

MY SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT
DOODLE BOOK

MAKING
SCHOOLS
BETTER

THREE
NOTES AT A TIME

BEN KEELING



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Foreword

When is a school improvement book not a school improvement book? Or, to put it another way, can a school improvement book that doesn't tell you how to improve your school, that doesn't give you any tips and ideas or fail-safe systems, that doesn't offer quotes and insights from top school improvement gurus, that doesn't even have any sentences in it, not really, can a book like that call itself a school improvement book at all?

Well, to be honest, that rather depends on you.

When Ben Keeling, working in a school in Indonesia, started putting together these 'three Post-it™ notes in a row' little works of art, he did it as his way of getting to grips with some of the key issues in education that were vexing him. Issues like what is the purpose of school? Are grades enough? Is the world of education changing as fast as the world outside education? What will happen if it doesn't?

Rather than doing what so many people would do, are positively encouraged to do, and reach for the latest school improvement best-seller or go on a course or a year-long programme, he sat down and used his not inconsiderable talent as an artist to kick start *his own thinking* about the issues. It was his way of reflecting on, thinking deeply about, coming to terms with, the very nature of education. And it helped him become a better teacher and a better colleague.

What it boils down to is that when things are changing fast, as they are in the world of education, today's great answers are tomorrow's

passing fads. It's not that the questions keep changing, far from it. 'How do we design a school system that gets the best out of the children in it?' is the same question for us today as it was for the Ancient Greeks. It's that the answers to those questions are constantly evolving - evolving to reflect the nature of what we know about learning, what we know about leadership, what the world beyond school is like, what children are like, what classrooms are or could be or, better yet, should be like. But if you look for the answers from someone else you may never find the answer that your exact situation needs.

Independent Thinking, though, is about independent thinking. What we have tried to do over the years is (along with plenty of little tips and techniques that simply work when you use them in the classroom and that prove you can trust us) to encourage teachers and school leaders to think for themselves. To look for a system is to look for a way to not think for yourself. A system is fixed. Apart from the timetable and the calendar, nothing in school ever is. Applying a system in a school setting is like trying to do a jigsaw made of water. There is no system. There never will be. Not for the sort of education we believe in (which is more than just having children pass exams). What there is, is the professional application of possible answers to big questions that need constantly appraising as part of your journey. And that involves thinking long, hard, collaboratively and creatively about the questions.

Which is where this book comes in.

How you use this book is up to you. You can keep it in your desk for a quiet moment. You can

put it by your bed or even by the loo. You can leave it lying around the staffroom. You can use all of it or just bits of it for staff meetings, leadership team away-days or full school INSET sessions. What counts is that you use it as a stimulus to your own thinking. After all, you are the expert; you know the school, you know the staff, you know the parents and, importantly, you know the children. Somewhere in the gap between your brain and the long-term success of each child there is the right path, the one where you have come up with the right answers. This book will help you think your way between those two points. Even if it's not really a book.

Ian Gilbert
Craig-Cefn-Parc
July 2012

Introduction

The truth, the whole truth and
nothing but the truth

It has been suggested that groups of three are inherently funnier, more effective and all the more satisfying than any other numerically specific group. From pigs, goats and bears, to stooges, musketeers and men in bathtubs, the Rule of Three remains a fundamental tool in the literary world. Things simply work better in threes, as George Lucas should perhaps have been pre-warned. The Rule of Three also has its uses when it comes to school improvement.

The rule is: jam tomorrow, and jam
yesterday, but never jam today

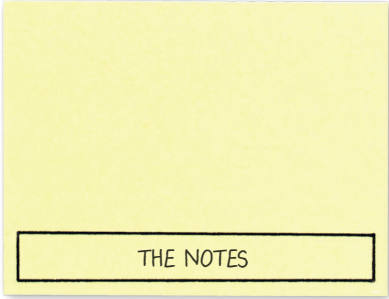
How often are we encouraged to stop and ask why? After all, school development can only begin when challenge is encouraged and change embraced - and embraced warmly. Change, however, is a divisive subject. Much like a cup of coffee, it will either keep you sharp and focused, or up all night. Thoughtful and deep consideration about what we could and should be doing, as opposed to the continual vindication of what we have always done, must not be a luxury but a cornerstone of our practice if we are to move forward progressively and with the greatest

impact – it is what leadership is all about. And questioning, like the illustrative notes within these pages, begins with only one assumption: nothing is sacred.

Cultural resistance is infectious. Creativity should be permitted, encouraged and inspired. Let it take hold. Let everyone become engaged in the process. Reflect, consider, imagine – and ensure that others are free to do the same. Stoke the fires of discussion and debate. Encourage argument and dissent. Reconsider the foundations on which you stand. After all, impudence is only creativity without table manners.

