

# Not the way forward ...

Couldn't believe what I heard on the radio today, and found [reported here](#) on the BBC. Definitely not the way forward ...

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## Hedgehogs and Foxes

I've been exploring metaphors for cross-curricular teaching and learning over the last few days. I came across this metaphor which builds on a textual fragment attributed to the Greek poet Archilochus in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC which inspired Isaiah Berlin's to write his essay 'The Hedgehog and the Fox'. Archilochus was believed to have written the following: 'The fox knows many little things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing'. Using this as his starting point, the opening of Berlin's essay contains the following passage:

*Scholars have differed about the correct interpretation of these dark words, which may mean no more than that the fox, for all his cunning, is defeated by the hedgehog's one defence. But, taken figuratively, the words can be made to yield a sense in which they mark one of the deepest differences which divide writers and thinkers, and, it may be, human beings in general.*

*For there exists a great chasm between those, on one side, who relate everything to a single central vision, one system, less or more coherent or articulate, in terms of which they understand, think and feel – a single, universal, organising principle in terms of which alone all that they are and say has significance – and, on the other side, those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory, connected,*

*if at all, only in some de facto way, for some psychological or physiological cause, related to no moral or aesthetic principle. These last lead lives, perform acts and entertain ideas that are centrifugal rather than centripetal; their thought is scattered or diffused, moving on many levels, seizing upon the essence of a vast variety of experiences and objects for what they are in themselves, without, consciously or unconsciously, seeking to fit them into, or exclude them from, any one unchanging, all-embracing, sometimes self-contradictory and incomplete, at times fanatical, unitary inner vision. The first kind of intellectual and artistic personality belongs to the hedgehogs, the second to the foxes. (Berlin 1953, pp.1-2)*

So, put simply, Berlin's application of Archilochus is that human beings can be categorised as either being 'hedgehogs' or 'foxes'. Hedgehogs' lives are dominated by a single, central vision of reality through which they think and feel. Foxes, in contrast, live what might be called a centrifugal life, pursuing many divergent ends. Berlin goes on to give examples of each type. Famous hedgehogs that he cites include Plato, Proust and Nietzsche; famous foxes included Montaigne, Goethe and Shakespeare. The bottom line in Berlin's use of the metaphor is that there are different ways of knowing or approaching reality, namely the far-ranging generalist or the concentrated specialist.

As a bit of light relief, do you think you are a hedgehog or a fox? Tetlock's book (Tetlock 2005) contains this short quiz to help you find out. Answer all of the questions first by either agreeing or disagreeing with the following twelve statements and then check how to score your responses below.

1. Scholars are usually at greater risk of exaggerating how complex the world is than they are of underestimating how complex it is.

2. We are closer than many think to achieving parsimonious

## explanations of politics

3. I think politics is more cloud-like than clock-like (cloud-like meaning inherently unpredictable; 'clock-like' meaning perfectly predictable if we have adequate knowledge).

4. The more common error in decision making is to abandon good ideas too quickly, not to stick with bad ideas too long.

5. Having clear rules and order at work is essential for success.

6. Even after I have made up my mind about something, I am always eager to consider a different opinion.

7. I dislike questions that can be answered in many different ways.

8. I usually make important decisions quickly and confidently.

9. When considering most conflict situations, I can usually see how both sides could be right.

10. It is annoying to listen to someone who cannot seem to make up his or her mind.

11. I prefer interacting with people whose opinions are very different from my own.

12. When trying to solve a problem I often see so many options that it is confusing.

To score your responses, start at 0. If you agreed with any of the above statements apply the scores below; if you disagreed, apply the opposite score (i.e. -3 will become +3).

1. -3

2. -5

3. +4

4. -5

5. -2

6. +5

7. -6

8. -4

9. +5

10. -3

11. +4

12. +1

If you end up with a score of +7 or above, you are a fox; -7 or below, you are hedgehog. If you are somewhere in-between, you are a curious, new mammalian cross-breed (perhaps a fox-hog, or maybe a hedge-hox?). But do not take it too seriously!

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## **'New' attainment target for music**

You've got four weeks to comment on the 'new' subject level descriptors and attainment target. You can find all the necessary information [here](#). Whilst not wanting to pre-judge anyone's comments, I found it very hard to find anything but minor changes in the new level descriptions as compared to those that accompany the latest revision of the new National Curriculum in 2007 (which didn't change them in any meaningful way from the previous version in 2000). Given all incessant debate about these levels and how they should be

used or not used, it seems that we have missed a real opportunity here to change something that is the bane of many teachers' lives. It is disappointing to say the least.

On a related matter, there is an interesting reference in the letter from the QCDA to Ed Balls about APP:



It seems that there is a move to shy away from dictating to schools the precise approach that they should conducting teacher asesment at Key Stage 3. It is all 'as you are then' to my mind. My response: what a wasted opportunity.

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