



President's Address

Birmingham

Friday 30 March 2018
Monday 02 April 2018

President
Dan McCarthy

General Secretary
Chris Keates

Honorary Treasurer
Neil Butler



Dan McCarthy

NASUWT National President 2018-2019

Conference. Honoured guests.

Thank you.

Thank you for giving me what I consider the highest award, the absolute best present to be awarded to a serving teacher in the UK – the presidency of this incredible union, the NASUWT, the teachers' union - a union that, unapologetically, puts teachers first, at home and across the world.

For choosing me as your President, I thank you.

We now reach that point in the process when I tell you who I am as a person, what I stand for as a professional and the sequence of events that placed me on this stage.

I am a teacher. And I am hearing impaired. I wasn't always hearing impaired but I have always been a teacher.

I am a son. I am a husband. I am a proud father of four lovely children and three and a half grandchildren. Three of whom are seated here. My daughter Jennifer, a maths teacher in Bristol. My daughter Sara, a Burnham-on-Crouch primary school teacher, and my daughter Tamsin, a buyer of dresses for a high street retailer [she is very popular with her mum and sisters]. As we speak, my son is flying in from San Diego where he lives in a beachside property while making computer games – It's a tough job but somebody in the family had to do it and so he volunteered.

That's it. As to how I got here, what I stand for and why I hold my views, well, that's a story...

I was born on March 31. Daniel William McCarthy. Danny Mac. Danny, sometimes Danny Boy, but never Dan. The eldest son of Billy Mac, a driver and trader, and Eileen, a seamstress and school cleaner, a family of licensed costermongers. I was born in Cheapside. An interesting name – Cheapside. The Cheapside – within the sound of the Bells of St Mary-le-Bow in the heart of the City of London, London.

My early childhood, though happy, was chaotic. I started school each year in late October after hop-picking. Our transport was not a car but a charabanc. There were no books in our house. But we did have comics – every comic on the market, courtesy of my uncle Wally who worked on Fleet Street, on condition that I would read aloud to my younger cousins and sisters. My Aunt Kitty, observing this weekly event, took my cousin Erica and I to the Treasure Island Children’s Library. My memory of it is that it was a wondrous place, not just the murals, not just the books, but that they would let me borrow 14 books a week! We could have books in our house!

And so I read. I read everything from Shakespeare to Herodotus from Aristophanes to Isaac Asimov. Alone in my room. Hidden. From here I learned about the world.

I began to do something very difficult. I began to think. I began to question. *Cogito ergo sum*. I began to win prizes at school. And my mother made a decision, one that my father disagreed with, but her mind was made up. My mother wanted me to have the education that had been denied to my parents by poverty.

To that end, I have a memory I wished I did not have.

I remember a large, opulent, wooden-panelled room, a large ornate table and a group of people sitting on one side and my mother and I standing on the other. She had to prove our poverty and I had to prove that my intelligence was worthy of their behest. Money for my school uniform. Money for me to attend school. This was selection; by ability, yes, but also by poverty.

I wanted to leave that room. But my mother wanted to remain, wanted me to answer their questions. She wanted me to have a better life. She saw education as a means of getting that better life. And so we stayed and I answered their questions and I won that scholarship. She knew that if my intelligence could be channelled I would be able to change, and change I did.

But though I was teaching my cousins to read, I had not decided I would become a teacher. This I did when I found the Tavistock Repertory Company – an amateur theatre company that put on 40 plays a year. I worked on all 40. Extra, stagehand, lighting, prompt, front of house, walk-on parts. I took to sleeping in the theatre wrapped up in the stage curtains. And I watched, listened and read and I began to think...

We did a show at the Tower – a black comedy, “The Ruling Class”.
A refrain from the play kept going through my head:

*“Those playing fields of Eton
Have really got us beaten
But it’s no use aggrieving
If it’s Britain you believe in.”*

Well, I believed in Britain. I would fight. But how?

And then I read *Timothy Winters* by Charles Causley, a teacher I never met, but one who made a profound difference to me. I committed his poem to memory – it’s when I realised what my mother saw, what I was.

*“Timothy Winters comes to school
With eyes as wide as a football pool
He sleeps in a sack on the kitchen floor
And they say ‘there aren’t boys like him anymore.’*

*The welfare worker lies awake
But the law’s as tricky as a 10 foot snake
Timothy Winters Drinks his cup
And slowly goes on growing up.”*

When called upon to pray for those less fortunate than himself, the loudest voice is Timothy roaring “Amen!”

