This term we have a focus on education around the world. Dr Sakena Yacoobi, founder of Afghan Institute of Learning, and our opening speaker at Real 2016, shares her insights on the challenges of educating young people in Afghanistan.

Professor Graham Donaldson, examines the key features of ‘what makes a good school system’ and Jonathan Simons, Head of Education at Policy Exchange, provides his guidance on the move to universal academisation of schools in England.

Sometimes controversial, but hopefully always thought-provoking, we hope you enjoy the topics discussed at Real 2016 and in the magazine. We’d love to have your feedback, please do get in touch at rmrealmagazine@rm.com

We’d also be grateful for any topical stories you would like to share with us.

The views expressed in this magazine are those of the authors of each article, and do not necessarily reflect the views of RM Education.

We hope you enjoy.

Becca
Real Magazine
Editor
In many walks of life, there’s a tendency to look for a single solution to current problems and issues. That’s also true in education; for example, not too long ago, interactive whiteboards were seen as the ‘magic bullet’ to transform teaching and learning; it’s fair to say that for most schools that hasn’t been the case. Indeed, the reality probably is that no single panacea has ever existed, or ever will.

Instead of a single solution, maybe we can learn from the success of Sir Dave Brailsford’s GB cycling team. A focus was given to improving ever so slightly every aspect of the team’s performance; a process known as ‘The Aggregation of Marginal Gains.’ As Brailsford says, “The whole principle came from the idea that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike, and then improved it by 1%, you will get a significant increase when you put them all together.”

This principle can be applied across a trust, a school or even at faculty or department level. Let’s take, as an example, an English department that is looking to lead the school in building a culture of high expectations, enjoyment and achievement in literacy. ICT can play a part here. Using free or very low-cost tools, teachers can improve the quality of learning experiences in small steps, that collectively add up to create significant improvement. We’ll take a brief look at just a few of these highly effective tools.

An important consideration in choosing these is that they are easy to implement, have very shallow learning curves, and are free or inexpensive.

In our example, the English department can play its part in developing a culture of literacy achievement by becoming a centre for students’ writing through the use of blogging and publishing tools. Using free services such as Issuu, students’ writing can be created quickly as digital magazines hosted online on the department or school blog. Students’ writing can also be transformed into high-quality printed books by using a free service such as Lulu.

Students’ expectations and sense of production values have risen considerably. The days when an English teacher could create a class anthology using a photocopier, cardboard covers and spiral ring binders have long past. Instead, Lulu provides a means to publish printed books with the same production quality as you would expect to find in Waterstones. By using these simple ICT services, the English department can provide an authentic purpose and audience for students’ writing. An American educator, Rushton Hurley puts it: “If students are sharing their work with the world, they want it to be good. If they’re just sharing it with you, they want it to be good enough.”

High impact visual media can engage students in discussion and creative responses. The excellent, and free, Literacy Shed provides a wealth of videos, visual literacy ideas and teaching tips. A superb service is also afforded by Watch Documentary which saves considerable teacher time by providing a curated source of free online documentaries. Careful use of these resources can also help students to achieve a better understanding of how visual media is used to inform and influence. To help create active engagement with videos, teachers can make use of services such as EDpuzzle and eduCanon. These tools allow teachers to embed questions directly into a video and provide analytics on students’ use of the visual material.

For information on how RM can help you access online teaching resources, please visit www.rm.com/what-we-do/teaching-and-learning

By Andy Hutt

Andy has many years of experience working in schools. Former roles have included English teacher, Head of ICT, Literacy Tutor for young adults with autism, and PGCE Teaching Fellow. More recently, as an independent consultant, Andy has worked with schools across the UK, Russia, Africa and the USA. Andy enjoys spending time with pupils, teachers, schools and educational providers to enable a more creative and effective use of ICT.
The Benefits of Becoming a Serverless School

As ICT becomes an increasingly integral part of education, senior leaders are increasingly concerned with how to use ICT more effectively in the classroom but with tighter and more constrained ICT budgets.

One of the most effective ways to reduce ICT costs is to change the way your budgets are used. Rather than having a large capital outlay on hardware, associated maintenance and support costs, you could become a ‘serverless school’ where services and systems are delivered to staff and students through the internet.

This allows the costs to be spread through a friendlier revenue model, and means you can opt for more cost-effective internet-optimised devices for your teachers and students. This model not only makes financial planning easier but reduces the need for schools to build up a capital fund for future ICT purchases.

Accessibility is also improved, as staff and students can access systems from anywhere, on any internet-enabled device, rather than just within the school network.

Adopting this model also reduces the need for a large on-site technical team; our research has indicated that having remote support in place can be more cost-effective for schools, with an average 60% of issues resolved remotely, reducing the need for a large on-site technical team and allowing schools to concentrate on physical tasks.

These cost-effective technologies are easily managed by your senior leadership team, meaning precious budgets can be spent in a manner that provides the maximum return for your school and better supports your teaching and learning objectives.

“This model not only makes financial planning easier but reduces the need for schools to build up a capital fund for future ICT purchases.”

By Martin Pipe

Martin Pipe is Head of Service Scope & Design at RM Education. He has been with the company for nearly 20 years and specialises in managed services, IT strategy, cloud computing and SaaS. His team supports schools across the country in providing a range of fully scalable education IT support and reliable ICT services for primary and secondary schools.
One of the biggest problems facing education in the UK is a fundamental issue that you will see if you cast your eye to any other corner of the public sector - organisations being asked to do more with less. Ultimately most decisions will be made on the basis of whether or not they are financially sustainable, and this can often see schools, colleges or trusts not fulfilling the true potential of their staff and students.

So how can schools balance the academic aspirations of the faculty and attendees, with the black and white reality (or rather, black and red) of the financial ledger?

