Editorial

Cast your mind back – or in any direction, come to that: can you recall the last occasion on which you heard somebody defend with fervour the splitting up of the primary curriculum into chunks of unrelated 'subjects'; anyone speak from the heart on the desirability of depositing children into ability groups from which they may rarely escape; defend with genuine feeling the practice of league tables? Ever listened to someone justify such practices with credible passion on the grounds that they might make for a fairer society in which all children are given an equal chance to develop their own capabilities, and which will eventually bring about a more comprehensive, to say nothing of more comprehensible education?

The nearest to an emotional response that could be deemed passionate in relation to such initiatives might just be the extra gleam in the metallic eye of bureaucrats or politicians who have sensed opportunities for even further control; such people who dismiss anything spoken about with feeling as a tiresome and juvenile element in debates that they think should be governed by what appears to be reason and rationality – in other words they take the view that one cannot seriously defend a position on any other grounds.

How fortunate then that we can point to those in education who have combined both passion and logic all their lives and been able to prove that not only can these be exemplified at a personal level but have been able to use them to great effect in those arguments they defended so vigorously. Caroline Benn, whose life is celebrated in this issue by Clyde Chittty and Brian Simon, was one such outstanding example. The presently beleagured defenders of a genuinely comprehensive education should be strengthened by the memory of such a generous and clear-sighted commitment to a movement that still sees itself as a powerful means of realising human potential.

Ironically, many of the self-same bureaucrats and politicians owe much, as indeed we all do, to those whose reasoned arguments and passion to overcome what they saw as injustices, led to many of the great social and public-health improvements we now take for granted. These pioneers were also belittled in their time, the passion they attached to their campaigns being dismissed as equally tiresome by their contemporaries in high office.

We should distinguish though, between constructive emotions which have been used to highlight aspects of social injustice and those destructive ones that have been, and indeed are, made use of in the course of social control. For example, the present day bureaucratisation of education depends itself on a very particular, but by its bureaucrats, a largely unacknowledged emotion, if not for its defence then for its very perpetuation. This emotion was recently recognised and publicly named – and shamed – by Martin McGuinness, the Northern Ireland Minister for Education, who has stated why his country will no longer be using league tables and spelled out why: an education system that is built on a foundation of fear, for which read league tables, cannot belong to a country that wishes to call itself civilised.

Annabelle Dixon

Caroline Benn – tributes

CLYDE CHITTY and **BRIAN SIMON**

write in deep appreciation of Caroline Benn's loyalty and friendship, and her incalculable contribution to the comprehensive school movement. A letter that she wrote to Brian Simon only a few weeks before she died is also included, testament to her unswerving support, whatever her personal circumstances.

Clyde Chitty writes …

I arrived in London in the Autumn of 1966, having spent a really exciting PGCE year at Leicester University where I'd been profoundly influenced by the lectures and writings of Professor Brian Simon, one of the country's leading campaigners for comprehensive education.

Before leaving Leicester, I asked Brian how I could play a part in the accelerating comprehensive campaign, and he told me about the Comprehensive Schools Committee (CSC). This has been launched in the Autumn of 1965, two months after Tony Crosland's DES issued Circular 10/65, requesting local authorities to prepare plans for comprehensive reorganisation. The Committee was apparently composed of parents, teachers and researchers, and Brian Simon was one of the original sponsors. There was to be a new magazine called *Comprehensive Education* which would publish accounts of research carried out by teachers in individual comprehensives and the Committee was looking for volunteers to help with its termly production.

I took up my first teaching post at Malory School on the Downham Estate in south-east London and one night early in l967, I made my way nervously to a house in Notting Hill Gate to attend my first meeting of the Editorial Board of *Comprehensive Education.* This was the occasion when I first met Caroline Benn, and I can still recall the impression she made upon me. I was instantly bowled over by her enthusiasm and vitality and by her incredible knowledge of the progress that the comprehensive reform was making throughout the country. She was warm and friendly and welcoming with a wonderful sense of humour and amazing energy. Thus began a friendship and writing partnership that was to endure for over three decades.

Tuesdays and Fridays were to be CSC days; and while Tony was a member of the Wilson Cabinet, we were able to make use of his office in the basement of their Notting Hill home. Caroline became CSC's Information Officer and co-editor of *Comprehensive Education.* She produced a detailed annual survey of the progress of the comprehensive reform, and DES civil servants would ring her up to find out what was happening in various parts of the country.

In 1968, she and Brian Simon began work on a major survey of the comprehensive reform, which was to be published in 1970 as *Half Way There*. We sent out a questionnaire to 958 comprehensive schools in England, Wales and Scotland, and the overall response rate was 81 per cent. The book attracted rave reviews and provided a whole generation with a detailed profile of the kind of comprehensive education that Britain was developing in response to national policy requirements at that time.

Twenty-five years later, in 1993-94, Caroline and I began work on a second major independent enquiry into the state of comprehensive education in Britain which was first published in 1996 as *Thirty Years On*, and, once again, we were heartened by the response our undertaking received. Writing in *The Times Educational Supplement*, Professor Tony Edwards described the book as 'a lucid, coherent and richly-documented analysis of successes, failures and difficulties and of the necessary conditions for improvement … an impressive review of where we are and where we could be'.

Caroline was a wonderful collaborator, and I cannot recall the slightest disagreement over areas of analysis or interpretation.

She also thrived as a member of a writing collective and was an enthusiastic and lively member of the Hillcole Group of Socialist educationalists and teachers. She never tried to impose her views on others and was always anxious to seek areas of consensus and agreement. Together we produced *Changing the Future* in 1991 and *Rethinking Education and Democracy* in 1997.

Although in the last years of her life, Caroline was deeply saddened by New Labour's willingness to continue with the right-wing education policies that had been pursued by the Thatcher and Major governments, she was always a tremendous optimist and retained enormous confidence in the good sense and integrity of the teaching profession. One of her favourite sayings was Tom Paine's famous dictum from his 1776 treatise *Common Sense:* 'we have it in our power to begin the world all over again'.

Brian Simon writes …

I first met Caroline at a small party in London for teachers and others. We found ourselves sitting together on a sofa talking animatedly about the move to comprehensive education. I had no idea who she was, but discovered shortly after. This must have been in 1964/65. But I was already deeply struck by her knowledge of the situation and her close involvement.

Caroline was the driving force behind the CSC, set up at that time. Assuming the modest office of 'Information Officer' she set about monitoring closely every aspect of the movement. Under her guidance CSC quickly became a very effective pressure group. Indeed there is no doubt that Caroline knew a great deal more about what was happening on the ground (which was crucial) than anyone else, the DES included.

When the publishers, McGraw Hill, asked me for a book on the progress of the entire comprehensive movement, I agreed but provided they would accept a joint production from Caroline and myself. This they did. So *Half-Way There* was born. This turned out to be one of the

best moves of my life.

Caroline was a superb collaborator. She put everything into our work, largely designing the crucial questionnaires, tracking all recent developments, keeping in close touch with key schools and teachers. Further, she bore the brunt of the writing and data analysis – of the 21 chapters she wrote 12, myself 7, while 2 were joint productions. For the second Penguin edition (1972) which greatly extended the first (things were happening so quickly) Caroline wrote a new chapter (on developments in 1970/71) and two follow-up sample surveys were carried through (on grouping procedures and sixth form size and growth). The two editions together sold some 20,000 copies. Though most of the book was written by one or other, we were able to confirm in the preface that we were both 'in full agreement on all opinions expressed and on all recommendations made throughout the book'.

It was an astonishing achievement, on Caroline's part, to repeat the whole project 30 years later with Clyde Chitty, who had helped with the original book. *Thirty Years On* stands as a massive, and worthy, memorial to Caroline's indispensable role in the crucially important move to comprehensive education from the 1960s on, involving a seismic change in the whole structure of education. Those who oppose that move today display only a surprising (or is it a considered?) ignorance of its significance.

Caroline was always so cheerful and optimistic, being driven by a real faith in comprehensive education as the means of realising human potential. While working on *Half-Way There* she was nurturing her own family of four, caring for an exceptionally busy husband and running her house with informal affection and a warm hospitality for all. Completed chapters would appear from nowhere – if sometimes a little illegible, each was a completed scholarly study. She was absolutely remarkable, and above all such fun to be with. I was very privileged to work so closely with her over the four years or so that it took to produce the two editions of *Half-Way There* and later, when she continued to contribute her lively articles for *FORUM*.

Caroline Benn's last letter to Brian Simon

This was written as a response to a letter which Brian Simon had written to her telling her about his anti-Blair FORUM article, published in the Autumn 2000 issue. It was written on 9th November – she died on 22nd November 2000.

Dear Brian,

Thank you so much for writing. It has been ages since you wrote an education letter. But how right you are! New Labour's leaders and advisers are true victims of *Daily Mail* culture; they actually believe that comprehensives have always aimed to give 'the same (and mediocre) education to all', not knowing that, from the start, the objective was always to help each child to realise his or her ability to the full – so they really do believe that all comprehensives from the start were forced to use mixed ability and that none had yet discovered setting or streaming; and that teachers today still suffer from 'trendy' ideas of the 1960s and are letting pupils down, that all failure is down to teachers being unable to throw off the 'left-wing ideology' of the past – as if ninety per cent of teachers are 'Marxists'. One of Blair's advisers wrote an article arguing that all schools in future should be made up of three inner schools (preferably on three different sites!) – one for 'grammar ability', the second for the 'average learners', and the last for 'slow pupils' or those with 'learning difficulties'. This article, released the day Blair made the speech you objected to, was entitled something like 'Comprehensives are dead; long live selection'. The tragedy of a Prime Minister who knows little about education and takes all his advice from half a dozen people who take exactly the same elitist and anti-egalitarian stand, is very difficult to accept. But Labour MPs themselves are still dedicated to the comprehensive principle, and although they (including Ministers) have let themselves be bullied into silence, Blair knows that there is a point beyond which they will not go. Hence all his talk about 'modernising' and 'reform' rather than what he really wants to say ('abolition'). Woodhead's departure clears the way towards a different approach. Just hope we get it.

Clyde [Chitty] says your *FORUM* article is 'first class' – I look forward to seeing it. I may not be able to move a single muscle below the waist, but I can still move the arms to pick up a book!

Lots of love to you and Joan. It's wonderful you are still in there fighting!

Caroline

Effective Teaching: some contemporary mythologies

ANDREW DAVIS

Andrew Davis, a senior lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Durham, refutes, in valuable detail, the simplistic findings of the Hay McBer Report and its furtherance of myths about 'effective' teaching. Although longer than most *FORUM* articles, its carefully considered arguments make it a very important contribution to the debate and mark it out as an article of future reference for many teachers, educationalists and policy makers.

Introduction

Research into effective teaching and schools began to influence the educational policies of the last Conservative Government. New Labour has embraced the trend with great enthusiasm. This tradition's conceptions of education, educational research and social science are not shared by the educational research community as a whole. Indeed, many of its key ideas have been severely criticised (see for instance, Slee et al, 1998 or Galton et al, 1999).

Some of the standards required of Newly Qualified Teachers (DfEE Circular 4/98) together with the 'Model of Teacher Effectiveness' outlined in the Hay McBer Report, commissioned by the Government and published in June 2000, are firmly rooted in the 'effective teacher' ideology. This is equally true of the OfSTED criteria applied to observations of teaching (OfSTED, 1995). A select but crucial subset of 4/98 standards purport to identify effective teaching skills and characteristics. Many of these relate to teachers working with the whole class whether with primary or secondary pupils and regardless of the subject. There are close parallels in Hay McBer. Here are three illustrations:

1 Students are required to demonstrate that they can (provide) 'effective questioning which matches the pace and direction of the lesson and ensures that pupils take part' (4/98 Annex A B k vi). Hay McBer comments that 'effective teachers ask a lot of questions and involve the pupils in class discussion. In this way the pupils are actively engaged in the lesson …' (1.2.7).
2 Students are required to demonstrate that they can (provide) 'clear instruction and demonstration, and accurate well-paced explanation' (4/98 Annex A B k v). Hay McBer speaks of 'a great deal of direct instruction to whole classes …'.
3 Students are required to demonstrate that they can 'ensure that the introduction of any new topic incorporates the essential features of the mathematical concepts which pupils must ultimately acquire' (4/98 Annex D 1 I). Hay McBer says that the 'effective teacher communicates the lesson content to be covered and the key activities for the duration of the lesson'.

Teaching styles recommended by the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies bear all the hallmarks of effective teacher research. Reynolds and others believe in a technology of practice, and that internationally there exist 'great teacher-effectiveness knowledge bases'. Britain, we are told does not sufficiently utilise these but the Teacher Training Agency is improving matters (Reynolds, 1999b).

Political fortunes might be linked to the viability of a technology of practice. If certain teaching methods maximise learning, then government would like to be seen as responsible for extending their use. Even if much of pupil progress is causally linked to socio-economic background the latter is *largely beyond political control.* The government has recently 'learned' that schools also 'make a difference'. Hence it is now 'persuading' the education system to emphasise certain approved methods.

This state-driven policy is unlikely to be dented by empirical criticism of research into effective teaching. Flawed statistical techniques, small sample sizes, inadequate control of relevant variables, to name but a few of the ills commonly detected by empirical researchers in their colleagues' projects could all be remedied. After all, 'driving up standards' with the help of a technology of practice is such an appealing idea. Philosophical criticism has the potential to inflict more permanent damage, and that is the objective of this article. I show that much of the technology of effective teaching (TET) involves mythological constructs. The phrases purporting to refer to these constructs do not and could not refer to real teaching competencies, skills or qualities.

Correlations and Causes

Before penetrating to the heart of this mythological thinking we must note a classic criticism of the 'effective teacher' research paradigm. This tradition often equates correlations with causes, and indeed causes flowing in a particular direction. Robin Barrow explained the point very effectively nearly two decades ago (Barrow, l984). Astonishingly the myth is still alive and well, namely that if we discover associations we are automatically discovering causal processes which flow *from* aspects of teacher performance *to* pupil progress. Yet it may be very difficult or even impossible to establish *either* that causes are not either wholly or partially running in the opposite direction, or that there is no independent cause of both the choice of teaching method and the rate of pupil progress.

Causal language is prominent in the Hay McBer Report from the beginning: 'We found three main factors within teachers' control that significantly influence pupil progress; teaching skills, professional characteristics and classroom climate'. However Hay McBer's language sometimes describes correlations only. For instance, it remarks that 'teaching skills, professional characteristics

and classroom climate *will predict* well over 30% of the variance in pupil progress' (1.1.8, my italics). Prediction, of course is compatible with causal influences proceeding in either direction, or with a joint cause of skills, characteristics and climate on the one hand, and pupil progress on the other. Often the language taken literally describes an association, but the obvious subtext is that the teachers are 'doing the causing'. Note, for instance, 'effective teachers set high expectations' and 'the effective teacher communicates the lesson content to be covered'.

Concerning teaching skills it suggests for example that effective teachers 'presented information to the pupils with a high degree of clarity and enthusiasm and, when giving basic instruction, the lessons proceed at a brisk pace'. Now consider for a moment the 'kinds' of pupils who are going to progress creditably, for it is with such pupils that this teaching 'skill' is *associated.* Might not certain classes make it easier than others for the teacher to 'proceed at a brisk pace' or to 'present information with enthusiasm'? Researchers may claim to control for relevant factors and to have established that 'similar' groups of students have different rates of progress. They can argue from this point that it must be teaching styles and methods *causing* different rates of progress rather than that particular 'kinds' of pupils are influencing the frequency with which one teaching style is used rather than another. Relevant factors for which researchers typically attempt to control are supposedly measured by proxies of socio-economic deprivation such as the proportion of pupils on free school meals, and previous attainment as captured by base-line tests or SATs.

However, experienced teachers may well suspect that certain stable motivational and socio-economic features of individual students are *not* picked up by standard research measures, that over the years these features can vary from group to group *which are otherwise comparable,* and in particular that *relatively persistent group effects* can result from these factors. Informally teachers will speak of the 'chemistry' of the group and it is arguably of special significance in primary schools where classes are often stable and taught by one generalist teacher for a year or more. Such group phenomena may not only affect pupil progress *directly* but also influence the teacher's selection of one teaching style rather than another.

In the 1980s a certain primary school was pursuing the Calculator Aware Number Curriculum (CAN). Part of the recommended style for CAN schools at that time is quite nicely captured now by phrases from Hay McBer. These include 'a range of teaching approaches and activities designed to keep the pupils fully engaged …'.

'Individual work and small group activities were regularly employed … the active style of teaching does not result in passive pupils …' (Hay McBer 1.2.7). However, all these elements in the effective teacher's armoury were temporarily abandoned by the school in the face of a one in 30 years 'class from hell' whose peculiarly dreadful properties were identified as early as reception. These children failed to make the expected progress throughout their years at the school. All the teachers resorted to formal whole class didactic methods where the pupils were as 'passive' as the teachers could contrive. They could only control the group by resorting to these seemingly 'ineffective' methods.

This of course is a mere anecdote; we do not know the baseline scores or socio-economic indicators for this class. Perhaps the teachers could have found a more educational and enlightened solution to their problem. Nevertheless it illustrates just one possible explanation of an association between teaching style and pupil progress where the causes are not all operating in the conventional direction. Groups of children vary from one year to the next in many more ways than those captured, if captured at all, by measures of previous attainment and indices of socio-economic deprivation and it may be precisely these varying features that influence their teachers' choice of methods.

Has research into effective teaching *really* succeeded in proving the direction of the causes or that there is nothing else influencing *both* teaching styles employed *and* pupil progress? Could it do so in principle? If for instance we thought that causes sometimes run from pupils to teachers we might take an unorthodox view of the Hay McBer 'findings' that certain factors 'do not allow us to predict … effectiveness' (1.1.6). These factors include information about a teacher's age and teaching experience, additional responsibilities, qualifications and career history. We might say that these features could not in principle be *consequences* of pupil personalities, motivation and behaviour in the way that lesson 'pace' might be and so that is why correlations have not been discovered. Pupils may metaphorically age their teachers, but not literally.

The Deeper Mythology

To resume the main theme of this article, whatever the nature of the disquiet felt by teacher trainers about 4/98, or by experienced teachers when studying the Hay McBer Report they are unlikely to reject the recommended approaches out of hand.

Indeed, how can we quarrel with suggestions like these?

- ❏ Your lessons should have 'pace' and you should draw them to 'crisp conclusions'.
- ❏ You should set high expectations for your pupils and communicate these expectations clearly. (Adapted from 4/98)

Surely every teacher should achieve these standards! My answer ultimately will be that we *can* quarrel with these ideas, and at the most fundamental level, but this needs substantial and detailed argument. In the end we should not reject the good intentions embodied in 4/98 or Hay McBer but the emptiness of these prescriptions.

I have spoken of 'mythological constructs'. The term 'construct' is carefully chosen, and should recall its use in the general theory of assessment and the psychology of abilities. Some tests may be said to possess 'construct validity'. They are valid if they measure what they are claimed to measure, and sometimes this is held to be an unobservable underlying 'trait' or construct. Constructs of such traits in the literature include intelligence, verbal reasoning ability, spatial ability and even fairly specific traits such as spelling ability.

Researchers into effective teaching have invented or 'constructed' skills or characteristics that students are supposed to be able to come to possess and to 'demonstrate' in the classroom. These traits are intellectual artefacts. Now it does not immediately follow that such

artefacts are in any way dubious. After all, natural scientists have constructed the concept of gravity, the idea of an electron and of a gene. These have turned out to be extremely useful. They pick out significant aspects of the physical universe and enable predictions, explanations and control. (I allow myself this informal way of expressing the matter, thus side-stepping important and crucial issues in the philosophy of science which are outside the scope of this article.)

However, my key claim is that many constructs linked to effective teaching cannot in principle be identified with 'real' teaching skills or competencies. Hence research into effective teaching is radically constrained in a fashion of which many of its current adherents are blissfully unaware. In Davis (1998) I argued that the emptiness of the constructs is peculiarly dangerous, with the potential that those with idiosyncratic and prejudiced pedagogical agendas may hijack the training and promotion procedures for teachers in a fashion that damages the rights and interests of pupils.

Precursors of my Argument in Contemporary Debate

In seeking to advance this argument I am not intending to imply that others in the educational community are unaware of it. There are many anticipations in current educational debate albeit in heavily disguised form. I will first briefly rehearse one or two of these contemporary themes.

Holistic Approaches and the Problem of Atomistic Competencies or Standards

Many involved in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) will have argued with the Teacher Training Agency over the last year or so about whether the 4/98 standards must be assessed 'one at a time' or whether matters can be approached 'more holistically'. The ITT providers' difficulties with the former approach are in part severely practical. It is not actually possible to assess each standard separately and distinctly especially in the one year PGCE courses. No ITT institution when awarding provisional Qualified Teacher Status could truly claim to have taken each standard on its own and carefully weighed the available evidence for each student having achieved it even if such a process makes any kind of sense in theory.

Beyond these practical difficulties lies the familiar unease about teaching being broken down into atomistic competencies, as though teaching skills resembled those of apprentice lathe operators or hairdressers. Some regard such skills as 'low level', as incorporating little in the way of rich cognitive elements and certainly as requiring no hint of 'reflective practice', an activity much beloved by teacher trainers.

Universities fear (possibly with some justification) that policy makers wish to take one of their established activities, namely the preparation of teachers for the profession, academically down-market. If universities resist such a tendency they may only too easily be seen as self-serving and irrational. Moreover an excessively 'intellectual' approach to teacher training may be held by critics to be part of the explanation for poor standards in schools. It may be felt that 'reflective practice' was never a particularly transparent notion and that it was used to camouflage educational ideologies opposed to the tough accountability climate introduced at the end of the twentieth century. The critics may conclude that reflective practice should be abandoned in favour of proven technologies of teaching. A particularly important point about these, according to their protagonists is that they will ensure that all teachers reach minimum standards of competency in the classroom.

As hinted above, one form of opposition to the criticisms just outlined, is sometimes termed 'holistic'. Even if we can attach any sense to notions of individual teacher skills, competencies or qualities, they actually operate together in complex fashion within students' and teachers' classroom performances, or so it may be argued. A teacher exhibiting 'pace' when delivering explanations effectively, may also be demonstrating at one and the same time the skills of paying 'careful attention to pupils' errors and misconceptions, and helping to remedy them' (Circular 4/98 Annex A B 4 k vii). Indeed, it might not count as 'pace' unless at the same time attention is being given to pupils' errors. Without the latter, the 'speed' of the teacher might amount to a precipitous rushing through the lesson plan, even if the brisk atmosphere helps to maintain discipline and keeps pupils 'on task' at least in the short term.

