Knowledge and the Curriculum

Policy Exchange

A collection of essays to accompany
E. D. Hirsch's lecture at Policy Exchange

Edited by Jonathan Simons and Natasha Porter

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Policy Exchange

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Contents

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Many thanks to all the contributors to this collection of essays for their informed and thoughtful contributions to the topics raised in the lecture.

Above all, thanks go to E. D. Hirsch for giving up the time to fly to the UK and share his views with policymakers and practitioners in this lecture.

About the Authors

Nick Gibb MP was appointed Minister of State at the Department for Education on 15 July 2014. He was elected Conservative MP for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton in 1997. As Minister for Schools, Nick's responsibilities include oversight of the curriculum and assessment in schools, where he has been greatly influenced by the work of E. D. Hirsch.

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Tom Sherrington has been the Headteacher of Highbury Grove School in Islington since 2014. Previously, he was Headteacher of King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford. Tom is one of the founders of the National Baccalaureate Trust and is a core member of the Headteachers' Roundtable, set up in 2012. He has also been appointed to the Teachers' Professional Development Expert Group.

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Matthew Sanders was Special Adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg MP, until the end of the Coalition Government in May 2015, covering the Department for Education; the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Cabinet Office. In that period he also spent two years as a Policy Fellow at the Cambridge University Centre for Science and Policy, and was an elected councillor in the London Borough of Camden. Later this year he will take up a new role as a Policy Director in the Ministry of Education, New Zealand.

Foreword

It is a great privilege to be welcoming Professor E. D. Hirsch to speak at our second annual Policy Exchange education lecture. Hirsch has been enormously influential in the world of education in recent years, both in the United States and in the United Kingdom. Recently his work has inspired major curriculum initiatives, including the introduction of Common Core State Standards in the United States and the reformed national curriculum in England. Alongside this, in Britain Civitas has published an Anglicised version of the core knowledge curriculum developed by Hirsch, which has been implemented by a range of primary schools. At Policy Exchange, Hirsch's work on the importance of knowledge and cultural capital in schools has inspired much of our work on education. We are in total agreement with his assertion that a traditional, academic approach is the best way to raise standards in schools, and eventually to achieve social justice.

The influence Hirsch has had on the English education sector in recent years is no doubt how we have managed to engage such an impressive list of contributors for this essay collection. The authors here include experts in policy, classroom practice and assessment, and represent many of today's great education thinkers. We hope you find their viewpoints as interesting as we have, and that their essays both expand and deepen your thoughts on curriculum, pedagogy, and the wider education system.

The essays which follow all approach Hirsch's work from slightly different perspectives, and this helps us understand the broad impact which his ideas have had on our education system. Perhaps the most obvious of these comes from reading the essay by schools minister Nick Gibb MP, who describes how he discovered Hirsch's work as shadow Minister for Schools in 2005, and how his ideas have given shape and definition to Gibb's own beliefs

about education ever since. As a result of his influence on Gibb, and Gibb's subsequent introduction of Hirsch's ideas to the former Secretary of State for education, Michael Gove MP, Hirsch has had a profound impact on educational policy reform in England since the 2010 election.

Many of our essayists explain that part of the attraction to Hirsch was the impact of his work on closing the gap. Two senior leaders of urban London schools have particularly focused on this. Michael Fordham, the Assistant Headteacher of West London Free School, argues that it is exactly Hirsch's repositioning of a traditional knowledge curriculum as non-elitist which makes his argument so strong. Not only does Hirsch argue that the goal of building knowledge and developing cultural capital is to achieve social justice, he also explains why progressive education leads to the opposite. The Headteacher of Michaela Free School, Katherine Birbalsingh, also focuses on the social justice aspect of a knowledge curriculum in her essay. She explains that if knowledge is not transmitted to students at school , then all the responsibility for doing so is on their parents. For those children without middle class or educated parents, this can leave them at an enormous educational disadvantage and unable to access the curriculum.

Amongst these essays there are also some who challenge Hirsch's position that a knowledge curriculum can close the achievement gap on its own. Matt Sanders, who was special adviser to the former Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, warns against approaching education with polarised views, and argues that focusing only on the knowledge gap means ignoring the skills gap many disadvantaged children have. This is a viewpoint which is supported by Headteacher of Highbury Grove, Tom Sherrington. His essay outlines the argument for a rich and challenging National Baccalaureate curriculum which incorporates both knowledge and skills. Chris Husbands from the Institute of Education also gives a fascinating and helpful history of the conflict between knowledge,

progressivism, and skills and application in education policy, eventually concluding that all are important. He goes on to explore the possibility that knowledge and the elite are linked through correlation rather than causation.

Alongside the debate about using knowledge to address issues social justice, there is also an exploration of how Hirsch's work can develop good character in students. James O'Shaughnessy describes his chain of Free Schools built on the belief that knowledge plus character leads to "practical wisdom", and his position that these two attributes are self-reinforcing rather than contradictory. Katherine Birbalsingh also writes passionately about the impact of knowledge teaching rather than discovery learning on students' engagement and behaviour, as does Michael Fordham who describes how a shared body of knowledge is an essential characteristic for democratic citizenship. Again there is dissent on this, most noticeably in Tom Sherrington's essay, when he argues against a narrow shared body of knowledge across society, claiming that, instead, developing a wide body of knowledge which varies between different parts of society is more beneficial for society, as it leads to a wider collective cultural capital.

One of the most interesting themes to emerge from the essays is what Tim Oates describes in his essay as the "authority" question; that is, who decides what should be taught and what children should know? Oates is clear in his view that objections to politicians setting curricula are ill founded. Matt Sanders agrees to a point, arguing against a blanket presumption that politics should be taken out of education, but cautioning against political sign off of individual Programmes of Study. And Tom Sherrington argues thoughtfully that in fact, political sign off of a curriculum limits its effectiveness, whereas a wider Baccalaureate qualification which incorporates knowledge alongside other elements would have greater buy in, because it would remove resistance to political decisions, which he characterises as "unhealthy and unnecessary".

In terms of recommendations for further policy, our essayists have a range of suggestions. Daisy Christodolou and Michael Fordham refer to a need to reconsider aspects of teacher training to incorporate some of these ideas. Matt Sanders argues that all decisions about curriculum reform should be taken away from politicians and given to expert groups. Daisy Christodolou acknowledges that curriculum is driven more by assessment than anything else, and so explores what Hirsch can teach us about assessment. Her analysis explores the practical lessons which can be learnt from Hirsch's work, and in doing so reminds us why his work has been so influential on administrations in both the North America and England.

This collection of essays leaves no doubt that there is an enormous amount in recent education reforms which we can ascribe to Hirsch, and that his writings will continue to form a core part of the future education debates in this country (no pun intended). We look forward to playing our part at Policy Exchange in these debates.

Natasha Porter and Jonathan Simons

1. How E. D. Hirsch Came to Shape UK Government Policy

Nick Gibb MP

No single writer has influenced my thinking on education more than E. D. Hirsch. Like any book which becomes seminal in one's intellectual journey, I distinctly remember the first time I encountered Hirsch's work.

I was appointed shadow Minister for Schools in 2005. My researcher at the time, Edward Hardman, recommended that I read Hirsch's *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (Hirsch, 1999), so I took it with me on my summer holiday to Savannah, Georgia. I began reading it on the beach and could not put it down. Back in my hotel room, I emailed Hirsch to explain my enthusiasm for his ideas.

Ever since, Hirsch's books – filled with post-it notes providing access to my favourite passages – have come with me from opposition and into government. I recommend Hirsch's books to anyone I meet with an interest in education policy, and I would like to think that his book sales this side of the Atlantic have seen a significant spike as a result. A familiarity with Hirsch serves me with perhaps the easiest indicator that someone in education 'gets it' when it comes to understanding curriculum and pedagogy.

Reading *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, I had the strange sensation that Hirsch had taken my own inchoate and disparate thoughts on education, and turned them into an articulate and intellectually robust case for action. To quote Alexander Pope, Hirsch's books showed me "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed".

Such an experience is invaluable for a minister. Though my mother was a primary school teacher, and I had always taken an interest in education from afar, I still required a crash course in

education theory and debates once I became Shadow Minister for Schools. As with so many other professions, education has developed a language of its own, erecting barriers to entry for the interested layman. To implement an effective programme of reform, it was imperative that I and my colleagues learnt this language – and Hirsch was our tutor.

Back when I was in opposition, it would not have been immediately obvious that, for example, the 2007 National Curriculum overlay of 'Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills' (QCDA, 2007) was arrant nonsense. To the uninformed outsider, 'independent learning', 'learning to learn', and 'individualised instruction' all sound misleadingly like reasonable ideas. However, reading Hirsch provided me with the mental armour to see these ideas for what they were, and fight them accordingly.

In 2009, Michael Gove gave a speech to the Royal Society of Arts (Gove, 2009) in which he acknowledged the influence E. D. Hirsch, and explained his vision for reform in eminently Hirschian terms: "A society in which there is a widespread understanding of the nation's past, a shared appreciation of cultural reference points, a common stock of knowledge on which all can draw, and trade, is a society in which we all understand each other better, one in which the ties that bind are stronger, and more resilient at times of strain."

Gove ended the speech by promising that, if entrusted with public power, he would "completely overhaul the curriculum – to ensure that the acquisition of knowledge within rigorous subject disciplines is properly valued and cherished". A year later, that is precisely what we set about doing.

In the first meeting with civil servants after the 2010 election to discuss the curriculum review, all the officials had bound copies of the Core Knowledge Curriculum. In this way, Hirsch's work in America provided us with a tangible precedent for our thinking on the English National Curriculum, which could reassure civil

servants that we were not entirely alone in our ideas. The American Core Knowledge Curriculum reassured us on vital considerations within curriculum design, such as effective sequencing, language acquisition, and the importance of discrete disciplines.

Perhaps more importantly, Hirsch's arguments provided us with a compelling social justice case with which to argue for a knowledge-rich curriculum. One passage that has always stuck with me from the first chapter of *The Schools we Need and Why We Don't Have Them* explains the 'Matthew Effect' within language acquisition. This is the accumulative advantage that pupils with large vocabularies experience once they begin school: because they know more, they learn more, and the gulf between them and their less advantaged peers grows ever wider.

As Matthew Chapter 25 states, "For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away". Applying this to education, Hirsch writes: "Those children who possess the intellectual capital when they first arrive at school have the mental scaffolding and Velcro to gain still more knowledge. But those children who arrive at school lacking the relevant experience and vocabulary – they see not, neither do they understand."

The inequality in terms of mental architecture, as measured through studies in language acquisition by the likes of Betty Hart and Todd Risely, provides a clear case for a knowledge based curriculum at an early stage. As they show (Hart and Risely, 2003), a child from a professional family will experience 2,153 words an hour by the age of 3 compared to a child from the most disadvantaged background who will hear only 616 words an hour. Whether or not it is the role of schools to combat this inequality remains – frustratingly – a point of debate. But at least the existence of such a gulf is now incontrovertible.

Vitally, this is an argument which falls upon receptive ears across the political spectrum. Hirsch has unfairly been character-

ised as a right-wing, neo-conservative educationist for advocating views which – I would warrant – are entirely mainstream within US society.

By the same token, it was dispiriting to hear our own efforts at reforming the National Curriculum derided by one critic as 'rote-learning of the patriotic stocking fillers', as if all that was driving us was a desire that schoolchildren celebrate the glories of the British Empire. In reality, our reforms were based on a desire to see social justice through equalising the unfair distribution of intellectual capital in British society. Unlike so many other inequalities, this is one that schools – if performing their function properly – have the power to address.

We inherited a National Curriculum from 2007 which, at its opening, stated its aims as enabling young people to become:

- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve;
- confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives;
- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

All laudable aims, but rather beside the point when it comes to planning a programme of study.

For secondary school Geography, the 2007 National Curriculum did not name a single Geographical unit with the exception of the European Union. Instead it focused upon 'Concepts' such as 'Physical and human processes' and 'Cultural understanding and diversity', and 'Processes' such as 'Geographical communication' and 'Geographical enquiry'.

