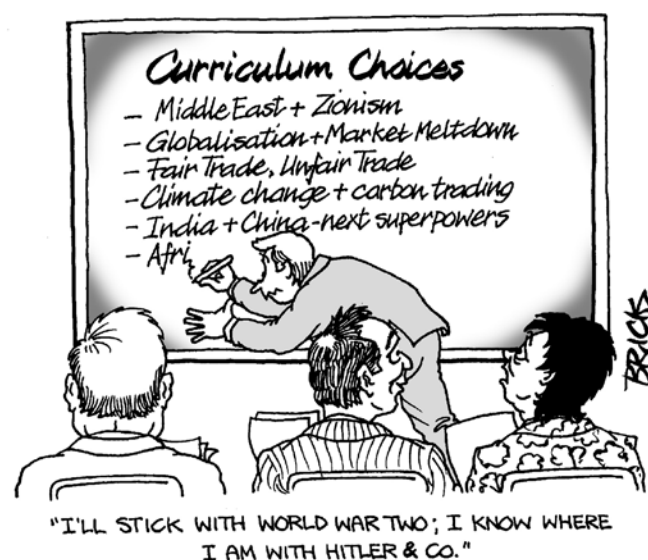




A curriculum that educates - rather than teaches

The Black Lives Matter movement has led to calls for the de-colonising of the curriculum and this has led schooling to question its influence and how it should respond.

The discomfort felt by many in the school system arises because the system has never been good at dealing with 'contentious issues'.



While the spotlight is currently on 'black history', it could equally be the Holocaust or the legacy of the Japanese involvement in World War 2 or the impact of nuclear testing in the 1960s. The discomfort is not confined to history but exists around issues of gender and of ethics in science or the portrayal of contentious issues in art.

Our national curriculum was developed in part to 'rein in' the growing tendency in some schools to debate with youngsters some issues that might be troubling if society at large started to 'think'.

I remember when I was at QCA and we published the initial draft of the structure for the revision of the key stage 3 curriculum. We had said that some aims for the curriculum might be useful (seen as a novel idea) and included one which was something like ...

'young people will be able to explore moral dilemmas and understand aspects of different moral codes, appreciating different viewpoints on the difference between right and wrong and justify their actions.'

This was met with questions in parliament and demands that children be taught precisely what is right and what is wrong. I remember being attacked on a radio programme by an MP who insisted that there are no 'grey areas'; actions are right or wrong and children should be told which was which. Two months later he was arguing that his apparent misclaiming of expenses took place because of the grey areas in the rules.

When state schools were established in 1870, the curriculum of the day reflected the current and popular aspects of society along with some things that had been the diet of public schools, though the classics were deemed not particularly appropriate for the masses and there was concern that we were going to lag behind other countries in developing science in schools. History was the British Empire in all its grandeur.

Just as we currently tell young people about World War 2 in part to recognise those who fought in it, so in 1870 we were about the same time span since Trafalgar and we were just out of the Crimean War. While we moved towards mass education to fuel the industrial growth, we still needed volunteers to fill mass graves of war so schooling could not risk anything other than to preach allegiance.

Mick Waters explores some fundamental issues about schools and the real world ... challenges to thinking about the future of global learning

Mick who is a Professor at Wolverhampton University is well known as Director of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA] -- 2005 - 09.



On the way to school. What should they expect of school? The Pampas Argentina. Painting by Miguel Argibay*

Geography was of our explorers. Livingstone had recently crossed Africa and it was exactly a hundred years since Cook popped into Botany Bay and claimed Australia. It was only 40 years since Wilberforce had persuaded parliament to abolish slavery and, while the inhumanity was acknowledged, there was no teaching of the wealth generated through the trade for some of the prominent British food producers, for example. Teaching about exploitation may have made those in Victorian times realise just how much they were being exploited by the mill owners and mine developers. Dickens died in 1870 and he formed the 'modern' of literature, a bit like teaching Margaret Atwood today. The Arts and Crafts movement was influential and current...and 'art and craft', including symmetrical pattern potato printing, was taught in English schools right up to 1980s.

From the outset, it was viewed that children should be taught that Britain is a model nation, successful and right. The same unregulated curriculum continued largely untroubled until the 1970s. A national curriculum arrived for many reasons. One was the growing mobility of families and the wider realisation that schooling was variable and also that children who moved school would repeat learning. With awareness of variability came growing disquiet about quality in schooling which became a convenient rationale for central control of schools.

In the 1960s, University exam boards, who ran GCE O levels and A levels began to bring in 'strange' subjects. One such was 'British Commonwealth History' O level, which encouraged consideration of the East India Companies and the triangular trade, with pupils invited to discuss issues of power, wealth, heritage and equality.

