

A JOHNCATT
PUBLICATION

THE MISSING PIECE

THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS THAT EDUCATION FORGOT

EXCERPT: INTRODUCTION



TOM RAVENSCROFT

First Published 2017

by John Catt Educational Ltd,
12 Deben Mill Business Centre, Old Maltings Approach,
Melton, Woodbridge IP12 1BL

Tel: +44 (0) 1394 389850 Fax: +44 (0) 1394 386893

Email: enquiries@johncatt.com

Website: www.johncatt.com

© **2017 Tom Ravenscroft**

All rights reserved.

Skills Builder Framework in Appendix © Enabling Enterprise CIC

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the publishers or the editors. We cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions.

ISBN: 978 1 1911382393

Set and designed by John Catt Educational Limited

Praise for *The Missing Piece*

“This timely book captures what has made Enabling Enterprise with Tom’s great leadership so successful over the last decade. It sets an ambitious vision of how we could support every child and young person to build the essential skills and understanding of the world to succeed - and then shares the practical steps to get there. It will be invaluable for businesses, employers and all those who want to make a real difference for those they support.”

Dame Julia Cleverdon, Vice-President, Business in the Community

*“No one is better placed than Tom Ravenscroft to write about the essential skills that our youngsters are failing to learn while at our schools and colleges. *The Missing Piece* is a clarion call, a well reasoned treatise that no one involved in the teaching of young people can afford to ignore if we are to develop a workforce fit for the 21st Century.”*

Jo Owen, Co-Founder and Trustee, Teaching Leaders, Future Leaders, and Achievement For All

“This is a bold and ambitious book, founded on a fundamental belief that no child’s success needs to be limited by their socio-economic background and that essential skills are teachable.

“This is a bold and ambitious book, founded on a fundamental belief that no child’s success needs to be limited by their socio-economic background and that essential skills are teachable.

“Tom brings lots of passion and commitment, real experience of the front line and lots of practice through Enabling Enterprise to life in this great book.

“The Missing Piece is widely researched and full of real experience that is ultimately packaged into practical advice focused on each stage of a child’s development.”

Paul Drechsler, President, The Confederation of British Industry (CBI)

“The Missing Piece is a powerful argument for the elevation of ‘essential skills’ in our education policy. As Tom states clearly and eloquently, these skills are the enablers of social mobility and will set children up for future success in the 21st century. There is a decade of insight behind this book, and it shows.”

Brett Wigdortz, Chief Executive Officer & Founder, Teach First

“Across the education sector, organisations are grappling with how to how to make education fair. This book thoughtfully and engagingly builds the case for how we can best focus our collective energies on a key part of the challenge – ensuring that every child and young person, whatever their background, builds the essential skills to be set up for the rest of their lives.”

Lewis Iwu, Director, The Fair Education Alliance

“It’s clear that education systems aren’t setting all young people up for success in their future careers and personal lives. In this book, Tom shares a new approach for how to ensure children are ready to flourish when they leave school which is relevant not just to the UK, but to education systems across the globe.”

Lucy Ashman, Global Director for Social Innovation, Teach For All

“As a long-term partner of Enabling Enterprise, we have seen the transformational effect of building not just our students’ knowledge and understanding of the world but also the essential life skills that underpin it all. Tom’s book makes this accessible for all teachers and schools, as well as showing the rigorous evidence behind the approach.”

Alison Helm, Headteacher, Curwen Primary School

“A successful primary curriculum, one that includes and values enterprise education, presents children with opportunities and experiences to build on their knowledge and understanding of how their learning prepares them for the world of work. It also develops interpersonal, communication, creative and problem-solving skills – key character components for employability.

“As a partner school, we have seen the remarkable difference working with Enabling Enterprise has made, confirming the effectiveness of the principles set out in this book.”

Tanya Watson, Headteacher, William Tyndale Primary School

Contents

Preface	7
Introduction.....	9
Part 1: What is the Gap?.....	19
Chapter 1: The Gap.....	21
Chapter 2: What are we doing wrong?	35
Part 2: Reimagining Essential Skills.....	51
Chapter 3: Communication Skills.....	57
Chapter 4: Interpersonal Skills.....	65
Chapter 5: Self-Management Skills.....	73
Chapter 6: Creativity and Problem-Solving Skills	81
Chapter 7: Why aren't we teaching them?	89
Chapter 8: Reconceptualising Essential Skills	105
Part 3: Filling the Gap	113
Chapter 9: Keep it simple.....	115
Chapter 10: Start early and keep going	123
Chapter 11: Measure it	133
Chapter 12: Focus tightly.....	147
Chapter 13: Keep practising	157
Chapter 14: Bring it to Life.....	163
Part 4: For all children and young people	173
Chapter 15: The roles we all have to play.....	177
Chapter 16: The next leg of the journey.....	191
Chapter 17: Ready for the future	201
Conclusion.....	209
Thanks and acknowledgements	213
Appendix: Skills Builder Framework	215
Endnotes.....	227
Bibliography.....	237

For everyone who has helped build Enabling Enterprise.