In this article we’ll seek to explore how a leading multi-academy trust is using Office 365 and Power BI to make school data meaningful, and making data-driven decisions that positively affect not only the performance of students, but the sustainable running of the trust.
“MAKING USE OF THE DATA CREATED BY A SCHOOL AND ITS STUDENTS CAN ACTUALLY BE THE KEY TO SHAPING A TAILORED EDUCATION”

DATA, DATA EVERYWHERE
Data is being created by and about individuals faster than ever before. Previously, the question was “how and where can we store this data safely?”, but now the wind has changed and the questions have progressed to ponderings of “which data sources can be combined?”, and “what can we do with the data in the future?”

The notion of ‘big data’ being used in the business and commercial sectors for market predictions, personalised advertising, trend spotting and much more, is nothing new. But how can the same approach be used within education? What are the data sources? What would the desirable outcomes be? How does this translate into an improvement in learning outcomes?

Academic institutions of all sizes need to function at a sustainable level, and the need to remain economically viable can impose limitations on the ultimate objective of improving learning outcomes and student prospects.

Clearly the quality of the teaching and the underlying pedagogical approach are integral to this. There will however eventually come a point where the school infrastructure becomes a limiting factor in student development and the overall progress of an institution or trust.

Making use of the data created by a school and its students can actually be the key to shaping a tailored education. Making that data accessible and understandable to those involved with the academic planning and delivery is key to maximising the impact of adopting a ‘commercial entrepreneur model’ when it comes to education.

Of the dozen schools, 11 of them were running at a deficit, and 11 were classed as ‘Special Measures’ or ‘Requires Improvement’.

By the end of the 12 month period, the Bright Tribe Trust had undergone a significant transformation. Across the trust, turnover went from zero to £100m in that 12 month period, but more tellingly, the £3.2m collective operating deficit of the schools inherited by the trust was eradicated.

MATs are not allowed to run any school at a deficit without express permission, but are also judged on the student outcomes, so schools need to be able to afford the delivery cost of their education objectives in a sustainable fashion. However, one of the biggest skills gaps in the MAT market - if not the biggest of all - is the ability to manage this challenge from the business side of things, all the while balancing the academic needs of the students.

THE BUSINESS OF RUNNING A MULTI ACADEMY TRUST
Joining Microsoft at RM Real this year are Mike Dwan, Founding Sponsor of Bright Tribe and Adventure Learning Academy Trusts, and Matthew Woodruff, Development Director from The Knowledge Network. Through the use of Office 365 and Power BI data analytics, the business teams and the teaching and learning teams at the schools comprising the Bright Tribe and ALAT Trusts are able to combine their knowledge and data, empowering them to make data-driven decisions that are significantly improving not just the standards of education delivered across the trust, but also the financial performance of the institutions.

From a standing start, the Bright Tribe group grew from zero schools to 12, and opened two UTCs in the space of a single year. When work began, there were severe financial and academic problems afflicting the institutions comprising the trust.

Coupled with this transition from a position of economic loss to one of financial prosperity and sustainability, was a comparable improvement in academic standards. Six of the schools are now classed as ‘Outstanding’ or ‘Good’, with the remainder all rated as ‘Requires Improvement’ or are on course to achieve Good by September 2016.
DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

With the vast quantities and types of data that schools are generating, the key lies in deriving meaning from this data. To look at this in greater detail, we can focus on the use of Power BI to drive more informed decision making at one particular institution within the Bright Tribe group.

In an article that recently featured in #TheFeed - a monthly magazine from Microsoft Education UK that provides a platform for teachers and school leaders to tell their stories - Matthew Woodruff shared his experiences on using Power BI to solve many of these issues at Whitehaven Academy.

Last year the school ran successful pilots focusing on ‘technology supported’ teaching and learning, working with the Bright Tribe to define their own view of the information requirements to help drive school improvement and student success.

The Trust’s existing data platform extracts data from the MIS and other sources, both in the school and hosted elsewhere. An education data model is applied which turns the data into meaningful information which is then played back to all stakeholders – whether SLT or Trust, class teachers, students or parents - through Office 365 or other apps specific to their requirements. And at the heart of getting the right information, to the right person, at the right time, to make better informed decisions is Power BI.

One of the challenges for Matthew and the team at Bright Tribe to overcome was the sheer scope of data involved with the running of a Multi Academy Trust. As well as collecting data automatically from the School MIS, they’d need to include financial and ‘softer’ records from various different systems and Excel sheets.

In addition to this, the Trust caters for students aged 4-19, so there is a large bracket of data to consider when looking at the progress of a student during their time there. Then of course there are the different levels of qualification and interpretation of MIS data at different schools within the Trust.

For Matthew and the team at Whitehaven, Power BI represents a significant step forward, putting the power firmly back in the hands of the data analyst rather than the BI developer, allowing the end user to explore the data and find the information they need.

In early 2016 they completed the first Academy and Trust ‘data drop’ for this academic year, and by sharing the results through Power BI reports they were instantly able to discuss and activity planning, in a way that simply would not have been possible without Power BI.

“Power BI affords us a solid understanding of past and present performance and how we can most effectively target our limited resources towards interventions that we know are successful in improving outcomes. We are moving forward from this foundation now to address both the predictive and prescriptive analytics space to help us better address the right information to the right person at the right time to make better informed decisions.”

With Office 365 and Power BI, these students are automatically identified and the Heads of Year can add them to their intervention groups. This also helps to turn the lens onto the teaching and lesson quality itself, getting to the root cause of absenteeism and adjusting the pedagogical approach accordingly.

WHAT NEXT?

While Matthew and his team have made good progress understanding how to harness the data that already exists, they recognise that they are only part way through their journey towards embedding data driven approaches in the DNA of the Academy and Trust.

