

## **A short reflection on my sixteen years of school teaching (boys, girls, mixed and three major reorganisations)**

### **Stage four of critiquing my curriculum vitae**

**I began school teaching in 1968 in a boy's secondary modern in Bootle. My classroom was in a hut called H.O.R.S.A. The letters stood for *Huts Organised for the Raising of the School (leaving) Age*. The age change was from 14 to 15. My status as a probationary teacher could easily be gauged. Outside my hut were the bins and the coke for the boiler. Mr. Elliot, the head who had been there since 1937, came into my classroom minutes before the actual start of my career when my bunch of eleven year old lads were due to arrive and presented me with a big cane saying, "here you are lad, you won't survive without using this." It was illegal for a probationary teacher to give the cane and I never did, ever. Perhaps he thought that because I wore a suit I could not cope in the area. Not only had my sister and brothers been born nearby but also my own junior school was very similar to Balliol (pronounced properly, not like at Oxford University) Boys Secondary Modern. It did not feel strange to me.**

We merged with the girls' school next door the following year to learn to team teach and to rewrite parts of the Schools Council Humanities Project to make it more workable and then, four years later, during comprehensivisation, I moved to a school whose library was perfect because taking books off shelves was discouraged. A year after that I moved to a girls Catholic secondary modern in Scotland Road, Liverpool. As it was a very Catholic area there was no sense of social division. But why go back from a mixed comprehensive to a single sex selective system to which I was opposed?

First, I was asked to apply and second, like so many Liverpool schools at that time, it was taking part in really stimulating curriculum development linked to Mode-Three CSEs and the production of programmes for Radio Merseyside. The work was called the Childwall Project and the Director of the Teachers Centre was Eric Midwinter. He applied to become overall Director of Education, which I think was regarded as presumptuous by the powers of the day. So he went off to become world famous. Our loss!

I later became an LEA advisor working on alternative curriculum and assessment strategies, industry links and recording and reporting for all phases including F.E. That job felt to me to be a natural extension of what I had done in that school and also in my final school.

I was appointed as an advisor in 1984. I think it was around then but both my parents died in 1983 and I was doing my masters and dates did not seem important. The job seemed a natural for me because it carried forward the work I had been doing and gently blew on the embers of the work of Eric Midwinter. My last school was a mixed but small comprehensive, which was unusual in the Catholic sector. There had been lots and lots of consultation prior to comprehensivisation and I attended many meetings and made copious notes (all lent to someone who lost them). I am absolutely certain that the majority

opinion was in favour of mixed gender schools but some religious orders did not want that and I witnessed lies and manipulated voting at a level I had never before witnessed. A dog collar came to signify falsehood to me. As a confirmed atheist I had been elected to both the Education and Community Councils of the All-Souls Deanery containing thirteen parishes.

At one point Archbishop Worlock came to conduct a mass for the Community Council. Although he had replied to every letter with which I had bombarded him about how the reorganisation was being handled he was put out that I made my letters public. He did not, I am glad to say, know my face. When the service reached the homily stage he stood up to square the circle with best quality religious bullshit. There we were, engaged in what was supposed to be an honest and open consultation exercise including teachers and parents and in one short speech he knocked it on the head, kicked it into touch, reminded us that the guardians of faith had more power than the followers of faith. From memory, he said,

**“Expert and informed opinion may indicate that the way forward lies over there”, waving one arm, “but religious intuition may indicate that the way forward lies over here.” He waved his other arm. “And it is for those of us who are in receipt of religious intuition to take our brethren in the right direction.”**

I may have one or two words wrong but that is essentially what he told us. I immediately thought of 1870 and the Declaration of Papal Infallibility. What was the point of holding a long and costly consultation exercise? I remember one large meeting full of parents and some teachers in which the clear decision was that mixed gender schools were what was wanted. The priest chairing the meeting transformed this clear positive vote into a negative by saying that he would report to the Archbishop that we were not against mixed schools. I even heard one head of a boys' grammar school tell his parents of the terrible consequences of their children having to mix with the likes of my kids who lived down by the docks. I would have my kids any day and St. Brigids, which was in the area I had taught in for ten years, was the only school to which I applied during the reorganisation.

**It was in this context that St. Brigids (Motto ‘Pax’) came into being. It swam against the official mainstream. Perhaps I shall write more on this later.**

**Cliff Jones 27<sup>th</sup>. July 2018**