* Miguel was a partner in a project in the Basque Country. He is now retired. He paints, lives in Vitoria and is very busy.

One of the reasons for the establishment of the private exam boards (and their replacement with awarding bodies) by Baker was the need to stop the universities encouraging thinking which would upset the balance of society. Indeed, one of the drivers for the national curriculum was to rein in the discourse that was growing about the extent to which pupils might be allowed to meet and discuss controversial matters. The raising of the school leaving age in 1947 and 1971 had meant that 16 years olds were now at school so, in effect pupils who were previously seen as men and women were debating right and wrong in aspects of government and, by implication, their rulers. Hence, Thatcher decreed that teachers could only be registered if their degrees were in subjects of the national curriculum. Psychology, sociology and philosophy were all outlawed at the time because they were potentially dangerous.

Hence the national curriculum in 1988 tightened everything. There was sop to 'cross curriculum issues' which included such things as civics, health, technology and careers but they were quietly dropped after about a year because teachers were genuinely promoting cross curriculum thinking and ministers wanted certainty, in history in particular. Instead there was a nod to PHSE and Personal Development ... and civics which was neutered as much as possible. Doing this meant these aspects got about an hour a fortnight which would ensure they had as little impact as possible.

When Christian Barnard did the first heart transplant there was a moral and ethical outburst. Not only was it an affront to religion in many people's eyes, it involved a black man in the donor role. How could a woman's heart be placed in a man's body? When Louise Brown was born, the outcry about test tube babies was significant. **For these things to be discussed in**

school would risk a thinking generation so the pressure to increase the content and volume of exams was a strategy to stop teachers bringing learning into a real world ... and the real world into learning.

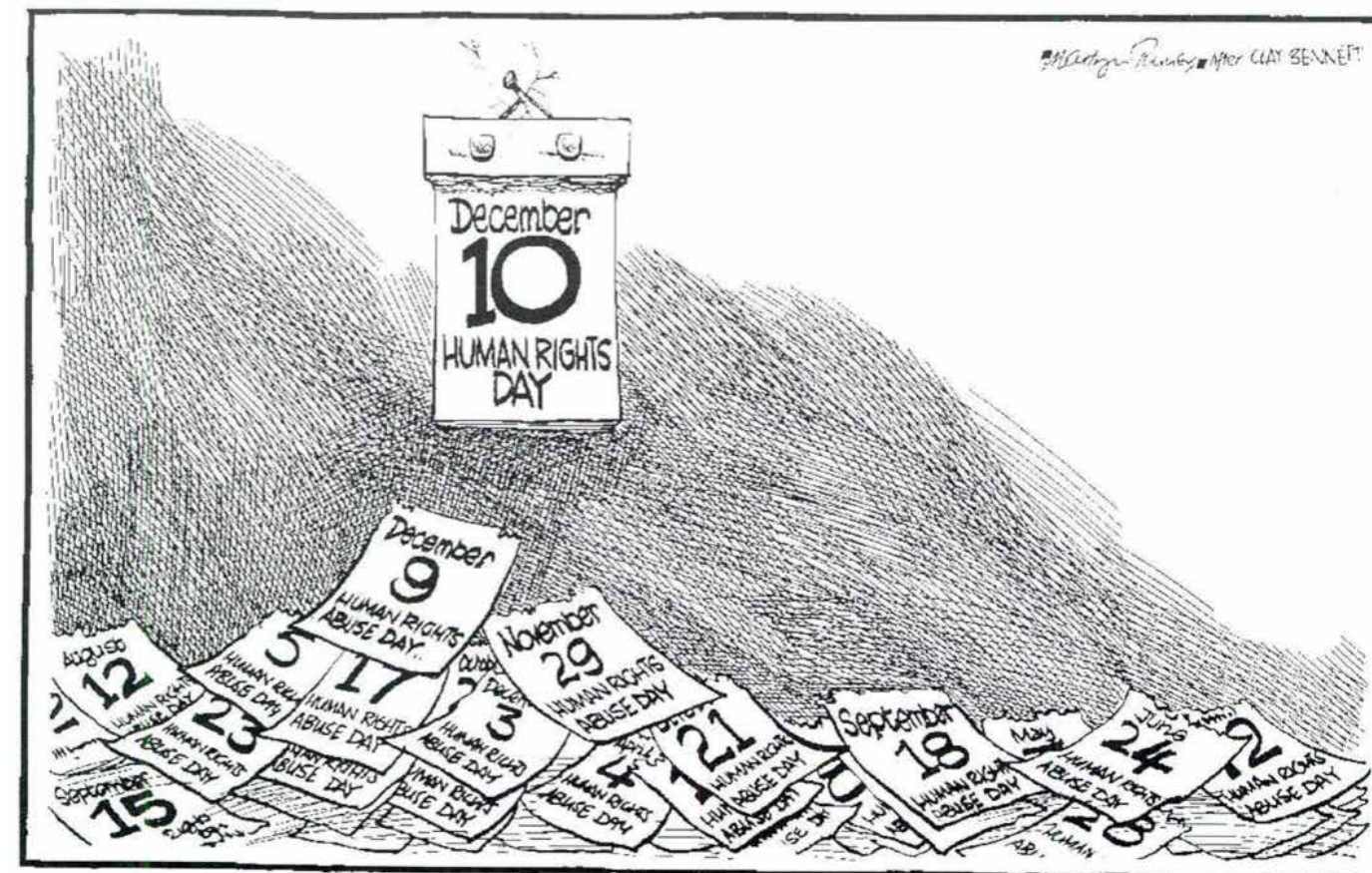
So vast swathes of life pass schools by: the Cold War, troubles on Northern Ireland, the battles with unions, the poll tax, the migration crisis, the MeToo movement all received barely a mention except perhaps, after due time, in history. More recently for example, the relatively uncontentious finding and relocation of Richard III's body got virtually no mention, even in history ... because teachers needed to 'get on'. The grooming of girls in towns across Britain went largely unmentioned in schools. This is not surprising; teachers have become so pushed to ensure success in the exams with passing groups of pupils that their capacity to build interest, excitement or intrigue in their subject discipline is limited as they teach 'an exam course'.