In History, the 2007 National Curriculum made no mention of any specific historical events aside from the two world wars and the Holocaust, and – in an explanatory note – the French Revolution

and the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire. Again, it focused instead upon 'Concepts' such as 'Chronological understanding' and 'Cause and consequence', and 'Processes' such as 'Using evidence' and 'Communicating about the past'.

This was a curriculum which was actively hostile to teaching prescribed knowledge, and sought to minimise the importance of subject content wherever it could. In the conception of the 2007 national curriculum, knowledge was simply a means of acquiring the far more valuable skills. Whether you studied James I or Jack the Ripper, to do so was neither here nor there, provided you were learning the key historical process of using evidence.

This had to change. The body of academic knowledge belongs to everyone, regardless of background, circumstance or job. The new National Curriculum published in 2013 (DFE, 2013) is a programme of study in the spirit of Hirsch. At primary school, the National Curriculum in English is properly sequenced so that pupils learn how to read and write in a structured and comprehensive fashion. In Year 2, pupils will be introduced to the apostrophe and the comma; in Year 4 they will encounter the possessive pronoun; and in Year 6 they will be taught about the colon, ellipsis and the passive voice. In our new more ambitious mathematics curriculum, pupils will be expected to multiply and divide proper fractions; calculate the area of parallelograms and triangles; and read any number up to 10,000,000 by the end of primary school, as well as having memorised their multiplication tables by the end of Year 4.

At secondary level, the curriculum is properly sequenced to allow the incremental accumulation of knowledge. For example, in Key Stage 3 Physics pupils will learn about 'forces as pushes or pulls, arising from the interaction between two objects', allowing them at Key Stage 4 to learn about 'acceleration caused by forces and Newton's First Law'.

In English, we have established that all pupils should learn three Shakespeare plays over the course of their secondary school

education. To aid their learning of English language, there is even an eighteen page appendix of grammatical terms, guidance and examples stretching from 'active voice' to 'word family'.

Perhaps more important than such curriculum changes, though, is the intellectual excitement in favour of teaching knowledge that Hirsch has inspired. Hirsch has been the wellspring for innovative and challenging ideas amongst new generation of British educators. Since 2012, Daisy Christodoulou, Robert Peal and Toby Young have all written books with explicit indebtedness to E. D. Hirsch. This is not to mention the countless blogs kept by the likes of Joe Kirby, Kris Boulton and Greg Ashman which have discussed and popularised the ideas of Hirsch.

Schools such as Pimlico Academy, Michaela Community School and the West London Free School (where three new primary schools are teaching an adapted version of Hirsch's Core Knowledge scheme) have all embraced Hirsch's ideas. Whilst these schools remain a small vanguard, they are treading a path upon which I am sure many more will embark in the coming years.

So why is it, in this internet age where countless views on education can be accessed for free online through blogs and twitter, is the voice of one English Literature Professor from Virginia so important? Why does an intellectual movement, such as that which is taking place in English education, still need a figurehead such as Hirsch?

Whilst pondering this question, I reached an amusingly Hirschian explanation. What Hirsch has provided English reformers with is a shared language. Re-reading Hirsch's work, I realise how many terms – which I now use on a daily basis – I first came across when reading his books. I am thinking not just of 'Cultural literacy', but also 'national communication'; 'common reference points'; 'the education thoughtworld'; 'intellectual capital' and the supposed split between facts and skills. I will wager that for many of us, it was Hirsch who first exposed us to such ideas and concepts.

In this way, Hirsch's work provides an unrivalled intellectual armoury with which reformers can equip themselves prior to engaging with the education establishment.

At the back of *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, Hirsch even provides a glossary of education jargon, complete with some wonderfully Johnsonian definitions. For "passive listening", Hirsch writes that this is "a progressivist phrase caricaturing 'traditional' education, which makes children sit silently in rows in 'factory-model schools,' passively listening to what the teacher has to say, then merely memorizing facts."

Hirsch defines "research has shown" as "a phrase used to preface and shore up educational claims. Often it is used selectively, even when the preponderant or most reliable research shows no such thing, as in the statement 'Research has shown that children learn best with hands-on methods.'"

Today, Hirsch still provides inspiration for the next steps in England's journey towards having a world class education system. In *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Hirsch, 1988) he writes that "A curriculum reform designed to teach young children the basics of cultural literacy will thus require radical changes in textbooks and other teaching materials."

This is very much a live issue, as the former Chair of our National Curriculum Review Tim Oates made clear in his recent policy paper *Why Textbooks Count* (Oates, 2014). The next stage in the advancement of knowledge-based teaching must be the creation of a new generation of classroom resources. A start has been made with the introduction of Shanghai maths textbooks into English schools via our network of 34 maths hubs, but there is much more work still to be done.

In addition, Hirsch is right throughout his work to recognise that it is deficient ideas, and not deficient teaching calibre that is holding back our schools. I see this throughout the education sector: dedicated and hardworking teachers are not getting the

results they deserve because they have been let down by the ideas fed to them by a deficient education thoughtworld.

In *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know*, Hirsch reproduces an extract from the introduction to Thorndike and Baker's 1917 school book *Everyday Classics*, an elementary schoolbook which aimed to introduce American schoolchildren to the canon. As the extract shows, one hundred years ago, it was seen as self-evident that such literature was the rightful inheritance of every citizen. The authors wrote:

"We have chosen what is common, established, almost proverbial; what has become indisputably 'classic,' what, in brief, every child in the land ought to know, because it is good, and because other people know it. The educational worth of such materials calls for no defence. In an age when the need of socialising and unifying our people is keenly felt, the value of a common stock of knowledge, a common set of ideals is obvious."

One hundred years on, such an outlook is far from 'obvious': it calls for a spirited defence, which will be opposed by no shortage of grandees in the education establishment. It is to our enduring benefit that E. D. Hirsch decided to take up this fight when he published *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know* in 1988, and has pursued it so doggedly and effectively ever since, inspiring a whole new generation of reformers in the UK and US.

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2. Assessment Knowledge

Daisy Christodoulou

Over the last five or six years, there has been a significant change in the way that people think about the role of knowledge in the school curriculum, due in no small part to the works of E. D. Hirsch becoming better-known in England. Hirsch's book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know*, published in 1988, summarised much of the research in cognitive psychology which shows that knowledge is vitally important for thinking, learning, and problem-solving. For various reasons, his ideas have become well-known in England over the last few years, and for those of us in favour of a knowledge-rich curriculum, these last few years have been heartening: whereas once, mention of the word knowledge led to evidence-free stereotypes about backward-looking Gradgrindian taskmasters, now it is possible to have a much fairer debate with reference to the kind of evidence that Hirsch has done so much to publicise.

However, although there are now exciting debates taking place about the curriculum, assessment tends to get less public attention. Newspapers would rather argue about whether Florence Nightingale or Mary Seacole should be on the curriculum than about the arcane details of the Angoff standard-setting method. And yet, because of the exam-focused reforms of the past few decades, assessment is often the driver of curriculum. In many schools, the ring binder or pdf which contains the national curriculum will be barely touched. The exam specification, by contrast, will be pored over as though it is holy writ. Changes to assessment have a significant impact on how the curriculum is implemented, and interestingly, Hirsch himself has written extensively about assessment too. In the rest of this essay, I will outline three assessment issues which I think are particularly important, and suggest some implications for policymakers.

Authentic assessments

Authentic assessments are those which aim to represent more accurately the kinds of problems a pupil might face in the real world. So, for example, instead of a science question which asks pupils to apply the speed-distance formula, or a language question which asks pupils to identify a verb or a noun, an authentic assessment will place these kinds of problems within a more real-world context, such as a creating a brochure to help people decide how to pick a fast car, or an essay about the impact that language has on the reader. Such tasks may involve groupwork and different kinds of activities: the assessment expert Daniel Koretz gives an example of an assessment designed to test pupils' understanding of density which required them to work in groups to construct an aluminium boat out of foil (Koretz, 2008).

On the surface, these kinds of authentic assessments seem far fairer, because they test the types of things we really care about. However, they have many technical flaws. Precisely because they are so authentic, pupils can respond to them in a number of different ways, which makes reliable marking very hard. Tasks such as the one Koretz mentions also introduce irrelevant elements: what if a pupil understands the concept of density, but struggles to make a boat out of foil? Whilst such tasks have been designed to reward creativity, paradoxically, they can actually end up stifling it: in an attempt to make the marking of such tasks reliable, they are often accompanied by extensive rubrics which define a 'correct' method of solving the problem (Wiliam 1994). Pupils who respond in a more ingenious way may receive no marks at all. Such was the fate of many of the coursework tasks on the old science GCSE: acceptably authentic answers to these could be found on the internet.

The alternative to such assessments is more structured items, such as short answer and even multiple-choice questions. Multiple-choice questions in particular have a terrible reputation in the UK, with progressives decrying them as soulless, and traditionalists as

'gimmicky' and easy to guess (Wiliam 2014). However, they also have an extensive amount of evidence on their side. Contrary to received wisdom, they are capable of testing higher-order skills: in the US, the GMAT determines entry into some of the most prestigious academic institutions in the US, and it is composed largely of multiple-choice questions. In the recent past, many top universities required sixth-form students to pass the 'Use of English' exam: part of the exam involved reading a passage of modern English and answering some fairly challenging multiple-choice questions on it. In *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, Hirsch reviews the literature on authentic writing tasks and multiple-choice questions, and concludes that when assessing writing, the ideal balance would be an exam composed of two parts multiple-choice, and one part writing task (Hirsch 1988). This mix of tasks delivers a high level of reliability, as well as retaining an authentic element. Nor are multiple-choice questions only of use in national exams: as Dylan Wiliam has argued, multiple-choice questions can be very powerful when used for classroom formative assessment, because the existence of several wrong options allows the teacher to identify who has grasped a new concept, and who is still labouring under a common misconception (Wiliam 2014). In short, we could all benefit from moving away from our prejudice against multiple-choice items, and using them to improve both exam reliability and classroom assessment.

Teacher assessments

Similarly, teacher assessments seem, on the surface, to be fairer and more valid than exams. Exams can only test what pupils know in a narrow two or three hour window, when a pupil's performance might be hindered by illness or a disturbance at home. The teacher has knowledge of the pupil that spans more than just those two or three hours, and is therefore better placed to be able to give a fairer

assessment of the pupil's abilities. There is some truth to this, in that variable performance on the day is one of the main sources of exam unreliability. However, teacher assessment has significant flaws of its own. It is extremely hard to ensure that all teachers are applying the same standards in the same way. One review of the literature speaks of the 'depressing fallibility' of teachers' judgments (Sadler 1987). There is also evidence to show that teacher assessment is unconsciously biased against certain groups: disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEN and pupils from some ethnic minorities actually do better on tests than on teacher assessments (e.g. Shorrocks 1993, Harlen 2004, Campbell 2015). This is a well-documented finding which is relatively little-known: indeed, it is not uncommon to find educationalists who assume the complete opposite, and argue that one of the advantages of teacher assessment is that it benefits such underprivileged groups (e.g. Bousted 2013, Emery 2013). Finally, teacher assessment is often extremely onerous, imposing a significant logistical and bureaucratic burden on teachers.

The above arguments may sound excessively critical of teachers. This is not the case: if teachers are bad at making such judgments, it is not because they are teachers, but because they are human. A growing body of research shows some of the difficulties everyone has with making certain complex judgments and decisions, and the short cuts we resort to when the mental strain becomes too great. Indeed, it is plausible to speculate that the reason why teacher assessment is biased is because it is so burdensome: when we are faced with difficult cognitive challenges we often default to stereotypes (Kahneman 2011).

Teacher assessment has already been reduced at GCSE because of some of the reasons outlined above. Currently, it is still used in the national assessments at the end of Key Stage 1, when pupils are 7, and there is a strong case for the government to consider whether these assessments are serving the best interests of both teachers and pupils. Possible alternatives are formal tests, or abolishing the

assessments entirely, both of which would be controversial. But given the flaws outlined above, some form of reform is surely worth the controversy.

