

STIMULUS 1: Does Education = Achievement/Standards?

[Driving Improvement]

Leaders who **see the adults and children in their care through God's eyes** recognise how precious each one is, and how important the opportunity that individual has been given is. To such a leader, these **individuals appear as the pearl of great price, the lost sheep or lost coin**, a child with just one shot, and one chance at education. They hold the highest aspirations, and treat each one with the utmost dignity, regardless of their starting point. These leaders pursue the very best for each pupil, and regard high standards as a norm, consistently living out ambitious expectations for their children's development at each stage of the journey. **That which leaders choose to improve communicates much about their values.** While academic success stands at the heart of great education, character development and wider flourishing stands as fundamental to any sustainable academic success.

Therefore, the pursuit of the **very best and broadest outcomes** for all young people defines education driven by a Christian vision – this is life in all its fulness. Thus leaders pursue and drive improvement; they are **impatient with mediocrity, and passionate about improvement.** They critically analyse the meta-narratives to which they are subject, and challenge the perception that whatever you are doing, it is not yet good enough. They seek to go beyond narrow measures of performance success and recognise the futility of zero-sum data processes that mean there will always be winners and losers. Leaders who love their pupils recognise the transference of fear that can ensue from macro to school to teacher to pupil, and care deeply for the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils, taking great care with them, particularly at pressure points of examinations.

In seeking to serve the most vulnerable, leaders recognise the need to **design and implement curriculum and pedagogy that redresses inequality** and offers opportunity for broad-ranging activities for all pupils. It takes care not to pigeon-hole children by narrow assessment of ability through static groupings, and spurs children on to greater knowledge and wisdom through creative and inspirational teaching, which draws out the very best and broadest outcomes. Leaders consistently demonstrate that their ethos enhances outcomes.

Leaders live with the same passion that Paul writes to Philippi about, **dealing with the past and pursuing the future:** *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 3.13-14). Driving improvement is about recognising that **each child has one shot**, and thus pursuing the very best for each one as result.

STIMULUS 2: Does Education = Creativity?

[Developing Imagination]

In his seminal study of the Old Testament prophets, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann writes: “The **imagination must come before the implementation**. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and imagine almost nothing. It is our vocation to keep alive the ministry of imagination”. The Bible understands **God as inherently creative**: “...he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.” (Jeremiah 10.12), and imaginative: “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” (Isaiah 43.19). Jesus constantly re-imagines the expected notions of the saviour the people of Israel were awaiting, showing himself to be **an imaginative and observant teacher, storyteller and question-poser**, and seeing that which is not yet possible, in miracles where water becomes wine, and the kindness of a child feeds a crowd.

Brueggemann builds his notion of imagination around two simple concepts – **to criticise and to energise**. The prophetic leader offers an accurate and evaluative critique of the current situation, and then energises their teams to pursue a future they cannot yet see. The prophets did this in their context, and then Jesus’ ministry does exactly the same, re-imagining the past, present and future. Imagination sometimes defies what currently seems plausible, believing, sometimes together, sometimes alone, that “*nothing is impossible with God.*” (Luke 1.37). Leaders who develop this imagination in their teams, like teachers who do the same with their children, **build resilience for challenging moments or when things change**.

Imagination is an expression of the heart’s treasure, an orientation of desire, a trajectory of intent: “*All my longings lie open before you Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.*” (Psalm 38.9). It defines our behaviour and communications: “*A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart....For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*” (Luke 6.45). It dialogues with reason, as C.S. Lewis explains: “*Reason is the natural origin of truth, but imagination is the origin of meaning.*”

While it is easily squeezed out of the pedagogical craft, when lost to the narrow pursuit of productivity, **it is a raw force present in children, for the teacher to draw out and cheer on**. It leads to the best music, art, drama and dance, but also the most innovative science, politics, enterprise and business. Great teachers look at their class lists and data with imagination, creating environments and experiences that lead to a future their pupils cannot yet see.

STIMULUS 3: Does Education = Courage?

[Offering Encouragement]

To *en-courage* another person is literally ‘**to put heart into**’ them, to give them the vision, belief and energy to start or keep moving forward, in the same way that to ‘*in-spire*’ another is ‘to put breath into’ them. Courage is **built on the confidence of the shared stories of our past, and leads us towards an unknown future within a bigger picture**. Leaders establish rhythms of prayer – of **evaluation and gratitude, reflection and grace, enabling others to come back the next day with the imagination of something new**. Encouraging leaders are not rose-tinted in how they see the future, nor are they simply ‘glass half full’ people. Rather they take challenge seriously, and they define reality accurately, even when it presents uncomfortable truth.

The **biblical narrative is no stranger to suffering**, and recognises times of feeling surrounded, yet comforted and assured of the bigger picture – the encouraging perspective of faith. Isaiah writes ‘when not if’: **“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.”** (Isaiah 43.2), while the Psalmist cries out surrounded: *“I lift my eyes to the mountains, where does my help come from?”* (Psalm 121.1). Jesus himself acknowledges the reality of the challenge, but gives encouragement and the offer of life in all its fullness: *“In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16.33), while Paul opening his second letter to the early church in Corinth draws repeatedly on the legal notion of a paraclete (or advocate), speaking of a *“God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we receive from God.”* (2 Cor 1.3-4).

Encouragement is fundamentally relational, following the call to *“spur one another on toward love and good deeds”* (Hebrews 10.24); this kind of leadership **notices others, spots the good and catches people doing well**. The advocate is **someone consistent in your corner, giving validation, purpose and identity, and providing a safe environment for risk-taking and growth**. Their nurturing words are chosen wisely, and are offered regularly, replenishing and enabling, restoring and renewing.

Encouragement takes some of the strain of leadership, giving perspective to the pressure of success or fear of failure, and replacing this with the call to faithfulness. The Psalmist speaks of a God who is both our **shade and our shadow (Psalm 17.8, 63.7, 121.5), countering our dominant educational meta-narrative of ‘not good enough’**, while Jesus offers peace and rest for the busy and fearful: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest...I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matt 11.28) This relational rest is grounded in teams known for a culture of encouragement.