



## Why state schools should stream their pupils

**Her chaotic comprehensive let her down. Now Zoe Brennan argues that brighter kids deserve to be taught separately.**

This was to be the first step towards a glittering future, so as I pushed open the heavy, Seventies-issue London comprehensive school door, I was full of ambition and youthful enthusiasm.

“What do you want to do?” the careers adviser asked my 16-year-old self.

“I want to be a journalist,” I said proudly. “And I want to go to Oxford.”

“Have you thought of a secretarial course?” she asked.

The head of sixth form refused to give me a reference for Oxford, because “no one from here gets in there.” My sister wanted to be a doctor, but my parents were told that this was also a hopeless delusion, as she was “not good enough” at science. She is now a senior consultant in emergency medicine, running a busy A&E department.

I left that school and pursued my dreams, too. We both have wonderful memories of Pimlico Comprehensive – a visionary place in many ways. But suffice it to say, aspiration was lacking, and so was the education.

So I read Sir Michael Wilshaw’s speech to the CentreForum think-tank last week with interest. The Ofsted chief inspector talked of “the lingering damage caused by the botched reform of our schools in the Sixties and Seventies.”

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He said: “The ideologues who drove the comprehensive agenda confused equality with equity. They took it to mean that one size should fit all. There was a wholesale dumbing down of standards.” And he added: “Look up the initiatives that encrusted schools like useless barnacles, such as the Smile maths programme, which encouraged children to amble up to the filing cabinet, pick out their worksheet and learn at their own speed.”

Oh, yes, we remember Smile, and those lacklustre maths sessions. And the school strikes, the Militant Left teachers, the pupils wrestling on the unpoliced concourse to the jubilant chorus of “Fight, Fight, Fight,” the regular setting fire to bins, the lack of school uniform and the total absence of discipline.

Pimlico was built in the late Sixties: a futuristic vision of education for all, captured in glass and concrete. Along with the gleaming Holland Park comprehensive school in West London, it was a flagship for social reformers who believed this utopia would deliver a brave new world, doing away with the dreaded 11-plus and offering everyone opportunity.

Progressive middle-class parents – my own included – sat around Hampstead dining tables discussing how the inclusion of their offspring in this experiment would filter achievement and academic aspiration down.

On the ground, by the time I arrived at Pimlico in 1983, things were rather different. My parents were appalled when told it did not matter what grades I achieved. Thankfully, they disagreed.

Elements of the vision remained: we had Hurtwood, a wonderful country house where we went for school trips. The eminent journalist Victor Keegan ran the school newspaper, inspiring my choice of career. But teaching was delivered in mixed-ability classes in a permanent atmosphere of chaos. Some pupils were unable to read or write, instead disrupting the class. I left to do my A-levels at a sixth-form college, going on to Oxford.

Today, my own children, aged 12 and 14, go to a non-selective state school, where they are streamed in all subjects. This seemed to me to be the perfect solution. They work hard, they are not bored, there is discipline in the classroom and peer pressure to do well. Above all, they are motivated to achieve.

Then I spoke to a friend whose son is in the bottom stream at his state school. He is a lovely, highly intelligent boy with dyslexia. She is at her wits' end. "It's known as 'the stupid class'," she says. "He doesn't want to go to school anymore, and is sick on Sunday nights."

Interestingly, his father is a teacher, who has been working at an inner London comprehensive for seven years. His is a hard-nosed response: "Our son is unhappy being in the less able class. It has been a self-esteem issue for him. But the fact is, in life there are winners and losers. You've got to suck it up. He's just got to try his hardest. The teachers give him extra help. It is a gold mine for bullies, though, and the school could disguise things better by mixing the bottom-set children into different forms."

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As a teacher, the father is pro-streaming, having taught mixed-ability classes where he wastes time managing the behaviour of "a few clowns". "You see two or three kids, really bright, with loads of potential, just sitting there having to put up with this circus," he says. "Believe me, that doesn't feel great either."

So who benefits most from streaming? And what should you do as a parent? Of course, this is not an issue at highly selective schools – Eton takes only the very brightest children.

Dr Lee Elliot Major is chief executive of the Sutton Trust, which aims to improve social mobility through education. With setting, children are taught by ability in individual subjects, such as maths, whereas with streaming the whole year group is divided into bands.

