Twelve Reasons Why New Labour Shouldn't be Touched with a Bargepole!

Government education policy has taken so many wrong turnings since the New Labour landslide general election victory of May 1997, it is difficult not to feel a profound sense of disillusionment and despair. The so-called radical proposals in Gordon Brown's Budget of the 17th April this year may have signalled an end of the absurdities of 'the Third Way' as far as attitudes towards taxation and the funding of the National Health Service are concerned but no one seems to have passed on the message to the Blairite appointees at the Department for Education and Skills.

Just when you think things couldn't possibly get any worse, along comes a new ministerial speech which further emphasises the undeniable continuity between Thatcherite and New Labour education policies.

This time it was Estelle Morris's ill-judged address to the right-wing Social Market Foundation on the 24th June, which spelled out a new agenda for the comprehensive school and in the course of which the Education Secretary said: 'I know that all secondary schools are not identical. As a teacher, I go into some schools and think: "I would like to work here"; but there are some I simply wouldn't touch with a bargepole.'

This insulting aside, which echoed last year's infamous 'bog-standard comprehensive' jibe by Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's all-powerful Communications Chief, was made by someone who is still a member of the National Union of Teachers and who taught at Sydney Stringer Comprehensive School in Coventry before becoming a Labour MP.

Not surprisingly, it provoked anger and dismay from the majority of the teacher unions. In the words of Doug McAvoy, Leader of the NUT: 'This is an outrageous statement which ill becomes the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Our teachers devote their energies to doing the utmost for their pupils. There will be many wondering whether they are teaching in a school the Education Secretary wouldn't touch with a bargepole. Her statement will leave many of them asking the question: "if she would not teach here, why should we?" … Her statement is totally demoralising and ignores the efforts made by our teachers, many of whom work in extremely difficult circumstances.'

Yet although the 'bargepole' insult became the obvious focus of newspaper headlines on the 25th June (for example: 'Morris infuriates teachers with bargepole insult' in *The Times*; 'Bargepole jibe angers teachers' in *The Guardian*), it is important not to lose sight of the vital message that the Social Market Foundation Speech was trying to put across. The famous jibe, which may not have been scripted, came in the course of an address which claimed that the comprehensive system had clearly failed in its mission to 'raise standards for all' and which promised to end the era of the 'one-size-fits-all' comprehensive by introducing greater diversity into the system through new specialist schools and city academies.

It was John Dunford, General Secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, whose response to the Speech showed that he understood its true provenance and real import: 'Estelle Morris has demonstrated that she is "on-message" with her bosses in Downing Street, but miles "off-message" with the teaching force to which we expect her to give supportive leadership … The comprehensive system, by definition, serves the whole community, and some schools work in extremely difficult circumstances. For too long, the comprehensive system has been expected to work with one hand tied behind its back. Estelle Morris has made the task of those schools even more difficult. I don't recognise her image of "one-size-fits-all" comprehensive schools, which belies the rich variety of education which pupils receive in these schools.'

Slogans like the 'one-size-fits-all' comprehensive ask important questions about what a comprehensive school should be like and about how much choice and diversity it should permit. Should there be both diversity *within* the secondary system and *within* the schools themselves?

In an article published in *The Observer* ('Why comprehensives must change'), timed to coincide with the delivery of her Speech the following day, Estelle Morris wrote that we must keep the 'entitlement' that comprehensive education and a comprehensive curriculum offer all our children. But she went on to say that 'we have to encourage every single one of our comprehensive schools to develop its own sense of mission and play to its strengths'. It seems to me that there is a major contradiction here, and it is one that gets more glaring every day as the Government sets about dismantling what's left of the National Curriculum.

Of course, there is no reason why breadth, balance and coherence have to be lost from the secondary curriculum. Even if we accept the Government's new concept of a more flexible 14 to 19 'continuum', there would be no need to deny students a more or less common 'entitlement' curriculum, provided we embrace the concept of breadth over time and adopt a modular approach to post-14 curriculum planning.

The trouble is, as John Dunford strongly implied in the Press Release quoted earlier: we cannot pretend that we are dealing with a situation where the DfES effectively makes education policy in this country. It was the contention of a well-researched Channel Four television programme 'Tony: President or King?' shown on 4th May 2002 and presented by the talented *Observer* columnist Nick Cohen, that current education policy is largely determined by Tony Blair and his close friend Andrew Adonis, who was appointed to advise the Downing Street Policy Unit on education in 1998 and went on to become Head of the Unit after the 2001 Election.

Blair and Adonis are both implacable opponents of the comprehensive ideal. And that is one of the many reasons why although the Labour victory in 1997 was electorally seismic, it was historically unimportant.

Clyde Chitty

Creationism: bad science, bad religion, bad education

DEREK GILLARD

In the Spring 2002 issue of *FORUM*, Derek Gillard wrote about the Labour Government's policy of promoting more 'faith schools' – schools run, at taxpayers' expense, by churches and other religious groups. Now it appears that at least two such schools are teaching their students 'creationism', a phenomenon previously limited to the USA. This piece outlines the origins of such teaching, surveys the criticisms of it and asks whether it is the inevitable outcome of Labour's love affair with religion.

The roots of 'creationism' – the belief that the world was created a few thousand years ago exactly as described in Genesis – can be traced back to the completely fallacious chronology of scripture propounded by Archbishop of Armagh James Ussher (1581–1656), who set the date of the creation of the world at 23 October 4004BC. The teaching of this belief has been a controversial issue in the USA for years. Now it appears that at least two British schools are teaching their students to doubt the theory of evolution. In March 2002 *The Guardian* reported that Emmanuel City Technology College in Gateshead had hosted a 'creationist' conference and that senior staff have urged teachers to promote biblical fundamentalism.

Darwin and Evolution

National Curriculum Science requires students to be taught about evolution. This is hardly surprising, since the theory is universally accepted as the basis of life on earth and has been repeatedly demonstrated to be true by observation and experiment.

The theory that all plant and animal species have a common ancestry and that life is a process of constant change and development was first developed by a number of naturalists including the French biologist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck (1744–1829). The most important figure in the development of the theory was British natural historian and geologist Charles Darwin (1809–1882). Between 1831 and 1836 Darwin sailed the southern hemisphere as unpaid naturalist on HMS Beagle collecting the material which was to become the basis for his later work. He and fellow naturalist Arthur Russel Wallace (1823–1913) jointly developed the notion of a causal evolutionary mechanism which they called natural selection and in 1858 simultaneously published their thoughts on the subject. Darwin went on to publish many books and papers, the most significant being *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). His work 'changed our concepts of nature and of humanity's place within it' (Oxford, 1998).

On the Origin of Species marked a watershed in scientific understanding and sold fourteen hundred copies on the day of its publication. Evolutionary theory quickly became universally accepted and has been confirmed by many branches of science. Genetics provides the basis for the study of heredity and mutation. Biogeography supplies evidence of the geographical variations within and between species. Palaeontology and geology have demonstrated the development of life forms on earth over 3,500 million years.

The theory of natural selection argues that, in the competition for survival, only those organisms best adapted to their environment will live to reproduce – the so-called 'survival of the fittest'. The theory has been 'confirmed by observation and studied by experiment' (Oxford, 1998). While some details – especially relating to human evolution – remain unclear, the general outline is well established and is supported by every new discovery.

The only people who have a problem with evolution are those fundamentalist Christians who wish to believe that the Bible is, in every detail, the literal and inerrant word of God. 'Darwin's name has become a byword for atheism in fundamentalist circles, yet the *Origin* was not intended as an attack upon religion, but was a sober, careful exposition of a scientific theory.' Indeed, Darwin himself was 'always respectful of religious faith' (Armstrong, 2000).

In fact, there was surprisingly little religious reaction to the book at the time, probably because the following year seven Anglican priests caused a much greater furore by publishing *Essays and Reviews* in which they sought to make textual criticism of the Bible available to the ordinary reader. This new 'Higher Criticism' represented 'the triumph of the rational discourse of *logos* over myth'. Higher Criticism – which demonstrated that it was impossible to read the Bible in an entirely literal manner – was to become 'a bogey of Christian fundamentalists … but this was only because Western people had lost the original sense of the mythical' (Armstrong, 2000).

Creationism in the USA

While virtually everyone – and certainly all scientists – accepted the basis of evolutionary theory, a small minority of fundamentalist Christians – mostly in the United States – found it impossible to accept that the world could have been created in any way other than that described in Genesis. Despite Darwin's protestations to the contrary, they regarded the whole evolutionary project as an attack on their faith.

In 1920 the Presbyterian Democratic politician William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925) launched 'a crusade against the teaching of evolution in schools and colleges' (Armstrong, 2000). Bryan considered that Darwinism had been responsible for the horrors of the First World War, on the basis that the theory had persuaded the Germans that

'only the strong could or should survive' (Armstrong, 2000). He was also influenced by James H. Leuba's book *Belief in God and Immortality* which suggested that a college education damaged religious belief. Darwinism, Bryan concluded, was 'causing young men and women to lose faith in God, the Bible and other fundamental doctrines of Christianity' (Armstrong, 2000). He toured the States lecturing on 'The Menace of Darwinism', drawing large crowds and much media attention. His conclusions were 'superficial, naive and incorrect' (Armstrong, 2000) but people had been unnerved by the First World War and were uneasy about the power of science. Those who wanted a 'plain-speaking religion' were anxious to find a plausible reason to reject evolution. 'Intellectuals and sophisticates might follow these new ideas with enthusiasm in Yale and Harvard and in the big eastern cities, but they were alien to many small-town Americans, who felt that their culture was being taken over by the secularist establishment' (Armstrong, 2000).

This anxiety was especially strong in the southern states, where people began to feel that the teaching of evolution in their schools was an example of the '"colonisation" of their society by an alien ideology' (Armstrong, 2000). Consequently, Bills were introduced in Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee and Arkansas to ban the teaching of evolution. Tennessee's law was particularly severe so John Scopes, a young teacher in the small town of Dayton, decided to challenge it and to stand up for the right to free speech. He announced that he had broken the law by teaching evolutionary theory and was duly taken to court.

His trial, in 1925, 'ceased to be simply about civil liberties, and became a contest between God and science' (Armstrong, 2000). William Jennings Bryan appeared for the prosecution and was torn to shreds by Clarence Darrow, head of the newly-formed American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). He was forced to concede that the world was far older than six thousand years, that the six days of creation described in Genesis were not literally twenty-four hours each and that he had never read any critical account of the origins of the biblical text. Scopes was convicted and fined $100 (later overturned on a technicality by Tennessee's Supreme Court) but there is no doubt that the victor of the trial was modern science. Bryan himself died shortly afterwards amid widespread press criticism of him and his followers as 'hopeless anachronisms' (Armstrong, 2000). Despite this, Tennessee kept its anti-evolution laws on the statute book until 1967.

Fundamentalists felt marginalised by the hostility to their views, but their faith, 'rooted in deep fear and anxiety', was, if anything, strengthened by the Dayton disaster. During the following thirty years, their resentment festered and their beliefs became even more extreme and right-wing. 'Fundamentalism exists in a symbiotic relationship with an aggressive liberalism or secularism, and, under attack, invariably becomes more extreme, bitter and excessive' (Armstrong, 2000).

Their cause was given an unintended boost in the 1960s. The federal government's policy of requiring state schools to be racially integrated was unpopular with many white middle-class Americans who began sending their children to privately run church schools, many of which taught creationism. Pupils were taught that 'Dinosaur bones were those of creatures killed during the Flood, while fossil dating – using the principles of the radioactive decay of atoms – was derided as a fraud' (Robin McKie & Martin Bright, *The Observer*, 17 March 2002).

Today, seventy-odd years after Dayton, creationism is making another come-back in the USA. A recent survey by California State University's Professor Lawrence Lerner, published in *Scientific American*, reveals that creationism is spreading in the world's most technologically advanced nation 'at a disturbing rate'. Forty-five per cent of Americans – and even forty per cent of US Catholics – say they believe God created life some time in the past ten thousand years, despite the fact that Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the Church's commitment to evolutionary theory in 1996.

Amanda Chesworth, head of the anti-creationist Darwin Day group, is worried. 'It is very, very scary. Creationism is spreading further and further. Creationists use some very effective tactics. They target small towns and get supporters on important local organisations, in particular boards of education. Then they launch campaigns to demand equal time for their views beside those of evolution. Voters get confused. They don't understand that creationism is a doctrine and is very different from scientific theory. Equating one with the other is simply false. One is science, the other is religious belief.'

Scientific American also reported that school textbooks and lesson plans are already being affected by creationism. Cheswell agrees. 'Our nation went from the Earth to the Moon a few years ago, and discovered these worlds date back billions of years. Now it is sticking its head in the sand, claiming the whole lot was made in a flash a few millennia ago by one entity. They even argue that dinosaurs and humans coexisted, like they do in The Flintstones. That's not healthy' (Robin McKie, *The Observer,* 24 February 2002).

'Intelligent Design'

In 1999 the Kansas Board of Education voted to ban any mention of Darwin in its schools but members were voted off the Board and their anti-evolution policy was reversed. In the wake of this defeat the creationists tried a new strategy. They demanded that schools should teach the theory of 'intelligent design'. This acknowledges that the universe may be very old but claims that everywhere you look you can see clear evidence of a creator's handiwork (a view in stark contrast to that of most scientists, who believe the cosmos is random and unpredictable). The concept of 'intelligent design' had first been postulated by the eighteenth-century English theologian William Paley. He argued that if you stumbled on a watch on a heath you would have to assume it had a maker. Followers of intelligent design point to the example of the human eye. It is so extraordinarily complex, they say, that only a creator could have produced it. With Paley as its inspiration, the 'Intelligent Design Network', led by University of California in Berkeley law professor Paul Johnson, is now the main anti-evolutionary force in America (Robin McKie & Martin Bright, *The Observer,* 17 March 2002). There is a delicious irony here, as Lerner has pointed out: '[Creationism] evolves. It actually changes in response to the environment it struggles to survive in. It is natural selection in action.'

In March 2002 the Intelligent Design Network sought to persuade the Ohio School Board to require the teaching of intelligent design alongside evolution. This was clearly an attempt to introduce creationism by the back door. 'There is a certain amount of deception going on', said David Haury, Associate Professor of Science Education at Ohio State University in Columbus. 'The people who have promoted this are all creationists. They are looking for a test case.' He added that if Ohio allowed intelligent design to be taught, 'it would have a resounding effect across the country in terms of a wake-up call that there is a serious threat to scientific education'. The eighteen member School Board was divided and both sides predicted that the issue would end up in court.

The problem is not confined to Ohio. Creationism has taken a powerful grip on education at a local level in other traditionally liberal northern states such as Illinois and Wisconsin. Even New York and Massachusetts are reviewing their positions (Duncan Campbell, *The Guardian,* 12 March 2002). What's more, its tentacles are spreading beyond the USA. Australia has its own 'Creation Research' organisation. and according to Amanda Chesworth creationism 'has missionaries across the world and even has bases in Russia and Turkey'.

And now 'the fundamentalist doctrines that have polluted US education' (Robin McKie & Martin Bright, *The Observer*, 17 March 2002) are spreading to Britain. In March 2002 *The Guardian* reported that Emmanuel City Technology College in Gateshead had hosted a 'creationist' conference and that senior staff have urged teachers to promote biblical fundamentalism.

Emmanuel College

Emmanuel College was set up by the Tories and was designated a 'beacon' school by the Labour government after it received a glowing OFSTED report in 2001. It is a non-denominational Christian school and there is no doubt about its religious credentials. Two Bibles (the New International Version and the Gideon New Testament and Psalms) must be carried by students at all times. Former pupil Hollie Brown told *The Observer* 'Sometimes there were checks. You were punished if you didn't have your Bible. It was like some sort of cult.' Some of the school's practices appear to come close to brain-washing. Students are required to attend weekly two-hour lectures on spiritual subjects and must submit a long essay at the end of each school year based on these lectures (Robin McKie & Martin Bright, *The Observer,* 17 March 2002).

The religious ethos of the school comes as no surprise. The College was built with £2m of sponsorship from evangelical Christian Sir Peter Vardy, the multimillionaire owner of 'Reg Vardy' car dealerships. Vardy is Chairman of Emmanuel's Board of Directors. Another member of the board is Baroness Cox, the Conservative peer who sponsored the amendment to the 1988 Education 'Reform' Bill requiring religious education in state schools to be 'in the main Christian'. The Vardy Foundation's chief education adviser, John Burn, is a founder of the Newcastle-based 'Christian Institute', set up in 1991 to promote fundamentalist Christian beliefs. Its other founding members include Revd David Holloway, vicar of Jesmond Parish Church and founder member of 'Reform', an evangelical pressure group, and Revd George Curry, who chairs the council of the evangelical Church Society. Both are outspoken opponents of the ordination of women. Although there are no formal links between the Christian Institute and the school, senior members of staff have published papers on the Institute's website.

The current furore is the result of revelations in *The Guardian* that Emmanuel is teaching its students creationism alongside evolution. Headteacher Nigel McQuoid has claimed that he wants his pupils to learn to make up their own minds but several members of his staff have urged teachers to 'show the superiority' of creationist theories. Vice-principal Gary Wiecek has said, 'As Christian teachers it is essential that we are able to counter the anti-creationist position'. Maths teacher Paul Yeulett has declared that 'a Christian teacher of biology will not (or should not) regard the theory of evolution as axiomatic, but will oppose it'.

In a lecture at Emmanuel College on 21 September 2000, Head of Science Steven Layfield told teachers, 'Those of us engaged in the struggle to show the superiority of a creationist world-view against the prevailing orthodoxy of atheistic materialism and evolutionism in science have been viciously attacked'. Teachers, he said, 'must be prepared to express without compromise the integrity and infallibility of the biblical historical narrative'. In particular, science teachers should 'note every occasion when an evolutionary/old-earth paradigm is explicitly mentioned or implied by a textbook, examination question or visitor and courteously point out the fallibility of the statement. Wherever possible, we must give the alternative – always better – biblical explanation' (*The Guardian,* 9 March 2002).

A number of prominent scientists, including Professor Steve Jones of University College London, one of the country's best-known geneticists, David Colquhoun, AJ Clark Professor of Pharmacology at UCL, Richard Dawkins, Oxford University's Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science, and Professor Peter Atkins, SmithKline Beecham Fellow and Tutor in Physical Chemistry at Oxford, all demanded that the school should be reinspected. OFSTED initially refused, but on 25 March it emerged that Chief Inspector Mike Tomlinson had decided to contact Emmanuel to seek clarification of the school's policy on science teaching. An OFSTED spokeswoman said, 'He is asking to see the schemes of work in science. He will decide whether any further action is necessary when he has seen these documents' (Tania Branigan, *The Guardian,* 26 March 2002).

Creationism Spreads

But Emmanuel College is not the only problem. As the National Secular Society's Keith Porteous Wood pointed out in a letter to *The Guardian* (11 March), Emmanuel is not the first state school to teach creationism. 'A Seventh Day Adventist School in Tottenham is already part of the maintained sector and taxpayers have been stumping up the cash for it since 1998.' And it probably won't be the last. Creationists are hoping to develop another Christian school at Torfaen in South Wales and have already sought advice from staff at Emmanuel. Baptist minister Revd Richard Harrison, a leading supporter of the project, has said of evolution 'OK, it's a plausible theory, but it's a hoax'. The establishment of the new school is currently in doubt. The Welsh Assembly's Education Minister, Jane

Davidson, fears that children might be brainwashed and David Rosser, the Director of CBI Wales, which had agreed to sponsor the school, said 'The CBI wouldn't be involved in anything like that' (Tania Branigan, *The Guardian,* 9 April 2002).

And it's not just schools. A determined campaign is being waged to infiltrate UK universities and colleges. The Australian 'Creation Research' organisation already has a British office and has sent its international director, John Mackay, to take part in debates with academics at meetings held by Christian Unions at several universities. Now, one of its members, fundamentalist Christian John Forbes, is carrying out a survey of staff at British universities to ascertain their views on the origins of life.

Scientists are unsure how to respond to the survey. Professor John Farrar, Director of the Institute of Environmental Science at the University of Wales, Bangor, feels that if they ignore it, the results will be skewed towards creationist views. 'I can't complete it because it's uncompletable – it is so badly worded that it clearly is not written by someone who knows about the area – but I'm going to write back making my views clear. Scientists have a responsibility to get involved in this kind of debate.' And Tim Astin, a geology lecturer at Reading University and a Church of England priest, said that creationism was growing in the UK and it was important to defend evolution. Geologist Trevor Emmett of Anglia Polytechnic University said, 'To enter into engagement with them gives them credibility they don't deserve. But to ignore them gives them a free rein in schools and universities. They won't go away. These guys work to an agenda which isn't about open debate; they are only interested in promoting their own views.'

'Creation Research' complains that the media and schools have indoctrinated people with evolutionary humanism 'which denies creation, the Bible and Christ'. Its UK website even suggests that belief in evolution is to blame for the attack on the World Trade Centre. 'Believers should not be surprised when things like this happen … The root cause of this increasing violence is sin – sin which is rooted in the refusal to glorify The Lord as the God who created the universe' (Tania Branigan, *The Guardian,* 25 March 2002). A bizarre interpretation, to say the least, of an attack perpetrated by Paradise-crazed individuals on a country where forty-five per cent of the population believe in the Genesis account of creation.

What are we to make of all this? How can apparently intelligent people be stupid enough (I don't mean to be offensive – I can't think of a more appropriate word) to promote as scientific fact something which was intended as religious myth? Do they not understand that such a stance ridicules science, brings religion into disrepute and undermines what education should be about? God gave us our brains. Presumably he intended us to use them. Creationism is bad science, bad religion and bad education.

Bad Science

Evolution is a fact. No straight-thinking person could seriously assert otherwise. Creationism, on the other hand, is, as Dr Neil Chalmers, Director of the Natural History Museum in London, told Robin McKie and Martin Bright (*The Observer* 17 March 2002) 'quite literally incredible'.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme at the end of March 2002, Lewis Wolpert, Professor of Biology as Applied to Medicine at UCL, described the promotion of Genesis as literal truth as 'the equivalent of teaching that the sun goes round the earth … The most important idea in the whole of biology is Darwin's theory of evolution.'

'Evolution by natural selection is a fact, as modern medicine knows to its cost', wrote Dr David Harper of Cambridge in a letter to *The Guardian* (19 March 2002). 'Bacteria and parasites have grown resistant to the antibiotics and drugs that were developed in the latter half of the twentieth century, and they have done so by pure Darwinian natural selection.'

As for the theory of 'intelligent design', Richard Dawkins has demolished that (along with other criticisms of Darwinian theory) in his book *The Blind Watchmaker*. He suggests that the theory is based on what he calls the 'argument from personal incredulity' – which is no argument at all. 'Even if the foremost authority in the world can't explain some remarkable biological phenomenon, this doesn't mean that it is inexplicable. Plenty of mysteries have lasted for centuries and finally yielded to explanation' (Dawkins, 1986).