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Looking ahead further, Learning Analytics is an area of great interest, and the personalised learning pathways built on Office 365, can lead to greater understanding of the value of particular curriculum pathways and even particular resources.

As newer technology gradually finds its way into education, new sources and types of data will be available, as Matthew adds, “We look forward to every opportunity to leverage emerging technology to support the Academy and Trust aims. Today, we are pursuing applications in education of Cortana Analytics and wearables, and we’re hugely excited by the possibilities with Augmented Reality in the near future. All of which help us to meet our aim for all our students to Learn, Grow and Prosper.”

And that is what data-driven decisions are all about – learning, growing and prospering. Why shouldn’t the students be the only ones challenged to increase their knowledge, understanding and skills?

To find out more visit: rm.com/realmicrosoft
Rethinking school’s ICT needs

Developing an ICT strategy which empowers teachers and learners, creates tangible improvements and fuels innovation both in and out of the classroom needn’t cost the earth, but it does need to start with a clear plan of what you actually want to achieve. By Martin Pipe

Think about the particular challenges in your school or group of schools. What have school inspectors recommended you work on? What kind of apps, devices and tools do your teachers like to use? Your ICT strategy should fully support your teachers’ pedagogy and become an intrinsic part of your Strategic Development Plan or School Improvement Plan, rather than standing alone as a separate objective.

Once you have a clear plan in place, it becomes much easier to determine exactly where your technology needs to be in terms of supporting teaching and learning. The key driver here is for your pedagogy to dictate the technologies you use, rather than the other way around.

We frequently encounter schools whose ICT investment plans are driven by the latest technology trends, where ICT investment hasn’t been steered according to how the technology could and would support their pedagogy. Conversely, some schools have always had an ICT suite of 30 computers and as they get older and begin to slow down, the school simply goes out and buys the same again because that’s what they’ve always done.

But what if you don’t even need these computers? What if your pupils are only really using them to write a few documents or do some brief research on the internet? In that case, you would probably be better with something like a Chromebook, which is half the cost of a PC so you’re immediately reducing your spend as well as using a more collaborative tool which will help give your students future career skills.
What does the commitment to universal academisation mean for schools?

By Jonathan Simons

Jonathan is the Head of the Education Unit at Policy Exchange, where he directs research on all aspects of education including Early Years, schools, skills and HE. Previously Jonathan worked at Serco Group, where he was Director of Strategy in HE. Previously Jonathan worked at Serco including Early Years, schools, skills and HE. Previously Jonathan worked at Serco Group, where he was Director of Strategy in HE. Previously Jonathan worked at Policy Exchange, where he was Head of Open Public Services in the Cabinet Office, and Head of Education in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit in the administrations of both Gordon Brown and David Cameron.

Unless you’ve been hiding under a rock, you’ll have seen that in the Budget and subsequent Schools White Paper it was announced that every school must become an academy or in the process of becoming one by 2020. This has, unsurprisingly, generated a lot of discussion, with (also unsurprisingly) a lot more heat than light, on both sides.

I think that there are good, in principle arguments for this move to an entirely academised system, that go beyond whether academies perform better than maintained schools (spurred, given that, as others have pointed out, academies weren’t set up randomly, it isn’t possible to show conclusively one way or the other, especially for converters).

In short, these are:

• Academies and academy trusts offer the best starting position for where capacity exists in the system now in order to address the challenges that schools face – financial efficiency, recruiting and retaining teachers, developing heads and the like.

• As a point of principle there is a conflict between local government representing the interests of all of its parents and children, and representing the interests of (some of) the providers of services to those same individuals via holding a formal position over the governance (and sometimes employment of staff and ownership of assets) of some schools.

The polling data provided for Real shows that just under half of all maintained schools are either in a school partnership, actively exploring one, or think they need to turn their attention to it soon. Unless you’ve been hiding under a rock, you’ll have seen that in the Budget and subsequent Schools White Paper it was announced that every school must become an academy or in the process of becoming one by 2020. This has, unsurprisingly, generated a lot of discussion, with (also unsurprisingly) a lot more heat than light, on both sides.

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Five Steps to Better Internet Safety in Your School

Check you’re up to date

The most common issue schools approach us with is an out of date internet safety policy. It’s vital to update your school’s policy regularly to ensure it outlines clear protocols for dealing with issues across the latest websites or apps, such as Instagram or Snapchat.

Take a collaborative approach

Involve your whole school community in your policy; students can share information on the sites and apps they use, whilst your safeguarding governor should ensure teachers, parents and students are up to date with protocols.

Filter and monitor content

Use filtering and monitoring tools to filter age-appropriate content and track keywords which may highlight a cause for concern such as students seeking information on suicide—self-harming or extremist content.

Create escalation routes

The increase in the sharing of inappropriate images highlights the necessity for schools to have a clear escalation route outlined within their policy. This route should offer students and staff a clear course of action for these situations.

Set up a committee

Create an online safety committee that includes partners from every aspect of your school, and give them the opportunity to talk through any issues and consequences around online behaviours.
Making the most of cloud technologies

Recently we’ve had a lot of interest from multi- academy trusts about how to make the most of the cloud technologies available. Guest blogger Andy Hutt, Educational Specialist from Learning Potential, looks into ‘what is The Cloud?’ and explores some of the options available.

Andy Hutt
Guest Blogger Educational Specialist from Learning Potential

There are many different definitions of ‘The Cloud’, some of which are quite complex. For what it’s worth, I’ll add my own simpler and, I hope, incomplete version here—with an educational slant: Cloud computing is when schools use remote internet-hosted servers, rather than locally hosted servers, as the backbone of their ICT provision.

Cloud services are therefore applications and services that are held outside a school and that can be accessed over the Internet. Any internet-enabled device can access these services through a web browser or an app—files are not stored locally.

