

## **A PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL THEME**

**I have so often convinced myself that it might be possible to take hold of a government initiative and, while doing what we were ordered to do, humanise it and transform it into something almost good. Examples that come to mind include my attempt to place the assessment of the National Curriculum within a Record of Achievement framework. The idea being that whatever a SAT score said about you there was a lot more that could be said about you. And little of what could be said came with a score. Education is beset by the urge to measure.**

I devised a diagram to illustrate all of this. It was published and I did my best to convince the powers controlling educational policy in Liverpool that this was a viable model. I don't think that I succeeded because too often senior management are appointed not for their commitment to education but for their commitment to being in control; but, one day I found myself explaining all this to the head of Alexei Sayle's old school. His reaction surprised me. He said that he would make my model the basis for school budgeting and that every department would be required to submit their budgetary proposals on the basis of my curricular model.

I had never anticipated that. Of course the weight behind government policies is almost always far too strong because it comes with huge budgetary power. In his book, *Kind Of Blue, A Political Memoir* (2016) Kenneth Clarke betrays not the slightest sign of how, by ignoring all the research being undertaken by the University of Leeds, he did so much damage to how seven year olds were assessed in the National Curriculum. He then compounded that damage by inventing Ofsted who are little more than curricular traffic wardens ensuring that teachers stick to his imaginary standards. He is so proud of inventing Ofsted. The T in Sat, by the way, stood for Task and was intended to be enjoyable. Thatcher preferred Test and Clarke believed in measuring. Out went enjoyment.

I don't want to spend too long on Clarke but his sheer laziness also messed up GCSE for a few years so that professionals like me had to explain to teachers and parents why results wobbled about from exam board to exam board and from year to year. He actually imposed an extra Assessment Objective with very little warning so that every subject had to suddenly assess performance in spelling, punctuation and grammar. He said we should have three marks available to do this but did not say whether or not the three should be included in the normal available marks or added on. Nor did he explain how each mark, one for spelling, one for punctuation and one for grammar, could be differentiated. What does one third of a mark look like? And I would be very interested to know what perfection looked like for any one of those. If, for example, your punctuation was thought to be weak you were to be given one third of one mark! In the end, quite naturally, the only sensible thing to do was to give almost everyone two marks.

Avoiding such rubbish not only demands the ability to think for five minutes but also the belief that it is important to do so. As far as education is concerned that was never Clarke. His cock ups fade into history but what he did to seven year old kids I shall never forget or forgive.

The title of his book? 'Kind of blue': Possibly you might think that it refers to his position on the Tory spectrum. Possibly that is what he expects most people to think. More subtly he hopes that we notice that it is a reference to Miles Davies. We know of his image as a pint and Castella man. That is one way of gaining a few working class votes. But how cool is it to be associated with so-called 'modern jazz'? Sorry, but for me King Oliver and Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday come more quickly to mind. Not his type obviously and in the later era I much prefer Dizzie Gillespie. As for the great Bix, I am tempted to pinch the title of his wonderful piano composition for my autobiography. It is called, In A Mist.

Where else does educational policy place us?

Cliff Jones 20th. March 2020

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