The change of the clocks twice a year is hardly mentioned, children study phases of the moon in a one-hour lesson without being asked to look at it. The wonder of ancient science or mathematics is lost in the clerical routine of schooling for exams.

Since schools began, they were in part seen as a haven for children away from the realities of life. One of the explicit reasons for compulsory state schooling was to protect children from the exploitation of child labour. Schools have always been places where kindly people protect children from the travails that adults in society are facing: wars, bombing, and, very recently, looking after vulnerable children in epidemic.



Cartoon: Bill Sanderson. DEC Pub: Half the lies are true [1986]



Cartoon by Martyn Turner from Thin Black Lines Rides Again

There has always been an effort to preserve children's innocence; shelter them from the harsh world outside and to leave to their families the embarrassing or the difficult to explain. Hence sex education was a quagmire that teachers were better avoiding until media let the previously hidden birds and bees escape. Steering clear of religious issues was seen as fine when church and Sunday school were prominent, yet with the new complexity of belief systems, schools usually fail to fulfil legal obligations in terms of worship, condoned by inspectors who turn a blind eye to contentious issues.

Contentious issues, though, have always vexed and governments avoid them in the knowledge that the teaching profession is unlikely to object to not being required to enter a minefield. So contentious issues tend to be addressed tentatively: Black History gets a month (in some schools), LGBT gets a fortnight and consciences are assuaged or issues dodged. Texts such as 'To Kill a Mockingbird' elbow in alongside the GCSE texts but pupils add to the pressure on teachers to pass the exam through extracts rather than explore thoroughly the social issues it exposes.