In a letter to *The Guardian* (11 March 2002), Professor Niall Shanks of East Tennessee State University, USA, said that he 'read with sadness of attempts to introduce British students to creationist buffoonery as an alternative to evidentially well-grounded evolutionary biology. Evangelical creationists have elevated the art of lying for Jesus and Genesis into a science.' He concluded, 'The US experience shows that good and sensible people frequently have their voices drowned out by well-funded purveyors of baloney'.

The teaching of creationism in schools has also been criticised by leading philosophers, including Jonathan Ree and Professor David Papineau, who signed a British Humanist Association petition urging the government to clarify the wording of the National Curriculum to prevent creationist theories being presented as science.

Bad Religion

Genesis is religion, not science. This simple point seems to have been missed by creationists, as Karen Armstrong has pointed out, 'As a myth, the biblical creation story was not an historical account of the origins of life but a more spiritual reflection upon the ultimate significance of life itself, about which scientific *logos* has nothing to say' (Armstrong, 2000).

Other writers have made the same point. The biblical doctrine of creation 'must not be confused or identified with any scientific theory of origins. The purpose of the biblical doctrine, in contrast to that of scientific investigation, is ethical and religious' (Philip, 1962). 'Genesis I deals with simple observable phenomena … Something is lost if in interpreting this chapter we press the exegesis to unnecessary limits. The whole is poetic and does not yield to close scientific correlations … The Bible is asserting that, however life came into being, God lay behind the process … the chapter neither affirms nor denies the theory of evolution' (Thompson, 1962).

In missing the point that Genesis is religion, not science, the creationists are damaging both science and religion.

Bishop of Oxford Dr Richard Harries, speaking on BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day* (15 March 2002), said he was saddened that Christians should oppose evolution, which 'far from undermining faith, deepens it'. He went on, 'Historians of science note how quickly the late Victorian Christian public accepted evolution. It is therefore quite extraordinary that 140 years later, after so much evidence has accumulated, that a school in Gateshead is opposing evolutionary theory on alleged biblical grounds. This attempt to see the Book of Genesis as a rival to scientific truth stops people taking the Bible seriously. Biblical literalism brings not only the Bible but Christianity itself into disrepute.'

Episcopal Bishop of Newark John Spong agrees. 'Those who insist on biblical literalism become unwitting accomplices in bringing about the death of the Christianity they so deeply love … The Bible relates to us the way our ancient forebears understood and interpreted their world, made sense out of life, and thought about God. Our task is the same as theirs. We must interpret our world in the light of our knowledge and suppositions' (Spong, 1991).

Revd Arthur Peacock, winner of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion and former Director of the Ian Ramsey Centre for the Study of Science and Religion in Oxford, said 'Creationism is bad religion and false science. Creationism – as distinguished from a belief in creation – is not an alternative scientific theory. It is not even a proper way of interpreting the Bible and it certainly shouldn't be taught [to children]. Evolution is a very stimulating idea which expands our understanding of God the creator' (Tania Branigan, *The Guardian*, 16 March 2002).

Revd Ursula Shone, secretary of the Society for Ordained Scientists, said she was alarmed to learn that teachers were promoting creationism, 'Genesis is trying to say in a wonderful story that God created everything', she said, 'but science and modern knowledge have shown us other ways of God's creating. To call science a faith position is to misuse the term "faith"' (Tania Branigan, *The Guardian,* 16 March 2002).

Sir John Polkinghorne, the physicist who became a Church of England clergyman and won the 2002 Templeton Prize, added 'If [creationists] are trying to serve the God of truth, they should not fear truth, from whatever source it comes. And it certainly comes from science' (Tania Branigan, *The Guardian,* 16 March 2002).

It is clear, then, that creationism is bad science and bad religion. It is also bad education.

Bad Education

The Spens Report (1938) said that 'no boy or girl can be counted as properly educated unless he or she has been made aware of the existence of a religious interpretation of life'. Few would disagree with this. It is also true, as Edwin Cox and Jo Cairns have suggested, that before 1944, 'the aim of religious education can be broadly defined … as to enable the young person to find meaning in experience as a result of embracing the values of Christianity' (Cox & Cairns, 1989).

Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, British society has become increasingly multi-cultural and multi-faith and religious education syllabuses have evolved to reflect this diversity. The Christian church – which pioneered education in England – has largely ceased to be the keeper of the nation's morals. This has had implications for the nature and purpose of state education. 'Every school subject is an expression of an intention on the part of the educating society. If the church is conceived of as having the right to educate, and as being the educating society, religious education is likely to take a form different from that which it will assume when it is granted that the State has the right to educate and that, in a democracy, society as a whole is the educator' (Hull, 1982).

It has long been accepted that seeking to persuade pupils of the truth of any particular set of beliefs is not part of the purpose of religious education in state schools. The point has been emphasised repeatedly since 1870, when the Education Act of that year included the 'Cowper-Temple clause' which stated that 'no religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination' was to be taught. The Cornwall Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (1964) noted that 'most teachers in this country shrink from the idea that they should assist in propaganda and indoctrination'. Ninian Smart commented that 'propaganda is not the aim of teaching, but the production of a ripe capacity to judge the truth of what is propagated' (Smart, 1966). And the Durham Report (1970) suggested that the religious education teacher should be 'seeking rather to initiate his pupils into knowledge which he encourages them to explore and appreciate, than to a system of belief which he requires them to accept'.

Being human is about asking questions and learning to live with the fact that not all of them will have answers we can find. This is, in itself, a profoundly evolutionary task, since human knowledge and understanding have expanded in breadth and depth since humans began to think, and the speed of expansion has increased rapidly in the past hundred years or so as new technologies have been developed. Our knowledge is not set in stone. The contexts change. Old ideas and beliefs either evolve or are discarded. This is, if you like, natural selection in action. The danger of a purely dogmatic, inculcative curriculum is that unless pupils appreciate the limitations of the enquiry that produced the knowledge, they will be bewildered by revisions. On the other hand, if they are given freedom to speculate on the possible changes in structures, they will 'not only be prepared to meet future revisions with intelligence but will better understand the knowledge they are currently being taught' (Schwab, 1964, quoted in Golby et al, 1975).

If, then, education is about inducting young people into this process of critical thinking, it is surely absurd to seek to persuade them that the knowledge and understanding of ancient peoples are still appropriate today. 'When knowledge expands, it renders the interpretive framework of ancient people inadequate, and it reveals the ignorance of the past. For people living in one age to try to cling to the objective truthfulness of the concepts of another age is to participate in a doubtful enterprise' (Spong, 1991).

Yet this 'doubtful enterprise' seems to form the basis of the education provided by Emmanuel College. How else is one to explain the comments of staff that they should 'show the superiority' of creationist theories, that they

should ‘counter the anti-creationist position’, that they ‘must be prepared to express without compromise the integrity and infallibility of the biblical historical narrative’? This would be bad enough if we were discussing religious education. In the case of Emmanuel College, however, we’re talking – incredibly – about the science curriculum.

In an article in *The Guardian* (9 March 2002) Richard Dawkins wrote, ‘Any science teacher who denies that the world is billions (or even millions!) of years old is teaching children a preposterous, mind-shrinking falsehood. Teachers who help to open young minds perform a duty which is as near sacred as I will admit. Ignorant, closed-minded, false teachers who stand in their way come as close as I can reckon to committing true sacrilege.’

What is the *motive* of those who want to teach children creationist nonsense? As we have seen, there were various causes – some social, some political – which underpinned the faith of previous generations of creationists in the USA. But what motivates the creationists of Emmanuel College? In the end, isn’t this all about power? Religions have always sought to control their adherents through moral codes and threats of divine retribution. If you can persuade people to believe nonsense – in other words, if you can get them to deny their own intellectual capacity – you are well on the way to persuading them to accept the moral code you wish to enforce.

Denying one’s own capacity to think certainly seems to be an essential prerequisite for believing in creationism. How else could apparently intelligent people accept this stuff? ‘In the creation story, in the creeds of Christianity, and in countless stories in the biblical drama, a non-operative, pre-scientific, and clearly false view of the world is perpetuated. Those who seek to preserve these biblical understandings have to become anti-intellectual or must close off vast portions of their thinking processes or twist their brains into a kind of first-century pretzel in order to maintain their faith system. It is no wonder that they are afraid of knowledge. Their faith security system is built on sand. It cannot and will not survive, and they have no sense that there is any alternative save despair, death and meaninglessness. This is enough to cause fear to erupt in anger’ (Spong, 1991).

Fundamentalism is diametrically opposed to education. Fundamentalists are certain they know the answers and are determined to force those answers on the rest of us.

Where Does the Labour Government Stand?

Questioned on BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme (March 2002), Sir William Stubbs, Chair of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) pointed out that ‘the science curriculum requires that young people should be taught about evolution, that the fossil record is evidence for evolution and how variation and selection may lead to evolution or extinction. The National Curriculum does not specify what young people should *not* be taught. It’s a positive document. Creationism is not in the National Curriculum.’ (All of which is fairly academic in relation to Emmanuel College, since City Technology Colleges are not required to teach the National Curriculum.)

National Curriculum Science (Key Stage 4) requires that students should be taught ‘how scientific controversies can arise from different ways of interpreting empirical evidence’. On this basis, it could be argued that schools should ‘subject creationism to rigorous critical analysis by their students, if only to reveal its total inability to explain the history of life on Earth. But there must be limits to how far we ask our schools to devote their precious time to the teaching of error’ (Dr Neil Chalmers, *The Observer*, 17 March 2002).

All of which means that, as things stand, teachers are free to present evolution as no different in status from the idea that the world was made during a quiet week in October 4004BC. A spokeswoman for the Department for Education and Skills told *The Guardian*, ‘What schools need to do is teach the National Curriculum in an impartial way. Personal doctrines should not override anything that should be taught in the curriculum’ (Tania Branigan, *The Guardian*, p. 9, 26 March 2002).

At the beginning of April 2002 some of Britain’s leading clerics and scientists wrote to the Prime Minister expressing their ‘growing anxiety’ about the spread of faith schools in Britain and the introduction of creationist teachings. The group, amongst whom were biologist Richard Dawkins, Astronomer Royal Sir Martin Rees, Sir David Attenborough and six bishops including those of St Albans, Hereford and Oxford, called on Tony Blair to monitor school curricula to ensure that scientific and religious teaching in Britain is properly respected. ‘Evolution is not, as spokesmen for the college maintain, a “faith position” in the same category as the biblical account of creation which has a different function and purpose’, they wrote. ‘It is a scientific theory of great explanatory power, able to account for a wide range of phenomena in a number of disciplines. The issue goes wider than what is currently being taught in one college’, they added. ‘There is a growing anxiety about what will be taught and how it will be taught in the new generation of proposed faith schools.’ Downing Street officials told the group that Tony Blair would respond to their concerns ‘in the near future’ (Robin McKie, *The Observer*, 7 April 2002).

Despite the deluge of criticism from leading scientists, philosophers and clerics, the Prime Minister remained silent. Questioned in the House of Commons by Liberal Democrat MP for Richmond Dr Jenny Tonge about the use of taxpayers’ money to fund the teaching of creationism, he avoided answering the question and said, ‘In the end, it is a more diverse school system that will deliver better results for our children and if you look at the actual results of the school, I think you will find they are very good’. Labour MP Paul Flynn commented, ‘Why couldn’t he come out and say such teachings should have no part in state education?’ The National Secular Society condemned Tony Blair’s comments as ‘a deplorable acceptance of anti-science by a man who purports to value education’ (Tania Branigan & Michael White, *The Guardian*, 14 March 2002).

Did Tony Blair refuse to condemn creationist teaching for fear of upsetting Peter Vardy? After all, in addition to sponsoring Emmanuel College, Vardy has already donated a further £2m to build a ‘city academy’ in nearby Middlesbrough, due to open in 2003, and has offered to fund five more. ‘If it turns out that Blair’s response in Parliament had anything to do with Vardy’s offer of £12m for the city academies, this is very worrying’, said Jenny Tonge. ‘Is this Government prepared to accept money

from anybody, regardless of the doctrine or religious beliefs of the donor? Tony Blair needs to make it clear where he is coming from. Does he believe in creationism himself?'

So far, Tony Blair has not enlightened us with his own beliefs on creation and evolution. It is little comfort to note that his weak defence of creationist teaching in Britain looks 'positively comforting' compared with the views of President George W. Bush, who claimed during his election campaign that 'on the issue of evolution, the verdict is still out on how God created the Earth' (Robin McKie & Martin Bright, *The Observer*, 17 March 2002).

It's quite a spectacle, isn't it? Bush and Blair stand 'shoulder to shoulder' in their fight against fundamentalists who hijack aircraft to kill the innocent. They stand equally 'shoulder to shoulder' in their fight for the right of fundamentalists to kill the minds of the innocents.

The teaching of creationism is the inevitable outcome of Labour's policy of encouraging private sponsorship of religious schools. That children should be taught such nonsense is inexcusable. That taxpayers' money should be used to fund such teaching is outrageous.

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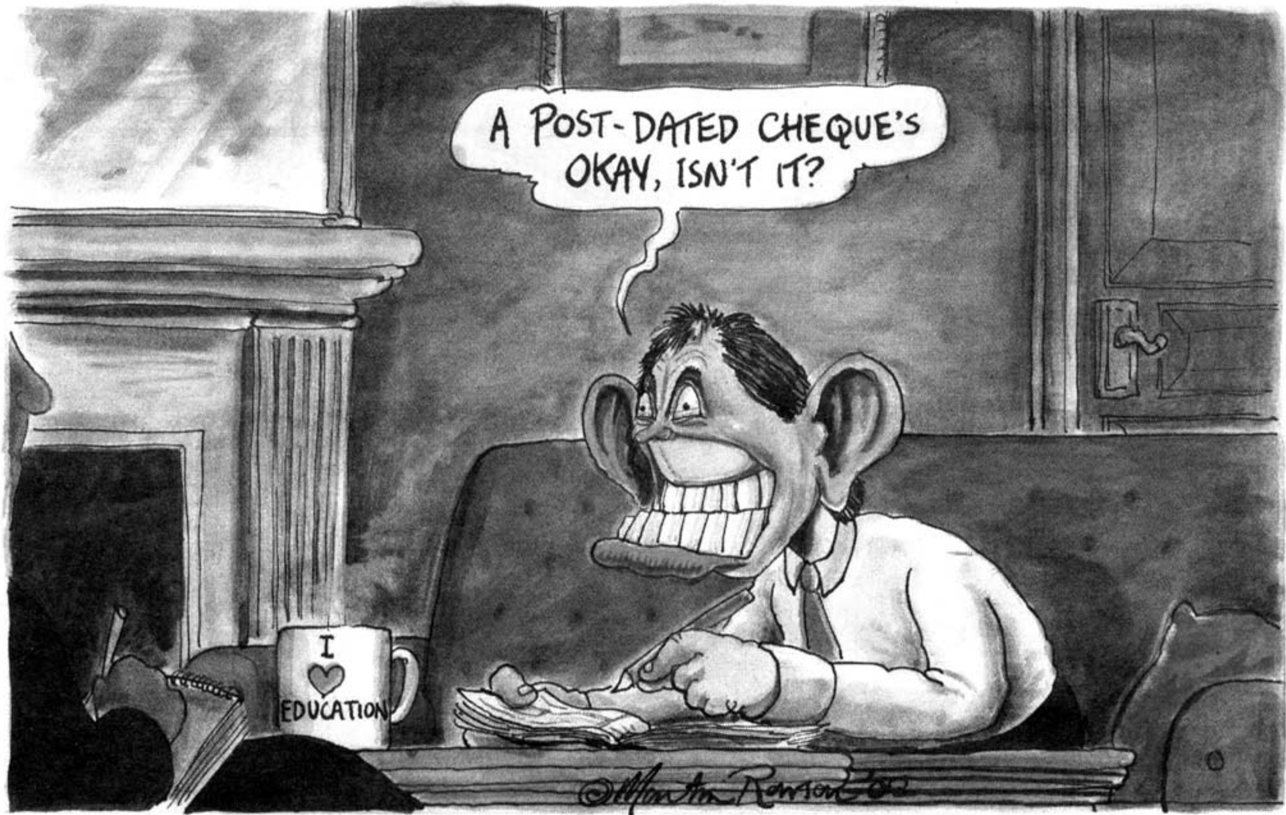

Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 5 July 2002

The Confirmation of Fixed Ability: can't act; can't sing; can dance a little

PATRICK YARKER, *FORUM* Board member and experienced and practising English teacher, examines the present and observable effects in schools of accepting the apparent objectivity of statistics and test results which go to harden and confirm the construct of ability as meaning 'fixed academic ability'.

Early in the film *Marathon Man*, the character played by Dustin Hoffman attends a lecture at Columbia University, where he is a student. The professor quotes a few lines of poetry and asks his small and unresponsive audience the name of the poem. We see Hoffman write the answer on the cover of his folder, but remain as silent as the rest of the students. This brief moment in a film sensationally concerned with a world beyond the academy, a world full of torture, terror and treachery, has stayed with me perhaps because it served as a lesson about the dangers of ability-labelling. (The famous verdict on Fred Astaire after his screen-test, which gives me the sub-title of this article, is another.) Just because no-one in the class tells the teacher the answer it does not mean no-one knows, and yet the evidence before the teacher may prompt her to an erroneous assessment of the abilities of the students. Perhaps Hoffman withholds what he knows because the question is not a real one (since the professor knows full well the poem is 'Locksley Hall'). Perhaps he despises the academic game he finds he is caught up in, or is not under enough pressure to give of his best, or is unwilling to stand out from the rest of the student-body by displaying his knowledge and hence legitimising what lies behind the professor's pseudo-question, a criticism of the students as unworthy or unable, for they ought to know the answer. What Hoffman knows and does not know is returned to at key stages in the film, most celebratedly in a sequence where his genuine ignorance of what the answer is results in an examination first of the state of his teeth, and then of his ability to withstand pain.

Albeit the intensification since the introduction of the National Curriculum of the testing regime in schools has brought physical consequences such as anxiety attacks or loss of sleep for some students, torture as a method more rigorously to ensure that students answer test questions fully in line with their capacity to do so and do not withhold their knowledge or try less hard than otherwise they might, has not yet become accepted practice. That the conditions in which CATs or SATs or other kinds of tests take place affects the performance of students, along with the kinds of questions asked and the ways in which they are asked, and that the cultural, gender and class-based biases inevitably written into such tests also make an impact on a student's ability or willingness to answer, is however an area all too often silenced in contemporary schooling. National testing at the end of Key Stages, together with bought-in testing for 'cognitive ability' or 'reading age', continues to carry enormous authority, and to act decisively on the kinds of educational experiences different students may have. CAT scores, for example, may determine which set a student is initially placed in, and thus whether she or he is with friends or strangers, which texts she or he may study, which everyday activities within the class she or he may be offered. The apparent objectivity of statistics and numbers (an objectivity unchallenged partly because of the silences around the biases inherent in question-setting and in the conditions under which tests are taken) continually works to harden the judgements teachers make about a student's so-called 'ability', and to construct and confirm 'ability' as meaning 'fixed academic ability' in common parlance in a thousand staffroom conversations. 'They're an able class.' 'Not what you'd expect from someone of her ability.' 'She produces beautiful work. But is she bright, or is it just neat-girl's syndrome?' 'If it's making him distraught his parents say he should move down a set, but I think that's a defeatist attitude.' 'He's a star, a stunner, but only a level 3 for English …' More supple understandings of 'fixed ability' see it as a field of force from which the student can draw if they decide to work harder or improve their attitude. The student's performance in a test is reified, and thereafter becomes something meaningful about the student as a learner in whatever context, occasionally even something which stands over against other public manifestations of that student's performance as a learner: 'A star … but only level 3 …' The statistical information validates itself within the system, with GCSE predictions made on the basis of scores in tests at Year 7. Such information, properly presented, is supposed to motivate individuals.

Perhaps it does. And yet, as testing becomes increasingly high-stake, and as each year of each Key Stage becomes an exam year, with curriculum content dictated by the demands of the SATs, the question of compulsion also comes to the fore. How freely do students now work in school? Can students be expected to 'show what they are really capable of' or 'work to their true ability' within a system where their assent and involvement in what they do and how they do it is more and more diluted, and where their identity as learners is constructed increasingly on the basis of a flawed and unexamined model, that of 'fixed ability'? Such a model legitimates a pessimistic view of students, and a version of teaching which privileges teacher-delivery as best practice. The current Key Stage 3 National Literacy Strategy video, full as it is of teachers talking, is exemplary. In it, student-

talk is almost entirely teacher-directed: students responding to a teacher's question. We are shown very little student-to-student talk, and none which arises out of the students' self-directed activities. On occasion a student's response is rejected by a teacher not because it is irrelevant but because it isn't 'just right'. Knowledge is presented here as something constructed by people other than the students, and the way to it lies in their reflecting what they are told or shown, rather than reflecting on it.

Companionably with the video, the introduction to the National Literacy Strategy Years 7–9 document sees literacy as first and foremost about 'raising standards'. What these standards are is undefined. Like 'ability' it is a term whose meaning is assumed to be known and assented to generally within teaching, and as such its ideological mass remains mute and invisible, and so operates to maximum effect. Measured by increases in test scores, it enables Ministers to profit politically from the work of teachers while failing to do what is necessary to increase the educational opportunities and the life-chances of the poorest and most disadvantaged. 'Language lies at the heart of the drive to raise standards in secondary schools …' the NLS document announces. One had hoped for funding, or enough teachers … but then this is a document concerned with literacy. Language is 'the key to developing in young people the capacity to express themselves with confidence, think logically, creatively and imaginatively, and to develop a deep understanding of literature and the wider culture'. Whatever the merits of this list and its continued scrupulous avoidance of any reference to the material necessities for developing such qualities as confidence, the word 'critical' is notably absent, and the word 'standards' leads the way. Literacy itself , the document claims, is 'much more than simply acquiring "basic skills" … it encompasses the ability to recognise, understand and manipulate the conventions of language and to develop pupils' ability to use language imaginatively and flexibly'. Again, nothing about seeing the world critically, and no acknowledgement that students in secondary schools are already highly skilled users of language, even if the language conventions they recognise, understand and manipulate are not always those the document would endorse. The word 'critical' does appear in the document, in the section to do with reading, something we do to 'get at meaning in a text', as if meaning were single and already resident there rather than being made in our multiplicity of encounters with the text. The NLS itself is commended to teachers because it 'sets an ambitious agenda for all abilities'. The decisive final term is glossed within its predictable parameters by the succeeding sentences which speak of 'the gifted and talented' and 'the underachieving pupils'. Elsewhere the pessimistic view of students which the writers of the document hold is fully uncovered. 'Particular texts, a motivating teacher, or other stimulating factors can all contribute to *more able pupils* discovering a medium to practise fully their latent talents' (DFEE, 2001, p.70, my emphasis). A view of students which saw their capacity to learn as limitless and their 'ability' as unfixed, which in short saw students as always potentially able and the limits to their learning located beyond them (in resourcing, in the curriculum-offer, in what was historically possible at the time) could not subscribe to a perspective so confining.

