



Benedict Kestner M.Ed

Educational Consultant | Speaker | Advisor on Student Voice and Wellbeing

Leadership Experience & Impact

Educational leader and consultant with over 30 years' experience across the UK, Europe and the US, specialising in school culture transformation through democratic participation, student agency and relational behaviour systems.

My work focuses on building environments where belonging, wellbeing and student voice are not add-ons, but the cultural foundation of a school. I have led cultural change in established schools, founded two democratic learning communities, and advised leaders on school improvement, student wellbeing, behaviour, community governance and learning design. I help schools rethink behaviour and wellbeing systems, strengthen student voice, build shared accountability, and align innovation with the needs of young people and the demands of Ofsted and accreditation frameworks.

CORE EXPERTISE

- Culture transformation & school turnaround
- Democratic schooling and shared governance
- Student agency & voice structures
- Relational behaviour systems (non-punitive)
- Belonging, wellbeing and mental health
- Leadership coaching and cultural diagnostics
- Learning environment design & pathways
- Inclusion, attendance and engagement models
- Community partnerships and parent engagement
- Innovation aligned to NEASC/CIS/IB frameworks

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Educational Consultant (2025–Present) UK, Europe & US

Adviser to school leaders on culture transformation, behaviour systems, and the integration of student voice and democratic participation into daily school life.

- Supporting schools to build shared responsibility models between students, staff and leadership
- Designing relational behaviour systems that reduce punitive approaches
- Facilitating cultural diagnostics, community workshops and leadership coaching
- Advising on innovation frameworks, reflection systems and student growth evidence
- Experience with learning platforms that support reflection, agency and visibility of progress

Head of School – The Learning Project (2021–2025) Ibiza, Spain

Founder of a democratic, self-directed learning community for ages 4–18, developing a culture built on belonging, shared governance, wellbeing and agency.

- Built a democratic school culture from first principles
- Designed community governance structures involving students, staff and families
- Implemented wellbeing and belonging frameworks aligned with UNCRC
- Created student evidence systems for reflection and self-assessment
- Led NEASC accreditation, aligning democratic practice with standards
- Transitioned toward a foundation model, improving access through sliding-scale tuition

Co-Founder & Head of School – Glacier Lake School (2013–2021) Montana, USA

Co-founded Montana's first democratic school in a rural and economically marginalised community, with a strong focus on identity, agency and local partnerships.

- Established a democratic learning community in challenging cultural and regulatory conditions
- Built community and tribal partnerships (Salish Kootenai College & Tribal Education)
- Developed student agency frameworks combining curriculum and pastoral care
- Created whole-community experiences to build identity and belonging
- Raised over \$150,000 through local foundations and donor partnerships

Middle School Principal – St John's International School (2010–2013) Belgium

Led cultural change in a large international school, shifting the learning experience toward agency, purpose and student ownership.

- Designed a competency-based curriculum with reflection, choice and belonging
- Introduced collapsed timetable experiential learning (“Big Ideas Weeks”)
- Restructured schedules to support autonomy and inclusion
- Implemented 1:1 learning technology for reflective practice
- Led Middle School accreditation for CIS and MSA

Middle School Principal – Berlin Brandenburg International School (2006–2010) Germany

Designed a new Middle School section, building culture from scratch and doubling enrolment through community trust and student experience.

- Built a new Middle School identity, focused on agency and whole-child experience
- Developed co-curricular and service learning
- Led IB re-accreditation, aligning rigour with student-centred approaches
- Introduced student choice structures and thematic learning

EARLY CAREER (1995–2006)

Classroom Teacher & Faculty Leader – UK & International

Built a deep foundation in teaching, pastoral care and creative curriculum design, working across multiple age ranges and cultural contexts before moving into school leadership.

Highlights include:

- Leading music, arts and interdisciplinary projects to build identity and belonging
- Developing early forms of student voice and agency within classroom structures
- Building pastoral relationships that prioritised wellbeing and confidence
- Supporting early technology integration to widen access and creativity
- Leading community events and productions that strengthened school culture

QUALIFICATIONS

- **M.Ed – International Educational Administration**, Endicott College, USA
- **PGCE – Secondary**, University of East Anglia
- **Graduate Diploma Degree (Hons)** – London College of Music

SELECTED SPEAKING & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

- Co-organiser, **TEDxKids**, platforming youth voice
- Speaker, **TEDx Brussels – “What If...?”** (student empowerment)
- Moderator, **European Commission panel – Rethinking Learning**

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

Nationality: UK and US citizen

Safeguarding: Enhanced DBS + International Police Checks

Interests: Writing on democratic education, running, football, arts

CONTACT

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