Those seeking TTA support for a 'holistic' approach to the assessment of the 4/98 standards want assurance that they can group standards and assess student performance against each group rather than one by one. ITT providers know that skills and qualities work together and interact with each other in a performance. They fear that attempts to assess some of the standards in isolation might well give a different result from the most professional and stringent assessment of those same standards in appropriate combination with others. For instance, students are supposed to be able to 'assess how well learning objectives have been achieved and use this assessment to improve specific aspects of teaching'. If demonstrating this standard makes any kind of sense, it must be shown in performances in appropriate combination with a range of other standards. These include whether students can pay 'careful attention to pupils' errors and misconceptions, and (help) to remedy them' and can listen 'carefully to pupils, analysing their responses and responding constructively in order to take pupils' learning forward'. Any attempt to discover whether the assessment standard is met without considering the many others to which it is intimately related would, of course, distort the result. For instance, an OfSTED inspector might question the student and examine her teaching file in an effort to catechise her on the assessment standard alone. Depending on the form taken by the inspector's questioning, her response may not in fact do justice to the fact, if it is indeed a fact, that her teaching performances are being informed rigorously by her assessment of her learning objectives. She may be 'doing the right kinds of things' with the pupils in the classroom even if she is not always able to say the right kinds of things to an inspector outside the acts of teaching themselves. It may be objected that OfSTED inspectors are aware of the ways in which standards work together in a performance and that they would not behave in the way suggested. Not all ITT providers would agree that such confidence is well-founded.

Moreover there seem to be a number of distinct yet

equally natural ways of grouping standards. 4/98 has separate sections on planning, and on teaching and class management in the generic Annex A. This seems perfectly sensible, and arguably if we are trying to group the standards they would be selected from these broad categories, rather than assembling them in a more ad hoc fashion from different categories. And yet it is difficult to see how a teacher could 'make effective use of assessment information on pupils' attainment and progress in their teaching and in planning future lessons and sequence of lessons' (under Planning in Annex A) if they are not also 'matching the approaches used to the subject matter used and the pupils being taught' or paying 'careful attention to pupils' errors and misconceptions, and helping to remedy them'. However, the latter standard is laid down in a different section altogether (under Teaching and Class Management in Annex A).

To anticipate an element of my final argument, some may already be wondering what counts as an individual teaching skill, quality or process. We appear to be able to refer to a specific aspect of teaching performance by stringing together words to form phrases such as 'make effective use of assessment information on pupils' attainments'. Yet it is often unclear how one aspect, quality or competence is to be distinguished from another. Barrow (1984) made similar points about earlier 'fruits' of research into effective teaching.

The Importance of 'Context'

Experienced observers of teaching in a variety of classroom and school contexts will have remarked how some students and teachers are excellent in one school or classroom but less so in another. Even veteran teachers in the same school may perform unevenly over the years with different classes. Students judged as failing by the most conscientious professionals armed with extensive 'evidence' that they are not 'meeting the standards' on a final placement are sometimes granted an extra period in a different school to see whether they can make the grade after all. On occasion the new school is delighted with the student's performance and just cannot understand how they failed before. Sadly, the opposite can also occur, with extremely promising teaching apparently demonstrated in one school being followed by 'failing' performances in a later placement.

Of course we can tell various stories about all this. One obvious approach is to question the judgements and the evidence on which they are based. It may be said that the student apparently failing on a final placement actually had strengths that were missed by her school and university tutors. Or the student who appeared to be starting well and then suffered a catastrophic decline actually had fundamental weaknesses from the beginning but these were not seen.

A second account may accept the probity of the judgements. Perhaps the student who failed in her final placement had her mind wonderfully concentrated by the experience, rapidly acquiring teaching skills which she had not bothered with before. Both the earlier and the later school are 'right' about her performance and qualities. Again, it may be suggested that the student who suffered a catastrophic decline is just one of a small number of cases whose performance takes a drastic turn for the worse during training. Possibly personal problems account for the change; the events in question could be explained in other ways. For instance, she became complacent having sailed through the first placement and failed to make the effort required to maintain and improve her standards in the later school.

Each of these versions makes a basic assumption about judgements concerning the presence or otherwise of effective teaching skills and qualities. It is assumed that they can be *straightforwardly identified and that this can be done independently from the contexts in which they are exercised.* According to the folk wisdom embodied in this assumption there are contexts on the one hand, and there are skills which may be exercised in them on the other. Hence teacher trainers, headteachers, OfSTED inspectors and any other professionals accustomed to observing and appraising teaching can think of themselves as *making allowances for context.* 'Given that this is a tough school, catering for pupils drawn from an area with considerable deprivation, then on the basis of the evidence available, Miss X meets the standard which specifies that she is able to "ensure that pupils acquire and consolidate knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject(s)" being taught' (4/98 Annex A B 4m).

Or again, it might be said of a teacher that she normally has good standards of discipline, but the combination of an extra long assembly by that tedious vicar, children going in and out for the photographer, and Darren being sick on the carpet area meant that she was not seen to advantage …

Seemingly relevant 'skills' are conveniently laid down in 4/98 under 'Teaching and Class Management':

- Annex A B 4g 'monitor and intervene when teaching to ensure sound learning and discipline'.
- Annex A B 4h 'establish and maintain a purposeful working atmosphere'.

We begin to question the distinction between performance and context when we remember cases which do not fit either of the versions outlined above. Some students seem to perform remarkably differently in one school in comparison with another even where there are no obvious explanations in terms of fluctuating motivation, unstable competencies, or surface contextual features such as difficult pupils that are somehow interfering with skills that they very obviously possess. We may feel that there is a more intimate link between the teaching performance and its context. It is somehow 'situated'.

Let us note one or two symptoms of the truth of this claim, before arguing it directly. A recently published study on 'failing teachers' (Wragg et al, 2000) drew on evidence from heads, teachers themselves, union officers, LEA personnel, Chairs of school governors, parents and pupils. It discovered that '… the lack of a universally accepted definition of "incompetence" may result in different interpretations of the term at different times and in different schools'. Indeed, according to this study 26 out of 44 'failing' teachers went on to obtain employment as teachers in different authorities and were, presumably 'effective teachers' once more. Now if the notion of a technology of practice made sense, these results are quite extraordinary. The 'failing' teachers of this study ought to be paradigm cases of those who lack the technology. If we assess them against 4/98 standards they should only meet a few if any of those which directly relate to classroom

performance. If such assessment could be reliable, valid and in any other sense rigorous and professional, it should mean that these teachers should *not* be 'demonstrating' these standards, they should only meet a few, if, any of those which relate to classroom performance. If such assessment could be reliable, valid and in any other sense rigorous and professional it should mean that these teachers should *not* be 'demonstrating' these standards after all in different schools. To sum up, it is arguable that this study suggests that even what is thought of as a global teaching incompetence is 'situated' or context-specific.

Fascinatingly, Hay McBer is occasionally on the verge of expressing the true 'situatedness' of teaching skills and qualities. It offers an example of a teacher having:

> *the professional characteristic of Holding People Accountable, which is the drive and ability to set clear expectations and parameters and to hold others accountable for performance. Such a pattern of behaviour could make it more natural for this teacher to exhibit teaching skills like providing opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning … (1.1.3.)*

but it goes on to note that:

> *In other circumstances, with different pupils,* in a different context, *other approaches might have been more effective … there is 'a multiplicity of ways in which particular patterns of characteristics determine how a teacher chooses which approach to use from a repertoire of established techniques in order to influence how pupils feel. (1.1.4)*

It might be objected here that the above examples simply demonstrate the well-known difficulty in transferring skills from the contexts in which they are learned to different contexts. The implications for the assessment of students against relevant 4/98 standards, or for the judgements about teachers seeking to cross the threshold are obvious. Evidence should be gathered about performance in a good variety of contexts. This is the common sense approach and it is being used widely within the teaching profession and by reputable initial teacher training providers. The problem about 'failing teachers' is that, usually for practical reasons, evidence about their performance can only be built up while they are in a particular school. Morally speaking we could not wait before taking steps to rid the profession of incompetent individuals until they had been given a chance in several schools. It would be wrong to hold back until it was conclusively established that the sheer lack of competence transferred across a range of contexts.

Can 'Performance' be Distinguished from 'Context'? The Constructs of Effective Teaching Lack Identity

In order to respond properly to this point I now need to deal directly with the conceptual difficulties associated with some effective teaching constructs. Ultimately 'situatedness' is a matter of principle. Transfer failure is not a matter of learning deficiencies on the part of students and teachers. It is a symptom of the fact that performance characterisations provided by effective teaching research *do not identify just one type of action or process and that the failure to recognise this stems in part from the assumption that we can always distinguish between context and performance.* Indeed the very idea of distinguishing definitely between types of teaching performance is itself problematic (see Davis, 1998).

Small wonder then that what is counted as 'structuring information well, including outlining content and aims, signalling transitions and summarising key points as the lesson progresses' (4/98 Annex A B k iii) or 'setting high expectations for the pupils and communicating them directly to the pupils' (Hay McBer) may not transfer. What individual teachers actually do at particular times with specific groups of children that an observer might 'interpret' as exemplifying either of these alleged features of effective teaching is enormously diverse.

Consider 'structuring information well' as applied to a teacher of a reception class who is dealing with the topic of death because Lynn's hamster has died. Compare possible scenarios here. Imagination does not need to work overtime to conjure up an indefinite variety of teacher–pupil interactions, depending on the personality of the teacher, the particular characters of the reception pupils, their group chemistry and so on. Moreover, the A level maths teacher explaining simple differential equations may also be 'structuring information well'. So may the geography teacher talking about safety procedures before leading the field trip to a venue in the high Pennines. Let us not forget the drama teacher trying to convey to 12 year olds how to set out dialogue in a play scene.

Once these basic points are considered what becomes surprising is that any 'transfer' occurs at all. My critics will ask me whether I am suggesting that it is wrong to classify all these different teaching activities as 'structuring information well'. If so, they will continue, my position is wildly implausible. There is nothing wrong in detecting something crucial that all these different teaching performances have in common, and summing it up in the form of a 4/98 standard.

My response to this criticism is ultimately that the whole terminology of 'skills' and 'transfer' is in fact misconceived, whilst conceding that so long as such terminology is still embraced it cannot be denied that 'transfer' does occur *up to a point.* Nevertheless I have already noted some significant cases in which transfer does *not* occur, and suggested that these should incline us to search for deeper problems about this whole way of thinking. The clarity of discourse about skills transferring from one type of context to another is deceptive, to say the least.

To develop the argument, I need to return to an issue about the classification of actions or performances that I have already discussed in Davis (1998) and Davis (1999) and elsewhere. The analysis is so basic and simple that at first sight it is not easy to understand its radical implications. The 'constructions' of 4/98 or Hay McBer, depend on putting teachers' actions and/or classroom processes into categories. The TTA, with the support of TET research has invented this classification. What is their justification for classifying performances in this manner? What actually is the 'same' about the diversity of performances that might be thought to come under the auspices of a particular standard or teaching competence?

When someone observes teaching, they are interpreting a performance. This interpretation is informed by the observer's appreciation of the physical and cultural

context of the teaching activity. Interpreting behaviour involves making assumptions about the teacher's intentions and about the teacher's beliefs about her context. What is the scope of this term 'context'? It covers a good deal, and certainly includes the current cognitive and motivational states of pupils, the teacher's own relationship with them, wider aspects of the school ethos and basic physical features such as the size and shape of the room and the degree to which she is visible to and can be heard, by all her pupils. The fact that the teacher may be waving her arms about, or opening and closing her mouth while emitting various sounds in itself does little to determine *what kind of thing she is doing.* Judging that the teacher is 'explaining' something, let alone 'ensuring that the introduction of any new topic incorporates the essential features of the mathematical concepts which pupils must ultimately acquire' requires several rich layers of interpretation. The observer's perspective will depend on a complex interaction between her beliefs about the context, beliefs about the teacher's intentions, and the physical actions performed by the teacher.

Teaching performances are perceived to have many of their key characteristics in virtue of relationships between teachers and their sociocultural and physical classroom contexts. We select from these relationships in order to invent teaching performance categories according to our particular purposes and interests. Membership of these categories is in no sense 'intrinsic' to a performance. The question of whether it belongs to a particular category cannot be settled outside a context. Yet the typologies of performance invented by effective teaching research and perpetuated by 4/98 and Hay McBer purport to be applicable regardless of context. They are supposed to be able to form the basis of competencies, skills or qualities, enduring features that teachers are supposed to be able to possess in any context.

The importance and difficulty of the question about what is common to distinct performances supposedly manifesting the same standards is often masked by the fact that the constructs of effective teaching qualities and skills *have built into their characterisation their supposed consequences in terms of pupil learning or response.* (See also my discussion in Davis, 1999.) To support this claim I can only quote some examples, both from 4/98 and from Hay McBer:

- 'introducing the lesson *to command* attention …';
- 'using skilfully framed open and closed, oral and written questions which elicit answers *from which pupils' mathematical understanding can be judged* and giving clear feedback to take pupils' learning forward';
- 'using oral and mental work, in particular *to develop and extend* pupils' use of mathematical vocabulary and accurate recall of number facts' (these three from the primary mathematics section of 4/98, my italics).

'Commanding attention' is an achievement. The standard does not say 'to *try* to command attention'. Success is built in. Similarly, in the second example above, the questions must actually succeed in probing understanding, and the resulting feedback must actually take pupils' learning forward. In the third example, the oral and mental work must actually develop and extend pupils in the relevant respects.

Hay McBer tells us that teaching skills:

> *are those "micro-behaviours" that the effective teacher constantly exhibits when teaching a class. They include* behaviours *like*
> *– involving all pupils in the lesson;*
> *– using differentiation appropriately to challenge all pupils in the class. (1.2.1, emphasis added)*

So, these so-called skills also are characterised in such a way that pupil achievement or response is built in. Hay McBer's use of the term 'behaviours' is really very odd. It looks as though that which is the 'same' about these performances, which is supposed to legitimate their being placed in a particular category and expressed as a standard is a consequence in terms of pupil learning. There is little or no indication of what else might be shared by all the different performances.

We can concede that perhaps certain things are *ruled out*; thus a teacher cannot be commanding attention if she is not actually there, and her questions cannot be successfully probing pupils' understanding if she has a very severe speech defect or speaks to them in Mandarin. (Well probably not, but once we start thinking …) We can also accept that some very broad positive features may be shared. For instance, in the case of some of the standards both the teacher and the pupils must do some speaking. However, we cannot go much further than this. Of course, in theory a precise behavioural specification could be given of required teacher actions. For instance, take two steps forward, speak the following words in a certain tone, and so forth. The technology of effective teaching as so far developed and presented does not involve prescriptions of this kind, however, and in Davis (1999) I have shown how these would be incoherent given inescapable aspects of the role of the teacher.

Conclusion

To sum up, neither 4/98 nor Hay McBer are actually offering any specific teaching methods. The constructs in terms of specific teacher performances are empty.

Where does this leave effective teaching research and the status of any standards based on its results?

First, we may be forgiven for wondering whether it is actually possible for research to establish anything about effective teaching methods *where these involve recommendations about how teachers should act.* We have seen that we cannot conceptualise the categories of teaching performance invoked by effective teaching research outside contexts. So how could there possibly be a rich data-base of knowledge about the kinds of performance that are linked causally to pupil progress since *ex hypothesis* it would have to characterise those performances independently of contexts?

Secondly, we can ask how anyone can actually assess students against some of the 4/98 classroom performance standards, in particular those listed under 'planning' and 'teaching and class management'. The answer is that literally speaking they cannot. What actually happens is a more complex 'holistic' process. The whole edifice of 'standards' as they relate to teaching quality becomes an irrelevant and time-consuming game which is played by ITT providers and students and is unrelated to the real process of supporting and judging the progress of entrants

to the profession.

Does this mean that judgements that a student or teacher has given qualities or skills associated with effective teaching are worthless? No, indeed, because educational practitioners are still struggling to assess with integrity. The judgements that individual standards relating to teaching performance have been achieved can indirectly convey a good deal to the community of professionals who are the audience. However, virtually none of this will be captured by the *literal description* of these standards. Education professionals have to proceed regardless of the fact that there is little surface meaning to the characterisations of teaching quality with which they are burdened.

As I remarked earlier, this situation has its dangers. The emptiness of the standards means that they may be caught up in an accountability process in which external agencies may give standards a 'meaning' that reflect political agendas whose educational implications have not been properly researched and argued. Certainly the experience of ITT providers over the last few years has been that one OfSTED team may not 'interpret' the standards in the same way as another. This possibility is built into the very fabric of 4/98. Even if it could be established that OfSTED is *not* ever politically motivated in any way, inconsistency was virtually inevitable.

Thirdly, what precisely is the 'effective teaching' paradigm advising teachers to *do* in the classroom? It may be argued that the State is entitled to lay down the kinds of *intentions* teachers ought to have for pupil-learning outcomes, though evidently these must be based realistically on pupil potential and must also take account of a range of basic moral and value questions. Needless to say, researchers into effective teaching have no mandate to lay down such intentions, though they do not always seem to be aware of this point.

Suppose then, that one of the teaching intentions required of teachers by government is that they 'structure information well' and a teacher wonders how she should do this 'effectively'. Effective teaching research *could not in principle offer* us any help. We have to use our professional judgement in our particular context in the light of our knowledge of the group of pupils we are teaching. If we are experienced teachers we will be well aware that we will reach an indefinite variety of different solutions to this particular problem from one day to the next, even with the same pupils.

It may be objected that there must be something wrong with these arguments because they 'prove' far too much. Surely there are some perfectly clear recommendations from effective teacher research which those with common sense can understand perfectly well. For instance, teachers particularly in primary schools, are being advised to offer their pupils more interactive whole-class sessions and that pupils should be spending less time working on their own. Everyone knows what this means!

I have to accept that the *negative element* in this guidance is reasonably clear. What is being discouraged is so much time being spent by pupils working on their own, rather than in direct contact in a large group with the teacher. However, it simply is *not clear* what interactive whole-class teaching means, since it can legitimately cover an indefinite variety of different actions, strategies and processes. It is quite obvious moreover that there are plenty of possibilities for interactive whole-class teaching that all would agree are very unlikely to promote pupil progress and some of which would be distinctly immoral! Teachers *have* to make choices from a vast number of interactive whole-class teaching repertoires. Further, there will still be occasions when for all kinds of good reasons pupils will spend significant amounts of time working on their own and the proportion of 'interactive whole-class teaching' will be modest.

It does not follow from the argument in this article that students cannot learn from experienced teachers. At least some of the latter have knowledge about advancing pupils' learning that most beginning teachers lack. The debate here has been about a particular way of conceptualising, researching and assessing effective teaching. Questions about the proper conceptualisation of treating expertise remain, and have scarcely been touched in this article. Ironically, we can agree with David Reynolds when he speaks of the 'need for a blend of methods' (Reynolds, 1999a) especially since he seems to suggest that the particular blend selected 'should depend on factors such as student age, ability and, most crucially, the task to be performed or the subject to be learned' (Reynolds, 1999a). Some would wish that he had made a few more factors explicit, such as the level of student motivation, the teacher's personality, what has taken place for the pupils just before the teaching under consideration and general aspects of the school context and climate. It is a *very important point* that this list could be extended almost indefinitely.

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STOPPing Performance Pay

PATRICK YARKER

In this article, Patrick Yarker, a secondary English teacher who has recently joined the Editorial Board of *FORUM*, documents the resistance or otherwise of the main teaching union, the NUT, to performance-related pay and how it brought about the creation of STOPP – School Teachers Opposed to Performance Pay.

As part of its assault on the public sector, that space in the capitalist economy which workers have won for themselves in order to provide the services everyone needs regardless of ability to pay, New Labour has accelerated and extended Conservative attacks. Privatisation and its hybrids (PFI, PPP) have been the main weapons, but along with these have come changes in methodology and culture imported from the private sector or modelled on its practices. As ever, language signals the shift, and so the climate of education is currently described by learning outcomes, benchmarks, action-plans, job-holders, line-managers, key stages … People even speak happily of 'value-added', as if the students who leave school were more valuable than those who arrive.

The latest example of the colonisation of the public sector by private sector practices (infiltrating the one place as it is being jettisoned in the other) is Performance Related Pay (PRP), together with its necessary mechanism Performance Management (PM). Teachers spectacularly rejected the proposals in the original Green Paper, and remain overwhelmingly opposed to PRP. A National Union of Teachers (NUT) survey of members before Easter 2000 had a high response, and showed 60% of respondents willing to strike against the imposition of PRP, and 80% prepared to take action short of striking. Yet, as will be seen, the NUT leadership failed to mount a credible or sustained campaign against PRP. It has been left to activists in the NUT and other unions to carry the fight. To this end they have established STOPP: School Teachers Opposed to Performance Pay.

At its 1999 Conference the NUT unanimously voted for a motion opposing PRP. Notwithstanding this, and for the second year running, the NUT leadership did nothing actively and decisively to counter the imposition of the government's policy, nor to implement that of the Union. It was apparent that the NUT leadership would instead make an accommodation with New Labour. STOPP organised in February 2000, at very short notice, a demonstration in London to oppose PRP. It drew 1500 teachers from across the country, including members of the NUT Executive, and those who would be on the General Teaching Council, as well as members of the NASUWT. Some teachers dressed in Victorian clothing to remind the NUT leadership of how that union was founded to oppose and remove the original PRP scheme over a century ago.

STOPP members lobbied the DfEE in March, and despite NUT leadership procedural manoueverings were able by the force of their arguments to win the union again to active opposition to PRP at the NUT Conference in the Spring, and to institute a ballot for a one-day strike. Doug McAvoy (NUT's General Secretary) at once refused to comply with the Conference decision to campaign for a 'Yes' vote, thereby breaching NUT rules, and within a month had a motion passed on the NUT Executive to call off the ballot STOPP kept the campaign alive with a regional conference in Leeds, attracting teachers from across the North of England to hear from a member of the PCS (the Civil Service union) about what PRP and PM meant in practice. Particularly telling was information from the union's statistical analysis which showed how PRP discriminated against Black and Asian workers.

Meanwhile STOPP scrutinised line-by-line the DfEE model proposals for PM and produced the amendments necessary to protect teachers from the worst excesses of the policy. STOPP stands to PM/PRP and will not be co-opted by the process, but it recognises the need to give what protection is possible to teachers across the country facing the implementation of the government's policy. STOPP materials also analysed the responses of the NUT, NASUWT and SHA to the model proposals, and indicated not only where these were found wanting, but also how to improve them, so that all union reps had the material necessary effectively to intervene as the PM policy was being drawn up in their school. In some cases, where union-groups have been strong, organised and well-led, this has meant that the intended linkage of pay with 'pupil progress' (which the Government hoped would mean results in public exams such as SATs or GCSE) has been avoided.

At the end of the year STOPP held a national conference in London. In spite of floods and chaos on the privatised railways, 60 teachers from different parts of the country attended. That conference called for the NUT to implement its own policies, including a flat-rate no-strings rise for all teachers. Such a policy contrasts with the government's threshold arrangements which do nothing for the pay of new or recent entrants to the profession and which will lay teachers passing over the threshold open to increased workload and the possibility of more individualised contracts in return for biennial (not annual) incremental rises in pay, provided there is enough money in the school's budget to fund the rise. STOPP saluted the 20% of eligible teachers who refused to apply for the threshold payment, but understood that in the absence of effective union counter-action, teachers would apply. Desperate to embed the threshold arrangement this year, the government committed to funding it fully, and it was understood that a very high percentage of applicants would receive the rise, but it has been made clear that such 'generous' funding-arrangements will not obtain in future years. The overhauled system is not designed to reward the vast majority of teachers, but to ration pay according to definitions of performance set according to the DfEE's model PM policy 'by consent where possible' or in other words by imposition where necessary. PM/PRP extends the reach of all the recent tendencies toward increased

surveillance of classroom teachers. It strengthens the hand of managers to control what we do in our classrooms and how we do it. As such, it tightens yet more the government's centralised grip on educational practice. However, with staff shortages increasingly commonplace in every subject and across the country, and recruitment to Initial Teacher Training well below what is needed to staff schools adequately, the conference saw that teachers could make demands. STOPP called on teachers to make maximum use of official union sanctions to disrupt PM where they could, to sign the national petition on pay, to build support for a boycott of PM where possible, and for a demonstration or rally in London timed to coincide with the Schoolteachers' Pay Review Body decision early in 2001. Teachers individually, school-groups and union branches should affiliate to STOPP, set up local STOPP groups, and involve themselves in the campaign.