Both systems can work well, he believes, but tend to benefit the children in the highest sets. Poorer children are disproportionately represented in the lower sets. "It can be a blunt instrument, particularly when used as a 'fixed' concept, with children consigned to one set their entire time at school. It comes back to the quality of teaching – good teachers will be continually assessing children," he says. Parents should ask questions when looking at schools, such as whether, and how often, sets are reviewed.

The Sutton Trust has commissioned Prof Becky Francis, from King's College London, to research the issue, which remains politically charged.

Pimlico Comprehensive was put on special measures, and then demolished six years ago, a sad defeat for the idealism on which it was founded. It has been replaced with a new-build academy.

For my part, I am glad my children are being streamed. I would hate them to endure the boredom of endlessly disrupted lessons, as I did. Sir Michael Wilshaw is right – equality and equity are not the same at all.

*<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/12129019/Why-state-schools-should-stream-their-pupils.html>*

## Why Do Americans Work So Much?

**The economist John Maynard Keynes predicted a society so prosperous that people would hardly have to work. But that isn't exactly how things have played out.**

How will we all keep busy when we only have to work 15 hours a week? That was the question that worried the economist John Maynard Keynes when he wrote his short essay “Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren” in 1930. Over the next century, he predicted, the economy would become so productive that people would barely need to work at all.

For a while, it looked as if Keynes was right: In 1930 the average working week was 47 hours. By 1970 it had fallen to slightly less than 39.

But then something changed. Instead of continuing to decline, the duration of the working week stayed put; it's hovered just below 40 hours for nearly five decades.

So what happened? Why are people working just as much today as in 1970?

There would be no mystery in this if Keynes had been wrong about the economy's increasing productivity, which he thought would lead to a standard of living “between four and eight times as high as it is today.” But Keynes got that right: technology has made the economy massively more productive. According to Benjamin M. Friedman, an economist at Harvard, “the U.S. economy is right on track to reach Keynes's eight-fold multiple” by 2029—100 years after the last data Keynes would have had. (Keynes did not specify what he meant by a “standard of living,” so Friedman uses per-capita output as a proxy.)

In a new paper, Friedman tries to figure out why that increased productivity has not translated into increased leisure time. Perhaps people just never feel materially satisfied, always wanting more money for the next new thing. “This argument is, at best, far from sufficient,” he writes. If that were the case, why did the duration of the working week decline in the first place?

Another theory Friedman considers is that “in an era of ever fewer settings that provide effective opportunities for personal connections and relationships,” people may place more value on the socializing that happens at work. But the evidence for this “remains uneven at best,” and, once again, “its bearing on the abrupt change in trend in the U.S. working week in the 1970s is far from established.”

A third possibility proves more convincing: American inequality means that the gains of increasing productivity are not widely shared. In other words, most Americans are too poor to work less. Unlike the other two explanations Friedman considers, this one fits chronologically: inequality declined in America during the post-war period (along with the duration of the working week), but since the early 1970s it's risen dramatically.

Keynes's prediction rests on the idea that “standard of living” would continue rising for everyone. But Friedman says that's not what has happened: although Keynes's eight-fold figure holds up for the economy in aggregate, it's not at all the case for the median American worker. For them, output by 2029 is likely to be around 3.5 times what it was when Keynes was writing—a bit below his four- to-eight-fold predicted range.

This can be seen in the median worker's income over this time period, complete with a shift in 1973 that fits in precisely with when the workweek stopped shrinking. According to Friedman, “Between 1947 and 1973 the average hourly wage for non-supervisory workers in private industries other than agriculture (restated in 2013 dollars) nearly doubled, from \$12.27 to \$21.23—an average growth rate of 2.1 percent

per annum. But by 2013 the average hourly wage was only \$20.13—a 5 percent fall from the 1973 level.” For most people, then, the magic of increasing productivity stopped working around 1973, and they had to keep working just as much in order to maintain their standard of living.

What Keynes foretold was a very optimistic version of what economists call technological unemployment—the idea that less labor will be necessary because machines can do so much. In Keynes’s vision, the resulting unemployment would be distributed more or less evenly across society in the form of increased leisure.

Friedman says that reality comports more with a darker version of technological unemployment: it’s not unemployment per se, but a soft labor market in which millions of people are “desperately seeking whatever low-wage work [they] can get.” This is corroborated by a recent poll by Marketplace that found that for half of hourly workers, their top concern isn’t that they work too much but that they work too little—not, presumably, because they like their jobs so much, but because they need the money.

