

# A conversation

## with Jo Fairclough

### On the Sustainable Development Goals as a stimulus for curriculum innovation

Perhaps it's unfortunate that we're tempted to link everything that goes on in schools to Ofsted, but Ofsted's thinking has changed. Now there is much more of a focus on curriculum, not just on outcomes, and I think that is a positive development with an emphasis on what sort of learner we want to emerge from school, not simply on what qualifications they have.

We want to produce learners who are responsible, resilient and can face the challenges that life may well bring them. We want our pupils to be inquisitive and to question what's going on around them. That means we have to consider what knowledge the pupils need to be empowered with so, if they choose, they are able to change the world they live in.

The Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] provide a lens through which we can look at the curriculum and link what's done in school to what's relevant to the learner's world. Our pupils are enthusiastic about what they learn in geography, in history, in school, but they tell us that they want a hook that links topics in school to "Why is that important to me?", and "How is that going to help me going forward into the world?".

The SDGs provide that hook, that relevance, which takes them into the consideration of wider education issues. **It's not simply teaching about the SDGs, but it's about using them as a stimulus for curriculum planning.** For example, supporting learners to explore the local and national implications of what they're studying, together with the global aspects of the topic.

Community is an important part of our school, and not just the local community, but also the global community.

Jo Fairclough is Head at Wolgarston High School, Staffordshire.

She has recently become Vice Chair of Tide~ Trustees.

Jo reflects on project plans and the impact of Covid-19

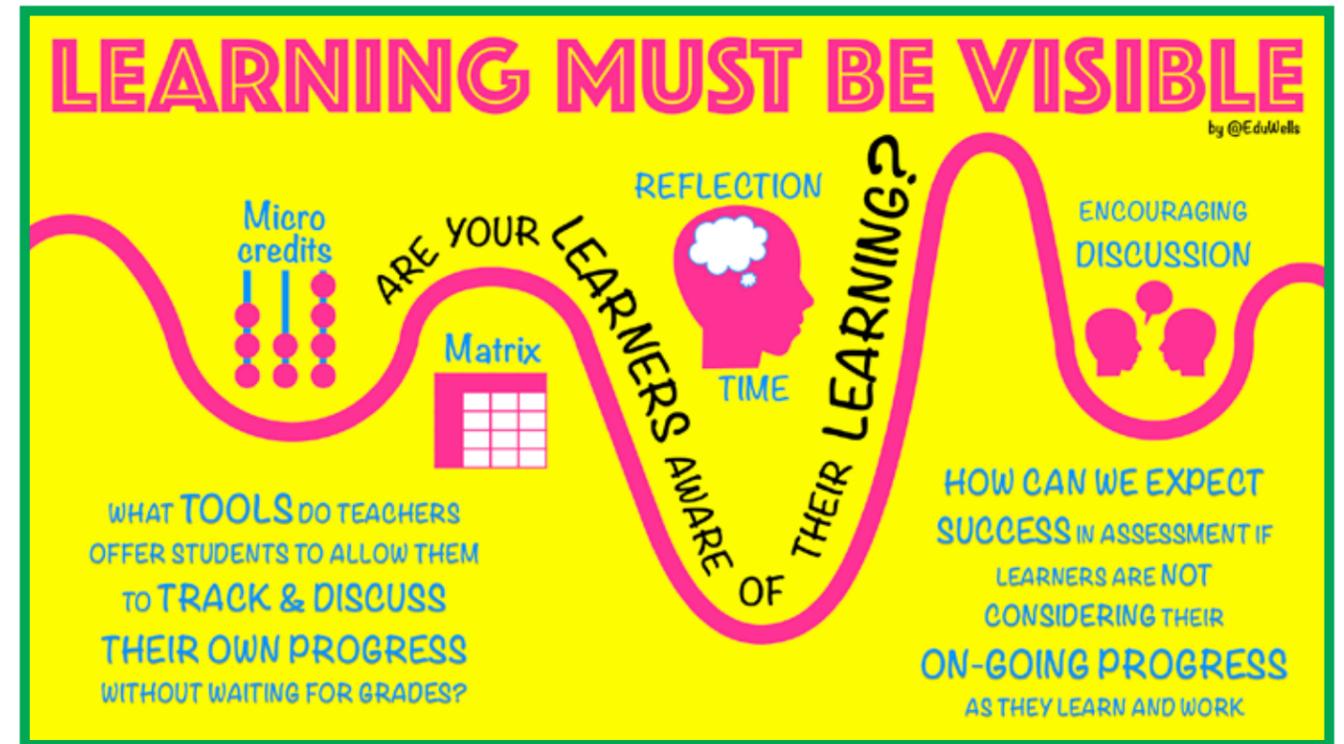


Image: Thank you to Eduwells

Wolgarston High uses a Visible Learning strategy. See [case study](#) Students have a lead role in their own learning. Emphasis on what they are learning and why. Do the SDGs offer clarity about the 'why'?

### On the implications of Covid-19 for such a curriculum

At the moment it feels almost as if curriculum development has halted. From a leadership point of view, it's difficult to "think strategically", as we're never sure what challenges we'll be faced with from day-to-day. That goes for all in the school.

Teachers have great difficulty planning because some pupils will be present, others 'attending' on-line, others returning after a period of self-isolation. They're trying to take pupils forward, plug gaps for others, and plan remote learning.

**Another effect of Covid-19 on school life is that we've become very insular and that presents a very real challenge if you're trying to get pupils to think globally.**

Our experience is that lock-down has made pupils and their families think more about themselves and made it difficult for them to think more outwardly. For example, we've always celebrated our links with other schools, but that's become more difficult. Using, say, Zoom, just isn't the same.

The messages about protecting your loved ones, saving the NHS and so on have led us to become more, well, xenophobic. At the moment, it's very much about "our school", "looking after our staff", "looking after our pupils", and linking those ideas to the global community hasn't been as much a priority as it has in the past.

### On future curriculum projects

I think that we'll be in this mode for the remainder of this academic year. I don't feel that staff will have the mental space to engage in meaningful curriculum development until 2021-22. In the meantime, we should lay the foundations for reinvigorating the curriculum and for providing teachers with the space to plan and reflect.

I think staff have missed the interaction with other professionals, sharing what they've been doing, sharing their common experiences, and so Tide~ should consider how it can engage teachers in early networking to prepare for next year when, hopefully, things will be "more normal".

Perhaps some discussions about how the SDGs could stimulate curriculum development, what have the challenges been this year and how we can work together to address those challenges. I think that would be valuable from both a personal and a professional level.

If we are to reverse the insularity that has developed we can't ignore the challenges that Covid has presented to teachers and learners. We must reflect on what Covid has taught us and that's difficult whilst we're in the midst of the pandemic, but there will come a point when we want to consider what happened, for example, and how our pupils changed.

However, one aspect that I think will emerge is that those ideals that were valued pre-Covid will still be important. For example .... **pupils leaving us with independent learning skills so they have the capacity for life-long learning and the ability to reflect on what they've learnt and what they need to do next. Those skills have always been important and, for me, the past few months have highlighted that even more.**



## SDGs - a stimulus to curriculum development?



Plans for a Tide~ project bringing together teachers from Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 to support such curriculum development and share outcomes are on hold because of Covid-19. We are working towards a launch in September 2021.

To help with that preparation we invite teachers, from any place, to get in touch.

Express your interest to Jo Fairclough: [jkfairclough@hotmail.com](mailto:jkfairclough@hotmail.com)