Many STOPP members are in the NUT. That union's leadership has accommodated to the Blair/Blunket agenda. General Secretary Doug McAvoy justified this on BBC radio by protesting that the government had a huge majority and so could not be prevented from imposing its will. No clearer evidence of the gulf which divides a union leader (who is paid more than three times the salary of a classroom teacher) from the members who pay him and who remain opposed to PM/PRP could be offered, unless it be the letter McAvoy sent to every eligible NUT member telling them to apply for the threshold payment and not to listen to those who were arguing against applying *and in favour of the NUT's own policy: a flat-rate pay-rise for all.* McAvoy is about to relinquish the role of General Secretary. His stewardship, and the control exercised at the top of the NUT by members of the Broad Left who support him, has seen teachers suffer real-term pay-cuts year on year, the surrender of the SATs boycott, a vast expansion of testing, creeping privatisation of state schools and the increased atomisation of the profession through accommodation to threshold, 'fast-track' teachers, Advanced Skills Teachers, and now to PRP/PM, as well as a continued readiness to ignore the democratic processes of the NUT and the policies it decides.

Many of us entered teaching to give something back to society: to contribute to the common good and to help others. Such reasoning can seem increasingly outdated now, something fit only to mumble against the daily clamour for general approval of the enterprise culture, entrepreneurship, 'wealth-creation' and other euphemisms for capitalism's dog-eat-dog approach to the world. The Prime Minister condemns comprehensive schools, his Education Secretary lies about halting selection by ability, New Labour out-Tories the Tories in their ability to underfund schools as a proportion of GNP, and ministerial initiatives remove more and more of teachers' professional autonomy. PM/PRP threatens to narrow further the educational offer made in schools. Teaching-to-the-test will carry a cash-prize, and the testing-culture which has seen children in England and Wales become the most tested in Europe will continue to cast its shadow over the lives of students and their teachers. PRP is a market-mechanism, and education should not become a market. Teachers know this, and that is why they will continue to resist performance-pay. They should have the loud support of their unions in so doing.

To affiliate to STOPP, contact:
kevin@camdnnut.demon.co.uk
martinpd_uk@yahoo.co.uk
£5.00 individuals, £10.00 school groups

Testing, Testing, Testing … Investigating Student Attitudes Towards, and Perceptions of, Eleven Years of Testing and Target Setting

NON WORRALL
The author is currently Deputy Head of a large girls' comprehensive school. She has extensive experience of classroom-based research and is particularly concerned about the way in which the voice and experience of young people is being largely ignored and discounted. For example, what do young people make of being continuously tested for 11 years? Her article is an account of listening to the voice of those who had this first-hand experience and a summary of its implications for policy-makers.

> '*We know we're the guinea pigs and there's not much we can do about it' – Year 11 student's explanation of her year group's position as the first cohort to experience all of the National Curriculum assessments from Year 2 onwards.*

When the year group who took their GCSEs in June 2000 entered primary school between September and May 1988-89, they were destined to become the children who would first experience the full panoply of the Government and DfEE's new testing and target-setting regime. In the spring and summer terms of 1991 they were the first children to be assessed by their teachers in English, Maths and Science; they are now the first year group to be taught the new AS syllabuses which have replaced the established A levels. As a teacher I am concerned about the effects on pupils of being in the vanguard of such an all pervasive initiative as the National Curriculum and its accompanying assessment arrangements. As these students have now passed beyond compulsory to voluntary post-16 education, it seems an appropriate time to try to find out how they feel, with hindsight, about their experiences of Key Stages 1-4.

Writing in 1990, Tim Brighouse envisaged 'a point where every practising teacher will become familiar with the *newspeak* of attainment targets, statements of attainment, levels, keystages, programmes of study, standard assessment tasks, and profile components'.[1] Certainly this is now the case, with teachers adjusting necessarily quickly to the new and still developing (i.e. frequently changing) assessment system created alongside the National Curriculum. Despite the continuing debate about the reliability and validity of the SATs, particularly those for English, pupils and parents are given individual and comparative results indicating progress at the end of each Key Stage. Schools and colleges are judged, through PANDAs and the League Tables, on their students' achievements at the end of KS2, 3, 4 and 5.

The students themselves are as aware of these processes and procedures as any of the adults in their lives, but are also the people who have to sit the tests and live with their individual assessments. Tim Brighouse entitled his chapter 'What Does it Mean to the Youngster?' My intention is to present a microcosm of some of the reactions and experiences of a small sample of these youngsters whose achievements and attitudes represent the outcome of a decade of governmental drive to improve educational standards.

I teach in a non-selective girls' comprehensive school in an outer London borough. I decided to seek the views of a volunteer sample of students, now in Year 12, on their experiences of testing and target setting from Year R onwards. Of the 16 volunteers interviewed, 13 are taking 3, 4 or 5 AS courses, plus Key Skills, three are on GNVQ Intermediate courses. They have in common the decision to remain in a school environment for post-16 education. Their profiles of examination success are varied, although a significant majority (80%) had achieved at least 5 A* – C passes at GCSE. Certainly as a school, the benefits of the government's intervention, in terms of examination statistics over the last decade, are clear as shown in a steady rise in achievement (from 42% A – C grades in 1991 to 69.4% in 2000) but how have the students felt about their enforced roles in the new testing and target-setting arrangements?

In a series of semi-structured interviews, I asked each student to reflect upon her memories of experiences of testing and target-setting from the time she entered primary school onwards. I then probed more generally to uncover any enduring attitudes and opinions about testing and their perceptions of themselves as learners, in an attempt to discover any longer term effects of the assessment system of the National Curriculum. What are the immediate effects on pupils of our attempts to establish the four assessment purposes – formative, diagnostic, summative and evaluative [2] – as envisaged by the TGAT Report.[3]

KS1. Playing with Sand … or Dolls …

Having entered school between September 1988 and May 1989, when the children reached Year 2 in May 1991, as designated by Circular 5/89 [4], they were tested by their teachers in English, Maths and Science. At this point, the NC assessments were in accordance with the 10-point scale recommendations of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing. These first tests proved so cumbersome for teachers, that the Dearing Review [5], carried out during 1993, was charged, among other things, with simplifying the assessment arrangements, particularly so that KS1 teachers could reduce the number of hours (reportedly as high as 70 hours per student for the first cohort tested) to manageable proportions. Given the outcry that I recall from primary teachers at the time – or as Libby Purves in her column in *Times Educational Supplement* on 5 January 2001 defined as 'the first infamous seven-year-old SATs, the ones that were remodelled without apology after a chaotic year of tick-boxes and bewilderment,' – I asked the, now 16- to 17-year-olds, what they recalled of their experiences. Their memories created a very different picture. A common reaction was a complete blank:

> *I don't remember anything at all about any tests in Infants. (Student JS)*

or, at the most, a memory jogged by later explanation from an adult:

> *I can remember doing them but I didn't know they were tests. My mum told me they were tests but I didn't know. (Student RS)*
>
> *I have a vague memory of something to do with sand and then afterwards somebody – it must have been my teacher – saying 'That was your test'. (Student VD)*

Others, however, did have a general picture of something special happening:

> *I do remember the teacher coming in and saying 'We're going to be doing a little test today' and we were sat down and it was really, really quiet. (Student NP)*
>
> *I can remember where I sat – I remember going into another room with another teacher and sitting there with all these dolls and doing science related questions. (Student NWH)*

For some individuals, even at this very early age, the SATs meant distinct changes in classroom organisation and the work they were expected to do:

> *… depending on what levels you got we were put into some kind of separate Maths group and that continued into Year 3. I think because my teacher in Year 3 was Maths – she had the Maths degree so she was the one who encouraged it in the Juniors. (Student SJ)*

The majority of the students I spoke to seemed to have remained blissfully unaware of the turmoil their teachers were experiencing in these early days of the National Curriculum. This may partly have been the result of the decision that the results of these first SATs would be unreported. For whatever reason, it is certainly the case that their primary years were largely untroubled by any consciousness of judgements being made about them as they progressed through the biggest exercise in large-scale assessment undertaken so far in this country.

KS2. They Were about the Teachers and the School, Not Us …

Although the Year 6 memories were qualitatively different in all cases, the pupils remained protected by the rationale given by the vast majority of their Junior school teachers. By the summer term of 1995, the girls all recall being well aware of the imminence of the KS2 SATs:

> *When I was 11, I knew I was doing it because for the week before we had – 'this might come up' or 'look at this, just in case' or 'look at that'. (Student VD)*

but they also were quite sure that the main reason for their doing the tests was in order for the teachers to compile statistics for the government:

> *I remember it all being for the school. It was more about the teachers so we didn't need to worry. (Student LRG)*
>
> *In Year 6 we were actually told we were going to do exams and that they were called SATs but they were more to do with statistics so we did not need to take them so seriously. (Student NP)*

This casual approach was not, however, the case for all of the girls. Some continued to be grouped within their primary classrooms on the basis of test results and, so, by the time they reached Year 6 ,were more conscious of what could be at stake:

> *In Year 6 it was a big deal if you were good enough to do the Extension papers. If you got a high level you felt good because you knew you were better than everybody else. (Student FNO)*

During the course of the interviews it became apparent that the timing of the KS2 SATs and the fact that these results were reported to parents and nationally, meant that the girls' recall of the end of the primary phase is indelibly marked by their first conscious awareness of being graded against others. The summative and evaluative functions of the SATs were clearly the strongest in their consciousness. Many of these pupils were at the same time sitting entrance examinations for local selective schools. Where their teachers and parents had almost conspired not to disturb their childhood innocence by bringing the KS1 SATs to their attention, at KS2 transfer time the adults' attitudes were significantly different:

> *We did practice tests and our teacher always seemed worried. She kept talking to us about the bits we got wrong. (Student AP)*
>
> *I remember my parents being so pleased with me. They kept smiling and telling the rest of my family. (Student SH)*

Attention was drawn to the pupils' results and praise given for success. They quickly absorbed what seemed to them to be their position in the academic pecking order:

I thought I was pretty average. I knew I definitely wasn't the brightest in the class because I didn't get the best SAT results. (Student RS)

However, it was also apparent to the girls that the SATs were only of minor importance compared to the entrance exams for the selective schools.

I thought I was quite a reject when I came to secondary school because all my friends got into [a local girls' grammar school] and I was the only one who didn't, even though I got the same SATs results as them. (Student NP)

When asked about their feelings about themselves as learners at this point in their school careers, several students similarly emphasised the impact of their failure to pass an entrance test as a defining ingredient in their self-perception. They underline the fact that their new awareness of the SATs results led at this point to increased competition between members of the class as they compared themselves with others:

My best friend was fantastic – she got fantastic levels for her age and I remember my reading was good and my spelling was good but my writing was absolutely appalling and I thought 'OK I'm not as clever as everyone else!' (Student SJ)

In fact, despite all of the claims from so many of the sample that the KS2 SATs were considered irrelevant:

I've never been someone who cared majorly about exams so I don't think I cared at all. I just wasn't bothered. (Student FB)

There is strong evidence, albeit from a minority of girls, that these KS2 results have had a lasting effect on their expectations and attitudes. Student SJ' s failure to achieve as high a level as she would have liked in the writing part of the English test would seem to have left her with a continuing dislike of an aspect of her work which she regards as weak.

Int: *Did you do practice tests?*
SJ: *Yes, I remember we did in English for* Macbeth *and I hated it because I had to write an essay!*
Int: *And you still hated writing?*
SJ: *Yes, still. I hated it.*
Int: *Is that still true?*
SJ: *Yes, I hate writing essays … writing my opinion and other people's opinions, I hate all that. Getting my own ideas across in writing I find really difficult – that's why I'm not doing English at AS.*
Int: *What did you get for English at GCSE?*
SJ: *An A (laughs).*

There is a worrying tendency for the failure to achieve a desired level at KS2 to almost haunt some individuals. Student VD, for example, who was told that she had scored Level 3 in her Maths SAT, only missing Level 4 by one mark, still dwells on how this could have happened; despite the fact that she had progressed into the top Maths set by the beginning of Year 8 and achieved an A grade in her GCSE. However, on the whole, the feedback from the students remains reassuring in that the majority record what could be regarded as a healthy ability to take it all in their stride.

It is noticeable that none of the students drew attention to the existence of Teacher Assessments; the only experience of assessment they recall of their primary years is SATs. They otherwise seem to have experienced no conscious concerns about testing, regarding things such as spelling tests as routine but unthreatening. One student (NP) recounted in some detail the formative feedback she and her parents received from her primary school teacher at the end of Year 6:

My parents were really pleased with the feedback because the teacher could tell us exactly how much we missed the next level by and so on. … because at that stage we got an extra sheet saying 'Although she's got this, we think she should concentrate in particular on these things.' We've still got that sheet.

However she is the only one of the sample students to refer to such detailed feedback and the only one from her particular primary school. The other nine primary schools represented in the sample would seem not to have developed a system of individual feedback since the majority simply remember getting the levels along with their end of year report. Given the timing of the Year 6 SATs any diagnostic information gathered from the SATs would have needed to be passed to the secondary schools. At this point the transfer system at 11 plus within the LEA was not helpful to such a process.

KS3. Scary!
Even Though They Don't Really Count …

The year group transferred to secondary school in September 1995. Did the students' new teachers make use of their NC assessments? From the girls' perspectives, the answer here is a resounding 'no' since not one of them recalls any individual teacher of any subject referring to their KS2 results. Despite the well-thought-out and extensive programme of transfer interviews and discussions, no overt reference was ever made to the SATs. Not surprisingly, all of the sample students describe the speed with which they accepted that the test results which had so interested their parents were of no actual value since they had no influence on any grouping or expectation made of them during Year 7.

But, by the time the year group reached the end of Year 9, in the summer of 1998, the National Curriculum was well established in secondary schools. The guinea pigs were not trail blazers but were inheriting a system that had been developed beginning with the Year 7 cohort of September 1991. Teachers had become more used to the regime of teacher and standardised assessment tasks. Although still mainly focused on GCSE and A Level results, since these were what affected their positions in the competitive League Tables, secondary schools had internalised the need to begin to focus on demonstrating the value added by the school vis-à-vis KS2 results. The emphasis on the SATs, as opposed to Teacher Assessments, had already been established.

The school adopted a formal examination approach to organising SATs. No longer would students be protected from the cold reality of being tested. The primary school approach of doing SATs in the classroom, sitting at either end of tables with a familiar teacher, was a thing of the past. Not surprisingly, girls, and parents, who had been

very relaxed about testing in primary school were suddenly quite alarmed by the intensity of the teachers' preparation and expectations:

> *I was really scared. My mum had bought me lots of revision books and I worked through them on my own. I thought they were really important because people were getting really worked up about the exams and how well they'd done. (Student NWH)*

> *I was terrified in Year 9. I spent more time – like all night long the night before – revising for my Maths SAT … Even though teachers had said the Year 9 SATs didn't matter, I wanted to achieve what I knew I could do and I thought that meant putting in so many hours of my own time. (Student VD)*

Because of her memories of this period, the same student makes a plea for more effective communication with parents:

> *I think parents should be educated about how unimportant they are because my parents thought it was life or death about what I got but now, with my brother, they've realised because, with mine, nothing happened after I got them. So now my mum's realised that they're less and less important but I think all parents should know that before their children take any tests because otherwise they might put them under too much pressure.*

And yet other students still held fast to the belief that the KS3 SATs were no more important than the earlier ones, putting their personal emphasis on the *real* exams that were to come at the end of KS4. Student FB's response indicates a determination to ignore current results in favour of a declaration of future application:

> *I didn't do brilliantly well. I remember my mum and dad talking to me about having to settle down and stuff and concentrate on work and that sort of thing. But I knew at the back of my mind that I could do better. I felt that when the time comes when it's really important, when it's GCSEs, then I will put everything into it and I will do well. I just didn't think SATs meant anything about me.*

A small minority of students did make positive use of the KS3 SATs. For example NP, the one student who had received detailed formative feedback from her teacher about her KS2 SAT performance, states:

> *When my results came through, I looked at them and thought they were like a learning point and it was from then on that I thought 'From here I can go on and do better' – you know, learn from what I didn't do or did do.*

Several students laboured under the misapprehension that their SATs results would determine their GCSE groups, despite the fact that the school teaches all students in mixed ability groups for all subjects except Maths and Modern Foreign Languages, for which subjects the students were already in ability sets. The students and their parents knew this from the GCSE Options Booklet made available in February and yet, in May, the students apparently still believed that they would be placed in ability sets for all subjects:

> *Well, I knew there were different levels for GCSE so I thought they'd use my SATs levels to put me in groups so it was very important that I did as well as possible. But then afterwards, nobody ever talked about them so I didn't really know why we'd done them at all. I was a bit fed up really 'cos I'd worked so hard and then they didn't count. (Student PB)*

When the results of the SATs were given out, students remember some teachers being quite thoughtless about the public manner in which this was done. For example, some Maths classes were given their results alphabetically in front of the whole class, in some Science classes individuals were called up one by one. The prominence given to the results of the externally marked SATs dominates their explanation of this moment in their lives. They cannot recall the levels awarded by Teacher Assessments, even in English where most of them talked of the teachers' emphasis on the Speaking and Listening component, whereas each one of them could recite their SATs results for the three core subjects. Assessments in the other foundation subjects of the NC have been consigned to oblivion, although one or two students did offer to look them up in their end of Year 9 reports!

The very public nature of these first 'real' exams, as the guinea pigs call them, meant that their awareness of being judged against each other became more pronounced:

> *You had to find out what was average so you knew whether you were above or below or on average – I remember thinking my results which were 6, 6, 7, were quite good because they were better that some other people's. Some people were down because they got 4s so they felt miserable.(Student JS)*

> *Getting them all together with people sitting next to you who've done really well, it's really off-putting if you get Level 3 and everybody else has got 6 or 7. I'd worked so hard but none of it was worth anything. I might as well 've just mucked about like some other people. (Student LD)*

All of these students retain a very strong memory of the issuing of these results and reflect upon the wide-ranging effects on themselves and their peers. There is, however, an acknowledgement that the impact on longer-term attitudes and aspirations is unique to each individual:

> *If they didn't do so well, it encouraged some people to work harder to get the grades in GCSE but some people I know were 'Well I tried for my SATs and I didn't get any better than that so how can I do better at GCSEs – it's not even worth trying!' (Student AP)*

It would certainly seem to be the case that the Year 9 SATs are a key determinant in students' expectations of themselves and others. The use of the average SATs score as a predictor of GCSE grades, means that teachers' attitudes towards target grades for students are increasingly more influenced by these results than by any other data about past performance. These students would

seem to have absorbed, by a process of osmosis with no conscious intention on anybody's part, that this is the case. If so, is there now a danger of the SATs becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy of future GCSE grades?

KS4. The Ones that REALLY Count …

The recommendation of the Dearing Report that revised GCSEs, not the TGAT 10 level NC scale, should remain the mode of assessment at KS4, meant that the cohort reaching Year 11 in September 1999 were the third year group, following the revised syllabuses, to benefit from the experiences of preceding year groups. The vital importance of success at GCSEs had been present in their minds even during Year 6, so how did they adapt to knowing that these exams really were 'about them', not just about the school or their teachers? Had their experiences of being tested and assessed prepared them effectively, in their eyes, for 'the ones that really counted' (Student JS)? And what about the Targets Initiative launched jointly by Ofsted and the DfEE in May 1996?[6] Was that now helping the guinea pigs in their quest for success?

Overall, the strongest message about the effects of the SATs upon these students' outlook is neither positively encouraging nor highly critical. They seem to have reached saturation point:

> *To be honest I don't think SATs are a good idea at all because you have so many that by the time you get to your GCSEs, the important ones, you're almost blasé and not in the least bit worried about it. (Student VD)*

> *I think earlier year groups would have thought their GCSEs were more important, they would've meant more to them, because they hadn't sat so many tests when they were younger. Because we've done so many tests it means they're less important because ev'ry test you do you kind of think they're less important all together. (Student RS)*

One student gave a more familiar explanation of her relative underperformance in GCSEs:

> *… suddenly in Year 10 we were all in different groups for different options and a group of us got together and were having a laugh about everything. And suddenly GCSEs were only a few weeks away and – erm – they crept up on us really fast and I guess, not that it was really too late to do anything about it, but I had other things on my mind that shouldn't have been prioritised above school but – erm – were at the time. I was out socialising too much. I shouldn't – 'cos the thing was when I was out with my friends I knew that I should have been at home, sitting down, doing some revision for Maths or something like that but obviously at the time I wasn't particularly interested in doing that. (Student FB)*

But, within this volunteer sample she is a lone voice. A different and equally worrying explanation of underperformance involves the lack of excitement and adrenaline caused by such over-familiarity with testing:

> *Doing so many tests does undermine the value of exams, I think, because I know I could have done better in my GCSEs … usually if you're doing an exam the adrenaline on the day really helps but I only felt that in Graphics where you do research beforehand but you have to be creative with that knowledge in the exam itself. In the other exams, like in Geography for example, I just felt 'Oh, no, another case study' and I was just droning out facts that I didn't care about. I had so little enthusiasm about how well I did. (Student LRG)*

So although there is a strong acknowledgement that 'practice is good in the long run' , the sample group also register a powerful awareness of the dangers of over-testing.

Target Setting: learning to learn or learning to play the system?

