

# Editorial

The second half of January 2003 saw the publication of two very important documents on education by the Blair Government: a discussion document with the title *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence* and a White Paper on *The Future of Higher Education*. This Editorial aims to present a brief preliminary analysis of their main proposals; and I will deal with each of the documents in turn.

## **14-19: Opportunity and Excellence**

Many of the ideas and themes presented in this new document were foreshadowed in the DfES Green Paper *14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards*, published in February 2002 and discussed in the Summer 2002 number of *FORUM*. Yet in some respects this 2003 document is stronger and more coherent than the one published a year ago because the Government has clearly taken note of many of the views expressed at the 58 Green Paper consultation meetings held around the country last Summer.

There is still a strong commitment to the idea of a 14 to 19 'continuum', with the age of 16 thereby losing its traditional status as a major 'break-point' in the lives of young people. What the Government seems clearly anxious to articulate is an evolving vision for greater coherence in the 14 to 19 phase of education and training combined with a flexible approach which enables all students to proceed at a pace best suited to their developing abilities and preferred ways of learning. To all intents and purposes, then, the National Curriculum will now effectively end at 14, followed by greater flexibility and a clearer sense of continuity in the years spanning the age 16 barrier.

It is proposed that English, mathematics and science will remain at the heart of the compulsory curriculum for 14 to 16 year-olds, with the current substantial Programme of Study for science being reviewed to arrive at a core content that is considered suitable for all learners. All students will learn about work and enterprise; and ICT (information and communications technology) will remain compulsory for the time being, though with the understanding that the skills involved will increasingly be taught through other subjects in future years. Citizenship, religious education, sex education, careers education and physical education will remain compulsory to ensure, in the words of the document, that 'all students continue to learn to be responsible and healthy adults'. As envisaged in the 2002 Green Paper, modern foreign languages and design and technology will no longer be 'required study' for all 14 to 16 year-old students and will join the arts and the humanities as subjects where there will be 'a new statutory entitlement of access'.

The document is anxious to highlight three reforms designed to address the weakness and low status of vocational education. It points out that new GCSEs in eight vocational subjects were introduced in September 2002: in Applied Art and Design; Applied Business;

Engineering; Health and Social Care; Applied ICT; Leisure and Tourism; Manufacturing; and Applied Science. Each was designed to be a double award, equivalent to two GCSEs. Now to complement this initiative, there is to be a new system of 'hybrid' GCSEs each with a common core and optional vocational or general units. Secondly, modern apprenticeships will be improved and expanded, so that at least 28 per cent of young people can become apprentices by 2004. Thirdly, GCSEs and A Levels will no longer be labelled as either 'vocational' or 'academic' (or indeed as 'hybrid'). The document rightly points out that status matters and that engineering should enjoy equal status with mathematics or art and design.

There are a number of issues where the Government has clearly had second thoughts since the publication of the Green Paper. There will be no new A Level A grade 'with distinction', the Government preferring to stick with the Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) which were introduced in the Summer of 2002 to 'stretch' the most able Advanced Level students by requiring a greater depth of understanding than does A Level itself.

At the same time, the Government has decided to scrap the proposal for a new 'overarching award' to mark the completion of the 14 to 19 phase, called provisionally the Matriculation Diploma. This was attacked by many organisations for the lack of a foundation level diploma, below the intermediate level, which would send out all the wrong signals to those students who are most difficult to motivate. It is also true that universities and employers were not attracted to the idea and that without such currency, the Matriculation Diploma simply could not succeed.

The document deliberately distinguishes between *short-term* and *long-term* reforms. It announces the appointment of a new Working Group for 14 to 19 Reform, to be headed by former Chief Inspector Mike Tomlinson, which will be expected to look at the possible introduction of an English Baccalaureate, designed to recognise vocational and academic courses as well as activities outside the classroom, such as volunteering, and reward achievements by students at both ends of the so-called 'ability spectrum'. In the words of the document: 'Baccalaureate-style qualifications of this type work well in other countries, and we believe that this model, designed to suit English circumstances, could tackle long-standing English problems, giving greater emphasis to completing courses of study (and training as appropriate) through to the age of 18 or 19, without a heavier burden of examination and assessment' (page 13). This suggested area of reform, threatening as it does the so-called 'gold standard' A Level, has received considerable emphasis in newspaper reports of the discussion document – the headline to the story in *The Times Educational Supplement* (24 January 2003) being 'Future without A Levels is on the cards'.

There are, of course, shortcomings and disappointments in the Government's new approach. For one thing, the document shows great timidity where the future of the GCSE is concerned. On page 11, it accepts that the GCSE has become a qualification at *two* levels, with Level 2 (or grades A\*-C) being viewed by the public as 'success' and Level 1 (or grades D-G) being widely seen as 'failure'. This means that for many young people, achieving Level 1 is demotivating and that they would often prefer not to reveal that they have taken GCSEs than admit to gaining a lower grade. We know that many secondary schools find it necessary to 'ration' their attention and resources in order to concentrate on those students at the 'borderline' between grades C and D. There really is no point in having a public examination at 16 if we are serious about wanting to establish a 14 to 19 'continuum'.

This leads us on to the second major disappointment in the document: the failure to abolish league tables. In any sensible 14 to 19 system, there would be no place for examination tables for 16 and 18 year-olds. It is, after all, the crucial factor of league table success that has led so many schools to developing new ways of identifying and encouraging those students who might, with additional support, manage a C grade in a number of subjects.

Finally, we seem to have abandoned any possibility of a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum for all students beyond the age of 14. Greater clarity about the future composition of an English bac might mean a reversal of current trends, but it is difficult to be optimistic about this. The proposed curriculum reforms are not supposed to take effect before the 2004/2005 academic year at the earliest; but we know that hundreds of secondary schools are 'jumping the gun' by dropping compulsory lessons in foreign languages and in design and technology. The key to combining flexibility and breadth at Key Stage Four lies in a modular curriculum structure, opening up the possibility of breadth over time, but the Government shows little or no sign of recognising this.

### **The Funding of Higher Education**

After eighteen months of media speculation, four postponed launches and a number of well-informed 'leaked stories' about marked divisions of opinion within Blair's Cabinet, Education Secretary Charles Clark finally announced the Government's plans for the future funding of higher education in the 105-page White Paper *The Future of Higher Education*, published on 22 January. We now know that universities in England will be able to charge 'top-up' tuition fees of up to £3,000 a year for their most popular and prestigious courses. Students will not have to pay the new fees until they have graduated and are earning at least £15,000 a year (a repayment threshold that is higher than the current one, of £10,000). Poorer students with parents or families earning less than £10,000 a year will be eligible for a grant of £1,000 a year. This will all come into effect in the Autumn of 2006. It has been

estimated that many students will leave university with total debts amounting to at least £21,000: £9,000 in tuition fees and £12,000 in maintenance costs. And accountancy experts have calculated that all this may well lead to graduates facing a higher rate of tax than that paid by millionaires, once they reach the £15,000 threshold (report in *The Independent*, 23 January 2003).

### **The Question of Access**

Many have argued that the fear of debt will deter many teenagers, and particularly *working-class* teenagers, from embarking on a university course. We know that the social class gap among those entering higher education is already unacceptably wide and growing. Those from the 'top' three social classes are almost three times as likely to enter higher education as those from the 'bottom' three. And young people from professional backgrounds are over five times more likely to enter higher education than those from unskilled backgrounds.

The White Paper announces the appointment of an independent Access Regulator, whose task will be to agree with universities on action to increase the take-up of students from 'disadvantaged groups' and who can then impose penalties or withdraw the right to charge variable fees, where appropriate, if universities do not fulfil their part of the agreement. The aim of the appointment is a laudable one, but it is not clear exactly how this new system will work, and it is feared by many that could involve the imposition of new and invariably cumbersome bureaucratic controls and regulations.

Currently around 43 per cent of 18 to 30 year-olds in England enter some form of higher education; and the Government is committed to raising this figure to 50 per cent by the year 2010. The White Paper makes it clear that this target will largely be met by increasing the number of youngsters on new two-year vocational courses, many of these being offered at further education colleges. In the words of the document: 'We do not favour expansion on the single template of the traditional three-year honours degree' (page 60).

### **Towards a New Structure for Higher Education?**

The White Paper is about far more than new funding arrangements and the widening of access. What is being proposed is the rapid development or *intensification* of a hierarchy of institutions. Three-quarters of research funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England already goes to just 25 institutions. Now research money is to be concentrated even more on 'top-performing' departments. The Government is urging 'less research-intensive institutions' to all but forget about trying to make breakthroughs in, say, science and technology and instead to work more closely with local companies solving 'real-world problems'. In other words, what the Government wants is the wholesale restoration of the two-tier university/polytechnic divide.

**Clyde Chitty**

# Comprehensive Schools Then, Now and in the Future: is it time to draw a line in the sand and create a new ideal?

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**TIM BRIGHOUSE**

This article is an edited version of the first Caroline Benn/Brian Simon FORUM Memorial Lecture given at the Institute of Education, London, on 28 September 2002, with an introduction by FORUM Chairperson Michael Armstrong

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## **Chairperson's Introductory Remarks**

As Chairperson of the Editorial Board of the educational journal *FORUM*, founded by Brian Simon and Robin Pedley way back in 1958, I would like to welcome you to this first memorial lecture in honour of two great educational thinkers and campaigners, Brian Simon and Caroline Benn.

Caroline and Brian are the founding heroes of comprehensive education.

Two great beliefs united them:

The first – that all children, however diverse, are alike in their capacity to reason and to imagine, to criticise and to create, to examine and to make, to interpret and to construct, to participate and to innovate in every aspect of culture.

The second – that all children, however diverse, learn best when they learn together, sharing each other's insight and experience, absorbing knowledge and recreating knowledge as they collaborate, in the company of their teachers, in a common pursuit.

Over the summer I have been reading the letters of Keats. In a letter to his friend John Reynolds, dated 19th February, 1818, I came across a passage which, for me, celebrates, incomparably, this dual commitment. Keats is arguing that originality is a common human possession rather than the privilege of a few. He goes on like this:

'But the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse Journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions – It is however quite the contrary – Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in Numberless points, and at last greet each other at the Journeys end – An old Man and a child would talk together and the old Man be led on his Path, and the child left thinking – Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour, and thus by every germ of Spirit sucking the Sap from mould ethereal every human might become great, and Humanity instead

of being a wide heath of Furze and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees.'

Brian Simon and Caroline Benn campaigned for that 'grand democracy of Forest Trees', informed by 'common taste and fellowship', throughout their lives. It is now our privilege to continue the struggle, for, as we know well, it is far from won.

Tim Brighouse has been himself a heroic figure in the more recent history of comprehensive education.

I remember meeting him for the first time in 1981. He was Director of Education in Oxfordshire and I was the newly appointed headteacher of an Oxfordshire primary school. Unannounced and unexpected, he sauntered onto the school field where I was attempting to referee a game of football. He wanted to find out how I was settling in, what plans I had, what I was thinking about, how he could help.

Over the years, I grew familiar with Tim's enthusiasm, his inventiveness, his restless imagination. But above all I came to understand and to appreciate the depth of his affectionate fascination with the thinking and learning of children of every age in every school. It came as no surprise when, on leaving Oxfordshire, he asked, as a leaving gift, for a portfolio of work by Oxfordshire schoolchildren – poems, stories, art work, essays.

Of the impassioned brilliance of his later work as Director of Education in Birmingham I am not qualified to speak. But none of us will forget his dialectical struggles with John Patten and Chris Woodhead, or his unflagging resistance to the narrow orthodoxies of the Department for Education, the Inspectorate, successive governments and the bulk of the educational establishment.

For many years his example has been an inspiration, and a welcome relief. We are delighted to welcome him as our speaker and to invite him now to deliver the first Caroline Benn/Brian Simon memorial lecture.

Michael Armstrong

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## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

The genesis of this paper is unusual. It began with a request from Michael Fielding and Clyde Chitty, which I was minded to refuse because I knew I would be overwhelmed in my last months in Birmingham. But I subsequently agreed to accept the honour, thinking that I could rework or cobble together ideas I had worked on in the last few years. Of course the names of Caroline Benn and Brian Simon soon changed my mind and brought me up with a sense of guilt and responsibility.

So I was jolted into the need to clarify my views. I therefore began writing very early drafts which I shared with a number of people. So I must thank Don Field, Dave Brockington, Fred Jarvis, Mick Waters, Sylvia McNamara, Christine Garrett, John Foley, Bob Moon, Seamus Gaynor, Geoff Whitty, Carol Adams, Sarah Stephens, Emma Westcott, Kathy Baker and Jon Bloomfield. All made helpful comments, as did many others. I am also extremely indebted to, among others, Colin Bayne-Jardine, Ronald Arnold, David Halpin, Peter Newsam, Ted Wragg and David Woods for their detailed advice. They will see they have influenced and improved the coherence and scope of my thinking and presentation. But the responsibility for the final text (and any of its inadequacies) is mine.

## **Introduction**

This paper is intended as a contribution to the debate about what sort of secondary education we want. To begin with, I suggest that the comprehensive ideal, for so long forcefully advocated by Caroline Benn and Brian Simon, has been realised on any scale in only one of three contexts within which secondary schools have developed since 1944.

The next part of the paper sets out a different model – more ambitious and comprehensive in its scope – for secondary education in the future. I use the term ‘collegiate’ rather than ‘comprehensive’ to describe it. Words, as we know, are important, and the word ‘comprehensive’ itself has begun to get in the way of productive debate. There remain considerable differences of interpretation among those who support comprehensive education, but the media, sometimes assisted by those who should know better, have ensured that the use of the term comprehensive has increasingly implied something vaguely second-rate. The phrase ‘the local comp’ has become sufficiently worrying that few of the 3,000 plus schools which might be expected to incorporate its use in their headed notepaper and school signs now choose to do so.

It was not always so. Indeed, this talk is in honour of the lives of two people. One of them, Caroline Benn, has become synonymous with the early confident march of the comprehensive pioneers. The other, Brian Simon, in the process of becoming the greatest educational historian of the last century, took time to chart the course and guide the thinking of so many of us who have grown old chasing the elusive comprehensive ideal. Both act as a conscience to my thinking.

## **The Comprehensive Campaign**

When I was young in the mid-1950s, I argued the case for comprehensive secondary schooling in a school debate. People then rallied under the comprehensive flag for a variety of reasons and from different sets of values. For

Harold Wilson, when Crosland launched the famous circular in 1965, it was a promise of ‘grammar schools’ for everyone. For many others it went a bit further: it was a feeling of unease about the tests at the age of eleven. Indeed, a pressure group, STEP (Stop the Eleven Plus) was active in those years in most of the LEAs where the reform of secondary education along comprehensive lines was under active consideration. Such people’s unease with selection was confirmed by the exposé of Cyril Burt’s research methods which had led him to encourage what we now see as misplaced belief in the reliability of IQ and verbal reasoning tests at the age of eleven.

Administrators felt that to divide into ‘sheep’ and ‘goats’ at eleven was unfair. The clarion call to which all answered was, as the Secretary of State said in her June 2002 speech, ‘equal opportunity’. When the validity of the 11+ was questioned, however, there was not necessarily a denial of the concept of sheep and goats, nor of general intelligence as the criterion for selection. It was just that the method was unreliable and the age of sorting too early.

There were those in the pro-comprehensive lobby who argued that it was not enough in urban areas to create catchment areas: there needed to be a balanced intelligence mix among the youngsters at a school. So, accepting still the notion of general intelligence, they would allocate children according to the three or four ‘bands’ based on reading or intelligence tests. The purpose was to get a fair mix – thought to be essential to ensuring a good comprehensive school.

Driven in a similar way by the prevailing intelligence notions of Burt and others, and by the grammar school tradition, the administrators creating comprehensive schools followed a strong orthodoxy that comprehensive schools had to be large – at least eight forms of entry – in order that there were at least two forms of entry equivalent of those who would have attended grammar schools, because ‘after all, we had realised that one form entry grammar schools were unviable’. Thinking became focused on how comprehensive schools might be organised rather than on analysis of the nature of the common curriculum.

