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Supporting Successful Multicultural Societies Education is Key to National Progress

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ABSTRACT

Successful societies depend on everyone signing up to core values and actions. In multicultural settings the acceptance of differences in the way people operate has led to rules flouted, bringing chaos and conflict. Core to successful relationships are narrative language abilities, which enable creative as well as critical thinking to broaden and improve information processing and production. Critical, linear thinking analyses a situation, based on facts and data, whilst the creative, lateral approach develops new ideas and solutions. A study shows how language and thinking competencies have declined to hinder interactions between people - vital for new interdisciplinary job-roles now that technology is taking over routines. Focus on developing direct talk, to assist effective collaboration and learning is advocated. Training is required to appreciate language dual function to develop effectively, but also stratify people to potentially add to inequality if not aware. Most learning problems, at all student levels, are rooted in low levels of language, thinking and communication, which receive limited attention in teaching and training. The article looks at the background to thinking and expression and considers a route to more successful multicultural societies.

Keywords: Core values, Multicultural settings, Critical thinking, Communication

INTRODUCTION

Michaela Community School, in multicultural North London, is top ranked for "Progress 8", a measure of how much a secondary institution has helped pupils improve since the primary stage (Morris & Perry, 2017). Inspectors have remarked on the happy pupils and a brilliant team of loyal, dedicated staff under the head teacher, Katharine Birbalsingh. School ethos is that multiculturalism only succeeds when *every* religious and ethnic group makes sacrifices for the sake of the whole (Birbalsingh, 2020). This is based on teacher conversations with pupils about continual incidents, like a Muslim girl forced by her religion to drop out of the school choir, because it was "haram" (forbidden). Children are told they are "bad Muslims" for not praying in school time. Half of the school population of 700 are Muslims, who intimidate peers and school staff with constant death threats and social media condemnation. Muslim parents have now taken the school to the High Court for not providing a prayer room for student use, so preventing their human rights to pursue religious rituals. The school trust points out this means students leaving lessons unaccompanied and missing instruction time. Imagine 350 Muslim pupils tramping out of classes for prayers! The court action is being defended in order to maintain a successful, stable learning environment, where children of all races and religions can communicate and thrive.

The school focuses on national regulations and not virtue signalling and has learnt from the past. Herodotus, the Greek Philosopher and "Father of History", studied people movements, concluding that if incomers to nations did not accept the traditions, dress and life-style of natives, the society would decline from tensions and conflicts. We have seen this happen in western nations, with rules for some but not for others, if allowing newcomers to flout norms. Preparing education students for teaching practices, there are often difficult conversations with head teachers not wanting those wearing veils. A reason is the large numbers of students with language problems, depending on non-verbal communication for meaning. Cook & Woods (2018) reminds us that 93% of meaning is through voice

and gestures rather than the word, so if dress diminishes this people have information processing difficulties. Indeed, research in Britain's most multi-cultural city found this in schools (Sage, 2000). In a first teaching post in a mid-England city, with indigenous people in the minority, the teacher assistant (TA) was a Muslim. However, she was required to have an escort, so only appeared in class at 9 o'clock (*missing assembly as not permitted for her*), and left on the bell at 3.30pm to be led home. Also, she was unable to attend music, drama and cookery lessons, school performances or the monthly staff-bonding group for supper together. Obviously, this provoked some criticism from staff expected to be in school by 8am and not leaving before 5pm, with this TA allowed to escape National Curriculum requirements, because of religious ones.

In multicultural societies, there are constant issues about accommodating the huge number of different values, attitudes and practices in operation. As someone who has worked as a health service clinician, psychologist, teacher in schools and university academic, continual tensions have been witnessed. For example, national exams fall in times of some religious festivals, with, in some places, students allowed to miss them but still progress, much to the annoyance of those forced to sit assessments. Jehovah's witnesses object to *Macbeth* as a set GCSE text. Christian families ask that revision sessions are not held on Sundays. Hindus will not use dinner plates touching eggs. Dietary requirements of the different religious groups are now a minefield with students sometimes feinting during fasting periods. In a small, local area, 6 young teachers have given up school posts within 18 months, because "*not prepared or supported to cope with diversity*". In a school, five teachers left from one class within a term, so pupils were upset about constant staff changes. UK universities accommodate foreign students by adopting *inclusive marking*, meaning grades are not reduced for inaccurate grammar and spellings. Acceptance of low literacy standards is complained about bitterly by employers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Education in a Changing World

British television told the story of 6 young people (*one a medical student*) who committed suicide. National UK Health Statistics show 1 in 6 take antidepressants, doubling over the decade 2010-20 (*71 million annual prescriptions*). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development-OECD. Burns & Gottschalk (2019) reported that British teenagers are the saddest, least satisfied of the 38-nation group. Why is this so? Reasons are:

1. Students spend more time online than others (except Chile), so are sucked into a toxic culture of self-comparison and cyberbullying
2. More tests/exams than other nations bring pressure in a one-size-fits-all system targeting *what* to learn rather than *how*
3. Social relations in diverse societies suffer from limited communication competencies from time spent online rather than in direct interactions.

