

Teacher entitlement - why is it needed?

Jeff Serf & Scott Sindair

We reflect ...

Conversation has potential, - potential to influence positive change, potential to unlock our ideas and to value the stimulus of a diversity of responses to a challenge – a challenge such as the climate crisis.

As editors of the ET magazine, we keep on asking people to reflect on what they have been doing – in recent issues this has focused on the educational implications of climate change. It is now time for us as editors to reflect on how we might build on the dialogue that has evolved.



The poster 'The Climate is Changing' asks "Why aren't we?". In the case of this ET the "we" is the education community – and the systems and professionals that shape practice.

The role of teachers is pivotal, yet often taken for granted.

Would debate about the notion of a Teacher Entitlement help highlight how 'we' could change?

The [Conversations](#) in November 2022, and associated interviews, highlighted many examples of sound practice and enthusiasm for engaging with the issues. There is much that inspires.

Yet many concerns were also expressed ranging from: the schools that are not addressing the basics of sustainability and climate change awareness; to the confusion of government messages.

The experience has endorsed the proposition that there is value in work that focuses on **an education-driven agenda responding to the climate crisis**, work that helps build the confidence of education practitioners to be creative about the role of teachers and schools to be part of the solution. Work that complements and is stimulated by other climate change responses but that is distinctive in its focus on the role of schools.

There is a need for further dialogue about: - all aspects of learner needs; teachers and teacher entitlement; school organisation and the effect of education policies.

Many young people are leading the way on the need to address climate change and the importance of climate justice. They have agency. The 'Teens and Teachers' conference highlights this priority and the value of teachers learning with students [see p 39]. As [Liz Cripps'](#) article put it

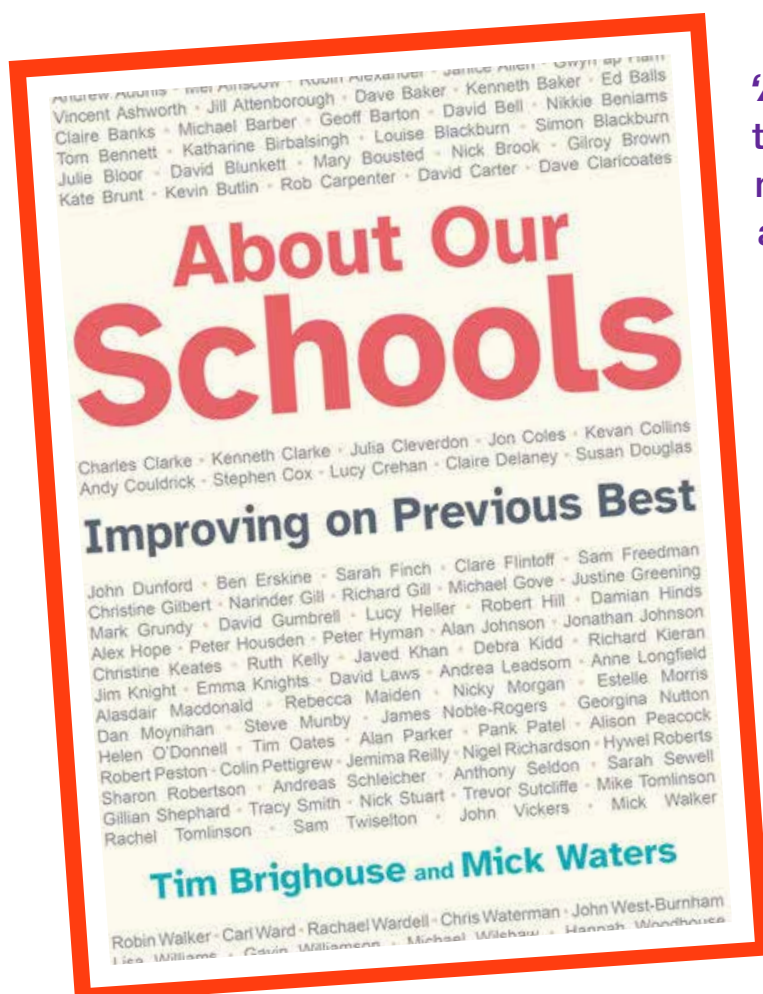
"As well as cultivating citizenship and autonomy, we must recognise and respect young people's unique vulnerability and insight, their political voice."



