

Teaching in England: Big changes – bigger questions

Reading Gavin Williamson's recent [speech](#), in which he reiterated the Government's ambition for schools to achieve 100% academisation (how did that ever become a word?), I was struck by his rationale. He wants to see us "*break away from our current pick-and-mix structure of the school system and move towards a single model.*" In the 1980s the Government invoked 'choice' (they meant 'preference') to start dismantling the single model of Local Education Authority (LEA) schools overseen by elected councils. Yet now we need to break away from pick-and-mix to achieve complete academisation (don't say privatisation). And we're told that, for Gavz, "*it is not about ideology...*" Yeah, and I'm a potato.

Tuber or otherwise, I'm not here to call for a programme of *re-local authoritisation* (wince away, it may yet become a thing), rather I'm interested in what this means for environmental education. Before doing that, I should mention a related development in teacher education. The Government's Early Career Framework, which all newly qualified teachers must follow for two years starting this September, includes funding for schools *if* they use one of only six Government-recommended providers. Interestingly, there is also a Core Content Framework for initial teacher education that will no doubt lend itself to the same pattern of privatisation. Thus, the next generation of teachers will, in time, no longer be moulded by supposed lefty university lecturers; instead they will train on-the-job within private or voluntary sector Multi-academy Trusts (MATs), overseen by a handful of corporations that will have cleaned up the national provider contracts. So, less theory and criticality – more doing 'what works' according to Government-sponsored research. For a privatised model, it's Stalinist in its centralism.

Perhaps the biggest surprise – even to me – is that I see some hope in this not-at-all-ideologically-driven shift of education into the hands of big business and social entrepreneurs. Not hopeful for the soul of education you understand but, possibly, for environmental education.

Ask yourself these questions:

Q1. When was that Golden Age when the environment was a pre-eminent concern for our schools?

I would hazard a guess that, despite some excellent support for environmental and outdoor education across many LEAs in the past, most responses to this question would admit that there has always been – and remains – much to be done to put the environment at the heart of education.

Q.2 Between government ministers and socially-immersed businesses, which of these is likely to respond more quickly to cultural and environmental shifts?

Responses may depend on ideological positions but while I'm no fan of raw capitalism I do recognise the private sector's creativity; businesses thrive or fail depending on their ability to adjust. Similarly, schools have always responded, one way or another, to pupils' concerns – and now, it seems, they have a commercial imperative to not being on the wrong side of history.

Q3. Is a deep-seated cultural shift taking place in favour of social and environmental justice?

Post-COVID, some may wish 'new normal' to resemble business-as-usual but change is afoot. Driven largely by young people who, unencumbered by capital's old snares of secure jobs and mortgages, are making themselves heard in their networked millions. Chiming with recent UN [resolutions](#), their demands are unlikely to recede any more than our environmental crises. As 19-year old activist, Xiye Bastida, [said](#) at the recent Leaders' Climate Summit, "*It is not enough to ask what world we are delivering to future generations but what generations we are delivering to the world.*" MATs, like

other businesses, may well recognise that it is in their best interests to respond swiftly and positively to such calls. If there was ever a Golden Age for environmental education surely it has just begun.

UN [resolutions](http://tinyurl.com/od9mens): <http://tinyurl.com/od9mens>

Bastida [said](https://tinyurl.com/7cz78kkf): <https://tinyurl.com/7cz78kkf>