

## **Hope for Education:**

A consideration of how the theological virtue of hope can energise a school.

*'For in this hope we are saved.'*

Romans chapter 8 v 24

**The Armitage Lecture**

**2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2017**

**Sydney Church of England Grammar School**

[Opening Remarks]

We are here this evening to think about *HOPE*. For, as the Bible states, ‘*hope does not disappoint us*’. (Romans 5:5) Indeed love ‘*always hopes*’ (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Over Easter, my children and I began a meditation on the nature of love from 1 Corinthians 13. I am sure you all know it by heart, but it is worth reading again. ‘*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always **hopes**, always perseveres. Love never fails.*’ Having spent time learning these verses, I then asked my children, ‘*which one of these virtues do you think you need more of?*’ My youngest son, who is five, immediately piped up, ‘*mummy, I think you need more patience!*’ The others paused for a moment and then my eldest son replied, ‘*hope, I need more hope.*’ He then went on to say, ‘*I need more hope because when something goes wrong, I get so disappointed. I find it very hard to pull myself out of it - I lose my hope and then everything goes wrong.*’

My eldest son is nine. He has the best that life can offer, a happy home life, a great school, a magnificent mother! Yet he knows, intuitively, that what he needs is *hope* – otherwise, in his words, ‘*everything goes wrong.*’ How many of our students does that apply to? How many of our students have we seen living in despair? How much are mental health issues on the rise for students in our schools? How much do we see that, without hope, ‘*everything goes wrong,*’?

One of the most common places to find hope mentioned in education in Australia is in the Gallup Poll. Gallup Education Practice have studied the key factors that impact student performance for over forty years. Their results point to three factors in particular: hope, engagement and wellbeing. As educationalists, you will all resonate with the terms engagement and wellbeing. These terms are used on an hourly basis by teachers and school leaders alike. However, how many of us regularly use the term hope in our staffrooms or classrooms? This research suggests that hope is the key factor that affects student performance and yet we rarely mention it. What’s more concerning is that, when you take Australia as a whole, only 48% of students were found to have hope, as compared to 63% who were noted as having healthy well-being and 59% who were found to be engaged. Hope is the key factor affecting student performance and yet reportedly the missing factor for over half of our students.

For Gallup, of course, hope is a pragmatic concept that equals the ideas and energy that students have for the future. For Christians and for Christian educators it is a fundamental theological virtue that is rooted in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For as is simply stated in Romans (8:24) ‘*in this hope we are saved.*’ Christians live *in* hope. We indwell this virtue that has its focus on and its locus in God. In hope, we are saved. Indeed, Paul states in this same passage, that is what saves the whole of creation, ‘*in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*’ (8:20b,21).

Therefore, our view of hope does not stop at student performance but is an altogether thicker description that should transform both students and institutions.

But what does that look like? What is the anatomy of hope? How does it transform a school community? And how do we educate for hope?

The aim of this lecture is to consider these questions. To do so I will employ a primarily inductive method which first presents the story of a school that was brought into creation through Christian hope. Drawing from this story, I shall then unpack, what I have termed '*the anatomy of hope*'. This will help us to consider the workings of this gift of hope and how it might energise and transform our own school contexts.

---

It was 1995. We gathered expectantly in the common room at the department of educational studies, University of Oxford. Day one of our teacher training. Quite a severe looking woman stepped forward and introduced herself as the course convener. She held up two things: a bar of chocolate and a diary, pronouncing, '*If you want to stay the course as a teacher you will need two things: energy [pointing to the chocolate] and organisation [pointing to the diary]. If you don't have them, leave now.*' Then she sat down. We shuffled nervously, not quite knowing if we should go to the nearest confectionary store or examine our character. Needless to say, nobody left, yet we all remember it vividly. Partly because it was the first thing we heard and partly because it is true. Working in a school requires irascible energy. However, is it chocolate that brings that energy? (Definitely, I hear you cry!)