For the educational and social reformers, including Caroline Benn and Brian Simon, who led the comprehensive campaign, however, it was much more than a negative unease with the eleven plus. It was also in line with the positive assertion that secondary schools should reflect the communities within which they happened to be located. The secondary school should be the common school to which all children in an area should go because it was in principle a good idea that all should be educated in their local school during the teenage years, just as they always were in primary schools. In addition, there was a growing belief that the curriculum should reflect a common culture. The main component of the comprehensive ideal was to give equal value to all sorts of human potential and activity within certain moral limits and principles. I have personally always been an advocate of that.

Some of the early comprehensive campaigners also argued, logically and passionately, for the abolition of the fee paying public schools (cf. the Newsom and Donnison Reports) and of the direct grant schools. Many of the same people also regretted the 1944 religious settlement and thought it only a matter of time before church-aided

schools would be abolished.

Even in that early period, under the same comprehensive school roof there were many practical differences of interpretation by advocates of the idea. Comprehensive schools were never 'one size fits all', or 'bog-standard'. Some had mixed-ability teaching for the first year, some for the first three years, a tiny minority throughout. In a survey of year 9 classes in 1230 secondary comprehensive schools in 1993/94 80 (6.5%) ran mixed ability groups in all subjects; 225 (18.3%) setted in no more than two subjects but were mixed ability in the rest; 774 (62.9%) setted in at least four or all subjects; and the balance 151 (12.3%) banded or streamed.[1] Most banded and streamed in such a way that they retained in effect selection under one roof. The term 'comprehensive' was sometimes preceded by 'bi-lateral' or 'multi-lateral'. Most used setting. Prior to the 'one size fits all' national curriculum and the central prescription of the curriculum and tests, the curriculum offered varied too according to the ideas of the staff of the school.

In short, the people who marched under the comprehensive flag included some unlikely bed fellows for whom the highest common factor was probably little more than an agreement that selection at eleven was unreliable, contravened ideas of social justice and inhibited the aim of providing equal opportunity for all. Such people perversely campaigned at a time when some children were still regarded as 'ineducable' and were therefore quite content to operate with the selection of children for special schools at the lower end of the general intelligence spectrum. The word 'inclusive' did not feature in educational debate let alone shape decision making. That is how comprehensive schools were.

### Comprehensives – 'Then' and 'Now'

There are three distinct contexts within which comprehensive secondary education has developed since 1944: one successful and largely unchanging; a second once successful but more recently increasingly at risk; a third illusory.

The *first* pattern of comprehensive schools developed and is still found in largely rural areas and market towns. In these areas often small or unsuccessful grammar and secondary modern schools were replaced by all-ability schools for all the pupils in the locality. Nobody in those areas would dream of going back. New models of secondary school (for example, the city technology colleges and the latest city academies) have barely touched them. Others, including GM, specialist or beacon schools, have caused a little friction, but have been accommodated and absorbed, providing a welcome cash injection and a boost to thinking.

The *second* pattern is to be found in urban areas, such as Coventry, Norwich, Oxford and some others – the large town or small city surrounded by countryside. Here there is a changing story. At first schools were carefully constructed to be comprehensive and this was largely achieved. But as time has gone on and parental choice, league tables and changed housing patterns have made their impact, schools have increasingly diverged in their composition. In some of these areas schools spend much of their energy in jockeying for position.

The *third* 'comprehensive illusion' affected the very large conurbations. In Birmingham there have always been

grammar schools, so my experience there is no guide to my understanding of the comprehensive movement nationally. But I do not believe that Manchester and London are very different. In the large cities, the comprehensive school in practice has all but disappeared, if it ever existed. The outcome has been a giddily steep pecking order of secondary schools. So also in other large conurbations outside London, such as Manchester and Birmingham, where in any case there are many grammar selective schools. If there happens to be an underground tube railway system (as in London) or frequent short-haul trains and 'bus networks, upwardly mobile and aspirational parents take the opportunity to send their eleven year olds to their choice of any of thirty or forty secondary schools. The combination of this and a similar pecking order of social housing has made secondary schools very different one from another.

So in the densely populated conurbations the bell of the comprehensive ideal has always had a slightly false ring to it. Moreover, some schools have become the dumping ground of pupils from other schools. In Birmingham, for example, those schools at the top of the pecking order will 'phone the next pupil on their waiting list during Years 7 and 8 when they have a pupil vacancy. Some think nothing of, in effect, 'poaching' a pupil already in another school. And so it cascades on with the schools at the bottom accepting those pupils either officially excluded, or 'counselled out' of schools higher up the pecking order.

The rising exclusion figures – both permanent and temporary – of the last ten years make a mockery of any claim that a comprehensive school, in practice, successfully educates all its pupils.

With the large conurbations and urban education generally in mind, and setting aside, the names schools are given and the means by which they are funded or managed, so far as their pupil composition is concerned is what Sir Peter Newsam has described as eight sorts of school, whether independent or state maintained. Hierarchically ordered, these can be identified as:

Type 1 The super selective school (e.g. Manchester Grammar) taking most of its pupils from the top 10% of the top performers at 11+.

Type 2 The designated grammar school taking mostly from the top 20% (sometimes as far as 30%/40%) performers in standardised tests.

Type 3 The comprehensive 'plus' school taking all abilities, but heavily skewed (by catchment area, partial selection, or parental choice) to the top 50% of the performance range.

Type 4 The comprehensive school where there is a more or less even mix across the performance range.

Type 5 The comprehensive 'minus' school taking pupils of all ability, but very few from the top 25% of the performance range.

Type 6 The secondary modern school in an area served by designated grammar schools which gets none of the top 25%, but a fair mix of all the rest.

Type 7 The secondary modern minus school which gets none of the top 25% and less – sometimes far less – than its fair share of the next 25% (because such pupils are in types 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6) plus pupils excluded or 'counselled out' of types 1-6.

Type 8 The sub-secondary modern school which gets none of the top 25%, few of the next 25% and an intake heavily

weighted towards the lower parts of the bottom 50%.

The story of the comprehensive in the counties [2] and market towns is largely the story of types 3, 4 and 5.

The story of the larger towns and small cities varied. Types 1 and 7 are rare, but there is evidence in some places that the proportion of the group attending types 2 and 3 is increasing and so too is the proportion attending types 5 and 6.

The story of the secondary schools structure in the large conurbations is of types 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, with many in types 6, 7 and 8.

In short, in many rural areas the pattern of secondary schools is comprehensive and successful. In many towns the pattern started out as comprehensive, but is increasingly unstable. In the large conurbations there may be one or two comprehensive schools, but the widely differing hierarchical structures mean that the set of schools when taken together does not conform to anything that can fairly be described as a comprehensive pattern.

The New Labour Government in 1997 faced a crucial choice. Would they phase out the city technology colleges, the grant maintained schools and the specialist schools? There seems to be little point in arguing what they should have done.[3] Seventeen years of parental preference, coupled with seven years of published league tables of exam results, meant they had a dilemma. In terms of resources, they had to level up not down, but their self-denying ordinance on finance precluded that. So it seemed better to go for specialisms for everyone. In the name of diversity the range of new models has now been extended, both within types of specialisms and more recently with 'beacon', 'extended', 'training' and 'advanced' schools – and of 'city academies'. There is talk of 'ladders' and 'escalators'. The essence of structure of this kind, of course, is to enable individuals – and indeed institutions such as schools – to move down as well as up. This will perpetuate a hierarchy of 'better' and 'worse' schools.

### **Let me sum up what I have been saying**

It is only in the counties and the market towns that we have a remotely comprehensive pattern of secondary schools. It has proved a well-supported and successful way to organise the schools. Nobody in Suffolk or Norfolk, in Oxfordshire or Cambridgeshire would want to turn back the clock. Children from all backgrounds and both sexes attend the local school. Admittedly there is some creaming to the private sector making it likely that some are what Sir Peter Newsam described as comprehensive plus and comprehensive minus. On the whole, though, the schools reflect their local communities and the ability range of the community.

But, as we know, only a third of secondary children attend schools in counties and market towns. The other two-thirds are in large towns, small cities and very large conurbations. In the latter it becomes increasingly likely that there will be a full range of schools and that genuinely comprehensive schools will be few and far between.

In practice, certainly in the most densely populated areas of the country, what Caroline Benn and Brian Simon argued for as the comprehensive school, is further away from realisation than it ever was in their early campaigning days.

### **Within the hierarchy of secondary schools I have been describing, three other issues affect the position**

*Firstly*, my definition of comprehensive, thus far, ignores ethnicity, socio-economics, gender and religion. Yet in the urban areas the pattern of the super selective, through the five others to the secondary modern 'minus' at the bottom of the list, is a complicated one. It is reinforced by girls' only, boys' only, lopsided co-educational and denominational schools. It is finally compounded by schools which are mono-ethnic.

A *second* issue is that of staffing, especially the supply and quality of teachers. Schools towards the top of the pecking order – super selective, selective grammar, comprehensive plus and comprehensive – have increasingly occupied a privileged position in terms of attracting and retaining teachers. Comparatively, none of these schools has difficulty: significantly, there is less wastage of newly qualified teachers. Teachers in rural areas are more likely to live within the locality in which they teach, adding to the strength of the community. The absence of this advantage – indeed, the presence of the reverse, namely a shortage of suitably qualified teachers – contributes to the problems of secondary schooling, particularly in the large conurbations.

Finally, a *third* issue affects the work of schools and compounds the problems they face. There has been a proliferation of different admission authorities with different declared criteria, and very different ways of operating them. The effect has been that in the conurbations and other areas, where there are many different admission authorities, any connection between the local community and its local school(s) has all but disappeared.

So what is the difference between what I have called in the title, comprehensives 'then' and 'now'? Those who care about social justice and wish to design something better in the future in the hope of getting nearer a secondary schooling system which provides success for everyone need to understand the differences between then and now.

'Then' we were preoccupied with, if not general intelligence, at least a narrow view of 'intelligence'. 'Then' we wanted the common local school and preferably one with a fair distribution of ability defined by general intelligence in a school. 'Then' we asked for the abolition of fee paying schools and there were many who rallied to that cause – enough for there to be a royal commission to consider it. 'Then' there was no parental choice: indeed, Circular 10/65 did not suggest that parents be consulted. 'Then' LEAs had power.

'Now' many view intelligence differently; 'now' in large urban areas there is an increasingly steep pecking order of schools; 'now' in many of the same areas there is a heavy imbalance of girls' only to boys' only secondary schools and therefore an equally large imbalance of boys to girls in co-educational schools in the lower reaches of the pecking order; 'now' parental preference for a school has to contend with a Byzantine pattern of autonomous admission authorities, who play ducks and drakes with the idea that parents choose schools rather than vice versa. 'Now' there are 15 city technology colleges and the likelihood of more than twice that number of city academies. 'Now' a third of the schools are specialist and some of them select by 'aptitude' in a particular subject.



But 'now', too, we know more about how the brain works, more about how children learn, more about teaching successfully, more about school improvement. 'Now' we are on the cusp of a huge breakthrough in the technologies for learning which can change significantly the way schools and learning are organised. So it is not all problematic. But it is confused.

These are not the only differences between then and now. We are now in a world where we have an increased obligation to help the young equip themselves with the skills, dispositions and values to survive and thrive in a much more shifting, complex and diverse set of societies. Globalisation is not confined to the economy or multinational companies. What happens in the Gulf, in the Middle East, in Afghanistan, in New York immediately affects us all. So do social changes – such as those in the structure of the family and the ready availability of drugs. Childhood ends earlier and adult independence starts later, while the contextual circumstances for the adolescents in between are more complex. September 11th last year left most secondary schools struggling to make sense of what happened: too many simply ignored the issues, all of which needed urgent and intensive discussion. We live in a high risk world, but the secondary school is a low risk environment. We live in an age where nations have few national enemies, but are suffering an identity crisis and where ordinary citizens wonder about the interface of nationality and religion. In short, it is an age of uncertainty, with the traditional isolated secondary school struggling to remain a place of certainty, but dealing with a client group of adolescents who can see that they are living in a world which is altogether different and to which their school seems not sure how to relate.

### Comprehensives in the future

So much for comprehensives 'then' and 'now'. What of the future?

I know that Caroline Benn and Brian Simon would have argued that just because the circumstances are hostile to the ideal we espoused, that is no reason to abandon our ideals or give up our principles.

I start from the position that comprehensive education (save in most rural areas and many market towns, where it has proved well supported and successful) is further away from being realised elsewhere than it has ever been.

So what of the future? How could the comprehensive idea be realised in urban areas?

We must strike out boldly for an ideal where all young people, whatever their 'home-base' school, whether in the state or private sector, take substantial periods of their education together. This would be within a collegiate framework which acknowledges that secondary education involves belonging to at least two institutions – the school and the collegiate to which it is attached. In urban areas this has become essential for a variety of reasons in order to:-

- overcome the huge and unfair divergence of experiences for pupils according to whether they have had access to a school near the top or the bottom of the pecking order;
- match the diversity of provision of schooling to the diverse needs of individual children;
- give all pupils equal access to the separate specialisms

and expertise designated specialist schools have earned;

- give pupils from all schools the best possible access to high quality staff in shortage areas;
- ensure that gifted pupils on the one hand and youngsters with barriers to their learning on the other, come together and gain from the scarce expertise of specialist staff;
- increase the intellectual curiosity and knowledge which comes from teaching and other staff from different schools, but in the same discipline, sharing opportunities for continuous professional development and ideas;
- take advantage of the transformational progress now occurring in the learning technologies and avoid losing time in doing so during the present pioneering phase;
- increase the chances of a good fit for any pupil in their individualised 14-19 learning pathway;
- mix and bring together, at least for a time, pupils of both genders from different social, ethnic and religious backgrounds to learn, to engage in sport and the expressive arts, to undertake citizenship tasks and to debate their future as international as well as national citizens.

If secondary schools are left stranded in a 'devil take the hindmost' competition of 'beggar thy neighbour', we shall achieve none of this. We shall not win the race between 'education and catastrophe' for many of our disadvantaged youngsters. We must now encourage all schools in our great cities and towns to move on from a culture of total independence to one which recognises the added value of carefully developed interdependence.

This is what I mean by a 'collegiate' system. A truly comprehensive secondary education in our conurbations would be one where all the youngsters, boys and girls alike, from the different faiths and ethnic groups are educated together for significant periods of their post-primary education. They will know that they are specially and equally valued, whatever their different intelligences or talents and backgrounds. They will know this because the school and other educational provision they attend – the collegiate – will celebrate difference, whether of gender, race, or religion, but at the same time equally value different intelligences and talents.

In 1993 I expressed to a mainly primary audience my hopes for what a full educational offer to all our children would look like:

*We must all work to make this world worthy of its children. Because they are 100% of its future. Let this be the beginning of a wish for every Birmingham child: that we would want them to be people with a strong sense of themselves and their own humanity, with an awareness of their thoughts and feelings, with a capacity to feel and express love and joy and to recognise tragedy and feel deep grief. We would want them to be people who, with a strong and realistic sense of their own worth, are able to relate with others, to co-operate effectively toward common ends and to view humankind as one, while respecting diversity and difference. We will want them to be people, who even while very young, somehow sense that they have the capacity for lifelong spiritual and intellectual growth.*

*Above all, we would want Birmingham children to cherish the vision of the person they are capable of becoming and to cherish the same potentiality in others.*

Although the audience consisted largely of primary-school teachers and the focus was childhood, I do not today want anything very different for adolescents. With that in mind, I am certain of two things: first, that our present urban system cannot provide it. Secondly, that in an urban area, however hard individual schools acting alone try to do so, collectively they will fall short of what is needed. Schools operating in isolation and in competition one with another necessarily cause changes in each other's compositions. The creation of 'escalators' of schools – unless it is an escalator that defies the rules of physics – will take some schools down as others rise up for so long as we have parental preference, 'bus routes, and schools that have a practical limit on their size. So we need another answer to work towards in the large urban settings.