Criterion-referenced assessments

Criterion-referenced assessments are those where pupils are judged according to whether or not they have met a certain criterion – for example, whether they are able to use percentages, or whether they are able to punctuate sentences correctly. Again, on the surface this seems fair, as it means pupils are held up to an objective external standard. It certainly seems fairer than one of its main alternatives, norm-referenced assessments, where pupils are instead judged with reference to how other pupils did on the same assessment. However, in practice, the apparent simplicity of criterion-referencing is fraught with difficulty. What does it mean to say that a pupil can use percentages? That they can calculate 50% of 200? 67% of 5834? Or that they can solve a word problem involving the percentage profit on a series of goods that are all sold at different prices? Criteria can be interpreted in many different ways. Even simple changes in the structure and wording of a question result in vastly different numbers of pupils answering it correctly. More pupils will answer the sum 11+3 correctly than will answer 3+11. 90% of pupils can work out that 5/7 is larger than 3/7, but only 15% can identify that 5/7 is larger than 5/9 (Hart 1981). And these examples are from maths, a subject where criteria can be relatively precise. As Hirsch has shown, the problems with criterion-referencing are even more pronounced in English, where the criteria are often as nebulous as 'can draw inferences such as conclusions or generalisations' (Hirsch 2006).

As a result of the difficulties with criterion-referencing, public exams in England have never been fully criterion-referenced: exam boards and Ofqual quite rightly do not solely depend on criteria

to set standards. But whilst few policy changes are necessary in this area, there are other problems. The recent Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training (Carter, 2015) found that training in assessment was particularly weak, and that many important assessment concepts, including norm and criterion-referencing, were simply not being taught. This is of course problematic in and of itself, because such concepts matter. However, it is also problematic because one of the current government's major policy aims is to create a school-led education system. As part of this, schools have been given the responsibility for designing a replacement for national curriculum levels, a criterion-referenced form of assessment which has been abolished by the government. But if initial teacher training does not equip teachers with key assessment concepts, then schools will struggle to design the reforms demanded of them. And indeed, the early signs are that a number of school's replacements for national curriculum levels are simply rehashing a criterion-based approach to assessment (Department for Education 2014). There are fewer signs of schools using genuinely innovative replacements for levels, such as the No More Marking system of comparative judgment, which allows teachers to stop using criteria altogether.

Conclusion

A central theme of Hirsch's work is about the importance of ideas. More than one of his books features this famous Keynes quotation:

> *"The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist."*

Ideas and research about the importance of a knowledge-based curriculum have made themselves felt both in the US and in the UK. However, new ideas about assessment are much less well-known, and there are many practical policymakers and educationalists in thrall to defunct ideas about soulless multiple-choice questions and straightforward criterion-referencing. Whilst there are specific policy changes the government could make which would help to improve assessment, the most significant change that could happen would be in the terms of the debate – and, as with the curriculum, E. D. Hirsch's work could be the catalyst for a change in how we think.

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3. Knowledge and Character

James O'Shaughnessy

"Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education"

No one has more succinctly captured the essence of education than Martin Luther King did when writing for his student newspaper in 1947. His argument was that the goal of education was twofold: about 'utility', the cultivation of the mind so that people can distinguish between truth and falsehood; but also about 'culture', the moral basis on which men and women exercise their intellect. After the quote at the top of this chapter, the young college student went on to say that: "The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. The broad education will, therefore, transmit to one not only the accumulated knowledge of the race but also the accumulated experience of social living"(King, 1947).

I am very proud of the education reforms that the Coalition undertook over the course of the last Parliament, and the role that I played in helping bring them to fruition. The growth of Academies and the introduction of Free Schools were seminal, as was the introduction of the pupil premium – funding specifically targeted to helping close the gap between disadvantaged children and others. These were ideas I helped bring to life during my time at Policy Exchange ten years ago, and their long-term effect on the school system will, I believe, be profound. But the recent changes the government has made to the curriculum, raising the expectations of children and dramatically increasing the amount of knowledge they are expected to learn at all stages, have the potential to be the longest lasting.

The key theoretical insight that drove these academic reforms, which came directly from E. D. Hirsch, is that, once a child has

learnt to read, the biggest factor in whether they score highly on a reading test or not is whether they know a lot about the topic in question. In other words, beyond the first years of schooling, more sophisticated comprehension skills can only develop if the pupil has sufficient knowledge specific to the subject in question. This insight underpins Hirsch's Core Knowledge Sequence, which has been implemented in many US schools and forms the basis of the Common Core curriculum now being adopted at federal level. Its effects have been remarkable: Massachusetts, which implemented a core knowledge curriculum in 1993, regularly tops the US school league tables.

I have to confess, however, that I am a relatively late convert to the importance of a knowledge-based curriculum, having spent too much of time in government worrying about what Tony Blair would call 'structures' and not enough about standards. It was only when I left government and began the process of creating my own group of primary schools – Floreat Education – that I saw first hand the extraordinary impact that a knowledge rich curriculum can have on academic standards, especially for pupils who do not get exposed to cultural references at home.

This was brought home to me when visiting a primary school serving a poor, entirely immigrant community in London. The headteacher explained to me that she had taken her pupils on a visit to the seaside. Not only had none of them ever seen the sea before, but they lacked any of the shared cultural reference points that many of us take for granted – fish and chips, the sailing metaphors that abound in spoken English, a basic understanding of marine plant life. It was very obvious that, unless these children were inducted into our national conversation and exposed to the best that has been thought and said, then however smart they were they would end up being excluded from the mainstream of British life, with all the attendant risks of economic failure and political marginalisation.

Developing pupils' cultural knowledge is central to our vision of Floreat because it is essential to making sure our children flourish. High academic standards are the sine qua non of education, and genuine intellectual development is not possible without creating a strong and deep foundation of knowledge. At Floreat, children's induction into the rich, diverse culture of Britain and the world starts from the moment they enter the school. Our curriculum helps pupils develop a sophisticated understanding of the world in which they live, starting with an emphasis on the rapid development of the core skills of English and Maths. As children move through the school, increasing time is allocated to subject-based lessons that will deepen and broaden pupils' cultural knowledge.

However, as Martin Luther King said, a true education is more than the pursuit of knowledge. It must also include the pursuit of moral purpose, and that is why a Floreat education has the development of character as its heart. By character, I mean a set of strengths or virtues that individuals can develop, and which contribute to leading a happy and successful life. The role character plays in guiding our lives is described in the introduction to the Framework for Character Education in Schools drawn up by The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (Jubilee Centre, 2013).

> *"Human flourishing is the widely accepted goal of life. To flourish is not only to be happy, but to fulfil one's potential. Flourishing is the aim of character education, which is critical to its achievement. Human flourishing requires moral, intellectual and civic virtues, excellence specific to diverse domains of practice or human endeavour, and generic virtues of self-management (known as enabling and performance virtues). All are necessary to achieve the highest potential in life."*

The idea that education should focus on developing good character as well as the pursuit of academic goals is not a novelty; in fact, it is as old as civilisation itself. From Aristotle in the West to

Confucius in the East, since classical times the purpose of education has been broadly understood to include the imparting of knowledge and intellectual skills, intertwined with the development of virtuous behaviour in young people.

The modern practice of character education is based on the understanding, amply justified by research, that our virtues are not merely given but can be developed through instruction and practice. Research carried out by Nobel Prize-winning economist Professor James Heckman (Heckman, 2013) has confirmed that character strengths are indeed 'skill-like', insomuch as they are not fixed and can be developed positively, just as cognitive or intellectual skills can be. This is critical. While most people accept that intelligence is not fixed and can be developed, there is a tendency to be far more pessimistic about character: the leopard cannot change its spots. But it can and it does, bringing about not only improved mental health and wellbeing but also benefits to academic outcomes (Challen, 2011, Morrison Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012).

Following research in the field of positive psychology from academics such as Angela Duckworth (Duckworth, 2011), we have a much richer understanding of the impact of character education on academic attainment and the importance of so-called 'non-cognitive skills', such as determination, patience and grit. The old dichotomy that you can have happy children or successful children is wrong. A true education provides not one, or the other, but both (Arthur and O'Shaughnessy, 2012).

Hirsch himself recognises the need for character development. In his review of Paul Tough's book How Children Succeed, he rightly takes the author to task for over-stating the power of character education. However, in the same article he also provides an essential quote:

"Classic texts on education such as Plato's Republic and Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education emphasize that character

development and virtue are far more important educational goals than mere acquisition of knowledge. At the same time, those writers are quite explicit in setting forth the breadth of knowledge children need to acquire. If Tough had updated that "both/and" tradition with the latest reports from the field, he would have no argument from me" (Hirsch, 2012).

At the heart of the Floreat mission is that good character and outstanding academic study, rather than competing, are self-reinforcing. We believe that the two strands should be integrated as far as possible in order to enable a child to flourish. Both knowledge and character are infused into every part of school life, based on the idea that we should make every moment of the day work harder. They are literally inscribed on our walls – the hall at Floreat Wandsworth Primary School is emblazoned with the essential character virtues we aim to develop in pupils, while the corridor in the Early Years building has a beautiful, hand painted mural depicting a timeline from the Big Bang through to the writing of the Domesday Book.

More practically, our pupils are introduced into a Hirsch-inspired humanities curriculum from the age of three onwards, while we have also created a unique character curriculum so that our pupils learn about the virtues through stories, myths and history. This groundbreaking syllabus is influenced by the pioneering work of the Jubilee Centre, as well as the Wellbeing Curriculum at Wellington College (Wellington, 2008). Discrete character lessons are not to everyone's tastes, but we believe that character should be 'taught' through the curriculum as much as 'caught' through the school ethos and role-modelling by staff. And the study of character provides further opportunities to reinforce our knowledge goals, providing more lesson time to ensure our pupils gain cultural as well as virtue literacy.

I am deeply in favour of learning knowledge because it is one strand of the DNA of true education, but on its own it is an incom-

plete description of human development. As Teddy Roosevelt said, "To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." No one wants smart and corrupt young people. For knowledge, and the intellectual power that flows from it, to make a positive mark on the world it needs application. How that application takes place, and to what ends, depends on a person's character.

During my time as a policy maker I spent too little time thinking about the purpose of education. Now, perhaps, I think about it too much. But it seems obvious to me, both as a parent and as someone observing every day what the very best teachers do, that a broad description of education that encompasses both knowledge and character is the right one. And it is right not because it indoctrinates pupils into an existing way of thinking – the paternalist objection that proponents of both knowledge and character often face – but because it offers freedom, independence and the ability to choose one's future. A true education equips us with what the Greeks called *phronesis*, or practical wisdom: the ability to make good decisions about our lives so that we have autonomy in our own realm. This can only be achieved through the development and practice of character virtue, and it is of equal importance to our individual and societal freedom as being introduced to the best that has been thought and said.

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4. How Knowledge Leads to Self Esteem

Katharine Birbalsingh

When my 3-year-old boy looks out of the tube window at St. John's Wood, he will often say, "Saint John's Wood, S – T for saint, not street." And I will respond, "Yes, that's right. And what do we call shortened words like this? Ah… bree…", and he will continue, "vee…a…tion." "That's right," I say. "Abbreviation, repeat after me, abbreviation." "Abbreviation, mummy, yes, abbreviation."

Eventually the time will come when he will look out of the window and say, "S – T, abbreviation for saint." The public will look on at him in wonder, as they often do now, thinking, my goodness, how is that little boy so clever? And I will want to explain to them that he only knows these things because I told him. He isn't a genius. He didn't discover this knowledge inside his soul. I just told him, over and over again, and eventually he internalised the knowledge so that it seems to be part of him.

Of course it seems obvious that we need to tell infants what they need to know: how to walk, how to count, how to say their own names – but even then, we often stump them with our questions. My friends and family do it all the time with my son. They use a word he is unlikely to know and rather than just tell him what it means, they ask him if he knows what it means. His response is always to say yes. When prompted to explain the meaning, he shuts down, changes the conversation, asks for water, runs to get a toy; anything to avoid the humiliation of not being able to give the answer the adult desires. They kill his interest in acquiring the knowledge. Knowledge has become his enemy.