In using the cloud, teachers, pupils and administrators use services and applications for planning, resourcing, assessment, teaching, learning, communication and record keeping, as well as for secure financial and data management. Internet-based hosting helps to reduce costs, simplify access and improve communication and collaboration for all school users.

There are two aspects to this definition: (i) the means to achieve Cloud computing and (ii) the uses to which it is put. In considering the first aspect, there is no shortage of Cloud computing solutions. Perhaps the biggest names in education are those of Microsoft and Google, with Apple rapidly improving its Cloud services for schools.

Listing these companies separately suggests that academies are in an ‘either/or’ situation and would have to choose just one of these behemoths of technology for their cloud provision. That’s perfectly possible, but the truth is that schools, academies and multi-academy trusts can mix these solutions to take advantage of the benefits of each. For example, finance and administration officers in a school or trust may prefer House MS Office products, in particular HS World and HS Excel.

These still tend to be the dominant productivity technologies in the same school, or across the trust, staff and students might prefer to use Google Classroom with its amazingly simple tools for classroom management and document assignment. That same school or trust might also choose to use Google Docs and Apple’s iWork to create effective online learning materials.

The point here is that the means to achieve Cloud computing should be driven by intentions for use and not by the provider we sell. If a Cloud provider has tools, services and resources that give clear value for money and educational and/or efficiency benefits, then the provider should form part of the planning. Technical considerations such as choice of email domain (Gmail or Exchange) will be vitally important but the nature of the cloud means that accessing these resources is, at its simplest, a login.

Indeed, simplicity of access is a key technological and educational goal and a key point to raise with your ICT partner. RM Unify is one example of the way in which schools and academies can simplify access to this variety of services and applications. With RM Unify, users only need logging in once to their personal Launch Pad, and then have one-click access to any application or service which has been set up for them. As we have seen, because the cloud is internet-based, users can access their apps and data from wherever there are, wherever they want and using whichever internet-enabled device they choose.

Achieving this simple ‘anytime/anywhere’ access is a key benefit of cloud computing. It enables students (and teachers) to work together on projects in real time or over a period of time and in any location—the classroom, home, work experience, exchange—anywhere. This could even be a shared project between students in different academies within a trust, or communities of teachers within a school.

The benefits of simple location-free access extend beyond the classroom. For example, using this, teachers can create an assignment in Google Docs at home, in a staffroom or in their classroom and share these with the students in their class, online, within seconds. As Google Classroom and Google Docs will automatically append the student’s name to the teacher’s document, immediately freeing teacher name and password, classroom disruption created by forgotten login details is minimised. More generally for academy and trust managers, there can be considerable savings. Aside from reduced software maintenance and server costs, less reliance on paper can help generate greater administrative efficiency and save costs.

Against this backdrop of considerable benefit are some important considerations such as data security, e-safety, licence costs and professional development routes. Again, these are key points to raise with your ICT partner.

The cloud has already transformed our personal lives. How many of us bank, book holidays, insure cars, and use social media as an everyday activity? Increasingly, the cloud will transform the way in which students engage in their future educational and working lives. Equipping students with the confidence, capability and skills to manage their online activities securely and effectively is in itself an important step in making the most of Cloud technologies.
As I began my work with Afghan refugees in Pakistan in 1992, I found that the people there were not the same people I had left when I came to the U.S. The proud, self-sufficient people I remembered now only knew war and suffering, and didn’t have access to the schools or health services they needed.

I knew that rebuilding Afghanistan as a peaceful country would mean doing so from the community level upwards. People didn’t need an outside force telling them what to do or what to memorize to pass a test—they needed self-reliance, a sense of community inspiring them to work collaboratively, and a vision of what they wanted Afghanistan to be in the future for themselves and for their children.

This required a grassroots, community-driven, culturally-sensitive approach built on trust, high standards, and high expectations.

I started at a very basic step, by asking people what they needed. The answer: education for their children. I told them that we could start a school at the refugee camp, but it needed to be for both boys and girls, with at least 50% girls.

We also asked people to contribute what they could to the project, whether that meant a tent to hold classes in or their teaching expertise to instruct the children.

Finding teachers was challenging. Many of the teachers in Afghanistan had been communists and weren’t trusted by the community. We found a mullah, or religious leader, who people trusted, and so we trained him, his wife, and their daughters and started with them teaching 30 children. Within a year, we had 25 schools with 15,000 children.

When the Soviet War in Afghanistan ended, I started the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) to continue my work and expand it into Afghanistan. At this point, people in Afghanistan had learned about our work in the refugee camps and trusted us with their children, especially their girls. But then the Taliban invaded Afghanistan from Pakistan and closed down girls’ schools. This was a dangerous time, and again we turned to the community.

We required that everyone in the community be in agreement about their support of a home school for girls before we started one. Soon, we were supporting 80 home schools for 3,000 girls.

When the Taliban left in 2001, these students continued their education, graduated from university, and are now doctors, teachers, and engineers.

We never would have seen the success we did if we hadn’t followed the same core principles:

1. Involve the community
2. Allow communities to define their own needs
3. Listen to the community
4. Whatever you promise, deliver
5. Provide high-quality and culturally-sensitive training and programs
6. Take the time to cultivate trust, and work to maintain it

These principles have proven invaluable in our work. Over the years we have supported over 340 learning centres, and now support 44 in seven provinces of Afghanistan.

Each one is community-driven and supported.

All have become Women’s Networking Centres—places for women and children to come to learn to read and write, to develop skills, and to access information about peace, health, human rights, gender equality and violence against women.

It has taken time, but Afghan women, men and children are rebuilding their communities around our centres.

These are the places where people have learned to trust one another and to keep their communities safe together.