For me the comprehensive ideal will be the 'collegiate' academy. The purpose of the collegiate, beyond that of the individual school, will be to consider 'school plus' – i.e. the bit which when added to school creates a secondary education experience. Why collegiate? Bring to mind Oxbridge or the Durham Colleges and University. A group of six or seven schools would comprise at least a comprehensive plus or selective school and a range of others, including a faith school and a special school, together with a major FE/HE provider. For some purposes and in some places an independent school also perhaps. These schools would be either loosely or tightly coupled. The spectrum from loose to tight would start with agreements about ensuring heads of department are off timetable at the same time across the collegiate so that ideas can be shared and curriculum and professional development organised: it could end with jointly published results and agreement to admit pupils post-Year 7 to the collegiate.

As the collegiate model becomes more tightly coupled, the advantages increase for the pupils and for the realisation of the new comprehensive ideal. This would be one where youngsters from all backgrounds (and in urban areas this background frequently has an international or global dimension to it) have the experience of learning together, whether in the classroom, the workshop, the music suite, the debating chamber, the workplace, the theatre, the laboratory, or in sport and athletics. They also will learn and meet each other 'virtually' using the full range of the new learning technologies which will help bind the collegiate together and enlarge its capacity. Such collegiates and their constituent schools may have 'associate members' – those who come from other collegiates for short or long courses that are offered there, or from those educated 'otherwise' by individuals or groups of parents.

The issue is how we shall move from the very divided present to a future where diversity and equality can co-exist – even reinforce one another. This should be the mission of the collegiate academy where young people, while experiencing and enjoying independence, learn the more profound learning advantages of interdependence.

How shall we move from here to there? Is there a way of harnessing the non-negotiable agenda of 'city

academies', 'beacons', 'extended', 'training', 'advanced' and 'specialist schools' which our government has provided as the essential building blocks for the future? Is there a way of tempting Head Teachers and their governors to join in? (For make no mistake about it, the pleasures and powers of independence and autonomy are considerable, especially when in living memory they were preceded by the shackles of dependence.)

What if the city academy (and perhaps the independent schools in the urban areas) had only one form of entry and were the resource centre of the collegiate of which it is a member and the location of most post-16 study? What if the beacon status were adjusted to reflect departmental 'leading edge practice' in different schools within the one collegiate? What if each collegiate had its own residential centre? What if each collegiate were the lead agency for children looked after and secured the foster parents necessary? What if the specialist structure of each school were to be seen as complementary to its partners in the collegiate? Could the collegiate contribute to the broader social agenda by being the point of focus for inter-agency services for the most vulnerable families?

Why should incomers after Year 7 not deal with the admissions office of the collegiate and be placed in any one of the constituent schools? Why should parents not be confident that the collegiate programme was so extensive that wherever their youngster were placed, she or he would have full access to the best that no one school, but six others, could offer between them? What if these programmes were published by collegiates and by their individual constituent schools just as happens with colleges in Oxbridge?

At this point, I would like to add a new dimension to the notion of the collegiate: an international dimension through which collegiates were linked with sister schools in countries in the other continents of the world? And surely the collegiate could run international baccalaureates alongside or instead of the soul destroying diet of examinations we now require young people to digest?

Short of legislation, the development of what I describe as an 'international collegiate' will take lots of persuasion, some financial and other incentives, but above all an appeal to the idealism which attracted people to teaching and changing the world for the better in the first place.[4] The collegiate will include in its 'school plus' rationale a commitment to promote minority subjects and interests, cherish inter-faith and inter-cultural respect, promote European and global international citizenship, as well as that of the locality and the UK. The collegiate will be able to be inclusive where an individual school on its own cannot be. The collegiate will help overcome professional isolation so that there is a depth and richness of intellectual curiosity among the staff which will ensure that they are at the leading edge of practice in every discipline.

In Caroline and Brian's day the collegiate could not have existed. Then it would have been dismissed as a giant 'split-site' school. Now the advances in the learning management and communication technologies (ICT) coupled with the non-metronomic time-table involving 'days' or 'weeks' of study, mean that a new and extra form of organisation is possible.

In short, a collegiate can do what an individual school cannot. We have all been frustrated by the debilitating side effects of league tables and competing institutions. The



collegiate is a way of providing a solution by adding a dimension to a set of as yet unresolved urban issues and totally changing not merely its appearance, but also the ways by which the people in it will be able to work and realise their ideals. Inclusion could be a reality rather than simply an aspiration. The collegiate is a way of accommodating selection, diversity and equality of opportunity. As will all extra dimensions, it changes the appearance and the reality of a hitherto apparently intractable problem. Each collegiate will be seen to include the rainbow spectrum of different types of school which the Secretary of State has described.

It is not the job of those who want to see urban schools succeed to protest, wring our hands, or tilt at windmills in the style of a latter day Don Quixote. We need to provide opportunities for schools to see the advantage of richer interdependence that lies between the Scylla of dependence and the Charybdis of independence. We need to talk to some of the prestigious independent schools about how they might be prepared to associate with a collegiate. It is our job to ensure that the collegiate contains a representative group of comprehensive 'plus', selective, or super selective schools, as well as other secondary schools. We must lobby for conditions to be applied to all future city academies, specialist and advanced schools to be part of a collegiate, and that some of their extra community money is allocated to that end. It is our responsibility to see that all collegiates are involved with higher education institutions in initial teacher education and advanced study and that each collegiate has at least two or three 'beacon' departments so they can take pride in being at the 'leading edge of practice and performance' which rubs off on their pupils as well as their teachers.

If and when collegiates take hold, the youngsters in

such a collegiate will have a richer experience than many now do in their individual schools. We shall have come a little closer to realising the ideal of success for all our pupils in a truly inclusive environment where they have learnt the habit of lifelong learning and know they are all special and valued equally.

What I have now come to term the 'international collegiate' is worthy of our support. It must stand for a commitment to:

- providing success for every one of its members;
- focusing on learning as well as teaching; basing its ideals on the shared values of all faiths and promoting inter-faith respect;
- being inclusive not exclusive;
- promoting lifelong learning;
- enabling the pupils to see themselves as local, national and international citizens.

Without such a development, in which it is made possible for successful schools in comparatively comfortable circumstances to develop a wider commitment, we shall condemn a substantial proportion of the most challenged young people living in urban areas to a life of unnecessary and unavoidable failure. Translated into the future, the comprehensive ideals so vividly expressed by Caroline Benn and Brian Simon are no longer to be located solely within individual schools. They will be expressed in ways I believe they would have found acceptable – at least so far as great cities are concerned – within the families of schools. In their internal relationships they will be collegiate. They will also be outward-looking, with relationships and interests that lie outside national boundaries. Hence the name I have given to these schools: 'international collegiates'. Here, to conclude, are three scenarios: a nightmare, a dream and a gleam of reality.

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## EPILOGUE

### Nightmares, Dreams and Reality I am in an old people's home in 2022

I start from a nightmare. I have shouted myself awake from something so vivid that my heart was in a dangerous state of tachycardia. I am in a school – one of what the government calls 'Hope Schools'. Police are stalking the corridors and interdisciplinary teams work with troubled teenagers in cubicles with little natural light. What lessons they take are remotely but interactively provided: they take up half the curriculum time – the rest is 'one to one'. The staff are personal counsellors and the watchword is security. Most of the children are black. The curriculum gives high profile to 'anger management', 'basic living skills' (called 'survival in the twenty fifty world'), 'work experience'. All the pupils are electronically tagged 'for their own safety' (as the Principal tells me). Each student has drug counselling. Every Inner-London and Outer-London borough has at least one 'Hope School' located close to social housing: some have two 'Hope Schools'. Each 'Hope School' has its own budget and some of the major charities – the Shaw Foundation and the Rowntree Trust – contribute substantial grants. They conduct

research into the individual success stories – for each has some – which emerge from schools where all the pupils' parents have one thing in common ('correlation – not causation' – as the very old researcher, Emeritus Professor Harvey Goldstein, insists). None of them remained in education beyond the age of sixteen. Indeed, many did not get that far. Economic migrants and refugees attend what are called 'Opportunity Schools', of which all boroughs have one or two: some, three or four. Then there are the 'Specialist Colleges' – now celebrating 30 years of existence – not distributed according to boroughs (although the richer areas have more than the poorer). But they are located for convenient access near the underground stations and 'bus routes. Three-quarters of the schools are specialist and a further ten per cent designated as 'Advanced'. The advanced schools – they are called 'Academies' – have the best teachers, highly paid – partly for providing the distance learning to the 'Hope' and 'Opportunity' schools with which they are partnered only for teaching purposes (pupils are strictly segregated). The 'Specialist Colleges' and 'Academy' results are published college by college and there is much debate about them being better than the Independent schools. The 'Hope' and 'Opportunity' schools are

published as a group – borough by borough. ‘Hope’ and ‘Opportunity’ schools cannot call themselves colleges.

The Principal of the Hope school I find myself in tells me enthusiastically of the latest initiative which involves gene screening during pregnancy and of the newly born so that early diagnosis can be made of the potential ‘Hope’ pupils who are to have junior ‘Hope’ scholarships. But now I am sweating and awake. The care attendant assures me it’s simply a bad dream – a throwback, as I experience so often, to childhood.

### **Once more I fall asleep. Now I am in the Jeffery Hall, The London Institute of Education in September, 2022**

I have used my zimmer frame to navigate to my chair at the 20th Joint Brian Simon and Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture. The title of the talk is ‘The International Collegiate – where next?’. To our 2002 eyes it is a strange gathering, for the lecturer is the Master of Westminster School who is in her third and final year of the Deanship of the Parliamentary Collegiate and Visiting Professor of the Institute. Her Parliamentary Collegiate incorporates seven junior academies (in our age schools) of Pimlico, Westminster School itself, Westminster City, Grey Coat Hospital School and London Nautical. Her talk recounts the achievements, ‘undreamt of by all save Caroline Benn’ (as she puts it) of the Parliamentary International Collegiate. She explains the eight collegiate weeks and the student entitlements, including international visits and national residentials. She brings in her witnesses by three-dimensional video conference – pupil evaluations of the community missions they are actively following from their global citizenship programme. The particular story that intrigues me (for I am eighty-two) is the link engineered for the octogenarian in East London with his long remembered friend in the Mirpur – now actively pursued by satellite at the junior academy. Each pupil too describes what they call their ‘focused study’ – the activity that they learn about and in which they want to be at the leading edge of performance and practice. There is, incidentally, much pleasant ‘joshing’ between the students about the ‘senators’ – the third age personal tutors and teachers whose contribution to the collegiate is one of the essential keys to the collegiate success.

The Master argues that the word ‘collegiate’ is vital. ‘It symbolises’ she says ‘the interdependence both of pupils to each other – our team assessments are vital – of staff to each other; of young members and older staff – all united in learning; of governmental and international interdependence; and of our partnership of empowered junior academies. Independence and interdependence are natural allies as we all know – part of the inheritance of Anthony Giddens’s thinking of the last years of the last century.’ The Parliamentary Collegiate is one of 28 across inner-London. Each collegiate has its ‘leading edge of practice’ feature – some aspect of teaching, learning or assessment, whether of stage or subject discipline within a particular constituent school. All faculties are committed to each and every collegiate (as opposed to academy) student joining from their membership of the collegiate, what the Master calls ‘access to significant learning and experiences’. She reveals how this is achieved through a subtle blend of ‘personal learning and service plans’ – how the collegiate assesses the preferred learning styles and profiles of talents of each student every year tailoring their

access to the use of collegiate weeks accordingly. Peer tutoring – a programme that affects all students of all ages – is aided by the mixed ages nature of collegiate programmes. The Master claims that student surveys reveal that all feel ‘special’, but the ‘specialness’ score of 2.1 has dipped in the last year. The students and senators are most concerned for 2023 that their induction programme for asylum seekers should be changed. Too many of the 2022 entry scored lower on the ‘specialness’ factor. They are proud, however, of their necessarily anonymous work in the hostels and refuges scattered in the inner city. These sanctuaries from domestic violence had been acknowledged as a problem for the first time in 2003.

The collegiate is also pleased about the progress of the ‘children in royal care’ – the ones we used to call ‘children in public care’ until Prince Charles – now King Edward IXth – adopted them and linked them to his Prince’s Trust in 2005.

The Parliamentary Collegiate came third in the league tables of added value individual academic attainment results – although, again, Emeritus Professor Goldstein cast doubt on their validity. The Collegiate came first in the citizenship league tables assessed by a combination of attitudinal surveys of students, staff, senators and parents and a submitted research case study – externally assessed – of community service. This last success the Master puts down to the scheme of peer tutoring – now recognised as ‘leading edge’ in practice.

She is worried – and this is the burden of her talk – about the research skills of the collegiate tenth graders. She is asking the university associates on the faculty – all of whom come from the Institute of Education – to work on a new international research scheme with Chicago, which is the North American Collegiate link. (She has four others in Africa, Mainland Europe, Asia and South America.)

She calls for a review of the International curriculum which was introduced by the first coalition government in 2006 and of the twinning of collegiates in the developed and developing world. She acknowledges the ‘Damascene’ shift of policy in the 2005 Education Act which required interdependence among equals and completed the virtuous circle (once called ladder) of the school improvement programme. The voluntarism of the first few years had produced enough progress for the changes to be acceptable: it was the logical step agreed in other public services – how to have the certainty of local reliability without central prescription. It transformed – a favourite word of the time – free market competition into a viable third way for schools. Social Enterprises had been introduced to schooling through the International Collegiates.

### **The reality is now. It is the Jeffery Lecture Theatre: it is 2002**

Will the changes of the next three years bring the Government-led vision, when it is translated into practice locally, something that leads to the dream in the epilogue, or the nightmare? The choice is ours. On Tuesday next week I assume what Charles Handy has called an ‘empty raincoat’. I shall have retired from full-time paid work and am taking a final working journey. Part of that journey is here in the Institute of Education, which has always provided a beacon of hope for thinking teachers in

London. This paper has sketched only a part of the picture – the first brushstrokes. To complete the picture we shall have to look at ten inter-related facets of secondary education. The first four are learning, teaching, curriculum and assessment, of which the last powerfully influences the other three; and the fifth concerns the supply and quality of staff, especially teachers; a sixth the internal organisational arrangements of the school, particularly the timetable. A seventh is the articulation (or lack of it) between the curriculum in the school and the much bigger curriculum that lies beyond the school. An eighth is in the context of the school and its pupils and their origins. A ninth is the relationship of the school with other schools, other educational institutions such as universities, colleges and charities, and with the agencies which fund them and how admissions are arranged. A tenth is the purpose of secondary education and schooling itself. I have dealt insufficiently with each of these vital factors, all of which powerfully affect each other. But I have understood, which policy makers have not always done, that they are interrelated cogs. Move one and you affect another.

Clearly for the emerging international collegiate to be given practical expression, all ten aspects need to be examined in greater detail. But always with the memory of Caroline and Brian in mind, I start work on Tuesday and intend to develop those issues with colleagues here and elsewhere. Who will join the debate?

#### Notes

- [1] Benn, C. & Chitty, C. (1996) *Thirty Years On: is comprehensive education alive and well or struggling to survive?* (1st Edn). London: David Fulton, p. 258.
- [2] I have used the words 'rural areas' to describe a pattern of education largely adopted by the counties, although there are some exceptions (e.g. Lincolnshire, Buckinghamshire and Kent).
- [3] Brian Simon, Caroline Benn and Clyde Chitty have done so eloquently elsewhere.
- [4] One example of an incentive that would promote interdependence and collegiality among the grouping of schools would be for the collegiate's results to be published as a whole with each constituent school's funding being dependent on the performance of the weakest.