Most of all, the document goes on, the strategy equips students for the world in which they will live and work. It wants to enable them. But it is pointedly silent about the inequalities of that world and the ways the strategy itself contributes to the replication of those inequalities. No space here for the view of literacy as a tool of social change, for literacy which helps people understand, criticise and better the world, for literacy to overcome alienation, to emancipate labour, to become more fully human. To see it this way requires a new language, requires Portuguese in fact. In Porto Allegre in Brazil the State Government has instituted a process of popular democratic policy-making in education involving tens of thousands of people. The State Secretary of Education, Lucia Camini, explains: 'Education policies are, traditionally, designed in offices and passed to schools through packages with formulae and pedagogical manuals to be implemented. Reversing this practice, the State Department of Education in Rio Grande do Sol launched the School Constituency as a movement for constructing educational policy … We are handing over the school to those who make the school happen and changing the State Public Education into a truly public education.' The School Constituency has articulated five principles, the fifth of which is as follows: 'Utopia as a motivating vision of the education and the school we want, and also of the project of socio-economic development which is both possible and necessary for the great majority of the excluded and the exploited in the capitalist system. Utopia as the motor-force, driving forward the society we want to build.' Utopia tends to be a hopeless word in our culture at the moment, almost nowhere to be found, and so as Ernst Bloch puts it at the outset of his great work scrutinising the history of utopian vision and exploring its possible realisation: 'It is a question of learning hope'. We could start by questioning the notion of 'ability'.

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Nursery Education: the current state of play

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'The British Nursery School Movement has played a key role in the development of effective Early Years practice. Much of the current innovative research, development and application is carried out in Nursery School environments. These efforts are directed at the continuous improvement of young children's education and nurture as well as extended family support. Independent assessment by OFSTED, by its most rigorous methodology (Section 10) confirms high standards of education in Nursery Schools and their very good value for money.'
(Rees Jones et al, 2000)

Historical Background

Nursery education in Britain has a long history of development dating back to the latter part of the nineteenth century. It has developed from the work of a number of significant pioneers in the field of early childhood education, most notably Froebel (1782–1852), Steiner (1869–1925) and Montessori (1869–1952). Although these three had their own individual approaches, they had much in common, notably a recognition that the educational needs of young children are very different from those of older children and adults. They also recognised the importance of all aspects of a child's development – educational, social and physical. Perhaps most significantly, they all saw the importance of starting from what the child already knew rather than preparing them for the next stage.

Their thinking strongly influenced the key pioneers of nursery education in Britain, the MacMillan sisters and Susan Isaacs in England and Robert Owen in Scotland. Principles developed by these pioneers can still be seen in nursery education today: the combination of education with care, meeting the needs of parents, a recognition of the active nature of young children's learning and, in the case of the MacMillan sisters and Isaacs, an emphasis on the importance of outdoor provision. All three also came from a fundamentally socialist background and recognised the importance of early education for the working classes.

Although the principles which underpin nursery education have been derived from different sources they have, as has already been suggested, a great deal in common and are to a great extent organic, for they have changed over time as practitioners have drawn their inspiration from a range of different sources. The work of well known theorists, such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner, has informed the thinking of early years practitioners and contributed significantly to the development of the early years curriculum (Blenkin & Kelly, 1987; Bruce, 1997; Hurst & Joseph, 1998). Unlike curriculum models applicable to primary and secondary education, curriculum development in the early years has largely been in the hands of practitioners and perhaps more importantly it is more concerned with processes than with outcomes. However, the introduction of the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act in 1996 was to change this with the imposition of a set of narrow learning goals. This Act had other far-reaching effects as it also changed the nature of provision in England and Wales.

Nursery Provision in England and Wales

It is perhaps symptomatic of attitudes to young children, that nursery education was not accorded statutory status when this was given to primary and secondary school provision. However, many LEAs did make some provision for nursery education, primarily in the metropolitan areas, although there were some exceptions to this. Where it was available, nursery education was targeted at the most disadvantaged children, which was often reflected in admissions policies giving priority of places to children having an identified 'social, emotional or medical need' (ILEA, 1986). However, there remained some significant differences between LEA nursery provision and Social Services nursery provision made by the same Local Authorities. First, nursery schools and classes were staffed by a combination of trained (usually specialist) nursery

teachers and nursery nurses, while day nurseries had staff from a range of disciplines, including nursery nurses. As a result of this difference, the primary focus in nursery schools and classes was educational, whereas in day nurseries the focus was primarily on emotional and social care. Secondly, parents of children attending nursery schools and classes were able to choose whether their children attended, in day nurseries a place was often linked to children being identified as 'at risk'. This resulted in Social Services' provision often being viewed as stigmatising.

However, this is not a full picture of provision prior to 1996 as in many parts of the country there was little or no maintained provision. In these areas provision was made either by the private sector or in the majority of cases by the Pre-School Playgroup Movement. This was set up in the 1960s by Belle Tuatev, a young mother in London, who was concerned that her daughter was missing out on social contact with other children. Originally set up as a stop gap until the Government fully funded nursery education, the Playgroup Association, now known as the Pre-school Learning Alliance, rapidly became a major provider of nursery education.

In contrast with the maintained sector, the private sector is mainly staffed by nursery nurses or more recently less highly trained staff holding NVQ level 2 and 3. Playgroups rely on volunteer help from parents but over the years have developed a range of training options for staff. Further differences include the longer opening hours and weeks in the private sector as they generally cater for the needs of working parents. Playgroups, on the other hand, were largely sessional, often opening for only one or two days a week and operating from premises, which they shared with other users. Because of a lack of government commitment the picture in Britain was one of fragmented services, which generally speaking did not meet the needs of either parents or children. Despite more or less continuous pressure from organisations like the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA), British Association for Early Childhood Education (BAECE) and the National Campaign for Nursery Education (NCNE) together with growing demands from parents, successive governments refused to fund the expansion of nursery education. Then in the late 1970s the nursery schools, which had always been at the forefront of curriculum development and were the envy of much of the world, came under threat

The Changing Face of Nursery Provision

In the 1980s Conservative Governments under Margaret Thatcher embarked on a radical restructuring of education in the United Kingdom as they put in place a series of reforms designed to transfer education from the maintained to the private sector. In 1979 the Government removed the requirement for LEAs to spend the funding they received for under-fives on nursery schools. This led directly to the closure of a number of nursery schools and following the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority in 1990 many of the new LEAs, faced with budget shortfalls, looked to the closure of nursery schools as a way of making savings. Despite a growing body of evidence, the Government refused to make a commitment to nursery education, 'even in 1993 an education minister refused point blank to accept that nursery education provided the best start for our children' (Labour Party, 1993, p. 13). Then in 1996 after an apparent change of heart, the Conservative Government introduced the nursery voucher scheme and cynically claimed to have provided universal nursery education for all two-and-a-half-year-olds whose parents wanted it. Essentially what the 1996 Act did was to create an avenue for state funding of the private and voluntary sector.

This was achieved by providing the parents of all four-year-olds with a voucher, which could be exchanged for the equivalent of five two-and-a-half hour sessions of 'nursery education'. This provision was to be made by a range of providers all of whom had to agree to working towards a set of narrowly defined goals, somewhat dubiously described as the 'Desirable Learning Outcomes' (DLOs). They also had to agree to be inspected by a newly created arm of OFSTED which would carry out inspections under Section 5 of the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act 1996. Maintained nursery schools and classes were (and still are) subject to Section 10 inspections, the same regime that applies to maintained primary and secondary schools. In return, all settings (as they are now called) would receive £1,000 per child, a sum significantly less than the £1,600 it cost to educate a child in a nursery class at the time. This posed major problems for LEAs who recognised the potential for a massive reduction in their funding and resulted in the unofficial lowering of the school age to two-and-a-half as LEAs sought to protect their funding. As Margaret Lochrie of the Pre-School Learning Alliance put it, 'Parents are being pressured to send their children to school early if they want to secure the schools of their choice once the children reach the age of five'. By 1997 a total of 84 LEAs had arrangements, which allowed for the admission of two-and-a-halfyear-olds early to schools.

There were few winners in this process: in three years from 1997 two thousand playgroups closed as children were admitted early to reception classes where they became subject to an inappropriate curriculum. In March 2000, Margaret Lochrie warned 'if this continues there is a real danger that the pre-school movement will disappear entirely within a very few years'. While they remained committed to contributing to the expansion of nursery education, many nurseries and playgroups abandoned good practice as they struggled to meet the requirements of the DLOs and balance the often-conflicting findings of OFSTED and Children Act inspections. However, there were some winners: Group 4 (later to become part of Capita) became responsible for administering both the voucher system and the inspection arrangements.

In the1997 New Labour Party Election Manifesto, *Because Britain Deserves Better*, Tony Blair stated, 'Nursery vouchers have been proven not to work. They are costly and do not generate more *quality* nursery places.' Following the election of New Labour later that year, nursery vouchers were abolished, although the mixed economy of provision remained and is now funded via Local Authorities, which were required to establish Early Years and Childcare Development Partnerships (EYCDPs). These partnerships have forced the range of providers to work together in order to commission places for four- and more recently three-year-olds. As a result nursery provision is now more responsive to the needs of working parents and is more readily accessible than in the past but the picture is still far from perfect, as the promised

commitment to quality provision appears to have been lost along the way.

New Labour's Early Years Strategy

While still in opposition many leading members of the Labour Party attended a conference in 1996 entitled 'Transforming Nursery Education' at which the key speakers included Peter Moss and Helen Penn, authors of a book bearing the same name (Moss & Penn, 1996). At this conference, Moss and Penn raised concerns about the fragmented nature of early years provision, the early starting school age in Britain and the importance of meeting the needs of working parents and proposed a ten-year strategy to address these issues. Many of the ideas promoted have since become central to the Government's early years strategy, although they stopped short of raising the school starting age to six. A number of significant changes have taken place at government level with inter-departmental meetings being held to consider issues relating to the under-fives. Millions of pounds have been spent on a range of initiatives which include Sure-Start a joint Education and Health initiative aimed at the most vulnerable children in our society. Inter agency working has been actively promoted through the Early Excellence Centre and Neighbourhood Nursery initiatives, leading to the establishment of multi-disciplinary nursery centres which provide education and social care alongside extended day and all year round provision. Within these centres parents are often able to access health care and basic skills training. These are 'one-stop shops' where the needs of both parents and children can be met on one site. However, despite the requirement that they are able to demonstrate 'value for money', they are expensive and there is no indication as yet that the funding of either Sure-Start or Early Excellence is guaranteed for the foreseeable future.

In addition to committing resources to nursery provision, this Labour Government has also established a new curriculum framework for the early years. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this is that for the first time the educational needs of four- and five-year olds in Reception classes have been recognised. They have to some extent been freed from the tyranny of the National Curriculum, but the Government stopped short of raising the schools starting age to six despite heavy lobbying of the Education and Employment Select Committee. In 2000 the 'Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage' was published (QCA, 2000) and is due to become the statutory curriculum framework for children of nursery and reception age in England. This document has much to commend it, there is an emphasis on children learning through play, the importance of outdoor provision is emphasised and the restrictive DLOs have been replaced by a slightly more child friendly set of Early Learning goals.

However, the document is a poor relation to the curriculum frameworks which are in place in Scotland and Wales. Neither the Welsh nor the Scottish document places the same emphasis on letter and number knowledge, instead these documents make reference to children enjoying 'marking and basic writing experiences – using pencils, crayons, etc.' (ACCAC, 2000) or 'developing an awareness of letter names and sounds in the context of play experiences' (SCCC, 1999). Significantly, the Scottish document has no separate section on mathematics as this is deemed to be part of communication and language. Unlike the English Curriculum Framework with its supposedly helpful 'Stepping Stones' there are no implied learning objectives; the Welsh document refers only to areas of experience while the Scottish document includes an introductory section in which the differing learning needs of young children are outlined. Neither document falls into the trap of offering up illustrative examples of what a child might be able to achieve at a given age.

Although the clear commitment to a Foundation Stage is to be welcomed, it is not without its difficulties and there are many. At no point has the Government acknowledged the complexities of teaching a 'play-based' curriculum, training has been minimal and pre-supposed a level of knowledge about the nature of learning through play that is not evident in the practice of many practitioners. Nursery teaching is a complex process, which requires well-trained and highly skilled practitioners. So far the Government has done little to address this and the suggestion that NVQ3 is adequate as a minimum qualification is insulting to both practitioners and more importantly to children.

There are also issues of equality of access to the curriculum, adult: pupil ratios in nursery settings are much higher that those present in the majority of reception classes. In a nursery class, statutory ratios of 1:13 apply and in the private and voluntary sector these are often higher, yet it is not unusual for ratios in Reception classes to be as high as 1:30 for significant parts of the day. Despite a clear recommendation from the Education and Employment Select Committee that in 'Reception and Year 1 classes there should be fifteen or fewer children for each member of staff working with children in the class', the Government has made no moves to resource staffing at these levels other than to advocate an increased role for classroom assistants. Although some schools have chosen to allocate classroom assistants to reception classes they do not equate to a specialist nursery nurse and it is difficult to see how children in reception would be able to access the outdoor curriculum even if it was physically possible to do so. While some resources have been allocated to EYCDPs to improve the quality of outdoor provision the amounts are pitifully small, bids for funding are typically ten times more than the available funding.

It is also difficult to achieve a true play-based curriculum when children have a highly fragmented day. 'Young children need time and space to produce work of quality and depth' (EYCG, 1992) but this is not possible when the school day is broken up by an endless round of assembly, break and hall times. While it is within the power of schools and governing bodies to do away with these distractions, there is little that they can do about the requirements relating to the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies. Perhaps it is a measure of the Government's true commitment to the early years that the 'Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage' is subservient to two non-statutory strategies.

In Conclusion

After more than a century of underfunding and fragmented services, Britain now has better coordinated services for the under-fives but there are still anomalies with major

differences between the regions of the United Kingdom. England still has a *narrower* view of the early years curriculum and is more concerned with outcomes than processes. Wales and Scotland, on the other hand have a less prescriptive somewhat healthier view as to what is an appropriate curriculum for the early years. While the present Government has raised the status of nursery education there is still a long way to go. Britain is still far short of the publicly funded education that has been fought for over the last 100 years. While the number of maintained nursery schools has declined and playgroups continue to struggle to survive there is a rapidly expanding private sector which is actively encouraged by the Government. Unlike successive Governments, which have failed to make a full commitment to state-funded nursery education, the private sector quickly recognised the wealth-creating potential of providing for the under-fives. In April 2002, four years after opening their first nursery, the Leapfrog Chain 'is now planning to become the first to float on the London Stock Exchange to fund an expansion programme. The company … opened its first purpose-built nursery in Burton-on-Trent in April 1998 and now has 34 nurseries, with 10 more due to open over the next 12 months. The flotation is expected to value the company at £70 million and raise £30m. It will enable it to open between 10 and 15 nurseries a year. Executive chairman Derek Mapp, who founded the Tom Cobleigh Pub Chain, said he wants Leapfrog to become 'the UK's largest private nursery group' (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 12 April 2002).

It is now difficult to ascertain the true level of provision in the maintained sector as the DfES routinely mixes provision when releasing statistical information. A DfES press notice on 22 April 2002 suggests a 42% increase in the number of nursery schools from 5,500 to 7,800 but fails to indicate that this growth has been entirely in the private and voluntary sector. At 517 the number of maintained nursery schools has remained unchanged for a number of years, although the existence of some may still be under threat. Marion Dowling, quoted in an article in *Nursery World*, questions the statistics in a report by the Office for National Statistics where the number of children in maintained nurseries includes all under-fives in reception classes. 'This change means it is more difficult to tell the number of children in maintained nursery schools, a number of which are in danger of closing.' In the same article, similar concerns are expressed by R. Murphy, Chief Executive of the National Day Nurseries Association.

As the Government works with interested parties to develop a training route for early years practitioners there are many who fear the 'dumbing down' of the profession. It would appear that despite the evidence from the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Study (1996–2001) commissioned by the DfES, Ministers remain unconvinced about the link between training and the quality of provision. Despite considerable evidence that the type of provision, qualifications and knowledge and understanding of how children learn have a significant impact on outcomes (Athey, 1990; Ball, 1994; Berruta-Clement et al, 1984; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993) the Government still appear to be unconvinced. So, to borrow a metaphor, 'while the DfEE fiddles, nursery schools and playgroups close'. If Government Ministers and civil servants at the DfES fail to make that link between the level of training, quality provision and the cognitive and social benefits for young children, then much of their investment in the early years will be wasted and the jewel in the nursery crown may well be lost.

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Eating Disorders and Comprehensive Ideals

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Introduction

> *A school metaphorically holds up a mirror in which an image is reflected. There may be several images, positive and negative. A school's ideology may be seen as a construction in a mirror through which images are reflected. The question is: who recognises themselves as of value? What other images are excluded by the dominant image of value so that some students are unable to recognise themselves? In the same way, we can ask about the acoustic of the school. Whose voice is heard? Who is speaking? Who is hailed by this voice? For whom is it familiar? In this sense there are visual and temporal features to the images the school reflects and those images are projections of a hierarchy of values, of class values.*
> *(Bernstein, 2000, p. xxi)*

Are new hierarchies being nurtured in comprehensive schools, 'hierarchies of the body', relating to size, shape and weight? Hierarchies that potentially are as virulent, unhelpful and anathema to inclusive, egalitarian comprehensive ideals as those of gender, race and class on which they feed and endorse? Paraphrasing Basil Bernstein, we ask: what body shape or form is being recognised of value in comprehensive schools? Is there a dominant image of value relating to the body, so that some students are unable to recognise themselves as having a 'body' or more broadly 'a self' of any value? What body images are excluded by the dominant images of the school? Whose body is seen and heard? We ask these questions because of our concern over the rising tide of eating disorders, especially anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, afflicting young women (particularly those in the 13–19 age range) in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. And our knowledge that, to date, very little attention has been given to how schools may be implicated in the aetiology and development of these conditions. Information of this kind is needed, we suggest, if schools are to construct curricula that will help students avoid slipping toward disordered eating and instead leave them feeling valued, included, competent, comfortable and in control of their bodies and health. We also suggest that answering these questions requires a much more critical stance towards the core assumptions and beliefs of the health sciences, which feed conceptions of the 'valued body' and its 'correct usage' into the curricula of schools, than is currently the case. We pay particular attention to the way in which 'a discourse of obesity' – the pervasive view that there is a rising tide of 'fatness' afflicting children and adults in the United Kingdom and elsewhere – is influencing the policies and practices of teachers and impacting upon students' sense of identity and health. Our hope is that the analysis which follows will encourage all professionals concerned with the health of students to consider whether they are promoting health or 'healthism' in schools. The latter system of beliefs defines health-promoting activities such as 'correct diet' and involvement in some form of physical activity as a *moral* obligation and an individual responsibility. In so doing, it can be said to divert attention away from the social, cultural conditions which shape and constrain an individual's health while damaging and eroding their confidence, competence and self esteem.

Background

Disordered eating is not simply a 'benign rite of passage' (Steiner-Adair & Vorenburg, 1999, p. 107) or 'an innocent phase of adolescent development caught up in the public gaze' (Evans et al, 2002). Although anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are relatively rare in comparison to other affective disorders, 'the sub threshold components, for example, negative body image, fear of fat, feeling powerless and insecure, are prevalent enough among girls and women in many countries to be considered normative and an epidemic' (Levine & , 1999, p. 321). We share the view that this horrible state of affairs, coupled with the astounding gender differences in eating disorder and the risk periods in early and late adolescence, points to the need to think about what 'eating problems' mean in the

lives of girls, women and increasingly of young men. As others have pointed out, they are the third most common chronic illness among females in the USA. Research suggests that '1–2% of female adolescents develop anorexia nervosa, a slightly higher percentage develop bulimia nervosa, and the prevalence of eating disorder among preteens and younger adolescents is still on the rise' (Goldman, 1996). In the United Kingdom the Eating Disorders Association estimate that about 165,000 people have eating disorders and that this condition is responsible for the highest number of deaths from psychiatric illness (BBC News Online: Health Medical Notes, 2000). Indeed recent research has suggested that children as young as three are developing unhealthy attitudes towards their bodies and eating, potential precursors of disordered eating and ill-health (Bee, 2002). It is hardly surprising, then, that the rise of eating disorders in the US and Western Europe has been described as a modern epidemic, one which now is extending to areas with which they were once thought to be culturally incompatible, for example, China, India, Mexico, and Brazil (Gordon, 2001). They are, it seems, unique amongst psychiatric disorders in the degree to which social and cultural factors, putatively the spread through processes of acculturation, of Western ideas of a 'perfect' body shape, play a part in their development and potentially their aetiology. New patterns of food consumption and production and new styles of eating may also be factors in the spread of the condition. If we accept that the 'thin, taut, slender body' is a powerful and influential imagery exported globally from the socio-cultural and economic conditions of the 'developed' Western world, then we do need to consider whether and how this imagery finds its way in the socio-cultural fabric of schools. Whether it is reflected in specific subject areas and how then interpreted by teachers and young people. This does mean interrogating both the nature of knowledge production in Initial Teacher Education, schools and beyond and the social and discursive practices that socialise the teachers and health professionals into particular pedagogic identities, relations, attitude and practice towards the body and health. However, if we also take it as read that no pedagogue in their right mind would purvey *directly* the notion that a near emaciated body is corporeally how young people ought to be, then we do need to consider whether a discourse of slenderness is transmitted *indirectly* via the cultures of schooling. Paradoxically, is it constructed unintentionally by its inverse, a discourse of 'obesity' driven by the interests of bioscience through the curricula of ITE and schools?

The Fat Epidemic

Hardly a day now goes by, it seems, without the public being told that it is in the midst of an obesity epidemic. Report after official report, invariably mediated by popular media, informs the public mind that the nation is getting fatter, less healthy, that our children are at risk from the creeping spread of fatness afflicting the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. An industry of research is now dedicated to measuring and monitoring the growth and flow of obesity across and beyond the Western World, and a private, multi-million pound, industry of health experts, exercise and diet technologists to match, have emerged to provide the cure to this social and economic ill. We are told that sedentary lifestyles, increasing use of technology, addiction to television and poor diets are to blame. Consider here, for example, the recent House of Commons Public Accounts Select Committee Report entitled *Tackling Obesity in England*. Having received views from a variety of expert sources, the Report states, emphatically and unequivocally, that: 'Most adults in England are overweight, and one in five – around 8 million in total – is obese. The prevalence of obesity is increasing world wide, and in England has nearly trebled in the last twenty years' (House of Commons, 2002, p. 1).

The Report concludes that 'obesity is a major public health concern which is increasing throughout the world and for which there are no easy or short term solutions'. Moreover, we are told that 'unless effective action is taken, over 20% of men and 25% of women could be obese by 2008, with important consequences for the NHS (National Health Service), the economy and the people involved'. Socio-economic changes in life-style, more IT and television, computer games, less active lifestyles, and changes in diet are given as the main reasons. The data is then rationalised to generate recommendations that are intended to influence the practices of health experts in local health authorities, government agencies and teachers concerned with Personal, Social, Health and Physical Education in schools.