These are the models for the country we want to see, and know that Afghanistan can be—one of peace, equality and harmony.
The last fifty years have seen an increasingly intense international search for the ingredients of a successful school system. The policy environment has moved back and forth across exhortation, direction, competition, centralisation and liberalisation, settling on various different combinations and forms of each according to the impact of national traditions, favoured ideologies and political, often performance-driven, pressures.

Success has frequently proved elusive or even illusory and, unsurprisingly, no clear, universal recipe has as yet been found. How far has this search for ‘success’ created a form of improvement trap within which the criteria for judgement have become increasingly short-term and reductionist? Have we lost sight of what real success should look like?

By Graham HC Donaldson
The starting point of a ‘good school system’ must be a shared mission to achieve worthwhile goals for all young people. Those goals should build on our accumulated wisdom, reflected in Arnold’s ‘best which has been thought and said’, but should also articulate the characteristics of an educated young person moving confidently from school to the next stages in life. The accumulation of evidence of absorbed learning is important but not nearly enough; curiosity and a desire to continue to learn, an ability to apply ethically and creatively what has been learned and a confidence about how to act in ways that promote personal and collective wellbeing should be key hallmarks of a ‘good school system’.

Governments across the world have espoused educational goals that relate to creative, applied and integrated learning while the reality of the experience system’ wellbeing should be key hallmarks of ‘a good school creatively what has been learned and a confidence about to continue to learn, an ability to apply ethically and important but not nearly enough; curiosity and a desire accumulation of evidence of absorbed learning is the characteristics of an educated young person moving accumulated wisdom, reflected in Arnold’s ‘best which all young people. Those goals should build on our be a shared mission to achieve worthwhile goals for ambition within which the tools of improvement have been used to serve a superficially important but unduly narrow and often ad agenda.

The result has been a paradoxical relationship between apparent, even trumpeted, success and a fundamental failure to equip our young people to make sense of and thrive in an increasingly complex, interconnected and highly competitive world. As the CBI said in a recent report on education, “Success is not just about exam results. How well the education system supports and prepares young people for life outside the school and college gates is the key outcome.”

Descriptions of the purposes of school curricula show remarkable similarities in countries across the world. From the Melbourne Declaration (2007) to the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (2004) and Singapore’s curriculum goals and many others, themes of lifelong learning, ethical citizenship, entrepreneurship, ambitious policy has been sucked into a metaphorical vortex of diminished ambition within which the tools of improvement have been used to serve a superficially important but unduly narrow and often ad agenda. ambition within which the tools of improvement have been used to serve a superficially important but unduly narrow and often ad agenda.

The focus at the system level should be on establishing a set of agreed strategic purposes for school education and creating the conditions most likely to achieve those purposes. Effort can then be directed towards promoting the kinds of classroom experiences that lead to worthwhile and sustained learning in pursuit of those agreed purposes.

Too often, system-level change loses sight of the fundamental purposes of school education and can fall prey to assumptions that structures are the main determinants of quality. The reality, however, lies in the quality of teaching and leadership and that requires high levels of professionalism in both teachers and those in formal leadership roles.

The system-level conditions for success lie in recruiting, supporting and developing the kind of teachers and leaders who have the confidence and the competence to realise the purposes of school education in the learning of each and every young person. Those meta-level conditions also relate to determining appropriate freedom and responsibility in decision-making and to putting in place accountability systems that relate to the agreed purposes in ways that mitigate risk while remaining constructive and enabling.

Professionalism in teaching combines content and professional expertise with deep values that relentlessly champion the needs of all young people. That kind of professionalism needs to grow over time and will flourish in collegiate cultures that embody shared purposes and values. The best professional development involves cooperative activity in pursuit of meaningful changes in practice that can be applied directly.

External challenge and support are necessary to guard against the limitations of localism but the essence of effective development must lie in collective reflection, learning and action directed towards the benefit of real young people in real classrooms. We need both academic and practical expertise to work in harmony in a new form of action research.

Professionalism in school leadership recognises that the intimacy of the teaching and learning environment does not lend itself to command and control cultures and approaches. Of course, different contexts and circumstances will require flexible and customised leadership styles but the thrust should be towards establishing a distributive leadership culture rather than a narrowly conceived, hierarchical set of relationships.

In the best cases, leadership can be seen as a space for initiative and action within which different individuals can play roles irrespective of their positions in the formal hierarchy of the school. Those in formal leadership roles must retain responsibility for ensuring momentum in progress and for providing the kind of inspiration that creates rather than depresses energy levels in a school.

Establishing the right relationship between decision-making and accountability presents one of the most difficult challenges for education policy. These system-level conditions must promote the full range of the agreed purposes of school education. Apparent freedom in decision-making can in reality mean a transfer of direction from central prescription to whatever the current focus of accountability might be. Apparent, rhetorical freedom for schools and teachers can be relegated to ‘teaching to the test’ or be subject to a ‘warmer/colder’ guessing game about the expectations of inspectors.
At its most extreme, honing the skills of teachers and leaders can simply lead to greater effectiveness in training young people to achieve a relatively narrow set of outcomes.

The concept of subsidiarity seems to fit the nature of a schooling process within which much of the activity is not amenable to external direction or observation. Subsidiarity assumes that local decision-making matters and that it should only be constrained for compelling reasons. Greater ownership of decisions is likely to lead to greater commitment to achieving the outcomes of those decisions.

The idea of distributive leadership within a school also has currency in wider governance contexts. Complete freedom could lead to an atomised school system within which there is little or no shared knowledge, culture or values. The challenge for policy is to set the strategic direction in ways that encourage exploration of how best to achieve agreed goals in the local context. A tightly defined national curriculum or rigid accountability systems are unlikely to create sufficient scope for such local creativity and ownership.

