***integrated education***

***A Template for Learning for Life***

**Dr Brian Lighthill**

[Text in red from Keir Starmer (2021) *The Road Ahead*]

If we are to remake the nation, we must help young people from all backgrounds develop their potential. To do that, we need to ensure they know what the world around them looks like and the possibilities that are available to them

**Research:**

The pandemic has created a moment in time where education is more concerned about keeping the school open than thinking about how to progress and develop teaching practice. But I argue that this is an opportunity for blue sky thinking about the future of education. Only when a political party grabs this Covid induced opportunity by the scruff of its neck and thinks outside the box of Education as-is, to Education as-is-needed, will learners learn meaningful skills for their future lives.

In this article I want to float the ideal of an integrated curriculum. I am well aware that an integrated timetable engenders deep rooted resistance from teachers - after all the very idea is an invasion of their subject silo. But I think that an integrated timetable could make the difference between *transmission* and *transformational* learning, and that only when the relationship between learning-in-school and learning-for-life is recognised will the *delivery* of Education move forward so that students become both work ready and life ready.

Every parent, no matter where they live, should be able to send their child to a high-quality school that prepares them for the future workforce [able] to adapt to change throughout their working life

There are two recent research papers which illustrate how State education is failing to equip learners for their post-school lives and they inform my thinking on bring ‘skills development’ to the fore.

A Labour government would focus not simply on grades and qualifications, but the so-called ‘soft skills’ that help develop and round young people

The first paper is [*Making the UK's skills system world class*](https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/skills/uk-skills-system-report/)  which concluded that, ‘whilst the UK performs well internationally on the provision of high level qualifications […] A high proportion of our workforce has poor literacy, numeracy, and computer skills.’ And the second research paper, based on analysis of ‘*Job application adverts*’, lists the soft skills most needed by employers: **Resilience; Good communication; Effective leadership and management; Planning and research skills; Teamwork and interpersonal skills.** And being **Computer savvy** seems to bea prerequisite for the job market today.

Fewer than half of British employers believe young people are leaving full time education with sufficient advanced digital skills

These papers also conclude that education should *not* remove itself from the world in which the learners will end up, and there should be opportunities offered within the secondary school curriculum to participate in *relevant* work experience and meet employers and human recourses representatives.

Coincidentally, these findings support the ‘Framework’ and ‘Statutory Guidance’ of the UK Department of Education. So, if the framework of the DOE is the same as the needs of employers why then do most employers perceive that the education system, as-is, fails students badly, and does *not* equip them to become the workforce of tomorrow?

Based on my research let me now propose some small, cautious steps, away from delivery of the extant education system, and toward a system which develops in learners, the ability to join up the dots between the subjects on the curriculum and at the same time develops much needed learning-for-life skills like: creativity, critical thinking, decision-making, collaboration, problem-solving, and adaptability - ‘skills’ which encapsulate what most employers list as their ‘top skill requirements’.

**A Template for learning for life:**

1. Towards the end of the **First term** of Y7 invite a local Company Director (or HR representative) to talk about what ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills are needed to gain employment. This would prime the students on the aims and objectives of the approach to learning in the following Term.

Our education system should be working with employers to make education and training ready for a world of work

2. Teachers then decide on an overall title for the following term. My proposal is that all subjects are taught in an integrated way under an umbrella title - which I call *Expeditions*[[1]](#footnote-1). Let me flesh this idea out a bit. What those *Expeditions* titles could be:

**‘Industry - what does our school community owe to our local industry?’ (**the students would take trips to museums in order to explore what local life was like throughout history (the History, Sociology, Literature teachers would be involved); the industrial changes over time (Maths, Geography, Social Geography, Sociology), and developing ideas about what is a community (Personal and Social Development, Citizenship, Comparative Religions).**)**

**‘Being Human - the body’ (**the students would take trips to art galleries in order to explore how figurative art has developed through time (Art and TD teachers will be involved), how Science, History, Art and Literature convey what makes a human, a study of the human skeleton (Biology, life-drawing, Drama), a wider investigation of the history of eugenics and Nazi profiling (History, PSHFE, Citizenship), the issues around current face recognition (Law), segregation and the civil rights movement (Sociology, History, Literature).**)**

**‘Stormy seas - climate change’ (**the students would take trips to science museums in order to explore how the climate has changed through time (Science, Maths and Geography teachers would be involved), explore climate change (Science) through geographical data (Geography, Statistics, Graphs/IT), explore the real-life ramifications of climate change through the issues of migration and survival (Sociology, Economics, History, Literature, Citizenship, PSHFE).**)**

3. Hold meetings with all year teachers to think how the statutory content of the following term’s syllabus can contribute to the *Expedition* title, and what are the gaps that syllabus does not cover.

4. In the **Second term**,

(a) There are *regular* visits to Museums, Art Galleries, Factories etc. which can inform, give real-life meaning to the *Expedition*, and increase student curiosity;

(b) Half of each lesson in school will be based on clear and concise transmission teaching which follows the National curriculum but emphasises topics which contribute to the *Expedition* title. Teachers also cross referencing to other teacher’s lessons in order to enhance the concept of an integrated syllabus. In other words: if Teachers ‘A’ shared with their peers, *the bullet points* being discussed in each of their lessons then Teacher ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’ etc. can cross-reference those *bullet points* in their own lessons - so that students will make connections across the curriculum and understand how discoveries made in one subject can inform another;

(c) In the other half of the lesson student-groups present and share their discoveries on relevant *teacher-set* *topic*s – filling in the gaps in knowledge that the National Curriculum does not cover. Initial research into these topics would be by individual students via: teacher recommended textbooks, the internet, the school library, talking to experts etc. and then, in *teacher designated groups* - say five students per group - turn their discoveries into a five-minute Power Point presentation to which all members of the group contribute. These presentations are followed by respectful peer-on-peer discussions on the contribution these presentations made to the *Expedition*.

5. Weekly checks are made by teachers to ensure that students update their ‘Personal Portfolios’, responding to the question, “What have I learned from this *Expedition* from an academic; personal; and social perspective?”

6. Develop a whole year, end of term presentation for the students’ families - so that knowledge gained can be shared and made visible. After all, the school ispart of the community.

And through these modes operandi the students will gain key life skills like oracy, critical thinking, and the confidence and resilience to be able to argue a point and communicate that point to others.

7. Set the students one whole year examination in order to discover how successfully their integrated learning has been.

I know this is extra work for the teachers but think what a journey the students will take. Think of the wellbeing of the students. Yes, bold leadership will be needed - collaboration…creative teaching…holistic sharing. Working towards the better good of all, levelling up…fairness for all students, and increased opportunities for the learners to develop academic excellence *and* personal skills so that they can become the best they can be.

And when it comes to those GCSE exams, *and beyond*, they will be able to join up the dots of various subjects being explored; they will have done extensive group work; they will have developed the skill of problem solving: resilience, good communication, effective leadership, planning and research skills, teamwork and interpersonal skills, become computer savvy, be adept at typing, be able to present an effective power point or graph during a presentation and, if they have experienced a talk from Management or HR, their learning in school will tie-up with learning-for-life - just as the Department of Education wanted, and more importantly, *just as students need*.

I want every child to leave school ready for work and ready for life.

1. Acknowledging, and with thanks, to the *XP School* in Doncaster. A revelation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)