THE LONG INTERVIEW

A Journey through the World of (Humanistic) Education

Professor of Education **Saville Kushner** is interviewed by Richard House

Richard House [**RH**]: Sav, you and I go back a long way! – right back to 1976 when we were both starting our respective Ph.D.'s at the University of East Anglia (UEA), you in Education, me in Environmental Science. I'd like much of this interview to be concerned with your interest in humanistic education, as befits a Humanistic Psychology magazine; but can we start with you giving our readers a potted history of your academic and educational career, your (research) interests and commitments, and perhaps mentioning which figures (colleagues, writers, theorists) have had most influence on you on your journey through education.

Saville Kushner [SK]: Well, I stayed at UEA for 23 years – it was too exciting a place to leave. The Centre for Applied Research in Education (C.A.R.E.) was a methodological hothouse. We were working on further developing Democratic Evaluation, Case Study and Action Research – along with transatlantic cousins at the University of Illinois. We shifted from one project to another, refining the techniques and deepening our understanding of the politics and ethics of evaluative research. I carried it with me to Bristol (University of the West of England – UWE), to a secondment to UNICEF (Panama) and then to the University of Auckland (Aotearoa NZ), wending my way

through case-study evaluations of international development, criminal justice, health services, education, the performing arts and more – all the time promoting the same democratic ethic.

As you know, in the background was always Lawrence Stenhouse and his humanistic approach to curriculum and curriculum development. That never left me – in fact, I recently wrote about how his curriculum principles underpinned much of the theorising going on at the time about evaluation methods (Kushner, 2017, Ch. II). So that's where I've returned in my retirement. Evaluation – at least in the democratic terms in which we cast it – is now a busted flush, so I took my leave of the field and came back to the loadstone: humanist curriculum. But Stenhouse died in 1982. The world has changed in so many ways, making different demands on curriculum. What would Lawrence say today?

So, 2017 – a minor car accident in Italy with an enforced extension of holiday for three weeks – Ame (my wife) and I made for Florence. I discovered what schooling had forgotten to reveal to me – the Renaissance. We had a guide take us round the Ufizzi on a chronological tour from Cimabue and Giotto, through to Boticelli, Michelangelo and Leonardo. I told him I was

noticing the emergence of narrative expression – he didn't respond. I plunged into frantic reading over the next two years, including a return to Florence, quickly linking Renaissance painting, narrative expression and a redefinition of European Humanism – all neatly drawing together historical threads in Florence, France... – Dante Alighieri, Petrarch, Rabelais, Abelard, Roger Bacon. Thomas Cahill's *Hinges of History*[1] series most recently summarised my studies into European Humanism.

I remembered Lawrence excitedly discovering Abelard, his embrace of doubt, rational ambiguity and empirical proof. Here lies the clue. And this is where I am on my journey into re-education. In order to understand the humanist challenge for curriculum – individual agency, subjective plausibility before truth, the non-contingency of knowledge – we have to go back to its roots, to those supremely gifted artists and poets who understood it so well, and who so immersed themselves in the commitment to its pursuit. They pre-figured existentialism and philosophical pragmatism – the two contemporary philosophies that are, for me, the contemporary pillars of humanism.

And, of course, it folds back, not just into Stenhouse but into the narrative methodologies that we were busy developing when you and me last met, Richard.

RH: Oh the memories, Sav. I remember all too well the sheer intellectual excitement of C.A.R.E., the amazing seminars you put on (with visiting speakers like Gunnar Olsson and Vic Allen), the thoughtful gravity of Lawrence (when he spoke, *everyone* listened!), and great intellects like Stephen Kemmis and David Hamilton. And of course our old sparring partner Nigel Norris (now professor of education at UEA). I'm not surprised you stayed for 23 years!

I really want to go into humanism and humanistic education with you in this interview. But first, a bit of ground-clearing and preparation. I can remember you discovering 'paranoia criticism' and dada, and me discovering Paul Feyerabend's 'anarchistic theory of knowledge' (Feyerabend, 1975 – see the Feyerabend interview in this issue) and Barry Hindess' social science philosophy

(Hindess, 1977), and every conceivable critique of positivism and its methodologies… – and the visceral excitement of mixing these discoveries into our intoxicating conversations. Now, in retrospect, I see all this as an instance of our own live, visceral (fumbling?) creation of 'the postmodern' – even though we didn't have that term available to us at that time (this was 1976–8; the first really public academic statement of 'the postmodern' didn't appear until 1979, with Jean-François Lyotard's celebrated book *La Condition Postmoderne* – Lyotard, 1984). So even as postmodernism was emerging in modern academic and intellectual-philosophical culture (with Rorty also coming on to the scene in the late '70s – Rorty, 1979), I now think we were immersed in that breathtaking journey in our own studies, interests and commitments, too.

