

## Learner Identity

## Further Thoughts

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For me the journey began with a statement I made on page one of my M Phil thesis back in the early 1980s. "I found it increasingly difficult to live with a regime which could only function on the basis of the repression of children's individual needs, emotions and personalities." Fundamentally, it hasn't changed!

Indeed not. But it's got harder! I wrote that observation in 1985 when I was midway through an identity crisis. I had moved from teaching in an independent school to teaching in a state maintained primary school and was finding the transition in my own identity difficult. I make no judgement in favour of or against maintained or independent schools. The "regime", I felt, repressed children's identities in both sectors – just in different ways. I was disappointed by my move, but determined to make good come out of it through beginning a career in educational research. I wanted to understand more and condemn less.

Schooling, as opposed to education (they're not necessarily the same thing), is often fundamentally concerned with herding children and young people. Have you observed the lesson change in a large school? Schooling is concerned with classifying young people, with sorting them, with assigning to them numbers. Schooling is concerned, above all, with results. What matters is the number of A\* - Cs, because it's numbers like that which give us the identity of the school, high in the league tables or low, – good, improving or in special measures. GCSE results published.

Job done.

Young people, on the other hand, are concerned with discovering their own identities. The identities that will shape them throughout life. Who am I? Where do I fit amongst all these others? What sort of a person shall I be? Shall I love or shall I hate? "My spirit is the unique me" a ten year old once told me. Children can be wise about their identity.

Job never finished.

Libby Brooks' book *The Story of Childhood: growing up in modern Britain* deals with this kind of thing rather well. The question is, will it have any impact on policy makers? Policy makers tend to prefer numbers. Numbers provide an anaesthetic against the pain of being "unable to grow up normal in Peckham". More than this, they tell us "what works". The way out of Peckham? Just what policy makers want to know.

What works.

Why, if we knew "what worked", we wouldn't have allowed a belief that there's no such thing as society to condemn generations of children to endemic poverty. We'd have found something better than the vacuous and pointless celebrity of those who have far too much as the hope in the lives of such children. We'd have found a way to *educate* them. We'd have equipped them to cope with their identity, not foisted upon them one initiative after another that "works".

Educate, not school.

Numbers are not without use. They do at least identify who has even more and who has even less. I use them from time to time in my research. But I wonder whether we really understand the real lives of the young people who contribute to the numbers?

We try to in CLIS.