One has to note the form, function and content of texts such as this to appreciate their potential significance as a *cultural toxin*: a powerful influence not just upon policy and practice amongst health 'promoting-agencies' and the 'public psyche' but also on the 'mind set' of teachers in schools. First, this is the voice of biomedical expertise, and it therefore has authority, power and authenticity; there are no uncertainties to be seen in its narrative. The reader is asked to accept as a given, for example, that 'overweight' and 'obese' are both fundamentally, inherently, very bad things. Both conditions are conflated (lumped together) in the above text, as in so many others of its kind, to inflate the seriousness of the problem and add impact to the central health theme (fat kills). Nowhere are we invited to consider the veracity of the assertion that 'most adults in England are overweight', despite the imprecision of the techniques used to measure overweight and obesity, the arbitrariness of the thresholds used to draw 'normal weight lines' and the diversity, uncertainty and ambiguity of 'expert opinion' in the field of health science research. Nor are we invited to question at what particular point the condition described as being 'overweight', becomes damaging to ones health or how thresholds are established and measured or what we are to make of the residue of the population: those who fall below the threshold, who, we must assume, are either 'normally healthy' or badly underweight. In the interests of the 'obesity discourse', on these matters the text has nothing at all to say. In effect, this is a narrative of *certainty* and *negativity*, signalling as it does a potential threat to personal, institutional, national and global health and economic well being. It is also a discourse of *immediacy, proximity* and of *risk*; all may fall prey to its advances unless appropriate intervention, investment and action are taken at all appropriate levels. In effect, it is instrumental in helping manufacture a public 'health scare', a problem which only surveillance and treatment of body shape, size, and weight, through intervention, will cure. 'Practice nurses, dieticians and school nurses can play a valuable role in identifying

patients with weight problems and in providing advice and support on weight control, but practices vary. General practices should seek to engage a wider range of health professionals in this work, including those working in the community and school settings' (House of Commons, 2002, p. 2).

The social, cultural, psychological and economic complexities of obesity are thus reduced to the identification of a weight problem and its panacea, weight loss. The moral, evaluative and regulative overtones of this perspective are not difficult to see. Although the aetiology of obesity is described neutrally in biomedicine as a positive imbalance between energy ingested and energy expended, as a social practice it is thus neither innocently neutral nor value free (White et al, 1995). It is a discourse that allows health experts to construct those who are overweight as 'lazy' or 'morally wanting', giving permission on a daily basis for at best intervention in people's lives, at worst ridicule and harassment and the right to publicly monitor the body shape of others. As Ritenbaugh (1982, p. 352) has pointed out, in the USA these terms ('obesity', 'overweight') are 'the biomedical gloss for the moral failings of gluttony and sloth. Important themes in American society are individual control and fear of non-control – obesity is a visual representation of non-control.' In the 'blame the victim' culture which this nurtures, 'fat' is thus interpreted as an outward sign of neglect of one's corporeal self; a condition considered either as shameful as being dirty or irresponsibly ill. The corollary of this, of course, is that control, virtue and goodness are to be found in slenderness and the processes of becoming thin. This is arguably the most powerful and pernicious aspect of fat phobia in the USA. It is equally prevalent, we suggest, in United Kingdom schools and especially, though not just, in those subjects, such as health, sport and PE, concerned directly with how the body is schooled (see Evans et al, 2002). Cautious and dissenting voices, which highlight the ambiguities, uncertainties and contradictions endemic within the field of bio-medical and health-science research, conveniently disappear. In the process the means by which knowledge about obesity is produced becomes hidden, as do its ambiguities and uncertainties.

It has been argued that programmes concentrating on weight and dietary change are not only seriously limited in their foci but are not working. Research on the overweight and obese, for example, suggests that men who are unfit have a higher relative risk for all-cause mortality than do their fit peers in all body fatness and waist circumference categories. In short, size is not the issue. Obese men who are at least moderately fit do not have an elevated mortality rate and, in fact, this group has a much lower death rate than that of unfit men. It can be argued that public health would be better served with more comprehensive attempts to increase population levels of physical activity, rather than emphasising ideal weight and ranges and raising an alarm about increasing prevalence rates of obesity. More sociologically, others have highlighted that any diagnosis requires a belief in the existence of the disease and its aetiology, in this case that obesity and fatness are unhealthy, requiring agreement on criteria and diagnostic equipment, in this case, standards based on weight for height. Ritenbaugh (1982, p. 357), in his quest to demonstrate that obesity, like other eating disorders, is also a 'culture bound syndrome', convincingly demonstrated that the downward drift in such standards over the last forty years in the US has not been based on bio-medical data alone. Confirming his view that cultural forces are at work, he notes, in particular, that the weight standard for females shows the most obvious steady downward trend and mirrors the trend in popular media imagery. Ironically, 'higher mortality rates and health concerns focus on males yet there has been no steady downward trend for them. Thus the changing biomedical standards have paralleled changing cultural values, rather than an accumulation of biomedical knowledge'. Within the 'obesity discourse', then, the focus for change is overwhelmingly on weight and it is this theme that has fed policy and practice in schools and nurtured specific attitudes towards diet, health and intervention. Ritenbaugh wryly points out that two recent articles on the unsuccessful treatment of obese adolescents (see Huse et al, 1982) indicated that initially many of the patients entering the (intervention) programme exhibited denial of their condition. 'Only with the help of the biomedical personnel did they begin to deal with the reality and recognise their disease. At this point, they also became depressed.' The authors had created a problem (depression) in (otherwise) healthy adolescents. The pedagogical implications of this are clear and they prompt us to ask the question: are these powerful discursive practices reflected in the practices of teachers in comprehensive schools?

School, Health Education and the Discursive Production of Ill Health

We now turn our attention to 'health communication' at another level, namely, practice in schools. Drawing on data from an interview with a Health Education co-ordinator (HC) conducted by one of the authors (INT), we interrogate the way in which a 'discourse of obesity', of a kind mentioned above, is reflected in the Personal and Social Education Curriculum (PSE) of a large comprehensive school in England. We then draw out the potential implications of the views expressed for students' identity and health. There are, of course, attendant dangers in centring the analysis on the voice of one teacher. We stress that we are working on the premise that talk is a form of social activity, and that spoken, visual and written discourses not only help constitute the world in which we describe ourselves and others; we also constitute and are constituted by discourse. Our claim is that health and illness are constructed, reproduced and perpetuated through language. In this case, teachers and subsequently students get to know about their illness and health through the language of the health expert, health educators teachers, in schools. We, therefore, look at this teacher's talk as metonymic. This short extract of text is seen to represent the whole, that is to say the wider health discourse, in this case, of obesity. As a specific discourse practice, it cannot help but throw light on the wider cultural practices in which it is embedded. The medical expert, in this case the teacher/health co-ordinator, is the provider of the service, that of health care; the patient, in this case the pupil, is positioned as the one 'at risk', who potentially suffers, is there to be surveyed, monitored and treated. While reading the extract we might also consider the view that 'the real champions of the ideology of

"healthism" in recent years have been the educated middle classes' (White et al, 1995, p. 166). And that in this ideology 'the ethos of individualism has become ascendant and the problems of the lower classes have been identified as personal and not rooted in structure' (p. 166). In effect, the body becomes part of a power relation which contributes to acquiescence to the logic of high capitalism. The social class and gender implications of this are reflected in the extract below. In order not to interrupt the narrative we present the extract in full and at length before adding our commentary at the end.

1. HC Right, um, well, we have a health programme on a spiral curriculum following national curriculum guidelines, so that they do like a food eating section in, um, year 7, then again in year 8, and then in year 9, so that, revisiting and reminding them, um, but in particular, say for year 7, types of diet, um, well, healthy eating, should I say rather than diet and also we look at ethnic diets and cultures because we have the biggest ethnic variety, shall we say, within the city … Um, we try not to push dieting. I am trying to push healthy eating.
2. INT Yeah?
3. HC Um, and also with the dinner ladies, cos the school is a healthy school.
4. INT Right.
5. HC We got the award last year. Um, so I spent quite a lot of time with the dinner ladies, um, the only problem is that the children will like their chips.
6. INT Yeah?
7. HC I tried a couple of days in like a healthy eating week and I banned chips for a week just to see.
8. INT Right?
9. HC Um, but you know they were not happy.
10. INT Yeah.
11. HC I mean, like the other day there was an alternative, you know, there was a pasta on – lasagne – which look quite nice, and, um, a Chinese dish, you know, with rice, but they were still choosing their chips.
12. INT Yeah.
13. HC And their beefburger.
14. INT Yeah.
15. HC And, ur, it's girls and boys. So although they may be conscious of how they feel or weigh or whatever …
16. INT Yeah.
17. HC They still, until they get variety in their diet and stop just going for junk foods or fast foods.
18. INT Yeah.
19. HC And start doing more exercise. So obviously that's the other thing we are obviously trying to encourage more exercise.
20. INT Yeah.
21. HC Um, so we're not particularly trying to say, you know, make sure you're thin or whatever, but …
22. INT Yeah.
23. HC The self-esteem's the most important thing, and looking for a healthy lifestyle.
24. INT Do you think there's a kind of, um, danger in schools, sort of pushing the healthy eating thing, that they might, that there's almost a danger that you might force people towards dieting and things like that?
25. HC Um, well we're not, no, we're really trying to encourage them to have variety.
26. INT Yeah.
27. HC Because I do dinner duty and, most days, or corridor duty, and I'm in the dining hall and I'm watching the same children having the same food every day.
28. INT Yeah.
29. HC You know, it's chips and beefburgers or it's chips and fish fingers or, for some reason, chips they can't leave out. Um, I mean I introduced, say for the last year I was giving them stickers if they were having a healthy variety, um, cos we, you do use stickers as a reward system as part of the system. Um, so I was trying to encourage that and also trying to encourage the dinner ladies to put more fruit on.
30. INT Right.
31. HC You know, put things on like melon, and in fact the melon went down sort of quite well when it was sunny.
32. INT Yeah.
33. HC Um, but as I say, it's getting them to choose a variety of foods, whereas they do tend to just go through and look for chips, chips, chips, all of the time.
34. INT And did the stickers work quite well?
35. HC Yes, I mean the fruit, I mean obviously we used it in the summer term which is easier to get a variety of fruit and there's always apples, but, um, I got some like bananas and melons and, I think, some peaches. Some different fruits and they went down quite well. Ur, but generally, as I say, the most important thing to do is to try and encourage their self-esteem to try and choose and be selective.
36. INT Yeah.
37. HC Rather than go along with the crowd.
38. INT Yeah, and how do you do that?
39. HC Um, right, well, when, in say, in they do, on the spiral curriculum, we do, so we do about peer pressure, um, we do things about, you know, 'how I see myself' and, you know, body image and exercise. Um, we do things about friendship and, um, you know, within the group …
40. HC So I would, I would say that the actual food and diet that we do is only a very small part of the whole. Obviously if they do home economics or food technology they do more child development and more food awareness there.
41. INT And do you do any kind of awareness of how images in the media might affect their own feelings about their own image and things like that?
42. HC Yeah, I mean, in English as well as in health, that's right, we do, um, say look at magazines and adverts and that sort of thing and, um, you do, you know, see which adverts they like or whatever, are they swayed by the adverts in choosing, you know.
43. INT Yeah.
44. HC One, buying products or the actual images that they are being portrayed and pop stars, as well.
45. INT Mmm.
46. HC We haven't actually had, um, we've perhaps had some people who are overweight, but I think we've only

had, say, one out of very few people have actually gone down the route of anorexia.
47. INT Right.
48. HC So I would say our problem might be overweight. The other way …
49. INT Yeah.
50. HC From people who are, you know, unhealthy eating, obviously, and lack of exercise.
51. (INT asks a question about the links between PSHE and PE in terms of healthy exercise.)
52. HC You do find there are some people who will not bring their kit in.
53. INT Yeah?
54. HC And if you look at them, they tend to be often, particularly the girls, the ones who are overweight.
55. INT Right.
56. HC Who are the ones, obviously, who should be doing …
57. INT Yeah.
58. HC more PE. Um, sometimes, there is support at home.
59. INT Mmm.
60. HC Other times, some of the parents sometimes are in a similar sort of situation and you can see, like, like daughter like mum.
61. INT Yeah.
62. HC Out to follow the same pathway. We can't sort of force them to do PE … And I would say they are the ones who are overweight. I can think of a couple of girls who, go down that route …
63. INT Um, do you see differences both in healthy eating and exercise when, between the different ethnic groups that you've got in the school or do you think it's more or less the same?
64. HC Um, right, I would say that the, I mean the eating habits in school aren't different.
65. INT Right.
66. HC And the ethnic groups are just as keen on their chips, but maybe because they don't get them at home.
67. INT Right.
68. HC Um, whereas you might say, I mean this is obviously a stereotyping, very much …
69. INT Yeah.
70. HC But, um, perhaps, I mean I have seen them choosing chips just the same as the others in the dinner time, but generally I would say the overweight people tend to be, um, say, white people.
71. INT Right.
72. HC Um, Asians, I haven't got any overweight of what I can remember. We have a lot of Somali children.
73. INT Mmm.
74. HC From a couple of years back when there was trouble in Somalia and they were all exceptionally tall and thin.
75 HC And you know, obviously their genetic make up is very different.
76. INT Yeah.
77. HC Really tall, well over 6ft by the time they got into the 6th form.
78. INT Wow.
79. HC And really sort of thin with it. Um, and so we've got some Caribbean ones, no I mean I would say that really, you know, for want of another way, it's the white people who tend to be more overweight than the ethnic ones.
80. INT Right.
81. HC And I think perhaps they're getting a better variety from their culture, if they're having chips or whatever in the school then they are getting a variety at home.
82. INT Right.
83. HC Whereas I think a lot of others are still eating fast foods or going down McDonalds or just snacking too often.
84. INT Yeah.
85. HC All the time, rather than eating and stopping.
86. INT Yeah.
87. HC And very much, I mean they all seem to be into, you know, computer games, of course, and the television.
88. INT In terms of eating disorders, are they actually taught what they are and what problems there are and what happens and things like that? Or is it more from the healthy eating side that they're touched on?
89. HC Yes, I mean if they're doing food technology for GCSE they will do in detail about the different disorders and that.
90. INT Right.
91. HC But we, we don't go into any detail, we just mention like overweight, obviously, but then we mention underweight or that sort of route and what effect it would have on your body cos we do body changes and things.
92. INT Right.
93. HC But we don't obviously stress the actual under-eating part.
94. INT Right.
95. HC But try and, you know, go for balance. And the amount of exercise in proportion to what you're eating and …
96. INT Right.
97. HC and variety and that sort of thing.

We stress that we have no wish to contest the commitment of either this teacher or her school to the cause of health education and enhancing the lifestyles of young people in their care. The good intentions are manifest and the school's health education, as mentioned in the extract, had received recognition for its excellence. Our claim, however, is that the actions implied in the above narrative are manifestly practices defined and constituted by the major themes and narratives implicit in wider discourse of obesity and health previously described. The PSE curriculum in this teacher's perspective is a legitimate response to a health epidemic caused by conditions of a postmodern world: too much television and computer games, sedentary lifestyles and bad diets are to blame. With appropriate intervention and given reasons, sound knowledge and a manipulation of diets, individual lifestyles can be re-engineered towards more positive health ideals. This, too, is a discourse of conviction, of

certainty, the HC/teacher and others are positioned as 'expert authority', given the right to intervene in and engineer a new and better lifestyle for the children in their care. The body is 'a site of political and ideological control, surveillance and regulation' (Lupton, 1996, p. 23). In this case, power is exercised through the 'panoptican of the curriculum'. For the pupil there is no escaping the medical/health carer's gaze. The body (its form, value and function) is not just a matter for modification by/from teachers in Personal and Social Education, or Physical Education and sport, those subjects dedicated to body concerns, but also those in Food Technology and English, for dinner ladies in corridors and cooks in canteens. There are few places available for the (abnormal) body to hide, avoid surveillance, and resist the receipt of a health diagnosis, intervention and 'health care'. And in this discourse, everyone *initially* is assumed to be suffering from the overweight disease. Although the PSE curriculum is intentionally 'liberal' and 'non-judgmental', with repeated reference to choice, variety, lifestyle, encouragement, the hierarchies implicit are not difficult to see. Clearly there is a hierarchy of good and bad food, with some ('chips', a metonym for all fat laden food, it seems) so potentially dangerous it has to be banned. And a hierarchy of good and bad lifestyles, that generate allegiances to the right or wrong kind of food. While for some eating chips at school is seen as an expression of rational decision making, of extending lifestyle choices, tasting and testing foodstuffs not experienced at home, for (working class) others, it is mindless conformity to bad eating habits, an extension of the restricted dietary practices of the home into the school canteen. The evaluative class and cultural implications of this stereotyping are not difficult to see. Ironically, although the concept of lifestyle features prominently in this discourse, it is fundamentally disconnected from the socio-cultural conditions that pupils may experience. There is, of course, no more reason to believe that working class/ 'white' children are exercising less of a choice than their 'ethnic' (or middle class) counterparts. Indeed, even if one accepts the veracity of a perspective that assumes working-class children have a restricted diet, we may still need to question the merits of a pedagogy that attempts to erode and dismantle what, for some, is a positive and enjoyable relationship with an essential food, albeit a plate full of chips. Once the child's relationship with enjoyable and healthy eating is broken or damaged and if there is really no alternative at home, then what is left? How is the child now positioned in the social practices of the family and its discursive field to respond? The individual is left with the knowledge that she or he is unavoidably eating bad food (delivered by bad parents or guardians) and a choice, of either imbuing 'bad' foodstuffs with accompanying feelings of guilt and self loathing, or perhaps not eating food at all. Shilling (1993) drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1984) reminds us that bodies are formed through the development of *taste*. 'Taste' refers to the processes whereby individuals appropriate as voluntary choices and preferences, lifestyles that are actually rooted in material constraints. In other words, taste makes a virtue out of necessity (Bourdieu, 1984). The consumption of food is an obvious example of how taste affects the body and develops in class-based material locations. People develop preferences for what is available to them. The development of taste, which can be seen as a conscious manifestation of habits, is embodied and deeply affects people's orientations towards their bodies (Shilling, p. 129). Given the rigid boundaries between expert health knowledge and lay knowledge which the obesity discourse implies, there is little opportunity, or need it seems, for the health expert to explore the life experiences of children, the nature of family life, the structures of schooling, or the sheer visceral pleasure of eating certain foods, that may lead some young people to choose, despite all options available, a plateful of chips rather than lasagne and fruit. Clearly, this process has the potential not only to pathologise pupils but parents and guardians too. Despite the rhetoric of building 'self esteem' this discourse presses towards degradation, the identification and labelling of good and bad eating behaviour, good and bad food, good and bad citizen. We hold the view that the knowledge and practices associated with this obesity discourse matter greatly. They serve not only to classify populations (nations, classes, cultures) but also individuals, as normal or abnormal, good or bad, therefore requiring intervention by the state, in this case, in the form of teachers in schools. It is, therefore, a discourse not only of information and knowledge but also of classification and control that allows us to construct those who are overweight as lazy, or morally wrong. This, then, potentially is a pedagogy of degradation, of classification and separation, no 'smiley sticker' for the fat, or for those unwilling to take concerted actions to lose weight and get thin. This discourse reduces the practice of education to the trivium of food (diet), exercise and weight, social practices in which the student is reduced to a 'body' not a person. It is a discourse which positions the teacher as health expert, he/she is apportioned social arbiter, since it is he or she who will determine the authenticity of the patient's/pupil's condition. If the pupil is seen or shown to be recurrently reprobate in his or her endeavour to seek refuge from potential illness (overweight, obesity) s/he runs the risk of acquiring the reputation of a malingerer, deviant, resistant to positive change.

In passing, we might compare the social practices described above with the repair work that professionals at the Rhodes Farm Clinic in London (a treatment centre for girls suffering from anorexia nervosa) have to engage in to correct the damage done by (mainly middle class) parents and schools dedicated to narrow eating ideals, and to help anorexic girls rebuild a healthy, pleasurable relationship with food, including pizza and a plate full of chips. In short, we are suggesting that a culture of weightism persists, despite the fact that thinking of this sort has, since the early 1980s, been subjected to a great deal of critical scrutiny in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The actions of teachers and policymakers still seem wrapped in an ideology of 'healthism' designed to make young people 'fit' and thin. Reports such as that of the House of Commons (2002) will continue to ensure that the curriculum is driven not by educational intentions but the functional pursuit of fitness and health, whose goal is the prevention and avoidance of being overweight and fat, indirectly the reproduction of slender ideals.

Conclusion

We have no wish here to draw causal connections between the social practices of schooling and eating disorders involving self-starvation. The 'aetiology' of such conditions is extremely complex and their origins and connections with processes of schooling are yet to be explored. But the obesity discourse we suggest does help feed and define a culture, which builds pressures for perfection and competence that are impossible, even undesirable to achieve. They also may inadvertently help reproduce old social class and gender stereotypes and hierarchies, albeit in new invidious ways. Far from empowering individuals, social practices such as those described may leave young people feeling powerless, labelled, alienated from their bodies and believing that they have less or worse still, no control over base essential elements of their lives. Eating disorders and obsessive exercise may become a response directed at regaining control of one aspect of life that remains in reach – the body – ironically potentially compromising rather than enhancing their health (White et al, 1995). Nor have we a wish to deny that there is a positive relationship between activity and health. But we do need to problematise received wisdom around diet, health and exercise and better reflect the uncertainties, contradictions and ambiguities residing in health science research in the curricula of schools. Only then might we avoid pathologising students and the building of 'body hierarchies' and instead help all students towards taking more informed decisions about their health care.

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Creative Looking and Responding

PAMELA SMYTH
is Art Advisor to the London Borough of Bromley. In this article she provides an account of an exciting project that involved primary children visiting an (unusual) art gallery and exploring the links between creative responses to works of art and creative writing.

Imagine a complexity of lines, colours, shapes and textures, composed in the form of a painting, and hung in a gallery. What might evoke a response to this artwork – causing us to pause and dwell for a while in its intrigue whilst we begin to delve into possible interpretations of meanings, information, inspiration and opinion? What might engage the attention of sensory perceptions, imagination and emotional involvement?

How might we as educators best help young learners read, respond to and make sense of ideas in artworks, in other texts, and the world in which they find themselves? Some children will be 'novice', 'competent' or 'expert' learners in their reading and / or their writing. But they will all have learning styles that favour particular intelligences, genetic dispositions and life experience. A novice literacy learner, one who is perhaps aware of rhythmic patterns, might be surprised to find how this relates to reading images and text; a competent learner, one who perhaps enjoys organising and classifying classroom bric-a-brac, might enjoy the challenge of placing imaginative ideas in a structure; an expert literacy learner, one who perhaps daydreams about the characters befriended in a book, might be reassured that they can express their ideas in ways other than writing.