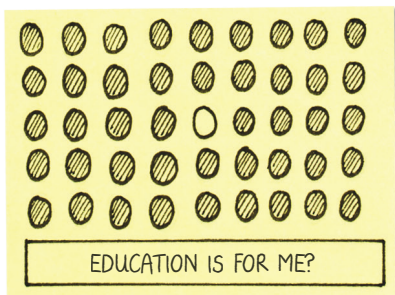
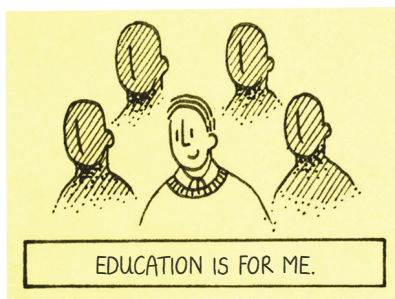
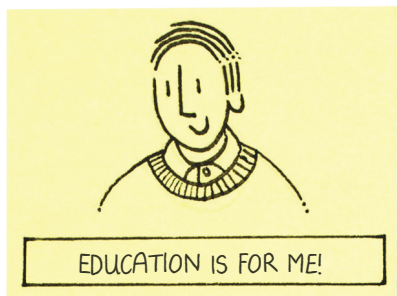
This is not the end. It is not even the
beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps,
the end of the beginning

To instil or provoke change is not a choice but an obligation for those of us fortunate enough to work within education. All the more so if we are school leaders. Taking small but relentless steps towards the refinement of practice and a better future for all of us is what we do. And, as with any journey, the direction we take is paramount. I wrote this book, then, as your roadmap, even though it won't tell you where you are going or how to get there. And it does it three notes at a time.

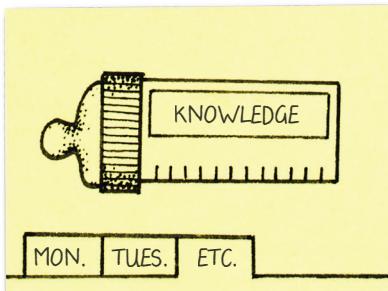
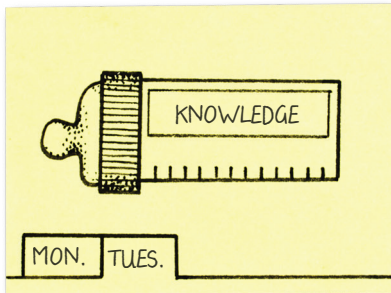
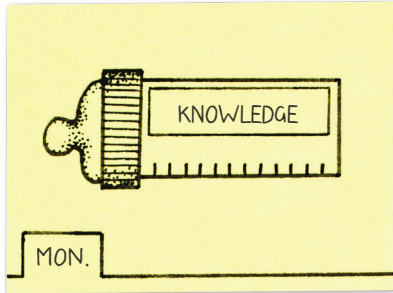


THE NOTES

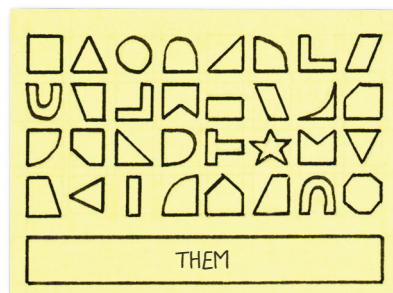
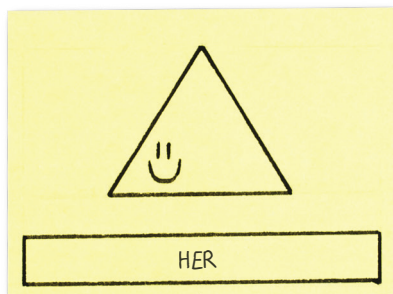
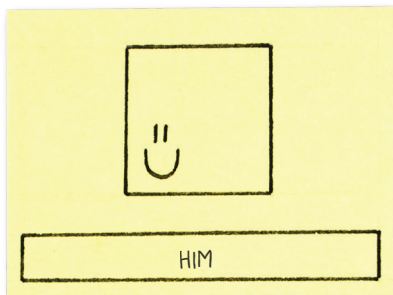
1. One size fits all ...