I was interested to discover from the sample group whether the advent of Target Setting had in any way helped them to be more pro-active as learners. The school had spent a considerable amount of time and energy in devising and implementing a system of subject-specific and general target setting that we hoped would enable each student to develop an individual action plan based on a more thorough understanding of her own learning strengths and needs. The students' responses to questions probing the effectiveness of the new system were disappointingly negative. Formal attempts to help them set subject-specific targets, in their opinion, simply became, at best, monotonous and repetitive and, at worse, a system to be played:

> *You look at your piece of paper and you think 'I've got to come up with something' – but some of the things you should put down make you sound absolutely hopeless so you make something up that you know you can do already just so that at the end you can say 'Have I achieved this?' 'Oh, yes, I can now do this extremely well. Oh yes, I've met my target.' You can lie so easily because no one can check anyway! (Student LD)*

Equally, the new system of Academic Reviews [7] which replaced Parents' Evenings and was introduced to involve parents as well as students in the process of setting [8] overarching targets to improve learning, is treated just as dismissively:

> *The interview with the teacher and talking through all the subjects with my mum was quite good because we had time to go through it all but then I never looked at the targets again after that day so in the end it didn't really help. (Student AP)*

However, many of the students drew very clear distinctions between target setting and formative feedback to help them improve specific aspects of their work, seeing much greater value in specific help to raise the standard of particular aspects of work set, by improved understanding of what is required:

> *The feedback is the most important bit because then I know exactly what to do. Getting detailed comments on drafts of English coursework and being able to see*

what a good essay looks like has helped me a lot. I think I'm a lot more confident about being able to tackle an assignment now. (Student AS)

Some students found their own ways of synthesising advice and their own ideas:

I compromised. I did half and half. Like the teacher doing my review said 'Why don't you use cue cards for History revision?' and I was going to do crib notes. I said I'd do it on the cue cards but my way of revising was to go over something and then come back to it so I did that but using the cue cards so I kind of used both methods together. (Student SJ)

The work that many teachers have done to build formative assessment into their teaching seems to be having a considerable and positive effect on student learning:

As long as a teacher tells me or shows me exactly where to change something, I feel I can always do better but I need it to be about my work not just general feedback about the whole class because then I don't know which bits apply to me. (Student PB)

Some teachers are excellent at explaining exactly why and how something needs to be done differently – or just explaining again and again until I know I've got it – if they take us seriously and believe in our potential we know we can improve – I've really felt this in English and Science where we always get very clear feedback about what we've done well and what needs changing. I'm sure that's why I did so well in these subjects in my GCSE. (Student MP)

For all the students, however, there is a clear distinction between formal target setting and formative feedback. The former seems to them to be about generalised statements of intent, while the latter is the approach which improves their understanding and performance. Perhaps these distinctions are inherent in the ways in which in this particular school target-setting has been developed alongside, rather than as an organic part of, assessment practices.

A Last Word …

My last question to each of my volunteer sample was to ask them to reflect on any particular outcomes of their experience of the NC testing regime and perhaps make suggestions of ways to improve the situation for future year groups. They register general approval of the desire to track individual progress from the moment of starting school, but also sound several cautionary notes as well as offering specific pieces of advice:

If you get too used to tests, you won't strive so hard – you won't take so much care. If there were fewer tests, each one might have meant more. (Student RS)

It's built up my confidence a lot but I don't think introducing more tests in Year 7 and 8 would be a good idea – you'd just get people completely turned off, especially if they're getting low levels. (Student SJ)

I don't think the SATs have had any effect on me because they weren't made a fuss of and I'd have had to do GCSEs anyway. But it's arguable because there are people I know who are saying it's not worth going on with education because there've been so many tests and it's been going on for so long that we'd be better off going out to work – which is what they've done. (Student JS)

Drawing attention to the need to focus more firmly on the diagnostic and formative functions of assessment, Student NWH proposes:

Perhaps it would be better if we did SATs at the end of Year 5 and Year 8? Then the teachers could really help us by working on the things we did badly on – and in Year 8 it might be better because all I remember doing in year 8 was spending all my time worrying about social things. If we did SATs then it would mean we could have a year to work on improving before we started GCSEs – I think that would be better all round.

At a point where they are looking forward to the first AS module examinations in January, their heartfelt pleas about the never-ending workload give rise to questions about our guiding principles and intentions:

Because there's been so much work, I don't feel as if I'm ever having a break. Last year they had a week's induction and settling in period – we had a morning and then it was straight into learning on new courses. I had to work all through half term and now with modules in January I'll be lucky if I have two days off. We've never stopped working. I don't think it should be such a chore. (Student VDA)

Perhaps we, who form the educational establishment, should ask ourselves what we are gaining if we lead our young people to see learning as a never-ending chore instead of a life-enhancing challenge? Perhaps we should consciously devise a longitudinal study of a truly representative sample of school students whose experiences and opinions could feed into policy making. Or shall we simply bury our heads in the sand, accept what is currently imposed, drawing comfort from the students' insistence that what counts in terms of learning is imaginative, engaging teaching, not testing?

To make people succeed, it's not to do with tests and results and exams. It's more to do with the teachers making people interested in the subject – like our History teacher who knew part of the syllabus was really boring so he made up a game about it for us to do so that we'd be interested and want to learn it. (Student JS)

Notes

[1] *Managing the National Curriculum*, Brighouse, T. & Moon, C. (Eds) Longman, 1990.
[2] *Using Assessment for School Improvement*, James, M. Heinemann, 1998.
[3] *Report of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing*, 1987.
[4] *The Education Reform Act 1988: The School Curriculum and Assessment*, DES Circular 5/89.
[5] *The National Curriculum and its Assessment: Final Report*, Ron Dearing, [December 1993], SCAA, 1994.
[6] *Setting Targets to Raise Standards: a survey of good practice*, DfEE, May 1996
[7] *Value-Added and Raising Attainment*, Spours, K & Hodgson, C. Institute of Education, University of London.

Listening to Children

ALISON PEACOCK

The author is Deputy Head of a primary school in a small county town. Like Non Worrall in the preceding article, she feels it is particularly important for children to know their voices are being heard. In her aim to make the school a genuine 'community of learners', she describes the ways in which the school is taking steps to ensure that at its base are strategies for listening to the children's voice.

Our school is a one-and-a-half form entry, open-plan, modern school with a two-term intake nursery and 260 children. When I first visited the school three years ago I was impressed by the overall ethos which celebrated children's success. The many photographs on corridor walls of carnival floats, plays, children learning to swim, all spoke of a school that celebrated the achievements of children in the broadest sense.

I subsequently chose the school for my two daughters and joined the school as SENCo and full-time class teacher.

I have recently been appointed Deputy of the school and through this role am seeking to evaluate our approaches to teaching and learning through pupil research. As SENCo much of my time is spent working with children, parents and staff to find ways of making school and the curriculum more accessible. Children have so much to teach us about how school can look from their perspective, especially those children who for social or academic reasons are finding it difficult to cope. Through working with individuals, my eyes have been opened to the potentially vast difference between the way that children and teachers often view school.

We have several systems in place in the school for children to communicate with staff about issues that are of concern. The first amongst these is a School Council which meets twice a term. Membership of the School Council is made up of representatives from each class, Midday Supervisory staff, a governor and the Head. The School Council was established two years ago; I was interested to learn from the children how effective they believed the School Council to be.

We also have a card system on the playground which was originally devised by Year 6 children. The coloured cards are used to gain access to the building (blue for the loo, green to gain access to the Head's office to sit quietly, red for feeling unsafe). However, we suspected that this system was becoming less popular as the children who had been involved in its inception have since left the school.

Each class has an established PSHE and Citizenship programme and timetabled Circle Time. All new members of staff receive training in this and our teaching and learning policy is reviewed regularly.

Alongside these formalised systems for discussing issues amongst peers and with staff we have prioritised approachability and willingness to listen. Before engaging in research about our practice with children as partner researchers we felt it necessary to review and evaluate how effectively children felt that they presently had a voice.

At the beginning of the Autumn term we spent an INSET day reviewing opportunities for student voice at our school. We used the nine clusters of questions 'Evaluating the Conditions for Student Voice' (Fielding, 2001). Staff were unanimous in their support for further development of this work and we decided that the best way forward would be to work with the children across the school during that term to evaluate the effectiveness of current strategies and systems aimed at providing children with a voice about all aspects of school life.

We decided that as we needed to develop relationships of trust with our new classes we could initially begin to explore issues through theatre-in-education workshops. Following a visit from one such group in October, the children suggested that we had a postbox in the dining room. We made a box and the children decorated it. The box is situated in the dining room and has a notebook and pencil with it. Every day since the box has been in place there have been messages from children. These are usually related to friendship problems on the playground but have also included requests for locks on toilet doors, time for indoor dance practice and mirrors in the girls' toilets! The box appears to be providing an additional opportunity for children to communicate their concerns in an environment of trust.

Later in the term a PSHE drama consultant worked with classes through the school, exploring issues such as always 'doing your PB' (personal best). In the afternoon she worked with the two eldest year groups and when staff had left the room she asked them to share any problems they may be experiencing in school. Once grievances about meagre school dinners had been aired the children began to explore ways in which they could help others in school who may need to talk about problems. They were keen to instigate a buddy system and a quiet room where children could go if they needed to get away from the bustle of the playground. Discussion took place about the best way to choose who should be buddies/prefects and the importance of a badge. Some children stressed the need for training. Thomas from Year 6 was particularly concerned that 'people would need to remember to listen properly'.

We are currently in the process of talking further with the children in order that we can suggest their ideas to the rest of the school via the School Council and make changes as soon as possible.

Towards the end of term, following a staff meeting where we reviewed issues that children were bringing to us in Circle Time and PSHE lessons, I devised a questionnaire that staff could carry out with their classes.

'Giving Children a Voice' Questionnaire

Please go through these questions in Circle Time or with small groups and jot down responses

- ❏ *Do you think teachers should ask children what they think about school?*
- ❏ *Why?*
- ❏ *What sort of issues do you think children at the school would want to tell teachers about?*
- ❏ *If you wanted to tell a teacher a secret what would you do?*
- ❏ *How would you let someone know if you were being bullied?*
- ❏ *What would you do if you had a complaint or question about the school?*
- ❏ *What do you think the School Council should be for?*
- ❏ *Some children have suggested having Year 6 prefects that you could talk to if you had any worries. They would wear a badge and be available at lunchtimes to talk to you. Do you think this is a good idea?*
- ❏ *Some children have suggested an indoor quiet area every lunchtime during the winter. Do you think this is a useful idea?*
- ❏ *If you could change something about the school what would it be?'*

Questionnaire Responses

In response to the first question, children of all ages were almost unanimous in their response that teachers should ask them what they think about school.

Children from all year groups stressed the importance of happiness. Their comments included 'so they know you're happy'(Y1), 'because you need to be able to feel happy' (Y2), 'because they can make the school more happier' (Y6) and 'teachers need to know if we like this school' (Y2). Taylor in Year 2 commented that teachers should listen 'so you can check if we're feeling alright about things'. Year 6 voted unanimously that they learnt better when they felt happy. Year 4 pointed out that six hours a day spent in school 'must be a happy time'.

Children throughout the school felt that teachers needed the input of children to make improvements because 'children come up with better ideas because they have more imagination than grown ups' (Y5). A child in Year 1 commented that teachers should listen to children because they need to know 'if there are any improvements needed'. Year 6 felt it would be 'very unfair' if children were not consulted about changes to the school.

It was important for teachers to listen because they need to 'find out how children are getting on' (Y3), Jonathan in Year 5 felt that 'teachers wouldn't know the work is too hard if no-one told them'. Year 1 children told their teacher that she had to listen 'because it helps you to learn'.

Teachers asked their classes what sort of issues they felt children wanted to tell them about. One of the ways in which we have tried to consult the children about their views is to bring outside agencies such as theatre groups into school to explore potential issues of worry and conflict such as bullying.

Every class in the school mentioned bullying. They felt it was very important to let someone know if they were feeling unsafe or had been hurt. Interestingly, some of the older children commented that Circle Time was 'too public if you've got a problem'. Strategies for alerting teachers included writing a message and posting it in the box, staying behind at the end of lessons to talk to the teacher, telling parents and friends. George from Reception said he would 'whisper it in your ear'.

The School Council was felt to be an important way 'to help look after the school' (Y2) and 'to make school better' (Y1). A child in Year 4 said that the School Council could help 'understand the minds of the children'. Year 4 were concerned however, that sometimes the school councillors could also be the bullies. Children in Year 5 commented that sometimes you could 'lose track' of who the councillors were. On the whole the School Council received positive support throughout the school but there is clearly room for improvement and review.

Most children felt they could talk to their teacher or another trusted adult if they were being bullied. However, it must be borne in mind that the teachers were the ones delivering the questionnaire so it would perhaps be unlikely for children to give a different answer! Kate in my class felt she could come and talk to me at any time in the day but added candidly 'it would depend what mood you were in'.

The youngest children particularly liked the idea of communicating with the Head or Deputy through the post box. Some children in Year 6 were worried that their comments may be read or intercepted by other children and preferred to think they may be able to resolve peer problems amongst themselves. Christopher, a new member of our school, commented 'I wouldn't get bullied anyway, I'm in Year 6'. When I suggested that his younger brother in Year 2 may need help he insisted that 'he wouldn't Miss … he'd just hit 'em!'.

In the questionnaire I explained the idea of developing a buddy system on the playground. This idea was met with great enthusiasm by children in the school, with Lewis (Year 2) explaining that 'you wouldn't get hurt and you would be able to tell secrets'. Members of Year 4, however, felt the system could be abused. The class were asked to vote and 42% felt it was not a good idea because some children felt intimidated by Year 6. If we decide to try the new idea it is clear that we shall need to build in child evaluation early on to monitor what is happening and how best staff can support the scheme to ensure fairness and usefulness.

When asked to comment on those things children would change about the school if they could, responses tended to refer to more outdoor play equipment, school lunches and 'Golden Time'. Some children felt that there should be greater punishment of those who did not obey rules. Year 4, who are in search of a permanent teacher, felt that there was not enough discipline and punishment for naughty children and that Year 6 dominated areas such as the cloakroom. Clare in Year 5 however assured me that you have to put up with some things because 'you just can't have life perfect'.

I found the responses to the latter question very interesting. Children in our school are either totally satisfied with every aspect of their learning experience in the classroom (unlikely) or feel somehow that they are not expected to pass comment on it. Desire for change was expressed within the confines of areas that presumably children feel they are expected to have a viewpoint, i.e. playtime and friendships.

As a staff, we are in the process of evaluating the systems we have in place in school that enable children to have a voice. It seems that our next move will be to encourage children to reflect upon their learning and ways in which we can move together as partners to evolve a mutually reflective learning environment. Children will not have all the answers but they may well be able to help us with some of the most important questions.

Suggested Reading

Fielding, M. (2001) Students as Radical Agents of Change *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(3) (forthcoming).

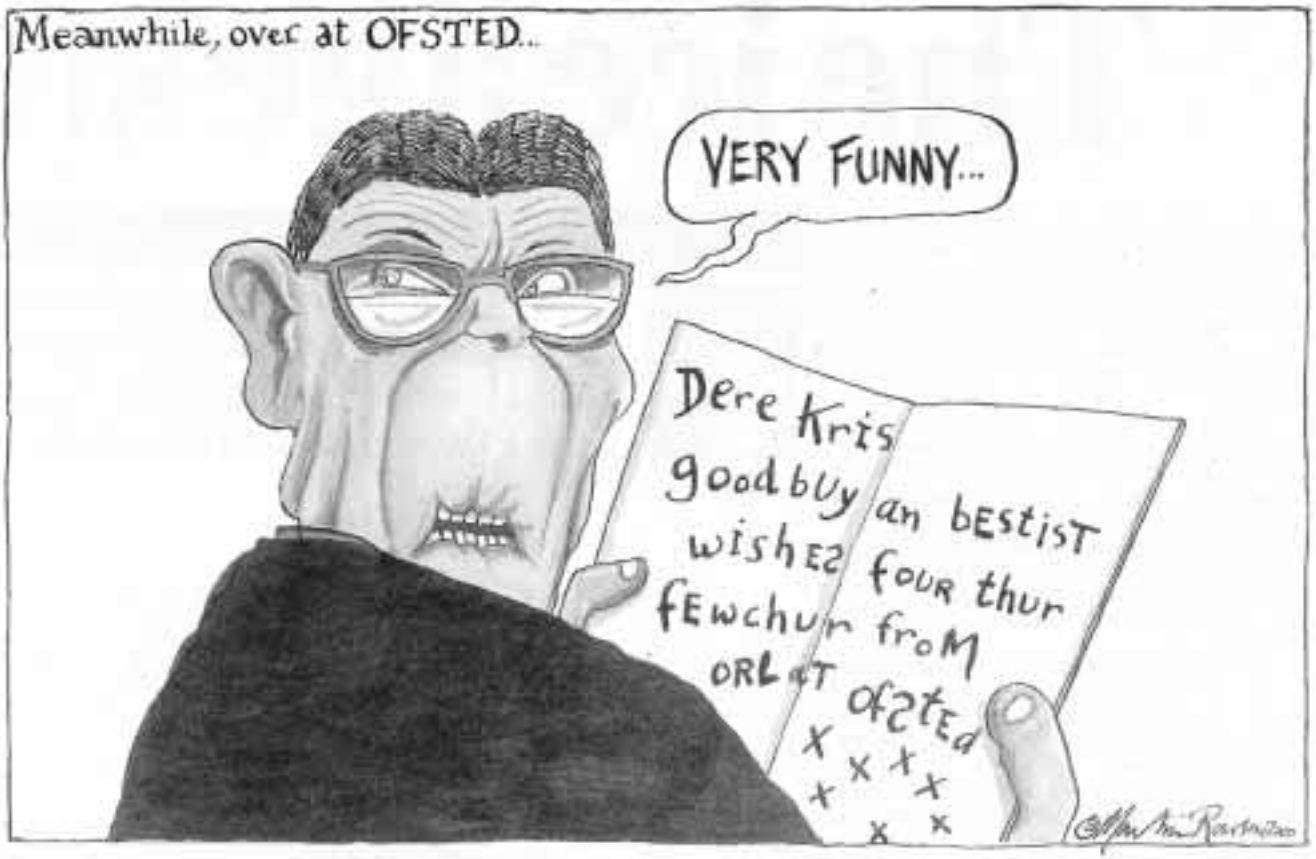
SooHoo, S. (1993) Students as Partners in Research and Restructuring Schools, *The Educational Forum*, 57, pp. 386-393.

Worrall, N., Wheeler, N., Ward, A. & James, M. (1999) Students as Researchers at Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School, University of Cambridge School of Education Newsletter, 5.

Theatre in Education

Sophie Lloyd's Educational Theatre, 'The Well Hard Show', PO Box 34, Liphook GU30 7YT

Lesley Williams, B.Y.T., 23 Larkswood Walk, Wickford SS12 9BY



Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*

A Word in Your Ear, Michael

SALLY TOMLINSON
Sally Tomlinson is Emeritus Professor of Education at Goldsmiths College London and a research associate in the Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford. With the top education adviser job up for grabs, Sally Tomlinson tells its present incumbent that she would lose the bossiness, military jargon – and football.

OKAY, so I won't get the job. They do not give top civil service jobs to sixty-something grandmothers, especially when they are also professors of education with Old Labour leanings. But the advert for the £90,000-a-year post as head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit does say the Department for Education and Employment is an equal opportunity employer, so it is worth a try.

Of course, the job currently belongs to Professor Michael Barber and I do not have his credentials, I never stood for Parliament against Michael Heseltine. But I did babysit Simon Hughes, now of Liberal Democrat fame, for three years and he turned out quite well. And I did send my children to city comprehensives, after which they got two science PhDs and an MA between them and are doing socially useful jobs.

However, I do not support any football team, although this might be a plus as many teachers are irritated by comparisons of football with the learning game. It might also be a plus to suggest changing the unit's culture from the macho club it often appears to be. We could get rid of the military jargon about being tough, having zero tolerance and mobilising parents, as well as all that patronising stuff about pressure and support. And I could probably help School Standards Minister Estelle Morris, for instance, by telling her it is not a good idea to write, as she did recently, to two national newspapers, claiming the Government had raised standards by closing 108 schools.

I was on a Labour committee in the early 1990s when we discussed the creation of an education standards commission, a prototype of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit. We never envisaged it being such a bastion of bossiness, imposing strategies and frameworks. Or such a scourge of failing schools, (you know, those schools in poor areas attended by a lot of poor children who cannot quite make five GCSE A-Cs and where it's cheaper to blame the teachers than shove in expensive help). And such a supporter of Fresh Starts that often turn into Sour Finishes.

I do not think we envisaged all the testing, targets and five-year-plans either. I have just visited schools in the Czech Republic and they seem keen to get away from that sort of thing. They talked about philosophies of learning and that chap Comenius (although I do not think he ever played for Prague United) and they wanted to hear about inclusive, not selective, education. They were a bit bemused that modernisation in the United Kingdom seems to mean centralised control and teachers being told it is their fault if the national economy is not competitive in global markets.

My aims for the unit would try to build on good things done, but a lot needs to be rethought. It is nice to know that central Government no longer has low expectations of the nation's brains, but we need more recognition about how recent that is. And we need to continue the slow rise in standards over the past 40 years without pompous management-speak or instant initiatives, and recognise the joint efforts at continuous improvement made by teachers, parents, young people, employers, local government and local and minority communities.

I would want teachers to be respected as real professionals, rather than technicians delivering a prepared curriculum, policed by an unpopular inspectorate.

Education markets would have to go, not least because in these petrol-conscious days it makes no sense to ferry children around in four-wheel drives. Competition between schools does not benefit all consumers equally, choice is a sham for many parents and increased social segregation works against raising standards for all and developing citizens who care about each other. Selecting a few gifted and talented to placate middle-class groups is not the answer – we have tried that often enough.

Observing the social and economic self-exclusion of highly educated professional and managerial groups should frighten us all. Bringing back more local democratic input into decision making would be a major aim, and I would want to raise educational standards both for economic ends and also to reclaim education as a humanising, liberalising, democratic force.

So I will not get the job, but I am sure Michael will carry on doing his best when (sorry, if) he gets it. I hope he will listen to David Hargreaves, new head at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, whose views on the post-14 curriculum really would raise standards. But a speech Michael made in Washington last July did have me worried. He said he wants education in the UK to be the best on the planet.

I hope his next initiative will not be interplanetary school competition, with league tables beamed down from Uranus, and the Vogon chief inspector Metalhead throwing educational failures into outer space. We shall see.

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Carnival as Inclusive Education: exploring carnival arts in the curriculum

CELIA BURGESS-MACEY
Celia Burgess-Macey, a lecturer in the Department of Educational Studies at Goldsmiths College London,
makes a very convincing case in this article for the introduction of the carnival arts into the curriculum and describes the enlivening and empowering effect they have had in the schools wherever they have been introduced.

> *Most of our cultural attitudes and unique behaviour are contained in Carnival and as such we should use such a festival as an appropriate and relevant material towards the development of educated citizens.*
> *People speak of us as having a carnival mentality. In that way they seek to degrade our people. They do not see beyond the tinsel, paint, velvet and feathers. They are yet to notice the creativity of mas makers, the imagination of band leaders and masqueraders.*
> *We have to realise that the aims of education are intimately bound up with value judgments and with the culture of the society providing the education.*
> *(Liverpool, 1990)*

> *Diversity is now central to the vitality of our national culture and a distinctive feature of it. There are immense benefits in this and there are deep problems … we have described contemporary cultures as dynamic and diverse. As a matter of urgency education must help young people to understand these processes and engage with and respect cultural perspectives different from their own. The dangers of cultural intolerance make this task a particular priority. We argue that creative and cultural education are dynamically related and that there are practical implications for the curriculum and for the classroom.*
> *(NACCCE, 1999)*

Carnival in schools provides an opportunity for the focused study and understanding of a particularly important cultural event, which has diverse historical and international origins and is in a constant process of development, incorporating new elements and linking different communities. Carnival has played a key role in the history of the resistance of Caribbean peoples to both slavery and colonialism and in Britain has been associated from its beginnings with the struggle against racism and for justice and equality. It is the most significant participatory cultural event for important sections of the black community, involving all age groups It is also a microcosm of cultural change. The pressing need for teaching approaches and materials which challenge institutional racism and positively recognise and include black and ethnic minority community perspectives make the understanding of these cultural processes essential for all teachers and all children. The recent report *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain* (Runnymede Trust, 2000) highlights the continuing failure of schools to meet the needs of ethnic minority pupils. African Caribbean pupils again appear to be losing out in schools, starting school at the same level as other pupils but falling behind by age 10. In its guidance materials for teacher trainers *Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils* (Teacher Training Agency [TTA], 2000) the TTA demands that student teachers learn how to 'recognise and respect the cultural experiences of all pupils' and states that 'successful schools are sensitive to the identities of their pupils and make efforts to include in the curriculum their histories, languages, religions and cultures'.