It is the same in a classroom. Ask a child a question when he doesn't know the answer and disruption almost always occurs.

They either attempt to shine the spotlight on someone else, or depending on their character, they might try to embarrass or distract the teacher. The last thing they are thinking about is what the answer is. They are too busy being humiliated, a feeling that will remain with them the next time they are asked a question. Similarly, ask the whole class a question that a child doesn't know and he will do everything to avoid being asked. In this moment, he is deafeningly quiet, desperate not to be picked on, hoping that the teacher doesn't notice him. Is he thinking about the answer? Of course not.

I don't ask my son straight out for the word we use for shortened words because I already know he doesn't know the answer is abbreviation. I do know however that if I 'scaffold' the answer by beginning it for him, he will be able to finish it. Over time, I can decrease the scaffold, eventually only starting with 'a', until he is able to remember the word without help.

The bottom line is, don't ever ask a child a question if you haven't already told him the answer or given him enough information to easily figure it out. It shouldn't be a game of 'guess what's in my head'. The skill for the teacher is remembering how knowledgeable each child is and scaffolding their questions accordingly. The better the teacher is at doing this, the more their pupils will trust them. A bond is built so that the child is happy pursuing and acquiring knowledge in that classroom.

Boris Johnson visited our school Michaela and was pleasantly shocked by the level of motivation and enthusiasm he saw in our pupils. We are a new free school in Wembley Park. We opened in September 2014 with 120 Year 7s and we now have 240 pupils, Year 7s and 8s. Boris wanted to know why they were so keen to answer questions, learn as much as they could, and revel in their knowledge. My answer to him was that 'buy-in' from pupils only comes when they can see that they are learning, and when they feel learning is safe. In other words, at Michaela, pupils are free to

learn in an environment which is devoid of humiliation. And this is because we teach a knowledge curriculum with a zero-tolerance attitude when it comes to discipline.

As Hirsch makes clear, It is traditional teaching of knowledge, not progressive 'discovery learning' that fosters a child's self-esteem. Discovery learning is precisely the thing that disengages a child and makes him give up on learning. Teachers are often told by their PGCE tutors, Senior Team managers and Ofsted inspectors that children should be left to discover things themselves. Whatever you do, don't give them the answer! *This is precisely the opposite of what we should be doing.*

The progressive way of teaching befuddles children, encourages them to misbehave, and makes them switch off, because they don't know the answer. Then they feel stupid. They don't presume the fault lies with the teacher for not teaching them properly. They understandably assume it is their fault for not knowing, especially when middle-class Jonny in the front row DID know the answer. How did he know the answer anyway? Oh yes, he has a middle-class family that gives him all sorts of knowledge around the dinner table and a mum who helps him with his homework and he lives in a house where there are books and newspapers lying around. The child doesn't think of all that, just like the public doesn't see all of the hard work that has gone into my boy learning the word abbreviation. They just see the end result and think, wow, what a clever boy. In the same manner then, if he is so clever, so many of our children conclude that they must be stupid. And with that disappears all hope of motivation and self-esteem. Extra classes in self-esteem cannot undo this formula for creating stupidity and soon too many children without Jonny's advantages are at best being channelled into non-academic fields like sport/drama and at worst finding alternative sources of esteem in bad behaviour or gang life.

The progressive then concludes that the problem is social determinism. Poor children do badly at school. Rich children do well. Family background is all. We conclude that the only way to 'engage' the child, especially the poor child, is to make learning more 'fun'. So we introduce games into the classroom, group work and iPads. To do this we need to reduce the amount of knowledge being taught. So our expectations decrease further. Inspectors and line managers at the back of the room expect to see 'fun' so that children seem 'engaged in their learning'. The content of their learning is irrelevant. And yes, with some children, superficially, they engage for the 10 minutes required to complete an exercise they know deep down is a waste of their time, from which they are learning little. It feels to the teacher and observer that they are making a difference. But they aren't. The children know it. And the school does not have their buy-in.

Michaela pupils buy into our school ethos because they want to be knowledgeable and clever. They know the way to succeed is through hard work and doing what their teachers say. We create this environment by doing four things:

1. We hire teachers who want to teach the Michaela way
2. We teach subject knowledge so pupils can master and remember it
3. We support teachers with our centralised systems
4. We ensure there is consistency across the school

We only hire teachers who want to teach a traditional knowledge curriculum. We are very proud of lessons that some people might find old-fashioned. We teach facts unapologetically. All of us, without exception, has had to learn to do things differently in order to adapt to the ethos of Michaela.

Reading E. D. Hirsch's *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (Hirsch, 1999) opened my eyes to what was going wrong in our schools. It wasn't just our poorly-run behaviour systems and low expectations. We were actually teaching them the wrong way! My teachers and I have since read much of Hirsch's work and it is so enlightening. Hirsch has helped to shift our mindset. We have been able to build a school with knowledge at the heart of what we do. We select and sequence subject knowledge for pupils to revise and remember for the long-term and we are explicit about this with them. Pupils understand that the reason Michaela moves learning forward so quickly is because we pump them with knowledge and have them learn it by heart.

Our teachers learn to expect far more from our pupils and then raise that bar again. At Michaela, we have an open door policy where school staff can wander in and out of each other's lessons freely. We would be worried if we saw group work, or lots of movement of children around the room. Visiting teachers often mention how surprised they are if they see me wandering in out of lessons how the style of teaching doesn't change when I am watching. As I always tell new staff, seeing the teacher sitting at his desk and the pupils working hard at their desks is an absolute delight at Michaela.

We feed back to pupils from the front of the class to all of the pupils. We don't mark the pupils' books. Do we believe in 'personalising learning'? No. Do we believe in staff spending countless hours writing 3 personalised targets in books where they are essentially writing the same thing over and over again (because children make the same mistakes) but then trying to phrase it differently each time so that at the next 'book look', one's targets will look as personal as possible? Erm, no. We don't set staff targets either. I have better things to do. So do my staff. And our pupils have better things to do than to pretend to read targets which they can then pretend to act on. Far better to stand at the front of the class and tell them what to do. Then insist that they do it.

We have weekly quizzes, marked essays in English and humanities, and bi-annual exams. So we do assess the pupils. But our marking workload for teachers is minimal in comparison to other schools, leaving staff more time for learning and improving on the content of our curriculum. The beauty of a knowledge curriculum is just how much easier it is for staff to teach!

So many pupils across the country don't do homework. Homework at Michaela is centralised and consists of reading literary classics, Maths and self-quizzing: all subjects in one book, always the same three things every evening. The reason we can have self-quizzing as the main body of homework for all subjects at Michaela is because we believe in memory and mastery. When homework is about learning things by heart, it can be centralised and marking is greatly reduced. With all homework centralised, it gets done. And if it doesn't, the pupil receives a centralised detention.

At Michaela, we believe in 100% consistency between staff. All teachers get pupils to use rulers to read anything, all number lines on a page, all use 'go' as the key word to set the pupils off on task, all use 'slant' as the call to attention, all use 'track' to get pupils to look at you, all count down from 5 when pupils are handing out the books. Staff pop in and out of each other's lessons to maintain that consistency.

We run a 'Behaviour Bootcamp' for several days for Year 7 in September to teach pupils how to behave the Michaela way. Everything senior teachers do is to ensure that teachers can teach a vast amount of content in ways that pupils will remember. And our methods seem to be working. In our first year, Year 7 pupils on average, made double the amount of progress they would make at other schools. We even have pupils who began with us at age 11 with reading ages of 8 or 9 and now have reading ages above their chronological age. This is confirmed by the external New Group Reading Test. The external *Progress in Maths* and the *Progress in English* tests show that our pupils have made 4 sub-levels of progress in

one year in Maths and English (4 in reading and 5 in writing). The average in schools is two sub-levels of progress in one year.

Of course we still have a long way to go. As we grow in size, we must not relax our high standards. We recognise that one key element to our success is just how much buy-in we have from our pupils, a typical Brent intake. Self-esteem comes from being successful. Every time our pupils read a classical novel that they could not have imagined understanding and enjoying before, they see the benefit of the education we are giving them.

We once had a visiting education professor from a well-known university in America. She asked me for our USP. I said that in essence, we tell children what they need to know. Her jaw hit the ground, and shocked, she asked me, 'Why would you want to do that?'

If teachers don't tell children what they need to know, then it is left up to the parents. But what if the parent doesn't know what abbreviation means? Discovery learning prevents children from poor backgrounds from succeeding in part because it doesn't impart knowledge and in part because it kills the motivation to learn. Our job as teachers is to help enable social mobility by imparting knowledge and by inspiring children to want to learn it. That is why at Michaela, despite many people insisting that our methods are too old-fashioned or lacking in creativity, we make no apology for teaching our kids a vast amount of knowledge, helping them to build an armour of intellectual resilience so that they can take on any challenge in life. That is the lesson we take from Hirsch, and we are determined to make it succeed.

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5. Which Knowledge Matters Most?

Prof Chris Husbands

In the first great wave of school reform, enormous hopes were vested in curriculum as a tool for transforming learning. In the 1960s and 1970s, projects such as *Nuffield Science*, the *School Mathematics Project*, *Geography for the Young School Leaver*, the *Humanities Curriculum Project*, the *History 13–16 Project* and the *Humanities 8–13 Project: time, space and society* all used research and development approaches which sought to develop the curriculum. Yet by the 1980s, expectations of curriculum reform had waned: after David Young's *Technical and Vocational Education Initiative* (TVEI) – the largest and most expensive curriculum development programme ever mounted – school improvers by and large lost interest in curriculum reform, focusing instead on test-based accountability, local financial management and inspection as tools for improvement. In the later 1990s, interest shifted to pedagogy as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies sought to change teachers' practices.

So the second decade of the twenty-first century is essentially witnessing a revival of this previous interest in curriculum as a tool for educational change. There are three main strands to the new debate over the curriculum. Hugely influential in England and North America is the strand represented by E D Hirsch, though it traces its genealogy back to Matthew Arnold, the Victorian poet and school inspector. It was Arnold who defined a pre-occupation with 'the best which has been thought and said in the world' as the 'best hope' for 'our present difficulties' in his 1869 essay, *Culture and Anarchy*. There is a more or less direct line from Arnold through to Hirsch and his concern with a 'critical mass of enabling knowledge over thirteen years of schooling', which so clearly underpins

the Common Core standards in the USA and the Gove national curriculum.

There are other important traditions which remain live in curriculum debate and practice. The tradition of child-centred progressivism is typically traced back to John Dewey in North America, at the turn of the twentieth century. For Dewey, the dynamic of curriculum was not the 'best which has been thought and said'; instead, "the true [focus] is not science, nor literature, nor history, nor geography, but the child's own social activities…. there is, therefore, no succession of studies in the ideal school curriculum" (Dewey, 1897). Dewey's ideas spawned the dominant mid-twentieth century tradition of, especially, primary education, given its fullest expression in England in the 1967 report *Children in their Primary Schools*, chaired by Lady Plowden, a Conservative peer (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967). Although now in some retreat in policy terms, Deweyan ideas of curriculum retain a powerful hold; the prospectus for the Bristol Steiner Free School in 2012 for example declared that the school would "create a curriculum that inspires and involves children in learning… Literacy will be introduced at the stage when children are ready, which we believe to be later than in current UK mainstream education".

The third powerful curriculum tradition is associated with the importance of skills and application. Employer dissatisfaction with school leavers is as old as education itself, though in recent decades the concerns appear to have become louder. Andreas Schleicher, the influential director of the OECD's education and training division, is perhaps the most articulate advocate of the importance of skills. "We live", he writes "in a fast-changing world, and producing more of the same knowledge and skills will not suffice to address the challenges of the future…because of rapid economic and social change, schools have to prepare students for jobs that have not yet been created." As a result, "educational success is no longer about reproducing content knowledge, but about

extrapolating from what we know and applying that knowledge to novel situations" (Schleicher, 2010). In what reads as a direct challenge to Hirsch's emphasis on content knowledge, Schleicher has been quoted as noting that "in the world of Google, no-one will pay you for knowing things". In England, the purest expression of 'knowledge in application' curricula is now, perhaps, to be found in the University Technical Colleges. The prospectus for the Greenwich UTC for example explained that "the Royal Greenwich UTC curriculum will be structured around a series of business projects, developed by our sponsors, which will tie all the subjects and classes together. Students will learn much of their core subjects in the context of these projects".