Benefits but downsides come from global connections and intelligent machines (robots) taking over routines. Robots now work alongside humans in manufacturing plants (co-bots) and offer home help and companionship to people with infirmities. In hospitals, they act as surgical assistants and play an increasing part, instead of real people, in training of medical personnel as well as the police and firefighting professions. Robots are in homes and offices, as they vacuum rooms and mow the grass outside, and because of a bee crisis pollinate crops. They are also used for land surveying, photography and filming. In war zones and natural disasters, like floods, drones (*unpiloted aircraft*) are invaluable for search-and-rescue missions – providing immediate information about a situation from their software systems. Every day, new robot uses come on stream. There is even a robot sommelier (wine expert!).They are our constant colleagues!

Technology highlights many issues that although may be worse in Britain, but are a universal trend according to OECD reports above. Amongst escalating world events education has to function. The present system was established to create employees for 19th and 20th century manufacturing models. The 21st century requires a rethink. Change is rapid, with students entering a workforce where jobs are not guaranteed. Taghon et al (2024) suggested that around 60% of future occupations have yet to be developed and that 40% of 5-year-olds will need to be *self-employed* for income. The *"Who is at Risk"* report showed how the COVID-19 virus accelerated the rise of robots (Wallace-Stephens & Morgante, 2020). Minimising human contact is how the pandemic was managed, creating a technology boom to

perform human tasks. Thus, the economy no longer retains a need for some workers, like people selecting goods for warehouse orders or stacking shelves in supermarkets.

We must prepare students for uncertainty – helping them *think* and *communicate* across cultures instead of *retain* and *recall facts* for passing exams. Some curricula content is either irrelevant today or gained at the press of a button. Memorising a formula for working out box volume has little value for most jobs and can be googled if needed. Listening and literate talk (*narrative speaking*) for solving real problems should be the focus – not *facts* forgotten after tests.

Speaking is our primary representational and learning system and required at narrative levels to enable the secondary ones of literacy and numeracy to become established. Reduced human interaction affects communication competence. If you do not use it you lose it! Thinking evolves from talking with others and one-self, but has less learning emphasis because of assessment focus, which has increased due to national and international comparison tables. Speech and language studies found that misdiagnosis of human disorders was due to ineffective human communication (Sage, 1996). Gaining and explaining information requires expert teaching for talking, thinking, problem-solving, effective judgements and decision-making, so needing attention in education. Intercultural communication programmes are essential for all learners.

Cook & Woods (2018), a surgeon, says around 50% of British patients receive inappropriate management because of scientific complexity and a struggle to process, because knowledge is not properly understood or correctly applied. Communication blunders account for £220 million medication claims alone over the last 15 years, estimated to have killed 22,000 UK patients annually. Pay-outs have doubled since 2014, indicating the importance of prioritising communication in education and training (Statistics – NHS England, 2020). Misunderstandings were obvious in the pandemic rollout of changing information.

Traditionally, transferable abilities have been marginalised in formal education as harder to measure. They include: *listening, understanding, empathy, communicating clearly informally (chatting) and formally (narrative talk), flexible thinking, metacognition, creativity, persistence, self-management and being open to continual learning.* Now robots are common, we need to explore, widen and deepen communication and empathetic connection with others.

Research on Thinking and Communication

A project to assess thinking and oral expressive abilities of children (6-10 years) in 4 schools of Mid-England was implemented in 2022-2023. Language and communication develop thinking and independent learning, and viewed world-wide as problematic now that technology is preferred to talk in interpersonal exchanges. The subjects undertook 4 activities – 2 picture and 2 story re-telling tasks, to elicit thinking and language expression in 2022 and again in 2023. Retests show improvements following a school focus on oral activities in teaching, which are highly significant for story re-telling. Results are discussed within a concept of consequence, as responses must be understood for successful personal development.

Limited narrative language levels to think through events amongst learners has long been identified and research shows has worsened now technology replaces talk (Sage, 2020). Government has been lobbied about the matter but does not view it as a priority. However, in workplaces it is regarded as greatly hindering performance and contributing to a rapid decline in personal and professional standards. Elaborating on this issue, Alex Mahon, the Chief Executive of Channel 4, addressed the 2023 Royal Television Society conference, suggesting that young people are a workplace menace as they "*haven't got the skills to discuss or disagree",* with resulting inability to work with staff holding different views (Channel 4, 2022). The Beyond Z (2022) research labelled half of Gen Z (1990-2010) as progressives, indicating more diverse sexuality, but lacking understanding of situations and tolerance of people. Less value for developing effective language and communication is viewed as the reason, although older people have complained about younger ones for ever.

In the 5th Century BC the Greek Philosopher, Socrates, lamented over the youth of Athens. "*The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs and tyrannize their teachers.*" (Good reads quotes). Could this be written about youngsters today? Nevertheless, many

Greek "tyrants" went on to make notable contributions to society. Abilities improve with age. Assessments carried out for the World Thinking Project demonstrates this in tables below (Sage et al., 2023).