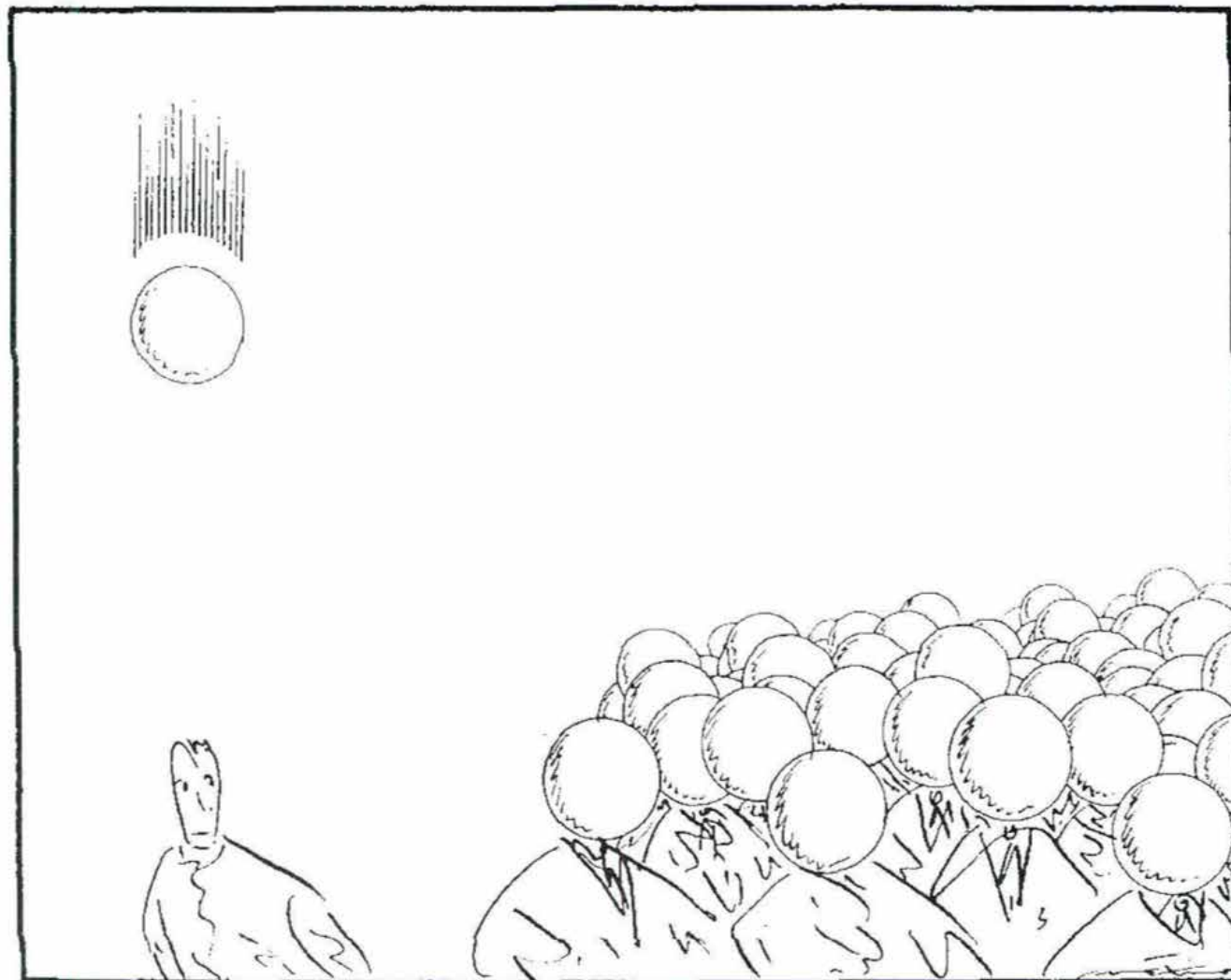
Our teaching of the Second World War encourages understanding of the blitzkrieg and British fortitude with little mention of allied bombing of Dresden. The opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in London, portrayed a history of the nation which we could celebrate, naturally avoiding the aspects over which we might be embarrassed. We celebrate British success in sport and schools are implored to seek marginal gains, yet the level of bullying and abuse that has become apparent in cycling, gymnastics and swimming creates an awkward discomfort.

Of course, environmental concerns and the battle for the planet were allowed, indeed encouraged by Gove as minister for the environment, who had determined that such issues of sustainability had little place in his 2014 national curriculum. This became less contentious in that it was a global issue and it would have been hard for us to be out of step.



The sad thing here was that teachers' new-found zeal for real issues seemed to stop at muttering about plastic. At the same time, the daily sticking in of printed sheets into exercise books meaning the destruction of trees simply to act as place holders for photocopying went unremarked ... even in so called Eco schools.

A few years ago, the government had a chance to assert again and introduced Fundamental British Values. Worried about Fundamentalism, they introduced not just British Values, but Fundamental ones. Given the gaming of the system to do well with Ofsted, this was relatively easy for many schools. A display near the entrance door with images of the Queen, prime minister, union flag, telephone box and a bag of chips...a quick assembly...job done! (Incidentally, I saw a school display in February this year which had David Cameron 's picture as prime minister).



Cartoon by MAXIMO [Spain] - from Thin Black Lines Rides Again

Too much of curriculum design perceives learning as a linear process both in 'coverage' of content and in the building of knowledge, skills and understandings. True geographers, scientists, mathematicians and historians make connections between spheres of learning. They see the potential tangents in science, the patterns in mathematics, the roots in languages, the influences in art and the cause and effect in geography; and they see each in the others. True historians do not see a linear progression of events but a 'corkscrew effect' of history repeating aspects of itself in the lives people experience.