So my first question is, did you embrace postmodernism and post-structuralism in the next decade or two, after we lost contact? – as did the likes of Peter Abbs, Stanley Aronowitz, Ian Byant, Henry Giroux, Patti Lather, Maggie MacLure, Peter Moss, David Orr, Ian Stronach, Michael Peters, Robin Usher etc. And if you did, what has happened over the years to any postmodern commitments you had at that time?

I'm also intrigued by your statement, 'Evaluation – at least in the democratic terms in which we cast it – is now a busted flush'. I'm struggling to know what this might mean – but I definitely need to know! Do you mean that the aspiration to, and hopes for, democratic evaluation have now been comprehensively dashed by the instrumentalist Audit Culture in education – such that the battle is now lost? Or do you mean something else? Lots to chew over there in our time-honoured fashion!

SK: You were introducing me to radical literatures – much in Geography. I was stunned that the academic Geography discipline was a site for more radical ideas and literature than was Education – which possibly remains the case. For sure, educational theorists have been at the centre of current extreme right-wing policies towards education and testing. There's an interesting book, *An Elusive Science*, in which the author, Lagemann, shows how, in the 1920s and 1930s, the commercial demand for education tests emerged

when school administrators were looking for sorting and accountability measures. Tests were developed – and only then did the theorists get to work producing theories that justified the use of high-stakes tests. It's been much the same today, with the Schools Improvement and Effectiveness Movement and the demise of school-based curriculum development.

Postmodernism. I rejected it at the start – not because I was wedded to structure or linear explanation, but because my first encounters were with Stronach and MacLure in our Centre. Their immediate enthusiasm was for the intellectually playful, iconoclastic early expression of postmodernism that was difficult to translate into action. It seemed to me (and still does) to be a disabling frame of mind rather than an enabling philosophy; born in opposition to analytical philosophy, for example, and positivism, rather than in the search for positive solutions to lived dilemmas.

It was not until I started reading Rorty (mostly, *Truth and Progress*, 1998) that I took on postmodern analyses, and then it was more under the umbrella of Philosophical Pragmatism. The key link – and to humanism – is the non-contingency of coherence and truth. For the pragmatists, coherence is not given by exogenous factors (belief, overarching rationality, standards) but by the experiential connection between elements. William James likened life (and organisation) to a 'mosaic' – but with no mortar. Coherence of the mosaic is discovered through interactions and is case-made, contextual. In sociological terms – and this resonates with all of the work stimulated by Stenhouse and Barry MacDonald – the analysis of empirical experience relies on abduction (the momentary discovery of patterns), while *induction* and *deduction* amount to the same thing.

I find this advance into non-contingency reflected in Renaissance art and literature. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is the empirical construction of a moral universe – ethics is derived from circumstance, not from reason. In Hell, murder is a less grave crime than fraud, of which treachery is the most heinous of all: murder is a closure, an individual end-point; fraud is the worst crime – an undermining and distortion of our attempts to forge meaning and

order through contingent relationships. Tintoretto's *Last Supper*,[2] located in a bar with incidental, vernacular action foregrounded against the 'divine', breaking the conventions of order and dogma, achieves the same thing. Look in the bottom left where a disciple is saying to a waitress, 'Hang on – something's going on over there'. We can only make sense of the last supper with reference to the commonplace.

Caravaggio's *Madonna di Loreto* achieves the same thing[3] – we have to infer her divinity from practical acts on the street, rather than assume 'goodness' from her divinity. Here, Madonna *earns* her divine status. Rabelais' Pythonesque lampooning of authority, perfection and rationalism repeats. The mortar is stripped away and we have to make sense of the world s*ui genesis* – 'It's true there's no perfection here, for you to note – except for laughs' (Rabelais).

In Sartre's (2007) terms, this spells 'experience before essence' – another humanist principle. We construct self and meaning through the choices we make, and each choice implies a form of preferred humanity, a desirable social state. Our freedom comes from our 'abandonment' – our estrangement from non-contingent truth or belief. There are no excuses and there is no metaphysical source for redemption. The sins of the past are here; the prison of the future is now.

All of the movements implied here constitute an assault on social psychology, a public education emphasising personal agency over given authority, appealing to the observer's judgement, rather than their appreciation. There is enough of the accessible kind of data in these works for the observer to take exception with the author, or merely to find their own interpretation of events and meaning. Authority from whatever source is brought down to ground with a bump.

