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# The Unexamined Life

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IBSC Conference, Baltimore

June 2017



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# The Unexamined Life

- The judgement of Socrates
  - Right about life after school
  - Wrong about life at school
  - The contrast of ends and means
  
- Headwinds and challenges
  - Academic ambition
  - Parental expectation
  - Extra-curricular endeavour



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# The Unexamined Life

- What forms can it take?
  - Reading for pleasure
  - Formal courses
  - External talks
  - Internal talking
  
- The life of the mind, for boys
  - Role models inside and outside the school
  - The pressure of the peer group
  - The school of life



# Reading for pleasure

- Different types of reading
  - Within academic disciplines
  - Prescribed in syllabuses
  - Stepping stones to learning
  - Fiction and other genres
- Why does it matter?
  - Subject knowledge
  - Vocabulary and grammar
  - Writing ability
  - Cornerstone of scholarship



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# Research on reading

- Cognitive benefits
  - Improving memory, focus and concentration
  
- Health benefits
  - Reducing stress, delaying the onset of dementia
  
- Life benefits
  - More important for educational success than family's socio-economic status (OECD, Results from PISA)



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# Reading and the purpose of school

- Learning
  - Reading is integral to scholarship
  - Reading satisfies and stimulates intellectual curiosity
  - Reading fosters independent thought
- Personal fulfilment
  - Finding out about the world
  - Understanding the human condition
  - Learning empathy
  - The power of imagination



# Reading and the community

- Children's reading is influenced by relationships:
  - Between teachers
  - Between teachers and children
  - Between children and families
  - Between children, teachers, families and communities
- As a result:
  - Current reading can be part of the e-signature
  - Teachers can read the same books as their students
  - Reading can be included in reporting
  - Reading can be discussed at parents' meetings and other informal events



# Reading and the community

- Parents have a big part to play:
  - Encourage parents to read to their children, young and old
  - Ask parents to encourage boys to read at home
  - Let boys read what they want
- And so do teachers:
  - Providing time for independent reading
  - Talking about books with boys
  - Promoting reading aloud
  - Recommending books to boys
  - Reading with boys in school, and to them





# Reading: a ten point plan

- New boys' reading list (1)
  - Answers on a postcard
  - Public displays
- Timetabled lessons (2)
  - For all boys, every week
  - DEAR
  - Pavlovian psychology
- Reading lists for everyone (3)
  - New boys, Summer, Winter lists from the library
  - Departmental lists available online
- Teachers reading too (4)
  - The same book as their students?



# Reading: a ten point plan

- Keep a record (5)
  - Online tracking
  - And not just the title....
- Heads of Subject (6)
  - Incorporating the reading habit
  - Reporting every year
- Teachers encouraging reading (7)
  - In the form room
  - In silence
  - Out loud
- Other Libraries (8)
  - In houses / dormitories
  - In departments
  - Boys choosing titles
  - Boys running lending



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# Reading: a ten point plan

- Encouragement in the evenings (9)
  - Before academic work
  - During academic work
  - After academic work
  - Before bed
- Talking about books (10)
  - Discussion
  - Simple questions
  - Individual boys
  - Groups of boys



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# Formal unexamined courses

- What are the challenges?
  - Boys' attitudes
  - Teachers' approaches
  - Time in the timetable...
  - ..and priorities outside it
- And what are the answers?
  - Freedom of choice
  - Frequency of rotation
  - Putting them at the centre of planning
  - The cultural landscape



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# Formal courses: Harrow's Electives

- The meaning of Electives
  - In both senses in the Sixth Form: boys and beaks
  - In one sense in the lower school: beaks only
  
- The nature of Electives
  - Horizontal and vertical extension, catering for all
  - Light but regular prep (homework)
  - The starting point for the timetable



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# Formal courses: Harrow's Electives

- Some examples in the Sixth Form
  - Super Physics
  - Philosophy
  - The Art of Programming
  - The History of Political Thought
  
- Some examples in the lower school
  - Introductions to History of Art, Politics, Economics
  - Critical thinking and evaluative reading
  - Oratory, Infinity, Etymology, Feminism, Rhythm & Poetry



# Formal courses: practicalities

- Freedom of choice for teachers
  - Teachers invited to submit multiple proposals
  - Staffing requirements include examined and unexamined courses
  
- Freedom of choice for boys
  - The psychology of choosing their courses....
  - ..and the number of them
  
- Freedom of timing
  - Different regimes for different boys
  - Allowing boys to prioritise exams, inevitably



# Formal courses: good practices

- Initiatives for teachers
  - On-line, pre-prepared courses
  - Harkness-style teaching
  - Mixing business and pleasure
  - Emphasising the visual
  - Ensuring a range
  - Different learning environments
- Activities for boys
  - Presentations
  - Posters
  - Flipped learning
  - Light learning
  - Peer assessment
  - Independence
  - Fear of failure...





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# External talks: outside the timetable

- External to the timetable
  - Twilight and evening lectures
  - Cross-curricular lectures
  
- External to the school
  - Visiting subject experts
  - Speakers with a high public profile
  - Balance to strike and bias to avoid



# External talks: motivating attendance

- The challenges for boys
  - Competing demands on their time
  - Peer pressure
  - Lemming effect
  
- The solutions to those challenges
  - Courage in the curriculum
  - Mentoring schemes
  - Accounting for their time
  - Accounting for their parents' money



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# External talks: hybrid model

- The Lyon Lecture Series
  - Rotating through subjects triennially
  - University lecturers invited for two days, resident
  - Compulsory lessons and optional lectures
  - Celebrating the academic life of departments
  - Inviting parents, other schools, other teachers

# Internal talking



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- An unsuccessful model
  - Why are they making us do this?
  - What is the point of this?
  - Why can't I just get on with my work?
  - Do you remember....?
- The objective
  - Discussion among boys and teachers
  - Anticipation for the next event
  - Pride in attendance
  - Do you remember....?



# Internal talking, both boys and teachers

- Cross-curricular lecture series
  - Themed, allowing boys to relate one to another
  - Evening lectures, but multiple speakers
  - Internally organised
  - Attended by teachers
  
- Structures for conversations
  - Informal, at the start of lessons and training sessions
  - Regular and formal, through teachers, tutors, house masters
  - Among groups of boys



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# Internal talking, among teachers

- Why did we choose our subjects in the first place?
  - Rediscovering and maintaining enthusiasm
  - Keeping up with scholarship and research
  
- The collegiate environment
  - Presenting to our peers
  - Enjoying the company of other practitioners
  
- The foundations for next year's programme
  - Future unexamined courses?
  - Future lectures and presentations?



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## In summary....

- Reading: the cornerstone of conversation
- Unexamined courses: the life of the mind
- External talks: only as good as their audiences
- Internal talking: boys learning from each other, their teachers' work done

# And finally



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