

# Centenary of Teenagers' Right to Schooling

1918 H.A.L. Fisher Education Act

"We are to-day losing much that is best - best in age, best in physique, best in moral qualities—of our manhood; and all that we can do, since we can never replace those lives, is to endeavour to improve the value of what is left to us. We hope in some measure to do that by this Bill. I may speak of it as a part of the payment of our colossal national war debt, an attempt to create a new source of national wealth in a race of men and women sturdier in physique, richer in intellectual accomplishments, more efficient in technical skill, stronger, wiser, and happier than those who have preceded them. That is one of the reasons for the introduction of this Bill at the present time."

Earl Lytton, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1918, Hansard

Further information: <http://www.newidealsineducation.co.uk/>

[https://www.academia.edu/35359891/The\\_Fisher\\_Education\\_Act\\_1918\\_New\\_Ideals\\_in\\_Education\\_and\\_the\\_Modern\\_School](https://www.academia.edu/35359891/The_Fisher_Education_Act_1918_New_Ideals_in_Education_and_the_Modern_School)

**Let's celebrate their dream of what our schools could be like if we liberate the child.**



## Self-Expression and Active Learning

"As a nation we are worshippers of freedom; as individuals there is nothing which we value more than our personal independence; yet in our schools (in too many of our schools to-day) our methods are still conducted ([1020](#)) upon quite a different principle—upon the principle of subservience to external authority. We see, therefore, in many of these schools, in place of the self-expression of the pupil the assertion of the teacher; in place of freedom, restraint; in the place of that active process—I think the most fascinating at any age, but more especially to children, the process of learning and acquiring knowledge for oneself—in the place of that we have the purely passive process of being taught (a very different thing), a process which is really only being informed of the knowledge of others. Thus it is that with many children, instead of their school days being a period of continual unfolding and development of those qualities most needed in after life, they come to look upon them as a time of enforced detention, during which they learnt a good deal which they were glad afterwards to forget, and were subjected to influences which arrest rather than stimulate their individual growth."

Earl Lytton, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1918, Hansard

## Liberating the Child

In 1914 Earl Lytton helped organise the Montessori Conference at E. Runton, Norfolk, inspired by three women, Lillian de Lissa, Maria Montessori and Harriet Finley Johnson. Under his leadership, and an organising committee including Bertram Hawker, Edmond Holmes (ex-Chief Inspector of Schools), and Percy Nunn (first Director of the Institute of Education) they renamed future conferences New Ideals in Education and helped to create the modern child centred, project and play based happy primary school. Their value statement, announced at the opening of each conference and in all their reports, was 'liberate the child'. The delegates were mainly practising teachers and headteachers from around the country, alongside school inspectors and local politicians.



### Community of Practitioners



"In the first place, this amazing Conference – at which we have seen sitting side by side Government Officials, advanced Montessorians, antediluvian Teachers like myself, University Professors, Soldiers in khaki, Musicians, Artists, Headmasters of Public Schools, the superintendent of the Little Commonwealth, Primary School

teachers, and the American Ambassador himself – stands, first and foremost, for Freedom, - I do not like “emancipation”, for the word suggests slavery, and the use of it probably promotes it. We have all agreed that the child is to be free: yes, but the teacher must be free as well as the child...”  
New Ideals in Education Conference 1915, Mr Lionel Helbert, Head Master of West Downs, Winchester.

### Physical & Mental Health

“At the present time some of the very best teaching in our schools is done among these very small children, and it is in no way intended that the nursery schools should supersede them. The nursery school will be as much a playroom as a schoolroom, and the instruction given will be rather incidental than direct. They will in fact aim at securing the healthy physical and mental development of the little children attending them, and thus prepare them for the lower classes of the elementary school.”

Earl Lytton, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1918, Hansard

### Importance of Art & Culture

Board of Education Pamphlet No 43, HMSO 1921 by the HM Inspector of schools, Mr J.D. Wilson, written in 1918: “If art which is now sick is to live and not die, it must in the future be of the people,

for the people, by the people; it must understand all and be understood by all.’ These are the words of a dreamer, our greatest of modern times, William Morris, artist and craftsman. If, not an isolated prophet, but a whole generation could dream such dreams they would come true, for what a people desires in its heart that its hand will fashion. The humanistic teacher in the continuation school stands between the prophet and the people, and can make them dream his dream if he have the will. In any case let him write up over the door of his class-room: *Nihil humani a me alienum puto*. And if the students ask what the words mean, let him reply, ‘They mean that we must try to make poetry out of the spinning-mules.’”

### Image of the School

“The elementary school would be the 'regional museum' of any given locality. In it would be stored and classified information relating to the natural features, animal and plant life, public services and buildings, and historical records of the neighbourhood, collected by the children themselves and set forth by them, under the direction of their teachers, in maps, charts, and plans, together with specimens of peculiar local interest or application gathered in their rambles. **Lord Lytton claimed** ...The school itself would become of greater interest to the children, their parents and the parish generally, and the children would cease to be merely passive objects of instruction. This is the kind of outlook that is manifest in most of the schemes.”

**'Working Out the Fisher Act – The Human Aspect of the Continuation School'**  
by Basil A. Yeaxlee, Oxford University Press, 1921.

### Invitation from H.A.L. Fisher

“...We have had many pioneers of education, we have on the platform here one of the greatest of our pioneers of education, but we want a great army of missionaries, and I would ask every one of you here who is anxious to secure an advance in education to influence so far as you possibly can those people with whom you come into contact and who may want a little gentle or strenuous conversion...”

Mr H.A.L. Fisher, President of the Board of Education.  
New Ideals in Education Conf 1917