Video: Paul Carvin - from The Three Rivers Learning Trust, Morpeth

The Paul Carvin video captures the essence of how we might begin to shape an education-driven response to the climate crisis. **It is not just learning about climate change, it is about the development of education opportunities that equip students, and society, for a future that will be impacted by climate change and the consequences of that change.**

See for example when Paul talks about the need for poets



‘About our Schools’, which was one of the starting points for the project, offers much to think about in terms of such an education response but the book [reflecting the many policy-makers and past Ministers interviewed] does not highlight climate change as such.

Authors Tim Brighouse and Mick Waters joined a Tide~ group set up to facilitate the project Conversations and the series of ET magazines, that brought together a range of people involved in education.

For an insight to some of the core questions they explore see BERA article ... [What is the purpose of school and who should control it?](#)

We explored many ideas. In this article we highlight matters relating to:

Learner needs, Awareness, Process - and revisit the connecting dialogue approach.

Learner needs ...

Much of the discussion, and many of the ET articles, highlight learner needs as a core driver for schools. However much concern was expressed about ways in which aspects of curriculum policy and approaches to accountability are in tension with this priority.

There is a need to address learning about climate change but also as important are matters of well-being and the impact of what could be described as eco-anxiety.

Many involved described how taking action on climate related matters was effective in reducing such anxiety. Nevertheless it a key issue. See, for example, [‘Climate change is harming my mental health’](#).

The idea of a Climate Education Entitlement is proposed, with specific opportunities for children, and for adolescents. The outcome of work on this will be the main feature of the next ET magazine.

There is a need for better connections between different aspects of curriculum and more learning approaches that enable learners to engage, for themselves, with complex realities. Such skills need not be developed by a focus on climate change or sustainability. Indeed, we need to avoid “going on about sustainability”, and **effectively reducing the questioning that is essential** – and maybe reducing the learning.

Clearly it is also important that schools, like other organisations, develop policies and practice that address their environmental impact. They have the advantage, or is it seen as a challenge, of also making those initiatives **a stimulus to learning and student engagement**.

See for example ET article by [Chris Berry](#)



Early exploration of the outdoors and of nature is important and needs to progress as children develop. The work of [Forest Schools](#) featured in several discussions. [Learning Through Landscapes](#) Outdoor Learning frameworks were also highlighted.

Awareness ...

Climate change is a complex reality, it is a global issue, global co-operation – [and the complexity that involves] - is needed to respond. Most solutions also raise other questions, not least, about global justice.

Opportunities to build our own awareness should be core to teacher entitlement.

This, we suggest, should be open to ALL teachers. It would be about our own learning, so we feel comfortable with the complexity and confident to be creative. This would, for example, enable us to work more effectively with colleagues on Learner needs in this context, and to clarify what different curriculum areas can offer. As mentioned already, those Learner needs are wider than “learning about climate change”.

Such an approach would also help clarify that we are not just talking about geography and science, nor about a new set of tick boxes, for example to do with recycling. The challenge is greater than that.

