



TIME STAMP: ((0:26:12))

Professor Priscilla Alderson

Professor Emerita of Childhood Studies

UCL Institute of Education

Hello. My interest is in social research with children and young people and the first reason I welcome Matthew's book is that so far there haven't been that many books on critical realism and young people. And the second reason I welcome it so much is that it connects critical realism to children and young people with such serious respect for them.

Matthew's erudite review of centuries of western and eastern history sets the context for understanding today's young people's differing, often conflicting viewpoints. And he shows how greatly Islamic, but also all other school students, could benefit from improved history, citizenship, and religious education in British schools. And the tragedy that they are being downgraded. He partly shows how and why this is happening despite their great relevance in an increasingly violent world.

They could help to increase mutual respect between all young people from both western and eastern heritage and to develop richer meanings of the confusing concept 'British' – does any one of us know what it means exactly? – as he shows.

Matthew addresses crucial questions, how can we promote humanities education in schools that helps to increase, as he says, everyone's humanity, that's what they're for! Increase their trust, their informed understanding and peace between all the very different social groups.



How can we reduce and prevent conflict and violence? And how can schools work with children and young people so that they may all flourish, socially, mentally and spiritually?

Socrates believed that education is kindling a flame; not filling a vessel and Matthew addresses this skilful kindling work. It's part of critical realist seriousness which as he says connects theory to practice in an integrity of daily living, being, doing and relating. The horizontal axis of the social and political is joined to the vertical axis of spirituality and the active emotional moral desire of many, perhaps all, young people to align their ideals with their daily practical action, however they're able to act this out within the constraints of modern living.

Last month two surveys reported children and young people's anxieties about immigration and about Islam and they showed how urgently these worries need to be addressed, explicitly at school but it has to be done through very sensitive, skilful, open discussion with them and Matthew describes this kind of work in the book.

For a while I was a schoolteacher and as the youngest, newest member of staff I was given RE to cover, the school didn't know whether I knew anything or cared less about religion. As it happened I was very interested in it but I realised through that experience the great challenges Matthew is posing for teachers and schools, for whole education systems but also for whole societies and the way we live our political and economic daily lives. How can we support children's spirituality?

We glamorise war and military heroes, nostalgia for the World Wars for example. Did you know that the top selling video game is a US Army



recruitment tool? And the British Army, does anyone know how often the British Army visits schools each year? Yes?

((Audience answers: - *2,000 2 million*))

In between 4,000 and we taxpayers of course fund this propaganda.

How do the visits affect Muslim students when they know that our wars are mainly conducted in Islamic countries? And yet the visits make out that war is romantic, fun and necessary. And one in three new recruits to the British Army is a child under 18. So is it any wonder that some Muslim young people adapt these strong messages into loyalty to causes they partly identify with and go off, for example, to join Isis?

Matthew doesn't dwell too much on that in the book do you Matthew? I hope you don't mind me talking about it but I'm sure it's near the top of lots of people's minds, I think Matthew's book is so tremendously relevant to today's anxieties and challenges and difficulties and it's a great reference book to think about for these.

Now the war propaganda is only part of the daily deluge of messages that jeopardise children's original spiritual sense. People who spend time with children know that all of them arrive and in their early months and years they have a strong sense, don't they, of altruism, solidarity, dignity, freedom and justice. And we need genuine debate in humanities classes to debate the deluge that is challenging this spirituality and that is particularly why Matthew's is such an important and timely book.