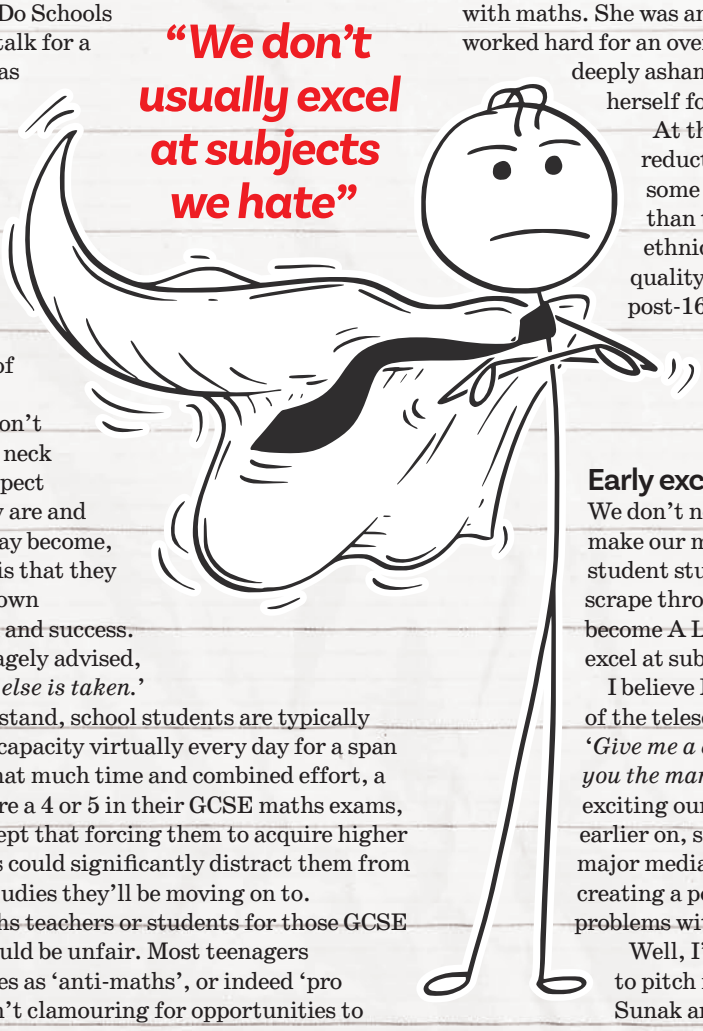
Maths is a vital subject, of course. We should teach it – arithmetic, especially – as well as possible, for as long as possible. However, any suggestion that maths is somehow 'superior' to the rest of the curriculum is misplaced.

The jewel in our educational crown is the solemn promise we make to sixth-formers that we will honour the subject choices they make that best suit their talents. Teachers should never be asked to break that promise.

Hearts and minds

The late Sir Ken Robinson spoke eloquently about the way in which intelligence is diverse, dynamic and distinct. Countless educators admire his 'Do Schools Kill Creativity?' TED talk for a reason. His message was a simple, yet profound one – that we should nurture students' imaginations and let dancers be dancers, musicians be musicians and artists be artists.

Listening to both the hearts *and* minds of teenagers is a crucial pedagogical skill; we don't just function from the neck upwards. When we respect teenagers for who they are and what they might one day become, what you'll often find is that they manage to forge their own pathways to happiness and success. As Oscar Wilde once sagely advised, '*Be yourself; everyone else is taken.*'



As things currently stand, school students are typically taught maths in some capacity virtually every day for a span of 11 years. If, after that much time and combined effort, a child still doesn't secure a 4 or 5 in their GCSE maths exams, we should perhaps accept that forcing them to acquire higher maths skills regardless could significantly distract them from the more specialised studies they'll be moving on to.

Let's not blame maths teachers or students for those GCSE failings, as to do so would be unfair. Most teenagers wouldn't see themselves as 'anti-maths', or indeed 'pro maths', and likely aren't clamouring for opportunities to study further maths.

If it's the case that a student simply doesn't find maths as enjoyable a subject as drama, art, history, music or politics, that's simply a preference – not a crime.

Naked prejudice

Instead, why can't we recognise and celebrate the sheer diversity of our collective teenage talents? I'd argue that doing this could even be crucial for our efforts at maintaining a vibrant democracy.

Many years ago, I taught RE to a rare, bona fide philosophical genius in Y11 who went on to became the school's head girl. The sole blight on her otherwise stellar CV was a lower-set placing in maths.

As brilliant as she evidently was, neither she nor anyone else could quite understood why she struggled as much as she did with maths. She was an archetypal overachiever, but one who worked hard for an overall 'D' grade in maths that she was deeply ashamed of, and would frequently punish herself for her 'failures' by refusing food.

