

Education, population, poverty, tax...getting views on topics like those in Jersey isn't the difficult part – but have you ever noticed how many people sound eminently credible when talking about them, even though they may actually be basing their views on conjecture, false facts and blind guesswork?

There is a real danger in making the 'facts' fit the opinion, rather than the other way around – which is exactly the point at which someone with an eye on the latest buzzwords will smugly insert the phrase 'post-truth' into the conversation, imagining it's actually helpful.

So, we've asked the Jersey Policy Forum to add some robust material to those crucial local debates – the point is not to provoke agreement or acquiescence; it is to provide reliable material on which others can build their views.



Gailina Liew, JPF Executive Director



What's the deal with these #\$\$%@! exams?

It's exam time for kids in school and anxiety levels are high for students (sitting GCSE, A level and IB exams), teachers, school staff and for all related families and carers. It's also the time when questions re-surface about the purpose of these #\$\$%@! (choose your own words) exams and whether they really accomplish anything other than assessing exam writing ability and inducing stress. Exams are arguably an objective way to rank students and provide some tangible measurement of the ability to retain and regurgitate data and knowledge (under duress) but it would be a stretch to say that exams provide a fair assessment of our kids' progress in light of what we know about how our brains work and how human beings actually learn. To understand whether exams are even useful, we might first need to explore a couple of questions: (1) why do kids have to go to school?, and (2) what is the purpose of education?

Most countries (Bhutan, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vatican City are the exceptions) have laws that require their governments to provide free compulsory

education for children in their primary and secondary school years (with home-schooling as an option in many countries). There is broad global agreement that access to free primary education is a fundamental human right as stated in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and that this enables other fundamental human rights. So, that's the (very simplified) answer to the first question. What about the second question?

Here's what some well-known people say about the purpose of education.

Plato "Do not train children to learning by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each."

Martin Luther King, Jr. "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."

Confucius "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."

Helen Keller "The highest result of education is tolerance. A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers."

And Article 26(2) of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states:

"Education shall be directed to **the full development of the human personality** and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace." (my emphasis in **bold**)

Think about your own experience and what you might be hearing from our school-aged children today – is the time and energy spent on creating, writing and marking exams helpful for any of the purposes we've looked at so far?

What comes to mind when you reflect on the following people?

Alexandra Scott – was diagnosed with a rare form of brain cancer who, at the age of four, stood at the end of her driveway selling lemonade to raise money for cancer research and inspired others to do the same – Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation (<https://www.alexlemonade.org>) had raised over \$1 million by the time she died at the age of 8; more funds continue to be raised.

Craig and Marc Kielburger – Craig was 12 years old when he read a newspaper article about the murder of a 12-year-old boy in Pakistan for telling the world about the terrible conditions that children are forced to work under in the carpet-making industry. He and his brother co-founded 'Free the Children', the 'WE movement' and 'ME to WE' social enterprises to motivate and empower young people around the world to take action and make better consumer choices (www.metowe.com).

Adele – a British singer-songwriter who has sold more than 100 million albums, won an Oscar (for Skyfall) and 12 Grammys...so far!

Felix Ulf Arvid Kjellberg – more commonly known as Swedish YouTuber PewDiePie who has more subscribers than any other YouTuber (over 95 million subscribers and 21.3 billion views as of May 2019).

Malala Yousafzai – survived being shot in the head by the Taliban when she was 15, is a speaker and activist for the education of all children, and co-recipient of the Nobel peace prize in 2014 when she was 17 years old (youngest Nobel Laureate to date).

Boyan Slat – was 16 years old and diving in the waters around Greece when he noticed that there was more plastic than fish in the water. He presented an idea to use the ocean currents to collect plastic at a TEDx talk the following year and has since founded The Ocean Cleanup, and is the inventor of a giant ocean boom that is being used today (www.theoceancleanup.com).

Banksy – an anonymous graffiti artist, who is amongst the most famous vandals in the world today, for his England-based street

art that provides political and satirical commentary on global affairs.

Rishab Jain – was 13 years old when he was named as the 2018 winner of the Discovery Education 3M Young Scientist Challenge for the use of artificial intelligence to improve pancreatic cancer treatment.

Salman Khan – started to create short videos in 2008 to tutor his cousin who was struggling with maths at school. Demand for his videos grew so quickly that he quit his job the following year and has since created a free online platform and non-profit organisation (www.khanacademy.org) with the support of millions of dollars in donations from Google, AT&T, Carlos Slim Foundation, etc. for people to learn about a huge array of topics at their own pace along with tools to chart their progress.

This is just a very small sample of people of our time who have and continue to make an impact and difference in the world. Why are they doing what they do? How did they figure out how to do it? What skills and knowledge did they need to be successful? Would the answers to these types of questions be useful when we look at our education systems and how we define and measure progress and success?

Perhaps Yeats said it best:

"Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire."

What inspired these people? What was the spark? What inspires you? How can we ignite more fires? Probably doesn't have much to do with writing exams!

What do you think? The Jersey Policy Forum is interested in your views. Please share your thoughts by email to contact@jerseypolicyforum.org.