Timothy cares for others. He has nothing, but he understands.

The angels hear Timothy’s “Amen”. But in this poem, society is not listening.

This poem was written in the 1950s. It’s about poverty not austerity, but it sounds like it could be.

Poverty is again on the increase and in parts of Tower Hamlets, where I started teaching, and here in Birmingham, over 50% of children are again living in poverty.

It was growing up with young people like Timothy that inspired me to teach – a decision that has allowed me to change children’s lives. I realised when I became a teacher, I did so both because it was what my mother dreamed for me and to make a difference. She was always keen to introduce me as “This is my son – he will be the teacher”. I was proud,

but embarrassed to hear her say, “my son – the teacher.” But, in my classroom, in her name, I have made a difference.

After a stint at the College of St Mark and St John, I found myself living in the East End Mission on Commercial Road, teaching at Stepney Green Comprehensive during the day, and doing community work in the Cable Street Community Centre for Dan Jones while he painted the Battle mural (“my Dad’s in that”). And at weekends, taking children camping; children carrying their possessions in a carrier bag and who had never seen a cow! And each day we made a difference. We taught motor vehicle maintenance, carpentry and joinery, speechmaking – taught by a Qualified Toastmaster and Tailoring by a Saville Row tailor as well as English, Maths, Science and the rest of the curriculum in mixed-ability groups. And by mixed ability I mean children from 44 different countries speaking over 100 languages, including cockney! with vastly different family circumstances that included refugees from Bangladesh, Sylhet, Cambodia and Vietnam [and various well known east London Gangs]. But, what united them all was poverty.

We recognised the experiences our children would bring to school, that the poor life experiences were not confined to refugees, or children whose first language was not English. We had huge numbers with chaotic home lives, or were carers, or children with disabilities. We were putting forward the view that, *“Schools should be a place where pupils enriched their resources because it would be there that they encountered verbal strategies and were inspired to more ambitious uses of language”* (Harold Rosen).

Inspired by the Bullock Report and *‘Language, the Learner and the School’* by the London Association for the Teaching of English – a committee I was happy to join and work on for the betterment of English teaching for over ten years – we rejected the view that education should be done to children but felt that education should be done with children; rejected the idea that children should leave their own lives and their cultures at the school gates and embrace a foreign culture. We showed that children needed to be taught not what they couldn’t do but what they could do with help.

Then the ILEA Race, Sex and Class Project, building on the Swann Report, started looking at Achievement in Schools. We were integrating language, learning and culture founded on the principle that what you

could talk about with assistance, you could learn to do with support and then as the support was reduced – fly...

Do you want to know how we made a difference in these children's lives? We invented courses where we could test their skills and show their successes, not demean them for their failures. We did not score red, green or amber whether a child could use an exclamation mark judiciously or a question mark effectively? We did not mark in five different colours.

Do you want to know how we made a difference?

We encouraged them to wonder.

We encouraged them to question.

We gave them a voice to express their feelings.

We paired them and made them all teachers.

We made them criticise and comment.

We made them use words, not fists.

We made them respond appropriately, apologise and mean it.

We made them spell "I'm a brilliant child, I have a voice" over and over and over again until they could never misspell any of those words.

We made them read, read, read, read and read some more.

We engaged with real books.

And they cried when George kills Lennie.

And they hid under their coats when we read *The Woman in Black* aloud.

And they screamed at the injustice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

I watched the lightbulbs flash as they got it.

I gave feedback and modified my teaching until they did get it.

Until I saw them fly.

Until I saw them think for themselves.

But, even though I am a teacher, I was also a learner.

I have learned the general public on the one hand think the teaching job is easy but when pressed individually say they could never do it. I have learned that the general public have a perceived opinion that teachers don't work very hard but when pressed individuals feel the job is too

hard for them but as individuals they would never do it. I have learned that everybody who is not a teacher knows exactly what teachers should teach but as individuals they could never do it. And I have learned that by standing together as teachers we could stand up for the rights of children. By ensuring that teachers have the energy, time and respect to focus on the job of teaching, we could secure better outcomes for our pupils.

Then I found a group of teachers committed to making a difference – globally – a place I could call home, the NASUWT.

Consequently, I am grateful to each and every one of you for being members of the NASUWT and for your continued support. Without you, I would not have been able to represent members facing adversity, secure in the knowledge that a slight to one is a slight to all. Without you, I would not be able to look a Head Teacher in the eye and say, “We are the NASUWT, we say what we mean and mean what we say.”