At the heart of every prejudice lies reductionism. It's ignorance that compels some people to reduce others to little more than their sexuality, race, age, colour, ethnicity or religion, or any other personal quality. My fear is that insisting on teaching post-16 maths to everyone amounts to naked prejudice, rather than positive discrimination. Why focus on what teenagers don't excel at, rather than fostering their unique talents?

Early excitement

We don't need to be skilled mathematicians to make our mark in life. Even if we insist that every student studies maths to 18, those who barely scrape through their GCSE exams will rarely become A Level maths hotshots. We don't usually excel at subjects we hate.

I believe Mr Sunak is staring into the wrong end of the telescope. Aristotle was recorded as saying, '*Give me a child until he is seven and I will show you the man*'. We need to focus far more on exciting our primary school children in maths earlier on, so here's a thought. Why not enlist a major media company or two and task them with creating a popular superhero who solves global problems with their advanced maths skills?

Well, I've calculated my angles and can't wait to pitch my own 'Fraction Man' creation to Mr Sunak and assorted Disney executives...

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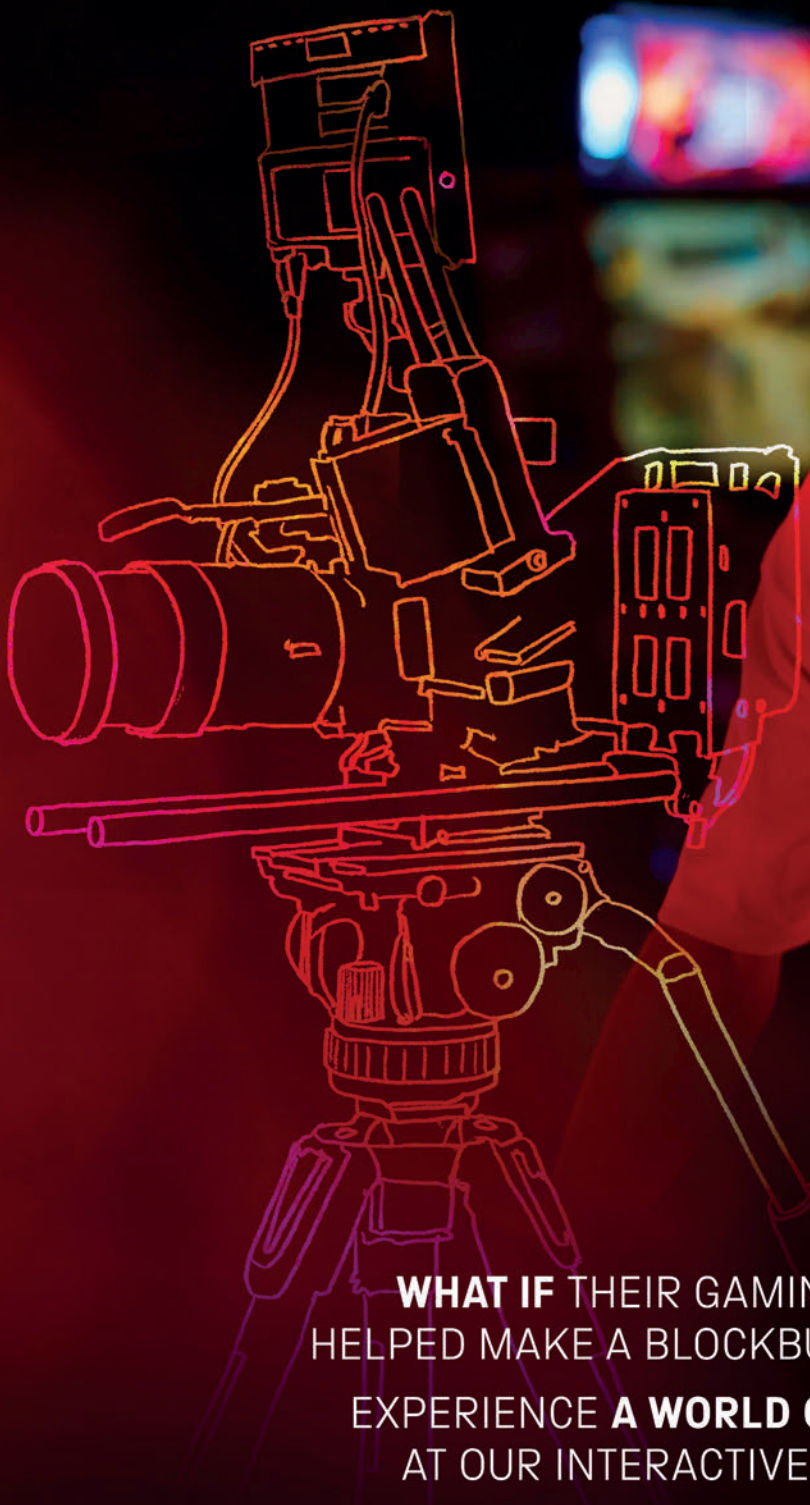

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HELPED MAKE A BLOCKBUSTER MOVIE?

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