Early twenty first century curriculum policy can perhaps best be seen as a titanic struggle between these three fundamentally opposed traditions. Of course, most practitioners will argue that their schools and classrooms reflect all three: a knowledge-based, learner-focused, skills-enhancing curriculum, but an attempt to square the circle in this way risks underplaying the ferocious differences of approach and philosophy. It's not at all clear where the argument will go. Hirschian ideas are currently influential in England and North America but get little serious purchase elsewhere; the highly structured East Asian school systems are battling to make their curricula and provision more sensitive to individual need, and the relationship between what is learnt in school and what is required in the workplace remains a running sore.

One of the obvious features of the argument is that it is largely evidence free: it is a battle of noisy disputation, characterised by authors who swap their own certainties based on individual prejudice, barely evidenced assertion and competing power bases. In one of the rare attempts to trace an evidence base, a LLAKES research paper by my colleagues Andy Green, Francis Green and Nick Pensiero used PISA attainment data at 15, and OECD data on attainment and return to skill at 26 to explore the effectiveness of

upper secondary systems (Green et al 2015). Their conclusion was stark: the most effective and equitable systems were those with strong upper secondary vocational provision. One-nil, perhaps, to Schleicher. But generally, curriculum debates are devoid of the sort of hard evidence which is routinely deployed in discussions of attainment, school performance or social mobility, and they are much the poorer for that.

Hirsch is, without doubt empirically correct to observe that the elites of American society are characterised by their possession of high levels of cultural capital expressed through knowledge. But it's by no means clear that this is causation rather than correlation or consequence. It's interesting that the argument about Common Core standards which has ripped through American education policy debate has done so at the same time as American society has become more profoundly unequal than at any time since the 1920s. The evidence of *Whither Opportunity?*, the massive study of rising inequality, schools and children's life chances which draws together an extraordinary range of quantitative and longitudinal evidence is striking. In 1972, high income families spent about $2000 more on child enrichment and 'para-education' provision than did low income families. By 2005, at constant prices, the gap had tripled (Duncan and Murnane, 2012). The elites of American society have access to many more advantages than are accorded by curriculum. In this sense, the argument about the curriculum seems at best a weak driver of improvement and at worst a side show. Likewise, in their analysis of American economic, technological and social development, *The Race Between Education and Technology* Claudia Goldin and Laurence Katz argue that the twentieth century was the American century because American economic success was driven by education: "because the American people were the best educated in the world, they were in the best position to invent, be entrepreneurial, and produce goods and services using advanced technologies" The nation, they argue, that invested most in egali-

tarian educational opportunities and did that during the century in which education would critically matter was the nation with the highest per capita income. This was America's great success. In the eighty years between 1900 and 1980, education attainment improved rapidly and continuously. America's failure since the 1970s has been the stalling of education improvement. For the first three quarters of the twentieth century, they summarise, 'education raced ahead of technology but later in the century, technology raced ahead of educational gains' (Goldin and Katz, 2010). The Hirschian curriculum argument too often neglects these technological, social and economic drivers in education.

Underlying all this is a different set of issues. Most serious thinkers about the curriculum have described the debate between knowledge- and skill-led approaches as being what Christine Counsell describes as a "distracting dichotomy" (Counsell, 2000): high levels of knowledge and high levels of skill are intertwined. They are indeed intertwined, but they are not directly interchangeable. I might be able to reel off the Opus numbers of Beethoven's later works; I might understand exactly how the structure of the last movement of the Ninth Symphony works, but stick me in front of a piano or – worse – an orchestra and my knowledge is unlikely to produce an effective performance: the piano demands the application of technical skills, conducting the orchestra requires technical skills and adds the demands of leading people. Knowledge and skill intertwine differently, in different ways in different contexts. Knowledge is important, but it is rarely the trump card in circumstances which really matter: someone once called being educated 'the art of knowing what to do when you don't know what to do'.

Once again, the noisy debate of assertion and counter-assertion distracts attention from some tough issues. Knowledge matters, but – in Schleicherian terms – being able to use knowledge effectively and appropriately arguably matters more. This is the territory of, for me, the most productive intervention in the debate: Michael

Young's *Bringing Knowledge Back In* (Young, 2009). Young's own intellectual trajectory is important: he began his professional life as a chemistry teacher and in 1971 edited a hugely influential book on *Knowledge and Control*, exploring the ways in which curricula are socially constructed and express power relationships in education and society. In the 1990s, he explored vocational education and training and became increasingly interested in the assessment challenges associated with skill. It was this long, thoughtful engagement with the complex issues of knowledge, understanding and educational change which lies behind Young's 2009 book, subtitled 'from social constructivism to social realism in the sociology of education'. Young distinguishes between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. 'Knowledge of the powerful' refers to who it is that defines what counts as knowledge, and has access to it. But fact that some knowledge is 'knowledge of the powerful' says nothing about the knowledge itself. Here Young develops his argument about 'powerful knowledge', referring to what the knowledge can do – for example, whether it provides reliable explanations or useful ways of thinking about the world. For Young, it is powerful knowledge which is the focus of curriculum, and the purpose of schools: it imposes a stern logic on schools and it involves thinking not just about the 'what' but the 'how'. Young is clear that "if schools are to help learners to acquire powerful knowledge, local, national and international groups of specialist teachers will need to be involved with university-based and other specialists in the ongoing selection, sequencing and inter-relating of knowledge in different domains".

So knowledge matters, but 'powerful knowledge' matters most of all, and, if it is not, ultimately possible to reconcile the quite different emphases of the three great curriculum traditions, 'powerful knowledge' does at least shift the attention of educators in what are productive ways to questions which are always important in curriculum. One of my distinguished predecessors

as director of the IOE, Denis Lawton, famously described curriculum as a 'selection from culture' (Lawton, 1975). Because there is simply too much knowledge which could be taught, the questions of what knowledge deserves its places in the school curriculum is often as much a matter of who has the power and authority to choose as anything else. It also drives attention to the abiding question for professional practice, too often overlooked by advocates of knowledge-led curricula: the challenge of developing the most effective and successful ways by which knowledge is acquired, developed and sustained. Knowledge matters, curriculum matters, but pedagogy probably matters most.

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6. An Inclusive Curriculum for All: Knowledge and the National Baccalaureate

Tom Sherrington

The concept of core knowledge is absolutely fundamental to understanding what constitutes a good education; it's one that all school leaders and teachers should engage with. We're now seeing some significant shifts in how educators think and, to that extent alone, E. D. Hirsch has made an important contribution to contemporary discourse – we're having an important debate.

As a school leader, I'm interested in the practical application of Hirsch's ideas at three different levels. Firstly it is important to understand how Hirsch can impact on pedagogy. If knowledge matters, as it clearly does, what are the implications for how we teach so that knowledge is transmitted, acquired, explored and retained? It is not enough to cover the curriculum; to simply expose children to knowledge, or to rely on them finding it for themselves.

The second area of consideration is how Hirsch might apply to detailed curriculum planning. There are lots of important aspects of knowledge that might constitute the cultural capital all of my students should share, but what should be included? Knowledge has many forms, origins and influences: on the basis that any curriculum requires a process of selection from the vast array of what might be learned, I think that the question of who makes that selection in a democracy is really important.

Finally, how Hirsch's ideas are important at the level of the wider curriculum. A well-educated, well-rounded student will have gained knowledge from multiple domains and will have had a

wide range of authentic experiences – physical, cultural, emotional and intellectual. They will also have developed a range of personal qualities, and these will be alongside and intermeshed with their knowledge. How can we ensure we provide all of this for all young people, not just those privileged enough to derive rich cultural capital from their families and peers?

At each level, there have been long-running debates and divisions in education using a variety of conceptual axes: knowledge versus skills, progressive versus traditional, vocational versus academic. My instinct has always been to seek to find structures and approaches that embrace both ends of each of these axes. I'm increasingly resistant to the idea that we can, or should, ever resolve the tension between these opposing concepts but I'm convinced that a truly inclusive curriculum which is rich and challenging for all needs to include elements from all sides of these apparent dichotomies.

In practice, at my school, we've found that two sets of ideas have helped us to make sense of how to embed core knowledge into our curriculum. The first is the work of Martin Robinson whose book *Trivium 21c: Preparing Young People for the Future with Lessons from the Past* (Robinson, 2013) has been a major influence on me as a school leader. In the context of the Trivium, the emphasis on knowledge (which Robinson refers to as 'grammar') has led us to strengthen our approach to direct transmission of facts. Within this we also include what Hirsch refers to as 'cultural capital'. Alongside historical, geographical, scientific and literary references, for us, cultural capital includes learning classical instruments, residential outdoor education experiences and a set of strong positions on equalities issues. There is knowledge implicit in all of these areas too and, as part of the Trivium, it makes perfect sense to give greater weight to establishing the core knowledge our students should acquire.

Where we probably differ from Hirsch in our concept of core knowledge is that we believe in a curriculum which is not exactly

the same in detail as in other, different schools – even if those schools overlap considerably with ours. I'd argue that this is a strength, not a weakness. We don't need all young people to read the same books or study the same periods in history; in fact, across the nation, we are probably be better off with a diverse curriculum so that collectively we have a broader range of expertise; our collective cultural capital is greater. There's enough nudging in the existing Department for Education guidance to keep us aligned without needing to go further.

The second set of ideas that has influenced our teaching, and determined our inclusion of knowledge in our curriculum is the concept of a Baccalaureate-style framework to recognise the achievements and knowledge of our young people. Through this framework we are trying to address some areas which we see as problematic in the current curriculum. The first of these is trying to counter the unhealthy divide between academic and technical education in our post-16 qualifications framework. The second is addressing an examination regime where grade-setting is largely fixed – in order to maintain year-on-year parity- such that at least 40% of learners are necessarily on a path to failure. We also have concerns that there is an over-emphasis on public exams, with their inherently limited content sampling. This means that students are judged on their grasp of a very narrow knowledge-set relative to the vast array of knowledge, skills and personal qualities that are actually valued in life and in the work place.

The main purpose of the National Baccalaureate for England is to provide a universal framework for students in all educational contexts, which gives recognition to a much broader range of their achievements and learning experiences, including academic qualifications and personal development. Completion of the National Baccalaureate signifies that a student has received a rounded education and has achieved success in a range of skill areas, not limited to those tested in formal examinations. The framework is designed

to have tiers of entry, from Entry Level to Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced, so that all learners – including those with special educational needs, those engaged in our most academically challenging programmes and those engaged in technical and vocational programmes – have the opportunity to complete the National Baccalaureate; it is inclusive and challenging for all.

At Highbury Grove, we feel that the broad Baccalaureate framework and the concepts embedded in the Trivium dovetail together beautifully. We're ambitious for our students so we want them all to acquire the knowledge, skills and personal attributes they'll need to find success and fulfillment in their professional and personal lives.

For us, Hirsch's core knowledge is a powerful concept but only as part of a wider framework; one which includes a significant degree of input from members of our school community. I'm convinced that, if the National Baccalaureate takes off across the country in the way that we envisage, a lot more people will actually be willing to embrace core knowledge; it will have its place at the centre of our educational thinking, strengthened by the presence of the other components that people also value.

As long as core knowledge is associated with the central power of the Secretary of State to dictate what students must know and the examination regime that absolutely dominates our system, we'll always have people resisting it. That's both unhealthy and unnecessary. With the Trivium and the Baccalaureate as a basis for knowledge and our curriculum, there is a better way!

