

On Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2019 the first UCL IoE debate of 2019 was held. The discussion was around the purpose of education and the role of wisdom as an objective. I was unable to attend in person but followed the livestream of the event; and then re-watched the event again on Saturday. My notes which provide a brief summary of the events are below. The event was chaired by Professor Becky Francis and each of the speakers began by summarising their views on the key question.

Tony Sewell, CEO, Generating Genius

Knowledge is for everybody. The importance of knowing stuff and giving that to children has come to him through two personal examples. Firstly, as a child being made to go to church; he managed to get a good understanding of the bible. Secondly, through a retired Latin teacher who gave him Latin lessons; and he took an O Level in Latin.

When he had his English class at university – with students who had had a privileged education – he was able to go toe to toe. It is very difficult to understand English literature without an understanding of the bible. The accidental knowledge that he didn't get from his secondary modern gave him access on an equal footing when in university.

It has become an issue for poor kids as you don't give them stuff that is related to their backgrounds, and you don't give them difficult stuff. Tony argued that we need to allow working class children to access the classics. At the moment we don't give them stuff related to their background; nor do we give them difficult stuff.

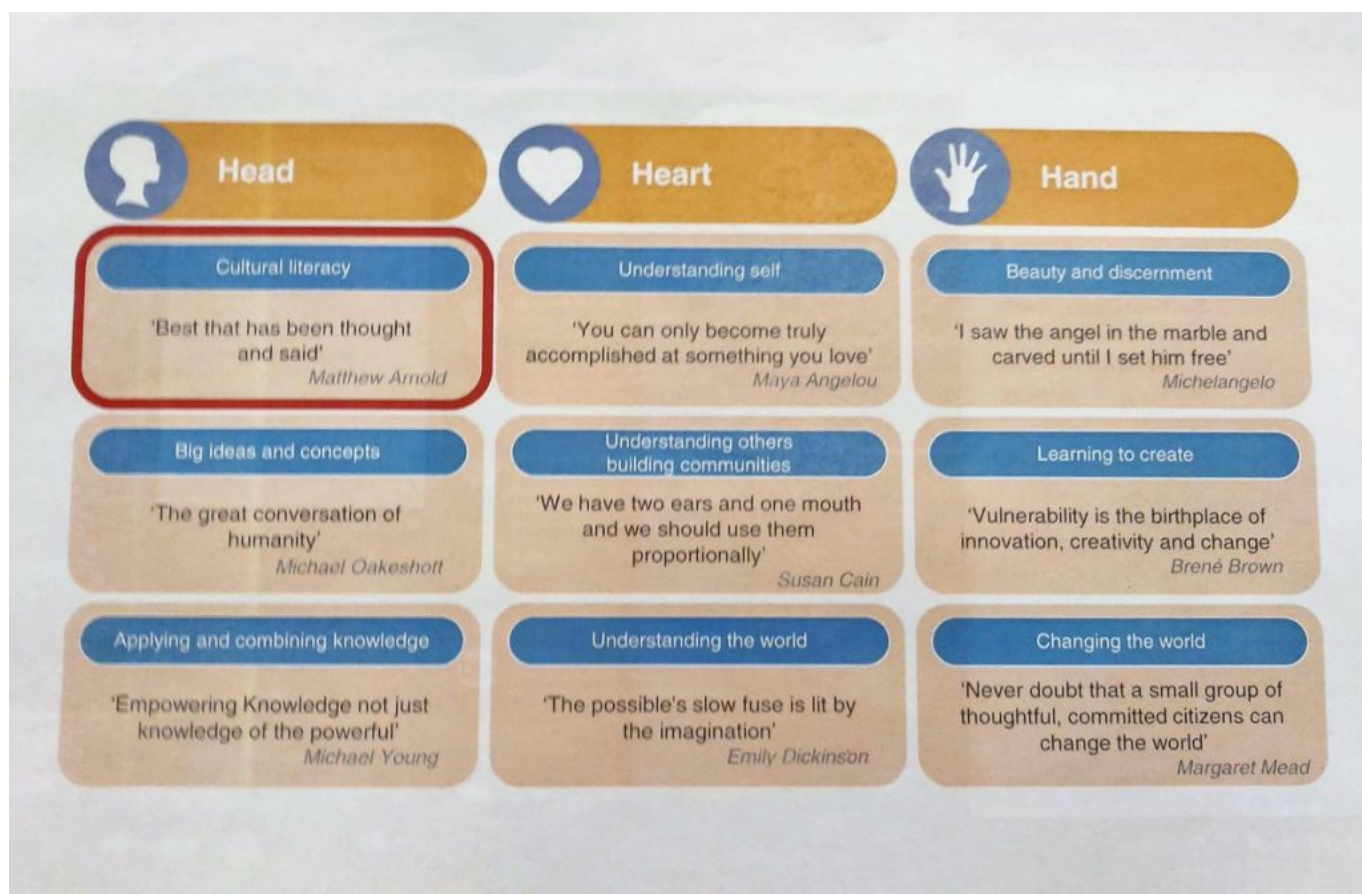
Knowledge is what you know, and it is good for you in itself; there doesn't need to be a purpose in it. Education should stop pretending it can build a workforce. Knowledge has value in itself. Education is about knowing the mind of god.