Preface

A fundamental piece of education is missing. Knowledge and good grades are important but insufficient. Building character is powerful, but it still leaves a gap.

We as adults need to know a lot. We need to make good choices. But we also need to be able to *do*. All of us, whatever we do, need a core set of skills – to work with others, to manage ourselves, to communicate effectively, and to creatively solve problems. We might call these skills different things – soft skills, life skills or employability skills – but we draw on them as much as numeracy or literacy. I have known them as enterprise skills, but have come to see that they are best termed ‘essential skills’. If we need them, our children and young people need them even more.

They underpin effective learning in the classroom. They stop students dropping out of university. They are more highly valued by employers than academic grades. They are a foundation for successful entrepreneurship. They are the enablers of civic engagement and social mobility.

When we look to the next decades, in a world of increased automation, fragmented jobs and the need for constant learning it is these skills that will really set our children and young people up for future success.

Yet as an education system, we behave as if they cannot or should not be taught.

But they can be, and they must be.

I am writing this almost a decade after I set up a social enterprise, called Enabling Enterprise. I was a secondary school teacher and the Enabling Enterprise programme was for the students in my inner-city classroom. They were not learning enough in school, and were in no sense set up for the rest of their lives.

Over the last ten years, I've had the enormous privilege of leading a brilliant team of teachers. We have worked with thousands of classroom teachers and volunteers and over 200,000 students. We have seen these children and young people, often from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, build those essential skills with the same rigour and focus as any other academic learning. They can become compelling communicators, they can balance logic and creativity, they can lead and be led, and they can set their own goals and stay on the path to achieving them. When these essential skills are mastered, we truly enable our students to achieve their potential.

This is not just another volley in the ever-rolling education debate, or picking sides in the false choice between prioritising skills, knowledge or character; they are a trio, and are all vital.

This book is partly my journey as a teacher and social entrepreneur; it is what our team at Enabling Enterprise have learnt the hard way; and it is also a manifesto for the future.

It is driven by the experience of teachers, parents, employers and our children and young people themselves and our collective insights about how we can all work together to fill this gap. Along the way, we draw from research and thinking across the educational spectrum, as well as from business and management academia.

I want for every child exactly what I wanted for my own students, and what I want for my own children: to have the essential skills to thrive in the classroom and to excel in whatever they want to do with the rest of their lives. Because this is possible for every child.

This book is a decade's accumulated insight and experience on how to do it.

Tom Ravenscroft
July 2017

Introduction

The rumble was the warning. It started as do the warning signs of a distant storm, building into the roar of a half-time crowd. The noise ricocheted down the white-tiled corridor, and my spine stiffened. I dug my nails into my hands.

The class stormed in, charging over tables, chairs and one another. Bags were swung, the desks scraped across the tired floors – their scratched and worn surfaces bearing the scars of a thousand other battles.

We settled with some effort. There was a seating plan which had been put together with the care of a diplomat, and then constantly rearranged to reflect shifting friendships and enmities lest hostilities break out. They still broke out, to the extent that some students were effectively isolated.

The fragile peace was a masterpiece of careful planning and the constant deployment of an array of distractive tactics. No one willing to put up their hands to answer a question – then I'll call on individuals at random. No answers – then I will give you time to think individually before coming back to you. I never came back to them.

Unable to get work done on time? Then I will build trackers to let you know exactly what you need to do next. Unable to structure your thoughts? Then I will create frameworks to the fullest extent allowed to help construct those ideas for you. Is your work just copied out? I will gently bring you up on that, and help you find your own words.

These students were on the verge of leaving school. Meanwhile, we crept, lesson by lesson, towards the targets I had dutifully written into my planner for each student.

And one day, everything came into focus. It might have been because we were writing an invoice for the third lesson in a row. That was the coursework assignment, and we had five taught hours to complete it.

I realised that these students were 15 or 16 years old. They were on the verge of going to college, apprenticeships or sixth form. Many of them wouldn't make it, and in 2008 would join the nearly one million young people who were not in education, employment or training.