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7. Curriculum Theory, Educational Traditionalism and the Academic Disciplines: Reviving the Liberal Philosophy of Education

Michael Fordham

E. D. Hirsch's philosophy of education is self-avowedly traditional. In *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Hirsch, 1988) he argued that "to learn a culture is natural to human beings. Children can express individuality only in relation to the traditions of their society, which they have to learn. The great human individuality is developed in response to a tradition, not in response to disorderly, uncertain, and fragmented education." These three sentences constitute a response to one of the principal arguments levelled at Hirsch's theory of curriculum, namely that an emphasis on 'extensive' cultural knowledge is a form of indoctrination that prevents pupils from developing the individuality, creativity and criticality that are taken as virtues in modern liberal democratic societies.[1] Hirsch's response is that these very virtues are best kindled in pupils through explicit encounters with extant cultural traditions. A thorough defence of Hirsch's thesis requires, therefore, that these traditions can be shown to be in keeping with the liberal aims of modern society, and that these traditions are not simply fossilisations of past social power.

Hirsch sits squarely in the liberal tradition of education philosophy which stresses the liberating power of knowledge over ignorance. It is much to our shame in the United Kingdom that our

1 The term 'extensive' is used here in the technical sense in which Hirsch employs it, meaning the wider cultural knowledge about which a person in a society might be expected to know something. In the UK the term 'breadth' is perhaps more commonly used, though what terms like 'breadth' and 'depth' mean vary considerably in different contexts.

own liberal philosophers of education – including Matthew Arnold and R.S. Peters – are rarely studied as part of teacher education. In recent years, however, this idea – that knowledge is liberating – has received a great deal more attention in the UK, and this is not least because Hirsch's ideas have both attracted political commentary and proved formative in the curricular and pedagogical theorising of a (predominantly) young generation of teachers who have great sought to advance a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum (Kirby, 2015).[2] This trend in contemporary educational thought has sought to identify existing assumptions that have proved harmful to education, and to point towards the flaws in these ideas (Christodoulou, 2014).[3] What is most notable about this trend is that its advocates have adopted educational traditionalism and directed this *against* educational elitism: the traditionalists have, in short, stolen a march on the progressives and planted their banner firmly on the moral high ground with the clarion call that knowledge is emancipatory and that a knowledge-based curriculum is a matter of social justice. It is no wonder that the those who associate traditionalism with elitism, and which sees challenging the former as a means of overcoming the latter, have responded so negatively and defensively to a trend with which they share much in terms of their final goals.

Part of this disagreement stems from the fact that traditionalists have not always been sufficiently explicit in distinguishing their position from elitists, and it is here that a more explicit emphasis on academic disciplines can help. A common response from those who reject educational traditionalism is that teaching children knowledge is an attempt to make children from diverse backgrounds conform to a white, middle-class, male culture (Kidd, 2014).[4] The purportedly 'critical' argument, in contrast to the traditionalist position, is that education exists not to induct children into existing traditions, but rather to equip them with the skills they need in order to uncover the power relations that rest behind those traditions. This does, however, make the mistake of

2 See, for example, J. Kirby, 'The signal and the noise: the Blogosphere in 2014', 2nd January 2015, https://pragmaticreform.wordpress.com/2015/01/02/the-signal-the-noise-the-blogosphere-in-2014

3 D. Christodoulou, Seven Myths About Education, (London, 2014).

4 For an example of this kind of response see D. Kidd, 'Hey you. Poor Person. We're here to make you just like us', 11th January 2015, https://debrakidd.wordpress.com/2015/01/11/hey-you-poor-person-were-here-to-make-you-just-like-us

assuming that children can be given some kind of Archimedean Point from which they can make a critique of culture. As Hirsch shows us, the level of prior knowledge needed to make sense of a newspaper article – or indeed a political speech, advertisement for medical treatment or website advocating Holocaust denial – is extensive. Indeed, as Alasdair MacIntyre put it, only an educated public is sufficiently well-placed to advance a critique of the claims to knowledge that they frequently encounter in society. For MacIntyre

> *"An educated public is constituted by educated generalists, people who can situate themselves in relation to society and to nature, because they know enough astronomy, enough geology, enough history, enough economics, and enough philosophy and theology to do so. What is 'enough'? For each discipline it is not too difficult to distinguish between what a specialist in that particular discipline needs to know and what non-specialists need to understand if they are to be aware of the relevance of the findings of that discipline to their individual and collective decision making"* (MacIntyre, 2002).[5]

For MacIntyre, his definition of 'enough' is pitched at a not dissimilar level of Hirsch's list at the end of *Cultural Literacy*. MacIntyre argued that

> *…there are some things that every child should be taught. What do these include? Mathematics up to and including the differential calculus, English language and English literature including… some [stories] … translated from other languages … but also including at least one Icelandic saga, some Chaucer, and some Shakespeare, at least one other language, and a good deal of history.*

MacIntyre has arguably done more than any other contemporary philosopher – perhaps save Gadamer (Gaamer, 1960) – to rescue

5 A. MacIntyre & J. Dunne, 'Alasdair MacIntyre on Education: in dialogue with Joseph Dunne', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, (2002), p.16.

the concept of 'tradition' from its Enlightenment graveyard. At the heart of all of his argument is a notion of 'tradition': education involves entering into a tradition which requires first mastering the basics before going on to extend that tradition in potentially new directions.

The idea that the academic disciplines ought to be at the heart of the school curriculum is not new, with a strong emphasis on these in nineteenth-century educational reform. A new generation of philosophers continued in the mid-twentieth century to advance an essentially liberal argument for a school curriculum based on academic disciplines. In the USA, for example, Phenix argued that

> *"The essential task of education is to foster growth of real understanding. There is no end of opinions that can be learned. There are also many skills that can be acquired. The educator's function is to direct the student towards authoritative knowledge rather than towards lower forms of learning. Such knowledge is found within the disciplines. Hence, it is to the disciplines that the teacher should turn for the content of instruction (Phenix, 1964)"*[6]

The latter part of the twentieth century saw a significant backlash against the liberal justification for the place of academic disciplines in the school curriculum. The onslaught came from multiple fronts. On the one hand, sociologists inspired by critical theory and, later, postmodernism called out the power structures inherent in the academic disciplines. On the other hand, academic disciplines increasingly came to be seen in pragmatic terms. The employability focus in the school curriculum around the turn of the century treated academic disciplines as, at best, the arenas in which 'transferable' skills might be developed. Mathematics thus became numeracy; English literature gave way to literacy; the humanities became subjects in which to learn the skills of debate or citizenship. In this context the disciplines were less the

6 P.H. Phenix, *Realms of Meaning: a Philosophy of the Curriculum for General Education* (New York, 1964: 313–314).

fundamental forms of knowledge, but rather archaic structures that created unnecessary boundaries in the curriculum. It was not surprising, therefore, that the early twenty-first century saw the rise of a number of curriculum proposals that did away with disciplines completely. The Royal Society of Arts' *Opening Minds* curriculum, for example, based its model on generic competences such as 'citizenship', 'managing information' and 'managing people'. (RSA, 2015). Criticism of such curriculum models was usually labelled as traditionalist, right-wing, elitist and nostalgic.

It was, perhaps ironically, the sociology of education that rescued the academic disciplines from charges of irrelevance and elitism. In recent years a significant new strand in the sociology of education – under the banner of 'social realism' – has developed with advocates in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK (Young, 2008).[7] Such sociologists argued that academic disciplines provided the only route by which human collective knowledge of reality might grow and that the specialised knowledge in the disciplines represented the current, most advanced account of knowledge of reality. Access to those disciplines, the argument runs, provides pupils with a way of distinguishing between their everyday knowledge – which is context-bound – to 'powerful' knowledge, which is generalisable beyond particular contexts. As Wheelahan put it

> *"…access to theoretical knowledge equips students to be part of society's conversation, and to shape their field of practice by questioning and critiquing the knowledge base of practice and the relationship between knowledge and practice. Knowledge thus must be at the centre of the curriculum… the pursuit of truth should be a normative goal of curriculum, but tempered by an awareness of the fallibility of our knowledge and the need to revise it in light of new evidence.(Wheelehan, 2012)"*

The result of this argument is to reach the same conclusions as the liberal philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centu-

7 M. Young, *Bringing Knowledge Back In,* (London, 2008); R. Moore.

ries, that the academic disciplines ought to be at the heart of the school curriculum. The route by which that conclusion is reached, however, reflects a late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century concern for social epistemology that places an emphasis on the growth of knowledge over time, the fallibility of claims to knowledge and the fact that members of each discipline continue to work to extend the frontiers of knowledge in their respective fields.

It should be made clear at this point that learning an academic discipline is not the same as being a researcher, and problems have emerged when it has been assumed that the epistemology of the discipline is the same as the pedagogy of the subject (Kirschner, Sweller ad Clark, 2006).[8] Placing an emphasis on academic disciplines does not mean that pupils need to learn their historical knowledge through the study of contemporary sources, nor that they need to learn the laws of physics through experiments. It is the case, however, that in studying academic disciplines, it is not sufficient to learn the substantive knowledge that these disciplines have given us; there is also some need to study the ways in which and reasons why disagreements have developed within the disciplines. In history, for example, an 'extensive' curriculum might well address broad chronological frameworks and sweeping narratives, without a great deal of associated critique. The 'intensive' curriculum, however, is easily able to take particular controversies in the academic discipline of history and to show where fault lines have developed, where dispute has emerged and what the grounds are for disagreement. The mistake made in history education over the last forty years has perhaps been to dress up this study of interpretation as a question of developing historical 'skills' or 'competences'. A more fruitful approach, however, is to take these controversies and to turn them into objects of study, so that pupils might be required to gain knowledge of, for example, the 'Whig' interpretation of the rise of Parliamentary supremacy in the UK, or the 'Marxist' interpretation of the transition from feudal to indus-

8 P. Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, (2006).

trial society in western Europe. In each case it possible to show pupils the kinds of claims made in these interpretations and where these claims might be faulted. It is fully in keeping with a traditional approach to the curriculum to introduce pupils to the major lines of debate that have emerged within each particular discipline, alongside an 'extensive' curriculum that provides the wider framework and reference points that makes those studies of dispute within the academic disciplines meaningful. The challenge of the curriculum designer is to construct a curriculum that achieves both.

Such a line of argument carries with it a particular set of implications for curriculum theory. It is necessary, first, to ensure that extensive knowledge is structured in a curriculum in such a way that, by the time they finish their schooling, pupils have the kinds of cultural reference points that Hirsch argues for in *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. Such a list will inevitable be a matter of dispute and indeed will vary a little from place to place: Hirsch's own list in *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, for example, would not quite be right for a British curriculum or an Australian curriculum. With the natural sciences, however, one would probably not quibble with the list outlined by Hirsch. At the same time, we should take opportunities where they arise to teach pupils knowledge about how disciplines produce knowledge. In the natural sciences, for example, a generally educated public needs to have knowledge of concepts such as 'statistical significance' or 'controlled experiment': these ideas are an important part of their cultural inheritance. Similarly, a pupil who leaves school having encountered ideas such as 'liberalism' and 'Marxism', and how these ideas led historians to interpret the past in different ways, is well-placed to enter into educated discussions about the nature of our knowledge and how it is developing over time. In this sense there is much to be said for incorporating the history of the academic disciplines into the school curriculum, for it is knowledge of this that will help an educated public situate claims

to knowledge in the present in the context of that which has gone before. In these ways both substantive knowledge (i.e. knowledge of reality) and disciplinary knowledge (knowledge of how disciplines create substantive knowledge) are important to an educated public: the mistake in the past has been to assume that substantive knowledge is unimportant, and that disciplinary knowledge is a matter of learning the 'skills' of the scientist or the historian.