This, as you will easily see, Richard, is the basis of Stenhouse's approach to curriculum – an essential humanist endeavour. His curriculum presented students with the elements of a mosaic (packs of data on issues of the day – poems, essays, photos, recordings), and it was left to classroom discussion to find an order, a coherence in the data which crystallised into the judgement of each individual

student. Where Renaissance work rejected the intercession of a religious or secular authority, so Stenhouse insisted on neutralising the pedagogical authority of the teacher who, in a Stenhouse classroom, is not an intermediary between knowledge and student – a midwife, perhaps. In curriculum, the teacher was to be responsible for the quality of classroom exchanges and nothing more. At the extreme, if, say, in an evidence-based discussion of racism and prejudice a student left the classroom as a confirmed and informed racist, that was their business and could not attract either the recrimination or the correction of the teacher. Of course, one hopes in a liberal democracy that exposure to these semi 'ideal speech situations' would prevent anyone plumping for prejudice, but that's another matter entirely.

So here is my humanist take on the postmodern – a pragmatic approach to action in which analysis of contingency is the appropriate methodology for the invention of meaning.

RH: Phew – there's a lot there, Sav! I love your 'humanist take on the postmodern': it's long been my view that both postmodernists and humanists are far too quick to reject one another's cosmologies – and I've been greatly inspired and engaged by both of these *apparently* divergent worldviews.

You've also helped me realise one of the temperamental differences and diverging commitments we had (and perhaps still do) – though of course we share(d) a great deal too! That is, I was drawn to the epistemological implications of (for example) Derrida's undermining of the core foundations of Western metaphysics to which postmodernism (inevitably?) led (e.g. Hepburn, 1999); whereas I think you were always more interested in (implications for) human *action* – as in 'action research' and so on. (And my apologies for forgetting the great Barry MacDonald in my C.A.R.E. list in my previous question.)

Not that I'm not interested in action! – but it's, to say the least, a very 'interesting' tension to hold, that embraces both a fundamental challenge to our conventional metaphysical assumptions about 'reality', and which *at the same time* attempts to foreground *action-in-the-world*. This is about the

theory/practice relation, of course (Habermas, 1986) – but in true postmodern style, I immediately want to problematise and deconstruct that binary opposition! (though here isn't the place to take that endeavour to any depth). Not least, if our everyday positivist-materialist assumptions about reality are just wrong (or at the very least, are highly partial to the point of caricature), then surely this will have implications for action and praxis? For how can we get beyond what David Harvey (1973) called 'status quo theory' if our action and praxis are couched within, and defined by, an unsustainable metaphysics, acting within the parameters of which can only ever reinforce that metaphysical worldview? But I'll leave that one hanging… (unless you want to pick up on it, of course).

Can you say a bit more about the following, Sav? (for clarification's sake for our readers and myself). First, you refer to 'an assault on social psychology' – that really gets my juices flowing! Can you say more about the nature of this 'assault' – i.e. I'm assuming you're saying that Sartrean existentialism-humanism drives a coach and horses through conventional Social Psychology? Perhaps you could unpack that a little?

I'm also wondering what you mean by 'the non-contingency of coherence and truth'; by 'analysis of contingency is the appropriate methodology for the invention of meaning'; and how it comes about that 'induction and deduction amount to the same thing'.

What you say about Lawrence Stenhouse's pedagogical approach is fascinating. Certainly, 'neutralising the pedagogical authority of the teacher', and the teacher only being responsible for the quality of classroom exchanges, are central to humanistic education as I understand it – as articulated, for example, by Carl Rogers (1994/1969). I just dipped into Stenhouse's 1975 curriculum text in response to your earlier point (thanks for the prompt), and immediately found two conducive statements for humanistic educationalists – i.e. 'Curriculum workers need to share the psychologists' curiosity about *the process* of learning rather than to be dominated by their conclusions' (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 26, my italics); and 'we should be a little wary of making curricula… conformable to developmental norms'

(ibid., p. 30). Amen to that! I was less sure, however, about his apparent advocacy (following Jerome Bruner) of *speeding up* the learning process for children (pp. 29–30; for a different view, see Honoré, 2009; House, 2015).

What for you, Sav, would be the other core precepts of humanistic educational practice? And (The Big Question, perhaps!) do you see any route by which schools and teachers can find their way to a far more humanistic pedagogical praxis within the context of the overbearing audit, surveillance and accountability culture that has now dominated our schools for decades?

SK: Okay – out on a limb, here. I don't think that metaphysical issues are much to the forefront these days. First principles have been well rehearsed in practical terms and measured in lived experience. Epistemological issues are fought out by the tabloids in terms of 'fake news', the authority of scientific knowledge (Covid, climate change), and the moral nature of consciousness (abortion, euthanasia). Ontological matters? Well, most of us go to the 'flicks' – *The Matrix, Doubt, Crash* (in which good people do bad things while bad people do good things), *The Third Man*…. Most cinema-goers are dilettante ontologists.