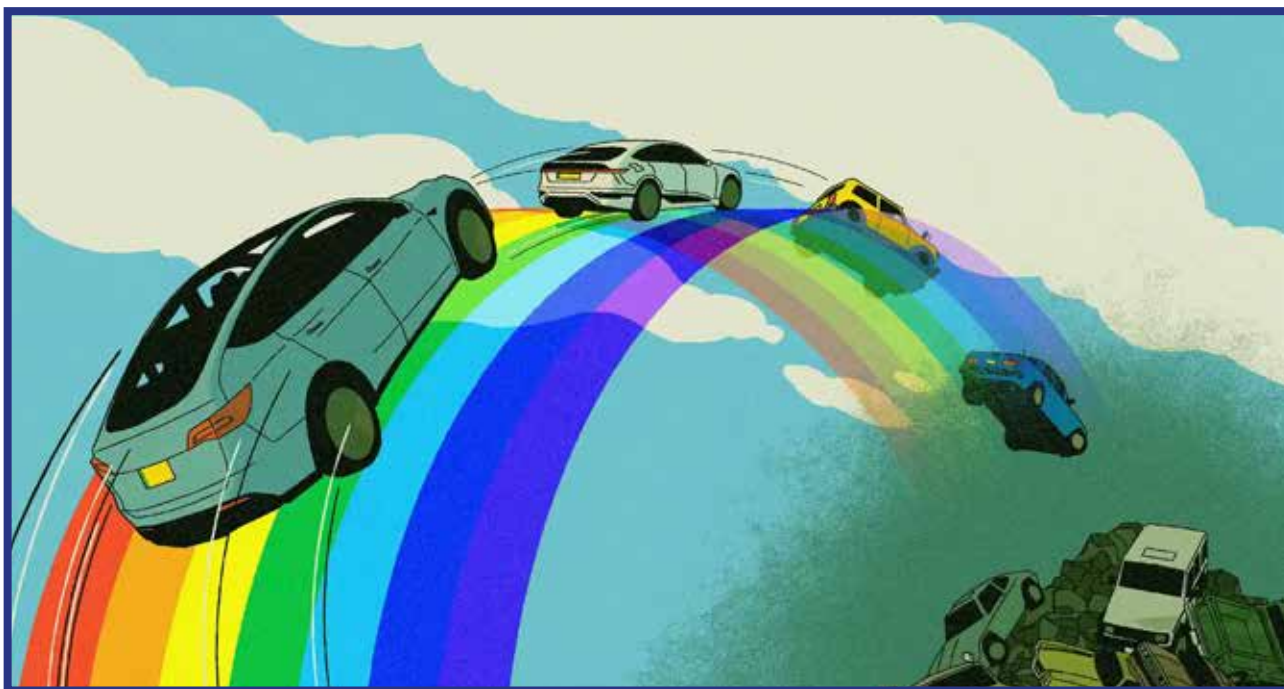


Illustration: R Freeson. The Guardian

Our learning, like that of children and students, needs to take on the uncertainty and the dynamic of new understandings of different aspects of climate change, and the ongoing essential debates.

The illustration - a positive solution, electric cars, fading into disappointment and the need to rethink. It introduced an article by [Rowan Atkinson](#) that is worth a read alongside a fact check article by [Simon Evans](#). The point is that we need to build our ability to engage with such debates. There is no one view that deals with the many questions there are to ask about electric cars. We need both facts and the ability to question.

We all need to **build up our own ‘Critical Reality Assessment’ processes**, even more so in the context of social media and partial news, and the dynamic of changing awareness of complex matters, such as climate change. This is also a core challenge to thinking about learner needs.

Such awareness in a teacher team would also provide the basis for discussion about professional roles relating to matters such as the balance between optimistic and pessimistic dispositions - and the political dimension.

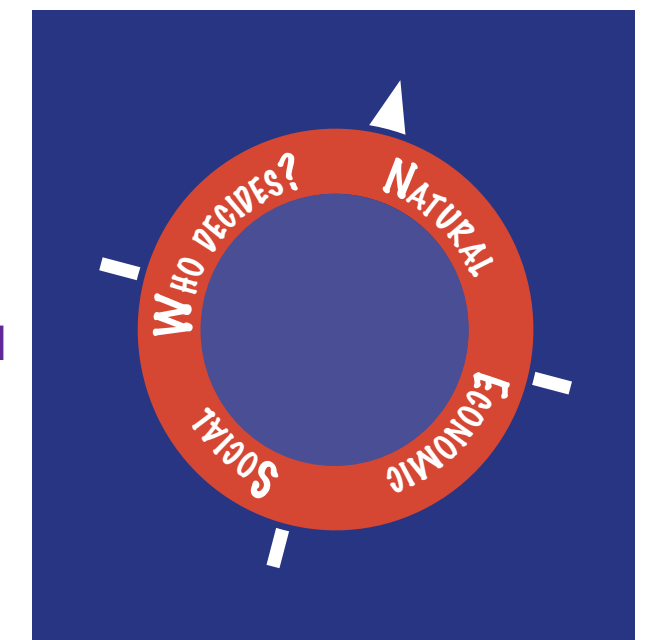
Professionally we have choices.