However, these tests, examining thinking and how it is expressed, and using standardisations from 3 decades ago, showed that only 3 out of the recent 120 subjects reached the average means of that time. In an age when people use technology for messaging rather than face-to-face talk, is this surprising? It is necessary to talk with others and share ideas to progress thinking and expression. The next section shows data from the 2022 UK Thinking project as a prelude to looking at how the same cohort performed on the same tests a year later.

Tests of Thinking & Expression using 2 Picture Activities & 2 Story Re-telling Tasks

Multivariate Statistics (MANOVA) of Children age 6-10 Years across 4 Schools (2022) There is significance differences across ages as one would expect, although slightly uneven. (Wilks Lambda = 0.35, F=5.82, p= 0.00, Partial Eta Squared=0.23)

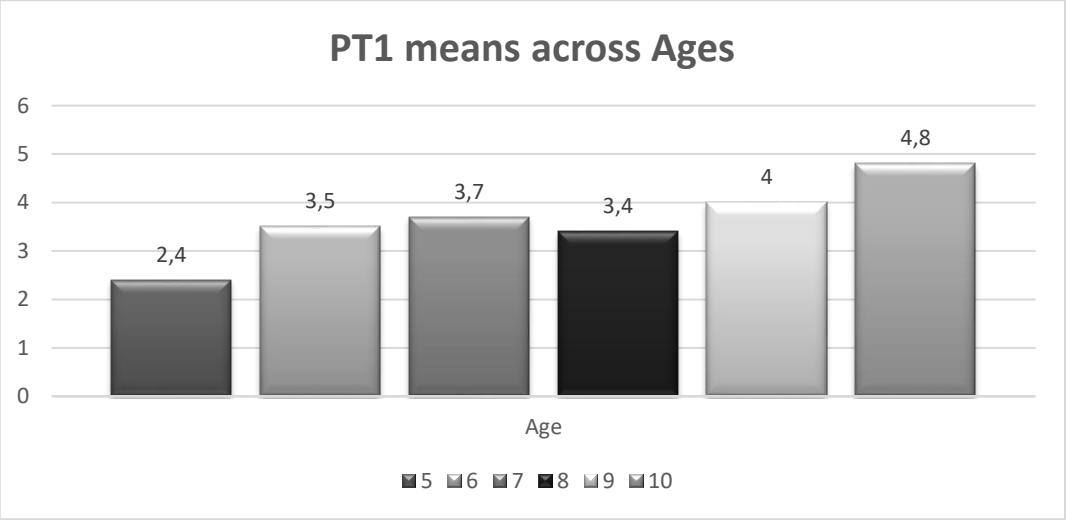

Diagram 1. Picture Test 1 (PT1) (F = 5.47, p = 0.00, Partial Eta Squared=0.22)

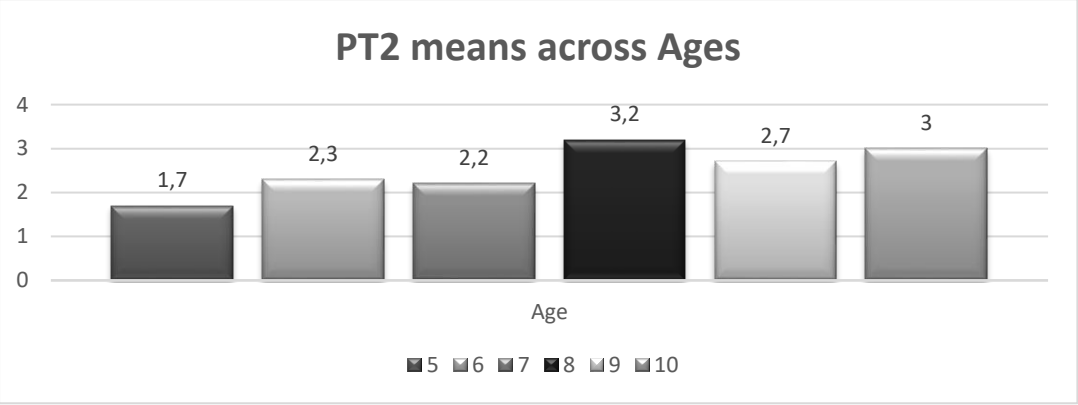

Diagram 2. Picture Test 2 (PT2) (F = 5.53, p = 0.00, Partial Eta Squared=0.22)

There is a dip in scores on PT1 for the 8-year age group (see Diagram 1), made up on PT2 when scores are slightly higher than the whole cohort (see Diagram 2). This pattern is also shown on the story-retelling tasks.