The incorporation of carnival workshops into the curriculum of primary schools and of teacher training courses has raised important questions about the nature of effective teaching and learning, particularly for young children. These questions can be located within a wider contemporary educational debate concerning the aims of education, the contested nature of the curriculum in a modern multi-cultural society, and the place of the arts, involving exploration of values, identities and cultural processes.

I took part in my first school carnival in London, at William Patten school in Hackney, in 1986 and began working on a Carnival curriculum project with Trevor Carter, Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) inspector for multi-ethnic and community education. It seemed possible then that a London-wide approach to carnival in schools would be developed. However at a political level forces were working in an opposite direction. The Conservative Government, angered by the Equal Opportunities policies of the Greater London Council (GLC) and ILEA were planning to abolish both. Meanwhile carnival was being contested on the streets of London:

> *In colonial times the black African peoples of the Caribbean had to fight hard against the British authorities to establish and maintain their carnival tradition of 'playing mas' on the streets. In the 1970s and 1980s black people of Caribbean*

descent in Britain have had to fight all over again to establish carnival in Notting Hill and for the right to play mas on the streets. Carnival is reported, not as a fantastic cultural and artistic achievement, but as a public order problem centred on street crime. The bottom line is calls for Carnival to be banned or taken off the streets and put into a park. (Association for People's Carnival, 1989)

No one doubts that the London carnival is here to stay. It is therefore important that all involved should work in a spirit of openness and co-operation to realise its considerable potential. (Hill, 1997)

['Mas' derives from masquerade, meaning carnival. To 'play mas' means to take part in Carnival in costume. Mas can also denote the costumes themselves.]

Some dedicated carnivalists, artists and educators have continued to work with schools and teachers to include carnival arts and carnival experience as an important and enjoyable dimension of learning. For the last three years we have also included carnival workshops on the teacher training curriculum at Goldsmiths College. This development is consistent with our positioning as a learning community concerned with the exploration of cultural and artistic processes.

The response of teachers and educational establishments to the possibility of working directly with carnival artists and organisations has been variable. Student teachers have been overwhelmingly enthusiastic and have engaged imaginatively with carnival, producing their own masquerade and writing their own calypsos, usually satirical comments on the theme of government education policy or on their course. Many primary school teachers have welcomed the opportunity to broaden the experiences of their children, others have been initially very dubious but have then become enthusiastic, yet others have been indifferent or hostile. Institutional boundaries are a real factor. There are important questions to be asked about the ability of schools to acknowledge the expertise that exists within black and ethnic minority communities, because they may operate with a deficit model of those communities, talking up problems and talking down positive factors. Some teachers find it particularly challenging to their own preconceptions to hand over the content of lessons and the control of their children to black adults.

The response of schools to the cultural diversity of their pupils has varied over the years reflecting changes in government policy (Epstein, 1993; Klein, 1993; Tomlinson, 1993; Runnymede Trust, 1993; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000) and as a result of pressure from parents and a black community increasingly dissatisfied with the inequality of educational experiences offered to their children and their obvious underachievement in,and exclusion from, schools (Stone, 1981; Troyna, 1993; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000).

The content of the subject orders of the National Curriculum is noticeably mono-cultural and Eurocentric (Hardy & Vieler-Porle, 1992; Searle, 1998; Tomlinson, 1993; Klein, 1993). In addition to the subject orders there have been non-statutory guidelines on cross-curricular themes such as multicultural education, citizenship, equal opportunities, personal and social and health education. Most commentators, including the Commission for Racial Equality and most recent government reports, agree that these guidelines have been virtually ignored and that often schools are failing to develop inclusive curricula and policies, and that Ofsted inspection reports have failed to highlight this (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 1995; NACCCE, 1999; Ofsted, 1999).

There is hesitancy in many primary schools to select areas of work which reflect the pupils' cultural backgrounds. Indeed, half the primary schools inspected take the view that responding in this way to the ethnic and cultural diversity of their pupil populations is unhelpful and patronising. (Ofsted, 1999)

It is not the purpose of this article to document the failure of the educational establishments and of teachers to recognise and tackle institutional racism, which is the root cause of the denial of educational justice to British-born children of African Caribbean descent. However, that is the context within which any curriculum reform must operate and it is my contention that the refusal to accord proper respect to important aspects of African-Caribbean children's cultural experiences constitute a racist response. There is much that needs to be challenged and changed.

Education for Citizenship is the most recent curriculum initiative but is an empty concept if it does not include teaching children about the equal right to justice and respect. The McPherson Report recommended that schools do more to teach children black history and culture and to engender attitudes of mutual respect between children.

With the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy strategies by the DfEE (1998–99), further pressures have been brought to bear on primary, and now secondary, schools and considerable worries have been raised about the impact on young children of a much more formal approach to teaching and the considerably diminished place for the development of creativity, the arts and the personal, social, moral, spiritual and cultural aspects of the whole child. The inclusive curriculum it seems is being undermined. However, early-years teachers can derive encouragement from the recognition in the new Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000) of the place of play and imagination in shaping the young child's engagement with the world. All teachers should also know that the Government does not speak with a single voice as the reports on creativity and on citizenship both demonstrate:

It is important to provide opportunities for pupils to work with and listen to people from other cultural backgrounds: hearing their stories, listening to their language, music and seeing images and designs that move them … Many of those who contributed to our inquiry believed that current priorities and pressures in education inhibit the creative abilities of young people and of those who teach them. There is particular concern about the place of the arts and humanities … there is a compelling argument for closer working partnerships with outside arts organisations.

(NACCCE, 1999)

There are many teachers and head teachers who recognise the statutory curriculum as flawed and who wish to respond more constructively to the challenge of developing a culturally diverse curriculum offer. Some of those teachers have conceptualised Carnival as just such a response. Such schools often see their parents and communities (school governors) as providing a countervailing pressure for the need to provide all children with models of knowledge which do not exclusively present white Anglo-centric experience as of value. My interviews with parents confirm that many parents, from all communities, see carnival as of value precisely in these terms:

For some children the Carnival was an important recognition of their culture and community and for others it served to increase understanding of a culture that might otherwise remain hidden from them.

I think it's wonderful. My children are really excited by it. They are learning to interact with people and love other cultures.

We used to have a kind of carnival in Pakistan. This is different, more Caribbean or Brazilian, and we are also enjoying it because basically it's fun and they can learn more about the countries from where these things originated because it's not English. It will add to their knowledge.

We were just saying we never had nothing like this in our day. It's really good for the children – they're happy aren't they? We mixed when we were young but not like this. They are all different. You've got to mix haven't you, in this day and age, otherwise they're lost aren't they?

Children need to see professional artists and people who are interested in their art form from outside the school. In Afro-Caribbean culture music is very important. I think it is very important but not all children get to listen to music at home. They need to get that in school.

Carnival is an inclusive experience because it embraces many art forms and creates learning opportunities in many subject areas. Carnival artists working in schools are very clear about this inclusivity:

Carnival is a very wholesome thing. It is very rounded and whole. It includes all aspects that you want to generate in the curriculum. It includes art, mathematics, sciences, geography, English. Apart from the techniques of making things there is the question of materials and how they work and then there is the buying side of things and finding the materials to make things, so in terms of young people it has a lot to offer to show them how to utilise things in their community, to make art and how to enjoy it at the end of it. (Amaru Chatawa, carnival artist and director of mas)

If you look at carnival art forms you are dealing with writing. In the end you discover what your concept is and write it down … You compose pieces of poetry (Robber Talk, calypso, jokes) it's all text. Dance is also about shapes, which is pure mathematics, and you are learning a lot about dexterity and co-ordination. You also look at the biology of the body because I tell kids 'Feel your sternum, your heart, move your hips, your pelvis, your vertebrae.' (Greta Mendez, carnival artist, choreographer and dancer)

Teachers have been able to link carnival to all subjects of the National Curriculum in a meaningful integrated way. There has been continued critique of the subject-divided curriculum, particularly from early years practitioners (Blenkin & Kelly, 1994; Nutbrown, 1994; Wood & Attfield, 1996) and even from some government sources as well:

The essence of creativity is in making new connections. These possibilities can be frustrated by rigid divisions in subject teaching which the current pressures tend to encouraged. Outside schools some of the most dynamic developments are the result of the interaction of disciplines. (NACCCE, 1999)

An inclusive curriculum needs to make these connections possible in children's learning. Yet in the current educational climate quite often the opposite process is going on:

I wish I could say we do as much as we used to, but we don't and that I am very sorry about. But we feel it is valuable because it is an enriching experience for everybody. It is also valuable to have artists in school because some children have difficulty accessing experiences like this … being taken to the theatre, art galleries, libraries … it doesn't happen for some children so the gap widens between children whose parents do all those things and those who can't. So we try to fit these workshops in near the end of term when timetable is more relaxed. In the past we would have had them at the beginning of term so we could use them to build in a lot of creative work, art, dance and creative writing and drawing all those aspects of the curriculum which are being squeezed out. (Headteacher)

A few years back we could go into schools for a week or two weeks and totally occupy a school and every class would become part of the carnival process and at the end of it all the classes would make costumes and become part of a band. That's one of the differences about working in a school because we actually start the process from design to finished product. So the whole school become involved in carnival fever. Everyone talks about carnival. Even at the end of the day we have sessions where parents could come and play the drums. Now that has changed. It is a quieter process so we may be working with one or two classes to create costumes and if there is dance maybe but the working of the school goes on alongside so it doesn't have the same impact I think

it did a few years ago. (Amaru Chatawa)

The questions of what children learn through studying carnival in schools is complex. It has become clear to me from interviews that the history and experiences of African Caribbean peoples in this country are somehow represented in carnival. Carnival represents the present day diaspora:

> *I'm not just making up a story, I'm living the story. All the time I have to learn in the different environment I go into, to go deeper into the story. The inner city is movement. Now with refugees that movement is so strong. We may go into school with a handful of ideas but they may not fit so we have to learn to listen and adapt. I meet a lot of challenges from children. (Alex Pascall, carnival artist, musician and storyteller)*

Carnival is an example of processes of cultural exchange and a site of struggle:

> *The carnival took place in the same streets where West Indians had been attacked and pursued by baying crowds. It began as a celebration, a joyous all-inclusive testimony to the pleasure of being alive … The people of the Windrush, their children and grandchildren have played a vital role in creating a new concept of what it means to be British. (Mike Phillips writing in the BBC Windrush materials).*

> *The children learnt about the history of carnival – where it started, why it started, how it started and alot of them know about carnival because they have been to Notting Hill but didn't really know why we have carnival. I had to learn about that myself. (Teacher)*

Michael la Rose, a carnival practitioner who has undertaken to record the history of carnival provided teachers with background material. This has been used by teachers to enable them to explain to children the origins of the carnival, to increase their historical and geographical understanding and to ensure that they did not see carnival as just a street party, and this is now included in the carnival resources pack produced by Lambeth schools carnival group (Lambeth Schools Carnival Group, 2000).

Carnival continues to be a superb example of the positive achievements of the black community who have engaged in and continue to engage in that historical process.

Carnival can therefore represent a challenge for schools in educating pupils for citizenship in a participatory democracy in a multicultural society and fast-changing interdependent world:

> *Britain's culture has been transformed over the past two decades with new forms, energies and cultural perspectives, being not so much absorbed as translated. (Arts Council, 1998)*

> *For some of those schools carnivals have become part of the wider carnival. In Wales for instance, in the mining areas, they had sort of carnival. Their carnival was on floats. We started by working in the schools and we made street bands to take to the carnival. Now those schools still carry on that tradition within the wider carnival so the school has had an impact on the carnival there and changed the face of it. (Interview with Amaru Chatawa)*

The study of carnival raises questions about the values placed by the dominant culture on the cultural practices of minority communities and the prevalent tendency to stereotype and over simplify, to pick and choose in what has been called a supermarket approach. Many of the influences on Caribbean carnival are from African, specifically Yoruba, traditions. There are many negative concepts of African culture which may interfere with a proper valuing of those aspects. Carnival can also help counteract these negative stereotypes when treated in a serious way:

> *Many of our black parents have expressed concern over negative attitudes to Africa from their own children and from white people. The project enabled the school to give black cultures a higher focus and to emphasise the African connection with the Caribbean and with carnival. It has encouraged debates with parents and governors on the importance of high visibility for black cultures. (Teacher)*

An inclusive curriculum must make space for the experiences, knowledge and skills which are abundantly present in minority ethnic communities. Schools must therefore find ways to work with individuals and organisations within those communities. Central to children's learning experiences about carnival was the positive role played by artists in schools and the enhanced visibility of black cultures:

> *I come from a carnival culture. It is in my interest to promote my culture particularly in London with the community from the Caribbean. It is important for them to know this culture. However, from a wider perspective Carnival brings a lot of things to people wherever they are. (Interview with carnival designer, Amaru Chatawa)*

> *Here I am visible. And many of them will be visible and there we are in schools where they see this man with a drum. Who is this man? What is the drum? What music will he play? Oh I don't lik e… that is me grandparent thing. Oh I like that … I didn't know. A number of threads come out from the songs dance and costume … This is a language you are talking and a response you are making against that stereotypical image every time you see a black man. (Alex Pascall)*

In several interviews with teachers it was apparent that they were acutely aware of the pervasiveness of white staff in primary schools and saw this as a problem:

> *It is particularly positive for them to have a black man to work with because in the profession they are constantly exposed to white female teachers. (Teacher)*

Many teachers and artists have raised questions about the role of carnival arts in supporting the development of children's identities:

> *It was interesting to see the body language and expressions on the faces of children. Children need black role models and male role models. I think that's why they were so delighted to see somebody from their own community doing something so exciting and stimulating. It gave them a feeling of pride.*

Carnival raises questions about the formation of cultural and racial identities which are far from simple. Teachers need to move away from the simplistic notion of identity as a singular construct:

> *Although many teachers feel overwhelmed by this theorising on identity and difference it is important to highlight the complexity of identity formation in children in order to illustrate why every black child or every girl child will not perceive themselves in the same way. (Siraj-Blatchford, 1994)*

> *The great thing about working with young children is that they themselves are struggling for their voice. They are searching for who they are … And if people are to begin to understand what mas is about, it's about that. If you look at a lot of young people who go to Notting Hill carnival you begin to see an act of defiance in their bodies and in the way they dress – the bits that they put together – that is what 'old mas' is. It says 'this is me'. (Interview with Greta Mendez)*

> *You should never go into a school with the assumption that if there are black children they will go with a black issue. In this modern day of ours one must take a subject like carnival and throw it into the wind. By doing that it is interesting what returns. (Interview with Alex Pascall)*

> *The development of children's personal, moral spiritual cultural and social education has been achieved in many ways. One class were intensely interested and personally affected by learning about the slave trade and how carnival developed out of it. Many of our black children showed interest in their African Caribbean roots and history. White children were keen to learn about the wit, humour and cultural customs expressed in African Caribbean language through poetry, story and song. They were also affected by learning about the white man's exploitation of Africa. We think this work has led to a raising of respect, esteem and empathy in the relationships between pupils parents and staff. (Interview with teachers)*

The success of carnival in schools depends on a number of factors, particularly in the context of Britain where most teachers will not be a part of a carnival tradition. This sometimes places great responsibility on the artists:

> *It depend a lot on the preparedness of the teachers. In some schools I turn up and they've only just been told 'you are going to have mas making' and they don't know what it involves. They are unsure. Perhaps they think it will be disruptive to the class. Teachers like to know what is going to happen in class. I think we as artists when we go into a school we need to understand something about what is required of teachers. By understanding the needs of schools we could work within that environment.*

> *Working in schools is very different to working in the community in the mas camp because in school I try to work geared to the curriculum, to make carnival relevant to what the schools are trying to achieve at the end and to be able to point out these things. So whereas in school I will talk about angles and measurements, how things stand up and balance so the children will see we are doing these things. In the mas camp I wouldn't necessarily talk about it in this way. (Quotes from artists)*

> *A lot depends on the teacher. There are some teachers who are very open. They say 'take me on a journey' and that is what creativity is about. You don't know where you are going, but you are on a journey of discovery. And with those teachers when you work with their children they excel, because the children feed off the teacher and if the teacher reflects fear they pick it up. Then you get those teachers who want the code, want you to lead them with a formula. But you have got to use instinct, imagination and intuition to make the discovery … I always make the teacher know for a fact that they are an intergral part of it. If they don't actually participate I still try to make the connection. Unless I feel it's really a blocking teacher. Then I block them out and focus in on the kids and some I will win, I will now take them on another journey to discover how they can manifest themselves. (Interview with Greta Mendez)*

The artists who worked in schools have needed to be very skilful in adapting concepts to materials and time available so that a satisfying learning experience was achieved. Teachers and student teachers have been keen to learn new practical skills from the expert mas makers and to learn how to bend wire, use flexible cane (withies) and use new materials such as foam and Plastozote as well as how to get the best from readily available materials like tissue paper and card. Children making their costume mas were able to incorporate many aspects of art and design education: pattern, symmetry, fabric printing, batik and tie dye techniques and collage. In some cases these techniques were linked to their cultural origins, for example in West Africa. The incentive of a public performance with children playing mas, dancing and singing gave strong motivation to teachers and children:

> *Learning through experience in practical workshops proved immensely valuable for the children, who were able to do rather than be instructed and were immensely excited by being able to realise their own designs from start to finish. Their work also had a real purpose as it culminated in a public performance in school and in the carnival parade. (Teacher)*

The variety of ways in which teachers, student teachers and children interpret mas has been a true reflection of the ability of carnival to inspire the use of imagination and creative intelligence.

For all children the making of the mas is a practical and hands on activity which they clearly enjoy and which also stretches them intellectually and imaginatively since in creating mas they have to symbolically reinterpret an idea. Even very young children have been able to conceptualise their costume idea, for example the 5-year-old who wanted to be a bird and who wrote 'I WL BE A BRD' and made a collage on paper representing herself.

For some children their carnival costume gave them a rare opportunity to explore aspects of their character and physical presence, and for many the use of masks allowed them to become other than their everyday selves.

> *Craig was a very quiet boy. The kind who has dreams. He struggled for a while. He always wanted help to do things. And by the end I remember he made a big giraffe which was the biggest piece in the carnival. He had started off quite stand-offish and in the end he was so involved that even when he left that primary school he came back for two years after to help with the carnival, to help other children and to make things for himself. So for some children it has a great impact. They see it as a way of making their mark. They usually find themselves by the end. Going on the street to perform their mas is where you see another side to children. Behind the mas they become something else. (Interview with mas maker Amaru Chatawa)*

The music of carnival, calypso and steelband, and the history of their development, is not familiar to most teachers. In London, during the period of the ILEA, there was a successful initiative, supported by the Music Inspectorate, to introduce the Pan as an instrument in schools and many primary and secondary schools employed steelband teachers and developed their own school steelbands. In some schools these have survived the demise of ILEA and schools have tried to seek alternative funding and are fighting to keep this tradition alive. A few schools also approached steelband musicians to demonstrate the instrument to children and to talk about it. The history of the invention and development of the steelband is not widely known even to those pupils who play pan, yet it is also a testament to the determination of African Caribbean peoples to keep alive their musical roots faced with opposition from colonial authorities who had banned the African drum. Even young children I interviewed had remembered some important aspects of the history:

> Boy: *'We learnt that in the olden days they weren't allowed to play their drums because of the people … That they did work … They weren't allowed to enjoy their selves and I think it was in August that they had a carnival and only then they were allowed to play their drums.'*
>
> Boy: *'… And if they played the drums they did get arrested …'*
>
> Int: *'So did they still play?'*
>
> Boy: *'They were brave … to still play the drums.' (From interview with a group of 7- and 8-year-old children)*

But perhaps the most important impact is felt by those children who have been learning to play pan, who normally only perform at Christmas concerts and summer Fairs but do not get the opportunity to perform for a carnival and to perform in the open air and on the road. For these children and their teachers the school carnival was a valuable opportunity to put their learning into its proper context.

Teachers have also been surprised to learn about the sung music of carnival, calypso and soca, which are generally unknown and ignored outside the black community in this country. It is a matter of great concern that primary schools in general make little use of the popular forms of black music:

> *You will find teachers, not many, who are bothered. Music teachers especially do not think we could teach music and feel threatened. I remember one school where Tobago Crusoe and I were working and the music teacher took her class upstairs and was arguing with Tobago about the calypso chords – and he starts to explain to her and I said 'no no no. This man is an expert in the field.' (Alex Pascall)*
>
> *I think calypso was new to the majority of the teachers because they were like, they were in awe, like they didn't even know this existed. A lot of them you saw enthusiasm on their faces – the same expression as the children – that excitement- because it was totally new to them, especially when we gave them the dance routine so everything, movement, rhythm, moving to the beat we use in Trinidad. It seemed like a learning process for them too. (Interview with Kizzy Ruiz, junior calypso monarch)*

The recent initiative by the Association of British calypsonians to run calypso workshops in primary schools during Black History Month in Westminster proved immensely popular with both children and teachers. Children were able to compose their own calypsos with help from junior calypsonians from Trinidad and Tobago:

> *I felt like I really came from a real band. We made up our calypso, our music like a real team.*
>
> *I felt like I was in a new band like the Spice girls and we were all singing and enjoying ourselves and dancing and it felt like I should go to Trinidad and experience it myself.*
>
> *It shows how much fun you can have and it makes me feel like I want to go back to the Caribbean and share my experience.*
>
> *It makes you feel you want to go where that music came from – you want to go there and stay there and sing every single song you hear. (Quotes from primary school pupils in Westminster)*

The importance of movement, the occupying of physical space, the opportunity for uninhibited self expression

through dance, the dramatic impact of hundreds of people flowing through the streets and across the stage in Trinidad carnival is difficult to convey to people who have not witnessed it. In Trinidad and Tobago even the smallest children know how to 'move in their mas'. In the Notting Hill carnival, constantly moving carnival bands occupy the territory of the streets through music, masquerade and dance. In school carnival dance workshops there is visibly a distinction between those children, usually children of African and Caribbean cultural traditions, who immediately recognise and respond with appropriate movement style and some white children who were initially very inhibited (particularly boys). Some of the dance practitioners who worked with the children did not attempt to teach soca dance directly, but worked with drums and African rhythm. One taught the dance steps for 'Play the devil. Jab Jab'. This was extremely popular with many children and they were observed chanting this refrain during their carnival.