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# The Right to a Comprehensive Education

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CLYDE CHITTY

This article is an edited version of the Socialist Educational Association – Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture given at the London Institute of Education on 16 November 2002

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The title of this talk may appear quite self-explanatory – and it's obviously a great title for any lecture designed to celebrate the life and work of Caroline Benn. But there is a special reason why it came to me when Malcolm Horne 'phoned me in early September asking for something to put on the publicity material. RICE – the Right to a Comprehensive Education – was formed by Caroline in the early 1980s to act as a sort of 'umbrella organisation' for pressure groups campaigning in the field of comprehensive education. Dame Margaret Miles was our President; Maurice Plaskow was the RICE Chairperson; I acted as Secretary and Treasurer; and Caroline was in charge of Publications. Despite all the setbacks of the 1970s and 1980s, Caroline and I really did feel, by the time Mrs Thatcher's long period in office was coming to an end, that the case for five-to-sixteen comprehensive schooling was well-understood and irrefutable; and for this reason, for the last number of our RICE journal, *Comprehensive Education*, published in March 1989, we asked twenty teachers and academics from a wide variety of backgrounds to look at ways of extending the comprehensive principle *beyond* the age of sixteen.

We retained what some may view as our naïve optimism in the 1990s – *largely because comprehensive schools themselves were refusing to be written off as 'failures'* – and although there is now so much to be depressed about, I know that Caroline would want me to spend a large part of this talk looking to the future in a *positive* way and seeking your views and advice as to where we go from here.

So this is going to be a lecture that both reflects on past triumphs and mistakes and also looks at ways of preserving comprehensive values in what Tony Blair likes to call a 'post-comprehensive era'. There may well be more questions than answers; but that's because I genuinely believe we've reached a crossroads in the story of the British comprehensive school and that the way ahead forks off in many different directions.

## Historical Background

When we were working on the book that became *Thirty Years On*, first published in 1996 (Benn & Chitty, 1996), Caroline was determined that we should stress that the comprehensive school ideal has a long and noble history in the British Labour Movement. (She had, of course, published her own widely-praised biography of the mythical Labour figure Keir Hardie in 1992 (Benn, 1992)). By the end of the nineteenth century, a common education system was being advocated widely by the various new radical political movements that were springing up around the country. At an international conference of socialists

held at the Queen's Hall in Langham Place in London in July 1896 (where one of the main items on the agenda was whether anarchists should be allowed to participate in socialist decision-making), delegates from all over Europe and the USA pressed for a full education for all working people. Britain's Keir Hardie spelled out what form it had to take:- free at all stages, open to everyone without any tests of prior attainment at any age – in effect, a comprehensive 'broad highway' along which *all* could travel (reported in *The Westminster Gazette*, 1 August 1896 and quoted in Benn, 1992, p. 135; see also Benn & Chitty, 1996, p. 3).

The emerging Labour Movement was not, of course, united on this issue. Many in the Fabian Society took an élitist position on the question of secondary education – Sydney Webb, for example, favouring specialised and differentiated schooling, a sort of 'ladder' by means of which the 'clever' working-class child would rise and 'move out of his (sic) station in life' (see Webb, 1908, p. 288). Webb strongly supported the new fee-paying grammar schools introduced in the 1902 Education Act which provided a limited number of free scholarship places.

This idea that 'able' or 'clever' working-class children need to be 'rescued' from their local environment and the schooling it provides is a recurring theme of the last hundred years. In his 1987 biography of R.A. (Rab) Butler, Anthony Howard tells the story of how Churchill summoned James Chuter Ede to Number Ten in February 1942 to offer him a move from the Board of Education to the Ministry of War Transport. Chuter Ede asked permission to refuse the offer, and in the evening he wrote a graphic account in his diary of the lecture he was given by Churchill while the Prime Minister was waiting to get through to Attlee on the telephone to discuss the full implications of Chuter Ede's rebellious stance:

*The Prime Minister was glad to be reassured that the public schools were receiving our full attention. He wanted 60 to 70 per cent of the places to be filled by bursaries – not by examination alone, but on the recommendation of the counties and the great cities. We must reinforce the life-blood of the ruling-class – though he said he disliked the word 'class'. We must not choose by the mere accident of birth and wealth, but by the accident – for it was equally an accident – of innate ability. The great cities would surely be proud to search for able working-class youths to send to Haileybury, to Harrow and to Eton.*  
(Howard, 1987, p. 119)

## Early Mistakes

If I can be rather 'negative' before I move on to assess the present situation, Caroline and I felt that many of the active campaigners for comprehensive schooling in the 1960s and 1970s made a number of basic errors; and there were FOUR in particular:

- many campaigners promoted the new comprehensive schools as 'grammar schools for all';
- we allowed the movement for change to be 'captured' (at least *partially*) by well-meaning individuals with somewhat unrealistic *social* objectives;
- we placed insufficient emphasis (at least *initially*) on the need for curriculum reform;
- we seriously underestimated the strength and determination of our opponents.

I will deal briefly with each of these in turn.

Firstly, it was widely assumed in the late 1950s and early 1960s that parents could be persuaded to support the idea of comprehensive reorganisation more on the basis of the widespread unpopularity of the eleven-plus than on account of any positive virtues associated with comprehensive schools as such.

And it was against this background that leading figures in the Labour Party were anxious to repudiate the idea that comprehensive reorganisation entailed one type of secondary school being *abolished* in order to create another. The late Emmanuel (Manny) Shinwell, for example, attacked Labour Party policy on comprehensive schools in a letter he wrote to *The Times* in late June 1958:

*We are afraid to tackle the public schools to which wealthy people send their sons (sic), but, at the same time, we are quite prepared to throw overboard the grammar schools, which are for many working-class boys the stepping-stones to our universities and a useful career. I would much rather abandon Eton, Winchester, Harrow and all the rest of them than sacrifice the clear advantage of a grammar-school education. (Letter to The Times, 26 June 1958)*

Hugh Gaitskell, the Labour Leader from 1955 to 1963, rejected this accusation that grammar schools were being 'thrown overboard' in his own letter to *The Times* written a week later and using what was to become familiar Labour Party rhetoric:

*It would be much nearer the truth to describe our proposals as amounting to 'a grammar-school education for all'. ... Our aim is greatly to widen the opportunities to receive what is now called 'a grammar-school education'; and we also want to see grammar-school standards, in the sense of higher quality education, extended far more generally. (Letter to The Times, 5 July 1958)*

This very precise interpretation of Labour Party education policy was reiterated by Harold Wilson (Gaitskell's successor as Party Leader from 1963 onwards) in the period leading up to the 1964 General Election. Despite the disquiet felt by those who had strong views about the limitations of the grammar-school model, the slogan of 'grammar schools for all' served a number of useful functions: it silenced the opponents of comprehensive reorganisation like Manny Shinwell; it appealed to the growing demands for a more 'meritocratic' system of secondary education; and it dispelled the fears and

misgivings of those working-class and middle-class parents who still had enormous respect for the traditional grammar-school curriculum. In a book published in 1982, David Hargreaves summed up its appeal in the following terms:

*The slogan was a sophisticated one for it capitalised on the contradictions in the public's mind: parents were in favour of the retention of the grammar schools and their public examinations, but opposed to the eleven-plus selective test as the basis of a 'once-for-all' allocation. If the new comprehensive schools could be seen by the public as 'grammar schools for all', then the contradictions could be solved. (Hargreaves, 1982, p. 66)*

This idea of promoting the new schools as 'grammar schools for all', with the clear implication that a grammar-school education would now be made more widely available, was enshrined in the introduction to Circular 10/65 which was issued by the DES in July 1965 and requested all local education authorities to prepare plans for comprehensive reorganisation. Here reference was made at the outset to a motion passed by the House of Commons on 21 January 1965 endorsing government policy:

*That this House, conscious of the need to raise educational standards at all levels, and regretting that the realisation of this objective is impeded by the separation of children into different types of secondary school, notes with approval the efforts of local authorities to reorganise secondary education on comprehensive lines, which will preserve all that is valuable in a grammar-school education for those children who now receive it and make it available to more children. (Hansard, H. of C., Vol. 705, Col. 541, 21 January 1965)*

Yet as Professor Hargreaves goes on to point out in the 1982 book already cited, the idea that the new comprehensive schools meant 'grammar schools for all' did not have *lasting* appeal:

Many people seem to have accepted the argument put forward by Hugh Gaitskell and Harold Wilson, at least for a short period, and at least in principle. But public opinion is notoriously fickle, and when comprehensive reorganisation began, many grammar schools had to be closed as part of their amalgamation into the new comprehensives; and immediately a strenuous defence of the grammar schools was activated. Many parents with children at these schools, as well as former pupils, believed these schools to be good ones and so, not surprisingly, fought against the closures. Harold Wilson's claim that grammar schools would be closed 'over his dead body' now seemed to be a thin and superficial assertion. Most people were delighted to see the demise of the eleven-plus; but many remained sceptical that the amalgamation of grammar schools and (usually several) secondary moderns actually constituted the provision of genuine 'grammar schools for all'. (Hargreaves, 1982, p. 67)

At the same time, the new comprehensive schools suffered from being burdened with a bewildering array of ambitious social objectives. We allowed the campaign to be 'taken over' by a number of well-meaning reformers with their own social agenda.

In the early days of the 1964-70 Wilson Government,

many genuinely believed that a capitalist society could be *reformed*, and that the new comprehensive schools would be a peaceful means of achieving greater social equality – greater social equality in the sense that working-class children would be able to move into ‘white-collar’ occupations or move on to higher education. Writing in 1965, for example, leading sociologist A.H. Halsey could begin a *New Society* article with the ringing declaration:

*Some people, and I am one, want to use education as an instrument in pursuit of an egalitarian society. We tend to favour comprehensive schools, to be against the public schools, and to support the expansion of higher education. (Halsey, 1965, p. 13)*

Other social reformers believed in the idea of the ‘social mix’ – the theory which anticipated the steady amelioration of social class differences and tensions through pupils’ experience of ‘social mixing’ in a new comprehensive school. This very narrow view of egalitarianism could be found in one of Circular 10/65’s definitions of a comprehensive school:

*A comprehensive school aims to establish a school community in which pupils over the whole ability range and with differing interests and backgrounds can be encouraged to mix with each other, gaining stimulus from the contacts and learning tolerance and understanding in the process. (DES, 1965, p. 8)*

By the end of the 1960s, both Caroline and Brian Simon were genuinely worried by the new emphasis on what many described as ‘social engineering’.

It is, of course, true that the very successful Holland Park Comprehensive School, as described by Melissa Benn in her article ‘Child of a dream’ in the *Education Guardian* (30 January 2001) had ‘a wonderful and extraordinary mix of class, nationality and religion’ in the 1960s; but there were other ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘community’ comprehensives which could *not* boast of such a wonderful ‘mix’ and they were also very successful.

Apart from any other considerations, the emphasis on promoting ‘social equality’ or ‘social cohesion’ in a capitalist society had the undesirable, if not entirely unexpected, effect of setting up useful targets for the enemies of reform to aim at. It was easy to claim, as did R.R. Pedley, at that time Headteacher of St Dunstan’s College in London, in the first Black Paper *Fight for Education*, published in March 1969, that supporters of comprehensive reorganisation were using schools ‘directly as tools to achieve *social and political* objectives’. It was easy to ridicule the concept of the ‘social mix’, where ‘the Duke lies down with the docker and the Marquis and the milkman are as one’ (Pedley, 1969, p. 47).

None of this seems to me to be *central* to the comprehensive school ideal. *Half Way There*, the major report on the British comprehensive school reform, that Caroline co-authored with Brian Simon and which was first published in 1970, contains the important statement: ‘A comprehensive school is *not* a *social* experiment; it is an *educational* reform’ (Benn & Simon, 1970, p. 64). In other words, it might be very exciting and even beneficial if a comprehensive school has a genuine ‘social mix’; but it is *not* a *sine qua non* of a school’s success. What *really* matters is developing the right teaching strategies in order to enable every child in the school to be successful and fulfilled.

A third mistake we made was in not paying sufficient attention to the need for major curriculum reform. In the early days of reorganisation, few campaigners argued that the new comprehensive school might require a new *comprehensive* or *whole-school* curriculum. Significantly Circular 10/65 had nothing to say about curriculum or assessment. In the absence of a nationwide curriculum debate about the *content* of secondary schooling, comprehensive reorganisation was promoted as primarily an *institutional* reform – as if comprehensive schools were obviously ‘a good thing’ *in themselves*. Writing at the end of the 1960s, politics lecturer Anthony Arblaster commented on the existence of ‘a general complacency’ regarding issues of curriculum and pedagogy:

*The long fight over comprehensive secondary education and virtually all the discussion and activity provoked by the series of official reports – Plowden on primary, Newsam on secondary and Robbins on higher education – has tended to revolve around questions of organisation and structure, principles of selection, equality of opportunity, numerical expansion, standards of teaching and accommodation, and so on. ... There has been no comparable re-examination of the content of secondary education. (Arblaster, 1970, p. 49)*

All this meant that for many years, the majority of the new comprehensive schools simply attempted to assimilate the two existing curriculum traditions handed down from the grammar and secondary modern schools.

To be fair, there was *no* blueprint for a successful comprehensive school in the 1960s; and until the raising of the school leaving-age to sixteen in 1972/73, it was not even accepted that all youngsters were *entitled* to a full *five years* of secondary education. Sadly, the Schools Council, established in 1964 and potentially an important agent for curriculum planning and development, failed to provide any kind of basis for a whole-school entitlement curriculum for the new comprehensives. As late as 1973, Denis Lawton could lament both the ‘elitist mentality’ inspired by ‘the post-war tripartite system’ and ‘the consistent failure to re-think the curriculum and plan a programme which would be appropriate for universal secondary education’ (Lawton, 1973, p. 101).

Finally, we made the mistake of underestimating the strength of our critics and opponents, many of whom developed an extraordinary talent for securing the support of the media. A.E. (Tony) Dyson, co-editor (with Brian Cox) of the first three Black Papers (Cox & Dyson 1969a; 1969b; 1970), died from leukaemia on 30 July this year (2002). In a somewhat belated appreciation of his life and work published in *The Guardian* on 10 September, the paper’s education correspondent, Wendy Berliner, pointed out that after eighteen years of continuous Conservative rule under Margaret Thatcher and John Major and then five years of a New Labour administration led by Tony Blair, Dyson lived long enough to see many of the things for which he campaigned become official government policy:

- a definite end to ‘progressive’, child-centred learning in the primary school;
- the drive to improve standards in schools dominated by tests and targets;
- a reversal of official government support for the



comprehensive school.

### Comprehensive Success Story

Despite all the initial problems, the story of the British comprehensive school has undoubtedly been one of success – and particularly in *rural* areas. I am not therefore prepared to begin an analysis of future prospects from a *defensive* position.

Both Conservative and New Labour governments have been very keen to stress that all secondary schools should be judged by the percentage of their Year 11 students gaining five or more GCSE passes at Grades A\* to C. So, whatever reservations one might have about this national obsession with the five A\* to C benchmark, it seems fair to point out that there has, in fact, been a pretty remarkable increase in the proportion of entries achieving these ‘top’ grades or their equivalent since comprehensive schooling became national policy in the mid-1960s. In 1962/63, the proportion was just 16 per cent; by the year 2001, this had risen to around 50 per cent. In 1970, 47 per cent of students left secondary school at sixteen with no qualifications whatsoever; by 2001, this figure had fallen to just 5 per cent (DfES, 2002, p. 5).

As far as GCSE Advanced levels are concerned (again a narrow criterion of ‘success’), the percentage of eighteen-year-olds passing in at least two subjects has risen since the early 1980s from 14 to around 30 per cent; and this year (2002), the proportion of A-level entries achieving at least an E grade or higher has risen by 4.5 percentage points to 94.3 per cent, the steepest rise in the exam’s 51-year history.

When I went to university in 1962, I was part of just 4.5 per cent of my age-group (Layard, King and Moser, 1969, p. 24); today the figure for participation in higher education is over 40 per cent, and it is hoped that by the end of the decade, it will be as high as 50 per cent.