Philosophically, I suspect that the pragmatists have won. Most people would get their heads (and hearts) around a Rawlsian 'original position' and a Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' – aren't these what is played out implicitly in focus groups and watchers of *Newsnight*? Rorty quotes Dewey, thus: '*the distinctive office, problems and subject matter of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises*' (my italics).

I would go as far as to say that we are seeing a democratisation of philosophy. Humanist education requires just this – where, for example, young people in schools are entrusted with argument and judgement over first principles (see later). This is precisely what happens at Summerhill School, and barely at all in State schools (and why, perhaps, former Education Secretary of State David Blunkett was so keen to close Summerhill in the late 1990s). For Stenhouse, a small triumph would be to hear a

young person say 'Mozart is crap' – AND give evidence for the judgement (i.e. putting justification before truth). The humanist battleground in education today is more focused on secular authority than the religious authority challenged by Abelard and Erasmus – but *plus ça change*, as Foucault would say. Stenhouse's principle of the teacher as 'neutral chair' in a discussion-based curriculum is more radical than Giroux and McLaren's critical theoretical approach, and even more so than Michael Young's social realism. Stenhouse distinguished between the teacher as *an* authority, and the teacher as *in* authority. The former is a 'knowledge resource', the latter, an unwarranted power broker. Thus did Lawrence upend power relations in the manner of Caravaggio.

Dewey's view of young people in a classroom as not preparing for citizenship, but acting out their citizenship in a context of rights is, again, what you see at Summerhill School, when the kids' parliament deliberates on the scale of the fine to be levied against a teacher. If individual agency, lying at the core of the humanist endeavour, means anything, we cannot prepare for it by subjecting young people in classrooms to arbitrary authority and behavioural discipline. Once the authority structure is taken away, this leaves us free to focus on principles of procedure – emphasising the quality of *exchange* rather than being preoccupied with *content*. This, as you point out, Richard, is Stenhouse's *process curriculum,* in which, as difficult as it may sound to justify, the teacher is little interested in learning outcomes and more in the quality of learning.

At the core of the process curriculum is another pragmatist/humanist principle – what has come to be spoken of as 'practical theorising'. This is in line with the non-contingency of truth – and theory. Truth is downgraded to 'plausibility' and discovered through circumstance. Stenhouse argued that *educational* theory arises out of the reflections and experiments that teachers undergo in the classroom. Theory is, in a sense, *sui generis*, and always a theory of context. Extant theory is, of course, a useful resource in terms of what the Grounded Theory people call 'theoretical sensitivity', and, in some cases, for providing analytical frameworks. But the teacher's and the

students' dominion over theorising is an important element in classroom agency and autonomy. Classrooms are for knowledge generation – not transfer

This leads us to a final element of humanist curriculum – the very term 'curriculum'. This is too readily reduced to structure and content. What we call 'the National Curriculum', the bureaucratised system of categories and hierarchies, is not at all a curriculum. It is an instruction manual, an anthology of terms and themes, a repeating pattern of indicators (involving an egregious misunderstanding of the 'spiral curriculum'). No. The curriculum is what translates all this into experience – the transactions, the relations, the intellectual resources, the affirmations and denials, the stipulations and prohibitions.

Let's look at it this way: what kind of society is implicit in the National Curriculum? – i.e. what is the true curriculum being implemented? Is it a society that is desirable to us? Well, I suspect few of us would want to live in that world. It is one in which we are told by officials what knowledges are worthy; it is one in which success arises out of compliance; where happiness and satisfaction, personal realisation and aspiration are incidentals; this is a society in which individuals are pitted against each other in competition, and where the success of one implies diminished opportunities for others. It is a society in which our individual and collective rights are mediated through so many prerequisites and protocols as to be rendered mere residuals. And it is a society in which ethics are derived from rational calculation rather than human circumstance.

Were such conditions applied to adult work and social life, we would have a name for political society that was repellent, and almost as far from humanist ideals as we could reach – utterly subject to technical rationalism.

Rationality plays an important part of humanism, but the third of Rorty's three versions of rationality –

> Rationality3 is roughly synonymous with tolerance – with the ability not to be overly

disconcerted by differences from oneself (Rorty, 1998, pp. 186–201) '...*it is a virtue that enables individuals and communities to coexist peacefully with other individuals and communities, living and letting live....*'.

It is what Rawls hoped to emerge from 'the original position' (an ideal in which individuals make value choices unencumbered by individual interests).

Here is the ethical foundation of Stenhouse's process curriculum, and why he believed that teachers who succeeded in creating high-quality conditions for classroom interactions and enquiry could safely adopt a disinterest in educational outcome – because their success has fostered protective layers of Rationality3.