In the early part of this century Prime Minister Tony Blair believed that the way to re-energise Britain's struggling schools was through the City Academies programme. Based on the Charter Schools movement in the United States and the Thatcher government's City Technology Colleges, the aim of City Academies was to break the cycle of failing schools in inner cities. In its simplest terms, it aimed to improve the worst schools in Britain by inviting a sponsor from the business sector to take responsibility for the school. This sponsor and the government would work in partnership to improve it. To gain approval as a sponsor you had to commit two million pounds to a capital works project and to prove your governance capability.

Initially this programme was focused solely on inner city schools, hence the name, '*City Academy*'. However, that vision was quickly expanded, with the acknowledgement that there was also extremely high social deprivation and educational failure in isolated rural areas.

The final inspiration for the city academies programme came from a visit to an 11-18 Christian ethos school in the North East of England called Emmanuel College. Andrew Adonis was then education adviser for Tony Blair. He visited the school and in his book, '*Education, Education, Education*' he recounts the visit in the following way.

'The seminal moment was at Emmanuel College, Gateshead, sponsored by the successful [North East] car dealer, Peter Vardy. Tony Blair called my mobile just as I was leaving an inspirational session with a group of sixth-formers telling me about their life stories, the brilliance of their school and their ambitions to get on. When I told Tony where I was, he said: "*Of course I know the CTC and Peter Vardy. I was at Durham Cathedral School with him.*" ..... Pacing round the car park I told Tony how far we still had to go to make this kind of school the norm. He listened intently, and by the time I had got to the end of the tale of the hostility of Gateshead council, the refusal of the local labour MP to even visit the school, and Vardy's wish to set up

at least five more schools in the north-east, he simply said: “*OK let’s work out how to go for it.*”

And so, at that moment, the legislation for city academies broadened out from the business sector to include the involvement of more faith based organisations, especially those who were Christian.

By 2003, this vision had become a reality and Emmanuel College had opened its first sister school, an 11-18 Christian ethos school called The King’s Academy in Middlesbrough. They also had agreement in principle to establish Trinity Academy in South Yorkshire. The proposal was to open this second school in September, 2005.

Trinity Academy was due to replace, Thorne Grammar School, an 11-18 comprehensive school with thirteen hundred students and a hundred and fifty staff members. Thorne was one of the highest areas of social and economic deprivation in the United Kingdom. It was an ex-mining community where the closure of the mines by Margaret Thatcher had led to extremely high rates of multi-generational unemployment. Aspirations were fatally low and the only school in the town typically sent around six students to university, which was approximately 5% as compared to a national average of 45%. Common issues within the school were teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, bullying, truancy, smoking and high rates of underperformance.

However, a couple who attended a church in Doncaster had a growing burden and vision for transformative Christian education in the town. They had no idea how this would transpire but they faithfully prayed. After years of prayer, Sir Peter Vardy and the Emmanuel Schools Foundation agreed to take over the school and to create Trinity Academy in its place. What they needed now were Christian school leaders.

The teacher trainer thought chocolate was the key, the Prime Minister believed it to be school structures and a faith based ethos.

---

The story of how I came to be one of those Christian school leaders began in my early teens. One day, the mother of a friend of mine looked at me and said, ‘*you’re better than you think you are.*’

I thought it was an odd thing to say, but she intermittently said it to me over the next period of time and it constantly repeated itself in my mind. Not only did I remember it, but it put me under significant pressure to rise to that expectation. At that time, I was a happy, but not especially successful, student. I had been brought up as a Christian but hadn’t fully made a link between school and faith and definitely hadn’t made a link between faith and excellence. This simple statement started that process and eventually, ten years later, I ended up at Oxford University, studying first for a master’s degree and then a doctorate.

When I arrived in Oxford the emotion that hit me was fear. I had risen to the expectation but I didn’t believe that I could fulfil it. As is stated in John Newton’s hymn, *Amazing Grace*, ‘*it was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.*’ Without going into the whole story, fear led me to a meditation on the concept of grace, grace led me to a

revelation of my sin, and repentance led me to receive Christ, the hope of glory. I couldn't fulfil the expectation, but with Christ in me, '*all things are possible.*' Matthew 19:26

This indwelling of Christian hope began to transform my mind and to give me a passionate vision for God's kingdom to come. What then took shape was a desire to set up Christian schools that would reflect this kingdom and transform the students and their community. My vision was for these schools:

1. To be part of the national system, not independent from it - thereby impacting local communities for Christ;
2. To be in areas/countries of disadvantage, thereby having the dual effect of, community development and the dissemination of Christian hope;
3. To challenge students with the '*Big Questions*' in life, enabling them to debate what they thought about these questions against a clear Christian view;
4. To enable students to achieve their personal best and to become transformational leaders.