I was doing everything I possibly could to get them their grades. And in the process I was preventing them developing the very skills that they would need in just a few months' time. They were unable to work together, they could not communicate effectively and they gave up easily. They had never been asked to set their own goals – I had set them.

I looked around and realised that this couldn't be what we were here for.

It was a scene that could have been in any one of thousands of classrooms that day. Classrooms where we had accepted that we had to get through, rather than get ahead. Where motivated, dedicated teachers feel that the long march to successful futures can only be directed through a set of grades.

While I worried about my students on the verge of leaving school, in other classrooms teachers were just as worried about their 11-year-olds' readiness for secondary school, their 8-year-olds' refusal to try again, or their 5-year-olds' inability to get on with each other.

Beyond our classrooms, my fellow teachers and I noticed concern too. Employers were perhaps the most vocal. It was while I was teaching, a decade ago in 2008, that the CBI published its first survey of business views on education and skills. The results made clear that employers had concerns about the basic skills of their joiners – including functional numeracy, literacy and IT skills. But they were also concerned about the employability skills that 86% of employers said were most important. Employability skills like teamwork, self-management, problem-solving and communication¹.

In 2009, the UK Commission on Education and Skills (UKCES) published a critical report on the vital importance of employability skills – describing the 'burning platform' for employers who were not seeing those skills in school leavers². This wave of business concern was nothing compared to the reality that the financial crash brought with soaring youth unemployment which was to end up topping one million before the recession receded.

But it was not just about employment. Universities were also concerned about

their undergraduates, who they felt lacked the basic skills to thrive in an environment with less structure and individual support. This was reflected in a high drop-out rate.

Finally, the third main route of school leavers – entrepreneurship. High level of business failure was a sad hallmark of the entrepreneurial scene. Some vital skills seemed to be missing.

What is missing?

So, what was going wrong?

Over the last 15 years, growing recognition of the problem has led different education ministers to apply different ideas to filling the gap – whether using enterprise education, introducing personal learning and thinking skills, emphasising social and emotional aspects of learning, or character education.

The reality is that under a broad and ever re-branded banner can be found everything policymakers thought students should know to be ready for real life that didn't fit elsewhere, everything that employers wanted that didn't fit neatly into the wider curriculum, and the individual philosophies of the teachers trying to do the best for their students.

In the resulting mess could be found: risk-taking, communication, resilience, financial literacy, commercial awareness, honesty, interpersonal skills, reliability and self-management. We confuse things further when we interchangeably use terms including life skills, soft skills, entrepreneurship, employability, 21st century skills, achievement virtues, or character strengths.

But whatever we call them, much of the difference is semantic – after sifting through the confusion, we can clearly identify communication skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and self-management skills.

To reflect these four critical domains at Enabling Enterprise we settled on eight skills, balancing nuance with pragmatism. The two communication skills are presenting and listening and understanding. The interpersonal skills are teamwork and leadership. Problem-solving skills are divided into the pair of problem-solving (where the problem is pre-defined) and creativity (where it is not). Self-management has the two components of aiming high to set goals, and then staying positive to stick at achieving them.

And once we remove the noise, the evidence is clear that each of these eight skills is an enabler of future success, and learning in school. Each has a rich pedagogical background.

Importantly, this is not about whether all learning should be forced through the prism of building skills or whether these skills are a replacement for academic knowledge or rigour. It is about making a concerted effort to develop each of these skills as part of the whole curriculum.

This is not a new idea. Take presenting as just one example. What we call presenting would have been called rhetoric back in Ancient Greece and remained a priority through to the re-focusing of education on economic outcomes during Victorian times. It lives on today as debating in many of our schools, or ‘oracy’ in others and can be coached and trained to high levels of achievement.

Or take staying positive. We talk increasingly about resilience but staying positive is about equipping students with tools and tactics for sticking at things and adapting plans when they see setbacks – practical things that they can learn and implement, not just a mind-set.

We dig into each of these in Part 2, and it’s fascinating to discover the richness of the individual skills – and their learnability and teachability.

So why aren’t we teaching them?

It might be intellectually interesting that we are tying ourselves in definitional knots, but not particularly helpful for our children and young people.

To actually fill the gap and restore our trio of knowledge, character and skills, we need to fundamentally believe that these essential skills are teachable. This is a big step. Both experience and research indicate three broad responses to the idea of teaching these skills. I’m thinking here of teachers I’ve worked with, but research suggests it is a fairly consistent view across parents and school leavers too.