It is in this sense that I suggest that curriculum can be defined as ***those school conditions which, taken together, carry a vision of a society*** (in a not dissimilar way to which Sartre says that each individual choice carries a vision of how we would like to relate to others). So a humanist curriculum models social transactions based on freedom (at least, psychic freedom) from authority, the will to self-determination, confidence in discovering your creativity, a willingness to subsume your subjectivity to a reasoned intersubjectivity, a learned disregard for metaphysical explanations, a loss of innocence, and more of similar ilk.

Here, incidentally, is the questioning of social psychology. In conventional social psychology the 'social' is constitutive of individual behaviours in the same way that culture sustains itself through its constant reproduction in individual thought and preference. Of course, there is feedback, but the concept is essentially conservative in an educational context. Individuals are not progenitors. Sartre (2007, pp. 22–3) says, to the contrary:

> Man is nothing other than what he [sic] makes of himself… and when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men.

Subjectivity is constitutive of the social (the intersubjective). This implies the mechanisms that are whirring in a Stenhouse humanist classroom.

RH: Wow – what a limb to be out on, Sav! – please don't start sawing!... That's a great vision for education and learning – and Lawrence is very lucky to have you as a passionate and lucid advocate of his vision, 40 years on. Again, there's so much here I could pick up on… Just to add, first, to conventional Philosophy's 'Theories of Truth' – correspondence, coherence, collaborative – we now have a new one: the **contextual-plausibility theory of truth**! I think the later Wittgenstein, Feyerabend and Rorty may well have heartfully approved. There's a paper, if not a thesis and/or a book, there! Of course philosophical drilling-down would raise issues to be grappled with – but what a great addition to the tired, mind-numbing analytical-philosophical perspectives on 'truth' this would be.

Now that you mention Grounded Theory (GT), I remember you and your C.A.R.E. colleagues being really taken with Glaser and Strauss and GT in the later '70s and early '80s (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I'm wondering where you are with research methodology these days, Sav? With many psychologists and therapists now *having to* engage with research in order to demonstrate efficacy of therapy practice, but being understandably repelled by the arrant positivism with which we grappled all those years ago, I'm sure our readers would be really interested to hear about where you've reached on methodology, after a career in high-level research and educational evaluation. As I write, a new paper just came out on the place of voice**s** rather than voice (singular) in qualitative research, that may tickle your fancy, for example! (Chadwick, 2020).

I take your points about mainstream Philosophy; and though you didn't say this, there is its aridity at best, and sheer irrelevance to the real world, at worst (with those two brickbats perhaps essentially amounting to the same criticism). But just to be clear: I raise these ontological questions from a *transpersonal* perspective. This shades into what is often a confusion in the Humanistic Psychology field – i.e. that the latter so easily gets conflated with *atheistic* humanism of the Dawkins kind –

which for the vast majority of humanistic psychologists and therapists I know, is emphatically not the case. As the late Father of Humanistic Psychology in Britain, John Rowan, used to say, 'Don't you dare ignore the transpersonal!' (Rowan, 2014).

So my question about the core (materialist) assumptions of Western metaphysics still stands as a vital question for me, and perhaps for many others – and one that surely *does* have implications for practice (for example, what kind of spaces can be created for 'the spiritual' in our schooling system? – things like contemplative inquiry and the like). I'll again leave that one hanging for you to pick up on, or not!

What you said about curriculum predictably had my drooling – thank you. The 'Open EYE' campaign I was involved in from 2007 to 2011[4] raised a stink at the time regarding the very idea that it was appropriate for the State to impose an early childhood *curriculum*, with associated 'early learning goals', on to very young children via the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (see House, 2011; some newspapers at the time even named it 'the nappy curriculum'). I just love your question, '**What kind of society is implicit in the National Curriculum?' –** brilliant! It got me thinking that, first, what ever 'curriculum' is or consists in should always be dynamic and evolving and changing – or we'll inevitably have David Harvey's 'status quo theory' rearing its head again. And also, perhaps the job for educational 'theorists' (dangerous term) could and should be: *first* define what kind of society we wish to see and inhabit, and *then* figure out what kind of process-curriculum is most likely to being that about – in that order! The latter proposal still feels too controlling to me, as I write – but it's still a damn sight better than the aridity we have at present.

And can I return finally to my previous question, that exercises many of us having to witness the parlous state of England's schooling system: do you see any route by which schools and teachers can find their way to a far more humanistic pedagogical praxis within the context of the overbearing audit, surveillance and accountability culture that has dominated our schools since the later 1980s?

Far too much from me as usual – pick up on anything you like from all this, Sav.

SK: Much, I guess, hinges on what we mean by the 'transpersonal': I understand just a little about the 'fourth force' in Psychology, lifting humanistic enquiry into transcendental states. I wonder whether this is another example of the struggle of psychologists to recover territory of 'the mind' lost to the devastations of Binet and Galton. But I understand too little of it to translate that into curriculum terms, which seems to be what you are after. I will read more.