So why, then, all the talk of ‘failure’ and ‘crisis’? Here we are talking about an *urban* phenomenon – and about a situation affecting primarily the large *urban* conglomerations. Many of the national journalists who write about ‘comprehensive failure’ are based in London; and the arguments put forward by Tim Brighouse in his Caroline Benn/Brian Simon Memorial Lecture delivered on the 28 September this year (2002) were based very much on Professor Brighouse’s own bruising experience in Birmingham. Obviously, I can’t avoid spending a large part of this Lecture dealing with the Brighouse ‘blueprint’ for the comprehensive school. Which also means looking at the issue of ‘collegiates’ as a strategy for coping with the steep pecking order of schools that exists in our large conurbations.

### A Critical Analysis of the Brighouse Plan for ‘Collegiates’

Since I began thinking about the contents of this Lecture, we have had news of the sudden and largely unexpected resignation of Estelle Morris as Secretary of State for Education (on 23 October 2002). A number of political and administrative factors have been highlighted in the press to account for this extraordinary event:

- incompetent handling of the A-level exams ‘fiasco’, leading to the forced ‘resignation’ of Sir William Stubbs as chairperson of the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority);

- the Government’s failure to meet its literacy and numeracy targets for eleven-year-olds;
- the problem of the failure of the Criminal Records Bureau to complete background checks on all new teachers by the start of the Autumn Term in the wake of the Soham murders;
- an inept intervention in the affair of the two students at Glyn Technology School in Epsom, Surrey, expelled after plaguing a PE teacher with death threats and then allowed back into school after consideration of the case by an appeals panel;
- a controversial decision to enhance the role of classroom assistants in primary schools.

What was *not* given any prominence in the press and on radio or television was the chaos and uncertainty surrounding secondary admissions and catchment areas, particularly in large cities, and the whole question of choice and selection.

Estelle Morris has left us with independent schools, over 160 grammar schools, church and faith schools, specialist schools, *advanced* specialist schools, beacon schools, city academies, city technology colleges, ‘fresh start’ schools, ‘contract’ schools – in addition to ‘ordinary’ comprehensives and secondary moderns. No wonder many parents are confused!

A recent article in *The Times Educational Supplement*, headed ‘Clarke doubts Morris vision for secondaries’ (1 November 2002), told us that Charles Clarke (Estelle Morris’s successor as Education Secretary) had ‘walked into controversy’ by ‘questioning the Government plans for a complicated hierarchy of secondary schools’. In a speech in Oxford to around 200 headteachers, Clarke had apparently raised doubts about the proposed structure for secondary schools, described by Estelle Morris as a ‘ladder’ and by Tony Blair as an ‘escalator’. (Officials at the DfES later confirmed that at least one category, the beacon school, was being phased out; in future, the best secondaries would be labelled ‘advanced’ schools.) This may well be true; but it hardly seems to represent a major inroad into the Government’s programme for diversity and specialisation.

The Brighouse Lecture made a big point of accepting Sir Peter Newsom’s thesis that in London and the other great conurbations, the comprehensive ideal has been an illusion – ‘a cruel deception where all concerned have tended to collude in a game of the emperor’s clothes’ (Brighouse, 2002, p. 21). In an important lecture delivered to the Secondary Heads Association Conference on 28 June 2002, Sir Peter argued that, in terms of their intake, English secondary schools can be divided, with some degree of overlap between them, into *EIGHT* categories:

- 1 super-selective (independent or state grammar) schools
- 2 selective (independent or state grammar) schools
- 3 comprehensive (plus) schools
- 4 comprehensive schools
- 5 comprehensive (minus) schools
- 6 secondary modern schools
- 7 secondary modern (minus) schools
- 8 other’ secondary or sub-secondary modern schools

It is, of course, the last three categories (6, 7 and 8) which give particular cause for concern. In Sir Peter’s method of classification, secondary modern schools are those schools

which rarely recruit any of the 'top' 25 per cent of the ability range. Secondary modern (minus) schools have *no* pupils in the 'top' 25 per cent of the ability range and only some 10 to 15 per cent of their intake in the next 25 per cent. Category 8 embraces those schools which consistently have *no* applicants in the 'top' 25 per cent of the ability range, which have 10 per cent or less in the next 25 per cent and, more significantly, have the remainder of their annual intake heavily weighted towards the lower parts of the 'bottom' 50 per cent. Sir Peter does not provide figures for each of his categories; but a CASE pamphlet published in July last year (2001) pointed out that if there are 141,387 pupils attending English grammar schools, there must be around 5 to 600,000 pupils attending some form of secondary modern. And that figure takes no account of all those schools affected by neighbouring specialist schools, city academies and city technology colleges.

It is against this sad background that Professor Brighouse puts forward his plan for secondary 'collegiates', a plan, coincidentally, which bears some similarities with the proposals for the post-primary years in Northern Ireland put forward by the Burns Report published in October 2001 (DENI, 2001).

Of course, the concept of 'collegiates' covers a wide variety of partnership schemes. In an article published in *The Times Educational Supplement* on 4 October 2002 (Brighouse, 2002), Professor Brighouse outlined the details of one, albeit limited, version. At the age of eleven, choice of secondary education would involve both a school and a collegiate. Modest timetable alignment would ensure THREE essentials:

- some key staff, such as heads of department, would be free at the same time each week, and all staff would share the five 'professional development' days;
- three or four agreed 'collegiate' days or weeks would allow intensive in-depth shared learning for pupils belonging to the collegiate;
- the time both *before* and *after* school could form the basis of the collegiate curriculum making maximum use of advances in the key learning and communication technologies.

The problem with all this is that I'm not convinced it will make any difference to the whole question of parental preference. Middle-class parents will still opt for the 'successful' schools which boast an élite of pupils drawn from the 'best' eleven-year-old performers in standardised tests. Nor can I see why independent schools or selective schools or the 'top' comprehensives would wish to enter into partnership with other schools. Apart from any other considerations, no school would wish to sacrifice its position in the all-important league tables based on GCSE results ... unless, of course, we moved over to a system of league tables of 'collegiates'.

### What of the Future?

In a somewhat depressing article published in *New Statesman* on 14 October 2002 (Beckett, 2002), the journalist Francis Beckett argued that 'there are just a few months left, at most, for all those who want to save the ideal of a comprehensive secondary school system – an ideal once as central to what Labour is about as the National Health Service.' I feel it would be a betrayal of everything Caroline Benn stood for to abandon the ideal of

the free-standing community comprehensive school – even in tough (or 'challenging') urban areas, though I accept this would mean some schools receiving preferential treatment in the form of extra staff and resources. Caroline and Brian Simon enjoyed one great advantage in the late 1950s and early 1960s: they could look forward to the election of a Labour government committed, at least in theory, to the comprehensive ideal. That, sadly, is no longer true today.

But if we refuse to be defeatist, we can at least go on campaigning for what we believe in and try to persuade parents and local politicians that the present system of secondary diversity is far worse than the divided system of the post-war period and will ultimately lead to a sub-standard education for thousands of youngsters. Wales and Scotland have turned their back on many of New Labour's gimmicks. Why does England have to be different?

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# Diversity and Admissions to English Secondary Schools

PETER NEWSAM

This article is an edited version of a talk given by Sir Peter Newsam at the Conference of the Secondary Heads Association, 28 June 2002.

The most important determinant of the results achieved by a secondary school is the nature of its pupil intake. That, in turn, affects the ethos of the school and its attraction for 'knowledgeable' parents. In England, the names given to secondary schools (grammar, high school, community school and so on) do not always accurately reflect the characteristics of their intakes. In parts of Yorkshire, for example, schools with 'Grammar' in their title (e.g. Tadcaster Grammar School) have been comprehensive schools for over 40 years. Elsewhere, many schools, often described by themselves and others as 'comprehensive' are nothing of the kind.

Analysed in terms of their intake, English secondary schools can be divided, with some degree of overlap between them, into eight categories. Each category is defined in terms of the proportion of its intake falling within the ability range of the pupil population in the school's local education authority area; so far as that ability range can be measured by tests taken at or just before the age of entry to secondary school.

**Category 1:** Schools which admit children almost entirely from within the top 10% of the ability range at the age of entry.

There is no recognised name for schools of this kind which naturally dominate the top of any league table. The category includes a fairly small proportion of the total number of independent secondary schools (such as Westminster or Manchester Grammar School) and an equally small proportion of the 166 designated grammar schools. A school of this kind may reasonably be described as a super-selective (independent or state grammar) school.

**Category 2:** Schools which admit almost entirely from within the top 25% of the ability range, including some pupils from the top 10%.

The designated grammar schools not included in category 1 above nearly all fall within this category, though some, in order to fill the places they have available, now take entrants within the top 40% of the ability range. A number of independent schools (day and boarding) fall within this category. (The remaining independent secondary schools belong to one or other of the six categories below and are not further considered.)

A school in category 2 may be described as a selective (independent or state grammar) school.

**Category 3:** Schools which take some children of all abilities but whose intake is heavily concentrated in the top 50% of the ability range.

These schools are highly sought after by parents. They achieve an intake of this kind for one or more of the following reasons: they may be located in a particularly

favourable area (e.g. Harrogate Grammar – now a comprehensive – school); they may be partially selective (e.g. Dame Alice Owens in Herts, admitting 30% of its intake on grounds of ability, under S.100 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998); or they may, as is the case with some denominational schools, exist in an area where there are no selective (category 1 or 2) denominational schools and, on faith grounds, parents of children who could, on financial and ability grounds, gain entry to non-denominational schools in categories 1 and 2 prefer not to apply to them (e.g. London Oratory RC, Lady Margaret C of E in London). Many of the schools in this category, including all those mentioned above, are ex-Grammar schools. The notion that schools such as these were all 'destroyed' at some point in the past is wholly mistaken. With few exceptions, they still exist, have grown larger and are highly successful.

As the intake of this important and clearly identifiable group of schools includes at least some children in the lower ability percentiles a school of this kind can be described as a comprehensive (plus) school.

**Category 4:** Schools whose intake is balanced in the sense of including about the same proportion of its intake in each percentile of the ability range at entry.

Traditionally, a school of this kind was developed to replace schools in categories 1, 2 and 6 (secondary modern) below in the same area. Examples of such schools occur in some urban areas but are most easily found in rural areas (e.g. in North Yorkshire, Richmond Boys and Richmond Girls Grammar schools were amalgamated with Richmond County School to form the present Richmond Comprehensive School). In these cases (as in the examples in category 3 above), it hardly makes sense to describe the grammar schools as having been 'destroyed' unless one adds that the secondary modern school element, with three times as many pupils was also simultaneously 'destroyed'.

There is no evidence to suggest that, where schools of this kind exist, they are not well-regarded by parents and, though there will always be exceptions, achieving satisfactory results or better.

A school which replaces grammar and secondary modern schools in an area and whose intake is unaffected by that of schools in categories 1-3 conforms to the original design of (and is correctly described as) a comprehensive school.

**Category 5:** Schools which recruit children of all abilities but have few (say 10%) in the top 25% of the ability range.

This is a common type of school in urban areas. The 10% or so of pupils in the top 25% rarely include any capable of entering schools in category 1 above. These schools may



strive (by means of a dynamic new head or by acquiring specialist status) to join category 4 above but, if an increasing proportion of children in the top 25% ability range are, for any reason, selected into schools in categories 1-4, they are at risk of moving into category 6 below.

A school of this kind is very different from those in category 3 and is sometimes known as a 'creamed' comprehensive. As the school takes at least some children of all abilities, though few of the most able, it may reasonably be described as a comprehensive (minus) school.

**Category 6:** Schools which do not recruit, other than rarely, any of the top 25% (or wherever the selective standard is held to reside) of the ability range.

Schools of this kind occur for one or both of two reasons. Either because schools in one of the higher categories (notably 1, 2 and 3) have recruited all the children in the top 25% ability range and/or, as in some difficult areas with transient populations, because the output of the local primary school has produced only a tiny proportion of pupils achieving that standard at the age of entry.

If the remaining 75% of the ability range are fairly evenly spread throughout a school's intake, such a school is properly described (though often publicly known by titles such as 'high school') as a secondary modern school.

**Category 7:** Schools which have *no* pupils in the top 25% of the ability range and only some 10-15% of the intake in the next 25%.

Such schools are to be found in a number of areas where an increasing proportion of children in the top 50% of the ability range are attracted to schools in categories 3-6 above (by the enlargement of the intakes to such schools, successful efforts to enhance their popularity and so on).

A school of this kind may be described as a secondary modern (minus) school.

**Category 8:** Schools which consistently have no applicants in the top 25% and have 10% or less in the next 25% of the ability range and, more significantly, have the remainder of their intake heavily weighted towards the lower parts of the bottom 50%.

So far, there are few of such schools but falling schools rolls in some areas, leading to increased access to schools in other categories, may increase their number while reducing their size.

These schools are effectively sub-secondary modern schools, but such a school might reasonably be given the title, used in the past but now discontinued, of an 'other' secondary school.

It is important to take note of the following points:

- 1 *The intake of one school or category of schools always affects the intake of one or more other schools. This is a matter of arithmetic rather than educational judgement or political opinion. For example, in an area where all the top 25% of the ability range are admitted to one set of schools, the remainder must necessarily be three times as numerous and able to attend only a form of secondary modern school within categories 6-8 (i.e. there is no arithmetical possibility of a comprehensive school).*
- 2 *The language in which schools are described is important. The notion of a 'two tier' secondary system is unhelpful. Secondary schools are far more diverse than that. Categories 1 and 2, for example, so far as ability at entry is concerned, have no pupils in common with those in categories 6-8. These two sets of school therefore sit uneasily in the same league table. Nor is it always clear what the phrase 'the comprehensive system' is intended to denote. There are a number of schools which have intakes which are more or less comprehensive (categories 3-5) and there are some areas (e.g. parts of North Yorkshire) which can fairly be described as comprehensive areas. But there is no comprehensive system in England. Absence of selection to a school (as in categories 6-8) and the development of a comprehensive school (as in categories 3-5) are two entirely different things. A comprehensive system, for example, would be incompatible with the existence of admission arrangements applying in categories 1 and 2 and, for that matter, in 6, 7 and 8. Similar difficulties arise with the concept of 'one size fits all', which does not accurately reflect the widely different characteristics of this country's secondary schools.*
- 3 *The quality of a school and its staff cannot be derived from the category in which that school finds itself placed. There are good and poor schools in each category.*

A classification of the kind set out above is useful for calculating the likely consequences of initiatives affecting the intake of a particular school or set of schools. If, to take an improbable example, it were intended to create more schools in categories 7 and 8 it would be necessary to ensure that, so far as possible, all pupils in the top 50% of the ability range went to schools in categories 3-6. That might be achieved by enlarging one or more of these schools, making them more attractive to parents by giving the schools extra money, encouraging staff to pursue a career there by relieving them of some of the requirements of OFSTED and of the National Curriculum; and so on.

# Research Evidence and Government Policy: the need for a stronger connection

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**JOHN DUNFORD**

This is an edited version of the NFER Council Address given by John Dunford, General Secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, 15 October 2002.

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## Introduction

I want to start by paying tribute to the NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) for the magnificent work it has done for education over the last 56 years since its inception in 1946, the same year, coincidentally, that Peter Scott founded the Wildfowl Trust – now the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust – which happened to be formed on the day that I was born. The NFER shares with the Wildfowl Trust an enviable record of success in its field, illustrated in NFER's case by the 200 sponsored research programmes now undertaken each year. That, more than anything, expresses the confidence of the education service in the work that is done.

I have always regarded NFER as a body that is authoritative, independent and plain-speaking, perhaps the only education research body that seems to do everything in its power to avoid the use of jargon and to ensure that its messages are not just *published* but *widely disseminated* to the education community, the Government and beyond. I believe that NFER is needed now more than ever, a view which finds its best expression in the introduction to its Annual Report:

*For all that we 'know' about education and schools there is a great deal that we do not know. Though we live in one of the richest and most privileged parts of the world, with an abundance of human and material resources, we seemingly do not know how to provide a decent education, let alone a high-quality one, for distressingly large numbers of children and young people. We have some schools to which no parent would send their child on the basis of an informed choice. The disparity between our best schools – which can be very good – and our worst schools is one of the highest in the developed world.*

I am grateful to you for the opportunity you have given me to address you today and for the opportunity this has given me to do some thinking – and even some research – to support my long held view that the connection between government policy and research evidence is too often weak and sometimes non-existent. I propose to give you some examples to illustrate recent practice on the part of government and then I will try to explore the reasons why this has been the case and to suggest some ways forward.