In this story of a group of teachers, their partner artists, the children in their classrooms, a gallery and its inspirational artist / curator, three strands are explored. To help all young learners be imaginative writers and creative readers who can respond adventurously to the complexities of artworks – images and texts – it was recognised that they would need, amongst other things, reassurance, surprise and challenge:

reassurance – they would be encouraged to bring existing understandings to bear upon many possible interpretations in a climate of enquiry in which, as learners, they feel safe, respectful of each other and allowed to be curious and tentative;

surprise – questions would be asked of them to guide their looking, offering a number of possible pathways through their learning landscape and new information would press the learner beyond assumption towards a thoughtful personal response;

challenge – adaptive lenses provided by observation, imagination, sensation and emotion would help them to view their prior knowledge, curiosities and imminent learning and engage in their own enquiry in 'a spirit that recognises what is familiar in new experience and moves beyond it' (Emde, 1995).

As we worked on the *Keeping Reading Project* (DfES, 2002a) we tried to discover some of the 'signposts', 'lightning rods' and 'cognitive road maps' (Bransford, 2000) that might reassure, challenge and surprise the children. We used the Keeping Gallery as a centre for inspiration for us all.

The Keeping Gallery exhibits original works by the renowned illustrator, Charles Keeping. This small gallery is an important and rich resource of original illustrations and writing for local schools and colleges. The late Charles Keeping has made poems such as 'The Highwayman' and 'Lady of Shalott' memorable to millions of readers. His distinctive style has earned him a place as one of the most influential illustrators of the twentieth century. Renate Keeping is recognised for her own work, which is also exhibited in the gallery. An apple room, a display of cake temptations and other works offer children and adults a delightful journey through the extraordinary created from the ordinary. Renate has also chronicled her eventful and sometimes painful life – as a child refugee fleeing from war-torn Germany through to the present day – in a highly original and famous series of textile panels. Renate helped us all to appreciate the multiple languages of art found in the evocative images and texts.

The children ranged in age from five to thirteen and were reassured, surprised and challenged to learn about the power of pictures and stories in a range of activities. *The artists* were creative individuals and professional artists in different visual art forms who worked as partners in aspects of the project, with the teachers, in their classrooms, for over a year. *The teachers*, innovative yet pragmatic as always, needed to meld these creative activities to the literacy framework and the National Curriculum. So did I. As part of the borough literacy team and arts adviser, I wanted to understand more about the creative processes involved in responding to images and texts. Some of the approaches we used to encourage creative response in the Keeping Reading Project are summarised in the rest of this article to illustrate the strands of reassurance, surprise and challenge.

Picture Power – developing ideas for creative looking and creative writing

Reassurance

The recently published transition unit for Year 6 and Year 7 (DfES, 2002b) promotes the reading journal as a way for pupils to explore and store ideas about the vibrant,

Visiting a Gallery or Museum
Anticipating the Visit
Ask where the children may have seen art exhibited - shop / place of worship / museum / school/ gallery Discuss why some things are collected or displayed Explain about the museum or gallery to be visited – itinerary and expectations of the visit Invite questions they might ask themselves about objects or pictures from the museum / gallery Explore how they might record what they see, think, do on the visit – to collect visual / other information
Responding to the objects, images or places
Observation – the content – what can they see? Imagination – the story clues – what do they think might be happening? Sensation – the visual and tactile qualities – 'see with the mind', 'touch with the eyes' Emotion – the mood – feelings shown in lines, colours, patterns, textures, shapes, form Evaluation – the information gathered – does the artist's way of showing their ideas work?
Reviewing the visit
Describing their experiences of the gallery Sharing their findings, collections and ideas Designing and making something inspired by the visit Following up the visit with further questions Evaluating what they have learned

Figure 1

contemporary texts exemplified, as they move from one phase of their education to the next. The National Curriculum for art and design specifies the use of a sketchbook to explore and develop ideas, investigate tools and materials and evaluate the process of making (QCA, 2000). In the Keeping Reading Project we used a *Keeping Book* - a place for keeping fragments of thought, emerging ideas, perceptions and collections. It could be called a visual diary, a sketchbook, a thinkbook, a source book, a design diary, a process journal, a reading log. In the past, people would often keep a 'Commonplace' or 'Keepsake Book' – they would put into it a daily collection of things that interested them – postcards, drawings, words and comments, tickets, bits and pieces. The Keeping Book is a unique and personal treasure trove – ideas (words, associations, charts, diagrams, maps, drawings), samples (materials, try-outs, investigations) and memorabilia (souvenirs, responses, first drafts, collections) – can be kept and used to inspire further work and discussion. We found that the simplest and most effective way to do this was to make 'chap books'. These little books, folded from A4 or A3 paper, are personal, easily filled and added to, and are precious when completed. As an assessment tool they are invaluable.

Surprise

The visits to the Keeping Gallery were planned for the teachers' and artists' professional development, and as an event in the children's learning experience. As we worked on the project, QCA began to publish draft guidance for art and design. The advice on *visiting a gallery* was simplified further, as shown in Figure 1, to help everyone make the most of their visit.

During the visits, Renate would guide their responses to particular images and objects, lead a drawing workshop and share one of Charles Keeping's own stories by showing the illustrations as slides. The children learned about the language of art and the work of an illustrator by looking, listening, talking and drawing. They also enjoyed biscuits Renate made for them in the shape of horses. Charles grew up watching the dray horses climb the brick ramps to their stables across the street and horses feature dramatically in many of his works displayed in the gallery.

Challenge

Responding to an artwork can be superficial (I like / don't like it) or demanding. Deeper looking at an image can provide an absorbing challenge to observation, imagination, sensation and emotion and artworks can subsequently be enjoyed, appreciated, questioned and evaluated more completely. An artwork can tell a story about a moment in time, another place, a different way of life, the weather, issues, familiar and unfamiliar events and celebrations. We can appreciate the shapes, textures and spaces in something that has been made and guess how it was done, how the artist might have wanted us to feel when we look at it. Renate helps the children appreciate some of this in her role as guide to the gallery, as shown in this extract from one of the project recordings, where she explores *Joseph's Yard*:

We have a close up portrait of Joseph. Can you see how Joseph's nose appears to be standing out from his face? This is because of the use of tone – light and shade. The tip of the nose is very light – nearly white – and under the nose as it turns back to very dark. This gives the impression of coming towards you. There is also a lot of tone on the hair. See how the whites of his eyes are not bright – this is because the cast shadow of the hair is affecting them. The gesture of his hands up against his mouth shows that he is feeling guilty, that the plant died again. Use your hands to express yourself. What sort of gestures would you make if you were saying 'I don't know', or if you were telling someone off, or yawning, or stopping a bus. (Keeping, 2000)

The teachers were given sets of books so that every child in their class could look at and respond to illustrations by Charles Keeping. This provided the starting point for work with the artist partners who helped the children to explore and develop ideas for their own stories and illustrations. Classroom approaches to looking were developed from, amongst others, QCA guidance (QCA, 2000), and research into adventurous looking and thinking (Perkins, 1994). This is shown as Figure 2. The development of these approaches is described more fully below.

Word Power – developing ideas for creative reading and creative writing

Reassurance

Reading and writing demand creativity – readers and writers respond imaginatively to words and ideas in order to make meaning. Talking about what has been read, and oral rehearsal of what might be written can turn a classroom into a community of readers and writers. The 'Reading Team' approach was adapted for this project from *Literature Circles* (Daniels, 1994) as a way of organising for independent reading and powerful collaborative learning. The teams are small discussion groups of pupils who read the same text. Each pupil in the

Some Thinking Prompts for Looking Adventurously at Illustrations			
	novice learners	***competent learners***	***expert learners***
observation Look at the *content*	What can you see? How would you describe it?	If you drew the rest of the picture, what detail would you put in it?	Can you find any metaphors or symbols that might stand for / mean something?
imagination Look at the *story*	Who is in this story ? Where is it happening? What do you think might happen next?	Are there any clues about characters, objects, settings?	What do you think the image is about - is the illustrator trying to share their own idea about the story with you?
emotion Look at the *mood*	How does it make you feel? How do you think you would feel if you were the character?	How do you think the illustrator wanted you to feel?	Does it remind you of other stories, pictures people, places your memories?
sensation Look at the ***lines, colours, patterns, shapes textures***	How do you think you would feel if you were in this place - what might you hear / touch / smell / see	If you could stand inside this illustration what might you feel - temperature, movement, textures,	How has the illustrator helped you to feel - temperature, movement, textures, shapes
evaluation Look at the *process*	How do you think it was made - do you think it is a drawing, painting, print, photograph, collage, sculpture?	Why do you think it was made like this - how has the illustrator has used tools and materials?	How is it set out - has the illustrator used any special tricks to help you understand the story more?

Figure 2

Reading Teams	
role	**task**
Word Wizard	To find words and what they might mean
Picture Person	To find a special picture or picture in the mind
Feeling Finder	To find examples of emotion and mood
Character Catcher	To find out about a main or incidental character
Surprise Seeker	To look for the unexpected
Scene Setter	To find out about the setting
Passage Picker	To choose a special paragraph or phrase
Link Lister	To list links / comparisons with other texts
Connection Collector	To think how the world they know connects to the world in the text
Tale Teller	To summarise the main points
Meaning Maker	To say why they think the writer chose to say something
Puzzle Poser	To find a confusing part of the text
Discussion Director	To make sure everyone has a turn to talk
Plot Prober	To find clues and hints dropped by the writer
Pivotal Pointer	To find a twist or turn in the plot
Ideas Illustrator	To make a drawing or a diagram to show an idea

Figure 3

group has a role to play in discussion. As they read or re-read the text, they also prepare to play their 'role' by finding clues, marking text or making notes with a particular focus in mind. They share their findings in turn and discuss them. The tasks and prompts can also be differentiated so that everyone has access to adventurous looking, thinking and discussion (Figure 3).

Reading Teams were used with the youngest children and the oldest in different ways: in one class, everyone was assigned the role of 'word wizard' and asked to prepare for discussion by finding, for example, adjectives; another class divided into 8 teams and prepared for small team discussion before they held class debates; another class used their 20-minute 'silent reading time' after lunch for individuals to prepare for their small team discussions in the literacy session the following day. Some teachers tried out this idea with children looking at images. The roles assigned were: Eagle Eyes, Surprise Seeker and Content Catcher – using observation to find detail; Story Spotter, Puzzle Picker and Meaning Maker – using imagination to find story; Feeling Finder, Happiness Hero and Sensation Seeker – to interpret emotion and sensation.

Surprise

Improving writing is identified as a priority for schools nationally and internationally. Teachers need a repertoire of approaches to teaching writing that motivate children to become successful writers and craft compelling stories. One of the long-lasting benefits of the project was to organise the objectives from the NLS framework (DfEE, 1998) into manageable clusters. Responses to the way a writer writes – *reading with a writer's eyes* - can inform

SPICE ADVICE reading with a writer's eyes - and - writing with a reader in mind	
Setting & scene	Enjoy how the writer pulls you into the story Investigate how writers set the scene to open the story Invent a place - visualise how fascinating it is (sounds, sights, feelings, smells) Imagine your characters in this place and write an opening 'scene' Drop in clues about the mood, time, weather, place, objects
Plots & plans	Enjoy how the writer makes you want to find out what happens next Investigate openings, endings, main events Imagine how your story might end Invent a simple plot-plan - opening, ending and a main event for in between Drop in a clue (dilemmas / cliff-hangers) - like a signpost to the story ending
Ideas & issues	Enjoy how the writer catches your imagination Investigate how writers use language to help you imagine, make you think Think about the sort of story you are writing Borrow language, themes and ideas - remember your story will have readers Drop in some clues to get your readers thinking
Characters & conversations	Enjoy how the writer has created convincing characters you care about Investigate how writers show what characters say / do - how they say / do it Invent convincing characters you care about Imagine what they do - how they do it, and say - how they say it Drop in clues about what they think, feel and believe in
Events & editing for effect	Enjoy how the writer has carried you through the story Investigate how writers link events Look at the words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters you have written Imagine your reader - have you given them enough information Drop in clues to show your reader the way through your story

Figure 4

Clustered NLS Objectives - Week 3 of 5		Y5
Text Level children listen to, talk about, read & respond to novels & stories *from a variety of cultures and traditions and* *write a story in chapters*	This week children learn how writers develop **ideas** in stories. They are taught how to:	
	read a story from another culture - identify & discuss recurring themes	2c
	identify the moral of the story - locate evidence in text	1b
	evaluate the writer's solution to an issue or dilemma raised in the story	8c
	explore the main issues of [own story] - write about a dilemma	11a
	write chapter of own longer story - [the dilemma]	13
Word Level	investigate suffixes - able & ible (SB page 36)	9
	use joined, fluent, fast handwriting	13,14
Sentence Level	investigate and use connectives (GfW Unit 32)	4

Figure 5

the writing of another writer – *writing with a reader in mind*, surprising young writers that they are real writers too. Margaret Meek, veteran proponent of how texts can teach, explains the interaction between reading and writing, of the power of 'orchestrating' meanings, of how young writers can be the teller and the told:

> *Words appear from under the writer's fingers … as they balance fluency and control, ideas and technique. Their media are language and imagination; their models are other writers. (Meek, 2001)*

The teachers used an early version of 'MICE' – an acronym for milieu, ideas, characters and events – and children enjoyed searching for MICE in the texts they read and then trying out their own ideas. Some key features of stories are the ways in which the teller sets the scene, develops the plotline, uses language to reveal their ideas, creates convincing characters and edits events so that some are shown in detail and others are skimmed past. These key features grew from MICE to SPICE – Setting, Plot, Ideas, Characters and Events shown in Figure 4.

The need for manageable clusters was expressed by the teachers and the SPICE device is now used by the borough literacy team to cluster all NLS fiction objectives in 5-week modules in termly guidance packs for schools (Figure 5) (Moody, 2002).

Challenge

Producing a *Book of Ours* involved the children in a 'publishing' process – exploring and developing ideas for the book, writing and illustrating the content, making decisions about page layout, compiling into a book and making the cover. The artists led workshops to produce the books – their challenge was to work in imaginative, memorable and highly participative ways. Children were given opportunities to energise their ideas with playful explorations of words and story ideas. They were shown how to work safely and with care and imagination – trying out materials, experimenting with techniques for blending and mixing colours, exploring printing processes, investigating collage materials, textiles and the possibilities offered by 3D work. All of the books made were distinctively different: one book was a compilation of illustrations and writing in the style of both Keepings – faux letters, simulated diary extracts, lyrical poetry, dramatic illustrations – in response to The Highwayman'; another class hung their stories and symbols like leaves on a tree branch within a folding willow screen; another class made an alliterative days of the week book with acetate illustrations.

The last part of the project was to design and make Keeping *Reading Story Seats*. The challenge was to make or change a seat into a sculpture so that anyone would be able to imagine the possible world of a story just by looking at it. The children were asked to think deliberately about the purpose of and audience for their work: Time-travel, fairies, temptations, Bess's trysting bench, clay alphabet blocks, a street, a chicken, a Nigerian marketplace, were all evoked as stories from the seats they made. Once again, the artists and teachers led workshops to take the children through a creative process of associating ideas, generating ideas, innovating ideas and communicating ideas.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to consider how we, as educators, might best help young learners read, respond to and make sense of ideas in artworks, in other texts, and the world in which they find themselves. Some of the approaches helped to directly enrich the learning of 372 children, 12 teachers and the 12 artist partners. I am grateful to all of them, and Renate, for the way in which they have enriched my learning, helping me to refine old ideas and discover new ones. From this experience I want to examine the creative process – Motivating ideas, Associating ideas, Generating ideas, Innovating ideas and Communicating ideas – and how theories of intelligence relate to imagination. That's MAGIC – and another story perhaps.

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Developing Pupil Involvement in the Assessment for Learning Process

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Introduction

The following article describes an initiative aimed at developing pupil involvement in the assessment for learning process.

The initiative formed a single strand of a project involving several implementations, executed concurrently, that investigated strategies by which both pupil and teacher empowerment could be increased within the constraints of current curriculum guidance. The entire project consisted of three distinct but related programmes: an initiative aimed to develop teacher reflexivity through in-class supported improvement; a whole school initiative focused on developing pupil involvement in the assessment for learning process; and the development of professional partnerships within the school.

Rationale

The rationale underlying the project as a whole, employing a multiple-pronged approach, arose from research evidence into the effective management of change in schools indicating that instability may arise from a transformation of whole school change from hierarchical to teacher centred, therefore requiring the establishment of supporting structures. The hierarchical 'top down' approach to school improvement has been compared to a pyramid. A turning upside down of this pyramid to facilitate democratic 'bottom up' strategies for change, could therefore be viewed as a 'wobbly pyramid' requiring scaffolding in order to maintain stability. It was felt that each of the initiatives would act as independent stabilisers, working concurrently to maintain the 'wobbly pyramid' of bottom-up school improvement (See Figure 1).

The action research project was rooted within the socially critical action research paradigm, since this paradigm, with its emancipatory interest, embraced the project's aims towards pupil and teacher empowerment. It also reflected the level of pupil involvement featured in the project with its characteristic of pupil as 'active creator' of knowledge alongside the teacher (Grundy, 1987 in McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). Livingstone (1998 in Tripp, 1990), defines socially critical action research as 'the empowerment of subordinate groups through shared understanding of the social construction of reality'. Indeed, Tripp describes socially critical action research as 'a means of empowerment' (1990, p. 166).

The project also incorporated features of two additional research paradigms: the interpretist approach and phenomenological theory. McCutcheon and Jung (1990) include self-reflection as 'an essential component' (p. 146) of the interpretist approach, and identify the incorporation of 'a dialogic interaction between pupil and teacher' as one of its features. Such reflective dialogue lay at the root of the value system of the project.

In exploring the concept of pupil empowerment within the learning process, we investigated the living experiences of pupils and teachers, and their feelings of control in daily classroom life. Phenomenological research approaches stress the notion that only those who experience phenomena are 'capable of communicating them to the outside world' (Parahoo, 1997, p. 43). Husserlian phenomenology advocates the concept of 'bracketing', during which the researcher suspends all preconceptions (Parahoo, 1997). In investigating the feelings of control that both teachers and pupils feel over their learning, it seemed a necessity to view their experiences from such a phenomenological perspective.

The value of pupils as participants in the research process has been documented: Ruddock & Flutter (2000)

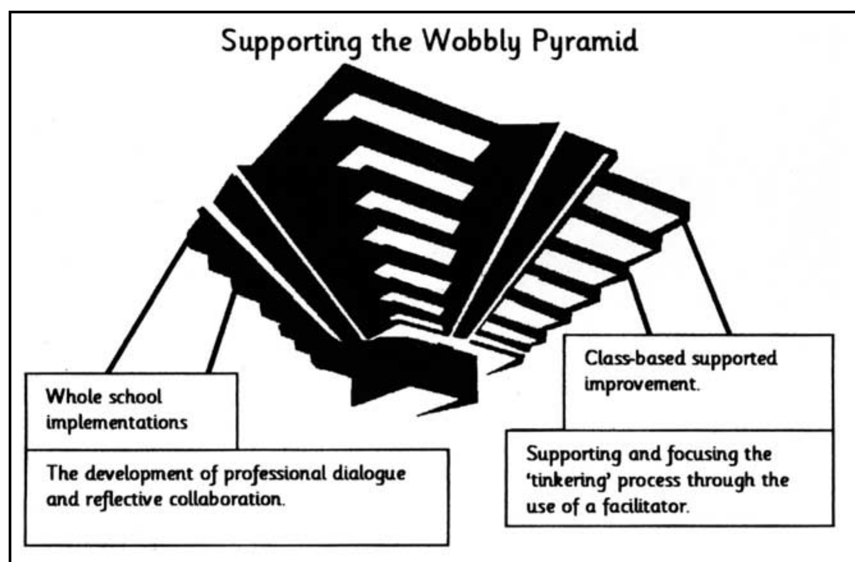

Figure 1

regard pupils as 'expert witnesses' (p. 82) and Pickering (1997) describes pupils as evidence-based 'informers'. The authenticity of the pupil voice has also been noted (Jackson, 2000; SooHoo, 1993). It was therefore felt appropriate that pupil voice be central to the project and indeed would initiate a 'reconnaisance' of current practice through data collection methods designed to elicit pupil perception. Stoll & Fink (1996) recommend such a use of the 'learners' experience' as a starting point (p. 154).

Reconnaissance

Pupils were interviewed in small groups employing a 'guided interview' approach (Berry, 1998) in order to enable 'deep-probing' whilst keeping to the 'parameters traced out by the aim of the study' (Wenden, 1982 in Berry, 1999, p. 1). The technique of 'funnelling' (Berry, 1999) was utilised, with initial use of convergent questions, leading to divergent questions later in the interview. Interviews were audio recorded, and a summary of the interview was written by the researcher at the end of each interview in a research journal.

The interviews gained pupil views on a range of areas, although only those relevant to this particular strand of the project are reported here.

Results

The initial data revealed a number of issues:

- *Current strategies for the communication of targets appear largely ineffective.* This was evidenced by 100% of interviewees being unable to recall any of the future targets identified on her/his annual report. In reading, a small percentage (16%) did have knowledge of their next target, and this was written in their reading record. Some children (12%) reported that they had been told their target verbally by the classroom support, but did not see this target within any continuum, and therefore did not know what would be the next target. Most year 6 children (80%) recalled their teacher sharing criteria from the Local Education Authority reading continuums, but could not now recall what these criteria were. Children who received additional reading support (generally only SEN registered pupils) with a classroom support had better knowledge of a) their current skills in reading, b) aspects that they find difficult, and c) specific short-term targets in reading.
- In contrast, children who could be regarded as 'middle ability' had little knowledge of future targets and appeared to rarely reflect upon their current skills, except in terms of either their current level on the reading scheme, or how many free reads they had completed. Similarly, in other curriculum areas, children defined as 'middle ability' knew which level they were aiming for, but not what this next level required.
- Children often did not know which specific skills they needed to focus on in order to reach a target. Many targets therefore focused on reaching a particular level, but were not attached to specific criteria.In Key Stage 2 this was exemplified by children knowing their target to 'get on to free reads', but not knowing the actual skills necessary to focus on in order to reach this level, although ironically, they sometimes knew the skills that 'free readers' demonstrated!

  Researcher: What will you have to get better at to get onto free reads? What will you have to improve at before you're ready for free reads?
  *Pupil: I don't know. I just got to get through all the Level * books.*
  Researcher: But what do 'free readers' have to be able to do?
  Pupil: They stop at punctuation, they take a breath, they say complicated words and they can read 'superextradiliocious'- you know, that real long word.
  Researcher: So are those the things you need to work on to get onto free reads?
  Pupil: No, I've just got to get through the levels.

- Many pupils regarded targets as being intrinsically linked to underachievement:

  Researcher: Do you have a target in maths?
  Pupil: Naah, I don't need one.
  Researcher: Why is that?
  *Pupil: 'Cos I'm really brilliant in it, ** has got to learn * though, cos he can't do them. He's in the * group.*

  Researcher: Do you have a target in writing?
  Pupil: No. It's my best subject so I don't need one.