However, I am enormously approving of your question concerning the role of the spiritual in schooling. I'm remembering that when I was working for UNICEF, I shared responsibility for overseeing 'indicators' (sic) of adolescent well-being. There were indicators for all material and transactional aspects of a young person's life: their health, family income, education, friendships, behaviours and so on. These indicators were being applied, in one instance, to Indonesian youth. Now Indonesia is a very spiritual country in numerous senses – why are there no indicators for 'spirituality'?, I asked – to great confusion.

Well, there are many answers to that question, of course: there is no algorithm or rubric into which such indicators might feed, even were they to be quantifiable. But the root answer is that the United Nations is an administrative system, and the mind of the administrator is essentially pegged to the tangible. This is why our English curriculum would never admit of spirituality (beyond religion) – its conception and implementation is by administrators. The National Curriculum accomplishes the bureaucratisation of knowledge. There is no transcendental/transpersonal experience, since that cannot be subject to administrative expression.

And yet, youth itself – perhaps even childhood – can be defined as a spiritual journey, a Dante-esque pilgrimage through the light and shadows of experience – conversing with demons and debutantes, exploring sin and taking the measure of moral obligation. In fact, youth is the experience of experiencing – in the sense of *initiation* into

experiencing. In Sartre's terms it is the learning of how to make choices that give rise to meaning and value. This is the spiritual journey – as with Dante, a series of encounters with others who have made their journeys – for good or ill – and who raise questions of self and being, a journey of no end, other than knowledge. I firmly believe that the spiritual state of society – its capacity to reflect in consequential and non-materialistic ways on personal experience and intersubjective experience – gives the measure of our education system. In a world of the 'compassionate algorithm', disdain for benefit claimants damns schooling, while tearing down a statue of Edward Colston is a small measure of success.

This elides into your question of where I am with methodology. I am with case-study, because I believe the only thing worth knowing is that set of conditions – context – which presents us with data in making our choices and generating/negotiating meaning – i.e. understanding social action, and how we come to value some things over others. We live in a world of generalisations – policy is based on non-contingent propositions for how we should live our lives, drawn from the fevered imaginings of people like you and me, Richard, who think our inquiries have produced fundamental insights into 'the good'. Admittedly, the generalisations of others whom you and I feel are less worthy seem to be most attractive in the market clamour of briefings – but we must not absolve ourselves from the sin of 'solution'.

At its best, enquiry relieves us of generalisation and returns us to the particular, the idiosyncratic, the contextual. In terms of my previous allusion, case-study, at its best, portrays the topography of youth's pilgrimage, a study of the terrain within which contingent actions take place and coherence forged in the moment; within which we learn to adapt, mutualise and respond to the circumstances that envelope us. Experience is little more than reflecting on contingencies in life – how we relate to people and events.

To take an extreme case, what is the point of judging a racist? We are inundated with such judgements. The unique contribution of contextual and personalised inquiry is a route to its understanding, the creation of a discursive space

within which notions of value and being can be negotiated with the racist. Here, I am influenced by Peter Berger (2011), no less, and his existentialist/humanist approach to social enquiry. Do you remember this, Richard? – 'maturity is the capacity to endure distance from the object of one's passion'. This is a distinctly non-postmodern proposition that the social observer can escape the existential fiction that is society ('erected against the abyss of being') – 'I am a teacher', 'I am a waiter', 'I am a doctor'. The social researcher can render herself ontologically 'apart'... it's a professional/psychological trick, nothing for the postmodernist to get worked up about!

But do you hear echoes of Stenhouse once again? – his discussion-based, teacher-as-neutral-chair, information-led process curriculum? Yes, indeed, for it was his curriculum theorising that gave rise to the branch of case-study to which I subscribe, and which I am now able to call Humanistic Enquiry. The impartial narrative accounting for the conditions that give rise to proposition and interaction.

I think this answers other questions you posed for us: what kind of society do we want, and what kind of curriculum realises/models it? And 'What is the pedagogical route to these humanistic ends?'

You have brought me to the limits of my understanding, Richard, for which I am grateful, but a little embarrassed!

RH: I'm so happy that you received my introducing of 'the spiritual' into the conversation so positively, Sav – given that we've not spoken (till now) for nigh-on 40 years, I had no idea where you'd be on this theme. What you say about the quantifiable is so prescient – '…there is no algorithm or rubric into which such indicators might feed, even were they to be quantifiable' (cf. House, 2019–20). What I find extraordinary is how the naïve positivism that we and many others were rightly railing against 40+ years ago *still* stubbornly holds paradigmatic ascendancy in many quarters; for example, there's the (often unarticulated) metaphysical view that if something can't be measured/quantified, it can be ignored/discounted (e.g. see Ofsted school

inspection judgements) – and at worst (*à la* 'logical positivism'), it just *doesn't exist*.