- ❑ We need to consider **the need for optimism and a positive outlook** without just putting a simplistic “green wash” on the realities.
- ❑ The political dimension - **the question of “who decides?” is pivotal to understanding** - we need to have clear strategies to engage this, without being partial ourselves.

The **development compass rose** is an example of making the complex more accessible. The activities enable learners to generate questions, then develop their own enquiry routes and make connections between different aspects.

Understanding sustainable development involves making connections between nature and **Natural** systems and **Social** and **Economic** activity, as featured in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The decisions involved, the **[W - Who decides?]** range from those we take individually, to companies and governments, to international organisations. Work on that dimension is vital to understanding, and creative thinking about the future.



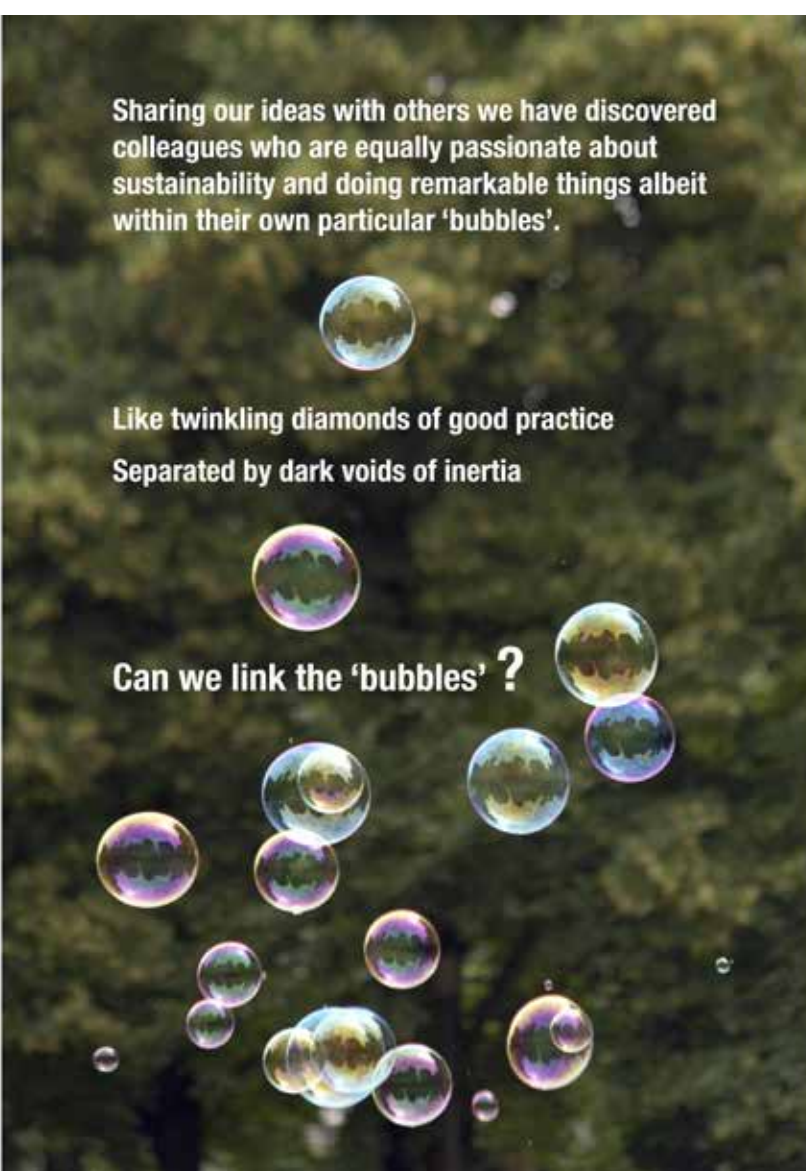
Process ...

In one of the Conversations, [Anne Dolan](#) described the process of developing 'Teaching Climate Change in Primary Schools'. It involved 21 contributors, who are lecturers in teacher education in Limerick. Many initially expressed concerns about their own awareness or assumed that this was a matter for those teaching science or geography.