  Researcher: Does anyone in your class have a target for writing?
  *Pupil: Yeah, * group have got to get better at writing, 'cos they can't really write very well.*

  Researcher: What is your target in reading?
  *Pupil: Nothing really – 'cos ** thinks I'm a good reader and you can't get higher than free read.*

- There was significant evidence to suggest that the teacher was viewed by the pupil as the 'controller' of learning; children did not perceive themselves as 'stakeholders' in the learning process, or having any role in the target setting process. 83% of children stated that their teacher alone decided what they needed to improve on in their learning, and that they had no involvement in this process:

  Pupil: [Teacher's name] tells you what you need to get better at.
  Researcher: Do you decide that together?
  Pupil: No, it's the teacher that decides isn't it, 'cos they know what you need to get better at, don't they?
  Researcher: Do you know what you need to get better at?
  Pupil: Yeah, [teacher] told me I need to get better at writing neater.

  Researcher: You told me earlier that you need to get better at putting capital letters and full-stops in your writing. Who decided that this was the part of your writing that you needed to improve at?
  Pupil: [Teacher] told me.
  Researcher: Did you help decide?
  Pupil: No, the teacher tells you 'cos they know 'cos they look at your writing.
  Researcher: But you look at your writing too …

Pupil: Well, [teacher], she sort of knows 'cos she's a teacher, so she knows what you need to do.

- Despite many children recognising their lack of involvement within target setting, they expressed a definite wish to have more say in their targets and had a keen understanding of their benefits:

I would like to have a target, 'cos it makes you really go for it and you know what you've got to do to get better.

I think we should get some say. They (the teachers) should say 'What do YOU think you need to improve on?'

The importance of children perceiving 'control' over the learning process is made clear by Bourne (1994), who notes that if pupils perceive adults as controlling learning, they will act with 'learned helplessness'.

Children's knowledge of targets is essential in enabling their construction of a 'learning map'; without such a map we are expecting children to 'Construct a jigsaw puzzle, without a picture to guide them' (Beane, 1995 in Stoll & Fink, 1996, p. 43).

The process of reflection by pupils about future targets will itself develop metacognition, which Leadbetter et al (1999) argues improves pupils' effectiveness as learners.

The data clearly indicated that there was a need to involve children to a greater extent in the target setting process, in order to enable them to:

- have better knowledge of their targets;
- understand what they need to do in order to reach those targets;
- increase their ability to reflect upon their learning, with a subsequent improvement in metacognition;
- give them a greater sense of control over the learning process.

Implementation

Southworth (1998), in his description of the characteristics of 'The Learning School', identifies the development of dialogue about teaching and learning (p. 29) as an essential feature, 'Learning schools will be places where teachers individually and collaboratively develop and hone their skills' (Southworth, 1998, p. 30).

Hargreaves (1998) compares the process of the implementation of change to the transplant of an organ, but warns: 'Transplanting innovations into a school is as risky as transplanting into our bodies a metal prosthesis or an organ donated by someone else' (p. 36).

He argues that a process of reflective practice, which he terms 'tinkering', in which the teacher refines and modifies practices in order to personalise it, is 'the most powerful immuno-suppressive' (p. 38). He adds that 'joint tinkering' is more successful than when carried out in isolation.

This view of 'tinkering' as the key to new knowledge is supported by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) who argue that it is the interaction between explicit and tacit knowledge that is crucial in the development of change.

Hargreaves (1998) reports that 'schools make poor use of their collective professional knowledge' (p. 27), arguing that the management of knowledge creation is 'one of the most important pieces of managerial capital' (p. 29). In his description of the 'knowledge creating school' he identifies regular opportunities for reflection, dialogue, enquiry and networking as keys to improvement.

The implementation stage of the project therefore aimed to embrace these principles of collaborative knowledge creation and reflective practice.

It was agreed that the process of negotiated target setting with pupils would focus on writing skills. It was felt essential that pupils be fully involved in all stages of the implementation, in order that the aim of 'empowerment' was achieved. The implementation thus assumed a four-stage process:

1. As whole class use pieces of work to identify a range of elements upon which the writing could be judged, e.g. Does it consistently used capital letters/full stops? List all of these skills. Children devise symbols for each element, using ICT where possible.

2. Individuals examine several pieces of previous writing with teacher. Together discuss current skills and negotiate ways forward that can be used as assessment criteria. Pupil creates own 'target sheet' (e.g. 'check my key words; hold my pencil correctly; use lots of letters shapes in my writing; remember word spaces'), using symbols devised by whole class.

3. Individuals join with peers who have chosen same targets. Teacher discusses writing skills with these small homogenous (ability) groups, and using example pieces of writing as a vehicle, the group:

- Composes a list of writing skills at which they are all currently adept.
- Produces a list of skills that they all need to develop further – thus establishing a set of criteria to be used as a group for assessing their own and each other's writing (e.g. 'Did I re-read to check it made sense?, Did I "read on and leave a gap" for words I was unsure of?, Did I blend the sounds together?').

4. Group targets are typed up with symbols and boxes in order that they can be used for self-assessment. The sheets are then laminated.

The target sheets served as prompt and check sheets during the writing process as well as acting as an assessment tool. The sheets were photocopied and used for self-assessment by individuals and for peer assessment within dyads and small groups. They were also employed with the whole class as an assessment instrument. Initially, assessment was implemented as an adult-led process in order to provide training in their appropriate use. Once pupils had gained familiarity with the procedure, the sheets were used as a pupil-led strategy. Pupils employed a traffic light system to indicate how they had performed in relation to each of the targets, with green denoting 'I can move on', yellow signifying a need to 'practice a bit more on my own or with a learning partner', and red signalling a requirement for adult support.

The production of target sheets was initiated in all classes across the school, during which team meetings were held in order to monitor the targets selected by different ability groups and ensure progression and continuity through the key stage. The Local Education Authority Writing Continuum was used as a basis from which to make these judgements. In order to ensure continuity through the school a common target sheet format was maintained in each class, and common

symbols were employed, although it was decided that years 5 and 6 did not require symbols.

Evaluation

The effectiveness of the writing targets was monitored through team meetings and interviews with pupils. All teaching staff reported an increase in the knowledge by children of their targets and of assessment criteria and more systematic and constructive checking by pupils of their own and other's writing. Pupils also reported a better ability to check their own work and reported increased feelings of control over their learning:

> *It helps me know what I have to do to make my writing better.*
> *When I get stuck I look at the sheet and it reminds me what to do.*
> *I look at it when I'm checking and think 'Oh, yeah, I forgot a capital letter!'*

Interviews also suggested that, since all sheets were used for whole class assessment, children gained an understanding of what the next step would be in their learning:

> *Researcher: Do you know your targets in writing – what have you got to get better at?*
> *Pupil: I've got to get good at segmenting three sound words.*
> *Researcher: So what will you need to work at next when you're fantastic at segmenting three-sound words?*
> *Pupil: Well, * group's target is to match consonant blends at the beginning of words, so I think that will be next.*

The above extract testifies the impact of the target sheets on helping pupils to construct a 'learning map'. It also illustrates the common language that has been developed between pupils and teachers (for example, in the pupil's use of the term 'target').

It can be concluded that the target sheets acted as effective scaffolds for the processes of effective checking and assessing by pupils and effected a marked increase in children's metacognitive skills.

Due to the author leaving the school, the second phase of implementation, to develop pupil involvement in the assessment process in all learning, was initiated in a much larger primary school (NOR: 587), comprising of 21 classes.

Initial data gathering through pupil interviews and staff meetings revealed that although pupil involvement existed in some classes, these occurred on an ad-hoc rather than planned basis, and were predominantly orally based and reliant upon adult direction. Since the involvement of pupils was not occurring in all classes, there lacked progression and continuity through the school.

One class from each year group formed a working party whose remit was to 'develop the involvement of pupils in the assessment for learning process through manageable strategies that become part of daily classroom practice'.

First, the vehicle that would form the basis for assessment (to be used by all staff and forming the framework from which 'tinkering' could ensue) was discussed, and it was agreed that the traffic light system would again be adopted.

Staff worked for two terms to develop strategies by which children could be involved in assessing their learning on a regular basis. Since the aim was to develop pupil involvement in assessment for learning on a daily basis, it was necessary to develop methods that could be employed regardless of the curriculum area. It was therefore not possible to employ 'target sheets' such as those detailed in the previous school. The initial problem was therefore to assist children in recalling the criteria by which they were assessing themselves. The following strategies were devised:

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- The child writing the learning intention in the form of a question ('Can I …') at the top of the product (piece of work) and evaluating this by simply colouring a circle in one of traffic light colours. (Used mainly by years 5 and 6).
- The child being given a small sheet in which is written the learning intention in the form of a question: 'Can I …' with space to fill with traffic light – at the end of the session when they assess whether they can or not (used mainly by years R, 1 and 2).

This is then pasted into their books/onto the piece of work/product (if any) at the end of the session (years 3 and 4).

- On the table on which a group is working is placed a sheet with the learning intention written at the top (the group can be reminded of what the slip says – and therefore do not necessarily have to be able to read it): (Years R and 1).
- The learning intention is written in the form of a question at the top of a sheet, under which is drawn a traffic light (years 3 and 4, see Figure 2):

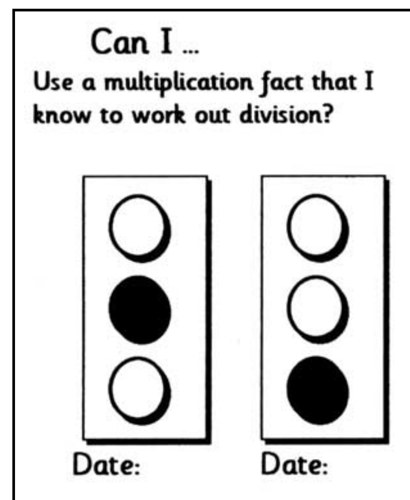

Figure 2

- The year 3 class devised a method by which all main learning intentions for the week are pasted onto a self-assessment sheet at the short-term planning stage. Pupils then use this sheet throughout the week.
- Year 6 classes have created a self-assessment sheet that covers a whole module of learning (created at the medium term planning stage). This has proved particularly useful for older children, in that it provides an overview of expectations for the half-term (or other

similar unit). The class teacher then records all children's self-assessments (i.e. the traffic light system that they have judged for their performance) against their own judgement. Any disparity in judgement prompts the teacher to discuss the learning with the pupil to further check understanding, knowledge or skills, thus increasing pupil-teacher dialogue.

- In a year 4 class, children indicate their own judgements adjacent to the learning intention (written by the child at the start of the session). As in the year 6 class, this judgement is recorded against the teacher's judgement, and any disparity results in further investigation as to whether the child requires further support. The use of a group sheet has also been employed by some teachers (see Figure 3).

Name	Am I able to write in sentences with full-stops and capital letters?
Jane	
Becky	
Catherine	
Jodie	
Michael	
Sam	

Figure 3

- A whole class 'Can I?' sheet on which children mark against their name when they feel they have reached a particular objective.

In Key Stage 1, a range of methods that help to focus pupils on evaluating their learning, but do not require any written record have been developed:

- children asked to pick up the coloured cube that shows how they think they have got on in their learning;
- children place the most appropriate coloured circle onto a laminated picture of a traffic light;
- children choosing a coloured bead from a string.

In order to negotiate where on a learning continuum a child is currently positioned, visual cues such as a person climbing a ladder/staircase/mountain have proved particularly useful in Key Stage 1. This has enabled children to understand the progress they have already made and the most appropriate next steps.

Evaluation of Phase 2

An evaluation of the impact of these systems aimed at developing pupil involvement in the assessment for learning process has been carried out through interviews with all teachers involved in the pilot, year group co-ordinators and pupils themselves (small groups from each class).

Teachers reported that initially pupils were either over-critical of themselves (consistently judging themselves to be red) or under critical (judging themselves to be consistently green). This is evidenced in the record books of the year groups in which the teacher and pupil judgements were recorded concurrently. Within a term, however, there was a significant increase in the accuracy with which pupils were judging their learning, and over 95% agreement between pupil and teacher judgements. This change in the accuracy of pupils' self-assessment indicates a need for pupils to become familiar with the principles of self-assessment as a tool to inform future learning, rather than a grading system. In this way, the emphasis lies on the adeptness with which a pupil can reflect upon her/his learning, rather than his/her final assessment.

Further investigation into the circumstances where pupil and teacher judgements consistently disagreed found that inaccurate pupil self-assessment was related to poor self-esteem, prompting subsequent action by the class teacher to address this. It could therefore be speculated that the use of self-assessment could also be valuable in contributing to information regarding appropriate personal, social and emotional provision.

In terms of the impact of the initiative upon children's learning, teachers reported a marked increase in children's confidence. In addition, although not formally measured, a general improvement in a pupil's intrinsic motivation for learning was judged by many teachers to have occurred as a direct result of their increased involvement in the learning process. Teachers also reported increased pupil-teacher dialogue and a better understanding by children of the success criteria for learning tasks.

Pupils reported increased feelings of control over the learning process and a better understanding of what was needed in order to improve. Many pupils reported feeling 'more confident' about learning generally.

Conclusion

The use of an over-arching framework for pupil involvement in the assessment for learning process (in our case the traffic light system, although alternative systems such as an arrow coding method could be utilised) has been an essential factor in the project's success. First, it has enabled the development of a system that retains an element of continuity throughout the school, facilitating the involvement of the very youngest pupils, yet still appropriate for the oldest. In addition, this will have an impact in its future success, in that as children move through the school, they will not have to 're-learn' the very principles of a system, before being able to effectively evaluate their own learning.

Secondly, whilst retaining whole school cohesion, the framework has facilitated the development of reflective practice and the occurrence of Hargreaves's 'tinkering'. It can be seen as providing a chassis upon which practitioners can build their preferred model of car – a model that can then accurately meet the needs of both teacher and pupils. The range of ways in which the traffic light system has been utilised is evidence to such tinkering: we indeed appear to have quite an array of models! Although they range from the hatchback to the sports car, all teachers involved in the pilot are in the driving seat and all are moving.

Such reflective practice also indicates the embedding of change, so that initiatives become incorporated into the culture of learning and teaching. Through 'tinkering', the implementations become part of routine classroom practice rather than bolted on additions that, with the current pressures, are soon abandoned. The fact that, a

year later, the use of regular self-assessment opportunities continue, is testament to this.

In addition to the classes involved in the pilot scheme, many teachers not in the group have embraced the traffic light system and begun to develop their own systems to facilitate pupil involvement in assessment for learning on a regular basis. The spread of new practice outside the pilot group is testament to the type of knowledge creation advocated by Hargreaves (1998) in his description of the knowledge creating school.

The involvement of pupils within the assessment for learning process is now being recognised at National level, with the recent ten 'Research-based principles to guide classroom practice' developed by the Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 2002) clearly and repeatedly highlighting pupil involvement as a key feature of effective classroom practice: 'Understanding and commitment follows when learners have some part in deciding goals and identifying criteria for assessing progress'.

The process of 'engaging learners in peer- and self-assessment' is recommended and teachers are urged to 'equip learners with the desire and the capacity to take charge of their learning through developing the skills of self-assessment'. The document goes further to recommend that 'Planning should provide opportunities for *both learner* and teacher to obtain and use information about progress towards learning goals' (my emphasis).

Although it is pleasing that the importance of pupil involvement in the assessment process has gained central recognition, its real effectiveness will be curbed if it simply becomes another column on the tick sheet of effective teaching skills. The use of self-assessment in the classroom requires the development of a much deeper underlying classroom ethos that regards the pupil view as paramount, and is achieved through long-term reflective 'tinkering' – by both pupil and teacher. It also requires a whole school belief in the high status of pupils as partners in the improvement process. Such involvement was found by the IQEA project to be one of the conditions for school improvement (Harris & Hopkins, 2000), and an aim regarded by Jackson (2000) as 'one of the ultimate objectives of school improvement' (p. 77).

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Improvement from the Bottom-up: assessing the impact of a self-evaluation project

HOWARD STEVENSON

Howard Stevenson, lecturer in Educational Leadership and Management at the University of Leicester, analyses the development and initial impact of a self-evaluation project at Hind Leys Community College, a 14-19 Leicestershire comprehensive school. The project sought to utilise self-evaluation methods to improve teaching and learning and raise the professional self-confidence of teachers.

Introduction: the politics of professionalism

The current crisis in teacher supply is clearly a consequence of many inter-related factors. The most frequently cited explanations, poor pay and excessive workload, are rightly highlighted as issues requiring immediate action by government and the employers. If such action is forthcoming, this would quite probably have a rapid impact on recruitment issues, both attracting new entrants and returners, whilst simultaneously reducing the flow of those seeking to leave. It remains to be seen whether the recent STRB report and recommendations regarding teacher workload will have such an impact.

However, the underlying causes of the crisis in teacher supply are more complex and require more fundamental and long-term solutions. One such issue, which must be addressed, is that of teachers' control, or more accurately non-control, of the curriculum. The years since 1988 have witnessed a relentless attack on teacher professionalism and teachers' professional judgement. Absolutely basic pedagogic issues – what is taught, how it is taught and how the impact of learning is assessed – have been largely removed from teachers' sphere of influence. Instead, teachers are faced with a tightly proscribed National Curriculum, accompanied by an unwieldy system of national testing. This is coupled with a plethora of 'accountability controls' (OFSTED, league tables, performance management) which further centralise approaches to teaching.

There can be little doubt that the cumulative effect of these developments has been to create a deeply alienated profession – unable to assert genuine professional judgment over key aspects of its own work. Interestingly, there is little evidence to suggest that new entrants into teaching, without the benefit of rose-tinted spectacles with which to look back at times past, feel any more positively about the situation. On the contrary, the rapid 'wastage' rate amongst new teachers suggests that even those attracted to teaching as a career do not find enough within the job (professionally as well as financially) to sustain them – they then leave in large numbers. The impact of this exodus on schools and their students is now all too plain to see.

The challenge for the teaching profession is to reassert control over the work of teachers – to place professional judgement at the heart of pedagogy and to return teaching to a creative and 'risk-taking' activity capable of exciting both teacher and learner. However, this cannot be a clarion call for a return to some mythical golden age. As a profession, teachers must recognise that a failure in the past adequately to confront the issue of accountability was more than anything responsible for the imposition of the post-1988 agenda. The key challenge is to combine professional autonomy with accountability, and to replace the fake accountability of the market with a more democratic model which better reflects the reality of power in society and its local communities.

Thankfully the picture is not entirely bleak. The government's own continuing professional development (CPD) strategy (*Learning and Teaching: a strategy for professional development*, DfEE, 2001) recognises that teacher ownership is central to success (not, alas, a lesson they applied to the dreadful NOF training), whilst the work of the General Teaching Council (GTC) increasingly echoes similar themes. Even OFSTED has shown a willingness to change and its recognition of the importance of school self-evaluation is a welcome development. Most welcome, however, is the growth at a grassroots level of self-evaluation projects within schools, and driven by teachers. The focus of this article provides an example of one such project – it provides a small, but tangible, example of how teachers are working together, and with students, to develop a 'bottom-up' model of school improvement.

Background to the Project

The project in question was developed by staff in the Business Education Department at Hind Leys Community College, near Loughborough in Leicestershire. The department is relatively small, with three full-time staff based permanently in the department and a few staff from

other curriculum areas who contribute to teaching within Business Education.

Two factors combined to give the project an initial impetus. First, the introduction of performance management. Could this be achieved in a way that impacted positively on team members, and avoided many of the potential pitfalls inherent in the DfES model? Secondly, some personnel difficulties in the recent past had led to low morale and a lack of team trust. The arrival of two new team members within the space of a year provided the opportunity to build a new team based on a different, more collaborative, culture.

It was the view of the Head of Department that performance management should not be top-down and managerialist, with the line manager making judgments as to whether subordinates had, or had not, met targets. Rather there was an opportunity to work together in order to improve teacher effectiveness. The favoured approach was to work collaboratively to generate data, identify issues and explore solutions. Initial ideas drew heavily on the self-evaluation work carried out by John MacBeath, and sponsored by the National Union of Teachers (*Schools Must Speak for Themselves: the case for school self-evaluation*, 1999).

The rejection of a hierarchical model established an early principle for the project, namely that each team member's experience should be broadly similar, regardless of nominal status. Team members would work together. In practical terms, this meant that each team member would both observe, and be observed by, other team members. Recognising the contribution of self-evaluation projects elsewhere, it was also decided that the views of students should be sought and consideration had to be given as to how this might be achieved.

Collaborative Teaching Initiative – Aims and Principles

Philosophical statement:

'The initiative is based on our view that through greater collaboration in our teaching it will be possible to both raise professional self-confidence and enhance the quality of teaching and learning.'

Aims:

- To improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Business Education Faculty
- To increase professional confidence of individual team members
- To support effective team working

Principles:

- The initiative's success depends on open communication between colleagues. This will create the critical success factor – team trust.
- Effective self-evaluation requires 360° analysis – our model is based on triangulating self-assessment, peer observation and student feedback.
- The initiative must provide positive returns on the time invested. Regular review of the initiative will seek to ensure this.
- Recognising the requirements of performance management regulations, team members have control over all relevant information and data regarding their own work.
- The outcome will clearly link to the professional development requirements of individual team members.

Figure 1

Several department meetings were devoted to developing the project before any practical action was taken. Everyone recognised that major sensitivities were at stake, especially if students were to be involved in some way. Time was therefore spent identifying and agreeing a set of aims and principles (see Figure 1). Once agreed, these informed all subsequent work.

As stated, it was agreed that colleagues would take the class of each team member both observing, and being observed by, each other team member. With a team of three, this was relatively easy to manage. It was further agreed that initial observations would have no focus, but act as a trigger to identify issues to look at in more detail subsequently. The practicalities of involving students raised more vexed issues. It was agreed to provide every student within the department with a questionnaire. The questions in the survey asked students for their views on a range of issues and drew on the Hay McBer model of effective classroom climate. In this model Hay McBer identified nine features of 'classroom climate' which they argued contributed directly to effective teaching and learning.

A questionnaire was drafted with 27 questions, three questions relating to each feature of classroom climate. The intention was to establish which aspects of classroom climate might be a relative strength or weakness. The advantage of this approach was that it allowed the team to develop questions that focused on the learner and learning – not on the teacher and teaching. It was possible, therefore, to avoid any phrasing in questions which suggested direct judging of teacher performance. A clear disadvantage of the approach adopted was that it drew heavily on a management consultant's model of effective teaching which some team members were uncomfortable about. This was recognised as a weakness, but in the end time factors dictated that an 'off the shelf' model was adopted, rather than one that was developed by the team.

Impact of the Project

My initial project research took place shortly after completion of the introductory stage. Classroom observations had taken place, with each team member both observing, and being observed by, each other team member. In the small group, this meant that team members had completed two observations of different colleagues and received observation feedback from the same two colleagues. The model agreed by the team envisaged that this process would be repeated on a termly basis. In addition, the questionnaires had been circulated to every student in every Business Education class (pre- and post-16, academic and vocational courses). One of the team members had devised a simple spreadsheet for inputting the questionnaire data and this produced a 'score' against each of the nine classroom climate characteristics. Finally, each member of the team had completed a self-assessment questionnaire which had drawn on the Scottish HMI material *How Good is Our School*.

