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Crib sheet

**Max Eshraghi, Philip Beadle and Diane Hofkins
Tuesday October 17, 2006**[**The Guardian**](#)

Fighting talk wins reward

Last Wednesday, Max Eshraghi won the Young Film Critics prize for his review of Saving Private Ryan

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From its intense and brutal opening sequence (depicting the D-Day Normandy landings) to its bittersweet finale, it's clear that "Ryan" is not for the fainthearted. Steven Spielberg's war epic is based on the semi-true mission in which Captain Miller and his squad are sent to find Private Ryan, whose three brothers were KIA [killed in action], and bring him home to his mother. However, as Private Reiben questions: "Where's the sense in risking the eight of our lives for one guy?" It's an interesting question, but one which is (wisely) never answered.

The entire cast create completely sympathetic characters, especially [Tom] Hanks, who gives a wonderfully subtle, yet haunting performance. However, it's Spielberg and his gut-wrenching battle sequences, most notably Omaha Beach, which cement this film as one of the greatest war movies of all time. Sights like terrified soldiers vomiting on

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the decks of landing boats; the entirety of a boat gunned down before they even have a chance to get out; limbs and entrails blown every which way and one oblivious shellshocked soldier wandering out into enemy firing range to retrieve his severed arm (a sight so sickening you're not sure whether to laugh or vomit) are those that linger in the mind longest.

The adrenaline and excitement of battle may entertain those with strong stomachs; however, with sights like these, entertainment can only go so far. It's not an entirely enjoyable film, but it's one that deserves to be seen and respectfully honours those who fought.

• Max Eshraghi, 13, Thornden school, Hampshire, won the junior prize. The senior prize was won by Grace Blackman, 18, of Sir George Monoux sixth-form college, London. The awards were sponsored by learn newsdesk, the Guardian's online news service for school pupils. Read some of the reviews online at www.learnnewsdesk.co.uk. The winning reviewers won free subscriptions for their school

Europe pulls out of the UK

The only European school in the UK, in Culham, Oxfordshire, is about to lose its funding from the European Commission, and is set to close.

This - and whether there is a future for just such a "European education" - was debated on Friday by, among others, Boris Johnson, shadow minister for higher education.

The first European school was set up in 1957 in Luxembourg, its aim being to educate the children of employees of the European Coal and Steel Community side-by-side, receiving tuition in their home language but with an entitlement to learn another three European tongues. The school's guiding principle is that learning a neighbour's language is both vital and natural.

European schools, of which there are 13 operating in seven countries, were intended to stand as a model for

European cooperation and integration. Founded on the principles of Jean Monnet, one of the architects of European unity, they operate in line with his belief that children would grow up "untroubled from infancy by divisive prejudices", and become "Europeans, schooled and ready to complete and consolidate the work of their fathers before them, to bring into being a united and thriving Europe".

Which many would regard as a fantastic idea. Why, then, has Britain's one educational institution formed on such principles been allowed to slide towards closure?

The problem lies in the kind of pupils it attracts. The school is dependent on funding from the commission, funding which is itself dependent on the school educating children of workers on the Joint European Torus Project. So it is seen by the commission as a perk for employees, rather than as an exemplar worthy of support in its own right.

In addition, the proportion of such children at the school is now minuscule, just 2% (though admission from other backgrounds is dependent on children's ability to speak two languages, and the social make-up is pan-European). And so the commission is contemplating withdrawing funding.

According to Johnson, this is a tragedy. "The European school in Culham offers a very valuable model of education and it would be sad to lose it," he says. "I hope the parents in the area will get together with the council and the government to create a successor school."

At their last debate on the issue, two years ago, a young David Cameron MP was moved to join Johnson in questioning Margaret Hodge, at the time minister for children. Hodge gave assurances that the government would look for "an imaginative solution" to the problems facing the school. It appears that this "imaginative solution" is either to push it into the full fee-paying, independent sector, or allow this unique experiment in European education to be curtailed.

Philip Beadle

What future for childhood?

The first comprehensive review of primary education in 40 years, launched last week, has three priorities: children, children, children. Or, as the Primary Review's website puts it, "children, their world, their education".

This is absolutely right. It is our responsibility to find the best ways to prepare children for the chaotic, dangerous, exciting world they will inherit. We can't protect them from it, but we can help them develop the skills to thrive. They will be the movers and shakers of the mid-21st century, searching for solutions to global challenges such as climate change and religious conflict.

We also want today's children to enjoy tomorrow's world, to appreciate art and music - and other people and to enjoy today's world. They should be engaged and enthused by school.

This two-year independent review will have all these things in mind. Supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and led by the eminent educational thinker Professor Robin Alexander, it is looking at childhood and child development, education's role in society and the education system itself.

The review is asking the fundamental question: what is primary education for? Alexander and his team at Cambridge University have commissioned national and international research surveys, and are seeking input from children, parents, teachers and policy-makers.

"Forty years on from the last major inquiry into primary education and with two decades of government initiatives behind us, it's time to take stock," Alexander says. "How well are we doing? Where are we heading? What kind of education should young children receive?" Such questions were last tackled in the 1967 Plowden report, whose recommendations included banning corporal punishment and offering universal nursery education. Most famously, it argued that children learn through experience.

Forty years ago, there was little government intervention.

Now teachers complain of initiative overload. Ministers emphasise tests, targets and league tables, but also want before- and after-school childcare, gifted and talented schemes, personalised learning, personal skills and creativity, and a modern language from 2010. How does it all fit together? How much can schools do?

The country has to decide what really matters. There will be tough choices. This review should help point the way.
Diane Hofkins

· Diane Hofkins is a member of the Primary Review's advisory committee. www.primaryreview.org.uk

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