"A rigorous CPD programme ensued. A group of committed teacher educators met monthly to discuss the causes and impacts of climate change. We invited guest speakers, we travelled to sustainable projects but most importantly of all we began a conversation."

Creating 'space' for teachers to work together creatively is vital to an entitlement. There is also scope for innovation as [Stephen Scoffham & Steve Rawlinson](#) reflected in an article about the development of their book - 'Sustainability Education: A Classroom Guide'...

"Just as in the natural world diversity helps to ensure the resilience of a habitat, so the educational eco-system benefits from a multiplicity of approaches and interpretations."



In that article Stephen and Steve talked about "a world populated by *twinkling diamonds of good practice* [and innovation] *but separated by dark voids of inertia*".

Can we both link the bubbles and value their separate entities?

Clearly there is much to be gained from books such as these and the innovation of others, as featured in ET articles. They give us a head start, but in the same way that no one can learn for us - we too need to be part of an innovatory process.

That is unless you think teachers are just there to do as they are told.

Agency is an issue we need to debate.

Can teachers enable learner agency if they have very limited curriculum agency themselves?



Cartoon by BRICK

Making the connections - teacher Agency - developing learner Agency skills?

A connecting dialogues approach ...

In 2020, during the global pandemic, Tide~ brought together a small group to review priorities. **The pandemic made it clear that we live in a global society and are intimately and intricately connected to people and places all over the world.** This is also essential to understanding the implications of the climate crisis.

The work reflected the spirit of the network's early thinking about the nature of 'Development Education'. Which we defined as

'an approach which seeks to equip people to participate in world society' - and is best described as -

'a process which enables people to work out for themselves what they think'.

From 'What is Development Education? - Nov 1981

A 'connecting dialogues' approach took shape because it was felt that dialogue is essential to enabling us all to engage productively with others, including those who we might not agree with.

The approach assumes that we are all learning all the time, so it is relevant to people at all ages and stages of our lives and careers.

The aim is to enable us as learners to consider our own views, to develop our ideas, values, and opinions, and to understand where and how these opinions are formed. And to be prepared to change our minds when presented with new evidence, or other ways of finding evidence.

Tide ~ has a history of enabling space for teachers at all stages of their careers to support each other. For us as teachers, and for our students, to participate as a global citizen means that we need the skills and enthusiasms to care about the big global challenges such as Climate Change, but also, for example, Migration, Inequality, Injustice, Exploitation, Conflict. These challenges do concern and motivate many young people. **There is a need to provide stimulus to encourage teachers to work with students, to have dialogue about their concerns.**

The aspiration is not to indoctrinate students, or push specific views at them, but to educate them by opening up possibilities. This is not easy, particularly with matters such as sustainable development when we can default to prescribing actions. **Education that enables active global citizens is about listening, reflecting, investigating, proposing, thinking, discovering: learning.**

In the current social, communications, political and economic environment it can be tempting to opt out, or to opt for simplistic answers and explanations of what is going on, to create new “tick boxes”. But reality is not simple. All of us can hold contradictory thoughts and emotions at any one time. **There is a need to find ways in which teachers and students can feel confident in learning about and discussing complexity, without feeling overwhelmed.**

To examine the many facets of complex issues and concerns is not about finding ‘right’ answers, or about particular activities, or even about taking part in protests, although it might involve all of those. Fundamentally it is about working out where we stand, what has influenced us, and to be prepared re-evaluate our position, as well as to debate it with others.

And if that is all we do, that’s ok. More than ok. Because when we have a dialogue about complex global concerns, we make it possible for others to do the same, the skill to do this, individually and collectively grows. **In this way, as educationalists, we contribute to the long-term development of thoughtful, active global citizens and to the possibility of creativity that leads to real change.**

- ☐ **How do we lobby for recognition of such a teacher entitlement?**
- ☐ **Who do we lobby?** [Education leaders? Government? International organisations? Climate Change organisations?]

Photo: Carl Mountain



Invitation

to a Zoom Conversation

Thursday 6th July at 6.30

To consider:

- ☐ core issues from the project - where do we go from here?
- ☐ a proposal about teacher entitlement
- ☐ the outcomes of the ‘Teens & Teachers’ conference

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