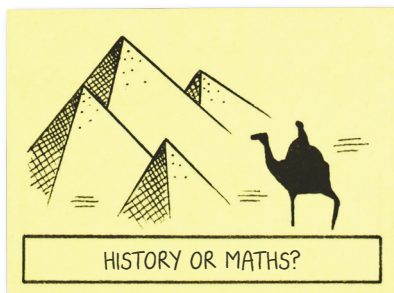
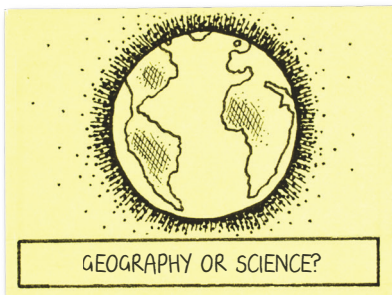
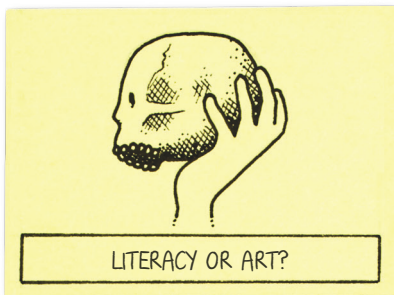
2. Educational obesity



3. Spot the difference



4. Subjective knowledge



Praise for *My School Improvement Doodle Book*

“Sometimes you come across a book that is totally unique in its approach. How can Ben Keeling write so little, but say so much? His approach of using three sticky notes for each section really draws you in and makes you think. Each time you look, you see more! Some pages clarify ideas you will have worked with for years, Bloom’s Taxonomy , Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences – all succinctly explained in three sticky notes with very few words. Others will really challenge your thinking; for some pages I’m still working out their meanings, but all have made me think. The ideas expound educational philosophy, question one size fits all education, look at styles of teaching and learning ... all done so simply but so, so cleverly. The illustrations are just pen drawings and doodles but they say so much and always make you question your ideas.

“I love this book and yet I know I’ve only scratched the surface – I’ve only just begun the journey of reflection that these simple yet complex sticky notes are sending the reader on. ‘Making schools better three notes at a time’ is such an innovative way of presenting ideas. The ending is, again, very clever – ‘Your turn’ – if it’s not down to all of us to have ‘our turn’ how will change happen?

“This is one of those books that keeps you coming back, I can’t wait to share it with others.”

**Jane Hewitt,
Consultant Editor, CTL magazine**

“Anyone championing reflection and creativity quickly gets my attention. In the delightfully stimulating *My School Improvement Doodle Book*, talented author, artist and teacher Ben Keeling offers us a great way to read, think and reflect creatively! It is refreshing to see such an engaging approach to thinking about school development.

“With the inventive sticky notes that Ben has developed, it is possible to structure a process of reflection about school improvement without the restraining effects of more systematised approaches. The sticky notes can be analysed, interpreted, sorted, organised, categorised, added to, discussed, debated, and even re-drawn! This book is not wordy, it is very clever. It is packed with ideas concisely gathered together in illustrations (doodles) and captions. The thoughtfully selected stimuli quickly prompt the reader to connect ideas together and formulate inquiring questions.

“I can see how this book will work for an individual reader or as a great tool for getting groups of colleagues to share their thoughts and develop their ideas about school improvement. This is great resource and one I whole-heartedly recommend school managers keep to hand for reference and inspiration.”

**Sharon Ginnis, Teacher,
independent trainer and consultant**

“I am so glad my preference is to read hard copy when reading text for the first time!

“I had only turned two pages of this inspirational and provocative resource, when my pen was in my hand and I was doodling ... inserting ... adding ... scribbling ...

“Spot the Difference?’ Which am I? Where are you? Does it matter? Do we care?

“Of course we do!

“So how do we solve this puzzle? Square the circle? Back to the first set ... How can one size fit all? And I was away ...

“That was *my* journey. Your journey will be different, for sure, but a journey will be made. It will be *YOUR* journey. Where will your journey take you?

“This ‘book’ will challenge you, mystify you, make you laugh, cause you despair ... it will take you on a ‘period of reflection’ – *one doodle/three notes at a time!*

“And you will wonder how you could have made that journey without it.

“Or even – *if* you would have made that journey without it.”

**Ros Wilson, Cert.Ed. Dip.Ed. M.Ed,
Developer of Big Writing, Education
Consultant, C/O Andrell Education Ltd.**

“I’ve never seen an education book quite like it – an ingenious visual exploration of big themes presented with a light, but thought-provoking touch.

“It’s beautifully produced and is a superb way of challenging our assumptions and kick-starting discussion with colleagues. I love its wit, its style, and its capacity to crystallise a range of educational ideas.”

**Geoff Barton, Headteacher,
King Edward VI School, Suffolk**



The first ever picture book to make your school a better place – three sticky note doodles at a time.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, imagine the power of three pictures at a time. Which is exactly what former graphic designer turned teacher and leadership team member Ben Keeling has done.

As thought-provoking as it is simple, this book combines an expert knowledge of schools and learning, an enviable talent for graphic design and a keen sense of irony.

"I've never seen an education book quite like it - an ingenious visual exploration of big themes presented with a light, but thought-provoking touch."

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Ben Keeling