Intrinsically, teaching is a stressful profession, but it has become more stressful as the challenges of poverty and inequality have worsened. But, instead of supporting teachers, teachers are being subject to more monitoring and more ‘surveillance’. Surveillance that is punitive and crushing. Support programmes designed not to support but to crush. Surveillance programmes designed to dismiss teachers on the basis of competency rather than redundancy because the cost to the school is cheaper. What of the human cost?

I have been told by colleagues that they are not just thinking of quitting teaching but that they have considered taking their own lives.

I am so proud of the members of this union who, though they may not say the words “Ne pasaran”, understand fully its meaning, implement it in practice, refuse to be cowed and carry out industrial action instructions to protect themselves and their colleagues from workload and further harm.

The other year I was observed in the last few weeks of the Easter term. At the end of the follow-up meeting it was suggested I be seen again in the first week of the summer term. A gap, including the holiday of just over three weeks. When I questioned why, I was told – to see if you have improved. To see if you could improve on outstanding. Improve on outstanding? To see if I have improved over three weeks? I refused.

But my story of observation overload is no different to many teachers. Mocksteds tell us nothing. Well that's not true. Mocksteds and excessive surveillance do have very clear outcomes: mental ill-health for the teachers and the children. And more money for consultants.

With the exception of maternity, mental ill-health is the single biggest reason for days taken off by members of staff within education, which means among men, of course, it's the single biggest reason. In actual fact, mental ill-health accounts for over 13% of all days taken off by staff at any point. So colds, flus and so on only account for about 6.3%, so mental ill-health is doubly responsible for absence days in contrast to things like colds and viruses.

I am so proud of our members in Northern Ireland who are refusing observations. Is it having an impact on learning? Yes. Exam results are up. I am proud to say the NASUWT has created model wellbeing policies, run courses, created wellbeing days and is actively training Mental Health First Aiders. The NASUWT community cares and shows its care by its actions.

Shakespeare once wrote of “a Band of Brothers” – on the eve of St Crispin he has Henry say:

‘A veteran will strip his sleeve and say *“these wounds I had on St Crispin’s day”*.’

Well, the wounds of teachers are not always physical, but the mental scars also run deep and hurt as badly.

We choose to teach, and help children grow, not because they are easy tasks, but because they are hard and they are important. We did not choose to become teachers; we are teachers. We strive to teach, to serve, to organise, because that is our moral purpose.

Teaching is the foundation for civilized society; but, if teachers are to have the status that was clear in my mother’s voice when she said, “my son – the teacher”, then society needs to work harder to foster and support teachers and ensure our wellbeing.

And, we need an education system and a curriculum that gives teachers and children a voice. We need Art, Music, Drama, CDT. We need an English curriculum that is about creativity and expression, not about memory and whether ‘after’ is a preposition or a coordinating conjunction. We need subject criteria which encourage speaking and

listening and encourage the reading of novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which are an essential part of an education that develops children as rounded individuals.

Meeting teachers from other countries, I have seen teachers who suffer repression and punitive action daily. In Iraq, teachers and students have been denied the free and universal access to public education that we take for granted. In Turkey, teachers denied the right to work and dismissed from their jobs; in Zimbabwe, teachers who have gone without being paid for months; and in Colombia, teachers who have been the victims of 'disappearances' and murders. I am so proud of the members of this union who have attended these conferences, who stride so tall on the world stage making it very clear that the NASUWT has a voice and speaks out against injustice wherever it is.

As trade unionists and as teachers, we are dangerous people. We encourage thinking and we care. We support all of our colleagues, wherever they are, and we do this willingly. We inform. We educate. We publicise. We shine a light on the abuses. All of our actions make a difference.

Let me end with one more quotation.

"But just remember this. One, Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and a chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives and what we think and say and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish. Good night"

Priestley was talking of a world war. I am talking about education but the truth is the same. If we, the NASUWT, do not enable our members to stand together to fix education then it is clear nobody else will.

I love – we love – being a teacher. I love being part of this union. We change lives. People do remember their inspirational teachers. People do love what their teacher did for them. Together we must continue to fight to give teachers the conditions where they can give our future generations an educational experience that respects who they are, where they come from and what they can and do achieve, as well as one that is fun, fulfilling and engaging.

Ne pasaran.



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