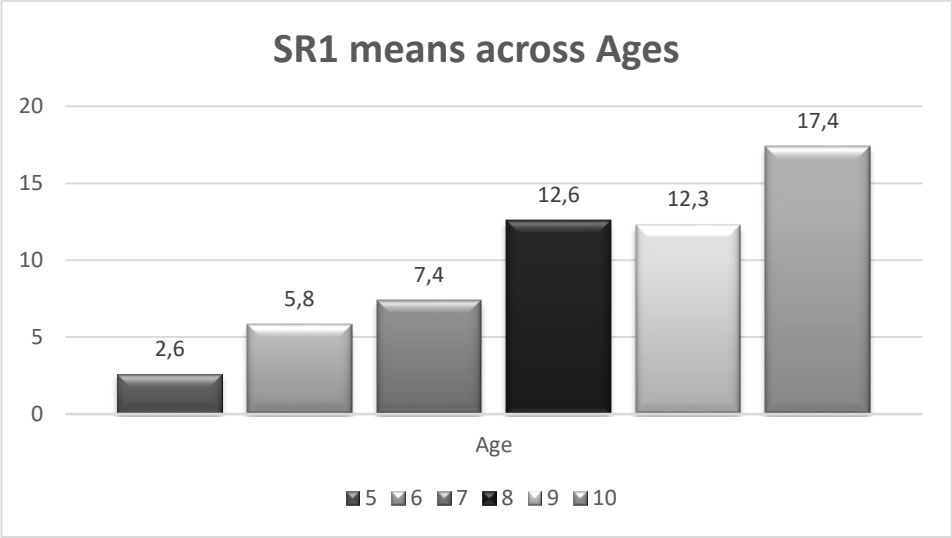

Diagram 3. Story Retelling 1 (SR1) (F = 12.64, p = 0.00, Partial Eta Sq=0.40)

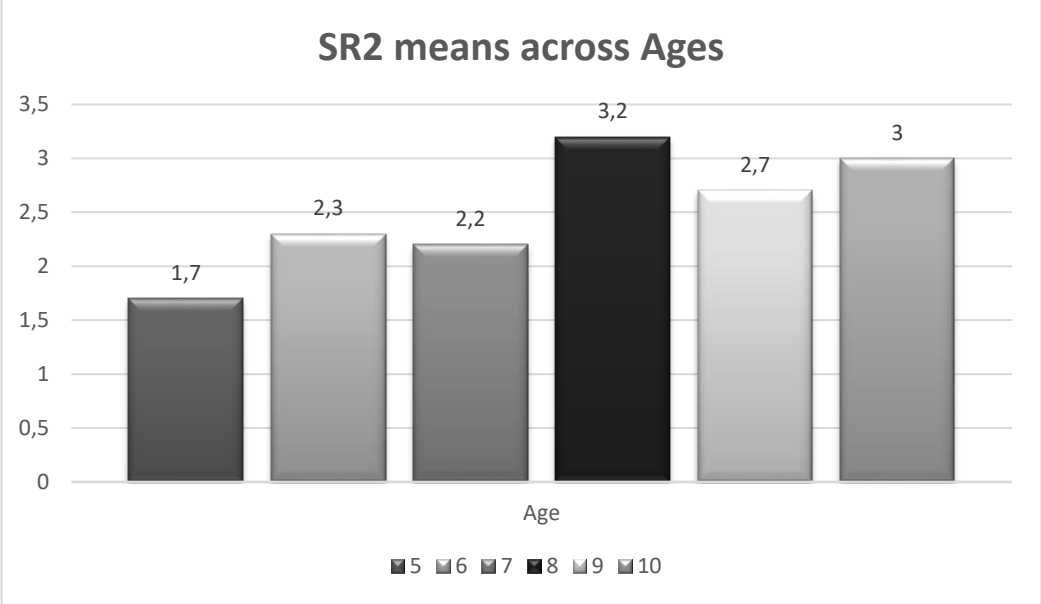

Diagram 4. Story Retelling 2 (SR2) (F = 19.84, p = 0.00, Partial Eta Sq=0.51)

102 students from this cohort were tested in 2023 to evaluate whether a school focus to develop thinking and expressive abilities showed increases in performance (see Diagram 3). As 18 students had moved to other schools, or were unavailable for testing, the 102 subjects represent those assessed in 2022 and reviewed in 2023 (see Diagram 4).

4 Tests to Assess Thinking and Narrative Expression Levels

1. Picture Test 1 – Picture of a mug to talk about it **(Diagram 1)**
2. Picture Test 2 – Picture of an apple tree to think about ways to get the apples **(Diagram 2)**
3. Story-retell 1 – Story of 9 propositions in simple language structure to repeat **(Diagram 3)**
4. Story-retell 2 – Story of 9 propositions in normal complex language to repeat **(Diagram 4)**

(Complex language has subsidiary clauses in sentences, in contrast to a simple subject-verb-object structure as in story 1. Also, 9 propositions are outside short term memory).

Significance levels (p values) compared the whole cohort of matched students across years 2022-2023. As numbers varied in each age group, as some students in the 2022 cohort had moved schools or were unable to participate in the review, it was considered more valid and reliable to use statistics on the individuals originally tested – treated as a whole group.