## Examples of Recent Policy Initiatives

My first examples are the literacy and numeracy initiatives. I am delighted to see that the NFER is now

evaluating these. But, if we recall the time when they were introduced, I think we would find a rather weak pilot with a narrow focus. There can be little question that the strategies have brought very great benefits, but it seems to me that the main criticism has been the narrow focus of the strategies. Some have regarded this as their main strength, but I worry about the effect on children's learning and the effect on the wider curriculum. It is my firm belief that the gains of the strategies could have been made without the apparent losses in these areas. If we look for the success of the strategies only in the raising of test scores at age 11, then we would find that the strategy has been successful. If, on the other hand, we examine the strategy on a broader front, say on the overall progress made by primary school children in the arts, then it would surely be found wanting.

Even the test scores themselves are open to the criticism that teachers will always teach to the test. This is, after all, what parents expect them to do, but it is not surprising that test scores rise when so much of the focus has been on the test for so many months beforehand. The same was true under the Revised Code in the 19th century when that famous HMI, Matthew Arnold, said that the Revised Code tests were '*a mechanical contrivance in which the teachers are bound to beat us*' and when that equally perceptive HMI, Joshua Fitch, who incidentally was Matthew Arnold's biographer, said that the Revised Code tests were:

*tending to formalize the work of elementary schools, and to render it in some degree lifeless, inelastic and mechanical. Too many teachers narrow their sense of duty to the six Standards, or what they sometimes call the paying subjects. (Report of the Committee of Council on Education, 1864-65)*

My point here is that the literacy and numeracy strategies, necessary as they may have been to raise achievement in the basic subjects in primary schools, were introduced with no research on their wider effects.

My next example is inspection and I raise the question of whether the change to inspection, railroaded in by Kenneth Clarke in 1992 with the introduction of Ofsted, has, on balance, brought greater benefits or greater losses to the education system. I am familiar with Carol Fitz-Gibbon's work on inspection in which she argues persuasively that the sum total of a large number of subjective judgements about lesson quality do not make for an objective assessment of the quality of a school. I am aware too of Philip Hunter's research on examination

results in Staffordshire schools, where he was Chief Education Officer, in the years when they were inspected by Ofsted. Philip found, as he suspected, that, in their inspection years, schools performed worse in external examinations than in the years that they were not inspected. The school's collective eye had been taken off the ball and the focus of staff attention had been too much on Ofsted and not enough on the normal processes of teaching and learning. Again, I make the point that the new system was introduced for *political* reasons and without any basis in educational research.

I hope very much that, under the new Chief Inspector, we shall move to a more defensible objective system of inspection, linked more closely to school self-evaluation, but before we do, let us explore systems in other countries and look at their effectiveness first.

My third example is performance tables, produced first, if you remember, by John Clare in *The Daily Telegraph*, when he caused consternation among independent schools by putting them into four league tables, football-style. Before long, as we know, this was transferred to the state sector and it has become accepted wisdom, if 'wisdom' is the right word, that performance tables, like Ofsted, have raised achievement. But if you look at GCSE results over the period from the mid-1970s to the present day, you will see that they have gone up steadily year after year. They went up on a steep line until 1992, thereafter they continued to rise, but less steeply. One might draw the conclusion, if one was not too fussy about cause and effect, that performance tables and Ofsted had slowed down the rate of school improvement, not speeded it up. I don't want to make too strong a case for this theory or I shall be subject to the same criticisms which I am levelling at the politicians today.

We all know that performance tables create a false impression of the quality of work in schools. What we know far too little about, it seems to me, is the effect of those performance tables on schools, both independent and state, which are not in a position to win the glittering prizes awarded by the media to those at the top of the tree.

From performance tables, I move to performance pay. I have spent more hours than I care to recall and I have acquired more grey hairs than I care to think about in meetings over the last four years about performance pay.

Of the examples I am giving you, I cannot think of a better example of a government initiative that has been introduced with no credible basis in research. Civil servants have their own cash-limited performance pay scheme, but, without any real experience of performance pay systems among the people who were devising it, without any pilot, without any comparable system elsewhere in the public service, and in contrast to the world of business where such schemes were rapidly being dispensed with, we have been saddled with a performance pay system which is already showing signs of wear and tear and which will surely have to be rethought in the next couple of years. I can only express the hope that a new system would be better researched than the one we have now.

My next example is the government's diversity agenda. I am delighted to see that NFER has a research programme on the impact of specialist and faith schools on performance, completed in 2001. My interest, however, is not whether pupil achievement has been raised in

*individual* specialist or faith schools, but whether pupil achievement has been raised in the system as a *whole* as a result of faith and specialist schools in their localities. There are plenty of people, usually with a vested interest, prepared to tell us how well specialist schools are doing and I accept this. Many SHA members work in specialist schools and have worked very hard to raise money for specialist status. They welcome the additional funding thus provided. But what effect has this had on the school next door and on the other schools in the town? I know of no research on this.

We do know from Ofsted that the obligation on specialist schools to work in collaboration with other schools is the weakest part of the specialist schools agenda, but I think there is a broader case to be investigated here. NFER has looked at beacon schools, but what of city academies and what of advanced schools, and more fundamentally, what will be the effect of the Government's 'ladder of schools', which will inevitably create not just a two-tier system, but a greater hierarchy of schools, making life more difficult for schools at the bottom of the pile?

At last we have a government that is talking the language of collaboration instead of imposing a culture of competition on the system, but I doubt whether the drivers for collaboration will get into the really difficult areas of admissions, exclusions and performance tables. That is where collaboration needs to take place. It would be interesting to carry out research on the benefits of collaborative projects of this sort, which are already taking place in certain parts of the country.

With a thousand schools already having specialist status, it may be bit late in the day to carry out a research project to see if it's a good idea, but better late than never to compensate for the lack of research at the outset.

My final example is the topical area of examinations and assessment in which NFER has done such valuable work over the years. This is not the place to set out the detailed history of the present crisis, but I know from my involvement in the work of Ron Dearing and the introduction of Curriculum 2000 the extent to which political considerations overrode educational priorities. It has been a sad chapter from which I profoundly hope that politicians will learn the lessons that initiatives must not be introduced too quickly and that they must be thoroughly researched and thoroughly prepared before the first teacher takes the first lesson under any new scheme.

As recently as February this year (2002), however, the Government was producing a Green Paper outlining a new system of qualifications and curriculum without any attention being given to the assessment system that would underpin it.

Unlike many of the previous examples I have given today, assessment is an area where plenty of high quality research is already available to inform government policy making, yet it is an area in which there is more confusion and less clarity than almost any other. The purposes of assessment were laid out by Paul Black in the TGAT Report and it seems that we have forgotten the need to think clearly about the weighting of assessment between the diagnostic, the formative, the summative and the evaluative. So much use is now made of assessment information for evaluative purposes. Not only are the same test results being used to monitor student progress and to



determine their entry qualifications for university and employment, but we are also using these test scores to create spurious league tables of school performance, to provide evidence for teachers' performance pay and to decide whether the government has achieved its national education targets. Greater clarity of purpose in each test must be a major priority.

There are, of course, other ways forward than the present high stakes testing systems at 7, 11, 14, 16, 17 and 18. Instead of using individual national test results aggregated to monitor national progress, why can we not return to the excellent sampling work of the assessment and performance unit, the APU, so wrongly cast aside by the last Government? Why can we not reduce the dependence on A level results for university entrants by using the SATs on which NFER has carried out such valuable research for Peter Lampl?

Why can we not reduce our dependence on traditional external exams by testing straightforward knowledge questions online – just-in-time testing that would greatly reduce the burden on individual pupils at certain times of year? Why can we not rely more on the professional judgement of teachers by using internal assessment systems to complement external examinations? SHA has set out proposals for Chartered Examiners – experienced teachers accredited by the awarding bodies to uphold national standards – who would carry out and supervise internal assessment in a way that would have public confidence and would, I believe, bring greater reliability to examination grades. I was delighted to hear Ken Boston's support for this at the QCA Annual Conference last week. It is surely an idea whose time has come. So let us get the research under way.

### **Conclusion and Prospects for the Future**

Why, then, is government policy so often introduced without any basis in research? Governments, of course, are always in a hurry. They have three time scales – immediately, next year, and after the next election.

They too often follow Randolph Churchill's recipe for political action: *'if at first you don't succeed, shuffle the cards and try again'*.

Priorities tend to be political, rather than educational. The introduction of Ofsted as a way of being seen to deliver John Major's Citizen's Charter was a classic example of this.

The growth in central control of education seems to have operated as a negative factor, with national political priorities paramount. But central control should surely operate as a positive factor, since national governments are in a much better position to fund research and set sensible timescales than local or school-based initiatives on their own.

This year's OECD Report on education research in England states that the government's commitment to education research is 'remarkable', especially when contrasted with other countries. But the OECD visitors noted that it pales when compared to the levels of R and D

investment in other knowledge industries. Education is the Cinderella at the research ball.

QCA has a major role to play in linking curriculum and assessment policy with education research and ensuring that its advice to government is firmly based in research evidence. In recent years, QCA has been palpably weak in this area.

Ofsted has been through a period when its publications and pronouncements have too often been rooted in a polemic rather than evidence. Fortunately, that period is now ended. With its huge database, Ofsted has a unique role to play in linking policy and evidence, as HMI did for many years up to 1992.

In our books on the modern inspectorate, Stuart Maclure and I both cited the removal of HMI from the Department of Education policy-making process as the greatest loss of the move to Ofsted in 1992. Prior to that, no policy discussion took place in the Department between middle ranking civil servants without HMI Staff Inspectors being present. No group of senior civil servants discussed policy development without input from a Chief Inspector. My own first hand observation of the present DFES is that far too much policy development takes place without professional input, and especially without that breadth of professional expertise, up to date evidence and research knowledge that used to reside in HMI. The School Effectiveness Unit, I am afraid, is no match for that.

What of the outlook? Like all head teachers, I am an eternal optimist, although a proper basis of evidence and research would doubtless demonstrate that pessimism would be a more sensible approach. At least I would not so often be disappointed.

But there are good signs. First, the appointments of David Hopkins as Head of the School Effectiveness Unit and Peter Housden as Director-General of Schools are, I believe, beginning to turn around the supertanker of Department ways of working. The Pathfinder Projects, for example, particularly in relation to teacher workload and workforce re-modelling, will provide a good basis in evidence for the way forward for schools as a whole.

The Innovation Unit, to be headed by Mike Gibbons, an innovative head himself, will encourage creativity and innovation in schools and will do much to show what works, even when it does not fit some politically planned stereotype.

The National College for School Leadership has placed a high priority on research. Its first fellowships have already provided some useful evidence-based work and its Networked Learning Communities will, I believe, become models of good practice.

The Teacher Training Agency, the General Teaching Council, and other bodies too, are promoting research among teachers themselves in a way that can only be good for the profession and thus good for the students we serve.

But NFER remains the leader in the field and we look to this body to continue its excellent work on which so much of the success of our educational system depends.

# Curriculum Innovation: learning from the Queensland Project

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**MIKE PETERS**

Mike Peters is Head of English in a London secondary school and an Associate Lecturer at the Open University. In this article he looks at some of the lessons to be learned from the innovative New Basics Project in Queensland, Australia.

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Whatever faults may be found with the present UK Government's educational policies, no-one can accuse it of neglecting curriculum reform. A revised National Curriculum, literacy and numeracy hours in primary schools and the Key Stage 3 Strategy in the secondary sector are, to name just a few of the more obvious examples, all evidence of a commitment to changing and improving the teaching and learning that goes on in the country's classrooms.

Critical concerns and questions about the reforms do, however, remain and are increasingly being voiced. Ofsted, for example, has recently warned of 'a serious narrowing of the primary curriculum', whilst the previous Education Secretary, Estelle Morris, wondered how she could get across the message to teachers that creativity is valued. Maths teaching is to be reformed to make it more relevant and one of the major components of the Strategy – whole-class teaching methods – has been criticised by researchers at Exeter University for disadvantaging 'under-achieving boys'. Standardised regular assessment is also coming under fire, with a Kings College research team arguing that the key stage tests are 'useless as a measure of educational progress'.

Cumulatively, the increasing number of questions and criticisms that are being expressed revolve around the issue of whether the reforms that have been introduced over the last few years will enable schools to properly meet the challenging demands of the 21st century. Significantly (and now, in retrospect, unfortunately) references in the 1999 National Curriculum document to the future – for example, to changing work patterns and the complex skills' requirements of the developing knowledge economy – are minimal to non-existent.

No wonder then that in this questioning environment, with even the Government establishing an Innovation Unit to explore and encourage different ways of doing things, schools are experimenting with the curriculum, recognising that 'the daily grind of unconnected hour long lessons is not working' (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 20 July 2002).

## Alternative Models

Where, however, can UK educationalists look for alternative models? In this country there is the Royal Society of Arts' Opening Minds initiative, which sets out a 'competence framework' that crosses traditional subject boundaries and which ten schools are currently piloting.

And across the other side of the world, in Queensland, Australia, the New Basics Project is being trialled by 59 primary and secondary schools – with 38 in Phase 1 due for completion next year and 21 in Phase 2 due for completion in 2004.

Based on a detailed research study begun in 1997 and shaped through consultation with a wide range of stakeholders (including students and parents), the New Basics Project is designed not to replace the old basics – approximately 50% of time is still devoted to traditional learning – but to provide, in the words of Queensland Education Minister, Ann Bligh, 'an integrated framework for curriculum, teaching and assessment that equips students for the future'.

Key features of the Project are in striking contrast to the current UK approach. Rather than laying out sets of discipline-based teaching objectives, the starting point of the Queensland strategy comprises four clusters of trans-disciplinary practices, skills and knowledges which students need to survive in the new conditions. One cluster – Life Pathways – is focused on preparing for personal and vocational development. Another cluster – Multi-literacies – refers to 'the acquisition of new media knowledge and skills'. And the Active Citizenship and Environments and Technologies clusters concentrate on enabling students to become engaged with the social, political and economic issues around them and to understand how scientific knowledge may be applied in 'real world' contexts.