The first group see essential skills as innate and natural to their students – they proudly identify the natural leaders, team players or presenters. By extension, there are a lot of students, perhaps even the majority, for whom these skills will remain out of reach.

The second group believe that these skills are formed by everything in a student’s life to the extent that a teacher can have very minimal impact. To this group, it is only a process of osmosis that will build the students’ skills – and so a bountiful supply of activities is useful but with limited expectations of the effectiveness of any particular activity, or indeed the whole roster of activities given that students are only in class for five hours each day.

The third group view essential skills as lying latent until inspired into existence. We can spark an interest or ignite a passion but the mechanism seems

mysterious. The onus remains on the individual to pursue this passion and realise their own potential.

In Chapter 7, I dig into each of these misperceptions and how they have hindered serious thinking about building essential skills.

A philosophical leap

The eighth chapter makes the greatest leap. Over the last eight years at Enabling Enterprise we have been ruthless about building our impact – seeking always to be as rigorous as possible, and being unemotional about cutting what doesn't work. We have seen that we have to think differently in order to make the breakthrough our students need: we have to build these essential skills alongside literacy and numeracy.

We've learned the hard way that occasional enterprise days, competitions or after-school clubs are not enough. We have tried all of these approaches.

I am keenly aware of the many claims out there for educational pet projects to be seen to be as essential as numeracy and literacy. It is slightly embarrassing to be trying to jockey for that turf.

However, when we look dispassionately at the characteristics of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, we see four key things:

- They are primarily about doing something, not knowing something.
- They are useful throughout life in many different settings.
- They are tools to unlock and access further knowledge.
- While they are applied with contextual knowledge, they are transferable.

These characteristics absolutely apply to our essential skills.

Reimagining essential skills

Across the country, hundreds of Enabling Enterprise schools are now embracing this shift towards making essential skills a core pillar of learning, alongside literacy and numeracy. These schools work with children from as young as 3 through to 18-year-olds. Some are remote and rural, others in the heart of our cities. Some have more than a thousand students – and some less than 50. The majority of these schools serve children in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the country, according to the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).

All of them have made this transformation by implementing six key principles.

- **To keep it simple:** Rather than being overwhelmed by the complexity

of trying to prepare students for all aspects of their future lives, these schools embrace a clear set of essential skills, and use them consistently.

- **To start early:** We rightly identify numeracy and literacy as the building blocks of education – and so we start young – and then we keep going. These schools also think about students' essential skills in the same way, rather than ignoring them after nursery age until the point they are about to leave school.
- **To measure it:** We are often led to believe that measurement is very difficult or a distraction from what we are trying to achieve. Schools who are excelling here find that by being precise about outcomes they become measurable – and that measurability drives better learning and better progress.
- **To focus tightly:** Whilst much teaching of enterprise or employability relies on presenting a smorgasbord of activities, we wouldn't expect students to learn to read by simply letting them loose in a library. Instead, these schools use essential skill levels to make sure students are working on activities that stretch them, akin to the way we use reading levels when developing literacy. We need focus and rigour, and to teach each of the essential skills explicitly and carefully.
- **To keep practising:** With literacy and numeracy we recognise the need to reinforce these key enablers elsewhere in the curriculum – a notion reinforced through initiatives highlighting that every teacher is also a teacher of English, for example. Similarly, while proper time is needed to develop essential skills in their own right, these schools reinforce it by highlighting the deployment and development of those skills everywhere else.
- **To bring it to life:** Finally, these schools apply the skills to real-life challenges – both to highlight their relevance and boost motivation and also to increase their transferability later on.

In the third part of this book, I explore how each of these principles actually runs counter to current mainstream practice. I look at what the evidence is for each principle and then what it looks like in practice. Along the way, it is illuminating to see how this group of pioneering schools are transforming their students' learning in school and prospects for the future.

A different future

I write this book with great optimism about the future. The plans and proposals here are ambitious, but they are achievable. They are already working in hundreds of schools today.

Through our experience at Enabling Enterprise, we can see the change for individual students, whole classes and entire schools. There are other programmes working in this field too. I know, though, that whilst Enabling Enterprise is working with over 85,000 students this year, our reach into 1.2% of English schools is just a small foothold on the challenge.

Ultimately, to ensure that all of our students are set up for the rest of their lives we will need to achieve three things. Firstly, to build a consensus that these skills are essential for our students' future success. Secondly, a shared belief that they are completely teachable. Finally, that we have a common language and goals around those skills to help all students to reach their potential.

