**When we ask children to change the world, we need to think about the burden on them.**

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Political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) caused a good deal of controversy in her response to what happened at Little Rock Central High School in the 1950s. In the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954*, the US Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional, a decision which Arendt said was "of great and obvious importance". What followed immediately in the wake of the change in legislation in one instance was that nine black children began to attend what had hitherto been an exclusively all-white school. The experience of those nine children was harrowing in the extreme.

Arendt's response, complex and subsequently explored and revised in later reflections, included the question of whether the state should use children for its own political aims. More specifically, whether or not the state's intrusion into affairs of private and social spheres, and the encroachment of politics into children's spaces was legitimate. Her reproach was never about whether segregation should be dismantled. About that she was clear: segregation was not good, but that the adults had left the children in the hands of the 'mob'.

Arendt's position included the idea that children are vulnerable and ought to be protected from the political world of the adults, an often messy and uncertain world at best. The nine children at Little Rock had no say in what happened to them, they lacked agency, and became the cyphers for the new world, at tremendous cost to them. Her criticism included the unfair position of making children "burden the responsibility from the shoulders of adults," and that "children were being asked to change or improve the world on behalf of adults."

The Little Rock case centres around the question of racial segregation, but what Arendt is pointing to is a wider philosophical question, which includes taking a critical look at the extent to which the state should interfere with the social and cultural matters of the private sphere, and also in the matter of children's lives. To what degree might these legislative changes interfere with, or marginalise, free will, and to what extent are we alive to the tensions it can cause in one's own rooted sense of identity of which culture is of central importance?

Those questions are with us today in response to two distinct forms: Fundamental British Values (FBV) and more recently the drive towards Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

The government instructs schools with a duty to show a clear strategy that actively promotes Fundamental British Values, and schools must to be able to show how this is embedded and is shown to be effective. While the ambition of the policy is well intended, the phrase alone has, for some people, distinctly imperialistic overtones and sits uncomfortably with many school leaders, especially those running schools in cosmopolitan areas. In London, for example, families are from all parts of the world, creating cultural richness and diversity in a school's community. When FBV was introduced I remember it causing unrest among young people at an international school I was working in, especially those old enough to see the political tenor of the policy. Some felt a strong sense of being made to feel unwelcome simply by dint of the phrase Fundamental British Values.

What exactly are these Fundamental British Values, and on whose terms? The core five values are not uniquely British and on face value seem entirely legitimate in any democracy. They are: *Democracy; The Rule of Law; Individual Liberty; Mutual Respect and Tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs.* The notion of 'tolerance', which by definition is the allowance of something that one dislikes without interference, makes no demands or requirement to seek to understand 'the other'. Perhaps that is balanced with the demand for 'mutual respect'. Yet other than Democracy (we live in a democratic society) and Rule of Law (we are all subject to it), the other three pillars of FBV are contested terms.

The strengthening of the FBV policy, already enshrined in the Prevent strategy of 2011, arrived after the political fallout from the Trojan Horse affair in 2014 in which some academy schools in Birmingham were investigated for alleged promotion of extremist agendas. In the end, no school was found to have broken the law, but the aftershock was a much more overt politicisation of the curriculum ostensibly to avert marginalisation and was part of the bigger cause of the 'war on terror'. Schools by design became part of the machinery of surveillance, and remain so through the Prevent Duty measure (2011) now part of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, which was introduced a year after FBV. All three are now conjoined.

Revel and Bryan in their analysis of *Fundamental British Values in Education* (2018), make the point that while education has always been a site of the promotion of nationhood, that "In the past, Britishness and national identity were either assumed or conveyed through the employment of cultural forms; it is only now that it is […] articulated through explicitly political language".

Cultural forms are now under the spotlight, from curriculum reviews to the books in the libraries of schools. At our school, we have just invested over £300 in new books that are considered more diverse and inclusive, and raises the question for some people of what place or value remains for those old British stalwarts such as Bronte or Shakespeare?

While the investment community is staking a claim with ESG (Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance *), which I would argue is just as relevant for school governance, one follow up to FBV is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), where those "cultural forms"

are placed centre stage. Not just in schools but in every area of civic life, from employment to leisure to education. The state is looking to schools to be the foundation of a new world order where these key ideas are articulated in policy and enacted in practice in their organisations. If EDI doesn't start in schools, then where else?

Arendt has something specific to say about equality:

> *"Equality of condition, though it is certainly a basic requirement for justice, is nevertheless among the greatest and most uncertain ventures of modern mankind. The more equal conditions are, the less explanation there is for the differences that actually exist between people; and thus all the more unequal do individuals and groups become."*

From: *The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951)*

In her reflections on the role of children in social change, we've seen that she believed that we should think carefully about burdening children with the role of being the change *makers*, while also recognising a parent's right to inculcate in their children their own beliefs, culture and political views**.

This idea has caught my attention. I frequently say that our role as educators is to help shape the future through our children, and Arendt has given me pause to think about how that works in practice.

EDI is the current driver for a great many organisations and institutions. In that ambition, there is the significant question of identify and history to bring into view. Creating new world views demand the intense questioning of cultures, habits of mind and beliefs of all kinds, some to the point of destruction or eradication. This is an extremely controversial question to raise. Even suggesting that EDI is not straightforward is risky and provocative. Yet the conversation must be nuanced, fuzzy, and too important to make binary or else society may well end up burning books, again.

The Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS) has set up an EDI review. We also began one some time ago, to which some of you will have contributed.

Defining terms of reference for what EDI means both in policy and in practice is not easy. When I asked the IAPS correspondent *what* they had defined as their EDI terms, they said that there was some difficulty in doing this and it is work in progress. I also asked whether the fact that we are an association of fee-paying schools had any consideration in the question of inclusion. The response to this is generally around the very real desire to increase bursarial support which in part confers access to all manner of other social goods and mobility. It is of course more complex than that as we commit to social change and how that might be enacted.

And so perhaps I should be more refined in what that means: change towards a more equitable world is a good aim, while being alert to the possibility of unintended harms to socio-cultural difference, and therein lies a tension between certain conceptions of equality and diversity. This is, if I have understood Arendt correctly, also bound up in ideas of freedom of association.

These are important discussions, and there is no easy answer or single answer, nor will there be an answer that fits every context. Nevertheless, in our wish to change the world, we need also to pay attention to Arendt's concerns about the vulnerability of children and the burdens the adults place upon them to be the fixers.

The two big global questions of our time are climate and poverty and, somehow, we need to help our children to be ready for this while not leaving them stranded while they sort things out. Any major social change movement is also ripe for radicalisation. We are seeing this in the Alt-right movements that have made social media platforms their home. The children in Arendt's time did not have the internet to contend with – children could at least have a private life. Not anymore.

Certainly, the state does have a serious and significant role in protecting children from harm. In the new world of the internet everywhere, it must do so even more robustly. Statistically, children are at their most vulnerable in their own homes, and also online.

If you missed the excellent Internet Safety Information evening this week, let me know and we'll run it again. The slide pack will be on the parent portal soon.

In the meantime, the sky larks are singing. Spring is coming.

Here is a cultural form for discussion. To paraphrase *The Clash*, should it stay or should it go?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XT9KLu86EE

*ESG Ratings aim to measure a company's exposure to long term risks that might not otherwise show up in reports and accounts. The measures supplement potential investors financial analysis. Organisations are now actively ramping up their ESG profile. In one example this week, a property business came to see me to see how they can improve their social engagement. They say it puts a tick in their ESG boxes. If that helps build community, I'm all for it.

**although other philosophers argue that parents should not have rights of access or influence over their children's belief systems.