At the time of writing, therefore, each team member had generated a wealth of information about their classroom teaching and the team were beginning to unpick its significance and to see how best it might be used. In

accordance with the agreed principles, each team member had control over all information relating to their teaching. Hence questionnaire results were seen only by the class teacher concerned, unless that individual chose to share results with a colleague. Similarly, it was agreed that discussions about classroom observations did not take place with anybody other than the two individuals concerned, unless the teacher chose to share the information with somebody else.

Interviews were conducted with all team members to assess the early impact of the project. It was agreed by all involved that classroom observations had been very successful. The principle of equality ('everyone observes everyone else') had contributed significantly to the style, and the initial success, of the project. Team members did not feel they were being 'done to', or indeed that they were being 'judged' as part of a process in which they had little faith – often the case with appraisal and performance management reviews. The importance of this factor was recognised by the Head of Department: 'I haven't got all the answers just because I happen to earn a bit more money, or I've been teaching longer. I thought that to have credibility, I should not expect anybody to do anything I wasn't prepared to do myself. With hindsight, I think it would have been a very different project if we hadn't adopted that approach – and much the worse for it'.

It was also recognised that the process of observing and feeding back to a colleague was often more instructional than being observed and receiving feedback – 'I have a better understanding of what other colleagues do and I've learnt from that. I've learnt by both receiving and giving advice. I think it's been win-win.' The opportunity, therefore, for new and less experienced staff to give feedback on equal terms to much more experienced teachers was seen as a major benefit. It also contributed significantly to the ethos of equal experience which informed the project. In interviews, team members anticipated that future observations would become much more sophisticated, with teacher and observer taking on the role of action researchers and the observer helping the teacher gather evidence relating to specific issues of classroom practice. A view was expressed that the term 'observation', with its connotations of being detached and judgmental, was not appropriate. Hence the project took on the title: *Collaborative Teaching Initiative*.

Inevitably, the major problem associated with the classroom observations was time. Although relatively few observations were involved, the programme was frequently disrupted due to the pressure of other work commitments. This proved to be a major and recurring problem with all aspects of the project and points to the need to provide teachers with adequate non-contact time to be able to undertake such projects. Within a primary school environment it is difficult to see such a project working at all unless it is better resourced. It also suggests that providing teachers with improved non-contact time cannot be seen as a concession to avoid staff retention problems. It is an absolute pre-requisite for delivering school improvement.

Using a questionnaire to solicit the views of students also proved to be a major success. All teachers felt that teaching groups involved took the questionnaire seriously, with one exception – this was a more 'difficult' Y11 group which had experienced a change of teacher at the end of Y10. Although this group's results were 'different', they were of course no less valid. The feedback from teachers suggested that not only had students taken the exercise seriously but that they also felt positively about being consulted about their learning experience. As hoped, the questions had triggered numerous discussions with students about what factors create a productive and enjoyable 'classroom climate', and what is students' own contribution to creating that climate.

The results generated by the questionnaire produced a wealth of useful data. Generally teachers indicated that scores were very positive, and this had an immediate effect of raising teacher self-esteem. There can be little doubt that the relentless condemnation of teaching standards by politicians and the press has left its mark on the profession and it is difficult to underestimate the impact of this on professional self-confidence. These feelings of failure are then reinforced when students perform well in public examinations but fail to meet the often unrealistic targets set within and beyond the school. To hear from those who really matter, students, that they rate highly the work being done provided a major fillip: 'It was nice to find out I wasn't doing such a bad job after all!'.

However, the data did point to several areas where teachers might want to take action, and issues raised could differ significantly between classes. One issue that was common across teachers and across classes was student dissatisfaction with the physical environment – it was considered both dull and dirty. The identification of this issue allowed staff in the department to immediately respond with improved wall displays, more effective display of students' own work and class discussions about how everyone could contribute to minimising the amount of litter. Once again, however, the workload implications of this were identified as an issue: 'It's frustrating because this is a really exciting project, but you just can't achieve a fraction of what you want to do. Even worse, you raise expectations and then you can't deliver. After the questionnaire with students – which went really well – they wanted to know what was going to change. How were we going to change the environment, for example? It was a big issue for them. The thing is I've not had time to do much about it and the danger is they will get cynical' (Interview: team member).

This example illustrates both the potential of the project and its limitations. Without sufficient resourcing, it is difficult to see many of the benefits being achieved.

Conclusion

Teachers who were interviewed reported that the project had been highly successful in meeting two of the three aims initially identified. There was a strong view that individual self-confidence had improved, whilst the department was working more effectively as a team – providing mutual support, sharing resources and talking through teaching strategies. However, the interviewees were less clear cut about the impact on teaching and learning – the primary aim. Arguably this simply illustrates that changes in pedagogy are subtle, complex and long-term – it takes time for change to happen and for that change to become internalised. There are no 'quick-fix' solutions. This research suggests that, in time, those involved will use the process to adapt and modify teaching strategies. However, those changes will evolve in the light

of experience and on the basis of evidence generated by the teachers' own research.

What seems certain is that the initiative was creating the conditions in which change could take place. All the staff involved described an increase in conversations about teaching and learning. Importantly, these were genuine dialogues in which both parties to the conversations identified issues and contributed solutions. Moreover, these 'learning dialogues' were not restricted to professionals, but were increasingly being conducted between teacher and student.

The increase in professional self-confidence points to the importance of developing 'bottom-up' and collaborative approaches to both performance management and professional development. Such initiatives must capitalise on teacher creativity and goodwill. This is best achieved by providing teachers with both control and support. The danger of ignoring this approach is that the dead hand of centralisation crushes goodwill and suppresses creativity. The result is an unwillingness amongst teachers to take risks and a corresponding lack of inspiration.

The research also showed that projects such as this require resourcing if they are to be effective. If teachers are to engage in 'high quality' professional dialogues about highly complex processes, they must be provided with the time to do it. Teaching is an exhausting activity and it is inconceivable to think that teachers can engage in these types of sophisticated discussions at the end of a day in which they have had no break from classroom teaching.

This project was one small-scale initiative. Inevitably, this limits the extent to which one can generalise from the experience. However, the project points strongly in the direction of developing a new approach to school improvement – one which places teachers at the centre of change. The lesson for policy-makers is that they must learn to let go. Whilst such an approach might run counter to the instinct of government policy over the last 25 years, there is increasing evidence that the tide *is* beginning to turn. The challenge for the teaching profession is to make it happen.

Copies of the student questionnaire can be obtained via e-mail. Contact Howard Stevenson on hps2@le.ac.uk

Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 28 June 2002

Standing up for Progressive Education: Alfie Kohn and the United Kingdom

MIKE PETERS & LAURENCE PETERS
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As the managerial approach to education, framed in a language of targets, performance and outcomes, tightens its grip, alternative voices seem few and weak. Where is the United Kingdom's Alfie Kohn?

US educationalist Alfie Kohn has established himself, through a series of articles, lectures and books, as one of that country's leading opponents of the 'Tougher Standards Movement – a movement that has increased in strength with the election of Republican George Bush Jnr to the White House. Featured favourably in *Time* Magazine and the popular 'Oprah' TV show and virulently attacked as a 'nihilist' and 'seducer of the credulous' by leaders of the Standards Movement, he has put together a coherent, powerful and accessible critique of the dominant educational agenda in the USA.

And it is a critique which is providing the inspiration and momentum for a number of campaigns, particularly to curb the influence of testing across the United Kingdom. Parents in Wisconsin, for example, have successfully prevented high-school leaving exams being used as the sole determinant of whether a student should graduate. Lawsuits have been filed in Louisiana, Indiana and Nevada to challenge the legality of high-stakes tests. Increasingly then, Kohn's message is causing questions to be asked about current educational orthodoxies and challenges to be mounted.

Although the situation across the Atlantic is, in many ways, different from here, nevertheless, common patterns are present. In both countries, there is a strong focus on the issue of declining standards in a competitive world, on the value of a 'back-to-basics' strategy and on the benefits of rigorous assessment. The schools systems of the USA and United Kingdom may look very different from the outside but similar ideologies and forces are at work.

What, then, can Kohn offer educators in the United Kingdom, faced by a newly-elected government with the confidence and resources to radically 'transform' (a key word of current policy-makers) education. Whilst on certain significant issues – privatisation, the relation of the vocational and the academic curriculum, and the impact of new technologies – he has little to say, on a variety of other topics his arguments will resonate loudly with those teachers whose commitment to progressive ideas and values has been slowly undermined over recent years.

Refreshingly, Kohn directly challenges one of the central props of current policy – the claim that academic standards are poor or even falling. Each generation, he points out, complains about the problem, suggesting that it is more a product of 'psychic anxiety' than a specific issue that can be simply addressed. He also notes that the rhetoric of 'declining standards' often provides a convenient mask for the introduction of a conservative educational agenda; would Woodhead's views have been any different if there was strong evidence that pupils' school performance was improving?

Another extremely influential myth he confronts is the notion that setting targets and keeping a close eye on students' progress through their assessment scores produces benefits. Quite the reverse, argues Kohn, who emphasises that to be overly concerned with how well you are doing is likely to be harmful to deep and sustained learning – learning which can happen only when teachers and students have their minds focused on the intrinsic meanings of their studies rather than on the anticipated extrinsic rewards: 'high achievement is a by-product of interest'. Working in a regime where grades are used to measure learning, who wants to tackle a more difficult Maths question or read a more challenging literary text, when this increases the risk of failure? Better to play safe!

Supporting his claims by evidence, Kohn cites research which indicates that children learn better in classrooms where facilitation and support are the watchwords than in classrooms where 'performing up to standard' is the governing ethos. Such research is particularly relevant to a British educational culture in which target-setting, frequent assessment and league-tables dominate. Here we have the measurable paraphernalia of academic achievement rather than the reality.

Underpinning Kohn's approach to education is his hostility to behaviourism and his commitment to the findings of cognitive psychology. Rather than a hierarchical model of learning, so popular with 'back-to-basics' advocates, in which knowledge is seen as a collection of separate skills and students have to show understanding of the simple and routine ones before being able to move on and upwards to those at the summit of the pyramid, he makes a strong case for integration. Creative thinking can be taught before a child has learnt to read, and reading can be taught to someone who is a creative thinker. 'Wise educators', Kohn writes, 'don't teach addition and subtraction as prerequisites for pursuing interesting problems; they teach these skills through interesting problems ...'. When learning to drive, 'you

practise the individual skills in the context of the act of driving'.

Just a couple of years ago, with a relatively broad statement of learning aims in the revised National Curriculum, these ideas would not have seemed especially relevant. But this is certainly not the case today. As the curriculum of United Kingdom schools becomes increasingly atomised – the recent Key Stage 3 Frameworks for English and Mathematics are good examples – with individual particles of learning becoming tightly defined as objectives to be taught at a particular age, Kohn's critique of the implications of the behaviourist model is particularly telling.

And as the demands of accountability intensify, many teachers are more likely to feel the pressure to make sure that they address all the specified objectives presented to them – something which can be relatively easily measured – than to ensure that the learning of their pupils is properly integrated and fulfilling. Coverage becomes what counts and teaching starts to resemble 'a caricature of American tourists in Europe'. Teachers, as they struggle with reconciling progressive values with the new fragmented curriculum, may want to hold on to the slogan of educationalist, Ted Sizer, quoted by Kohn in *The Schools Our Children Deserve*: 'Less is more'.

Fundamental to educational developments in both the USA and United Kingdom is what Kohn calls 'the arrogance of top-down coercion' or in another of his sharp phrases 'Do it my way … or else'. Few British teachers – particularly those of English and Maths, who are now expected not only to teach a set of detailed learning objectives, but also to structure their lessons according to a prescribed pattern – will not recognise what is meant by these formulations or the demand model of school reform they attack.

In this model, the educator becomes the 'technician, expected to put into play decisions made by others outside the school'. The consequence – of course – is the creation of a significant group of teachers who feel disempowered, defensive and demoralised. Resignation – in both senses of the word – is one option; the other is to construct – belatedly, it is true – a tougher campaign of resistance to the centralised, anti-educational and managerial reforms that are being driven through – a campaign in which, given the relative feebleness of United Kingdom contenders, the eloquent, energetic and determined voice of Alfie Kohn surely has an enormous amount to contribute.

Privatisation: a further threat to educational initiative and local government

BERNARD REGAN
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The question of privatisation is most frequently approached, for understandable reasons, from the financial perspective. Whilst it certainly is necessary to look at the whole way in which the funding of education is undergoing major changes, it would be an error not to remain aware of the impact on the whole educational process itself.

There are major questions about the effects of the growing involvement of private companies on the government of education – the impact of huge multinational companies coming into contact with local councils. Tower Hamlets Education Authority is currently being run as a trading wing of SERCO. The companies involved are large, worldly-wise, profit-motivated, competitive, familiar with the workings of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATs) – they can draw on their experiences of operating as capitalist enterprises not preoccupied by social or ethical considerations. The only real targets they are required to meet are those determined by the Stock Market. Local government is actually being marginalised, serving little role now other than to act as an occasional brake mechanism on the runaway train of privatisation. Government imperatives, funding mechanisms – the Thatcher inspired TINA factor – have rendered the role of the Local Education Authority as little more than that of a minor player managing central government directives.

In the Summer of 2002 Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, is due to carry out a comprehensive review of public spending which might lead to changes in the way in which local government funding is distributed. Few expect that the powers of LEAs are going to be significantly amended, let alone reasserted. There is little that LEAs are now able to do educationally because of the controls on funding – through the Fair Funding Mechanism, the grants system, the bidding processes, Excellence in Cities Programme, and so on. They are now less accountable to their electorate for the policies they implement than at any other time. They are almost solely accountable to central government.

The fact is that LEAs are now squeezed between the powers of central government and the might of the international companies now moving in on the education market. In the long run the balance of forces will move decisively in favour of the private companies – unless radical measures are taken to address this process.

Behind all this re-naming and re-branding of companies that is going on lies the creation of monopolies which will hegemonise the education market in every sense. It will mean much more than the process of ruthless pursuit of profits. It means more than the commercialisation of the education service – the intrusion of brand images, the proliferation of logos in the classroom. Whilst this is certainly a matter of concern, I do not share the view that it represents the most insidious aspect of the impact of privatisation on the world of education. After all, young people are surrounded by these images and commercialism all the time. Every television programme or media product is enveloped in a commercialism which is inescapable.

The Real Threat of Privatisation

The really insidious aspect of privatisation which I think will come to have the most serious pedagogical impact is the domination of areas of the education market by private companies, which will lead to a greater degree of uniformity and conformity in the whole process of teaching and learning. Some might say that the control exercised by a small handful of big companies over the Information Technology (IT) fields is perhaps a visible example of this, but I think even this is less problematic. After all, in the past, publishers had monopolies but this did not remove the ability of those engaged in the educational process from adopting a critical attitude to the material they were using. I think this can be true of the use of IT although Government hints at encouraging more individualised learning, 'managed' at arms length by teachers, remove the chance to intervene in the learning process and to question the material that might be being used.

The area of greatest penetration by private companies which, I believe, will lead to real uniformity in the education process will result from 'Outsourcing', where companies like Nord Anglia and others are being bought in as 'advisers' for curriculum development, school improvement and other similar areas. In order to ensure their continuing employment in such fields, these companies will insist that their employees focus uncritically on the achievement of Government targets. The straightjacket of the National Curriculum, SATs, league tables, OFSTED and the like will be reinforced by the imperative of advisers determined to deliver a conformism which fits the Government agenda. Private

companies wanting to be re-engaged by authorities and anxious to win new contracts are more likely to toe the line.

This is an area which requires a greater degree of scrutiny. It is a process which is less overt than the other aspects of privatisation which themselves are not standing still.

If you want to know what some of the more recent developments in privatisation look like, it is worth taking a look at Westminster City Council. There they have had it all. Private Finance Initiative, Education Action Zone, Outsourcing and now they face a new one: CsI – Customer Services Initiative. The proposal is that around one quarter of the Council's services will be sold off to a private company. The Council claims that the intention is to provide a 'one-stop' service for residents where they can inquire about any of the Council's services and get an answer to them. What appears to be proposed is a call centre operation which could of course, not necessarily be based within the City.

Although Westminster is not a big council, this initiative will be extremely lucrative for whoever wins the contract. The contract will be worth £1 billion over 10 years. Major international companies are already hovering – SERCO, Group 4/FALCK, Hyder (Nomura International Bank) and others. The proposal is part of the Government's Strategic Service – Delivery Partnerships (SSPs) which is already in operation in Middlesbrough. The Middlesbrough proposal was for every significant aspect of the council's services to be privatised. A 'scoping' exercise carried out by Capita estimated the contract at a value of £16.8 million. The strategy aims to move toward the 'virtual' council based on the Conservative model of the 'enabling' council – itself derived from the US notion of the 'contract city'.

Like the Private Finance Initiative, the SSPs will contract local governments to private companies for years to come and will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to unravel. It is portrayed as a 'partnership', but this is somewhat disingenuous. Everyone knows that the multinational companies which are moving in on such schemes have colossal clout and inevitably the backing of a legal system which is weighted in their favour if there are any problems. The New Labour advocates of PFI and SSP type schemes constantly refer to the safeguards for staff provided by the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE). TUPE is increasingly being revealed as worthless – it provides a cover for the operation and, in the longer term, offers no real protection to the employee. It offers no protection to staff who are recruited *after* the privatisation has taken place. Promotion requires moving over to the private company contract, pension schemes differ, overtime rates are altered, vacancies not filled, temporary staff sacked. Whilst educationalists and trades unionists will campaign vigorously for the maximum protection, in reality the TUPE simply helps to sugar the pill.

A report by the Centre for Public Services for UNISON details how those responsible for pushing forward the SSP in Middlesbrough failed to keep elected council members informed of developments. Unions, of course, knew even less about what was going on. Any notion of accountability through local democracy is fast being eroded. Commercial confidentiality is invoked time and time again to deny unions and local residents access to information. The increasingly centralised council cabinet systems remove the actual decision making further and further away from any system of rigorous scrutiny.

Privatisation has been promoted on the basis that it is more efficient and cheaper. All the available evidence points in quite the opposite direction, suggesting that it is more expensive. It costs around 15% more because the private companies have to pay more to borrow the money, since they are considered a greater risk than local government sources. They have to factor into their expenditure margins to recoup the increased charges for capital funding and profit margins. The most vulnerable targets for cost cutting are therefore, more often than not, the jobs, pay and conditions of existing and future employees.

Just a few examples of the efficiency of the private companies operating in the public sector.

In Sheffield – CSL commenced a £135m ten-year financial and IT services contract in April 1998 which involved the transfer of 475 staff. A year later the housing benefit contract was awarded to CSL. The firm has made a number of blunders, including issuing 2,000 court summonses to council taxpayers instead of reminders.

In Southwark – CSL was awarded five-year £40m contract in April 1998 to run Southwark's revenue and benefits services. 227 staff were transferred to CSL which was the only private sector company to bid and predicted to make savings of £10m over the life of the contract. The contractor had to engage 30 additional staff because it had under-resourced the bid.

Westminster City Council, Capita – In 1999 Capita failed to meet the target of processing 90% of housing benefit claims within 14 days in seven of the first nine months of its ten-year £40m contract.

Reporting on Lambeth's problems with Capita and other IT contracts, *Computer Weekly* concluded that Lambeth had a 'powerful contractual weapon'. And it is all but useless. The Council cannot dispense with Capita's services. There are many reasons: the time and costs involved in finding a new supplier, and unravelling the control of processes that operate across departmental boundaries (Capita runs a range of council services). Disruption of the relationship means disruption of the service. The Council has found itself locked into a supplier whose activities are too closely interwoven with the Council's services:

> *Big strategic outsourcing contracts – like those at the Inland Revenue, National Savings, Lambeth Council and the Stock Exchange – may seem a good idea at the time, provided that you don't mind being locked into the supplier, whatever the quality of service.*
> *(Computer Weekly, 13 April 2000)*

This example highlights some of the problems associated with the need for accountability. Local councils will not have the expertise to deal with multinational companies with an army of experienced 'battle-hardened' corporate lawyers.

There is an urgent need for a national campaign against privatisation. There are many valiant local campaigns which have proved successful – the victory of the Pimlico Governors being the most notable. The campaign at Pimlico went on for six years. Credit for their success must go to their dedication and commitment. The problem frequently is that pupils, parents and staff want to see a new building or urgent repairs because their school has been neglected.

There are campaigns in health, education and housing against privatisation. They share many of the preoccupations voiced in this article – a concern with the way public services are funded; a concern with public accountability; a concern about the values that are coming to dominate public services. There is an urgent need to continue to develop a critique of privatisation and to look to developing an alternative perspective to what is happening. There is no reason to think that the kind of idealism and determination which led to the creation of comprehensive education cannot be engaged in this process and that we cannot win. I believe we can and we will.

Towards a 14 to 19 Framework

The Labour Government's Consultation Document *14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards* was published on 12 February 2002. We consider this Green Paper to be sufficiently important to justify the publication of three detailed responses to its main proposals. The following articles are by **Clyde Chitty**, **John Dunford** and **Denis Lawton**. Clyde Chitty has been Reviews Editor of *FORUM* since 1982 and Co-Editor since 1989; John Dunford is the General Secretary of the Secondary Heads Association (SHA); and Denis Lawton is Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London.

1 Clyde Chitty Writes …

In an article published in this journal in the Spring of 1992 (Volume 34, Number 2, pp. 38–40), I argued that, on the face of it, the 1988 Education 'Reform' Act, and particularly the clauses relating to the National Curriculum, appeared to represent a 'defeat' for the thinking of two major groups: Her Majesty's Inspectorate and a powerful faction within the Conservative Party of the 1980s often referred to as either the 'Industrial Trainers' or the 'Conservative Modernisers'. The HMI model of a common 'entitlement' curriculum had been based on eight or nine 'areas of learning and experience'; the so-called Modernisers had emphasised the concept of a 14 to 19 continuum or framework, with the status of vocational education and training radically enhanced. Even in 1992, there were few among the decision-making class who wished to resurrect the HMI model of curriculum planning; but the views of the Modernisers were *not* to be dismissed so lightly and it was already becoming clear that Key Stage Four of the National Curriculum could not survive in the form envisaged by Kenneth Baker and his allies in the then DES. In its place, the idea of a 14 to 19 curriculum, embracing both 'academic' and 'vocational' pathways, was steadily gaining ground – culminating now with the publication of the February 2002 Green Paper.

A 14 to 19 Continuum

There is no denying that the recent Green Paper is a document of major importance, with a number of proposals that have far-reaching implications for the future of 14 to 19 education and training; but, that said, it has to be conceded that it is not always clear exactly *what* is being proposed, with some of the Government's proposed reforms appearing to be mutually contradictory. The one clear message that *does* emerge from the Green Paper is that the Government is firmly committed to the idea of the 14 to 19 period as *a single phase* with all students enabled to develop at a pace best suited to their abilities and preferred ways of learning. Indeed, the Consultation Document sets out an evolving vision for greater coherence in the 14 to 19 phase of education and training in England whereby the age of 16 loses its traditional status as a major 'break-point' in the lives of young people.