Table 1. Mean Scores for 102 Students on 4 Tests Significance level (p value)

Year Means	Picture 1	Picture 2	Story 1	Story 2
2022	3.4	2.4	10.1	4.9
	5.0	3.7	13.4	7.9
P Value Significance Level	1.8	5.6	0.001	0.000

The schools are to be congratulated on the large significance level between the 2 years for the story retelling tasks, suggesting a focus on oral thinking has improved narrative language ability with better memory and thinking (see Table 1). The means for the picture tests do not show a significant difference. One expects improvement with age, as seen in the 2022 statistics above, so results reinforce this fact for both the picture and story retelling tasks. Although there is a large significant difference in story tests from 2022-3, the means are well below the test standardisations across Britain of 20 years ago. The standard means for these tests are shown below for the 6-10 year-age groups, standardised in 2000.

Table 2. Mean scores from standardised tests from a population across Britain in 2000

Age	Story 1 Test Mean	Story 2 Test Mean
6	23	21
7	27	25
8	30	28
9	34	32
10	35	33

With the highest group mean for story 1=13.4 and story 2=7.9 in the present study, this is way below the original standardisation (see Table 2). However, the results reflect studies now reported worldwide. An encouraging sign of review assessments was the decrease in refusal to retell the stories. The refusal reason given by students was they found it difficult to remember what was told them and needed prompts, like pictures and words, to recall information. None of the students could do the standard test of standing on each leg for the count of 20, indicating inability to use the left (L) and right (R) brain together. The education system emphasises L brain linear activity at the expense of the R lateral function, so this is not surprising. Unless both brain sides work together, simultaneous processing of visual and auditory input is problematic. A comparison of story re-telling refusals, for both years, is seen in table 3.

Table 3. Comparing refusals for Story 1 & 2 in 2022 & 2203

Number of Subjects		2022	2023
102	Story 1	19	7
102	Story 2	48	14
P Value Significance Level		0.000	0.000

This indicates a significant improvement in performance over the cohort, which is reassuring. However, any assessment of this nature must be regarded cautiously. The fact that there was no significant improvement on the picture tests could be due to a number of reasons. These were the first tests presented, so students may have felt nervous and unsure at this stage. Also, the response was open for students to handle as they wished, with no indication of how it should be made. The story tests had a prescribed structure - to listen to the story and retell it as it was told to them. Thus, the second test was more in line with the prescriptive nature of school tasks, designed to learn facts for standard testing. Also, snap assessments are limited in providing a full picture of someone's overall performance, but a cohort of this size does provide some validity and reliability regarding the evidence presented. It is in line with the teachers' own view of student capacity, witnessed in school.

What are the Consequences of Limited Thinking and Speaking Levels?

Is this an unjust finding, age-old complaint or are young people today indeed lacking abilities expected for effective performance? Hugh Osmond (2023), the founder of Various Eateries plc,

employing many staff, reflects that today's young workers have serious problems not seen in his 40 years of business. He says they are incapable of using initiative, connecting and communicating effectively with other people or able to work independently (Osmond, 2023). They have to be tutored in basic intercultural communication and thinking competencies. Osmond (2023) reports that they respond well to training, once realising through real experiences that they lack abilities to perform effectively at work. He reports that those coming from universities are unable to listen to views different from their own and demonstrate more arrogance. Although having a commendable sense of justice that the world should be fair and rational, many cannot cope with the realities of working life today, so increasing mental disturbances amongst this group. This is supported by the UK Office for National Statistics, from data supplied by the Health Foundation think tank (Quality of Life in the UK, 2023). They report that 1 in 10 16-34 year-olds are too sick to work full-time, with mental health conditions the most common cause.

21st Century Education

The UK education curriculum takes little account of student potential interests and capacities, or that learners need to relate abstract ideas to their experience and life activities. The National Curriculum is narrow and academically focussed. Details for English, Maths and Science leave little space for other learning or the practical application of knowledge in real situations. This is the view of Andreas Schleicher, the Chief Executive Officer of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Research suggests British Education is dominated by learning facts, but lacking focus on personal and practical abilities to apply them (Schleicher, 2020). Since many students are more talented in personal and practical ways they are disadvantaged in a system not valuing these equally, and thus teaching and assessing in ways not suiting their learning styles. Continual dumbing down of academic standards occurs, with the Association of School and College Leaders supporting exam crib sheets (Barton, 2023).

Education operates with a fear of debate, prioritising "self-care" to generate indulgence and expectations within the student body, particularly at higher levels. Thus, young people enter jobs believing they can dictate their own terms, but this is not how work and communal life works. Everyone must serve their time, learn how to interact with others, earn their position from hard work and gain peer respect to progress. Now everyone expects everything at once.

Richardson and Antonello (2023) found that 52% of 18-24 year-olds demand annual promotion, with bosses inventing new titles to keep them happy. It is not the fault of GenZ as they have been fed false life facts. Also, limited communication and language levels mean constant misunderstandings occur. What people express must not be taken as a personal affront.