A very experienced dancer/dance teacher explained her approach to working with children and adults in school:

> *We are obsessed with the external, but if you don't take care of the things inside we are dead. So I start with the breath. And you know with kids I do a lot of work on 'I am'. They are into who they are and I work on 'I am …' With their names. It's that sense of themselves, because in the final analysis that is what this is about.*

She worked on a number of levels to get them to be aware of occupying space with their body and of extending their body space in their costume. To practice for this aspect children were given long pieces of cloth to move with:

> *The fabric amplifies parts of the body, so people start to see mas is about amplifying and taking a line from the solar plexus and radiating out in these angles. So I put fabric in their hands and something on their head and when they move with it the energy is extended out. Kids suddenly realise 'Great! I am taking space' and they go for it. (Interview with Greta Mendez)*

All the artists believed that carnival work should not be seen in isolation and cut off from the experience of carnival on the streets, so having a school carnival or a community carnival which children were working towards was important. This was not at first fully appreciated as it posed logistical and organisational challenges. Once experienced however, all schools have acknowledged its importance. Several teachers commented on the extent to which the performance aspect was the crucial inspiration for children, and some teachers acknowledged that the need for children to perform was generally not well recognised or developed in school. Yet the importance of dance for expressing a sense of belonging and connecting to others taking part is central to carnival as participatory rather than spectator experience:

> *Thank you for coming to our school to show us what we are going to do for the carnival. I really loved the bang from your drum which forms the Caribbean beat and it almost made me burst into tears because I have not enjoyed it like that before. I always like it when there are lots of people making rhythm of every kind because if we work together we might be able to make a great team. We really enjoyed your music. My best and favourite music of them all is Jab Jab because of the Grenada language. When you were singing it felt as if I was in heaven that time. (Quote from letter written by 9-year-old black boy)*

Only when we can guarantee all children experiences which connect with them in such deep and meaningful ways can we claim to have created an inclusive curriculum.

All schools profess to encourage parental involvement but are often unsuccessful in breaking down barriers of professional or social distance and overcoming distrust. There are few genuine opportunities for teachers and parents to communicate as equals. The power structures of schools place teachers above parents, certainly where those parents come from working class and minority ethnic communities. It is generally accepted that schools should have a dialogue with parents and communities but all too often this is entirely one way and consists of schools giving information to parents rather than seeking their ideas, expertise and involvement. In some schools spaces are created for parents to meet and parents are visible in classrooms. Black parents are significantly under-represented in most cases.

Yet through the school becoming the focus of carnival work and through parents seeing black adults working alongside their children, many black parents have been willing for the first time to become further involved:

> *It is the most common leveller you will find between the parent who is not there, the child who is between the parent and the teacher and who sees the parent at one level and their parent at another. Carnival is the only thing that brings that all together. (Alex Pascall)*

Conclusion

I want to conclude by making some claims about the relationship between Carnival and the nature of learning in communities and schools. There is always a danger that if something is formalised, defined, theorised, pinned down and placed in an institutional context it will be distorted or destroyed, diluted or colonised. I think carnival is too strong, too many faceted, too anarchic and too alive for that to happen. However carnival in school will be different, will have some different purposes and develop some aspects more successfully than others. Its development will depend crucially on the ability and willingness of schools to work with artists from carnival tradition and with carnival organisations within their communities. The question of ownership is an important one:

> *If you don't see what you are doing reflected in society you may say 'I'm not gonna do that'. It's not in a day-to-day reflection, whereas in Trinidad we live, breathe and eat carnival and it's part of society even if people reject it. Here it's not. If schools take it on board, it's great to put it as part of the curriculum, even at university level; but you have to have it in the fabric, which it* is, *because it's*

a denial that it isn't in the fabric of this society, the amount of people who get involved in it and yet there is absolute denial that it is artistic, that it has anything to say, that it actually progresses the nation and that it generates ideas, generates issues, has something to do with the brain as well as the soul. They try to pigeon-hole it as just this black people thing, but it's not unique to one race and it has great benefit, it addresses racial and cultural cross fertilisation. (Interview with Greta Mendez)

Carnival is a contested area of the curriculum and of British cultural life. There are many factors to prevent its effective practice and inclusion in schools but perhaps a few pressures for change which are also encouraging of some hope. Certainly for those artists dedicated to promoting it there is no choice but to continue:

Carnival has a future not just in school but in society in general because its value as a way of bringing people together is now being accepted, especially in a country like this with people from so many different backgrounds coming together. It's one way of making the callalloo. New things are being learnt and there is an awareness of cultural change. I think it is something that will grow in this country. (Amaru Chatawa)

Now schools I go into where they are doing this literacy hour its like a sacred thing. Its a fear that has been created by Ofsted. We must overcome it. We need to reinterpret what the National Curriculum calls for, otherwise we will get a continual form of rejection. This government claims to want diversity but they are just putting the glass ceiling a bit higher.

If you look at us in the Caribbean we should be the most challenging force for multi cultural education. We've lived it. Britain is just beginning to say they want to take it on but they have been trying to get rid of the Caribbean culture because it is so forceful and it is very active and challenging. Carnival is *a challenge. (Alex Pascall)*

John Egglestone, in his pamphlet *Arts Education for a Multi-cultural Society,'* has argued cogently for the importance of black artists as role models in schools and the prospect of creating new identities. He quotes Bourdieu (1997) in believing that:

fundamental life attitudes and values are not simply created by some inevitable process of social and cultural reproduction but by a process that responds to sensitive intervention and is tuned to human needs and motivations. (Egglestone, 1995)

It is important to develop practitioner-led and community-led partnerships in developing a curriculum for children which is respectful of different and culturally contextualised ways of belonging and connecting, being and becoming, contributing and participating, being active and expressing and thinking, imagining and understanding. Carnival is perhaps one such project.

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A Curriculum Development Pack on Carnival, based on work in schools referred to in this article, can be obtained from Lambeth Schools Carnival Group, 13 Helix Gardens, London SW2 2JJ, United Kingdom.

Boxing Not So Cleverly: the increasing compartmentalisation of the primary curriculum

DAVID ROSENBERG

The author, an experienced teacher and language coordinator at a large North London primary school, details the original and exciting work undertaken by his class and their improvement in attitude when a more integrated approach to learning and teaching was adopted. He contrasts this to the current demands for a more compartmentalised primary curriculum and mechanistic style of teaching, the limitations of which he sees as having serious consequences for children's attitudes to learning and themselves.

Dear Mr Blunkett, I have a confession. Back in 1992, in my first year as a teacher, there were occasions when I went a whole week without teaching any maths. And I didn't even feel guilty. Yet, by the end of the year, my class of 7- and 8-year-olds generally seemed to have a good understanding of basic maths concepts and were motivated by maths activities. They spent much of the last three weeks of the summer term working in pairs or small groups, designing, making and playing their own boardgames around the theme of recycling. Every time they played, they used and reinforced the skills they had developed – counting, calculation and probability, reading and understanding – and they were constantly compelled to think about which materials could be recycled.

Old habits die hard. At my school we retain a topic-based approach although every year it feels increasingly eroded by the endless stream of new initiatives promoted under the guise of 'raising standards'. My topic this term is 'Colour, Light and Sound'. Last week, after several uninterrupted days of rain, there was a day of glorious sunshine. The notes in my planning book were as clear as the sunlight itself: '11am – 12: Maths; Unit 2-4, lesson 12, Coins and money'. At 11 o'clock the maths apparatus stayed in the cupboard. Instead we lined up at the door, and armed with clipboards, paper and pencils, we walked to the canal that stands beyond the tall fences behind our school.

We looked at the reflections as the sunlight reached the water and the shadows cast by buildings and trees, and discussed their qualities. I identified a strip of canal pavement about 50 yards long and asked the children to choose a place to sit within it from where they could draw a canal view which would show the shadows or reflections, or both. The children were so engaged by the task and so able to work autonomously without support that I also managed to attempt it. I had an opportunity to put myself in the position of a child suddenly given an unexpected task to complete, something we do all too rarely.

Needless to say, the quality of work produced in a situation where the children were making some of the decisions was very high. Having already undertaken drier and more closed tasks on shadows and reflections in the classroom with torches, our visit to the canal made the ideas and concepts come alive. Children who are usually shy of making observations or answering questions in the classroom for fear of being 'wrong', animatedly called me over to observe shadows and reflections they had noticed. Others who may well have struggled with the maths on that day found the period before lunch far more pleasant than they might have anticipated.

Of course, they couldn't keep avoiding the maths, nor should they, but there is something suspicious about a teaching method that is believed to produce success only if it is repeated and reinforced on a daily basis like an army drill. This is what those who have designed the 'Numeracy Hour' believe. It's an argument repeated by those keen to shorten the summer holidays, who presume that children's heads are like egg-timers with knowledge that was once in there inexorably escaping. This is not to dismiss all the insights of those committed to the Numeracy Hour. There is a good deal to be said, for instance, for the argument that if children become more confident and capable at basic *mental* mathematics this will give them a firmer basis for tackling more intricate mathematical concepts.

More questionable, though, are the assumptions behind the Numeracy Hour, the Literacy Hour and any other 'Hour' which the Government/QCA are capable of announcing at any moment: that different parts of the curriculum can be neatly separated from each other; that everything of teaching value can be broken down and completed within a one-hour session; that every activity of educational value must produce an outcome from the children that is capable of being quantified; that in these discrete subject areas a single teaching method can be applied that can be assimilated by every child with equal success; and that learning takes place most effectively through formal didactic methods.

Those who hold to these assumptions argue them quite straightforwardly. They truly believe that the 3Rs are the be-all and end-all of education and by successfully compartmentalising each 'R' and chopping it up into

discrete chunks they can standardise education and raise standards for all. They pay lip-service to the 'broad curriculum'. For them 'topic work' is merely a succession of fillers sandwiched between the 'real thing'.

My experience repeatedly confirms the value of being flexible about approaches and seeking unexpected gateways towards the main ideas I have wanted to convey. It also continually demonstrates to me that given the opportunity and sufficient time, children will pick up an idea, chew it over and take it in their own direction, displaying a level of lateral thinking that we, as teachers, often underestimate, but ought to encourage. When this happens, I feel tempted to take my National Curriculum documents and stamp the covers with Einstein's famous dictum – 'imagination is more important than knowledge'. But I draw back from this, feeling that I mustn't be so disdainful about knowledge. And yet, I can't help feeling that in the current 'educational' nexus of National Curriculum/Literacy Hour/ Numeracy Hour/OfSTED/ Testing/League Tables, 'knowledge' is being placed in a competitive rather than harmonious relationship with imagination.

The compartmentalisation of the curriculum, realised through dedicated hours for specific subjects also carries a not very well hidden agenda about overall teaching methods. Literacy hours and Numeracy hours are custom-built for the committed believers in whole class teaching. They severely undermine teachers' autonomy and for the children they substitute training for a process of enquiry and learning.

Two years ago I had a class who were very vocal but not over-enthusiastic about writing. I could have opted for the Literacy Hour drill which would have ensured some writing, however limited in scope and interest, every day. But I sought other avenues. Fortunately the school, with much prompting from myself as 'Language Co-ordinator', had rejected the Literacy Hour as being inferior to the approach to literacy that we had gradually been developing over several years. So I had a certain amount of freedom in how I would respond to my class. The breakthrough came quite early on when I introduced the class to the art works of Pablo Picasso. They were fascinated by his choice of colours, his bizarre, contorted faces and bodies, his range of styles (they loved cubism) and were particularly taken with the terror encapsulated in his Spanish Civil War mural – Guernica.

That week, in our 'Writing Workshop' (free writing session) I read a poem that Picasso had written about one of his pictures and suggested that they might want to write about some of the pictures they had been studying. A seven-year-old girl, R, who had up to that point seemed to struggle with the work the class had been doing in most areas, wrote a poem:

Guernica
Burning crushed roses in screaming pain
Dying without water – and hungry
Burning in a house
Red flames burning brightly
People dying
Witches giggling in laughter
Children trying with all their might
To save their city of burning light

I was bowled over. When she read it to the class it inspired others to write similar poems. We never looked back and during the rest of the year many children produced some excellent pieces of writing. But more than that they developed a passion for art and a thirst for knowledge about different artists. The work which stemmed originally from an attempt to look at aspects of 'colour' branched out in all directions: timelines of artists (history), where they lived and worked (geography), their dates (maths), how certain colours were produced (art/science). My favourite moment was when some prospective parents came to view the school with their young children. As they appeared at the door, I beckoned them to come closer: 'Please come in, this is Year 2 and 3. We're just doing the Spanish Civil War'. They stood bemused, as the children questioned me closely about General Franco.

Last year my Spring term topics were 'Journeys and transport'; 'Famous people'; 'Stories and legends'. Although I sketched out a plan to give each of these aspects their own space, I also looked for ways to integrate them. I taught my class about Rosa Parks, the Black American woman jailed in 1955 after refusing to give up her seat to a white person on a bus. Her campaign was eagerly assisted by a young local preacher called Martin Luther King. Both he and Rosa Parks became legends in their own lifetimes. We probably spent as much time discussing and writing about racism and discrimination as we did looking at different kinds of transport. But what the children most strongly identified with through the topic were a number of civil rights songs from the 1950s and 1960s that I taught them. The songs appealed to their natural sense of justice – as children who often have a sense of injustice about how adults or older brothers and sisters treat them – and gave them a vocabulary in which to discuss these issues. By looking at this area primarily through history, music and PSHE, I was consequently able to develop their literacy.

Not all the parents appreciated my approach. One child, T, didn't like school very much, spent many mornings complaining of headaches and stomach-aches, and constantly felt a failure. His mother complained to me: 'You're teaching him about Martin Luther King, but he can't even read Winnie the Pooh'. It may have been plain old racism, but the educational assumption was that children can't learn about more complex matters until they have certain basics in place; an accurate internalisation of the messages about education promoted by central government. I questioned this assumption and argued that children will be more motivated to read and write if they are engaged and enthused by what is taking place in the classroom. We agreed to differ. Her child is still in my class. Most of last year's Year 2s are now my Year 3s. But he is now a very motivated learner. There may be other factors but he often makes reference to songs, stories and issues we discussed during that Spring term.

A topic-based approach is far more likely than a compartmentalised approach to have a positive effect on children's self esteem. If a topic is approached in an integrated way with different aspects valued equally highly, then children who find one aspect difficult can feel a sense of achievement in other aspects. The compartmentalisation of the curriculum and the clear message that English and Maths are the most important

compartments, and even within them that reading and writing is valued far more highly than verbal literacy, confirms any struggling child's sense of failure and demotivates them from other work.

In the twenty-first century when most forward-looking thinkers suggest that Britain's future workforce will be comprised of people who may move between a number of different careers in their working lives, lateral thinking will surely be a key skill and yet it is being discouraged from very early on. Of course, we should stress distinctions and categories but we must be able to identify the links between discrete areas as their differences and distinctions. By rigidly compartmentalising the curriculum and delegitimising children's own perceptions when they follow subjects off on to tangents that are logical for them, we are encouraging children's thinking to be equally compartmentalised and passive. When we undermine children's ability to take responsibility for decisions and their own learning, then teaching and learning become both dull and predictable.

I recently discussed my misgivings about current dominant approaches within British educational practice with a teacher who has taught our school's Year 6 children since the mid-1980s. He had done what has been required on a statutory level while attempting to maintain within his semi-autonomous space – his classroom – the core of progressive educational practice articulated and developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Since he started at our inner-London primary school, he has witnessed a swathe of interventions and initiatives promoted by both Tory and Labour governments, some of which have been adopted by the school, others rejected. In his opinion, the outcome on measurable results in our school has been marginal. With minor fluctuations, academic achievement by most pupils remains high. But what he has witnessed is a dramatic decline in children's abilities to make decisions for themselves, to initiate independent ideas and activities, to be autonomous. Being autonomous means having time in which to assess arguments and situations and make decisions; having time to make mistakes and learn from mistakes. And if that time comes from that which has been allocated to literacy and numeracy hours, teachers need not feel guilty. It will be time well invested for you and your pupils.

Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*

In Defence of Local Comprehensive Schools. Part II

STEPHEN GORARD
Stephen Gorard, currently working at the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences, argues that his research (largely funded by the ESRC) indicates that comprehensive schools are now more socially repesentative than at any other time. He also maintains that there are other improvements with regard to comprehensive schools that are not always given the publicity they are due.

Things have moved on a good deal since I last wrote a piece for *FORUM*, entitled 'In Defence of Local Comprehensive Schools' (Gorard, 1998). Both government and opposition policies on the nature of secondary schooling have changed, the School Standards and Framework Act is in force, the number of specialist schools is growing, Educational Action Zones are up and running, and the move away from selection appears to have stalled. Those I have termed elsewhere the 'crisis commentators' on British education are at it again (Gorard, 2000a), decrying the apparently poor standards of attainment among United Kingdom students compared to other developed countries, the increasing differences between the best and the worst schools, and growing stratification in terms of attendance and performance between different groups in society (as defined, for example, by income, ethnicity or gender). Recently George Mudie (while Minister for Lifelong Learning) claimed that in any other industry a performance level like that of British education 'would result in the companies concerned going out of business' (Skills and Enterprise Network, 1999, p. l), and in this view he would be supported by a host of policy-makers, public-bodies, media commentators and even academics.

Suggested solutions to these problems have been many. A survey by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) of 245 schools found that they had introduced no fewer than 630 separate approaches to raising scores at Key Stage 2 alone (Sharp, 1999). Our schools truly face a plethora of remedies. Fortunately the evidence for the standard crisis account of British education does not exist. Unfortunately, despite claims by politicians that they are enthusiastic about evidence-based policy-making, 'remedy' is piled upon 'remedy' to deal with this non-existent crisis. At best, an inappropriate remedy will be ineffective, at worst it will be damaging. When I say that the apparent crisis in schooling does not exist, I do not mean that everything is fine. I mean that things are generally getting better than they were – standards are rising, differential attainment is reducing, and social justice is greater. Of course there are still problems, but in order to be able to deal with these effectively we need to separate the history from the hysteria. In fact, progress in the twentieth century has led to considerable improvements in social inclusion and opportunities by gender, ethnicity, and class. 'If you take a long-term historical perspective of the provision of education in the UK throughout its entire statutory period … you could say that a constant move towards greater justice and equity has been the hallmark of the whole process' (MacKay, 1999, p. 344).

This article is in part a summary of the findings of what is so far the largest-scale study of change within a national school system (see Gorard & Fitz, 2000a). As such the article summarises a great deal of empirical evidence concerning long-term changes in education of the type that commentators are complaining does not exist (e.g. Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Jeynes, 2000). We hope thereby to bring the existence of this evidence to the attention of a wider audience. Our database contains a record of school structure and student characteristics for each school in England and Wales from 1989–99), archival literature, and interviews with a variety of LEA officials, teachers and school managers from a sub-sample of 40 LEAs. In considering changes in schools over time, we have used a variety of indicators and a number of analytical indices. The summary of results is presented in two sections, relating to changes in stratification and in school effects.

Changes in Between-school Stratification

The degree of socio-economic stratification in all secondary schools in England, using the most reliable and complete indicator of disadvantage (eligibility for free school meals), declined from a high of 36% in 1989 to around 30% in 1996 (before rising to 32% from 1997 to 1999). This is also true of all indicators used in addition to FSM, including ethnicity, first language, and statements of special educational need. Secondary schools are now more mixed than they were in 1989 (Gorard & Fitz, 2000b). A similar analysis shows the same picture for primary schools on all indicators. So, our results apply to over 8 million students in 25,000 schools over 11 years. The fall in stratification also appears in each economic region of England (and Wales) analysed separately, and in the overwhelming majority of local authorities, and school districts. Analysed at any level of aggregation, schools have generally converged over time in terms of their socio-economic composition. This finding, of a substantial overall decline in socio-economic stratification between schools, represents a powerful social change involving millions of families.

Additionally, we found no evidence that the era of school choice has led more schools into 'spirals of decline' in which they lose both market share and become increasingly stratified in terms of indicators of

disadvantage. The number of children in secondary schools increased during the period 1989–99 while the number of schools decreased (to reduce surplus places). Therefore, most schools have increased their average number of students even where they are seen as less desirable in their local 'markets'. Of the few schools ending the period in question with smaller numbers on roll the vast majority had an improved (i.e. nearer even) socio-economic composition (Taylor et al, 2000a). There is no evidence that this rare phenomenon has worsened over time. To a large extent this is due to the work of local education authorities who manage the school admissions system (especially school rolls, budgets and closures) in such a way as to protect schools perceived as under threat. We find, therefore, a valuable and continuing role for LEAs at a time when they are increasingly seen by policy-makers as marginalised.

Changes in School Outcomes

The good news about changes in school composition is matched by changes in the most obvious short-term outcome of schools – examination results. All such indicators show an overall rise over time, including the percentage of 15-year-old age cohort obtaining at least one GCSE at the lowest grade (G), and the percentage obtaining five or more 'good' passes (grade A*–C). Similar patterns appear at A level/GNVQ and at earlier Key Stages (although our records for the latter are clearly only for more recent years). For example, the percentage obtaining five good passes has increased year-on-year from 1975 to 1998 (DfEE, 1998). The same source also shows an *improved* increase from the late 1980s onwards. We are, however, unable simply to claim that this raw-score change is an improvement in educational standards rather than what has been termed, perhaps rather uncharitably, 'counterfeit excellence' (Zirkel, 1999). Many policy changes have taken place over the same period. Treating our analysis as a 'natural experiment', we would say that there are important confounding variables (Gorard, 2001). These include changes in the collection of figures over time, in the definition of the relevant age cohort, and in the nature of the qualifications themselves. Most notably the introduction of the GCSE in 1986/87 heralded an increase in course work at the expense of terminal examinations, and the abolition of strict norm-referencing which had previously worked to maintain results at a relatively constant level (Foxman, 1997).

What this natural experiment requires therefore is a control group, which might be provided by the private or fee-paying sector. Around 7% of students in England and 2% in Wales attend fee-paying schools. These schools have always existed in a market – a very real and volatile one in which money changes hands and schools 'go to the wall' (Gorard, 1997). Legislation such as the Education Reform Act 1988 had no direct effect on fee-paying schools. The 'experimental' treatment is therefore the introduction of the limited market (and associated changes) which affected only state schools, whereas changes in the nature of assessment affected both groups equally. It is now clear that state-funded schools have been catching up with fee-paying schools at all levels of attainment (Gorard & Taylor, 2001), and other figures confirm this trend (Howson, 2000). If the fee-paying sector is accepted as a control group, then this analysis indicates a real improvement in state-funded education.

In addition, it is now clear that differences in attainment between identifiable social groups within the school system are declining. Using valid proportionate analyses (thereby avoiding the politician's error, Gorard [1999]) differences in attainment have declined as measured between: the highest and lowest achievers; ethnic groups; boys and girls; economic regions, as well as between school sectors (e.g. Gorard et al, 1999; Gorard, 2000b) These changes are taking place both across and within schools. Despite the continued importance of socio-economic determinants of school outcomes, the system as a whole is therefore becoming fairer (Gorard, 2000a).

Can We Explain Our Findings?

Schools are now significantly more socially mixed than in 1988 in the sense that the intake to each school is now generally a better reflection of the wider society from which it recruits. Their measurable outcomes are now significantly greater than in 1988, and differential attainment between identifiable socio-economic groups has been reduced. Taking a long-term view, education in the UK would appear to be moving in the right direction, and the clear leaders in this progress are the local comprehensive schools which constitute the vast bulk of the system. We have so far suggested a variety of possible explanations for these findings. In summary we set out to test at least six main hypotheses, and there appears to be some truth in all of these possible explanations, and others like them.