I didn't know how I would do this. I didn't even have any teaching experience, but my vision was set.

After completing my doctorate, I set about getting some teaching experience which led me from Oxford to Cambridge where I worked in an international community school. During that time, I read and prayed into this vision, still not entirely sure how it would be realised. One significant experience I also had was when I won a global teacher award. This award placed me in a rural school in the Eastern Cape area of South Africa with a 5% pass rate. My remit was simple: '*improve it*'. That helped to cement my understanding of school improvement and how that ran in tandem with a Christian vision of transformation.

At the end of 2003 I saw an advert in the paper, where, what was now the Emmanuel Schools Foundation, were seeking to attract Christian school leaders. I made contact and the very next day I ran in to the Director of Schools at a conference. We got talking and he invited me to visit Emmanuel College.

This was a seminal experience for me. Within two hours of setting foot into Emmanuel College I knew that the vision I had for Christian schooling was already in existence and Trinity Academy in South Yorkshire was where I was called to be.

So, in September, 2004 my husband Andrew and I moved to the '*grim North*'.

---

By October of 2004 I had been appointed as the Academic Vice-Principal for Trinity Academy and was asked to chair a meeting between the Principal designate and the Director of Schools, putting together a plan for the development of the school (at that stage there were only three of us involved in the founding team). I started the meeting by asking them both to note down the ten qualities of a successful school. The Principal designate followed the research of the time and dutifully noted down his top ten. Meanwhile the Director of Schools paused for some time and then wrote down ten character virtues. When I drew them back for discussion, the Director of Schools simply said, a successful school is one that looks like Jesus Christ.

It was at that moment that Trinity Academy was born, with the key driver being: to have the character of Christ, bringing the message of Christ.

The Director of Schools went to discuss this with the Board of Governors and eventually what came back were seven core values that formed the backbone of everything that came next:

Honourable purpose, Humility, Compassion, Accountability, Courage, Integrity and Determination.

The building works, the leadership training, the discipline policies, the programmes of study, the focus on charity work, the teaching and learning philosophy, the class structures, the timetable, the hiring of staff, the engagement with the community, the engagement with the former school, all moved forward on the basis of the seven core values and how this school could reflect the character of Christ so that we could, with integrity, speak the message of Christ.

By January 2005, the principal designate, myself and a small handful of others were working in a Portakabin (demountable) on the site of the old school. Inside this Portakabin we were writing curriculum, hiring staff, creating policies and holding consultations. Outside the PortaKabin, the new school building was taking shape.

Meanwhile, in the old school and in the community, considerable opposition was forming. At a national level there was opposition to the academies movement. Those on the left believed that this type of public/private partnership was the first step to a fully privatised education system. They therefore formed the anti-academies alliance and became a loud voice for both parents and staff. Opposition websites were started, campaigns sprang up and at one point a channel four documentary was made to slander the schools' discipline policies. [Interestingly, the Christian ethos was never mentioned – it was the strict discipline that was perceived as a threat].

Opposition was also strong from staff in the old school (and this was more focused on the Christian ethos). Staff meetings, held by us, enabled staff to present a strong oppositional voice. *'I am a Buddhist,'* shouted one member of staff at the beginning of the meeting – *'what will you do about me?'* (she wasn't a Buddhist but it was an interesting question).

Meanwhile, the students were not presenting opposition. When walking around the old school students would hang out of classroom windows shouting, *'are you the new head teacher – you look nice!'* Followed by, *'do you believe in Jesus?'* *'What has he done for me?'* (Again, good question!)

