

# The BuGle

Dec 16

Dear Parents, Carers, and Friends,

The last BuGle of 2016 contains a few personal ruminations on the theme of competition and some good news (well, it is Christmas). I got thinking about this last Sunday, whilst listening to an excellent TED Talk by Victor Rios entitled 'Help for Kids the Education System Ignores'. Victor speaks from an American perspective, so not all his thinking is true of the English education experience, but it did contain some wonderful nuggets of wisdom.

Now, I am in favour of competition. Not because of the often repeated logic that this is 'the real world' and the facts of life don't lie, but because it is a way for individuals to aspire to their own goals and to be inspired by the achievements of others. Sport is a great example of this. BUT! We don't like cheats, do we? We can't be inspired by something we don't trust; misuse of drugs in sport is cheating and those that choose this path are destroying the simple beauty of competition. They are destroying our trust.

The Olympic movement recognised that competition without values was hollow. There can only ever be one winner, but there should be many participants. It should bring people together, not divide! But why bother when you know you can't win? That is the lie that some people believe about competition; that to win at all costs is the only point. Competition is also about personal goals, camaraderie and a sense of belonging, being a participant not an onlooker, of helping us all to have a stake in the future. Competition that does not do this is dangerous. Competition that encourages a 'lowest bidder' mentality, for example.

When a business can only drive down its costs by driving down the wages of its employees and

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reducing its investment in training, then it's time to worry. Organisations that export jobs, or take their money to 'lightly regulated' jurisdictions, only to sit on massive profits, should be a cause for concern. Businesses that don't believe they should pay tax, because they are not tied to communities, destroy trust. It bothers me that we live in a world where the richest 1% of the population own more than the remaining 99%.

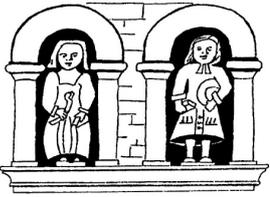
If competition does not benefit us then we need to think again. If competition can only respect rules and not values then it is time to think again.

When we come to the periodic wailing and gnashing of teeth that follows the publication of the latest PISA tests (international education tests to compare how well children are doing across the world) we also need to think again. Here, systems are pitted against each other. 'Big Data' is king and we are in thrall to the headlines. **ENGLAND'S SCHOOLS FALLING BEHIND ASIA**, seems to be the general theme. However, system level performance is not what should be concerning Head Teachers, or parents for that matter, because we are all lost in that kind of scale. Good organisations have to focus on the people they know. How good are we? Can we improve the way we do things? What would help us to be more successful? How can we help people to realise their potential?

Basically, this is about having faith in them, trust between partners, investment in personal development, and challenge so they can meet their goals. They meet their goals, we meet our goals.

Of course we are not free of the system. The system has its own priorities and can frustrate the work of individual organisations. The system dictates how much we have to spend. The system is amorphous, vague and distant.

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It's not that PISA comparisons do not have something worth saying. Why, for example, do England's primary schools perform rather better (around 10<sup>th</sup> place), than secondary schools (around 20<sup>th</sup> place)? How do these different systems compare in terms of their investment in training and development? What different methods of accountability are used in other countries? In short, there are things we can learn. This is much more important than what place we finished in, and here is where I need to return to Victor Rios.

Victor told a story about his own experience of school. He was not ready for it. He'd had a very hard life and his mind was on other things. He could have been viewed as a failure; a person of no value. The system could easily have failed him, if it saw him as a statistic, but he wasn't alone. He was part of a community. Crucially, he was valued by his teacher, Mrs Russ. She helped him to understand that there were important things about his life that were assets; that he had more things going for him than he could realise; he had things to build on. She had faith in him, but she wasn't stupid.

She knew he wasn't ready, but she was patient and willing to play the long game. Despite Victor's criminal behaviour she wasn't willing to give up on him. She would say to him, "Victor, I'm here whenever you need me. I know you're not ready for me, but as soon as you are, I'm here." This is a great lesson for us all to learn. At some point the child will be ready, if we are open to this possibility. Systems might view people like Victor as 'a risk', but Mrs Russ saw his 'promise', because she had a relationship with him. She cared.

We know there are pupils in our school, who are not quite ready, but that does not stop us from having faith. We are ready for them, when they

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are ready for us. There are real examples of lives being transformed in our school, because people care and are helping children to set goals they never had before. In some cases we are also getting better at recognising the goals they already have and valuing them.

When I think about this, the relevance of healthy competition makes sense. We can compare ourselves with others in order to question whether we have the fundamentals right. Of course we are not 'there' yet, but the enabling work that is going on is certainly pushing us in the right direction.

The publication of the school league tables last week was another sign of promise – the good news I mentioned right back at the beginning of this piece. Out of the 21,225 primary schools in England we were 1,235<sup>th</sup> for the proportion of our leavers who achieved the standard in reading, writing and maths, placing us in the top 6% of all schools. We were 284<sup>th</sup> for the proportion of leavers working at the higher standard in all three subjects, placing us in the top 2% of all schools in England. Well done everybody; we can only do this together. I think I feel a new banner coming on!



'We also have joy with our troubles because we know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character, and character produces hope.' ROMANS 25:15

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all! See you back on the 5<sup>th</sup> January.

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