❏ What we have observed is a small part of a much larger trend dated back to 1944 and before and unrelated to specific policies. The history of UK schooling has generally been one of continuous improvement and 'comprehensivation'. Schools reflect the society from which they spring.

❏ School stratification could be primarily due to residential stratification (which explains around half of the variance in school admissions). Therefore, either the policy of open enrolment broke the rigid link between area of residence and school allocation, or residential stratification has declined over the same period (Taylor & Gorard, 2001).

❏ School reorganisations, especially closures, have mixed up previous school intakes in new ways.

❏ Although our analytical tools are strongly composition-invariant (Taylor et al, 2000b) it is notable that the period 1989–96 involved a growth in indicators of poverty. What we may be seeing is therefore greater 'equality of poverty'. However, since poverty is negatively related to school outcomes at an aggregate level and these outcomes have improved, this is an indication that the link between poverty and results has been weakened.

❏ Market reforms in the 1980s have worked, in the sense of allowing poor families to use schools in areas they cannot afford to live in, and encouraging schools to concentrate on improving examination scores. Out-of-catchment enrolment has increased among poor families, and appeals against allocation are now almost universal.

❏ The changes can be explained through the way in which local school admission authorities have interpreted the policy changes (White et al, 2001). LEAs have worked hard to protect schools by managing the admissions

system, chiefly in terms of numbers and budget-share, and in some cases by not adhering to the spirit of the national legislation.

Our evidence has naturally been the subject of some dispute, since good news about social justice is anathema to many commentators. Politicians want to make a difference, the media prefers stories of crises, and some practitioners and academics fear that publishing good news will lead to complacency. This dispute has sometimes been on methodological grounds but more often on ideological ones (and it is interesting that our evidence has been used by right- as well as left-of-centre pressure groups). It is easy to exaggerate the significance of national policies in education, and therefore important for all observers to retain an analytical model in which such changes are heavily mediated by the actions of local agencies. Such a model is able to give credit where credit is mainly due (to the local actors), and to provide a counter-argument to yet more nationally imposed changes to local schools. Perhaps what schools need more than another brilliant initiative to solve a non-existent crisis is the time and space to get on with their primary job of educating children.

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Selective Memories: reliving grammar school experiences in the comprehensive system

KRISTINE BLACK-HAWKINS

Kristine Black-Hawkins, who now works for The Open University, illuminates her account of the highly resistant nature of the British class system by reference to her own personal experience of grammar school education and to her recent work in a comprehensive school that had previously been a secondary modern school.

My current research concerns the relationship between the concept of school cultures and the processes by which students and staff are included and excluded from participating fully in the life of a school. As part of this, I am interested in the relative autonomy of a school and how far its cultures are shaped by its interactions with the outside world, including government legislation on education. In this article, I focus on how students in England are selected to go to different secondary schools and the impact that such decisions have on the cultures of those schools.

I begin by describing my experience of being a student at a grammar school in the l960s and 1970s. I do so for three reasons. One, it offers an example of selection from the past to help to understand the present and so provides an historical context for my discussion. Two, it illustrates the interaction between the personal and the public and therefore it provides a political context. Three, it allows some insight into who I am, thus also providing a research context.

In the main part of the article I outline some of my recent findings from 'Bowden School,' an urban comprehensive. I deliberately set out to explore the cultures of this school by working there voluntarily as a learning support assistant (LSA) for a period of six months. I look at the public domain of national legislation as well as the private lives which members of the school bring with them: families, friends and neighbourhoods. I focus on forms of selection between Bowden and other local schools as well as selection within the school. I conclude that the processes of selection are exclusionary since they create school cultures in which students and staff identify themselves, and are identified by others, as either successes or failures.

Experiencing a Grammar School as a Student: an autobiographical tale

In 1968 I sat my 11+ exam knowing, somehow, that my future depended upon its result. About 20% of children in the area where I lived passed. These children went on to grammar schools where they pursued a strictly academic education until they were 18 years old and then nearly all went on to higher education. The other 80% of students – that is, the vast majority – who failed this exam, went to secondary modern school. Most of them left at the age of 15 with no formal qualifications. It was as simple as that. I passed.

However, my experiences of this new school were not so straightforward. For the first time on a regular basis I was taken out of my home environment. To travel from my house, the secondary modern school would have been a quick walk through south London streets; the grammar school entailed a bus ride to a leafy Surrey village. It was a different world and one which I was initially thrilled to join. I longed to be a part of this school, with its beautiful grounds, science laboratories, huge library and grown-up girls. And yet somehow I did not fit in. At my primary school I was encouraged to challenge my teachers' ideas and I did so loudly and enthusiastically. At this new school I was reprimanded for being over-familiar and impertinent. I was constantly in trouble. School reports suggested that my work, at least to begin with, was acceptable; however, as a person, I felt I wasn't. I realise now that *going to* a grammar school was not the same as *belonging* there. I did not feel understood or welcomed. It was like trying to join in a game I had never practised and for which I did not know the rules. By the time I began to know what was expected of me, I was no longer willing to play.

I was aware for the first time that my home and family were unlike others: that having a car, a telephone, holidays, a mother who did not work (or one who worked only because she chose to), were considered commonplace by staff and students. 'Describe your favourite holiday place', the English teacher would say. 'If you want to help with the play tonight you may use the school phone so your mother won't wonder where you are.' 'Ask your father to pick you up from the netball match.'

Whilst feeling excluded from the prevalent middle-class culture of the school, my experiences there also began to separate me from my family. As a teenager I was no longer sure where I did belong. For example, I wanted to go to university but because I had a part-time job the school were unwilling to help me apply. My teachers argued that working in a shop showed a lack of commitment to my studies. However, at home I was expected to earn money if I wanted to stay at school. As a truculent teenager I began to truant, dropping out of lessons and so fulfilling the expectations of my teachers. I

then realised that I was not really helping myself. Still truculent and still truanting, I decided to study for my A Level exams in the local library rather than bothering with school. I was the first member of my family to go to university. Finally it seemed my teachers and family had something in common: they were all rather more bewildered than pleased by this turn of events.

Exploring the Political/Historical Context

This part of my private history coincided approximately with growing political concern nationally about the selective school system, leading in time to it being largely dismantled. Early on, both the Crowther Report (Central Advisory Committee for Education, 1959) and the Newson Report (Central Advisory Committee for Education, 1963) were influential in highlighting its damaging inequalities. It was increasingly seen as simplistic to categorise students as possessing three distinct 'aptitudes' and the matching them into three 'types' of schools; grammar, secondary modern and technical. (Although where I grew up, as in many other areas in the country, there was no technical provision anyway.)

Studies also began to emerge which suggested that, even from the age of 11, students at secondary modern schools considered themselves to be failures in terms of education, whilst those at grammar schools usually saw themselves as successful. Members of staff, in both types of schools, often made assumptions too, about the abilities of those they taught (see, for example, Hargreaves [1967] and Lacey [l976]). During the early 1960s the Labour Government encouraged Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to introduce non-selective schools, for example through Circular 10/65. However, many LEAs chose to ignore such recommendations since they had no statutory force. By the time of the 1976 Education Act the Government was determined to be more robust. The ensuing circular ll/76 stated, 'At last the principle of fully comprehensive education is written into the law' (quoted in Simon, 1991, p. 454). The Act was intended to compel all LEAs to change, although nearly a quarter of a century later, some have still chosen not to do so. Nevertheless, by the mid-1980s, 90% of students who attended state secondary schools went to comprehensive schools (Benn & Chitty, 1996). My old school's response to the l976 Act was to change its name from 'grammar' to 'high' school, but it did not, and even now will not, modify its selection of students.

Experiencing a Comprehensive School as a Learning Support Assistant and Researcher: an introduction to Bowden School

My second story is about an urban school in England, called Bowden. It was built in 1939 as a mixed non-selective school for students aged 11 to 14, later expanding to 15 then 16-year-olds. Following on from the 1944 Education Act it was designated a secondary modern school, one of eight in the city, plus three grammar schools. In 1976, in response to the national political changes I have already described, these 11 schools became comprehensives. As part of this development a programme of building works took place at Bowden so it could, for the first time, include students in the sixth form It reopened in 1978 as a comprehensive school for 11 to 18-year-olds. Theoretically, all the city schools now had equal status and their intake was comprised of students with the full range of attainments. They were open to all students and parents were expected to want to choose for their children the local comprehensive school nearest to where they lived.

However, in practice this is not what happened in the city. There are five main reasons why schools such as Bowden could not (and still cannot) be described as fully comprehensive. First, it exists as part of a system in which some students do not attend any mainstream secondary school because of their perceived difficulties in learning. This city still supports five special schools and some young people who live locally to Bowden attend these schools. Secondly, some parents choose, and are able to afford, the 'privilege' of private education for their children and thereby opt out of state schools entirely. Thirdly, within the city there are pockets of extreme poverty and high unemployment, while other areas enjoy relative affluence. These social divisions are partly created and then exacerbated by local authority housing policy decisions. These, in turn, have an impact on the student intake for local schools. Fourthly, changing the name of Bowden from 'secondary modern' to 'comprehensive' does not necessarily alter how it is regarded locally by students and their families. Notions of success often still cling to what were once grammar schools and failure to the secondary moderns (Booth et al, 1998).

The fifth reason why schools such as Bowden are not fully comprehensive is because the changes in the national political culture of the l980s and 1990s have, through government legislation, reinforced these local perceptions. The government document *Choice and Diversity* (DfEE, 1992), for example, outlined 'five great themes' running through the history of educational change in England and Wales since 1979: 'quality, diversity, increasing parental choice, greater autonomy for schools and greater accountability' and argued that together they would bring about a diversity in types of schools which would be responsive to the different needs of local communities. However, as Whitty (1997) argues, such developments have not benefited all schools because they have increased 'the difference between popular and less popular schools on a linear scale' … by … 'reinforcing a vertical hierarchy of schooling types rather than producing horizontal diversity' (p. 91). So those schools least able to compete in the market-place have been further disadvantaged. This seems particularly important in the context of a city where a number of schools are in close proximity and are therefore vying to attract students. For certain schools to be seen as successful, others must be seen to be failing.

So in this historical/political context how has Bowden School fared? Where on that 'vertical hierarchy' is it perceived to be by students, parents and staff? It became apparent to me that, within the city, two or three schools were considered, in particular by parents and students, to be far better than others. The Cathedral School was one of these. Bowden was not. The main criterion used to judge this is exam results at GCSE and A Level. Members of staff were, perhaps naturally, more ambivalent in their judgement; whilst accepting that academic success varied between schools they argued that it was largely determined by student intake rather than the quality of the educational

experiences provided. Staff particularly argued that Bowden was excellent at supporting 'less academic' students. It seems to me that whilst this is to be applauded, it is in itself reinforcing the old split between secondary modern and grammar schools; that is, the selection of students based on notions of attainment.

Six Telling Tales of Selection from Bowden School

The first three of these tales are told by members of staff, each of whom live close to the school. They provide an insight into how parents view the school locally and the impact this has on its student intake. All three make reference to the Cathedral School. The fourth tale provides some background to this other city school. The fifth tale is told by the headteacher of Bowden School. In this he reveals the ambiguities inherent in a government maintaining a 'comprehensive' school system whilst promoting competition between schools and so-called parental 'choice'. The final tale in this collection explores the role of selection *within* the Bowden school.

l. A Story about Bowden School: from secondary modern to comprehensive without even moving

Sandra Stephens was born in the school's catchment area and, apart from her years at teacher training college, has lived there all her life. Her sister attended the school as a student but Sandra did not because she passed the 11+ exam and went to what was then the local girls' grammar school. She began her teaching career at Bowden School when it was a secondary modern and she is still there 26 years later. She begins her story by describing the effect on staff as the school changed its status to comprehensive in 1976:

> *We all had to write and apply for our jobs … But I don't know of anyone who didn't get them … It seemed just like a name change really … I don't remember the school changing much at all. We still did the same exam courses. I think what should have happened is that we should have had a lot more children coming who were brighter. The ones that had gone to the grammar schools.*
> *And now … we get a lot of children who are average and below because the catchment areas are poor. And we've got such a good learning support system, so some parents choose us because they think that their children will get a lot of help. When I go to the primary schools there are some children who are considered to be very bright, but they tend to go to other schools …*
> *Well, there's Bradley Grammar School in Othershire, across the border. And the old grammar schools … the Manor and the Cathedral, they're still going. They're all supposed to be comprehensives now, but, oh, some people think they're superior. Of course, the Cathedral School is a church school and they have boarders as well, which goes towards helping this image. I know of some people who deliberately start going to Church on purpose just to get their children in …*
> *There are some parents who realise that they are good facilities here and it's up to their children to make the most of them … The ones who go places like Bradley Grammar are those who have learnt that Bowden is in a poor catchment area and think it's going to have a lot of rough kids. But we've got some lovely children here …*
> *I'm not a parent, but being a teacher who deals with the children, I think they should come here. Also having been a house head and seeing children who come here when all their friends have gone to other schools … it doesn't help them. And I think if they've got it in their heads to do well, then they will. Yes, I think they should be here.*

2. A Parent's Story: memories of choosing what's best for my child

Jane Lee is a learning support assistant at the school. She moved to the school's catchment area about 20 years ago, when her children were at primary school. She did not send them to Bowden: she chose the Cathedral School. She explains why:

> *Bowden was our local school but two years before our son was due to go we went round all of the schools. When we came here we felt the staff were very, very friendly. But looking at the results, well, I got all the education stuff about how to work out what was a good school and what was a bad school, and Bowden wasn't doing very well at that time. Also, there were discipline things that you'd hear rumbling through the neighbourhood so I didn't want him to come here. He'd got grade 5 music so we decided to go for the Cathedral School (which allocates a number of student places based on 'musical ability') and he got in …*
> *If I had to choose now, well, I don't know. I've got a different view. I think if your kid's bright and they are willing to work, they are going to get on anywhere, providing they've got motivation and drive. And I've seen some really good stuff come out of here. We've got some dedicated teachers really hard-working staff … It's really difficult. I think if I was perfectly honest – no – I still wouldn't send him here … I suppose if he had to come here, then he'd have to make the most of it … But I would keep a good eye on him.'*

3. A Parent's Story: a contemporary tale of choosing what's best for my child

Jan Marina has two daughters: one in Year 9 at Bowden School and another who is about to start in September. She began working as a learning support assistant when her elder daughter was already at the school. She explains how she set about choosing a secondary school for them:

> *Well Isabel chose Bowden because all her friends were coming here. Initially I didn't want her to because I used to pass by when there were crowds of children coming out. But when I saw the facilities I was more impressed than with the other schools and so was my husband. So we didn't have any qualms about her wanting to come here.*
>
> *Well, it's a bit of a Hobson's choice. I can't afford*

to send her to private school. We all want the best for our children. And we knew we wouldn't get them in the best schools in the city … like the Cathedral School, for instance. That is the one state school that everyone wants their children to go to. But we're not particularly churchy people, which you have to be. And you have to have been for a number of years. You have to have your vicar saying you've been attending for the last couple of years at least. Or be extremely musical – church choir – which we're not …

I am pleased with our choice although I think I would have liked to have seen her at a different type of school … more of a disciplined school. But for the area that we live in and the choices that we had, I am pleased that this is the one we have chosen. This is the best, from the choices that I had. Or I think it is … And Isabel loves it. Yes, she loves it.

But before I came to look at the school, I didn't have a good view of it. I didn't have a particular reason really. When I was a girl and went to the grammar school, Bowden wasn't viewed as a good school and I think that's tended to stick. And in the area that it's in there's a lot of council housing. I lived in a council house as a child so I'm not going against that. But I'm just saying because of the area it was in, it just seemed to have that name when I was at school, and it's stuck even now.

4. A Story about the Cathedral School: from grammar to comprehensive without even moving

So why does the Cathedral School seem to appeal to parents in the city? And why did Bowden staff make reference to it when talking about their school? Last year over 90% of the Cathedral students achieved at least five A to C grades as GCSE exams. The figure at Bowden School was 35%. Student intake at the Cathedral School is clearly still heavily skewed towards the more academic. Students at Bowden described it me as being 'a posh school' for 'rich children' and for 'clever kids'. One told me:

It's like being in a glass house. I've got some friends who go there and they find they are pushed too hard, they can't cope, quite a lot of pressure. Because they were doing so well the teachers were pushing them harder and harder to get good grades.

It is still described by some as being a 'grammar' school even though it is nearly 25 years since it became, theoretically, a comprehensive. It publicises its association with the Cathedral and its choir as well as its own long history. The tone is carefully set in the school's prospectus, in which it is described as a:

Church of England comprehensive secondary school, with a large academic Sixth Form … founded by Henry Vlll in 154l as the Cathedral School to educate the Cathedral choristers … this close link with the Cathedral is still valued and maintained today.

The school has also benefited from changes in national legislation, which have encouraged a culture of greater selection and competition amongst schools, and so-called choice for parents. For example, the publication of league tables helps to perpetuate the concept of 'better' schools and encourages some parents to seek a place for their child in a school where they believe they will have a greater chance of academic success. The figures of 90% and 35% for GCSEs, quoted above, illustrate this. Another legislative example is the changes to the admissions criteria that are permissible for schools. In the case of the Cathedral School these allow, not only parents to choose the school, but more importantly, for the school to choose its students. Its first seven admission criteria are:

i Children of worshipping members of the Church of England
ii Cathedral day choristers
iii Children of staff
iv Brothers and sisters of children at the school
v Children of worshipping members of other Christian denominations and other faiths
vi 12 places selected on overall academic ability
vii 3 places selected on overall musical ability

All of these seem likely to support the maintenance of its predominantly middle-class academic intake. Only its eighth criterion refers to 'proximity to the school'. It is not therefore a local school for local families. In this way, it is able to select students from a wide area right across the city including some who live in Bowden's catchment area. This seems remarkably like a grammar school system. The current government does not appear to want to halt this trend. In their report *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) they state:

We are deeply committed to equal opportunities for all pupils.

But this is followed by:

This does not mean a single model of schooling. We want to encourage diversity, with schools developing their own distinctive identity and expertise. (p. 40)

However, 'diversity' will inevitably encourage selection and it is difficult to equate that with 'equal opportunities'.

5. A Headteacher's Story: competing for students in a selective market

Here the headteacher, 'David Roberts' talks about the impact of so-called parental 'choice' on schools in the city:

The Cathedral School … well, the grammar school factor is always going to be there. It's a comprehensive school – in name anyway. But it's not perceived as that because people will see that its selection process lends itself to a higher ability intake for parents with middle-class aspirations … Some also go to Bradley Grammar School which is 20 miles away (in an adjacent Local Education Authority) … And then there are those who we just can't detect, we just never see them. I mean they go out to the independent schools.'

At the other end of the hierarchy of the city's schools there are a small number with severely falling rolls. League tables, and parental 'choice' have exacerbated differences at both extremes. One school in particular is under threat of closure. If this were to happen there would be no local school for that community. Inevitably the possibility of this school closing has contributed to its numbers falling even further.

Whilst Bowden's student numbers are fairly static, the importance of maintaining them was evident during my time at the school. For example, open evenings were taken very seriously indeed, as was any opportunity to promote the school in local papers. Although the headteacher seemed unwilling to acknowledge there was any pressure on him because of this competition, its influence was apparent. Here is another extract from an interview with him. The language he uses is, in itself, suggestive of the market-place: 'product', 'sell', 'recruit'. He seems keen to encourage as many parents as possible to select Bowden School as the first choice for their children. I asked him what he thought about being in competition with other schools, for students:

> *I suppose in the end you become immune. And my view is, if you have a good product it sells itself. I still think one of the key influences is the recommendation of other parents. So the better job you do the more likely you are to recruit … The one thing I did work hard on is our primary schools. Our named schools tend to be in the south and east, but our nearest ones are actually Willingden, and Southton. It's important for us to be quite central in our catchment area, because they give us our top end. So for me, the recruitment issue is not just about getting our 240 but it's been about getting the right spread of 240.*

He describes the school's natural catchment area as being 'a fully comprehensive range' but 'significantly skewed below average'. Yet his action in the primary schools suggests that he does not want the intake to mirror this: hence his aim to include the 'top end', which entails attracting some students away from their named secondary school's. Such students are valued by the headteacher presumably because they will, in time, enhance the school's exam results, which will, in turn, attract more parents. It seems Bowden would like to have some influence over their intake in the same way as the Cathedral School.

Such attitudes seem to be at odds with earlier statements in our interview when David Roberts articulated strongly his commitment to all students, as individuals, regardless of notions of attainment. Both appear to be genuine. He seems to be trying to operate within two different sets of cultural values: on the one hand those which are driven by external government pressures of competition and 'choice' and on the other his own deeply held personal belief that all students are of equal worth. His ideals seem to reflect a culture of inclusion, but, as in this example, they were often compromised for pragmatic reasons. For David Roberts, as for any headteacher of an urban school, the catch is surely that he has no choice. If he does not actively promote a positive public image (of his school and this can be only in relationship to the images of other schools) then his student numbers will fall. In the current climate, a school that does not enter the competition is automatically a loser.

6. A final Story about Bowden School: selection from within

Even if the intake of students at Bowden School is considered to be non-selective, like many other schools, it operates a policy of selection from within. Although some classes are taught in mixed attainment groups, others are not and there has been a gradual shift towards more setting. This is partly as a response to successive governments' demands for improved exam results. These, of course, feed into league tables and Bowden, like other schools, acquiesces in the belief that a high position in these tables will attract parents.

The current Government support the move towards greater setting in schools. They state (DfEE, 1997):

> *We are not going back to the days of the 11+; but we are not prepared to stand still and defend the failings of across-the-board mixed ability teaching … We intend to modernise comprehensive schooling. (p. 38)*

The reference to the 11+, although superficially critical, implies that selection by attainment and behaviour within a school, even if not between schools, is necessary. However, like the hierarchy of schools in this city, setting produces a hierarchy of students within individual schools: for some to be in top sets, others necessarily have to be in lower ones. As a learning support assistant these were often the groups with which I worked. Many in the lower sets inevitably described themselves in terms such as 'thick', 'stupid' and 'dumbos'.

Meanwhile, some students in middle sets, particularly in Years 10 and 11, complained to me that staff were over-concerned about pushing them to achieve as many C grades as possible in their GCSEs. They did not think this was to help them as individuals to do well but rather to improve the published league table results of the school generally. In contrast, perhaps unsurprisingly, some students who were more academically successful thought there should have been more setting because they considered themselves to be held back by others. These examples illustrate how such forms of selection can encourage a culture in which some students believe themselves to be more or less valued by the school than other.

Reflecting on these Different Experiences

When I look back at my own grammar school it is difficult not to equate it with the Cathedral School. I wonder how far we can argue that England has many genuinely comprehensive schools, particularly in highly populated cities where a number of schools are in close proximity to one another. I hope that the students at the Cathedral School feel more at home in its prevailing culture than I did at my school. I suspect that they do because of the uneasy advantage of the school selecting the families rather than the students simply passing an entrance exam. Middle-class cultural values still predominate in such schools.