Regardless of all of the opposition or otherwise, in September 2005 the school opened its doors for the first time. The community said, *'they'll never come.'* The staff said, *'they'll never wear the uniform.'* The media said, *'you're too strict, too Christian, you'll have uproar.'* Yet, they came.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2005, thirteen hundred students walked through the gates of Trinity Academy into a brand new twenty-six million pound building wearing perfect uniform. They filed into the playground, then into the classrooms and barely anyone spoke. There was a hush that day that I have never experienced before and never have again. A reverence for a new beginning, that everyone recognised, most especially the students.

They said, “*you’ll never do it.*” And yet, here it was. A new school.

So, what did this new school look like?

Firstly, *leadership*. The primary human difference between the former school and the new school was the leadership team. Therefore, it was expected that, in the first instance, change would be heavily driven from the top down. This benefited the school in that it kept the message tightly focused on Christian hope. The primary vehicles for the Christian message were assemblies, a special lecture programme (which primarily looked at epistemology) and philosophy, theology and ethics classes (PTE). While the core values were threaded through the programmes of study to varying degrees, there was little Christian input within the curriculum other than through PTE.

A whole school assembly was held every Monday morning in the sports hall. Thirteen hundred students and a hundred and fifty staff filed into the hall in silence awaiting the *‘thought for the day’*. For the students from this community, their mindset was, *‘we are no one from nowhere.’* Therefore, the countercultural message that we brought in Assemblies was, *‘you matter.’* *‘You matter, not because of where you come from or what you can do or who your family are. You matter because you are a uniquely created human being, made in the image of God. Not only that but you are created for a purpose.’* This was a message of hope. However, as with my own story, which started with the message, *‘you are better than you think you are.’* this message of hope demanded more. No longer could these young people live in a world of excuses and self-sabotage. *‘You matter,’* *‘you are created for a purpose’* demanded them to be more.

Second, *the academic strategy*. The aim of the academic strategy was to set students very high expectations in terms of academic outcomes and to motivate, teach and support them to meet those expectations. The high expectations were initiated through academic targets. Taking the students’ starting points, each child in each subject was set a personalised academic target i.e. in English it may be an A\*, whereas in Mathematics it may be a B. The actual target depended on their results on entry from both SATS and CATS (your NAPLAN and Allwell equivalents). On the basis of these academic targets, students were then placed into specialised sets i.e. grouped according to ability. They were then informed that their place in a group was not fixed. The groups would be reviewed each term and they would be able to move up (or down) depending on their achievement. Each term each child received a report. This report would either be a progress report or a full report which gave them a detailed breakdown of their grades against targets in each subject, and also their place in the group and the year group.

Thirdly, *the discipline system*. Discipline was seen as an end in itself rather than as a means of getting students to behave in lessons. The aim of the system was to develop good character in students. The language of the core values was key in this regard. Teachers and leaders tried to avoid generic language such as *‘that is simply not appropriate’*, *‘you know how to behave,’* and rather framed the conversation in terms of character based on the ultimate example of Christ. *‘That is compromising your integrity’*, *‘let’s discuss how you can develop more determination.’* etc. The system was also highly consequential. A tariff was created which made clear what the consequences were for each action that contravened either moral boundaries (e.g. physical violence) or school boundaries (e.g. uniform infractions). This enabled the school to demonstrate the values of accountability and integrity – both of which

were lacking in their previous school. When we asked students, what is the difference between this school and your last school, their initial response was – “*you do what you say you will do.*”

Fourthly, *teaching and learning*. What good teaching looks like is a controversial topic and over the last fifty years in Britain it has been significantly affected by ideas such as:

1. Children should not be instructed, they should discover things for themselves;
2. Knowing is unnecessary, using information is what is needed;
3. Children should be included no matter what their behaviour;
4. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds cannot access various areas of the curriculum.

The totality of these ideas led to a catastrophic undermining of teacher expertise, authority and efficiency. This ultimately led to underperformance and schools with cultures of excuses.