We are told in the Foreword by Estelle Morris that the Green Paper aims to meet *four* challenges:

1. to build an education system in which every young person and every parent has confidence;
2. to ensure that no young person is denied the chance of a decent education;
3. to reap the skills benefits of an education system that matches the needs of 'the knowledge economy';
4. to promote education with 'character'. This means that while academic achievement is essential, education must also be a basis for citizenship and inclusion.

According to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, these are the four central challenges that have to be addressed if we are to guarantee 'economic prosperity and social justice for all in this new century' (p. 4).

The aims are noble ones; and the Green Paper is refreshingly honest about the scale of the problem to be tackled. Only three out of four 16 to 18 year olds in England were in education and training at the end of 2000, and although this figure has been steadily rising, it is of serious concern that it remains well below European and OECD averages. In 2001, around five per cent of young people did not get any GCSEs at all, and although the proportion of Year 11 students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE has risen dramatically since the early 1990s, it remains only around 50 per cent of the cohort. Perhaps most worryingly of all, only 20 per cent of young people from the lower socio-economic groups go on to some form of higher education, against over 70 per cent from the highest. These figures are particularly significant, given that one of New Labour's much-publicised targets is to increase and broaden participation in higher education so that, by the year 2010, 50 per cent of young people aged between 18 and 30 will go on to university, with access widened in particular for those whose families have no previous experience of higher education.

The authors of the Green Paper are right to point out that there are many conflicting pressures on young people aged between 14 and 19 and that the price of disengagement from learning is often life-long failure. Young people may be more autonomous and independent than were their parents and grandparents. They also seem to demand more from their education and training and are prepared to reject what they do not like and what does not meet their immediate requirements. Yet, at the same time, they can find the world and their own role in it more complex and more confusing. Between the ages of 14 and 19, young people are striving to develop and make sense of their personal, sexual and social identities: they are often demanding and assertive, yet lacking in self-

confidence and vulnerable in their inexperience. They certainly need and deserve better education and training. They also need support and guidance from their teachers to help them to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available. According to the Green Paper, support for young people towards the end of Key Stage 3 will be crucial, focusing on outcomes at 19, not 16, and accepting that choices made at 13 or 14 should not constrain young people to particular 'pathways' if later it becomes clear that it is in their best interests to change direction.

A New Structure for the 14 to 19 Curriculum

New Labour is anxious to continue and indeed accelerate the process of dismantling Key Stage 4 of the National Curriculum, a process begun under successive Conservative Education Secretaries and given the seal of approval in the Final Report of the Dearing Review, published in January 1994. The Green Paper argues that the current framework for Key Stage 4 is sometimes seen as 'a barrier to student motivation', rather than as 'a valued entitlement for all'. And the evidence provided for this contention is the extent of 'disapplication'.

Under present arrangements, schools can 'disapply', for any one student, up to *two* National Curriculum subjects in order to:

1. provide wider opportunities for 'work-related learning';
2. allow students making significantly less progress than their peers to consolidate basic learning;
3. allow students with particular 'strengths' to emphasise a chosen curriculum area.

The monitoring of 'disapplication' in 2000/01 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) showed that around a third of secondary schools were using the regulations in respect of a total of five per cent of students nationally. The most common reason given was the provision of an extended period of work-related learning, followed by the consolidation of other learning across the curriculum. The subject most frequently 'disapplied' is a modern foreign language, followed by design and technology – with science being 'disapplied' in just a small number of cases.

The Government now proposes that the Key Stage 4 curriculum should comprise: mathematics, English, science and ICT (information and communications technology), alongside citizenship, religious education, careers education, sex education, physical education and work-related learning. Modern foreign languages and design and technology will no longer be 'required study' for all students; but they will join the arts and the humanities as subjects where, in the words of the Green Paper, there will be 'a new statutory entitlement of access'.

In a remarkably short space of time, we have come a long way from the Key Stage 4 Curriculum laid down by Kenneth Baker in the National Curriculum Consultation Document published in July 1987. Even one version of the HMI model of a common curriculum for older students translated 'areas of learning and experience' into a timetable for everyone which included: English, mathematics, a modern foreign language, a science, religious education and a social study, art, craft and music, careers education and physical activities.

The new arrangements will not take effect until September 2004 when, or so it is assumed, current disapplication procedures will become redundant and simply disappear. Yet there is evidence to suggest that hundreds of schools will be breaking the law by dropping compulsory lessons in foreign languages and in design and technology as soon as possible. For example: the figures from a survey carried out by the Association of Language Learning (ALL), reported in *The Times Educational Supplement* (24 May 2002), showed that nearly 30 per cent of schools planned to abandon compulsory language lessons for older students, beginning in September this year (2002). The veteran broadcaster Sir Trevor McDonald, who chaired the Nuffield Languages Inquiry, was reported as saying: 'If schools are making languages optional from *this* September, as all the evidence suggests, then we should all be very concerned. Whichever career path children choose to follow, they are going to need the skills that will make them employable in a world where recruitment is increasingly global and where flexibility and mobility are at a premium.' It is also worrying that, according to the available evidence, the majority of secondary schools deciding to drop compulsory language lessons are schools situated in inner-city areas, raising fears that learning languages such as French and German will become an 'elitist' activity confined to middle-class areas. The Government would probably reply that it is 'compensating' for all this by offering primary-school pupils a new 'entitlement' to languages, a move dismissed by ALL President Terry Lamb as 'a half-hearted fudge', designed to deflect criticism from the post-14 proposal.

Fears for the Future

The authors of this Green Paper are very keen to make use of such PC terms as 'entitlement' and 'inclusion'. Yet they also find it impossible to move away from the mind-set which wants to divide up young people according to spurious notions of 'fixed ability' and 'talent'.

This is certainly reflected in the newspaper coverage accorded the Government's new 'reforms'. 'New Super A-level Aims at Star Pupils' was the headline of the story in *The Observer* (10 February 2002). *The Times* chose 'Bright Pupils to Bypass GCSE Exams' for its front-page article on the 12 February; while *The Guardian* had 'Top A-level Pupils to have Chance of Distinction' for its story on the 11 February and 'Brightest Children Will Be Allowed to Skip GCSEs' for the article on the day the Green Paper was published.

The Government is right to attack 'the culture of snobbery' that pervades much of British society and to want to break down the barrier between 'academic' and 'vocational' courses. Interviewed in *The Observer* on the 10 February, Estelle Morris emphasised that new vocational GCSEs and A-levels did not mean that 'education was getting easier'. She went on: 'There are people in this country who every time a university launches a degree that has a vocational label, it is accused of "dumbing down" and lowering standards. If only we viewed medicine, law and accountancy as vocational courses, maybe that snobbery would end.'

The Education Secretary's point is a good one; but her general argument in favour of a more 'inclusive' and

'egalitarian' education system is undermined by the Government's refusal to reconsider the position of A-levels, allied with the inability to find clear and effective means of ensuring genuine 'parity of esteem' between 'academic' and 'vocational' courses. It is worth quoting the words of the initial response of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers to the Green Paper proposals: 'The Government is not looking at the long-term needs of Britain's schoolchildren. The proposed changes merely conform to the status quo, mixed with a hint of safe experimentation.'

2 John Dunford Writes …

The Government's Green Paper on 14 to 19 education has been a long time coming. It is good that policy is at last to be set in a 14 to 19 timeframe, although it is ironic that the Department has put forward these proposals at the very time when the Learning and Skills Council has taken over responsibility for post-16 education planning and funding. There is much to welcome in the Green Paper, but it still represents an inadequate blueprint for a comprehensive post-14 strategy.

It has taken the Government several years longer than expected to produce its proposals, which have been under discussion in Labour policy circles for a considerable time. The 14 to 19 timeframe was mentioned in the Labour Party's 1996 policy document, *Aiming Higher*, but was omitted from subsequent developments to Key Stage 4 and post-16 education. It had been an error on the part of the Conservative Government of 1995 to invite Sir Ron Dearing to produce a report on 16 to 19, when the clear need for improved progression across the age 16 barrier pointed to the need for a 14 to 19 study. The 1997–2001 Labour Government disappointingly continued to treat pre-16 and post-16 as separate entities, with lifelong learning being regarded as yet another category in policy terms.

David Blunkett's Speech to the North of England Conference at Wigan in January 2000 was a milestone, not so much for its announcement of the Key Stage 3 strategy as for the section towards the end of the speech on post-14 education. This part of the Blunkett Speech of 2000, like Keith Joseph's 1984 Speech at the Sheffield North of England Conference, sketched out radical changes for the qualifications system. He called for 'more imaginative provision for 14 to 19', with a 'growing range of pathways through that phase' as a 'crucial foundation for lifelong learning'. He acknowledged that 'all will be involved in education from 14 to 19'. He said that much greater diversity would become possible, but his examples of diversity were hardly imaginative and there was clearly some distance for government thinking to travel if his vision of post-14 education for all was to be realised.

The logical development from the Wigan Speech was to end the National Curriculum at the age of 14 and introduce a coherent and integrated qualifications programme from 14, as many of us have been advocating for more than ten years. The present disjunction between Key Stage 4 and post-16 courses serves no purpose, other than to give an unhelpful emphasis to the age of 16 as an educational endpoint. As Blunkett's Speech reflected, we are rapidly moving to a situation where 18 is the *de facto* leaving age from full-time education and the 'big bang' GCSE examination system at 16 is becoming increasingly irrelevant.

The Blunkett vision fell well short of a strategy, and it was clearly too soon for the Government to produce a complete picture. What was required to give substance to the vision was a unified system of qualifications, with no artificial division between the 'academic' and the 'vocational', and through which students can be guided along curriculum pathways that bring coherence and purpose to their studies in the light of their future ambitions.

One of the greatest benefits of such a system is an end to the age-relatedness of qualifications, since students would take General Level (equivalent to GCSE) examinations when they are ready for them. Under the present system, young people are seen as 'successful' if they obtain GCSE passes at 16 and as 'failures' if they don't. By sweeping away the age 16 barrier and introducing a framework of modular courses from 14, a unified system would enable young people to build their portfolio of qualifications, not only through the 14 to 19 years, but throughout their lives. Advanced Level courses, normally taken when General Level studies are complete, would not necessarily have to be taken at the age of 18 and many would take them at 17 or 19, or much later in life.

Removing age-relatedness and increasing flexibility in this way demands a new approach to school timetabling. Students in the 14 to 19 age group would no longer necessarily be taught in year groups according to their chronological age, but would be in mixed-age groups, a situation familiar to most colleges. Such flexibility depends on the curriculum being taught in modules rather than 2-year courses that would defy even the most flexible of timetablers to organise into mixed-age groups.

Age-relatedness is currently reinforced by the performance tables for 16 and 18 year olds, which would disappear without mourning. As a teacher, some of my greatest successes were students who passed Advanced Level at the age of 19, either because they had missed a year through illness or absence abroad, or because they had struggled for three years to achieve their potential and had eventually succeeded on a course that most of their peers had completed in two-thirds of the time. It grieved me greatly that the hard work and achievements of these young people did not register in performance tables. The 2002 Green Paper acknowledges that performance tables will have to change, although it produces no specific proposals and does not recognise the powerful case for abolition. It is simply illogical to have summative performance tables of achievement at 16 in a 14 to 19 system. It is equally illogical to produce tables of results of

individual schools and colleges at a time when the Government is seeking to promote collaboration between institutions. Performance tables are being abolished in Wales and Northern Ireland. It will be a good day for education when the same happens in England.

Within a unified qualifications framework, courses of many different types can be taken in a wide range of learning situations. The Green Paper seeks to build a system in which there is a less sharp division between the school and the workplace. Individual learning plans that match the abilities and interests of all young people over the age of 14 would include courses in schools and colleges, as well as workplace experience.

It is important, however, not to slip into the error of creating vocational courses only for those who cannot succeed on more traditional academic courses. There are clear signs in government thinking that this problem will occur, negating all the Government's good intentions to create greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications. Vocational education should form part of the learning programmes of all young people, not only those who are disaffected by traditional courses. Indeed, a case can be made that some vocational education is more necessary for those who may not enter the workplace full-time until the age of 22 than for those not going into higher education.

With a greater variety of courses and patterns of study, schools will need to collaborate more closely with other schools and with local colleges. This imperative holds out the hope that the culture of competition between schools, which has been promoted by governments for the last 20 years, will make way for a culture of collaboration in which schools and colleges work together for the improvement of the education of all young people in their locality. This would be a major step towards educational inclusion and open up the possibility that schools of the future become the learning centres for their local communities, working together – or federated – to provide education for all. Such a role for schools as community learning centres, incidentally, points to a radically different pattern for the school day and the school year.

The Green Paper on 14 to 19 has to be viewed in the light of recent changes to post-16 qualifications. Most secondary school and college leaders have supported the A and AS reforms because they represent a small, but important, step in the direction of a modular, unified qualifications framework of the type described above. Crucially, AS Levels represent a half-way house to Advanced Level, providing an interim qualification on a 2-year course that many students find difficult to cope with. Proposals for the 14 to 19 age cohort must recognise that the AS reforms, after a very difficult first year, need time to bed down. Wholesale changes to AS would not be popular, although some adaptation may be necessary in order that AS take its place as part of the more coherent pattern of qualifications that may emerge in the future.

Proposals for the reform of post-14 education need to find the right relationship between the qualifications structure, curriculum and assessment. Only if the Green Paper sets out a system that has the correct balance between these three aspects will it work.

The Green Paper's proposed *structure*, based on the components of a matriculation diploma, has several shortcomings. If we are to have a diploma, there is a wide measure of agreement that it should have three levels but, unfortunately, the Green Paper has the wrong three. The absence of a foundation level diploma, below intermediate level, sends the wrong signal to the students who are most difficult to motivate. If we are to have a multi-level diploma, it is unthinkable that the needs of these students should be ignored. An inclusive diploma system would have as its three levels, foundation, intermediate and advanced. Yet again, the Government's education policy has failed to put into effect its honeyed words about inclusion.

The higher level diploma is unnecessary and will devalue the advanced level. Employers and university admissions tutors will ask not for an advanced diploma alone, but for a diploma with a specified number of points, or including a specified subject. The higher diploma is superfluous because the highest levels of achievement can be expressed through the advanced diploma.

The main structural question to be asked about any overarching diploma is: will anyone want it? What gives currency to the Diploma? What ensures that 'gatekeepers' to higher education and jobs will demand that applicants have a diploma and will no longer ask for a certain number of passes at Advanced Level at specified grades? Regrettably for those who believe that an overarching diploma would be a valuable summative record for 19 year olds, the answer to these questions is surely negative, for the proposed Matriculation Diploma fails the essential test of any overarching qualification, which is that the Diploma must be greater than the sum of its parts.

The curriculum post-14 seems to have been designed around the perceived need to create greater flexibility for 14 to 16 year olds in their last two years at school and to enable them to follow vocational pathways. While these aims deserve support, curriculum planning should go well beyond this and steps must be taken to ensure an adequate degree of breadth in the study programmes of all young people.

Ministers have jettisoned most of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 4, leaving only mathematics, English, information technology and, after some debate, science as core subjects. Religious education, citizenship, physical education, careers education and sex education remain compulsory too. Making the study of modern foreign languages voluntary, except between the ages of 11 and 14, is surely a retrograde step, with young people spending their working lives in a global marketplace. With humanities, arts, technology and languages as optional subjects, breadth has disappeared at Key Stage 4.

Educational history demonstrates that British students specialise at the first opportunity and, unless breadth is built into the curriculum, some students will have very unbalanced study programmes. The Green Paper's proposals suggest that the good work done by schools in recent years to build a broader curriculum at Key Stage 4 will be lost. Even if greater flexibility is to be gained at Key Stage 4 and the full range of subjects cannot therefore be studied by all young people every week, the Green Paper should have explored how greater breadth could be secured over the 14 to 19 phase through a statutory requirement for *breadth over time*. This would ensure that every student – and especially those embarking on vocational pathways and workplace learning – would

maintain access to the wider curriculum that prepares them for life.

The weakest part of the Green Paper is its complete failure to address the issue of *assessment*. Apart from a single paragraph, there is no discussion of assessment in the Green Paper. Herein lies the main problem with the Government's proposals. In spite of all the difficulties with the introduction of AS levels, the opportunity of the Green Paper's publication has not been taken to carry out – or even signal – a major review of external assessment. Qualifications reform cannot be introduced successfully unless the amount of external assessment is reduced and greater reliance is placed on online examinations and internal assessment by teachers. No other country puts young people through so many external examinations and the signs of a system under strain are clear. Before the Government reaches a decision on the Green Paper proposals, it is vital that this message on assessment is heard loud and clear.

The Government has opened the 14 to 19 debate to a wider audience and brought it to the forefront of the agenda. Although the Green Paper proposals, in their present form, are unlikely to stand the test of time, the opportunity has never been greater to promote a broad, unified, coherent, modular curriculum within a qualifications structure that is not age-related and that gives greater parity of esteem to 'academic' and 'vocational' qualifications. That is a prize worth fighting for.

3 Denis Lawton Writes …

This is a very strange consultation document: so strange that it could well become a classic example of the New Labour 'language of education'.

I started with the firm intention of trying to make the best of this example of educational policy-making, and it does have some good intentions. It starts with two expressed aims that few *Forum* readers would disagree with, apart, perhaps, from objecting to some unnecessary rhetoric about 'world-class' and 'standards'. The first proposal is for 'an education system in which every young person and every parent has confidence'; a second is that 'no young person is denied the chance of a decent education'. Fine! These good intentions are from Estelle Morris's Foreword; after that the 'voice' changes to that of the professional scribblers, but even so, few of us would quarrel with the aim of increasing the number of young people 14 to 19 staying on in education, or, more specifically, that 50 per cent of young people should (by the end of the decade) be admitted to higher education 'with access widened for those whose families have no previous experience of higher education'. Getting the proper representation of students from low-income families in higher education depends heavily on transforming their experience of the 14 to 19 phase in school, college or workplace' (pp. 10–11). Equally important is the commitment to make sure that the other 50 per cent are offered worthwhile learning experiences, by means of a *coherent* system 14 to 19.

So far so good. But as so often happens, there then begins to appear a gap between ideal and reality; and the devil is in the detail. No educationist now believes that every young person should be offered exactly the same programme 14 to 19, but should New Labour interpret 'progression and differentiation for all' as a fast track through to A Levels for some and vocational courses from 14+ for others? Even so, we might be tempted to accept the principles of 'progression' and 'differentiation' if we could be assured that the vocational options on offer would be genuinely educational, and not just training for specific, low-status jobs. Vocational courses *could* be equally educational as academic programmes, but progress in that direction so far has not been encouraging within our highly elitist system. Both routes are in need of reform and bringing closer together, not driven further apart.

As more of the detailed proposals emerge (in Chapter 2) we may be forgiven for becoming even more suspicious. A new 'overarching award' 14 to 19 is announced. Something like the British Baccalaureat, that was supported by Labour in opposition a decade ago, might have been an excellent step forward. But the British Baccalaureat is not even mentioned: instead we have a proposal for the 'Matriculation Diploma' that is intended to divide young people into three rigid categories:

1. Intermediate (for those entering employment);
2. Advanced 'reflecting the general threshold level for higher education';
3. Higher, 'rewarding greater achievement at advanced level and reflecting a common entry level for high-ranking universities'.

Shades of nineteenth-century hierarchical thinking here? An up-dated Taunton Report?

As an aside we are told that 'a simpler alternative might be to provide all young people with a Certificate consolidating all their achievements and undifferentiated by level'. The writers of the Green Paper clearly have little enthusiasm for this alternative. What started out as an apparent desire for greater equity has now emerged (p. 40) as a means of antiquated selection for future adult status.

We are then promised that 'Targets and performance tables will continue to play an important role in driving up standards'. Is this what teachers wanted to hear? Is this the way to blur the distinctions between academic and vocational?

This is very depressing. The basic version of better education services for all has become a super-selective machine for categorising the young, with standards 'driven up' by targets and performance tables. The visionary ideal is so distorted by the ever-tighter bureaucratic assessment procedures that the original intention is contradicted. Why does New Labour think in this mechanistic and contradictory way?

Reading the Green Paper, I could not help recalling the account given by Gervaise Phinn, as a young school inspector (in *The Other Side of the Dale*), of a primary school where all the pupils were clearly literate, numerate and enjoyed art and music. Their Headteacher, however, had no School Development Plan, confessed ignorance of targets and performance tables, and admitted that, if he

spent time on such matters, he would have too little time left for encouraging children to learn and enjoy their learning.

More recently, the accountability issue has been posed in a very different way by the moral philosopher, Onora O'Neill, Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge, in this year's Reith Lectures on Trust. Dr O'Neill has suggested that some kinds of accountability, designed to ensure that behaviour is kept under scrutiny, may make those held accountable *less* trustworthy rather than better performers. Transparency may even add to the deceit involved in accountability. What is needed is an increase in the trust relationship. We should always remember that accountability is a term imported into education from the world of industry and commerce. We need not necessarily reject the principle of accountability completely, but we should question the appropriateness of ever-increasing targets, performance indicators and league tables, all of which can be manipulated by smart practitioners. Simple, but not uncritical, trust may be better than the new 'audit culture' after all. I know a few teachers whom I would not trust to take a dog for a walk; but they are a tiny minority, and it is a mistake to base policy on such extreme examples. Most teachers are conscientious professionals who can be trusted to do their best for their pupils. It is surely time for New Labour to concentrate on making it possible for teachers to be even more professional, rather than having policies that try to guarantee better standards by targets, league tables and demoralising paperwork.

Why is it so difficult for New Labour writers and policy advisers to listen to professionals and philosophers rather than management 'theorists' and efficiency 'experts'? This Green Paper is about the 14 to 19 age group, but the whole of the education service now, from pre-school to university, has been infected with crude systems of control and accountability.

During the Thatcher-Major years, two very different Tory views on education competed for supremacy, and the result was an uneasy compromise between those like Keith Joseph who would have preferred to leave education to market forces, and those like Kenneth Baker who wanted a modernised, more efficient service directed from the centre and controlled by accountability methods such as testing, targets, league tables and 'payment-by-results'. The traditional Labour policy of comprehensive education based on social justice was unfairly attacked as inefficient. In 1997 there was a splendid opportunity to up-date the vision of comprehensive education, but one of the problems of New Labour is the lack of any real theory of socialist, or even democratic, education. Without a clear vision for education, Blair simply continued with Tory policies, and tried to make them work more effectively; it is significant that he even retained Woodhead as Chief Inspector – he had served Tory policies of accountability very well. So we still have a system based on targets, standards and league tables. No wonder the Green Paper presents such a confused picture.

The time has surely come for a clear policy on education based on cooperation not competition, social justice not selfish individualism, excellent schools for all not selection justified in terms of diversity and choice. Only then will it be possible to rely more on professional trust instead of technicist accountability. Of course, professionals need to be held to account by the public, and the system kept under review, but not by using the present bureaucratic methods that are not only counter-productive but threaten to destroy the best aspects of the education service – including trust. Thatcher denied the existence of society: if there are only selfish individuals, it is difficult to justify trust. It is time to develop more morally acceptable forms of social thinking in education and in other services.