This explanation leaves an important question: if the very rich—the workers who have reaped above-average gains from the increased productivity since Keynes’s time—can afford to work less, why don’t they? I asked Friedman about this and he theorized that for many top earners, work is a labor of love. They are doing work they care about and are interested in, and doing more of it isn’t such a burden—it may even be a pleasure. They derive meaning from their jobs, and it is an important part of how they think of themselves. And, of course, they are compensated for it at a level that makes it worth their while.

The prosperity Keynes predicted is here. After all, the economy as a whole has grown even more brilliantly than he expected. But for most Americans, that prosperity is nowhere to be seen—and, as a result, neither are those shorter working weeks.

*<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/01/inequality-work-hours/422775/>*

## **Remember, the best performances are the ones nobody cares about**

*We could return sport to its innocence and not have to look at Ronaldo in his diamond earrings and underpants*

Doping? Corruption? Let me tell you what I know. I was once a shot-putter. Or I could have been.

“You’ve got the brawn for it, Jacobson,” our sports teacher told me. “You’ve got the shoulders. You’ve got the swivel. You might even have the far-sightedness.” The clear implication was that I had every attribute of a successful shot-putter bar one. “Would that be height, sir?” I asked. He looked down at me, shook his head and walked away. Later, I learned he’d told my only serious shot-put rival that I would never be in contention for the medals because I was called Howard Jacobson.

My rival was called Odin Testostenhammur. You can see the advantage he enjoyed. Just to go out with Odin Testostenhammur written on your back was worth another metre.

I often wonder whether I’d have made it as a star of field and track had I changed my name. But had I made it as a shot-putter, who’s to say I wouldn’t have ended up ruining my body with the steroids they’d have slipped into my Lucozade? I meet Odin occasionally when I’m back in Manchester. He represented England in the 1960 Olympics in Rome, unless it was the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo. He’s on the bottle now, lives on his own in a cold-water flat in Droylsden, and throws squash balls at his cat for a hobby. He is flabby, gaunt-eyed and cries a lot. So does his cat. Whereas I – well, I don’t.

The conclusion is inescapable. If you want a good life, don’t succeed at anything too early or too well. And don’t choose a profession that attracts money or attention. The minute people want to see you doing what you do, you’re finished.

I must have grasped this truth instinctively at an early age, because after shot-putting I went into table tennis. The sports teacher who talked me out of shot-putting thought I’d found my niche. “You’ve got the right build and temperament for ping-pong, Jacobson,” he told me. “Short arms, strong wrists, obsessive personality.” What he actually meant was that I had the right name.

He was not alone in deriding table tennis by calling it ping-pong. Table tennis, in the popular view, was a parlour game, not a sport. Some, who’d heard of my prowess, would challenge me to a match, convinced they were in with a shot because they’d scraped home against some five-year-old at Butlins. When I thrashed them to within an inch of their lives they’d laugh, not at their own ignominy, but because nothing in the world mattered less to them than being thrashed at ping-pong. A trouncing at tiddlywinks would have hurt them more. If anything, I was the real loser for being good at something no one minded being bad at.

Though I didn’t properly grasp it at the time, these were the tranquil years. Never again would I be so happy. No one envied me. No one burdened me with admiration. No one came to watch. When I won, no one congratulated me. When I lost, no one consoled me. No one bribed me to throw a match. No one offered me a backhander for inside information about other players on my team. And, most importantly of all, no one suggested doping. This, reader, I can swear with my hand on my heart: the game I played at the level I played it attracted not the slightest corruption. No sport was ever cleaner. And why? Because no one gave a damn.

Where there are no spectators, there is no sponsorship. Where there is no sponsorship, there is no money. Where there is no money, there are no officials with fingers in the pot. The lesson to be learnt from this is simple. If we want honest sport, we have to stop watching it. At a stroke we could clean up football, athletics, cricket and whatever else is bent. All we have to do is stay away – don’t go to the grounds and

don't watch it on television – and, hey presto, the money disappears; sport is returned to its innocence and we wouldn't have to look at Ronaldo in his diamond earrings and underpants.

That still leaves the problem of national glory, I grant you. But if we didn't overvalue sport to the degree we do, countries wouldn't want to associate themselves with it and might look elsewhere to bolster patriotism.

