



What's it all about - this education?

Cathryn Gathercole reflects on work since Tide~ and the challenges from young people to core network thinking about education ... and learning.

She now lives in the North East.

Cathryn was Director of Tide~ global learning 2009 - 2016.

I have recently been working for a large education charity with a mission to work with the most challenging schools and address educational disadvantage. It runs well regarded professional development courses for teachers to increase proficiency in teaching and learning. I learnt a lot while working there.

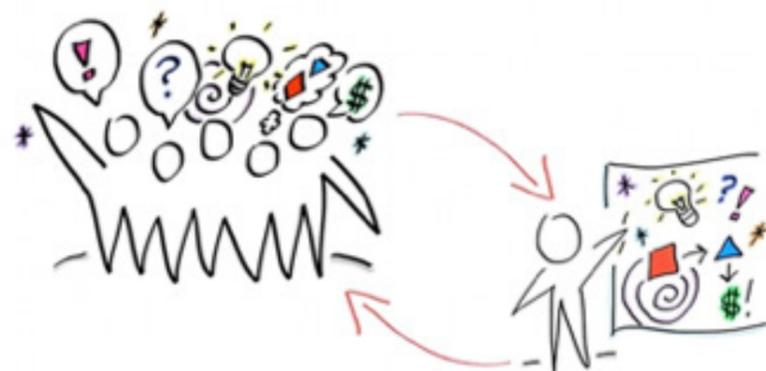
I had an opportunity to take part in high quality learning and gain new insights into teaching methodologies. The courses were very well designed, based on research with clear criteria for the choices of methodology. The teachers participating in the courses were enthusiastic learners and saw teaching as an academic endeavour. The organisation could point to evidence that previous participants had increased educational achievement among pupils, so the methods clearly worked.

These experiences prompted me to reflect on my involvement in global learning and consider the educational validity of what I did. The images used in these training sessions recalled the 'empty vessels' approach, whereby the role of a teacher is to fill the child with knowledge. I had used these images to show what global learning was not! **These reflections inevitably took me back to the perennial question about the purpose of education.**

The model I have described in paragraph 2 is based on key assumptions. Firstly, that levelling the playing field in educational achievement will level the socio-economic playing field. Secondly, that schools can do that on their own. Thirdly, that the current curriculum and assessment methods are best suited to achieving these ends.

Education is political. For years the focus was the 3R's – at least the focus for the public education system was. I would argue that the focus for the private sector was always how to maintain power, with both their formal and informal curriculum designed to do that.

Maybe that is why the private sector continued to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, extolling the virtues of educating the whole child when Michael Gove sought to shake up the curriculum for most learners in 2010. The current National Curriculum in England has just two stated aims. The first is to introduce pupils to 'the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens'. The second is not really an aim but says that teachers can also "do other things". I would argue that the current curriculum is about maintaining the status quo of power and influence rather than disrupting it.



Return to website



The Elephant Times



Photo: Amy Noonan

Black Lives Matter in Middlesbrough - one of many demonstrations all over the world.

In the last 12 months young people have organised on the streets demanding change for the climate and for racial equality. Both causes have made demands on the education system. The school strikes highlight collective action on climate change as a priority over an individual's education. Black Lives Matter call for the curriculum to be decolonised. **These demands challenge what is currently classed as essential knowledge, but they also raise questions of values, dispositions, skills and understandings.**

So I am bound to ask perennial questions of global learning:

What does it offer to young people today? Is it accessible and relevant to everyone? Will it improve their life chances and lead to a more just and sustainable world? How do we know?

Only if we challenge ourselves to respond to these questions can we ensure that global learning is relevant to the needs of all learners in 2020.



Cartoon: Martyn Turner

How should the Network respond to the challenges encapsulated in these demands?



Back to contents Tide~ on line magazine