If you'll allow me a mini-rant for a moment… – the insufferable, politically correct left-brain rationalism of the Audit Culture's philosophical secularism has been catastrophic in hyper-modern culture – and especially for children and education. A quotation I often deploy from one of my own personal heroes, Robert Sardello, speaks directly to this:

> Materialistic learning… dominates education…. Education has become an institution whose purpose… is not to make culture, not to serve the living cosmos, but to harness humankind to the dead forces of materialism. *Education, as we know it, from pre-school through graduate school, damages the soul.* (Sardello, 1991, Letter III *passim*; my italics)

Your memorable words that '…the spiritual state of society – its capacity to reflect in consequential and non-materialistic ways on personal experience and inter-subjective experience – gives the measure of our education system' sits very well with this Sardello quotation. Writers like Tobin Hart (Hart, 2004, 2009; see also Hendricks & Fadiman, 1976) also have a lot of great import to say about the place of the spiritual in schooling, and in modern culture more generally.

But with this, Sav, I think you have the crux of it –

the mind of the administrator is essentially pegged to the tangible. This is why our English curriculum would never admit of spirituality (beyond religion) – its conception and implementation is by administrators. The National Curriculum accomplishes the bureaucratisation of knowledge. There is no transcendental/transpersonal experience, since that cannot be subject to administrative regulation. (my italics)

Just brilliant! Phew – as I read this I remember all the literature I've read on the noxious Audit Culture (not least, Mike Power's vital work – Power 1997, 2004), and how inappropriate, antithetical and *anti-humanistic* it is for our schools, teachers and children. I'm also reminded of a book my friend Denis Postle introduced to me many years ago – James Scott's *Seeing Like a State*

(new paperback edition just published) – in which for me, Scott's contribution is not so much to challenge the rationale for state socialism (which is the way that many on the political right have opportunistically seized upon the book), but rather, as a grave warning against 'high-modernist', *rationalistic* policy-making by large bureaucratic institutions (public *or* private), that have zero respect for both local knowledge and conditions of complex diversity. Max Weber's important work on bureaucratisation (and perhaps Franz Kafka's, too) also become prescient here, regarding the ways in which the 'left-brain' bureaucratic mentality imposes its bean-counter will on, and does a violence to, the nuanced complexity of human-relational systems. In my view, this is the core reason why the Ofsted–Department for Education Audit and Accountability Culture has been catastrophic for schools – and catastrophic, too, for humanistic educational approaches like Steiner Waldorf (e.g. House, 2020) which dare to embrace a post-materialistic, post-instrumentalist worldview and pedagogical praxis.

But – and I know I keep coming back to this – just what are we to do? Do we just wait around for the materialistic *Zeitgeist* to change for the better before some educational policy-making sanity can prevail; or can we be effectively proactive in advocating for a schooling system that meets the developmental, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of children, and which therefore challenges head-on the narrow instrumentalism of Audit Culture proceduralism and its insufferable enforcers? I see this as the most important tasks for folk like us – and I'd welcome any thoughts you might have on this (for me) momentous question.

I love '…youth is the experience of experiencing'! – and also your advocacy of case-study methodology, re

> I am with case-study, because I believe the only thing worth knowing is that set of conditions – context – which presents us with data in making our choices and generating/negotiating meaning – i.e. understanding social action and how we come to value some things over others.

I wonder whether putting together the case-study approach with the phenomenological educational work of Max van Manen (1986, 1990, 1991) might

be not only the most potent methodological offer educational research can make, but also one that the rest of the social sciences urgently need to learn from?

Thanks so much, Sav, for this great opportunity, and for the wisdom and insights about humanistic education that you've generously shared for our readers. Bringing one another to 'the limits of our understanding' is wonderful – heartfelt thanks for the opportunity and the engagement. I hope our readers will forgive us for this dialogue having reached the rarefied heights of 8,000 words. The last words are fittingly with you.

SK: *'What can we do?'* Indeed. Such conversations as ours come to little if they do not feed into action. We need that delicious mix of recklessness, moral indignation and commitment that characterises Don Quijote. The least we can do is to keep the embers of hope for humanistic education glowing. Keep on 'talking'. Beyond that, we come down to two strategies: politics and rhetoric. But, as always, if we are looking for strategies for change we need to be clear about the most accessible *unit of change*, and the *power base* from which we mount any challenge. So – I will take them in turn; but first I'll address your question about waiting for the *Zeitgeist* to shift.

***ZEITGEIST* AND SOCIAL CHANGE**: Where will the key battlegrounds be in a post-Covid, post-austerity world? One, surely, has to be re-jigging Central/Regional/Local relations – fiscal and strategic. Covid has given us one key insight: that Whitehall lacks the knowledge, personnel, capacity and commitment to enter into fine-grained and context-saturated solutions. All local areas have intimate knowledge of their demographics and intellectual resources (all have access to epidemiologists, public health, business and economic resources).