The radicalism of the New Basics Strategy is apparent not only, however, by comparison with the add-on cross-curricular strands of the English National Curriculum but also by the central position given to extended assessment – tasks not tests. Rather than being detached from teaching and learning – symptomatically tacked on at the end of the National Curriculum document – assessment, in which are called Rich Tasks, is at the heart of the Queensland initiative. Undertaken at key points in a student's career, these centrally-produced and carefully detailed activities, with accompanying performance-criteria, provide opportunities for children to publicly demonstrate the knowledge and expertise which they have acquired; information obtained from conventional tests seems thin by comparison. Thus, for one Rich Task, 'students will identify a client's needs and take these and other factors into account in preparing a design brief for a structure'. Or for another Task, students 'will identify and provide a detailed analysis of an export opportunity and take

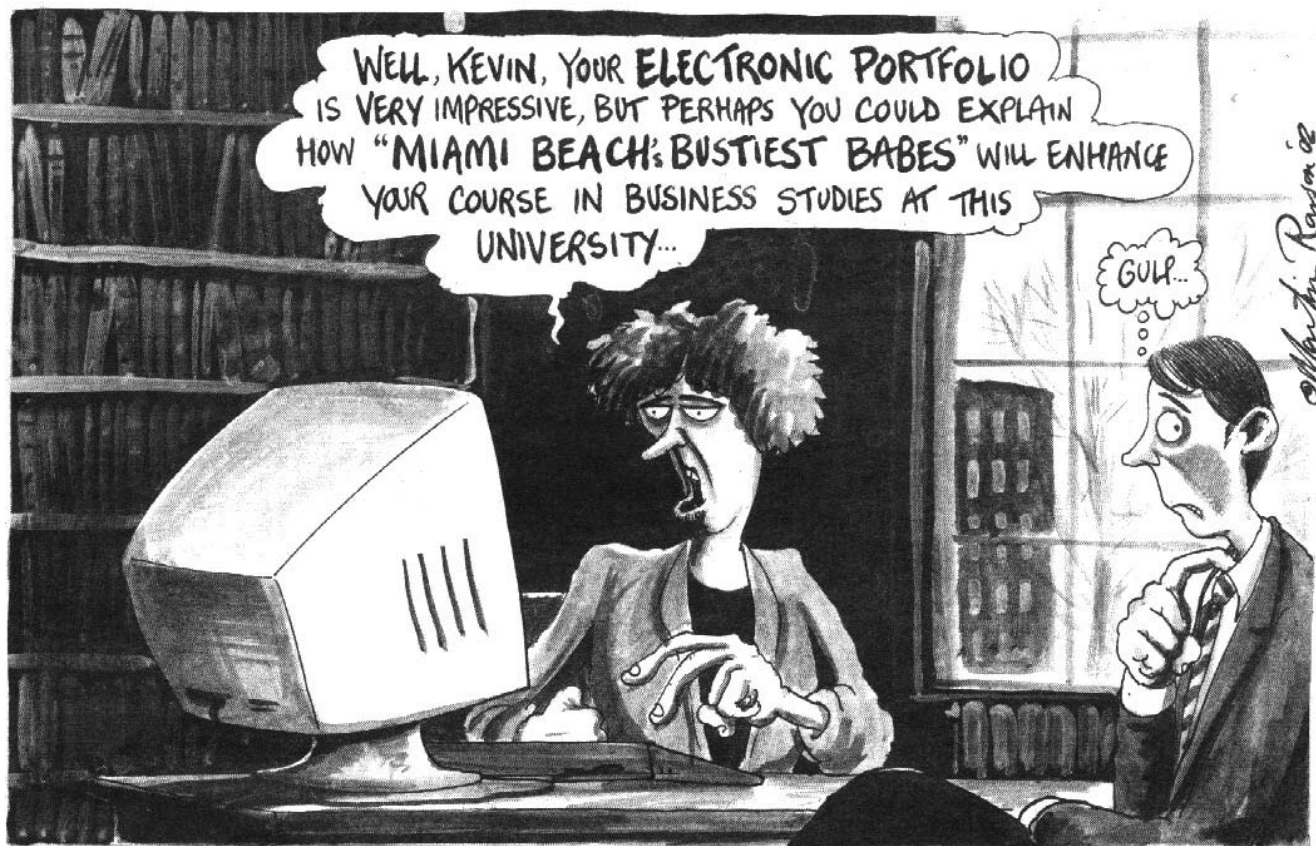
advantage of their skills in a language other than English to present a talk and supporting literature to promote this opportunity to different buyers and backers'. Clearly, 'rich' is not a misnomer.

Such tasks – described by Gabrielle Masters (a Director of the Queensland Strategy) as 'quirky' to 'suit the needs and talents of bright students' – require team-working, problem-solving and critical-thinking skills and have a strong 'real-world' connection. Given the concerns about the impact of educational reforms in English schools referred to earlier, the Queensland approach looks to have considerable appeal, possessing, in particular, the potential both to tap into and develop pupils' creativity as well as to educate citizens and workers for a rapidly changing society. Instead of a curriculum fragmented by a multiplicity of decontextualised objectives – see the Key Stage 3 core-subjects' Framework documents for an extreme example of objectives' overload – and by the sterile division between the academic and vocational, the New Basics model enables coherent, activity-based, practically-focused and purposeful teaching and learning – enables, to use the language of the Australian Project,

'productive pedagogies'. Students' high achievement can be secured through regular moderation and monitoring of their work and, most importantly, given the present 'top-down' model of teacher-training, teachers have the opportunity and authority to plan and operate in cross-curricular teams, thus making professional development much more than the occasional Inset Day.

### Conclusion

No doubt the trials of the Queensland Strategy, which are currently underway, will throw up problems and limitations. However, as it becomes increasingly apparent that the English curriculum reforms of recent years may not deliver all that was promised, much can be gained from looking to alternative approaches and models. New Basics makes sense because it is explicitly future-orientated, includes challenging and rigorously applied standards, holds schools accountable, and, most importantly, is capable of genuinely engaging students and teachers. It may not have all the answers but it certainly has a few.



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# The ISED Project: developing emotional literacy and social justice

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**BRIAN MATTHEWS**

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Education in large parts of Britain has lost its way. The emphasis on cognitive knowledge in order to 'improve the competitiveness of Britain' has proceeded apace. Wisdom and much educational knowledge have been swept aside or forgotten in the narrow pursuit of repetitious 'learning'. The Tories knew what they were doing in introducing the National Curriculum and other measures to control education. They wished to produce a society where learning of restricted knowledge was valued rather than wisdom, the development of social values and a caring society. The latter, of course, relies on the development of the socially and emotionally literate person who can enter into dialogue about what it means to value diverse groups in society for their difference. In other words, a commitment to social justice. I use this term in the sense that to promote social justice one must have 'voices of representation' (Young, 1990) where groups in society can say what they see as their needs, and take part in political debate. In order for this to happen, others, especially those in dominant groups, need to be able to listen and to empathise, to understand each other and enter into genuine dialogue. This is part of what it means to be 'emotionally literate'.

It appears that New Labour doesn't understand how its policies are so detrimental to a vision of society that values a *social* agenda. Yet, surely, this is the sort of society that educators should work to make more possible? The ISED Project was set up to find ways of promoting the social and emotional development of pupils, and to contribute to citizenship. Although developed in science, the processes developed are applicable to many subject areas.

## **Background**

I have been convinced of the importance of co-education and of finding ways of developing understanding between boys and girls as this is a major way of increasing social justice (Matthews and Sweeney, 1997; Matthews, 1998). I set up the *Improving Science and Emotional Development* (ISED) Project [1] with three teachers in two typical London comprehensive schools. The Project has developed techniques that can be applied to many subjects, although they were developed in science lessons.

In order to help secondary pupils to develop their social and emotional skills, we felt that it was important to situate these skills within the context of normal subject schooling. One reason is that this is where pupils spend most of their time. The second is that the cognitive, social and emotional are all intertwined. One aspect of promoting

development in these areas is to acknowledge this, and to find ways of enhancing progress. With the present emphasis on academic development, a focus on the social and emotional becomes even more vital.

Lastly, science is a natural area for such work. Contrary to popular opinion, it is inherently a social activity. Science incorporates imagination, creativity and social and political values. If these are to be valued, our education system needs to change. To develop social and emotional understanding in science lessons could give three for the price of one: (i) enhancing greater interest in, and understanding of, the nature of science; (ii) developing positive methods of communication and so getting along with people, and feeling good, as well, and (iii) maintaining academic success.

Clearly though, for pupils to progress emotionally they need to gain an understanding of each other across gender divides. Hence co-educational schools, where the other sex is present to talk to, provides the greater chance to enhance social and emotional development. This is because it is possible to engage pupils in their emotions, so there is a possibility they may internalise their emotional interplay and therefore change. Hence dialogue and the ensuing interaction is seen as central to helping pupils develop their sense of 'self' and 'other'.

## **How This is Done in the Classroom**

The overall theme is for pupils to work in mixed sex groups, self-monitor and make written comments on their cognitive and social interactions. They then have both aspects of development on the agenda and can discuss issues, engage their emotions, and so, hopefully, develop.

These procedures are designed to legitimate pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher discussions around social and emotional issues as well as cognitive ones. In essence, we are trying to get pupils to develop a social coherence based on accepting (a) each other, and (b) differences. They need to value each other for those differences.

## **Summary of results**

- Pupils learn to get on with each other, but they do not find it easy
- The boys and girls talk more evenly to each other
- They develop socially and understand each other more
- They feel more confident about working with the same and other sex
- They support each other in their learning
- They think that it is important that they learn together

- They enjoy science (more)

Here are some illustrative quotes:

*'Sometimes it [group work in science] makes you get on better with people but sometimes they disagree but I think that it is good for girls to work with boys and boys to work with girls because it will probably help you to understand the other sex and race' (girl).*

*'You get to know people who I never worked with [until we did group work]' (boy).*

*'... it's better to work in groups, because you learn more when you work with other people' (girl).*

*'Very important because other people's views matter just as much as yours' (girl).*

*'[You can learn to] listen to older people who have more experience' (boy).*

*'I think that in life it is very important because as we grow we will come across many different people and it's good to get along with them at an early age.' (boy).*

### Conclusion

This project was for only a year. Even so, the research is producing strong evidence for promoting the social and

emotional development of pupils. By seeing the complexity of the world (social, emotional and cognitive) they can come to understand and develop their own complexities. We are certain that there is potential for progress, and developing some of the approaches of the research could counter some of the worst aspects of the present educational policies.

For a FREE copy of the full ISED report please contact Brian Matthews, Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths College, Lewisham Way, New Cross, London SE14 6NW, United Kingdom (b.matthews@gold.ac.uk) giving your full postal address so that a copy can be sent to you.

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### Note

- [1] This research is funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation and Goldsmiths College.

# Teaching Assistants: whose definition?

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ANNABELLE DIXON

In this article Annabelle Dixon, joint Editor of *FORUM*, looks at some of the issues involved in enhancing the role of classroom assistants.

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If there are some doctors who no longer practise medicine but have now taken up work as ward orderlies it is not yet a matter of general knowledge and the chances are that there are probably very few of them. However, the number of ex-teachers who have now become classroom assistants is rising all the time and it is no longer a matter of surprise to meet them in schools. What are the pressures that are forcing these professionals out of their 'proper' jobs and into ones that are seen as comparatively lowly and certainly ill paid? What are the attractions that draw them to such work and are seemingly not to be found in being classroom teachers? It would be a matter of public debate, let alone public concern, if as many doctors departed from their posts, so why has this phenomenon not been taken more seriously? At a time when the government is finally admitting uneasiness about teacher retention, the two things might usefully be considered as having a possible relationship.

What should give pause for thought is that when interviewed, these ex-teachers nearly always say that it's job satisfaction, and they are now able to do the kind of things and help just those children they felt had extra need. To quote one such ex-teacher interviewed by the *Times Educational Supplement* (December 6, 2002) she said 'I am using all the skills I didn't have the opportunity to use when I was a teacher, and I'm doing so many useful things.' The burden of endless administrative work is also unsurprisingly mentioned by them as well as the relentless pressure of tests and league tables, but tellingly, its often the thing they mention second. The real attraction is being able to do those professional activities which they perceive as the real raison d'être of being a teacher.

This is not an unfamiliar tale and its very familiarity means that it has almost ceased to take us aback. Yet if we return to doctors becoming ward orderlies there would be understandable consternation if the reason given by such doctors was because they felt they could practise medicine more effectively in such a role. Doug McAvoy of the NUT also sees the suggested changes in medical terms and has expressed no small unease, saying that he considers it is '...like asking the theatre sister to take over from the brain surgeon'.

What has altered the definition of teaching (as the government defines it) that so many practitioners are feeling such a degree of uneasiness about what they are being asked to do? That they feel they can practise more effectively as classroom assistants? But that role too, is about to become re-defined and may no longer represent the safe haven it once did.

If it has now been officially recognised by the government that teachers have a work overload there is a

refusal to acknowledge that this is not of the teachers' making and that the solution lies elsewhere. The present official demand for administrative data for example, is simply astonishing in its emphasis and detail and is a demand that appears to take precedence over all else. As the *Independent* has it (December 5, 2002) the government culture is one of 'micro-management'. Indeed it seems that it is so important that teachers should undertake this work that it was with some fanfare the government recently announced (October 23rd 2002) the creation of a new kind of classroom assistant; one who, in primary schools particularly, could even relieve the 'burden' for the teacher of actually being before his or her class, by, on occasion, undertaking such apparently inessential and unimportant tasks such as art, drama, music and PE. And what is more important than art, drama, music and PE? The 'freedom' of teachers being able to do the kind of unnecessary paper work which they say constitutes so much of their overload in the first place.

The official message though, is that teachers should be properly grateful for such proffered help and both the *Guardian* Editorial of the day the scheme was announced and a lead article by Professor Robert Salisbury in the *Times Educational Supplement*, shortly afterwards (November 8, 2002) both took this uncritical and simplistic view. Teachers are only too ready to accept help but as other commentators pointed out (*The Independent*, October 23, 2002) it all looks a bit too good to be true.

Teachers have always undertaken lesson planning and marking outside classroom hours so there is a certain faux naïvete about the claim that at last, this is what they will have time to do. What teachers now have to do is produce 'facts' that can be translated into electronic language and in practice much of this free time will be spent producing such information. It is Gradgrind elevated to the age of the computer.

It would be certain that many teachers welcomed the words of the former Education Secretary, Estelle Morris, when she called for a move away '...from the old model of teaching as the transmission of facts and figures towards one which captures the teachers' role as expert practitioner in advanced pedagogy.' Advanced pedagogy is an area which many teachers would not care to define too closely but they know only too well about the 'transmission of facts and figures' even if it's in a context other than their classrooms.

It is not the only reason why the role of classroom assistant is to change and looking closely at the new tasks assigned to them and examining the role they may come to play in the years ahead could give an insight into official forward thinking. It has not escaped several writers,



amongst them Phil Revell (*Guardian*, October 23, 2002) that the newly proposed hierarchy of classroom assistants may be seen as solving more than one long-term problem. There appears to be an intractable problem of teacher retention; the statistics make for sobering reading with nearly three out of five recently trained teachers leaving the profession after six or seven years and a considerable number only going so far as to merely finish their training. The much heralded rise of 12% increase in applications is small beer set against the 60% drop out rate six years or so down the line. Teacher shortage is not a new problem, however, but past attempts to use non-teachers to ease the situation, most notably John Patten's 'Mum's Army' have proved both unpopular and unworkable. Yet one senses that the thinking has not yet gone away; supported by evidence from their own Labour Survey, the government knows that of the 20,000 support staff working in schools, the median educational level is NVQ2 (Clare Dean, *Times Educational Supplement*, October 25, 2002).

In official thinking then, jobs for 'mums' for the most part, and mums who are already housed and live near schools. Amongst them though some that could usefully go further, because it is not classroom assistants that are needed, it is basically teachers. And teachers on the cheap.

Festooned with the familiar language of management, the government are now proposing a 'career' structure for classroom assistants, which, it is not too hard to discern, could certainly lead to 'para-teacher' status. These people would be those most closely involved with helping teachers within the classroom, who would now become 'teaching (sic) assistants or even *senior* teaching assistants although some could become technical assistants or administrative assistants. As the government now sees it, assistants can opt to go down one of three pathways: the organisation and administration route, the behaviour and guidance route or the pedagogical route. It is foreseen that those who opt for the pedagogical route and become senior teaching assistants may be able to undertake a certain amount of supervised classroom teaching and planning, even to the extent of providing cover on occasion. It must, at the time, have seemed a master stroke to those who made this suggestion; no problems with finding and paying for increasingly scarce and expensive supply staff for instance and a blessedly inexpensive solution to the intractable problem of teacher supply. Sold as a package of 'help' no teacher could or should refuse, it must have seemed watertight. Only rather too transparent for many commentators, union leaders and experienced head teachers.

