



# A conversation with Gilroy Brown

## On Black Lives Matters ...

Black Lives have and always will matter, but what's different about the current situation is that many more people, regardless of age, ethnicity, nationality, gender or social class, are prepared to say it loud and clear.

George Floyd's murder is etched into people's memory, rather like 9/11. It woke up many people to the fact that we're still largely powerless and, that relatively speaking, things haven't changed much over the past 20 years.

In that time several reports and enquiries have made dozens of recommendations, but few have been implemented, and a lot of good opportunities have been missed. Therefore, the required structural changes haven't occurred and, so for people like me, success was in spite of the system, rather than any vision that the educational hierarchy should reflect its workforce, its pupils and the community. There was a lack of political will and the structural restraints are still there, the gate-keepers are still on guard. However, I'm optimistic about the future because young people across the board see the need for change and desire it. They're not demotivated by the 1970s and 1980s. The voices for change are now inside shouting, not outside facing a closed door.

I worked in and with Birmingham schools for many years and I believe that it's one of the best places to live. There have been less social disturbances there than in many other places. That's the result of several factors, including its strong multi-cultural support unit and the work of individuals such as Tim Brighouse and Maurice Coles.

## On Maurice Irfan Coles

I find it impossible to encapsulate Maurice's character and his contribution to education is hard to define but, nevertheless, significant. He was a true world citizen – a brother, a close family friend, a fellow traveller, a professional, a mentor, a stimulator of minds. He saw life as a series of discoveries and one of his personal discoveries brought him peace – his discovery of Islam – and enhanced his already spiritual nature. Above all, Maurice was a good teacher and so he cared.

Maurice believed that good teachers care about their pupils, care about their community and care about the planet as his short, but thought-provoking, [TED lecture](#) illustrates.

**C - Compassion ... Love in Action**

**R - Religion & Spirituality**

**E - Education & Equality**

**S - Science of the systems of the brain**

**T - Technology**

Although we were called to different religions, we both cared about a Higher Identity. Maurice was spiritual, authentic, and grounded, and was able to communicate with people, be they Harvard dons or a group of youngsters on a street corner in Handsworth.

We [Jeff & Scott] interviewed **Gilroy Brown**. It was a lively and enjoyable conversation.

We were reflecting on **Maurice Coles** who was taken by Covid-19 in April.

First we asked Gilroy about BLM. Gilroy, who was the first black male primary Head in Birmingham, has been involved in several Tide~ projects including the 'West Midlands Commission on Global Citizenship'. [\[add link?\]](#)

Jeff Serf wrote up some of the things he said .....



"Technology ... including trees - and the sun" [Maurice in Ted Talk] Birmingham : a city of many trees.

His long list of publications illustrates his ability to communicate with fellow educators; for example, **Towards the compassionate school**. Here, Maurice argued that to be compassionate one should recognise distress and suffering and empathise with those affected, but to go beyond that and be prepared for action – to alleviate the distress, to counter the suffering. His aim for education can be summed up:

**"By the time students finish their statutory education, what do we hope they will have become? That is the question. Most of us would agree that we hope they would be fluent, decent, self-driven attainers who live the democratic ideals to which we subscribe; that they would be compassionate individuals who care for each other and care for the planet."**

## On Compassion

Maurice's aim for education is a valid one. Compassion is innate to the human species; just like creativity, we're born with it. However, on the whole the present education system works against such innate traits. Therefore, the current system needs reform if it is to support individuals in developing fluent, decent, self-driven attainers, who work to protect a society that is lastingly democratic.

We should recognise that compassion is a verb – a 'doing word'. As Desmond Tutu stated:

**"Frequently people think compassion and love are merely sentimental. No! They are very demanding. If you are going to be compassionate, be prepared for action."**

We claim to prepare young people to take their place in society, to contribute to the general good, to provide them with the skills they're require to thrive. Development Education has a significant role giving individuals agency and enabling them to recognise and work against injustice - essential skills and dispositions for the 21st Century.