To reverse this trend, the policy of teaching and learning in Trinity was to restore the confidence of the teacher as an expert and authority in their classroom. Many of you will be aware of cognitive load theory - John Sweller’s decades of research that point towards the importance and efficacy of direct instruction – especially when dealing with new knowledge. Based on the fact that our working memory can only possess a very small amount of information, Sweller proved that the most effective method of presenting new information is to start with a vision of what you wish the students to learn i.e. an exemplar, a worked example or a finished artefact. Then the teacher instructs the class how to replicate that vision through a step by step process of direct instruction. The more competent the student becomes, the more the reins can be let off, however, this is not age related but rather related to their competence with the new learning.

Teachers were set free to directly instruct students and were expected to be the experts in their classroom. This was supplemented by weekly PD that was integral to the school day. On a Friday afternoon students left school two periods early and staff met together for professional development. This again enabled a coherent approach to classroom teaching and one that was driven through the Christian vision.

So, what was the outcome?

As regards the direct impact on student outcomes. When the school opened, the primary national measure was the percentage of students who gained five or more A\* – C’s in their GCSEs. The previous school had gained around 22% against this measure. In our first year of opening we gained 33%, in our second year, 56%, and within five years this measure was at 97%. During that time the government added in a new measure, which was the number of students who had gained 5A\*-C’s including English and mathematics. When the school opened, this measure was at 6%. After one year it rose to 20%, after two years it reached 40% and within three years it was at 63%. Another outcome was the rise in the number of students who went on to university. When the school opened this number stood at six students. Within three years this number had risen to seventy-five students per year.

The impact on school culture was also vast. The corridors and classrooms were calm, the students were engaged and committed to their community and parents in high numbers commented on the difference in their child’s character. In many ways the students became



ambassadors for a new way to live. The local community commented on the improvement of their behaviour around the town and everywhere we took them people passed comment on their manners, appearance (uniform) and attitudes.

After two years of opening, the Office for Standards in Education (the British inspection body) declared that the school was '*outstandingly*' well led, heavily over-subscribed and driving transformation throughout the community. At the same time, the specialist schools and academies trust named the school as the most improved school in Yorkshire and the following year it was awarded the accolade of most improved academy in Britain. Within five years, the Office for Standards in Education judged the school to be outstanding overall.

---

So, what can we learn from that story about educational hope?

Firstly, let us consider the anatomy of hope.

In classical Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman on earth. Hesiod in '*Works and Days*' recounts how, subsequent to her creation, she became a pawn in a feud between Prometheus and Zeus. This resulted in her being given a box which she opened in the presence of Zeus' enemies. What escaped from this box were all the evils of the world. Pandora, in her haste to stop the onslaught of this evil, quickly closed the box. However, all the evil had already been released and only one thing was left at the bottom of the box: Elpis, translated as, hope. For the Greeks, this was the explanation of the '*fallen-ness of the world*': hope was trapped, she could not escape.

Elpis was often personified in Greek texts as a little girl who gives out flowers wherever she goes. This image was also developed by the Christian theologian, Charles Peguy in his captivating poem, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, where little girl Hope interacts with her two older sisters Faith and Charity.

*The Faith I love the best, says God, is hope...*

*But hope, says God, that is something that surprises me  
Even me.  
That is surprising.*

*That these poor children see how things are going and believe that tomorrow things will go better.  
That they see how things are going today and believe that they will go better tomorrow morning.*

Staying with this image of little girl hope - what are the flowers that hope gives that enable us to meet hope herself?

Perhaps the flowers are virtue.

Daniel Willingham in his insightful book, '*Why don't students like school?*' outlines the latest research on cognition and concludes that, '*memory is the residue of thought*'. Within that same lexical frame perhaps we can say that, '*hope is the residue of virtue.*' When you see perseverance or courage or love or any virtue in others, at that moment we are gifted with

hope. No matter how things are going today, that virtue raises our heads and enables us to believe, as Peguy writes, *'that tomorrow things will go better.'*

However, hope does not end with a raised expectation for the future, rather, when we see this virtue it inspires us to model the same virtue. Hope leads to action, it is not static, it is not merely wishful thinking. As Paul writes in Colossians (1:5) *'the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you.'* Hope leads to faith and love - it is not inactive, it is not merely wishful thinking.

The conviction that hope leads to action is explored by Angela Duckworth in her transformative book *'Grit'*. For those of you who haven't read it – grit is seen as a mixture of passion and perseverance and Duckworth brings forth evidence from a wide variety of spheres that posits it as the key characteristic underpinning success.

