

## Saul Nassé Education World Forum January 2016 Speech

I want to talk about one word and one word only. POWER.

Education is all about giving people power. Power over their lives, their futures, their destinies...

I possess a tremendous power - in my pocket. I guess you do too. (GETS OUT SMARTPHONE)

Smartphones are packed with power. There's the processing power that tracks the Uber taxis I use – while the driver tracks me.

There's the multimedia power that means my smartphone has the capacity to store every picture I've taken since last year's Education World Forum. These are some colleagues in Indonesia by the way.

And there's the connected power that means I have access to millions of terabytes of information that far exceed what's stored in the great library of the University I work for, Cambridge.

The power of the smartphone is increasingly ubiquitous and affordable. By the end of next year, it's predicted that there will be more phone connections than people on the planet and half of those phones will be online.

But there's another source of power I want to talk about. It's a power that doesn't need a SIM card, that comes with simply being human.

It is the power that makes one person marry another, the power that ends wars and solves mysteries, the power that the world's great storytellers use to keep an audience in the palm of their hand.

It is the power of communication.

It's easy to take for granted such an old-fashioned thing as parent listening to child or teacher talking to student or teenager writing to teenager. But without the human power of communication, the technological power of the smart phone is as nothing. (PUTS PHONE AWAY). So it's critical for us to focus on communication if we want to make sure our children have the skills to take advantage of the revolution that mobile technology is bringing to our lives.

The world has had communication longer than it has had language. Look at these guys, they're orang-utans. (SHOWS PICTURE OF TWO ORANGUTANS) They communicate almost entirely by gesture. But they're actually highly skilled. The evolutionary anthropologist Federico Rossano has shown that orang-utans take turns to gesture just as people take turns to speak.

And child development specialists show that babies take turns to make sounds long before they learn to speak their first words.

So the skill of communication is absolutely innate to the world, and absolutely innate to every one of us from the moment we're born.

There's been many an argument over the balance in education between acquiring skills like communication and acquiring knowledge. But I think there's no argument that learning needs both. What I would argue is that gaining knowledge and mastering skills are both absolutely dependent on communication.

There's the communication between teachers and learners in the classroom – imparting knowledge and inspiring learning; there's the communication between learners and their peers - sharing and exploring new knowledge and skills together; and there's the communication between learners and their parents, key to building a supportive learning environment.

At the heart of communication is the power of language, the power of words – so communication is obviously central to language learning. But it's important throughout the curriculum. Think about something as far away from words as you can get - learning maths.

Maths is all about numbers, but it's learnt through words - it relies on the power of communication. Take a look at this. (SHOW CLIP OF MATHS CLASS)

Learning maths is hard, and as you saw there, it's the interaction with the teacher and peers – the linguistic communication - which makes it work.

Communication is nothing without language - and there are several languages that matter. First there's the mother tongue, which roots the child in the home. Then there's the national or school language, that anchors the child in the wider community and culture of the country. And then there's the global language, English, which links the child to the world.

I wince a little when I say English is the global language as it's of course my mother tongue and my national language. But genuinely I think it is no exaggeration to say that English is now the global language – it's the language of business, the language of the internet and the language, increasingly, of learning itself. That means acquiring the power of English is an essential part of being a great communicator.

Mother tongue, literally the language you first hear, is bound to be important, especially in the primary years. In fact research from UNESCO shows that children who have to learn in a different language are at a disadvantage. But if kids are going to be taught in English at secondary level, there's probably a balance to be struck between mother tongue, the national language and English, even in primary school.

Professor David Crystal estimates that two-thirds of the world's children grow up in a bilingual environment - bilingualism is the default condition for the majority of human beings. For most of them they're using both their mother tongue and their school language – and what that means is people are already bilingual before they start to learn the global language, English.

In his British Council book 'English Next: India', David Graddol identifies the three main motivations and benefits for people learning English in India. The first is Access to Education - accessing the world's knowledge, globally. The second is Employability - many jobs now require good English skills. And the third is Social mobility - English is the route to a middle class life.

The truth is the same motivations apply all over the world – and the power of English is growing faster every day as more people have access to connected mobile devices. They're hungry to communicate, and to communicate most effectively in the digital realm means communicating in English.

More and more of our children are growing up in a digital world and acquiring the digital literacy they need to master that world instinctively, immersively, organically. But I think it's critical that the world of education doesn't take that for granted. We must, as educators, inhabit that world with them – to enhance their acquisition of digital literacy, and to use digital technologies to enhance learning. And I don't just mean finding new ways of distributing old

content, I mean finding ways of creating functionality and experiences that simply aren't possible in the linear world.

Take a look at a couple of experiments in my field, English learning. There's a great app out there on the web called Dubsmash. It's designed as entertainment – letting kids lip sync to lines from movies. Like this. (SHOWS CLIP)

There will already be some learning in there if the language you're lip syncing isn't your mother tongue. As with this girl from Buenos Aires for instance. (SHOWS CLIP)

But what if we take it a bit further, and ask her to sing for herself the song she's just lip synched? (SHOWS CLIP)

You've started with something that really is a game, a classic piece of modern day communication where a kid records a clip to make their friends laugh – and you end up at something which is about English understanding and pronunciation.

Or take this project – Pen Friends. This is a really simple way of unlocking the power of communication, unlocking the power of kids' mobile phones. It connects children across the world and lets them share the work they've done, in English, on topics ranging from outer space to how trees grow, and in this case amazing animals. It's great.

For a talk that has been about just one word, power, I have found myself using around 1500 words. Such is the power of communication! I worked at the BBC for many years and we talked about being in the communications business. With digital mobile, soon the whole world will be in the communications business. It's never been easier to access communication, it's never been more important to access communication, but it's never been harder to communicate well. The real power of mobile technology will only be realised by the power of highly skilled human communication.

For us to unleash that human power, to em-power our learners, there are some things I think all of us in this room should do. We should put communication at the centre of education. We should give teachers the skills to support the learning of communication and language. And we should let children spend at least some of their school day in the digital space they will spend their lives in.

Do those things, and I truly believe through the power of communication we can unlock enormous power in the children we all aim to serve.

I have now communicated with you for twelve minutes. So I will exercise another power. The power to shut up. Thank you for listening.