Peter Hyman, Co-Director of Big Education and Co-Found of School 21

Knowledge is needed to pass GCSE exams.

Wisdom is knowing GCSE exams are crap; but you need to pass them to get to the next stage.

You need both but the wisdom to put it in some kind of perspective. It therefore needs an expansive form of education that is curious and handling things to make sense of it.



If you are just teaching knowledge it is only one 9<sup>th</sup> of an education. A balanced curriculum is balancing head, heart and hand. Being able to pass on the cannon and the classics is important. But you need to also enter into the conversation of humanity and wrestle with big ideas and themes, not just nuggets of information. It is about knowing the debates and applying knowledge.

Intersections and frictions between disciplines are where the interesting things happen; going on about core knowledge is doing students a disservice. Wisdom also comes from

understanding yourself and your background.

There is nothing more tragic than the exam factory at the moment that you stop taking the creative subjects when you choose your options. 95% of children do no music, art or drama from the age of 14. The things that make us civilized human beings are being drilled out of the curriculum. The curriculum does not have space for you take it if you are not taking it as an exam subject. Learning to create is important. You can create meaningful beautiful work while you are at school at any age. The currency of the school should be what you create not exam grades.

A curriculum of head heart and hand transcends debate over knowledge. What people need for their sense of fulfilment is a balanced curriculum.

David Lambert, Professor of Geography Education, UCL Institute of Education

As a geographer he is interested in how we understand and encounter the world. Due to the challenge of climate; we (collectively) need lots of ingenuity; and wisdom, and they are not the same thing. David goes on to state: I am a great believer in building wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding common sense and insight.

Need to be very cautious about what school can do; need to be very careful about what overclaiming education can do.

Need to be careful about the use of the term 'main objectives' - discreet, measurable, and short term. Lessons can have objectives, and exams can have objectives. Wisdom is not an objective; as objectives are staging points towards something less tangible. What about Wisdom or something more like it serving as our overarching curriculum goal.

Wisdom becomes very similar to capabilities. This approach must apply to individual subject components in a curriculum.

All teachers need to do something with the idea if wisdom is going to be our overarching goal. Teachers need to take responsibility for how content is taught, how it is sequenced and how they think students process in their context Teachers need to take back control. Teaching students someone else's interpretation of what is significant inadequate. Teachers need to be in the business of knowledge building not knowledge delivering. We currently have too many complacent practitioners.

There is both the how, and the what. The what is what it means to be a teacher of a subject. The potential of knowledge building and the building of knowledge is so powerful. David make reference to Michael Young's 3 futures.

Imagine young people who were able to think geographically about the Anthropocene, and how it might enhance the thinking and engage with the wisdom of the day.

Cat Scutt, Director of Education and Research, Chartered College of Teaching

Are we actually able to develop students who are wise? Or can we only develop that over time? Can an 18-year-old have wisdom - or does it take time. Is Wisdom individual or are we talking about building collective wisdom of society.

We can debate is it about knowledge and skills - is it important? The debate is not which matters more - but how we develop those. It is difficult to separate the what and how - and also the knowledge and skills. We need to talk about context and pedagogies.

When the debate is most polarised, they are talking about the hard to measure skills rather than the subject specific skills. The soft skills can be developed through traditional teaching methods.

When we are debating skills and knowledge - it is also about thinking about the curriculum and pedagogy for teaching this. We need to think about what it is we want our students to have when they leave schools. Need to ensure our focus is high quality learning not just

activities to engage pupils.

As Ofsted is more involved in curriculum, we need to ensure we are not moving from the pendulum swing just from skills to core knowledge and knowledge based curriculum.

It is about giving teachers wisdom, and knowledge to allow them to make good decisions.

Schools should be able to say this is what our curriculum is and why. Schools need to reflect on the key debate of what and why.

## Questions

The second part of the event was questions from the audience to the panel; I did not take many notes from this section however a couple of points are below:

Peter – it is good if Ofsted are looking at a broader view of the curriculum. Schools that are exam factories are marked down will be a good move. All incentives for schools are still linked solely to exam results.

David – I don't see the point of GCSE anymore; they are not as necessary as they distort education, experience, and students don't leave school at 16 anymore. There is a lack of public trust in teachers; teachers should take more responsibility but there needs to be more trust and support.

The full debate is available on youtube to watch; and the event page is available [here](#).