Constructive accountability is a further vital piece in the jigsaw of high quality school systems. The perverse effects of inflexible and narrow approaches to accountability have led some to see accountability as being inherently problematic. Indeed, the last twenty years have been characterised in many countries by moves towards increasingly powerful and intrusive approaches to accountability. However, education is far too important to build the confidence and expertise of both teachers and leaders to achieve agreed goals in the local context. A tightly defined national curriculum or rigid accountability systems are unlikely to create sufficient scope for such local creativity and ownership.

Constructive accountability is a further vital piece in the jigsaw of high quality school systems. The perverse effects of inflexible and narrow approaches to accountability have led some to see accountability as being inherently problematic. Indeed, the last twenty years have been characterised in many countries by moves towards increasingly powerful and intrusive approaches to accountability. However, education is far too important to build the confidence and expertise of both teachers and leaders to achieve agreed goals in the local context. A tightly defined national curriculum or rigid accountability systems are unlikely to create sufficient scope for such local creativity and ownership.

The history of recent developments in inspection reflects divergent views about accountability. On the one hand, there has been an emphasis on the need to maintain distance in evaluation and inspection has focused on judgements of quality and, increasingly, of outcome. On the other hand, some inspectors have sought to use inspection to promote and even support improvement while retaining bottom-line responsibility for identifying significant weaknesses in practice and outcome.

This latter approach is moving away from school grading towards a more constructive approach that aims to stimulate continuous improvement and to use the authority of inspection to help preserve the space for innovation and exploration at school level.

The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (2013) addressed such issues in its Bratislava Memorandum where it said, ‘Inspection must not take the responsibility for achieving high quality away from schools themselves. Self-evaluation leading to improvement rather than passive compliance with an externally determined agenda is central to sustained enhancement in the quality of students’ learning.’

The answer to the question of what makes a good school system is complex and the particular mix of characteristics will be dependent on context. Long-term success lies in school systems that understand the changing context within which they operate and have the agility and flexibility not just to respond to emerging pressures but to anticipate those pressures and adapt accordingly.

The starting point must be clarity about what ‘good’ looks like in an increasingly fragile and unpredictable world and that requires a shared understanding of the purposes of school education. It also requires deep professionalism on the part of teachers and school system leaders. For such professionalism to flourish we need to build the confidence and expertise of both teachers and leaders, create scope for genuine local ownership and decision-making, and ensure that accountability systems are constructive and command both professional and public confidence.

Reform that fails to capture the imagination and soul of those who must carry it out is, at best, likely to result in limited and probably transitory success and at worst to lead to a risk-averse, compliance-based culture that values looking good above being good. External pressure and support are not enough to achieve a sustained high-quality experience and good outcomes for all young people. Indeed, a policy agenda that is rooted in compliance can reduce school education to training young people for tests and qualifications while losing the essence of what it means to be educated. True quality requires agreement, inspiring and driving purposes; an ambitious curriculum not imprisoned by the past or the context; a confident, expert and empowered teaching profession; an active, extended and collegiate learning culture; leadership that is both inspired and inspiring; and constructive systems of accountability and evaluation.

Graham HC Donaldson CB
April 2016

Internet safety is about empowering students

Some institutions feel their students will be better protected if they remove all access to any site or app that isn’t related to learning. However, this is a mistake.

If a school simply blocks everything, we tend to find that because students aren’t learning within a controlled environment about what is and isn’t acceptable online, they don’t understand the risks or the consequences when they go home and start using their personal devices.

Students will always find a way to see content, so rather than prohibiting these sites, we need to educate students on what’s appropriate and what’s not, so that they’re encouraged to make informed decisions for themselves.

Students also need to be aware that if they do get into a situation, there’s someone within the school they can approach for help.

Despite the seemingly endless list of negative issues schools must navigate as a result of social media and the wider internet, we know social media can be an amazingly positive place and can create opportunities which can change students’ lives.

There are associated risks, and there has to be a balance. It’s not about scaring people away from using the internet; it’s about empowering them to understand those risks and be able to reduce them.

By Kate Brady

Kate Brady, Online Safety Product Manager at RM Education, looks at why empowering students to make informed decisions about their online safety should be every school’s goal.
Jenny Smith is headteacher of Frederick Bremer School in Walthamstow – the subject of Channel 4 ‘Educating the East End’ series – and takes to task Sir Michael Wilshaw over recent comments on the impact of reality TV programmes on teacher recruitment.

We have a simple mantra at Frederick Bremer which applies to pupils and staff alike: celebrate in public, challenge in private. Challenge is an inherent part of every leader’s role, and we work very hard to ensure it is done with tact, sensitivity and based on evidence rather than anecdote. We work on an appreciation model, and an understanding that a healthy school environment is based on developing strong, mutually appreciative, trusting relationships.

It is unfortunate that many in positions of national influence do not share this approach. It seems to have become so culturally acceptable to berate and belittle schools, and school leaders, that we now exist in a state of constant fear. We have an imminent Ofsted inspection, which should be an opportunity for us to be recognised for our considerable progress and hear some supportive feedback.

“It seems to have become so culturally acceptable to berate and belittle schools, and school leaders, that we now exist in a state of constant fear.”
Instead, to be blunt, we are terrified and the consequences of a poor inspection are too horrendous to process. I want to be involved in a debate about education, I want to be professionally informed if the work is to be improved and I appreciate feedback about other strategies and ideas. However, I am the headteacher of the school and I make decisions for no other reason than I believe they are the best for the pupils I am responsible for.

So, as I finally sit down at 9pm on Tuesday night after a 12 hour shift, I am looking forward to watching my day job on TV. I am one of only four headteachers who have been privileged to be part of the ‘Educating’... experience, and as a result I think I am uniquely placed to respond to Mr Wilshaw’s recent comments about the impact of programmes like this on our profession and that they are a poor advertisement for teaching.

His argument is based on anecdote and not evidence; I have seen a huge surge in recruitment as a result of ‘Educating the East End’ against the trend of a growing national recruitment crisis.

