

'We' not 'I'

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A visit to any of its alluring stores is a reminder of why Apple is one of the most successful global brands. The ambiance is seductive, the tech on display is beautiful. Apple tutors hold smart 15 minute talks to help you enhance your tablet or phone experience, simultaneously marketing the latest model.

One such presentation - on view in a store near you - promotes unashamed narcissism: how to take a selfie, embellish and annotate the image, then send it with a flourish to a friend. This is a pervasive world of me, me, me. And few teenagers can escape its clutches. Australia has just introduced a range of social media bans for under-16s, and the world is watching for impact.

Suffice to say, as 2026 unfolds, the me-first tech culture among children and young people will not abate, despite the best efforts of schools to rein in the attention-seeking device in almost every pupil's pocket. Parents are half-trying too, addicted themselves to their phone as a third hand.

How best to create a counter-culture?

Pupils are influenced by their peers and social media, yes - but what their teachers and schools say every day matters too. Schools are uniquely placed to model and embed the values of 'we' not 'I'. By their very nature, schools bring people together with a common purpose. They flourish when everyone is singing the same song.

During 2026, in schools across the nation, teachers and leaders need to set out a covenant in which community values and actions are celebrated, placing the common good before personal gain.

Through assemblies, subject teaching, visits out and visitors in, personal and social education - all teachers really can galvanise their students to appreciate that some of the world's pressing challenges have some answers in 'we' before 'I'.

In our classrooms we learn that fire gave us warmth and cooking, but it also gave us war and destruction. We learn that the internal combustion engine gave us mobility and industry, but that now it gives us climate change.

Look out of the classroom window and reflect globally. Climate degradation, the movement of peoples, the scars of wars, tensions on national borders, criminality small and large, outbreaks of disease - each requires relentless focus with resolution focused on people acting together for shared gain.

With AI upon us, will our economies struggle to cope with massive unemployment and income inequality? Will democracies sink under a sea of disinformation? Or will AI improve the longevity, health and wellbeing of countless citizens?*

Children in our classrooms today *are* the parents, employers and employees who will shape the globe towards 2050. Their formative education, their values and their mindset will be decisive.

We must help them understand their roles as community leaders and followers - to put aside the selfie in favour of championing the photo which captures the individual alongside others in striving for the common good.

Happy New Year!

*Recommended reading: *The Shortest History of AI* by Toby Walsh

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