It is, I would suggest, a fear of tradition that drives the thrust of Hirsch's critics. The argument is that knowledge is value-laden and dangerous and that any attempt to teach knowledge to pupils is indoctrination. What Hirsch and other traditionalists show us is that the contrary is the case: it is by immersing ourselves in prior traditions – of which the academic disciplines represent the best means available to use for studying the natural and social world we share – that we are able to enter into meaningful conversations about those traditions and how they might be extended in the future. Education in the academic disciplines is liberating in that it sets us free, but it does so not by getting us to stand empty-headed on an Archimedean point from which we might challenge dominant narratives, but rather by climbing inside the traditions of the past, and thus entering into the great conversations of mankind. A secondary school curriculum that does not focus on academic knowledge does not prepare children for these conversations and this is why, contrary to the progressive line of argument, it is traditionalism that can claim the moral high ground in preparing children for citizenship in a democratic society.

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8. ‘So who says that a 12 year-old should learn that?’ Confused Issues of Knowledge and Authority in Curriculum Thinking

Tim Oates

Many things have been written of E. D. Hirsch and his work on core knowledge. Much of it is wrong, and greatly misinterprets the origins and aims of the work on core knowledge. The commentary and reaction to his work is a textbook example of political appropriation, where various opposing factions – in education and in politics, inside and outwith the US – have claimed ownership, affiliation or non-alignment with the work, with the principal aim of furthering their own orthodoxies and positioning. The record needs to be put straight, or the vital messages at the heart of Hirsch’s mission and analysis can all too easily be lost.

In understanding the confusion around Hirsch’s work, it is important to examine the issue of political ‘leaning’ and the origins of the core knowledge ‘project’. When a Conservative Secretary of State in England – Michael Gove – cites Gramsci as part of the philosophical basis for a more equitable education system, thus allocating the founding principles of Left-wing educational struggle a key role in seemingly Right-wing policy, you know that something interesting is happening in respect of humanist thinking – a shifting of the tectonic plates of social and political assumptions. Likewise Hirsch, whose deep concern for equity derived from personal experience of teaching young people where neither

their schooling, nor their background familial and social learning, had equipped them with concepts and knowledge enabling them to understand or interpret elementary references and allusions in literature. The practical and moral purpose which derived from these serious deficiencies cut across existing demarcations, stalemates and vacuous stand-offs in educational policy. It challenged authority – and thus he has attracted the attention of both ends of the political spectrum, with all of the attendant difficulties of mis-appropriation. In a lull in trench warfare, sticking your head above the parapet gets the gunfire going again – and E. D. Hirsch has been brave enough to do more than just raise his head above safe ground.

The issue of authority is intimately bound with the concept of 'core curriculum'. Hirsch's moral and professional impetus – that some young people will not 'naturally' gain certain key element of subjects – suggests that it is vital to ensure that the curriculum includes these elements, and that they are acquired by all; otherwise, society will be trammelled with inequality, with consequent negative impact for individuals, society and economy. But this does imply a decision that the individual themselves does not make – if a child has not already learned x, then it should be someone's or some institution's decision that they should acquire it. 'Who says?' therefore becomes more than a childhood expostulation of identity – it becomes a material concern regarding the credentials of the person or institution asserting that something is essential. Social consensus about knowledge and skill immediately enters the picture. Who should learn what, when, and how, is deeply contested. Dan Willingham states it nicely: '…for almost all children, walking and talking is natural. Reading is not…' (Willingham 2012). And by implication, understanding and applying Ohm's Law, mastering all four functions in maths, and understanding the concept of 'unconscious motivation' – certainly also are not natural to the learning of human beings. And in respect

of something as essential as reading, while there is extremely broad social consensus that reading is a fundamental of education, the breadth of that capacity, the methods by which it is best acquired are highly contested. With any discussion of statements of curriculum standards – curriculum standards, objectives – the issue of authority is either covert or overtly present.

I should make my own position clear. I believe a core curriculum – a statement of key content – is both vital and possible, and is an essential of education. A core of this kind is essential for equity, it is the means by which the intelligibility and validity of assessment is established, and it both empowers young people and connects them with their human heritage of accumulated knowledge. It can be framed at different levels – the school, the district, the nation – and it will inevitably be a mix of the definitive, the provisional, and the arbitrary (distinctions which I will address in a moment). It should be based on the best possible research regarding content, the way that content is described, and on the way that content is ordered (Bill Schmidt's idea of sequencing). It can and should be informed by international comparisons – which should form part of the evidence for effective sequencing. But in all of this, the idea of authority is ever-present.

There are two ways in which I would like to explore this issue of authority. The first is associated with the nature of knowledge. The second is associated with the specific conditions regarding authority which obtain in a specific society or jurisdiction at a specific time. Much of the criticism of E. D. Hirsch contains deliberate or implicit categorical error – the mixing of issues regarding the nature of knowledge and the form of authority in a specific setting. And much of the progress of curriculum development is hampered by such confusions.

Actually, the first clarification needs to be around the definition of 'curriculum'. In England, we use the term 'national curriculum'. I believe that this is a serious misnomer. Many other jurisdictions

use the term 'core standards' or 'curriculum standards' – this is a much more satisfactory and effective definition. In England, the term 'curriculum' in 'National Curriculum' is technically incorrect– and this is no trivial matter. Used correctly, the term 'curriculum' actually refers to the totality of the experience of learning. It encompasses aims, content, methods, assessment, evaluation, and curriculum theory explains the distinctions between intended curriculum, enacted curriculum and actual learning outcomes. It encompasses 'taught curriculum' and 'untaught curriculum' as elements of the experience of schooling. This is not an over-elaborated view of curriculum. Understanding these elements and the interaction between them is a vital part of understanding the performance of schools and of national arrangements. The National Curriculum obviously states content – the things which should be taught – and it does determine to a degree, and in certain areas, the pedagogical approach. For example, requiring experimentation in science and development of phonological awareness in English does carry strong implications for pedagogy.

But the National Curriculum is not a curriculum. It is a framework of standards – of desired outcomes. Other countries use a far more accurate term, describing frameworks of outcomes as 'standards'. The moment this term is used, and the current arrangements for national assessment at KS1 and KS2 added to the 'national standards', it can be seen that the National Curriculum is far more assessment-oriented than curriculum-oriented. It is a framework of standards and assessment which determines aspects of curriculum. It is not a curriculum, it is certainly not the 'School Curriculum' – a distinction which I made essential to the review of the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2011). This is important, since it defines the scale and nature of the different responsibilities of schools and the State respectively. The State can use domestic and international evidence to create a parsimonious listing of desirable standards. It is for schools to develop a curriculum which

allows this to be become meaningful, accessible and motivating for each young person. It is for the school to determine in which contexts and by what means a child should develop and effective understanding of 'electrical resistance', 'metaphor', 'tectonic plate', 'justice'.

The precise nature of the term 'curriculum' has been unclear in discussion of 'core' and 'national' curricula, but the precise nature of the term 'knowledge' has suffered from far greater ambiguity and disagreement. For both E. D. Hirsch and the review of the National Curriculum, the accusation that the specification is 'knowledge-based' (and thus defective) was wielded as if it were a fatal hammer-blow. But the impact of this criticism is actually that of a child's inflatable toy tool – an ineffective squeak of a hollow body, far from a final knock-down. Modern epistemological theory and research on the role of knowledge in effective action sees knowledge as rich and expansive, and a vital constituent of observation and action. For a consultant surgeon, recognising the margins of mutated tissue and effectively and safely excising it, knowledge is an essential component of performance. For the mechanic diagnosing the fault in a fuel injection system, knowledge is vital. For the strategist recommending intervention in conflict, knowledge is critical. In contemporary theory, the skill-knowledge opposition is seen as spurious. Knowledge is a vital element of human action, as well as in human thought. It determines how we see others and the natural world, and how we interact with them and it. And a pause for only a moment finds core standards specifications full of things which are linked to action and not just thought – skills such as reading, writing, observation, recording, experimentation, amongst others. Highly incisive and well-designed longitudinal studies such as the National Child Development Survey (NCDS, 1958) show that differences between people in respect of knowledge acquisition are highly predictive of life outcomes. The labour market shows premiums attached to knowledge. Michael Young's

work on 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2008) highlights the importance of equitable access to bodies of knowledge which otherwise are unevenly distributed in society, thus closing down life opportunity and benefit to specific individuals and groups.

In the face of this analysis, the proposition that knowledge plays *too prominent* a role in the work of the Curriculum Foundation and indeed in the revised National Curriculum for England looks ill-founded. But there are three allied propositions which need seriously to be questioned also, all of which masquerade as challenges to a principal focus on knowledge. The first is the strong commitment of some educationalists to 'discovery learning'. It adds apparent credence to the notion that knowledge should be seen as created, individual and idiosyncratic rather than as codified discipline knowledge which should be acquired. At the heart of this commitment lies a profound and damaging confusion between theory of mind and theories of learning – a confusion which John Hattie, Tristian Stobie and I have begun to see as widely present and very damaging. The idea of 'the construct' is vital in epistemology and ontology. It is vital in contemporary philosophy of science. The idea of a metaphor or a molecule in my mind is not a metaphor or a molecule. It is a representation; a construct. And it may be accurate or inaccurate, partially, grossly or hardly 'true' – depending on its fidelity to the external thing in question. At one level, an over-commitment to 'discovery learning' simply is inefficient. It took many decades of camping on glaciers in Chamonix for Saussure to overturn previous theory and assert that glaciers are plastic and dynamic. I can now explain this vividly and effectively to my young child in a few minutes; I do not need to send him to Chamonix for two decades to camp on the glacier and work it out for himself. Of course, work on 'situated cognition' tells us that undertaking engaging practical activities including experimentation can be essential to understanding complex concepts such as

conservation of mass, and that well-chosen and well-constructed activities are both a vivid illustration of concepts (aiding retention in memory) and an opportunity for teachers to understand children's misconceptions. But some forms of commitment to 'discovery learning' go far beyond this, to deny the importance of discipline knowledge in children's formation and foundational learning, and thus to undermine the authority of teachers and schooling in ensuring the acquisition of 'core knowledge'. Again, the idea of authority is central in the problem.

The second troublesome proposition is associated with pressures on schooling from the economy. 'Schools are not preparing children for work…' can be read in press stories around the world, not least in the UK. Preparation for participation in society and the economy is a purpose fundamental to education. However, the inclusion of narrowly work-focussed skills-based elements in the school curriculum is a highly reductivist interpretation of this purpose. The kind of programme elements being promoted – including vocational qualifications and options inserted relatively early into secondary education – previously have been allocated to high-quality post-compulsory vocational routes. I would argue that this is where they rightly belong. That those reaching the end of compulsory schooling should be immediately 'work ready' runs counter to the history and effectiveness of high quality vocational preparation. The debate seems more about the failure of employers to support and develop these routes – thus placing illegitimate pressure on general schooling – than the balance of a core curriculum which allocates discipline knowledge a central role.

The third troublesome proposition is the view that in subjects such as history and science, the role of early schooling is to give children experience of doing 'real history' and 'real science' – that school should 'make little scientists and little historians' from an early age. As with the 'work-readiness' argument, this fuels erosion of the importance of discipline knowledge. Like 'work readiness', it

attempts to add specific curriculum elements which are inconsistent with both developmental theory and transnational empirical work, such as Bill Schmidt's, on appropriate age-related sequencing of content. It attempts to force 'premature maturity' on children, rather than carefully support their construction of sense and meaning, and the remediation of misleading and unhelpful misconceptions. My own work illustrates that professional science has features which are entirely at odds with the naïve characterisation and reductivist ideas which lie behind the 'access to real science' arguments deployed for a shift in the focus of primary and secondary education away from foundational education in science – with its focus on carefully-sequenced development of key concepts, core knowledge and fundamental operations. This position does not deny the importance of demonstration and practical work, but continues to assert the central role of knowledge and conceptual development.