Fact Distortions

Personal and practical competencies have taken a backseat to learning facts. This has a sinister side as now words and facts are distorted. Political activism, careerism and big money are linked on a large scale. Julien Benda, the French philosopher, lamented what he called *La trahism des clercs* – the betrayal of intellectual standards in the service of ideology. Natural sciences challenge "*Western-centric ideas of objectivity, expertise and merit*", removing structural hierarchies that privilege certain knowledge and societies over others (Oxford English Dictionary 2nd Ed. 1989). Cambridge University announced it was removing white statures as symbolising white supremacy. In moving away from a white, Eurocentric curriculum, universities are exploring indigenous world views. It is unclear what this means in a UK context. Is it teaching the world is flat, made in 7 days and white people have ruined it?

Interest and respect for other cultures led the European enlightenment. Decolonisation, promoted in education, is not being open-minded as suggested. It demonises and damages the people it favours. Vindictiveness towards western nations and denial of their achievements is seen in actions to ban books, pictures, statures and rename buildings. Even Edward Said, the Palestinian-American academic and anti-colonialist, concluded in media interviews that the British Empire "*made the world one*". Today, it divides into hostile camps to demoralise the world, with a stream of denigration from virtue-signalling elites lecturing us all. We need to ask why education fails to provide realistic preparation for adult life and work for many people.

Thinking broadly and reasoning imaginatively is vital for human survival. According to research by Polish academics, 1/3 adults do not reach the formal operational stage for problem solving,

characterised by ability to form questions and test them to answer a problem. In the formal stage one can think abstractly and understand the structure of an issue. The fact that many fail is of concern (Sage et al., 2023). The thinking and expressive study above, is a wake-up call, showing the limited thinking and expressive development of some students. None of the immigrant children in the study spoke English at home, but had to cope with it as the medium of instruction. Thus, they lack full exposure to English word use and nuances to further misunderstandings with problems of progressing in British society.

Hurlbert's (2007) research shows how inner self-talk functions in a limited way today, although vital to regulate thinking and assist mental stability. The reason is inadequate narrative language development, attributed to technology (texts/emails) now preferred to direct talk, with events, like the 2020 pandemic, assisting decline. Thus, it is more difficult to function independently and understand action consequences, as we lack the right experiences to develop these abilities. It does not become a problem until leaving education, when employees are expected to complete jobs without step-by-step guidance, which is a feature of prescriptive learning for passing tests. The propensity for "group-thinking" over issues is an example of lack of independent thought. World studies indicate around 60% of the population fail to achieve basic abilities to perform successfully, with education not focusing on teaching communication and thinking to remedy this gap (Bertling et al., 2020; Luckin, 2020; Sage, 2020; Tam & El-Azar, 2020; United Nation, 2020; Wallace-Stephens & Morgante, 2020)

Discussion- Coping with Culture Wars

Education can protect members from logical consequences to boost undesirable behaviour. For example, pressure to give students good marks, that they do not deserve, may encourage poor study habits, to prevent acquiring competencies for successful lives. *Inclusive marking* is an example. In a recent professional post, when I was involved in the appointment, there were numerous linguistic errors in many applications, which excluded them from consideration. This was a role which only experienced graduates could apply for! There is evidence of students buying assignments and paying for writing help with research theses at the higher education level (Glendinning, 2022). Why are such consequences important? Whether natural or logical, consequences help us learn and grow. When experiencing the results of actions, hopefully we make better choices and improve responses. Thus, consequences bring learning. Cause and consequence is a relationship between an event, a condition, or decision (cause) and the events or results that follow it (consequences). Understanding cause and consequence is key to analysis and comprehending how and why things happen. Below, is a model produced for a Medical Research Council project to investigate why students found learning difficult (Sage, 1980-2000). It revealed problems in assembling meaning, due to limited narrative thinking and linguistic structures . This research was years ago, but established that in all study subjects tested that the 3 higher narrative levels and thinking were not in place. These are essential underpinnings for grasping cause and effect. The graphic below defines these levels.

The data produced here suggests that two decades later, the situation is unchanged (see Figure 1). All actions bring a consequence that makes life easier or more difficult. Thus, life results from our actions, which in turn affect others. If politicians do not push for higher thinking and communication levels, the result will be reliance on people from abroad to fill the new jobs requiring competencies presently lacking in the population. The law of cause and effect is universal and states that all actions produce reactions. Each single effect has a cause and a starting point. Consistent, empathetic teaching produces awareness and understanding of balance, control, and humanity.

Learning involves recognising consequences of actions. People must take responsibility for what they do, which has both intended and unintended consequences for an individual and others. It is vital to consider how actions affect others instead of just focussing on compliance behaviours. This requires focus on language and thinking development and authentic learning situations, which need learner autonomy. This only occurs if autonomous choices are made. Monroe et al (2019) show that an effective learning environment respects national values and supports diverse talents and learning styles. The way one person learns may not be effective for another, and inclusive philosophies do not always acknowledge this fact. Providing autonomous learning motivates and gives opportunities to pursue knowledge and

competencies in the form best suited to the individual. Implications from this study for education are:

1. Provide learners with autonomy & choice in what & how they learn and represent this. Personal e-portfolios are preferred to grades in some nations, with video & audio interviews providing alternatives or support to conventional written responses.
2. Help learners to be aware of the consequences of actions to themselves & others by improving their intercultural communication and thinking. This allows them to make mistakes, reflect through inner language & learn as long as others are unharmed.
3. Focus on reflective talk to understand natural rather than punitive action consequences.
4. Nurture empathy with awareness of everything and everyone's interconnection.