National GDP is too blunt an instrument, as are proving to be national health and well-being indicators: we need local measures and algorithms if we are to deal with emergencies and build in resilience and preparedness. Education is no less a part of that. I am arguing up here in Liverpool for a *Liverpool Curriculum Development Plan* – and each area that boasts its unique needs and cultures

should do the same. We should be pressing the Labour and Lib Dem parties to take on such an agenda. There is an action context in which we can argue for educational change.

RHETORIC: We should not bemoan the 'fake news'/anti-'expert' debates. They mark a return to a public awareness of the art and practice of rhetoric – the use of language to persuade. We leftists and postmodernists need to be sharper practitioners of rhetoric – something Barack Obama understood explicitly, and Jeremy Corbyn didn't. However, I am reminded that Barry MacDonald rarely took the opportunity of media interviews: he was of the view that right-wing and anti-intellectual arguments in education were easily and well-served by simplification – perfect for the sound-bite. He was always left struggling to explain complexities that were glossed over. We have to get better at representing complexity.

UNIT OF CHANGE/POWER BASE: I've already said that the local authority (and, to a lesser extent, regional authorities) is the appropriate unit of change for modern challenges. Through them we can finally close down school academies and make schooling and curriculum responsive to local employment and social needs. But this has to be preceded by political change, and for that, for the moment we rely mostly on Keir Starmer.

The more immediate unit of change – in terms of leverage and problem-solving – is the university department of education (UDE). Now this is almost as great a challenge. UDEs have been cowed and controlled, asset-stripped of curriculum and creativity (*not* at the individual level – at the leadership and policy level). Their school partnerships are too easily dominated by National Curriculum service and the demands of teacher training. Finally, UEDs have been persuaded to shift nomenclature from teacher education to teacher *training*, manifest in a commitment to the mediocrity and simplification of competence frameworks. Yet UDEs remain a key resource – both theoretical and practical. I have two beacon examples:

1   Dewey's 'laboratory school' which served both as an observation post and as an experimental test-site for innovation. While school academies and 'free' schools are monumental blunders, it is an error for universities and UEDs not to have entered the programme to set up their own laboratory schools. UDEs are well placed to bring together local curriculum partnerships – not unlike the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) (but with strong policy connections to local councils) – embracing the interests of local services, commerce, health and so on.

2   In 1915 the city of Cleveland in the USA resolved to modernise, in order to keep up with New York and Chicago. As part of the project they set up a city-wide enquiry for schooling, which commissioned more than 20 'surveys', each looking at a discrete aspect of schooling: curriculum, finance, transport, architecture, etc. The draft reports were reviewed and redacted by committees of professionals and citizens, and the final reports were sold at cost to the citizens. A hotel room was booked every week lunchtime for one year, and citizens were invited to walk in and discuss a particular report. Deliberative democracy at its best, easily managed by a UDE.

THE POWER BASE: Young people. Youth Parliaments. Taking the model of the International Baccalaureate (the IB Primary programme is a humanist curriculum), young people are mobilised to deliberate, research and broker a curriculum discourse. Their voice, harnessed to proper enquiry disciplines (*à la* Stenhouse), is challengeable, but undeniable. If we had sought an organised power base among young people at the start of this sorry episode (it started with Shirley Williams, we may remember) – rather than seeing young people as exotic subjects for educational anthropology – we might have more leverage today.

Above all – or, rather, underpinning all – is countering the Tony Blair-inspired falsehood that education is not ideological. We need to be publishing, writing letters, appearing on the media showing that there are Left and Right approaches to education and schooling, and that we have been in the grip of right-wing policies towards curriculum for almost half a century. There is no collective memory of what a left or humanist approach to schooling might be, and so no

audience for it. Parents and media, educational theorists and practitioners – we have all been persuaded into evasion strategies. We talk of 'teaching and learning' techniques, not of curriculum ethics; we have been persuaded that children's rights demand disciplinary content knowledge; that educational quality is given by outcome measures; that classrooms are places for knowledge transfer, not knowledge generation; and that teachers 'deliver' curriculum rather than design it.

This latter, then, is the right-wing agenda. Here is the site of contest. Perhaps your left- and right-brain concerns map (in reverse) on to left- and right-wing educational policy!

So, Richard. Over and out from me. Many thanks for the platform and for your provocations. The reader will find threads of coherence running through your and my utterances here.

Notes

1 See https://www.thomascahill.com/series/the-hinges-of-history.
2 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Last_Supper_(Tintoretto).
3 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_di_Loreto_(Caravaggio).
4 See https://openeyecampaign.wordpress.com.

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