I now think I have a greater insight into what it might

mean to be a part of the culture of a secondary modern school. Members of staff at Bowden School were frustrated that their efforts were measured against those who taught in schools with such a different intake of students. Their league table results will never match those of the Cathedral School and others like it. And even if staff reassure themselves that the context of any school must be taken into account when comparisons are made, it can not be satisfying or comfortable to know that your school will not be considered as successful as some others. For example, in the two extracts from parents related here there was the sense that however well Bowden did as a school, it would never have been the first choice for their children. Competition amongst schools also impacts upon how students are valued by staff and therefore by themselves.

The current comprehensive system in England is not about equal opportunities for all. It is not concerned with celebrating diversity of attainment and backgrounds. It is divisive, selective and exclusive. Recent governments, both past Conservative and present Labour, argue that the needs of children and young people are best met within a culture of market forces, where the success of some is at the expense of others' failure and where teachers are valued most highly for producing academic results. In cities this creates a local culture in which schools are clearly pitched against one another.

I was a teacher in a number of secondary schools from 1979 until 1989. Although I certainly felt a loyalty to the schools where I worked, I also had a very strong sense of belonging to a wider education community. I saw myself as part of a professional body whose aim was to support children and young people as they developed into adulthood. I thought this was exciting, worthwhile and honourable. As I write these words, some 10 years later, I realise that they might seem naive. Cynicism has crept in. Yet, when schools are encouraged to consider one another as being in competition rather than as working together as part of an education service, it must be to the detriment of all students.

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Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of the Causes, Dynamics, and Pressures of School Exclusion: emerging findings from a small-scale study of four secondary schools

ELLE RUSTIQUE-FORRESTER
Previously a secondary teacher who has worked in New York, Elle Rustique-Forrester is now lead research officer at the University of Surrey, Roehampton. Her article shows how teachers recognise that the interaction between school and national policies over the last decade has had a series of negative effects on the number of excluded children, although individual teachers and schools have different perceptions and responses with regard to the underlying causes of problem behaviours.

School Exclusions: some recent historical background

Throughout the 1990s, the number of pupils expelled and suspended from schools in England increased at an alarmingly unprecedented rate. In secondary schools alone, the phase of schooling that accounts for over 80% of all school exclusions, the number of permanent school exclusions (expulsions) grew 500%, rising from 2,500 pupils in 1992 to over 13,000 in 1998. Recent research studies, government commissions, and national reports have provided some insight about the behavioural and social dimensions of school exclusion. We know, for example, that contrary to public perception, the most common reason reported by schools for exclusion is persistent, 'low-level' disruptive behaviour (i.e. a pupil's failure to follow school rules) rather than criminal acts or extremely violent behaviour (Gillborn, 1996). We also know that particular social groups are at greater risk of exclusion, including Afro-Caribbean pupils, boys, pupils from socially deprived backgrounds, pupils with special educational needs, and pupils in care (Donovan, 1998; Social Exclusion Unit [SEU], 1998; Commission for Racial Equality [CRE], 1996).

Finally, we know that rates of exclusion vary significantly between schools. Though exclusion is generally higher in socially disadvantaged areas, the highest-excluding schools are not necessarily those in the most deprived areas, and vice-versa (DfEE, 1997; SEU, 1998). Yet, despite this collective knowledge, we know little about the schooling and pedagogical dimensions of exclusion. Although previous studies (Rutter et al, 1979; McLean, 1987) revealed that schools differ in their approaches to and perceptions of behaviour, few studies have examined, post-1988 education reforms, how teachers view and make sense of exclusion today.

In a previous review of the literature, I criticised the limitations of a 'deficit model' of exclusion, through which the causes of exclusion were seen as originating with pupils' perceived social and behavioural inadequacies. I concluded that to understand exclusion better, we must look instead more closely at the complex role and impact of school context, teaching, and national educational policy (Rustique-Forrester, 2000). In this article, I argue that we need to consider more carefully, the wider policy context in which exclusions rose throughout the 1990s, and to explore more centrally, the views and experiences of teachers. Rather than continue to define exclusion from a conception of pupil behaviour and school discipline policy, a different and broader lens than has been traditionally used by psychology and sociology might be employed. This view and conceptualisation of the causes and dynamics of exclusion is what motivated the focus of the study discussed here.

Exploring Teachers' Perception of Exclusion in Four Secondary Schools

This article discusses emerging findings from a small-scale research study of school exclusions in four secondary schools. A major focus and goal of the study was to examine the views and beliefs of teachers, and to explore the following questions:

- What did teachers believe to be the causes of exclusion?
- What explanations could they offer for the rise in exclusions?

- What did they believe was their role, as teachers, the role of their school in providing a solution to exclusion?

In this article, I focus on two main areas of findings:

1) how teachers and staff viewed and conceptualised the causes and dynamics of exclusion; and
2) what teachers perceived to be the kinds of pressures in schools that aggravated the use of exclusion.

The data collected for this part of the study was based primarily on interviews conducted with 38 teachers and staff members in four secondary schools.

Table I – School & Interview Sample

School A – Eastdon Approximately 2000 pupils Southeast England {Low-Excluding}	*School B – Parkwell* Approximately 800 pupils Southeast England {High-Excluding}
School C – Fieldmoor Approximately 400 pupils Northwest England {Low-Excluding}	*School D – Riddington* Approximately 450 pupils Northwest England {High-Excluding}

Note: A total of 38 interviews were carried out between 1999 and 2000. 'Teachers' include classroom teachers, heads of years, heads of departments, SENCOs, as well as senior managers. The names of the schools have been changed.

As shown in Table I, the four schools, which comprised of the study's sample, were located in socially deprived areas of different regions of England. Two schools were located in a sub-urban area of Northwest England, and two schools were located in an inner-city area of the Southeast. Though each of the schools revealed similarly challenging profiles of pupil intake (this was based on indicators of free school meals, SEN, and % ethnic minority pupils), the exclusion rates for each schools varied significantly. Two of the schools, Eastdon and Fieldmoor, had lower rates of exclusion and had excluded less than three pupils between 1997 and 2000 (Fieldmoor had permanently excluded three pupils and Eastdon had excluded zero pupils). The other two schools, Parkwell and Riddington, had higher rates of exclusion. Unofficial (school) reports suggested that approximately 15 and 20 pupils had been permanently excluded within each of the schools, within the same three-year period.

Teachers' Perceptions about the Causes and Dynamics of Exclusion

By interviewing teachers and staff about exclusion, I hoped to explore whether any links or relationships could be made between their views and beliefs, and the school's approach and practices toward exclusion. Although I intended to compare teachers' views between the four schools, I did not wish to measure the extent to which teachers' views varied both within and across schools. Rather, I was more concerned with constructing from teachers' perceptions, possible theories and explanations about how and why exclusion occurred, and why rates might vary in between schools. Analysis of teachers' interpretations of exclusion revealed three categories of causes and dynamics:

- pupil-based factors;
- school-based factors; and
- external policy-based factors.

Pupil-based Factors: exclusion originating from individual behavioural and social deficits

This first category of responses revealed a 'deficit' model to describe the causes of exclusion. Teachers whose responses fell in this category suggested that exclusion was a consequence of pupils' behavioural, intellectual, and social deficits. Pupils at risk of exclusion were described as 'difficult to control', 'off-the-wall', 'impossible to teach', and 'a danger to others'. Exclusion occurred because pupils 'lacked the appropriate social skills', 'did not receive support from home', 'came from troubled and difficult families' 'had little confidence and low self-esteem', and 'did not have a high motivation for learning'. In describing the pupils who were excluded from the school, one senior manager from Riddington observed:

> *We have a challenging intake … their reading scores are below average and over 50% have special educational needs … many of these kids also come from single-parent homes … and even though it's not politically correct to say this [pointing to student records] … you'll see that many of the kids who are excluded do not have the same name as their mother or even their siblings.*

This teacher went on to explain that many of the pupils who were excluded from the school came from 'broken homes … some whose mums are involved in drugs … and then these problems get brought into school'. Other teachers who expressed similar views felt that exclusion was linked to a range of social dynamics originating from a pupil's home, community, socio-economic class, and culture. This view was used to suggest that pupils who came from a particular set of social circumstances or background exhibited behaviour that led to exclusion.

This set of findings suggests a tendency amongst teachers to externalise the causes of exclusion, and to associate social and behavioural 'deficits' with disruptive behaviour and therefore, exclusion. More worryingly, however, was the inevitability and powerlessness that also accompanied such views. Teachers who believed social background and behaviour to be the primary cause of exclusion tended to suggest that they could to little to prevent exclusion. One teacher from Parkwell concluded, 'At the end of the day, the solution lies with the pupil we take into this school … we need to be more selective if we want to reduce disruptive behaviour and exclusions'. In externalising the causes of exclusion and using a 'deficit' model to describe pupils, solutions were perceived by some teachers as being outside the scope and power of either themselves or their school.

School-based Factors:
exclusion as a consequence of teaching and learning

A second category of teacher responses linked exclusion with a range of school-based issues, including the curriculum; professional development and training; teaching and learning styles; pupil support structures and systems; and leadership and management. Teachers whose responses fit this category acknowledged the context of the school, and viewed exclusion as a wider dynamic of teaching and learning. Teachers thus described pupils who had been excluded as 'being unable to access the curriculum', 'in need of high levels of individual support', and 'needing additional support and help to cope with the pressures of school'. One teacher from Parkwell, for example, suggested that exclusion had worsened because of increasing class sizes, which he explained, 'mean teachers not being able to give the attention [to pupils] despite their wanting to'. He believed that the rise in exclusion was linked with 'a lack of training' … and 'poor teachers in dealing with behavioural difficulties'. Teachers who interpreted exclusion as being linked to issues of teaching and learning tended also to describe a pupil in terms of his disaffection and disengagement from learning, rather than simply his behaviour or social background. For example, one teacher from Fieldmoor felt that pupils who were at risk of exclusion were 'children who have great difficulty learning … [who] use behavioural tactics as a distraction. I am convinced of that'.

Although this category of responses also included the perception that a pupil's behaviour or social circumstances could aggravate his or her problems in school, teachers who associated exclusion with schooling seemed less fatalistic than those who defined exclusion primarily within a pupil-and social-deficit model. Teachers who linked exclusion to a pupil's difficulty with learning tended to suggest that they, as teachers, and their school, as an organisation, could exert some control and influence in preventing exclusion.

Policy-based Factors:
exclusion as a response to external pressures

A third and final category of teacher responses linked exclusion and its increase over the past decade, to the system-wide and external pressures of the national government's educational policies. This view of exclusion – as a consequence and dynamic of policy – emerged in the views of teachers across all four schools. For example, a teacher from Riddington believed that 'league tables give an incentive for heads to exclude pupils … who are not keeping up and disrupting others'. Another teacher from the same school explained that 'There's less time and little interest on the part of a school to devote valuable resources to a pupil who is not performing'. A teacher from Parkwell said, 'Inspection means getting rid of those [pupils] who will disrupt … don't ask me where they go, but they somehow conveniently disappear for a few weeks. Then they magically come back.' Teachers from Fieldmoor and Eastdon described their school as having been successful in preventing exclusion, though several acknowledged and described, 'increased pressures on schools to raise and demonstrate achievement'. and 'a system-wide incentives to exclude pupils who don't perform'.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Pressures to Exclude

What was particularly striking about this third category of responses was that whether or not a teacher described exclusion within a pupil-deficit model or whether the causes of exclusion were attributed to factors within the school, the majority of teachers, across all four schools, viewed a powerful confluence of policies – the National Curriculum, Ofsted inspection, exams and assessments, and league tables – as having had a profoundly negative impact on exclusion.

The effects of the system's pressures were described in terms of a series of constraints and dilemmas which resulted from a reduced tolerance and capacity for being responsive to pupils who presented difficulties in the classroom, either in terms of learning or behaviour.

In trying to explore the wider, policy context of exclusion, it worth discussing briefly three kinds of pressures that teachers linked with external, national policies:

Accountability Pressures
(Ofsted, League Tables, Exams)

A climate of greater competition and pressure to meet national targets for academic performance were cited as increasing the risk of exclusion. This category of pressures included the view that schools were more likely to exclude pupils who disrupted the learning of others because of public and government pressures to 'improve academic performance', 'raise our exam scores', 'meet inspection targets' 'improve our position on league tables' and 'improve our pupil intake'. Teachers also explained that pressure to produce and demonstrate outcomes translated to a pressure to place greater efforts on those pupils who were more likely to achieve desired results rather than those pupils experiencing difficulties. One teacher from Fieldmoor explained, 'Because of exam pressures … if you have students who are continually disruptive, and are stopping able students from doing well, the easiest way is to ship [those pupils] elsewhere!' He further explained, 'Under Ofsted, we were inspected … they knew from our intake the targets and exams we could get … but the report was still about not achieving the national average.'

Curriculum Pressures (Assessment and Exams)

Teachers connected greater pressures to exclude to the constraints of the National Curriculum. Such pressure was described in terms of the rigidity and pace of the curriculum, particularly in Years 10 and 11, when it was difficult to adapt content and lessons to individual pupils' needs. Teachers described pressures as 'having to get all the pupils through the syllabus' and having to follow a regimented pace of coursework and exam preparation. The pressure and pace of assessments were seen as 'making differentiation very difficult, if not impossible', 'difficult for some pupils to keep up', 'difficult [for others] to stay on top of all the coursework', and 'hard for some [pupils] to feel confident and positive about taking exams'. Teachers also described a greater likelihood of exclusion for pupils with low academic abilities in that such pupils became disaffected, and 'saw nothing positive for them in the later years' and 'could not engage in an irrelevant curriculum'. Teachers who taught Year 10 and 11 pupils also felt that exam pressures 'increased the stress levels of both teachers and students' and 'made pupils act out'.

Other views included the perception that the current curriculum provided relatively few options for pupils who missed school, who were absent, or who could not access certain subjects.

Time and Resource Pressures (Competition and Local Management of Schools)

The pressure to compete with other schools was described as 'no longer sharing the incentive to share and swap good ideas with other schools', 'skimping on resources for pupils so we can replace the roof', 'reduce staff if numbers go down'. Teachers attributed the pressures of market-based competition and LMS as reducing both time and resources available to teachers for training and professional development, and for shifting the emphasis within LEAs towards monitoring schools' financial efficiency and achievement, rather than encouraging them to be more caring, nurturing places.

Analysis – Linking the Pressures of the Classroom with the Pressures to Exclude

The dilemmas and conflicts experienced by teachers in the classroom raise important implications about the context in which exclusion occurs in schools. The effects of these pressures were described by a number of teachers as reducing their capacity to be individually responsive to pupils. Teachers described great difficulties 'trying to balance the needs of an individual pupil with the wider class', 'not having the time or tolerance to put up with disruption during exams even though I know the pupil is having problems' and 'not having time to follow-up because of all of the other paperwork'. For teachers, the combined pressures of national policies seems to have created a climate in classrooms through which exclusion has emerged more as a mechanism for coping with growing external pressures, rather than an appropriate response to behaviour. An illustration of the confluent impact of these pressures is shown in Figure 1.

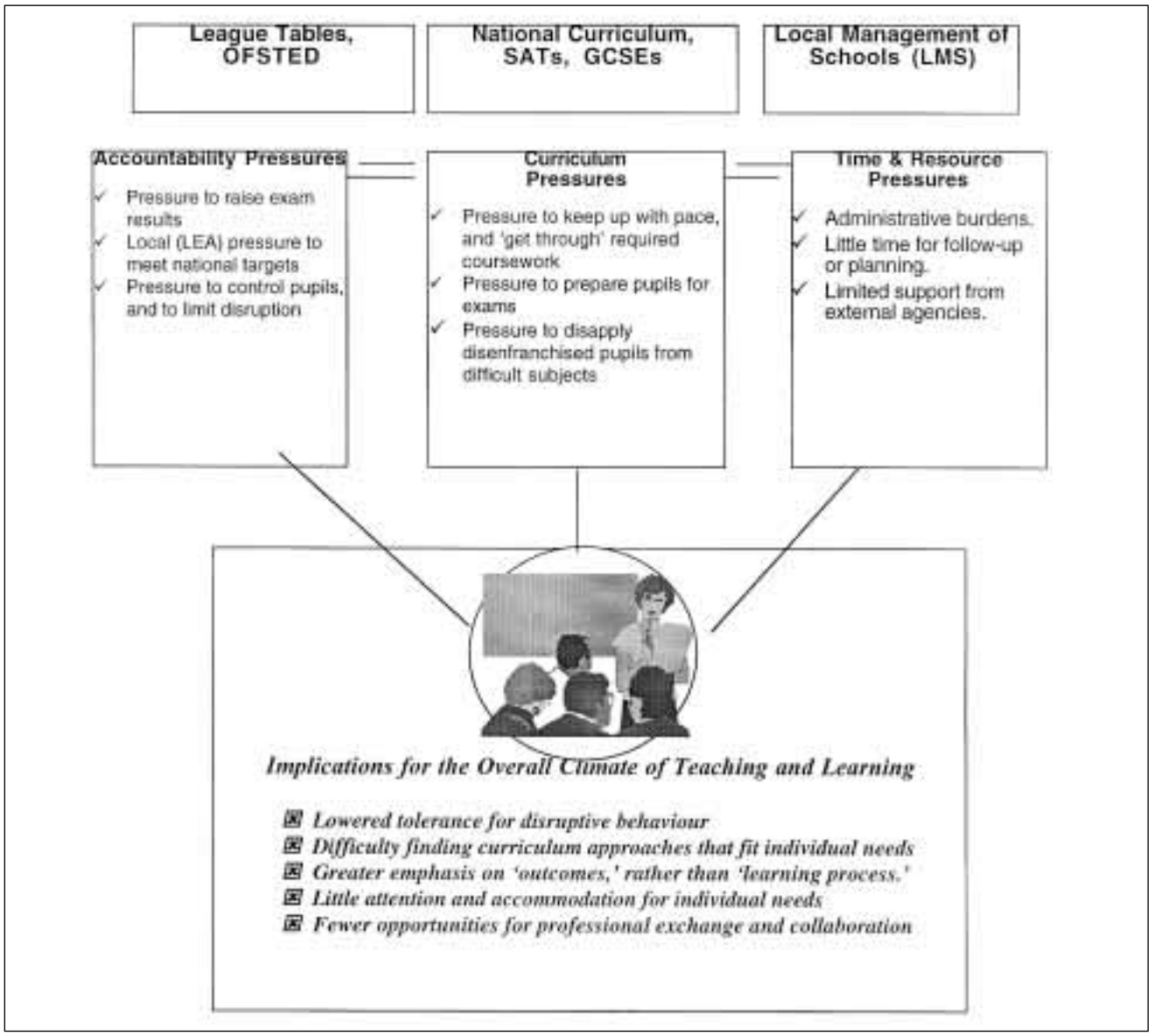

Figure 1. Linking the pressures of policy to teaching, learning, and school exclusion.

Although teachers expressed different theories and models about the causes of exclusion, teachers described similar implications for classroom practices. Across the four schools, teachers described exclusion as a kind of 'dilemma', 'tension', 'conflict', – a manifestation of trying to balance competing and conflicting pressures. As one teacher in Riddington explained:

> *I don't think exclusion solves anything. You put a child out, and there is [another] problem. I think it causes problems outside, and to the child. The dilemma is when … what you do causes dilemmas internally … [such as] … keeping the pupil who causes problems in class. You need to be safe in school, and if you can't guarantee this, then you have a problem. But you have a duty to the child. What you try to do is two things really … you are trying to help that child. You also try to provide education for the wider group. So it is that balance.*

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that teachers view exclusion as a difficult and complex problem, reflecting a set of dynamics with far broader ramifications than just pupil behaviour or social background. Though many teachers perceived that behaviour and social background could aggravate the problems which could lead to exclusion, few teachers believed these to be the only factor or cause. Rather, in almost all of the interviews conducted, the process of describing exclusion led many teachers to describe exclusion as a multi-layered, multi-dimensional problem.

For many teachers, exclusion was conceptualised within a broad, system-wide context – linked to the internal conditions, structures, and ethos of the school as well as to the external pressures of national educational policies. Teachers also suggested that the influence of factors at both the micro-level (school) and macro-level (national policy) was significant in explaining the context in which exclusion rose throughout the 1990s, and is used by schools today. Crucially, teachers viewed the interaction between schools and national policies as having had a series of negative effects on their classroom practices, namely, by reducing their time and tolerance – and in effect, creating a range of pressures and incentives to exclude.

In conclusion, it is perhaps worth returning to an observation made earlier that exclusion practices and rates varied within each of the four schools. In attempting to explore the possible explanations for these differences, some links could be made to the contrasting beliefs and attitudes of teachers of the higher- and the lower-excluding schools. Some of the differences in teachers' views of exclusion related to the level of certainty, coherence, and clarity through which teachers saw their own role and their school's influence. Thus, in the next stages of my analysis, I hope to examine more closely these differences – an area of analysis beyond the scope and length of this article. I suspect that the organisational context of each of the schools will shed further light about how and why some schools might exclude more than others might. Understanding how the day-to-day processes and pressures of school are managed and mediated by teachers in each of the schools might reveal even greater understanding about the context in which exclusion occurs.

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Contact: ellie@merf.demon.co.uk

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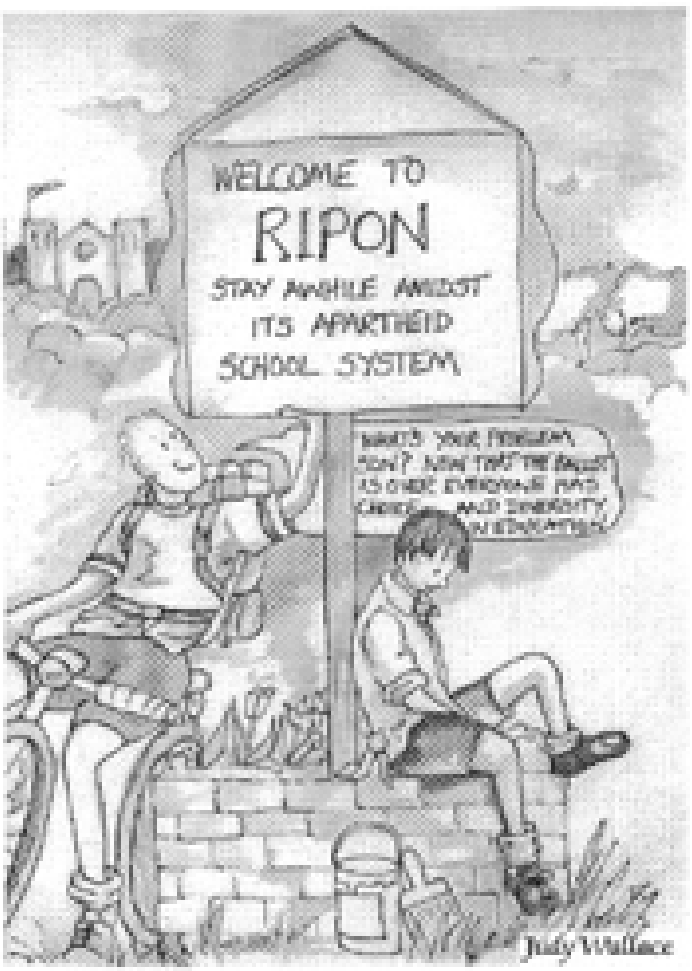

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