This needs personal awareness of……

1. language and communication with self and others to learn responsibility
2. well-being, ethical decisions, self-regulation and responsibility for actions
3. social understanding and empathy for other views
4. ability and willingness to communicate, cooperate & collaborate with all others
5. appreciation & respect of national values & norms of where one resides

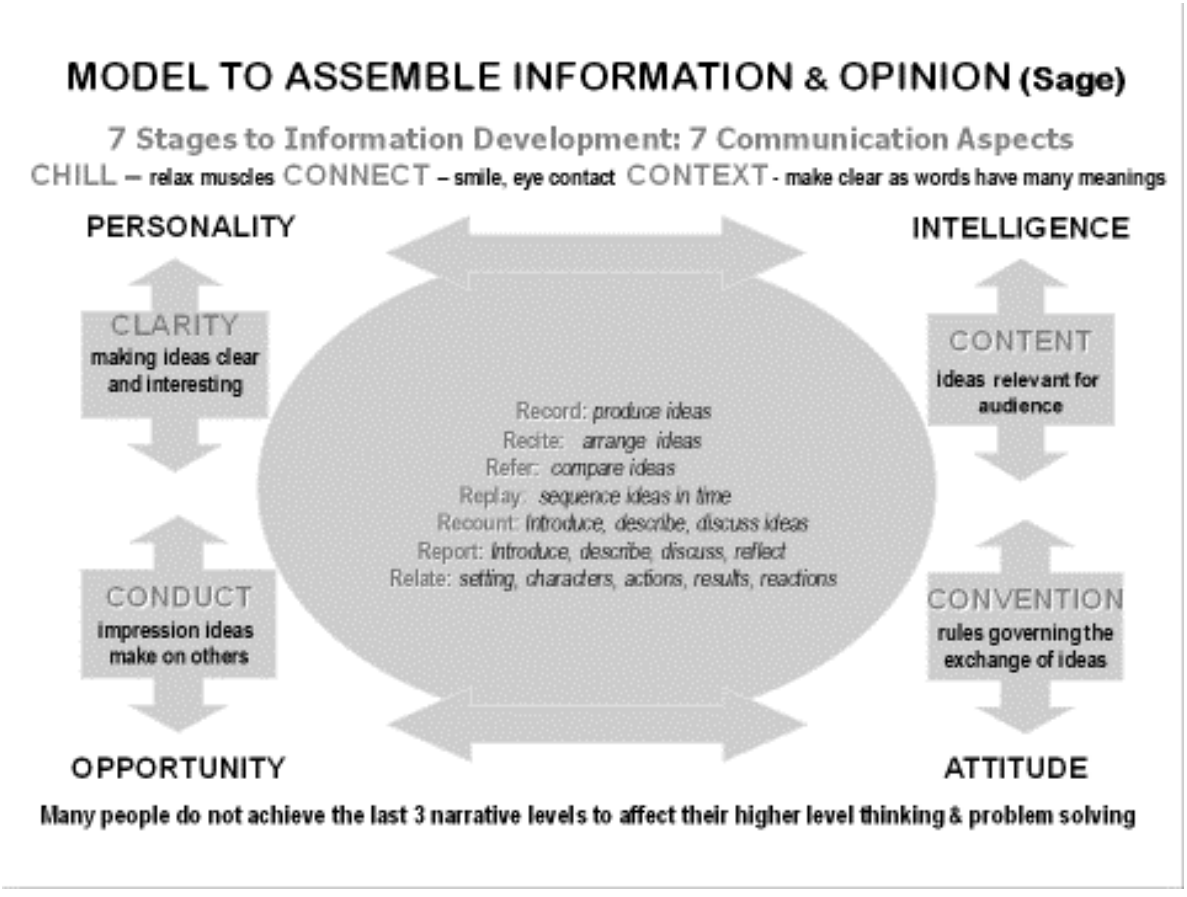

Figure 1. Model to Assemble Information & Opinion (sage)

Education must change to become more holistic and precise. While still accepting subject pass rates of 50% (or less) there is a demand for higher accuracy today. What accuracy rate do you want from your airline pilot, builder, bus driver, dentist, doctor and mechanic? This era requires more exactness than the system accepts. Fortunately, there is a world trend for personalised learning, ensuring students and professional trainees are prepared using practitioner models following agreed international criteria. We must work towards competencies not test scores and remain on content until mastery, in relevant, real contexts, rather than studying modular, abstract themes in prescriptive ways.

Our current system is called Swiss Cheese Learning (*cheese with holes*). Coffey et al (2021) used this phrase to describe gaps in human defences. If a student passes exams at a 75% level we praise them.