To science, maybe. Or literature. There must be substances out there that improve the performances of poets. Let the Americans and Russians fight over that – who writes the more sonnets. And at least there'd be no point in cheating.

Poets are not meant to be in competition. We don't question the value of "Kubla Khan" because of whatever it was that Coleridge took while he was writing it. We don't say he unfairly beat Wordsworth and ask for his plaque to be removed from his cottage in Nether Stowey. Writers are pragmatic about this sort of thing: whatever it takes, take it.

Everything is susceptible to corruption of one sort or another – humanity is one big cheat – but it matters particularly with sport, which ceases to be itself the minute the outcome's rigged. It is sometimes said, and I sometimes agree, that one answer is to call open season on doping and make performance-enhancing drugs available to everybody. That way no athlete enjoys an unfair advantage over another, though what we would then call what they do is a question for philosophers, as is why we would care who does it better. I see a future in not caring.

If athletics were to enjoy one tenth of the prestige table tennis enjoys – in the sense of being played for itself, for the beauty of the strokes and the silence of the arena, for what it is, not for what it brings, for the freedom it enjoys from the world's curiosity – the heat would all at once go out of it.

I don't know what Lord Coe would do with himself, but I'm confident Nike would find him something.

*<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/remember-the-best-performances-are-the-ones-nobody-cares-about-a6733851.html>*

## The psychology of super powers

This isn't the first attempt to try and place some psychoanalysis around why a person would choose a particular super power and it certainly won't be the last. This is just my non-professional look at it. I am not, in any way, suggesting this is a new or original idea. My guess is that every college in America has had a student address this topic.

Most people have, at least, thought about the question. If I could choose a super power for myself, what would it be? Would I fly like Superman, or talk to the animals like Dr. Doolittle, or maybe read minds like Matt Parkman from the TV show "Heroes"? I believe that whatever you choose says something about you.

Some people may choose a power based on something they feel that they lack, e.g. super strength or brain power. Others may choose a power that would help deal with an issue currently existing in their life, e.g. super speed would help them with not being able to do everything they need to do in a day. Whatever the reason, your chosen power helps define you. Let's look at a few examples.

Flying – this can come in many varieties (e.g. flying fast would incorporate the "super speed" angle as well). People who choose flying might have a feeling of being tied down or locked into a situation they find less than pleasant. The idea of flying gives the person a sense of freedom (nothing can hold you down, so to speak). Flying could also offer a needed change of perspective (i.e. the common notion of "viewing things from 10,000 feet"). The person has a mentality that they cannot change until they fully realize everything that is going on. This is sometimes clichéd as "can't see the forest for the trees".

Invisibility – assuming one can become invisible and then visible again at will. People who choose invisibility often see the need to get away and yet stay connected to their life. How often does someone on vacation feel the need to return home before the vacation is over (not that they actually do it, but the feeling is there)? There can also be a sense that this reflects their life. The majority of people in the world have no idea how you think or act and they don't want to. Invisibility is a metaphor for the fact that only friends and/or family truly see you. You allow them that window into who you are.

Telekinesis – the ability to move objects with your mind. People who choose telekinesis seek a sense of control over the world around them. They often feel as if their entire life is dictated for them and they are sick of it. They also feel that their mastery over these objects makes them noticed. The feeling of being underappreciated can make people choose many of these powers but none more than telekinesis. Some may even feel that their new power would allow them to become more useful.

Obviously, there are many more super powers than these three, but I felt these were some of the more juicy, and obvious, ones. I have heard some people say that they would choose the power to grant themselves more powers. The greedier people get, the more they feel they are lacking and in need of assistance. This isn't always the case but the "mind wants what the mind wants."

The dangers of the acquisition of super powers are many. The first is the intoxication of being able to do something others cannot do. Superman, and others, are regarded as having something of a God-complex. Being able to save a life could be seen as going against God's will. Super powers can also make you very lonely. A secret identity conceals you from everyone and doesn't allow anyone to get to know the real you. It takes a big leap to trust anyone with that kind of information. They may not wish to have such a burden. Any plans you have will always have the possibility of interruption unless you learn to ignore the calls of those you could use your help. That scenario brings a whole host of other problems like guilt and remorse.

Just like dreams, the person best equipped to analyze the psychology behind your desired super power is you. Take an honest look at yourself and you may be surprised by what you find out. By the way, my choice was invisibility.