And so, we come to a final discussion of the idea of authority. Of the many issues around this idea, I wish simply to remove one confusion regarding the criticisms laid against curriculum-analysts such as E. D. Hirsch who place knowledge in a central role. The confusion I wish to address can be outlined thus: *many of those who argue against the central position of knowledge are actually objecting to the authority relations implied by the construction of a core curriculum. In simple terms, they don't like the consolidation of power represented by a core curriculum*. This is where a category error really bites – the rejection of 'knowledge based curricula' seems principled and final, but actually it's an entirely different argument, one which might be more accurately framed as 'I just don't like what you have included and it cuts across what I see as the boundaries of your authority'. But a good map of physics is a good map of physics…

Of course there are likes and dislikes in human experience, areas of choice in which there is preference and not conceptions and propositions which must bear close relation to the nature of the external world. I may like Shakespeare's metaphors more or less

than a modern musician's, but even in this the concept of what constitutes a 'metaphor 'is specific and bound. It is in this sense that a child's understanding can be right or wrong, and misconceptions identified and corrected by teachers. The authority of teaching and learning thus lies in what should be taught and in correcting misconceptions which impede learning. Authority is essential to this, a fact which many educators find difficult. Gabriel Heller Sahlgren, in his incisive re-analysis of aspects of Finland's educational transformation (Heller Sahlgren, 2015) cited Hannah Arendt's neglected and brilliant observation: '…the problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition…' (Arendt, 1954).

The political dimensions in this can be seen in the rejection by the US Senate of the federal Common Core Standards, immediately following the shift of party dominance. Caught on the traditional ambiguity of State-Federal authority, the decision seems historically distinctly odd, and ignores the vital role of social consensus regarding the fundamentals of a school curriculum, consensus which played a key part in the US domestic success of educational reform in Massachusetts, and – following Gabriel Heller Sahlgren's and my own analysis of the successful phase of Finnish educational reform – in Finland (Heller Sahlgren and Oates, 2015). This federal- state dispute over authority has also played a role in the stalling of the implementation of the Australian National Curriculum. By my analysis, I want to assert that discussion of authority is vital, that social consensus about content of educational is paramount, and that nervousness about overt discussion of authority has led to confused and misleading discussion of the important of codified and coherent statements of core curriculum – principally, misplaced and misleading discussions of the role and importance of knowledge. The sheer difficulty of directly confront-

ing issues of authority and control has led to clouding, and not clarification of what is needed, and of the sound thinking regarding personal and social empowerment which lies behind the idea of 'core standards' and 'core knowledge'. By clearing the ground, I would like a more vibrant, evidence-bound discussion of 'what should be in, and what should be out' of such standards – and the territory for the discussion should be determined by focused discussion of what constitutes foundational knowledge for developing young people. In particular, evidence of which later things are enabled by what earlier learning should play a central role. Only then will certain life chances be open to groups currently denied them. Clearly, principled triage of the sum of human knowledge is essential to avoid curriculum overload, but principled argument needs to replace the obfuscation and disingenuous argument which has attempted to discredit the fundamental role of carefully codified 'powerful knowledge'.

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9. The Next Curriculum Reform: A Liberal Democrat View

Matthew Sanders

Few education questions reveal personal prejudices and passions more than the debate over what we teach our children in schools.

There is good reason for this. Views on curriculum content and teaching practice are both informed by and reflect upon our own educational background and personal choices. The debate often touches on acute cultural and historical sensitivities. For politicians and political parties, this makes curriculum and learning policy an irresistible way to say something about your values and political identity and to reach voters who share the same cultural instincts. A conservative emphasis on traditional learning is much more than an education policy – it sends a signal about cultural continuity and faith in the historic way of doing things. At the other end of the spectrum, progressive politicians will use curriculum policy to demonstrate they are modern, forward thinking and tackling the big challenges of the future.

These instincts all too often lead to clumsy policy making – removing calculators from the Maths curriculum or letting English students analyse Russell Brand's tweets – that is far more political signpost than serious policy intervention. Meanwhile, commentators and educational experts produce strongly held and well evidenced views as to why their favoured subject or method is better and more of a priority than all the others. Adding a subject to the curriculum has become the first policy ask of hundreds of campaigns and lobby groups – each producing convincing arguments to support their case. In truth, though, if you want your subject added to the national curriculum, the most important thing is catching the ear of the right politician rather than making

the best case. The result of this is constant change and disruption, usually for the wrong reasons. And, in the middle, most moderate people would instinctively believe that both facts and skills are important, and that traditional methods will work for some children but not for others.

The overriding purpose of the education system should be to ensure every child achieves regardless of social-economic background – closing social barriers rather than entrenching them. Some will argue that children from poorer backgrounds have a weaker foundation of facts from which to draw to support the rest of their learning. This is, of course, true – but it is also true that poor children remain less likely to develop some of the basic skills they need to succeed in education and the work place (in speaking and listening, for example, a controversial omission from an early draft of the latest national curriculum). When poor children remain behind on every measure and in every subject, the debate about, for example, what historical figures they study, as opposed to whether or not they should study History, is completely irrelevant. Instead, an education system should have the flexibility to adapt to each individual child, and the methods that will be most effective for them. The way to deliver this is through increased autonomy for schools and teachers (paired, of course, with strong accountability). In this context, the most interesting question is not what children should learn, but *who should decide* what they learn.

The most recent reforms to curriculum and qualifications, changed by the Coalition government and continued by the new Conservative government, were controversial for their scale, content and speed. In many ways, this suited the political and policy objectives of both coalition parties. The Conservatives understood that, for the public, traditional learning and high standards are two sides of the same coin. Their supporters instinctively believe that tradition equals rigour. The Liberal Democrats, meanwhile, were elected on a manifesto that called for the abolition of

the National Curriculum, and its replacement with a Minimum Curriculum Entitlement. A dramatic slimming down of the national curriculum, down to a core body of knowledge that every child should learn (with far less prescription over teaching method), was the party's aim.

But beyond this headline pitch, and looking at the actual programmes of study, the philosophical differences between the two parents of the new curriculum is more apparent. The new curriculum is distinctively Conservative in its more traditional elements. In return, Liberal Democrats secured the inclusion of skills such as speaking and listening, positive references to the importance of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) as well as totemic themes for the centre-left: diversity; Europe and human rights. Furthermore, as is little understood, the rules of collective responsibility mean that a new curriculum must currently be signed off by the entire Cabinet. This meant that, when the new curriculum was circulated for approval, different Cabinet Ministers were entitled (and eager) to ensure that their particular policy interests (reflecting both their departmental briefs and also personal views) were included. Often, such discussions were both oddly specific and made public, such as the discussions as to whether or not Mary Seacole, the Jamaican born nurse who sometimes divides commentators, would be included (Muir, 2015).

Of course, the new National Curriculum also benefitted from the oversight and input of a large number of educationalists, leading subject experts, and government civil servants – it would be wrong to suggest it is predominantly the product of political manoeuvre. But the role politicians have in initiating a curriculum review, and then signing it off at the end of the process, has two problems.

First, it encourages revolution rather than evolution. No Secretary of State of any party is going to instigate a whole review only to make minimal changes (or indeed, conclude that everything is fine). Every complete overhaul of the national curriculum then

places a burden on schools that distracts them away from improving teaching and learning. It also leads to a curriculum that is rigid and inflexible, requiring government intervention and extensive consultation to simply amend a few words. The curriculum must be a live document rather than a tablet of stone – able to respond in a subtle way to a fast changing world, adding or deleting bullets as they become outdated or new topics or technologies emerge. For example, the recent addition of Computing as a mandatory subject was an important step, but the programme of study will almost certainly become out of date quite quickly.

Second, the current system leads to political horse trading. A curriculum should be politically balanced; exposing children to a range of views and interpretations of facts, and giving them the opportunity to scrutinise, challenge and debate. A coalition government can result in some sort of balance – at least amongst the parties in the coalition – but more typically, a curriculum reform is likely to happen under a majority government of one colour or another. The capacity for an individual Secretary of State to barter over the inclusion of their pet topic, potentially holding up some other element of government business until the curriculum amendments they want to see are made, is inappropriate. And as I can personally testify, political advisers and politicians – who often won't have studied these subjects since their own GCSEs ten years ago – are an inadequate check and balance to debate the nuances of some curriculum topics.

This is emphatically not, however, an appeal to "get the politics out of education", as if politics is a dirty word whatever the context. Education will always be political and party political: it absorbs a huge amount of public money; touches on deeply held and divisive instincts; and is ultimately critical to the future of the UK. Education practitioners, who bemoan schools being used as a "party political football", need to accept that the public have a stake in their sector, rightly exercised through democratically elected politicians.

If education must always be political, it remains legitimate to consider where party politics is helpful and warranted, and where it is in fact harmful and unjustified. Elected politicians must decide what proportion of the budget to allocate to schools; and how that should be distributed. They must ensure there are enough school places and qualified teachers for every child to have a high quality education, and should set the overall policy framework on curriculum, qualifications and school accountability. It is therefore a political decision what subjects children must study (in a clutch of Birmingham schools last year we saw the public backlash that can occur when schools simply drop a batch of subjects their governing bodies disapprove of). But political influence over specific Programmes of Study should be removed. Just as the Health Secretary may set mental health as a strategic priority for the NHS but would never prescribe treatments, or the Defence Secretary might decide how many submarines to order but wouldn't dictate the best way to design or drive them, government regulation should set out headline subjects – English, mathematics, science, computing and more. Beyond this, the role of politicians in the curriculum should end. This would be consistent with the current situation for Academies and Free Schools, who do not have to follow the National Curriculum but, through their funding agreements, are required to teach English, mathematics, science and Religious Education as part of a "broad and balanced curriculum" (in contrast with maintained schools, academies have no prescription over what should be taught under these subject headings).

If this generation of politicians and political advisers should be the last to sign off a national curriculum: how should the next reform be conducted? Removing political direction from the Programmes of Study doesn't have to mean the creation of a new and unaccountable government quango. A new Royal College of Teaching, still in its infancy, would in time be the ideal body to oversee curriculum development – with formal duties set out in

legislation. A permanent Curriculum Panel could lead the overall process, with individual Subject Panels beneath it to monitor and review the detailed content. This approach would need political buy in – all parties would need to be realistic and accommodating of each other's concerns. On all sides, there would be a reluctance to give up control – and a fear that Curriculum and Subject Panels could become dominated by a particular strand of thinking. There would need to be reassurance that a profession-led approach would not mean sacrificing rigour. Teachers and unions would need to know that the explicit intention would be to reduce and manage levels of constant change; and the immediate priority would be to further slim down the mandatory curriculum. This could be addressed by setting out a framework in legislation, with specific prescribed subjects, limits to the extent of change (it would certainly be necessary, for example, to prevent in-year amendments) and a high level of prescription over the composition of the Panels. Given the importance of political balance, it would be sensible for each political party to make a nomination to the Curriculum Panel. The teaching profession; higher education institutions and public and private employers should also be represented. On Subject Panels, there should be a duty to draw membership widely and from across each discipline. Consultation with the public should remain mandatory. Finally, establishing this new process would be an opportunity to address the ongoing anomaly between the treatment of maintained schools and academies. Ironically, those politicians who defend their right to oversee the curriculum are also those who have given away that power over academies. The ambition of the current government to increase academy numbers is inconsistent with appeals for continued political control. It is not at all clear why democratic accountability is important for the detailed Programmes of Study in a maintained school, but can be set by staff and experts in an academy. All schools should have a simple, succinct, up-to-date

minimum curriculum entitlement, and then a huge amount of freedom beneath that.

This unprecedented freedom, combined with a shorter mandatory curriculum for all schools, would also create a wider market for Programmes of Study, with many schools looking for credible programmes that they could adapt to their own pupils. These products could, in turn, be accredited by the Royal College of Teaching to ensure high standards.

The tangled web of political prejudice, expert debate and practical curriculum delivery would take some time to unpick. But the rewards would be significant. We would still debate the best things to learn, and the best ways to teach – of course. But these debates could become less destabilising or subject to political fashion. A shorter, more succinct curriculum could become a live document, with genuine collaboration between educators and academics and unprecedented freedom for all schools to adapt to the individual children they teach.

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The influence of E. D. Hirsch on educational thinking has been profound, and most of the curriculum changes in recent years can be attributed to his work.

At its heart is the idea that returning to a traditional, academic curriculum built on shared knowledge is the best way to achieve social justice in society. His work has also encouraged schools to focus on the concept of building cultural capital as a way to close the attainment gap.

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