In the middle of this thesis she includes a chapter called hope. She proposes that the way to cultivate hope is by using the language of a growth mindset (C. Dweck) as well as modelling a growth mindset. In short, engage in optimistic self-talk together with persevering over setbacks and failures towards your goal. For her, the difference between hope and wishful thinking lies in the action.

Duckworth wasn't the only theorist that focused on the active nature of hope. Charles Snyder wrote extensively about hope within the arena of positive psychology. His prolific research evidenced that higher hope is related to better outcomes in academics, athletics, physical health, psychological adjustment, and psychotherapy. His theory described hope in terms of goal setting, agency and pathways i.e. a person's capacity to set goals (of varying degrees), design the pathways to meet those goals and have the motivation and agency to fulfil those pathways.

However, there is a problem with both of these theories – a problem that was raised directly with Duckworth by her colleague. This colleague said that Duckworth's view of hope was too independent: too reliant on *self-help*. She suggested to Duckworth that the idea that an individual would persevere through set-backs and failures, in pursuit of a goal, on their own was false. The very nature of setbacks and failures was that they are disappointing. This colleague said, *'I almost never get back up on my own – I ask for help and that enables me to hold on to hope.'* (pg. 193)

David Halpin is one of the few educationists who has written on hope. In his book *'Hope and Education'* he expands Aquinas' view that hope is twofold: the future good that one desires and, second, the help by which one expects to attain it. For Aquinas, God through Christ, is both the object and the means of hope. As with Duckworth's colleague, the idea that hope is gained or maintained on our own is false. Rather, hope is gifted to us and enabled in us by Jesus Christ.

Returning to the story of Trinity, you will have already started to put together the pieces of how this hope can be lived in a school.

The leadership started this cycle of hope with two words: *'you matter'*. This demonstrated love, started to unpack the Christian vision and provoked students to consider their place and purpose in life. In short, it raised their expectations. However, as with my own testimony, we

didn't leave it there but rather went on to share the message of who could help them to meet those expectations.

This vision of a better future was further exemplified through high and yet personalized academic targets. The emphasis was firmly on personal best and yet set that personal best at a level higher than they believed was possible. It then gave students the agency to meet those targets through the set system i.e. they could move up or down sets depending upon their effort and achievement. This enabled them to have short term goals within the longer term targets, all the while engendering hope.

The pathway to that better future was provided through the discipline system and the classroom activities. The discipline system used the character of Christ to raise their expectations of who they are. It then held them strongly to account if they veered away from the right path. In the classroom, the emphasis was also on starting with a vision of what was possible i.e. the exemplar and then providing high support (instruction) towards meeting that goal.

Both systems were characterized by extremely high demand and extremely high support. Both systems gave them a clear vision of excellence and helped them to meet that aim.

All the while, assemblies, special lectures and the PTE programme would explain this model in terms of Christian hope: there is a better future and Christ is the way to that future.

---

Sounds easy!

As all of you know – it isn't and it certainly wasn't.

David Halpin, as previously mentioned, so rightly identified the four enemies of hope in an educational setting: cynicism, fatalism, relativism and fundamentalism and all of these were knocking at our door all of the time.

Cynicism (as opposed to scepticism) he defines as '*being cryptically critical of most things*' (p.18). Taking on the staff of the old school also meant taking on a culture of cynicism. In the early days, everything we did was criticized internally. Not only that but staff criticized us in front of students, loudly in the staffroom and on the corridors. How does hope deal with that?

Exactly the same way as hope was brought to students it was brought to staff. Again, it started with: '*you matter*'. This started a conversation with them about the role of the teacher, their ability to affect the entire culture of the school and the life chances of young people. However, this needed to be backed up with support. Hope has high expectations – a vision of a better future, but also trust in the help by which one expects to attain it. Classrooms, teaching resources, timetables, teaching loads, assistance with discipline and so the list goes on. Unless leadership is prepared to support the teacher they cannot demand from them and expect no cynicism.