Taking this from hundreds of schools to thousands will be achieved if we focus on making four big changes at a systemic level:

- Firstly, by doing a lot more to *train and support teachers and teaching assistants* who may never have received any training on how to build the essential skills. We need expert teachers with deep understanding, as well as a basic grounding for all teachers.
- Secondly, by *creating and maintaining a shared language and expectations for essential skills* to bring coherence to the range of activities and programmes out there. By having a single shared framework, individual programmes can add up to at least the sum of their parts, with the same skills reinforced consistently.
- Thirdly, by *ensuring that value is placed on essential skills in the education system*. This includes the school inspectorate Ofsted ensuring an emphasis on provision of structured, age-appropriate opportunities for students to build these skills at all levels in the curriculum. Alongside, there are other policy levers the Department of Education could use, including making essential skills a core requirement, clearer up-to-date guidance, dedicated funding and stronger destination data of where students end up beyond formal schooling.
- Finally, by *properly engaging parents*. As we do with numeracy and literacy, providing parents with the information and tools to support the development of their children's skills, from the youngest to the oldest.

Some distance still to go

The development of literacy and numeracy over the last couple of centuries should give grounds for optimism. From a shaky start, the developed world has seen almost universal basic literacy and numeracy achieved, with wave after wave of innovation helping to further those goals – whether standardised grammar, reading ages, or newer technological tools.

As the essential skills become an expectation of schooling we will continue to increase our effectiveness in building them together. We will learn and share best practice internationally. We will collectively refine the skills frameworks, furthering our understanding of any interdependencies and the long-term impacts of different programmes. As a result, we will continue to innovate around how we build the skills, and might expect to see twice the current rates of learning in a decade's time. Finally, we will harness the opportunities that new technology presents – whether to capture or record progress, to use simulations to build the skills, or artificial intelligence to hone them.

The final chapter makes clear that we will need to keep innovating because these skills are only going to become more important. Automation and algorithms will reduce job opportunities for anyone without an adaptable skill set, as even complex tasks may no longer require human workers. Similarly, there are clear trends in the nature of employment towards self-employment and gig work – needing a lot more self-direction and management than ever before. Our children and young people will need to be constantly learning and re-learning over their longer careers if they are to succeed.

But these changes will also provide huge opportunities, including careers focused on solving some of humanity's most intractable challenges, from the environment to global development and health. To capitalise on these opportunities we need all our school leavers to be equipped with the essential skills to really grapple with these challenges.

Let's get going

Through the work of Enabling Enterprise and others there is a growing body of evidence in schools across the country that this approach works, that we can teach essential skills as a core enabler of our students.

There are primary and secondary schools in very different areas across the country where every child can tell you what the skills mean for them, and where their parents regularly join them to better understand how the skills are built and how they can support them at home. I walk down these corridors and see how each class is strategically, incrementally building the eight skills that they need for success. I talk to children who can tell me exactly what they find invigorating and frustrating about leading others, will say how they're trying to become better listeners or presenters or recommend me a strategy for staying positive.

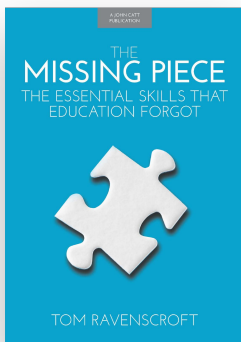
More than a couple of times I have given a speech only for an audience member to stand up to ask a question and to declare that their child has done Enabling

Enterprise. And when they do, my stomach constricts a little. Then inevitably they will blow me away that their child professed to adoring the activities that they have been doing – whether a trip to an employer like Birmingham Airport or an NHS hospital, or during their regular enterprise lessons in school. But what means the most is when the parents says that it's not just the activity – it's the change in their children. And that they wish they had had the same opportunity in school themselves.

I talk to our teachers a lot. Before they've started to implement the approach, they start in different places: some excited, some cynical, some unsure how they will find the time, and many sagely identifying the students who are their 'naturals'. Once they've started, they keep going because they see the difference in their students.

We can see the difference in the data too: students, even from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, can make progress in their skills at a rate that puts them on the trajectory for future success. It is unsurprising that students start in different places – and unsurprising that the majority are behind where they should be. It is exciting to see that student background is uncorrelated with the progress they subsequently make and that the gap can close. This can be done.

But let's start at the beginning.



**Read more about
the essential skills
in the full book,
now available at
bit.ly/TheMissingPiece2017**