I think it comes back to conversations about Personal Development. I think everything we do in school is about Personal Development and

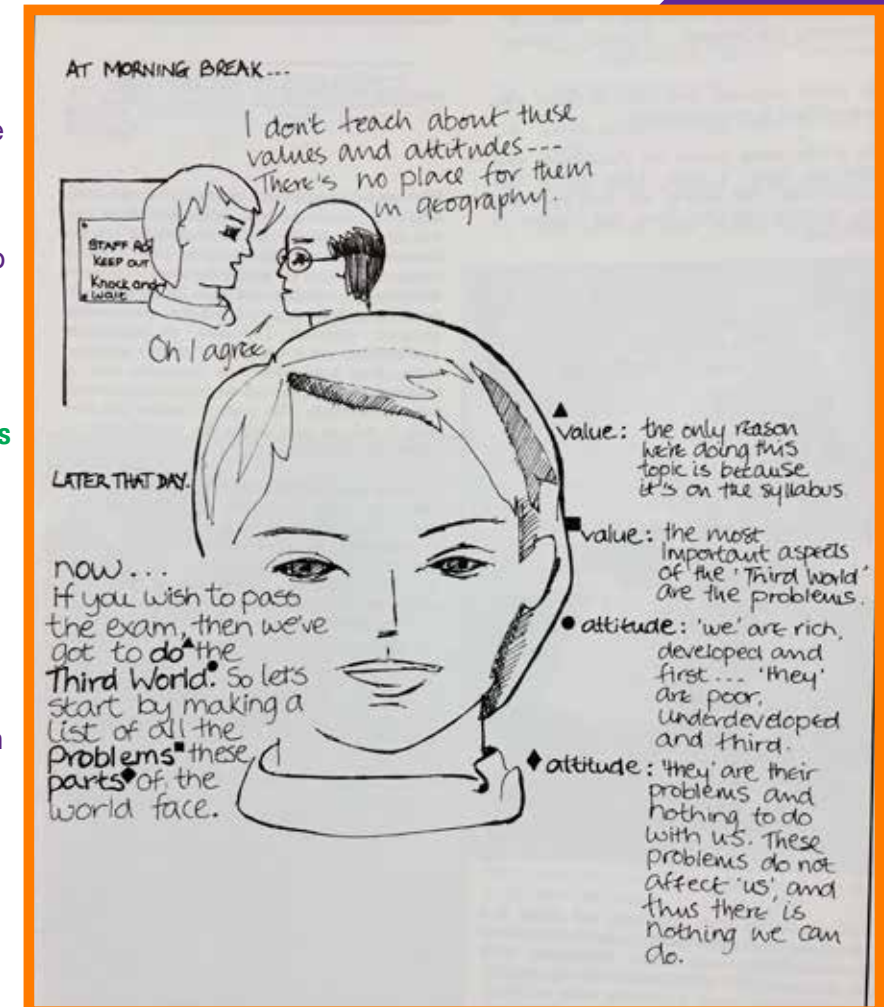
teaching history, geography, science, art, maths and other disciplines is all about working with youngsters to open their eyes through the subject discipline ... to educate them.

This was at the heart of the Crick Report in 1998 that heralded citizenship making an entrance. This asserted that **"we should not attempt to shelter our nation's children from even the harsher controversies of adult life, but should prepare them to deal with such controversies knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally."** Citizenship along with PHSE took a battering from Gove's reforms.

I still have the view that, if children are well taught, the syllabus for the exam can be used to prepare for exam in the recommended guided learning hours. If children didn't, for example, spend an hour a day in doing starters in lessons and writing lesson objectives that are rarely mentioned thereafter, they could be discussing contentious matters. That would be five hours a week ... the equivalent of about 7 school weeks a year or nearly a year over their secondary school career.

But that would need teachers who are at ease with discussing contentious issues and many are not. Partly because of the fear of parent reaction as in the gender demonstrations and blockades in Birmingham recently and also because, due to the curriculum of their own schooling, many do not understand the impact of their subject discipline on society beyond its exam status.

Communicating the joy of the subject discipline, the intrigue of those who have practised the discipline as specialists, the effect of the discipline on civilisation for good or ill, the application of the discipline in the real world and the relationship it has with others **are the true role of the teacher and it is where leadership has to step beyond the compliance of a results regime and engineer true education.**



From DEC publication 'People before Places?' [1985] What has moved on? What has not?

A time to re-think?

What questions does Mick Waters' article raise for thinking about Tide~ priorities ... and strategy?

We advocate bringing the world into the classroom, seeing global issues in our local community, enabling learners to engage with complexity. Has this now become something even more imperative?

What are the implications -- for teacher professionalism? --- for meeting the needs of learners growing up in the 2020s?