Fatalism is the enemy of hope as it is based on determinism and therefore a paralysis of the will to change conditions. It cripples the vivifying nature of hope and in an educational setting allows both teachers and students to be cynical in a way that avoids responsibility: '*We can't change things*'.

Duckworth in her summary of hope presented the famous psychology experiment by Seligman and Maier where two dogs were placed in separate cages and shocked repeatedly. The first dog was able to stop the shock by pushing their nose against the panel at the front of a cage. Whereas, the second dog did not have this available to them. The next day the dogs were placed in a different cage with a low wall in it. A high pitched tone heralded that a shock was on its way. However, both dogs could have escaped the shock by jumping over the wall. The one who had had some control the day before learned to jump the wall, the other one didn't. Based on repeated experiments the conclusion of this work was that, suffering that you have no control over diminishes your resilience, whereas, suffering that you have control or perceived control over, develops perseverance and ultimately hope.

In the case of Trinity, fatalism was one of our biggest enemies. Both staff and students were fatalistic. They felt '*out of control*' of their own destiny which was cemented by high social deprivation and therefore learned helplessness. For students, the academic system went a long way to overcoming this. The idea that they could determine what set they were in i.e. class grouping and that they could move each term enabled this sense of control over their own destiny. The results of this were students who arrived in set seven out of nine and who ended up in set one across all of their subjects and who eventually went on to study for degrees in Cambridge. One young man came in in set nine of nine and ended up in set one, being Head boy and going on to study medicine.

For staff, this learned helplessness was partly overcome through the new model of schooling. The finances came directly to the school and therefore, they saw that we had a lot of control over staff changes and the general resourcing in the school. However, it was also helped by the staff appraisal and performance management system. Prior to opening, we set out a very clear staff handbook which included a professional code of conduct. In the same way as we followed the student discipline code, we also followed the staff code. The result was that up to twenty members of staff had to be moved on or left for misconduct or underperformance in the first year. Staff saw that leadership was not impotent, which was motivational and engendered hope.

Relativism is the enemy of hope as it is blind. There is no reasonable vision to look forward to, therefore there is only confusion about what to hope for. This was fought against by the clear Christian vision which was centered around the character of Jesus Christ. Even in a Christian school you can suffer the blindness of relativism through an unclear and fragmented view of what you are trying to achieve. For us, in the early days, this was mitigated because everything was driven by a very small handful of people.

Finally, fundamentalism adheres rigidly to the past, which '*places limits on what can be looked forward to*' (p.23). While in setting out hope for the future this often '*entails a form of nostalgia or future-oriented remembering*' (p.23), if it leads to an '*irrational commitment to just one course or collection of courses of action*', this closes down hope and leads towards fatalism:

At Trinity, the students came on board quickly. The staff were mixed. Those that had leadership positions in the former school viewed all that was new with suspicion. This meant that in the early days a lot of the weight of the school was carried by the new staff. This was a heavy burden to carry and was very unjust given that a lot of the staff from the old school had come with protected high salaries. However, in that regard it was a simple case of holding your nerve. Success breeds success and as the school started on its upward trajectory staff forgot the former things.

Hope energized the leadership, the academic strategy, the discipline system, the quality of teaching and fought against the virulent enemies of hope: cynicism, fatalism, relativism and fundamentalism and the outcomes spoke for themselves.

However, again that was not the end of the story.

---

In 2011, Trinity was graded outstanding by Ofsted. Nine months after that I left to have a child. By the time I came back I was presented with the following challenges:

1. A key Christian member of the leadership team had been asked to leave due to a relationship he had conducted, and repeatedly denied, with his PA;
2. Another key Christian member of the leadership team was significantly suffering with burn out;
3. The sponsorship of the organization had been transferred to another organization, one whose schools didn't prioritise a Christian ethos;
4. The government had changed from Labour to Conservative and was in the process of changing accountability measures, Ofsted criteria, funding arrangements, assessment protocols and curriculum standards.

When we speak of hope – it is not wishful thinking. It is not weak or flimsy language. It is not a virtue to be passed over or ignored or forgotten. It is, in fact, all there is.