“...we work with the most inspirational, interesting and talented group of young people who deserve the very best in life.”

There is a deep seated cynicism amongst some educationalists about schools’ involvement in TV programmes. It is not celebrity we crave. I personally would have seen hugely talented staff unpicking their personal stories about some children who were challenged, academically gifted, lonely, autistic. He would have learnt a lot about our school. His there was some poor behaviour (of which I am not proud), but what emerged in the narrative were powerful personal stories about some children who were (understandably) struggling to cope.

Teenage years are tough, and they are even harder when you are dealing with extra “stuff”. He would have seen pupils from all spectrums, behaviourally challenged, academically gifted, lonely, autistic. He would have seen hugely talented staff unpicking their issues and supporting them to make the right choices and get back on track. Care, support and nurturing alongside a restorative approach can have a powerful long term impact – far more than sanction and punitive discipline. This does not mean we are soft or don’t have incredibly high standards, we just go about it in a different way.

Since ‘Educating’,... we have been inundated with applications for every single post at every level in the school. The quality of applicants is incredible.

“What unites people who want to work for us? They want to work in a school which is making a difference to the local community.”

But ultimately our decision was political. When visitors come to my school, they are always surprised. It is so quiet, calm, purposeful. “Your pupils are so lovely,” This is not what I thought schools were like. Why is the public perception of our schools so wrong?

My staff, like thousands of others up and down the country, work themselves to exhaustion day in day out for the young people of our community. Why? Because we work with the most inspirational, interesting and talented group of young people who deserve the very best in life. We see the difference great quality teaching, guidance and care makes to them. We are tired of professionals being criticised and told we are not good enough. We are tired of the media negativity and the crude generalisations about our professionalism. We are tired of seeing the young people of our community labelled as gangsters, rude and lacking manners.

And we are tired of our community being ripped to pieces by the increasing segregation imposed by the unregulated growth of free schools and their accompanying propaganda that local schools are just not good enough. This segregation only serves to further divide the amazingly inclusive and tolerant Walthamstow community, who have had their fill of the EDL marching on their streets.

If Mr Wilshaw watched ‘Educating the East End’, he would have learnt a lot about our school. Yes there was some poor behaviour (of which I am not proud), but what emerged in the narrative were powerful personal stories about some children who were (understandably) struggling to cope. Waltham Forest is one of the most deprived London Boroughs with soaring property prices. However, it is an amazing job and so rewarding. ‘Educating’,... has over the last five years opened the debate about education and helped inform the public in a more accurate way about school life. We should be proud and celebrate what we do in our schools, and some positive feedback will do more to raise standards than more public slating. We might not like everything we see on a highly edited TV programme, but this is not representing the wider picture, merely a brief snapshot.

There is a constant high political debate about education, from which education leaders appear to be absent. We are informed about educational priorities by diktats from which education leaders appear to be absent. There is a constant high political debate about education, which is not representing the wider picture, merely a brief snapshot.

For my authority, it is the reality that teachers working one mile down the road receive £4k a year more because they are in inner London, yet Waltham Forest is one of the most deprived London Boroughs with soaring property prices.

The reason, in my humble opinion, why people do not want to go into teaching is far deeper than a TV series; it is the intense pressure, the ever changing goal posts, it is the incredibly long hours and the unremitting criticism which are of course, it is the responsibility and the huge expectations. It is the culture of bullying, modelled at the highest level, which permeates so many institutions. It is the fear of losing your job because you did not achieve your targets.

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Learning Leading Tech: Making the Most of Technology

When you have a great experience at home using a tablet device, it’s easy to think of ways it could be used in the classroom. A classroom is a very different environment and careful thought should be given to how they’ll be used and integrated into the school’s current technology.

We sometimes see parents, pupils and teachers demanding certain technology because other schools in the area have it, and that can lead to very hasty decisions being made. Without a proper strategy, these devices end up not being used or worse – being disruptive in lessons.

Issues like these often occur when schools do not have the infrastructure to support the devices they have purchased, or when money isn’t invested in training teachers on how to effectively use this equipment within the classroom.

Whilst many schools are realising their pedagogy should be at the heart of the technology they use, for some it still leaves thousands of pounds of investment sitting in the cupboard gathering dust.

Everything should lead back to what the school is trying to achieve. Every school is different and will have different strengths and areas that they want to develop, so by understanding the vision and goals of the school, a strategy can be created to ensure that technology helps to achieve those goals in an integrated way, as opposed to being an afterthought or something that is implemented separately.

When technology is truly embedded, it helps to expand teaching and learning from being something that just happens within four walls to something that can be done anywhere – on the bus, at home, in the library – pupils can log onto a platform to share their work with other pupils and teachers and get feedback in real time, while teachers can really bring lessons to life.

When technology is used in this way, it will have a positive, measurable impact on everything in the school community.
April 39

"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses." - Henry Ford

In my school we had 108 printers. If I had asked the 100 staff what would make their life better they would have said 109 printers. In fact, what they really wanted was NO printers - they just didn't know how to imagine it.

The 109 printers story is a good example of 1X thinking. It is making incremental changes to an existing model. No printers on the other hand is 10X thinking, a concept championed by Larry Page in an influential 2003 article in Wired Magazine. In it, the Google founder explained how instead of refashioning existing models in the search for modest gains, it was his expectation that his company would be unfailing in its search for exponential change and improvement.

A couple of key factors are forcing UK schools to consider alternatives to a simple refresh of their existing IT models. Firsty, the IT experience offered inside a school seems ever distant from the one enjoyed by students elsewhere. Secondly, pressure on school budgets has priced schools out of traditional upgrade models.

With a 10% reduction in school funding over this Parliament, the need for 10X thinking has never been greater.