*<http://www.whitshappening.com/Super%20Powers.html>*

## **'Modernising' is the last thing our schools need**

### **Nevile Gwynne, best-selling author of Gwynne's Grammar, makes a provocative case for a return to traditional teaching methods**

An article by a retired headmaster of great distinction recently appeared in this newspaper. An important part of its message was that "modernisation" and "profound innovations" were much needed in schools today.

Dread thought, was my reaction. Fifty years of such policies, instituted in the teeth of denials, by people best qualified to know, that these policies were either needed or desirable, have done nothing but huge damage.

Surprising though it may now seem, back in the early Sixties, when all the radical, "child-centred" changes were about to be forced through, there was general contentment with education nationwide.

Today, by contrast, worried articles on education, and even on such basics as reading and numeracy, are a constant feature of newspapers.

*"Logic dictates that every single change in education that has taken place since 1960 should be reversed."*

Nevile Gwynne

Change is certainly needed, therefore. But what kind of change?

However shockingly, logic dictates that every single change in education that has taken place since 1960 should be reversed. Absurd? Even perverse? Consider just two pieces of evidence out of many available.

When the child-centred teaching theory finally triumphed in England in the Sixties, many headmasters, leading academics, MPs and others well placed to judge went on public record as predicting exactly the destructive results that are now evident.

A quick look at comparable public examination papers then and now shows beyond doubt that the standards demanded of children in examinations for all age groups have dramatically collapsed.

As to what the restored education should consist of...

### **What is the real purpose of upbringing and education?**

As was always recognised in the past, it is, from the time a child is born, to develop and train his or her mind and character so that it will reach adulthood with the capabilities needed to achieve all its reasonable desires, however demanding they may be, and to lead a life that is satisfying, successful and happy.

This cannot be done by teaching a large number of subjects superficially, as is the practice today. By, rather, teaching a relatively small number of subjects in depth and thoroughly, the overall science of learning is mastered, as well as the subjects taught, which, in turn, makes easy the mastery of any new subject.

Important to note is that, if children find their education enjoyable and interesting, well and good, but that is very much a secondary consideration. The primary consideration is that of helping them to become the kind of adults that sane people would want to be, whether, as children, they enjoy the learning process or not.

### **What general reforms should be made?**

- Schools single-sex, to minimise distractions and worse
- Boys taught by male teachers, girls by female teachers
- Discipline uncompromising. Obedience to teachers absolute
- Extensive memorising of all basics of the subjects being learnt; practising the memorised rules; then each child developing his or her own style under the “umbrella” of those rules
- Some of today’s textbooks replaced by the tried-and-tested ones of the past

### **What should be taught at primary schools?**

- Handwriting with fountain pens, correctly held
- Latin (ultimate for mind and character-training), starting with English-into-Latin, taught daily, with Latin verse-composition starting at 11 or 12
- English grammar and writing, taught by the Latin teachers against the background of Latin grammar
- Greek, starting at 11 or 12, for the brighter children
- French, starting with its grammar
- Arithmetic, geometry, algebra
- History taught consecutively – mainly British history because the history of our country is a considerable part of what we actually are
- Geography
- Scripture (sometimes known as divinity)
- Music and drawing

### **And at secondary schools?**

- The same subjects, further developed
- At about 15, one new subject (perhaps German) added, and one term each spent on physics, biology and chemistry
- At 16, specialisation in either one or two subjects, and most of the others dropped.

### **What I would ban**

- Computers, either at school or at home (As they are banned – yes, really – in leading schools in Silicon Valley today. Any computer use by children is reckoned by them to be damaging.) No iPads
- Television, other than on some genuinely special occasion

Is all this absurd – even outrageous? Be assured that what I have outlined worked. It worked even though the students of past times worked very much less hard than today's students do.

Furthermore, this happened not only in the fee-paying schools, but in the many grammar schools that existed in those days as well. In secondary modern schools, the only significant differences were no Latin, and the children tending to leave school when they were younger.

Moreover, for the record, most of us found our school days far from disagreeable. Yes, we looked forward to the holidays, but scarcely any of us dreaded the start of a new term, even though a deserved "six of the best" was always a possibility.

Reversion to the system just outlined, therefore, is the only safe and responsible choice, as opposed to continuing with a reckless gamble with our children's future that we have no right to make. But will this reversal happen?

*<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/Festival-of-Education/12099590/Modernising-is-the-last-thing-our-schools-need.html>*