I looked at the school and its context at that time and I was like the dog in the cage who couldn't escape the shocks. I had no control over sponsorship, indiscretion or burn out. I had no control over government decision making or funding formulas. So, how was I to hope now?

Naturally, like the dog in the cage the shocks kept coming. The undermining of the Christian ethos through leadership indiscretion and lack of integrity. The breeding of cynicism through leadership burn out and the inevitable lack of support for teachers. The fatalism and learned helplessness that returned from lack of funding, the culture of excuses and constant cry of, *'it's not what it used to be.'*

Where does hope lie in this lethal cocktail?

Rudyard Kipling in his poem 'If' wrote, *'If you can.... watch the things you gave your life to, broken. And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools.'*

These words went over and over and over in my head. Could I? Could I start again only arguably from a worse position than at the start? Could I once again bring Christian hope to this situation? Did I have enough hope?

In Romans chapter 5 Paul writes, *'we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.'*

I knew I had to keep going.

It was hard. In the beginning it was eighty hour weeks but every day you saw the impact of what you were doing. This time it was hard to see any impact and the wind of change was

blowing in the opposite direction. Paul says to rejoice when it is hard. That is how we are counter cultural. Rejoicing when it is hard *is* hard.

As Yeats says in 'The Lake Isle of Innis Free' '*for peace comes dropping slow,*' and, in this case, change was slow and that was a deep challenge to my hope.

However, change did come. One day I had an email from a staff member that used to work for us. She said that she believed she was called to return to Trinity. Then a very experienced Executive Principal joined us from our sister school. Then another email arrived from a Christian Principal in China who said that he had been praying about the next move and had been guided to Trinity. Every week, encouragements began to build and hope began to return.

The Bible says that, '*in this hope we are saved.*' (Romans 8:24) and that is the testimony of that period of the school's history. What saved us, was hope. Hope in the power of God to conquer sin and death. Hope in the mercy of God to forgive us our transgressions, hope in the grace of God to pull us out of the mud and the mire and give us a firm place to stand. (Psalm 40)

There is much more that could be said about this time but let me finish with Hebrews (10:23) "*Let us hold **unswervingly** to the hope we profess, for he who promised **is** faithful.*'

Whatever you face in your school, workplace, home life, health. Whatever, you are facing on behalf of your students: mental health issues, suicide, family breakdown, the diminishing of humanity to a data point, pornography, social media bullying and so much more, I say only one thing: hold on to hope.

Hold unswervingly to the hope of a new heaven and a new earth. Hold firmly to the vision of God's kingdom come through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Enact that vision in your school. Speak of it to young people, raise up their eyes through the flowers of virtue and let us transform this land through that hope which we embody.

I started with Paul's meditation on the nature of love from 1 Corinthians 13. Let me now use that same taxonomy to reflect on hope.

*'Hope is visionary, hope is expectant. It is not inactive, it is not wishful, it is not blind. It is not cynical, it is not fatalistic, it is not relative. Hope does not wallow in despair but rejoices in what's possible. It always purifies, always saves, always produces virtue. Hope will not disappoint us.'*

---

Adonis, A (2012) *Education, Education, Education*, London, Biteback Books

Aquinas, T (1952) *The Summa Theologica*, Chicago, William Benton (first published in the 13<sup>th</sup> century)

Duckworth, A (2016) *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, London, Penguin

Dweck, C. (2006) *Mindset: changing the way you think to fulfil your potential*, London, Penguin

Halpin, D. (2003) *Hope and Education: the role of the utopian imagination*, London and New York, Routledge Falmer

Kipling, R (1910) *'If' in Rewards and Fairies*, New York, Double Day Page and Company

Newton, J. (1779) *Amazing Grace*, Olney Hymns

Yeats, W. B. (1888) *The Lake Isle of Innis Free*, National Observer

Peguy, C. (1996) *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, London, Continuum

Snyder, C.R. (2002) *Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind*, Psychological Inquiry, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2002), pp. 249-275, Taylor and Francis

Sweller, J., Ayres, P., & Kalyuga, S. (2011). *Cognitive load theory*. New York: Springer

Willingham, D. (2009) *Why Don't Students Like School?* San Francisco, Jossey Bass