The temptation is definitely to invest in some of those faster horses - it’s the safest thing to do isn’t it? Nothing could be further from the truth.

To do that means investing extra money and extra resources into an energy sapping, soul destroying slog on a path where others have already failed. Instead the path to success requires creativity and bravery. It requires the courage to aim for no printers rather than 109 - you might not get there but that really doesn’t matter. It’s counter intuitive, but 10X really is easier than 10%.

For us, the 10X solution lay in cloud computing. A device-neutral, anywhere anytime learning platform that made technology invisible and allowed students and staff to genuinely work the way they lived. In turn this would develop a culture with collaboration at its core, built on open processes and seamless communication. We chose Google Apps as our platform, but other providers are available.

The journey to the cloud is one requiring substantial change management. It can seem daunting, but with the right advice and support it is achievable, rewarding and fun.

Strategic planning will ensure that the toolkit (hardware, infrastructure, connectivity), skillset (teachers, admin, technicians and students) and mindset (10X thinking) is in the right place to deliver a successful project outcome.

The outcomes for Fakenham Academy have been transformational, and are perhaps best summed up by the Principal - “In my 28 years of working in secondary schools this is the first time I can genuinely say I work in a collaborative organisation.”

Think 10X.

My school, Fakenham Academy in Norfolk, was very much in this position. An aging infrastructure delivered an IT experience which looked increasingly bizarre to students. At the same time we had ‘less than no money’, as our Principal Matthew Parr-Burman frequently reminded me. Just when things couldn’t possibly look any worse, we were placed in ‘Special Measures’. If there was a time for 10X thinking, this was it.

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Think 10X.
What does the Ofsted framework have to say about the role of technology in teaching and learning?

Dominic Norrish, Group Director for Technology, United Learning

Dominic leads the technology strategy for United Learning, a national group of over 50 maintained and independent schools in the UK. He works to help schools make effective use of technology for learning and teaching. He is a former history teacher, school leader and consultant and joined United Learning from an academy where he implemented a one-to-one strategy.
One of the affordances of technology given the least attention is that of agency and the related concept of independence. Agency can be described as the powerfully motivating feeling of being the active controlling force in an activity. The do-er rather than the done-to. It tends to produce higher investment in tasks, result in effort being sustained for longer and engenders greater care over outcomes. None of that needs technology, obviously. But technology makes it more likely to happen, it provides so many more opportunities to create a sense of agency in learners, to encourage them to keep going. In this bracket I'd highlight tools such as Explain Everything and, simply, the Internet (as it turns out that instant, indexed access to ever last iota of information amassed by the human race may yet have a positive role to play in modern schooling).

Visit a lesson in a school where pupils are allowed some level of freedom over how they go about tasks, using the familiar technological tools they take advantage of in every other aspect of their lives, and you will likely see curious, interested learners who seek out and use new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills – something which Ofsted notes about the most effective lessons.

Now clearly this all has to take place within a technical, pedagogical and behavioural environment that promotes positive, learning-focused use, and in which the tasks set have scope for challenge and investigation. Those are the hard things to get right, not the technology – that’s usually just a slab of glass and decent WiFi.

Any school that wants to be as effective as possible in these (and many other Ofsted framework) areas will want to use the best tools available to them. Often these are technological, and part of the incredibly complex, expert job of school leadership is being able to spot when this is the case.

The teachers provide pupils with incisive feedback, in line with the school’s assessment policy, about what pupils can do to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. The pupils use this feedback effectively and pupils answer questions to know how to improve their learning. They capitalise on opportunities for feedback, written or oral, to improve.

Great feedback is a really well-embedded part of the learning process, but giving it is problematic. Written feedback (marking) tends to produce very long gaps between the stages of doing the work (having it marked) getting it back responding, because of the paper-based nature of it all. Timely turn-around is a key element in helping a learner make best use of developmental feedback. Also, too often marking is a one-way conversation that fails to have the impact that the time it takes deserves. Let’s be honest here – it’s often far from ‘in-sawe’ too. Oral feedback is undoubtedly quicker, but suffers from the same ephemeral/ time pressures in lessons that are noted in the paragraph about assessment above.

Appropriate technology can improve this process with great efficacy, reducing the time gaps between stages, drawing the learner into a loop of conversation rather than mute critique, and even saving time for the teacher involved. Work can be completed and electronically submitted, feedback left via recorded oral comment (typed) hand written note, and a student’s response/ Second effort completed all within the space of a school day. Oh, perhaps the pace described here brings its own shadows of horror, but you get the idea. Tools like Showbie and Google Classroom are making a perceptible difference for learners and teachers in schools with well-embedded and distributed technology. They’re also giving the ‘lost worksheet/diary’ brigade no place to hide.

Pupils love the challenge of learning and are resilient to failure. They are curious, interested learners who seek out and use new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. They thrive in lessons and also regularly take up opportunities to learn through extra-curricular activities.

One of the challenges of mass education – only one teacher and 30 pupils’ progress to keep track of. Lack of time within a lesson means that it can be hard to ensure that you have a clear sense of who has understood, and who needs further support. Of course there are lots of low-tech methods of doing this (mini-whiteboards are a common one) but technological tools are often employed by teachers because they are, in Ofsted’s language, more systematic and effective.

Quizzing and assessment software such as Socrative and Plickers are two examples. Unlike mini-whiteboards, the information about learning that they can capture is not ephemeral and it can be reviewed to redirect the teacher’s planning. In the best examples, this data feeds into other systems such as the school’s Management Information System. Equally importantly, the software doesn’t capture a partial picture of a class’s understanding in the way that non-digital methods do (e.g. sweeping 30 mini-whiteboards with your eyes, it gets it all, and presents it in a way that makes the gaps clear
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or talk to us about your school's ICT vision on 08450 700 300