Thus, students think they have done well with a quarter of basic information missing. The issue is the 25% they may not know. Each year the curriculum builds on previously transmitted knowledge. Lack of a foundation compounds as learners move through the system, with some experiencing failure and loss of confidence. There are too many 'holes in the cheese' to apply knowledge effectively. A 50% (or less) pass indicates much learning is questionable, but is satisfactory for progression or a qualification.

Current education means completing set assignments and exams with little room for individuality. Passing prescribed tests does not guarantee students can apply learning in reality. Currently, 150 American schools have negotiated portfolios of evidence to universities and employers rather than Grade Point Averages (GPA). Portfolios demonstrate personal, practical and academic achievements more clearly than arbitrary tests. Thankfully, project-based learning is more common, demonstrating both knowledge and transferable abilities according to individual interests and capabilities. '*Since learning is so nuanced, so should be the means in which we assess it'* (Sackstein, 2015). Future education must centre around life-competencies and how to be a contributing citizen, based on individual talents and desires. It must focus on thinking, communication and practical application of knowledge and understanding. This requires rethinking everything we know and recognise about formal learning.

The World Bank (2019) report "The Education Crisis: Being in School is not the same as Learning" (2020) suggests hundreds of millions reach adulthood with no basic competencies, so that 56% are unable to be fully productive in life and work. The report stresses that educators generally are not given the knowledge to cope with a wide range of diversity. The United Nations 75 Digital Report (2020) suggests that 87% of people globally think that for education to improve there must be better communication and cooperation. Endorsing these views, two World Economic Forum 2020 reports state it is lamentable that trans-missive, lecture-based approaches dominate and so teachers must be trained to re-define their role and focus on the development of learners to become contributing members of society, by helping them to become aware of their specific interests and talents. Opportunities to learn how to communicate and cooperate are in group, project-based, relevant learning, which facilitates personal, practical and academic development. The Global Technology Governance Summit. Di Caro (2021) shows how diversity, equity and inclusion have failed, so attention should be given to equality issues.

How might we teach and reinforce abilities for the present and future? How can education deal with inequality issues of diverse learners? The answer has political, educational, social and technological aspects (Sage & Matteucci, 2022). Making language and communication a key factor may mean structural factors producing asymmetrical power relations amongst different social groups are overshadowed. We are all biased regarding accents and word use and classify people according to their speech. Thus, we are inclined not to listen to those whose talk reveals a social position we feel is not worthy of our attention. Language and communication proficiency and integration interact across many layers of social relationships. This must be acknowledged. Also, in today's world we love to label people to narrow our thinking. The times I have seen students diagnosed as *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder* (ADHD) to find that their language difficulties have never been considered as perhaps a reason for their attention and disruptive problems. Students deserve an expert, empathetic, integrated, holistic education that positively challenges, inspires and supports life-long learning. This requires interdisciplinary knowledge and understanding.

The OECD Director suggests Britain has made the slowest educational progress of the 38 OECD nations, because memorisation is the main learning strategy in a narrow, exam driven culture (Schleicher, 2020). He says that education today is not about teaching people something, but helping them develop a compass to integrate personal, practical and academic competencies. Work-readiness requires understanding of globalisation, coming from mobility and partnerships and continual professional development to broaden knowledge and understanding. Education must rebalance to develop a more holistic, world approach for coping with life, by fixing on real not abstract issues.

Bertling et al. (2020) report schools and colleges will never return to former teaching ways following the 2020 pandemic, with 50% preparing for a future of blended learning, with technology playing an increasing role in instruction. This requires ongoing professional development to understand brain information processing, as well as monitoring new teaching modes, using practitioner recording models to review evidence with colleagues. Since 60% or more students worldwide do not reach required educational standards, it is time to review policies and practices (Luckin, 2020).We are not there yet, but

if brave enough to do things differently it is possible. The training of teachers, with these ideas in focus, is vital if we care about the success of *all* citizens in our nations.

CONCLUSION

Education in the 21st century faces significant challenges, with British youth exhibiting alarmingly high levels of dissatisfaction and mental health issues, as evidenced by rising antidepressant prescriptions and OECD reports. This discontent stems from excessive online engagement, academic pressure, and limited social interactions, exacerbated by an outdated education system that prioritizes rote learning over critical thinking and communication skills. The advent of robots and artificial intelligence further complicates the landscape, rendering many traditional jobs obsolete and demanding new skill sets that current curricula fail to address. To prepare students for an uncertain future, education must shift from memorizing facts to fostering narrative speaking, intercultural communication, and independent problem-solving abilities.

The decline in communication skills and critical thinking is evident in studies showing British students' limited narrative abilities compared to past decades. These deficiencies have real-world consequences, leading to poor job performance, increased mental health issues, and higher costs due to communication errors in professional settings. Employers report that young workers lack initiative, effective communication, and the ability to work independently. To counter these trends, education systems must embrace holistic approaches, emphasizing autonomous learning, empathy, and practical application of knowledge. Personalized learning, project-based assessments, and portfolios can provide more accurate representations of students' abilities, preparing them for the complexities of modern life and work.

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