The ladder of 'career' progression is set out with a deceptive simplicity and the actual multiplicity of rungs on ladders could prove an administrative nightmare for schools. To take one ladder, that of teaching assistant, the first rung that of 'personal assistant' to the class teacher who will undertake the kind of tasks covered by anyone who was once called a welfare assistant and will concentrate mainly on purely practical or administrative tasks i.e. everything except working directly with the children. The second rung will be that of junior teaching assistant leading (with appropriate training) to that of senior teaching assistant. This in turn can lead to becoming a 'Specialist Teaching Assistant' and those achieving such giddy heights may find they have equipped themselves with a qualification that means they can use it to count

towards a foundation degree and the upwards and onwards towards Qualified Teacher Status. It is claimed (rather previously as its implementation is not supposed to take place until 2005 with standards and training being developed in 2004) that there is now a national qualifications framework linked to national occupational standards but at present the confusion of awarding bodies (at least eight) and the variously named qualifications they offer, appears to be a very piecemeal and ad hoc kind of framework

An examination of a few of these gives an idea of the current confusion. For example, amongst a range of training opportunities aspiring assistants can earn a Certificate for Supporting Learning and Teaching (Level 2) or a separate one for Literacy and Numeracy Support from one organisation and for an Intermediate or Advanced Award for Learning Assistant from another. They can also go still further gaining an 'Award specialising in Working with Children' (Cross-cultural). Another organisation, Edexcel, awards a BTEC Development Certificate in 'Teaching Assistance' etc etc. The situation is such that the National Employers organisation have announced that they are to meet unions to discuss what a simplified three grade career structure might look like. One area possibly crucial in the opinion of many, to the whole enterprise, will not be discussed – that of pay differentials. At the moment there is a great disparity between schools and local authorities but the average pay seems to be about £6.00 an hour. Any extra money for better qualified staff will not come from central government but will have to come from school employers. There is no doubt teaching assistants are certainly valued by schools and teachers although they don't save much significant time but research seems to show that they don't make that much difference either to what the government actually sees as important, i.e. SATs results. Will more pay be tagged to further qualifications and better school results? At the moment teaching assistants are insufficiently unionised to bring any effective pressure to bear on rates of pay and the attractions of the job are such that there is more competition for assistant posts than there presently are for teaching posts.

The devising of a 'national qualifications framework' seems likely to follow the pattern already set for the B.TECs offered to early years assistants. If so it might well suffer the problems discerned and described by Elise Alexander (*FORUM*, Vol. 44, No. 1 ) and which seem worryingly self-perpetuating. Based on units or modules of disconnected 'information' it will be unlikely to offer students the underlying rationale of child development. Books are already being published for teaching assistants which go into some detail, for example, about how to help the KS1 children with their phonics but with few ideas about helping those who would prefer to look out of the window, except label them as 'special needs'. Some realise that the child's attention should be caught though and one author, who shall remain nameless, suggests that, during a class lesson or discussion, in not too obvious a manner, the assistant should 'wink, nod and smile at the child who is not attending.

A five year old is likely to be transfixed by these adult antics but it may not be the kind of attention that was intended.

Add to that Heather Pinnell's reminder (ATL Report

November 2002) that there is in fact still no actual requirement for teaching assistants to have any qualification and the picture becomes clearer. Most schools rely on the DFE's own Teacher Assistant file (issued in September 2000) for initial training and any courses that the local education authority may put on from time to time. Will schools want to put pressure on their assistants to go for a 'career structure' that will prove rather costly to them in the long run? If there continues to be a willing army out there constituted of 'Mums' it seems there is still a welcome place for you.

Even so, pay differentials are very likely to aggravate inter support and staff relationships within schools and no doubt there will eventually be pressure for more pay from those who are better qualified. Will tasks in schools become strictly demarcated according to 'qualification'? A 'personal assistant' (lowest rank) being prevented from taking small groups of children for reading because she could be seen as taking work away from the support staff member (Intermediate Level 2 GNVQ Teaching Assistant (Literacy))? It is a point raised by Janet Moyles in the ATL publication 'Jills of All Trades' (1997) who considers that these roles will certainly need 'specific definition'.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that amongst those 'mums' who once saw themselves as welfare or classroom assistants, are now very aware that their role has changed and they are not necessarily very comfortable with these changes. For instance, one assistant saw her once valued range of craft skills as no longer being of importance to her school. Tellingly, she said that she was coming to see herself as a 'pretend teacher' and that it was her academic (for which read secretarial) skills that only seemed to matter now. A demand for an extension of these skills is on the way though. In their 'sell' of an extra 50,000 support staff, the government has listed twenty five specific tasks they feel could be left to others rather than teachers. It is an interesting list and one that merits some critical appraisal as some of the suggested tasks beg many questions.

Schools in city areas, and they represent the largest concentration of pupils, often have a considerable multi-cultural intake. At present many welfare tasks are undertaken by those drawn from these communities. The new demands, e.g. 'administering teacher cover', 'bidding for government money' 'writing standard letters' 'collating pupil reports' etc. etc. will not necessarily be easy or possible for those who have English as their second language. The demands also assume a certain level of personal maturity, let alone education. The unspoken assumption seems to be that these teacher assistants, a-k-a 'Mums', are in their forties, probably middle-class, educated at least to Further Education level if not beyond, and will do any job for the love of it. In practice, quite a number are between sixteen and twenty-five and amongst those who leave secondary school without qualifications. Are they going to find it easy to 'administer exams' or 'take charge of work experience students' or 'give personal advice'? (there are some older adults who would find such tasks daunting, too)

For many headteachers the tasks that can be delegated will be very dependent on their school's location and intake. What they really need as Professor Alan Smithers (*Times Educational Supplement*, October 25, 2002) points

out, is simply more teachers. It is true that some jobs can clearly be seen as suitable for delegation e.g. ordering supplies, filing, stocktaking etc. but other tasks, including those mentioned in the previous paragraph, have long been thought of as part of the team-work that goes to make the school function as an organisation and on which they could have some influence. Tedious though some of these tasks may be, they were not unduly complained about in the past. Taking registers and invigilating exams etc. etc. were what went with the job, so what has happened that they are no longer seen in this light? The give-away is in the final two tasks on the government list, namely 'managing pupil data' and 'inputting (sic) pupil data'. In other words an admission that such jobs are presently time-consuming and low level, which suggests that the content may well be of the same nature. It is new tasks such as these and the unbelievable amount of recording and detailed planning and forecasting that teachers have to undertake now that prevents them from doing what they are now supposedly going to be released for – planning and designing 'high-level' lessons. They did that before; they had time to do it before. That is what teachers are trained for and can do. Reducing pupil response and progress into the kind of data that can be translated into numbers is not. The problem with teacher 'work overload' lies only too evidently with a government that makes obsessive and unnecessary demands for bureaucratic detail. Although it is encouraging to read that a 'jury' of twelve experienced headteachers is to be set up who will oversee attempts to reduce this 'unnecessary paperwork' and 'bureaucratic processes', oversight in itself implies very little in terms of being part of the debate or taking decisions and could be seen as merely a cosmetic exercise.

Taking their own 'performance' criteria, the fact that Key Stages 1 and 2 results are beginning to stall at a certain level suggests that it may not be paying dividends to impose such demands in the first place. It could be that results might improve drastically by reducing these demands and allowing teachers, particularly at primary level, more time in their classrooms to do those very things e.g. art, music and drama that now form a minimal part of the timetable and which are even suggested could be the realm of assistants. It is interesting that those areas of the curriculum which engage the children the most and also do most in terms of educating them into their cultural inheritance are the very ones that are tacitly suggested to be of least worth. At a time when there is much research into the positive gains to be made through creativity and an emphasis on citizenship, it looks like official joined-up thinking has become more than usually unravelled.

Finally, there are two tasks on the government's list of jobs that should henceforth be tackled by classroom assistants that might have seemed too trivial to mention but are nonetheless rather telling. One is the simple task of photocopying (ALCS please note) What is this amount of photocopying that seems so necessary nowadays? Is it just a duplication of record details or a multiplicity of work sheets and the copying of old test and exam papers? Hardly best practice, even by official standards, yet it is rarely questioned and seemingly accepted as a burdensome but inevitable part of a teacher's workload. The second task, 'make classroom displays' seems innocuous enough and is evidently regarded as a wearisome job that is really

beneath trained teachers to undertake. This may not be a task that numbers of primary and early years teachers would see in this light however, and it betrays a serious and symptomatic misunderstanding of this kind of work. Providing the backing and mounting for such displays may well be a classroom assistant's job but teachers often have to make quite complex and professional decisions about such displays if they are to be genuinely in the children's interests. Unfortunately, part of the misunderstanding is possibly due to a practice that developed during the 1970's and 1980's in which schools were plagued with the necessity to produce 'artistic' looking displays with which to excite the adult visitor, but in which to the practised eye, little original children's thought or art work which could honestly be discerned. Such work is not always going to look good to the untrained eye and it takes a teacher's skill and care for the self esteem of her young charges that the work of the less confident should be selected and presented well. There are also ways in which displays can be used to pose certain questions and excite curiosity and in which the teacher's role is crucial. Such displays can indeed be at the level of tasteful wallpaper but perhaps it should genuinely be considered as one of the elements of 'advanced pedagogy'.

Having been particularly fortunate in the classroom assistants that I have worked with, I know their potential and their worth. They were not specialists but versatile, multi-skilled people who liked children. They did not save time though. If anything, it added extra work in that it was essential to discuss with them what needed doing (and explain why if one wished to train them) . It was also important to listen to their feedback and their questions but the advantages outweighed the disadvantages; having another adult alongside one in the classroom and someone who was interested in the children and their progress was

nothing but gain. A caveat should be added though, for as Philip Revell points out (*Times Educational Supplement*, November 8, 2002) the presence of another and sometimes daunting individual can be a particular challenge for newly qualified teachers.

With many local authorities strapped for cash the provision of training possibilities and pay for teaching assistants is going to vary widely. Whatever the roles eventually taken by classroom assistants, and whatever their new definitions, it could well be the familiar story of the poorer schools in the poorer authorities losing out yet again. It is also going to take a considerable amount of bargaining by the unions involved, mostly UNISON, to ensure that school support staff, in the main married women, get a fair deal. They are mostly on casual or temporary contracts and very few get paid during school holidays. Even an attempt to secure an entitlement to the jobseekers' allowance (JSA) outside term times was turned down by the Law Lords as recently as 8th September 2001. The fine words of the newly defined structure of classroom assistants looks as if it will be some time before any parsnips are buttered. The new definition of class teachers may be another matter though, but being bound up with the supply of such assistants, is one that could have some significance in the future, both on pay and the actual nature of the job. In her speech announcing these new support staff changes, Estelle Morris actually spoke of teachers in the future being viewed as 'consultant surgeons', supervising a number of classes at one time while (suitably trained ...) teaching assistants carried out the actual work with the pupils. In other words an invitation for teaching to return to a non-graduate, poorly paid job for the majority, whose only recompense will be having a new 'career structure' and an elaborate job description.



*Times Educational Supplement: date*



# Review Article: Patrick Yarker

## **Understanding Schools and Schooling**

CLYDE CHITTY, 2002

London: Routledge/Falmer

ISBN 0 415 23879X, 178 pp, £16.99

## **Teaching and Learning: pedagogy, curriculum and culture**

ALEX MOORE, 2000

London: Routledge/Falmer

ISBN 0 7507 1000 4, 192 pp, £16.99

### *Antidotes to quackery*

It's a school day but you're not in school. Required as you are nowadays to be responsible for what's termed your professional development, you have diligently set cover (and spared a thought for the supply-teacher whose hard-earned wage will be bitten into by the supply-agency they work for) and find yourself now in the conference-room of a local hotel, ready to be trained in-service. A hundred or so colleagues sit around you in rows facing a podium and a flip-chart on a tripod. The visible page of the chart has a buzzword or two written in red capitals: *creativity* perhaps, or *pace*, or *pedagogic leadership*, and over the course of the next few hours you will be treated to a version of education grounded in the 'common sense' of pseudo-science and biological essentialism: genes-and-behaviour, boys' brains and girls' brains, and the allegedly-declining attention-spans (except, of course, for when they're playing on their Playstations) of the Playstation generation. The course will be led by some dapper and charming he – in my experience it has always been a he – who will begin by explaining how humble he feels in the presence of so many teachers, for he himself has never taught in schools. Over the morning sessions he will have volunteers out front demonstrating whether they have boys' brains or girls' brains. He will have the rest of us on our feet as well, spinning on the spot or playing the game he'll naughtily call 'pass the clap', in which we clap our hands in turn along our row, racing the other rows and cheering when we win. Such harmless fun will bring excitement and variety into our lessons and cater for the needs of those who, he will say, require a more kinaesthetic learning-style. Amid all this the currently-dominant educational ideology which asserts that boys underachieve, that ability-setting is essential and good, that girls like doing coursework, that the only good lesson is a pacy lesson and that you can improve the quality of teaching through the application of a few tips will be dripped to us with greater or lesser panache by the practitioner at the podium. We teachers, such an approach implies, need not trouble our pedagogical heads about the historically-located and socially-constructed issues surrounding gender, racism, social class or the purposes of education under late capitalism. Nor in my experience of them will these events, so depressing in their banality and predictability, begin to enable those attending to question the view of teaching and learning which is being so extensively and expensively promoted.

So save yourselves from such ignominy. Avoid being constructed as unreflective and uncritical imbibers of the latest pedagogical quackery. Put the supply-budget to proper use by picking up a copy of these two books, bunking off from the hotel and doing your own INSET. You will recover what it means to be seen as a thoughtful, highly-skilled professional with a continuing interest in and concern for the intellectual complexities and demands of the job. You will be given knowledge, a reading-list and useful things to think about and do. You will not be patronised.

In his book *Understanding Schools and Schooling* Professor Clyde Chitty inoculates against over-simplified essentialist nostrums by following the dictum 'Always historicize!' He writes at the outset: 'One of the main arguments underpinning all the chapters in this book is that educational policy-making, *at all levels*, is profoundly influenced *both* by what has happened in past decades *and* by contemporary debates about the exact relationship between schooling and society.' [p. 1, original emphases] He examines concepts of schooling under 'three broad headings: ...as individual fulfilment...as preparation for the world of work...as an essential element of social progress and social change...' [p. 2] and considers some of the implications arising from these views before charting the rise of educational policy geared to fitting young people to the current needs of capital. He surveys the post-war development of state schooling, the emergence of comprehensivisation, the timidity of its implementation (a timidity born out of the failure on the part of a Labour government adequately to understand how hard reactionaries would strive to retain their power) and the corrosive effect of accepting as a definition of what comprehensive education was the soundbite of 'grammar-schools for all!' The unwillingness of Labour to value, defend and celebrate the achievements of comprehensive education laid the ground for Margaret Thatcher's destructive educational policies. The measures her governments introduced or whose introduction was delayed until Tony Blair could pick up the reins of power are outlined: opt-outs, vocational training, marketisation, the chimera of parental choice, National Curriculum and League Tables, OFSTED and failing schools, PFI, the contempt for and attempted eradication of a public service ethos and its replacement by the so-called rigours of the private sector, performance-related pay and above all selection, selection, selection. Professor Chitty quotes Kenneth Baker in a *Guardian* interview to telling effect: 'The introduction of parental choice was, in fact, part of a much bigger silent coup. My real target...was the comprehensive system of schooling itself... Stealth was essential.' [p. 39] Fourteen years on, and five years into a New Labour administration, neither Education Secretary nor Prime Minister sees any need for such clandestinity and caution.

There follow chapters on the history of the curriculum recording the tensions and struggles around the imposition of the NC in 1988 in its original form (and an instructive

spot-the-difference game comparing curriculum-models from that period and the turn of the twentieth century.) The bedrock for the now increasingly-detested and discredited SATs and the League Tables they engendered was the National Curriculum itself, sold by Kenneth Baker to the hard-right ideologues of his own Party precisely on the grounds that the NC would justify a massive new programme of national testing. The distance government ministers, their advisors and their 'think-tanks' were and remain from classroom realities is often obvious. The current results-driven concern about a 'performance dip' between years 6 and 7 is yet another example of how policy-makers fail to take a holistic, still less a dialectic, view, seeming to believe that learning as Year 7 students must follow smoothly and unproblematically from learning as Year 6 students despite the small matter of changing schools, classrooms, routines, teachers, status within the school and all the other host of alterations and renewals which accompanies the momentous move from Primary to Secondary. Have these advisers forgotten such moments in their own lives?

Under New Labour comprehensive schools and some of the best practices in them have been decried with increasing fervour, and mixed-ability teaching witch-hunted almost out of existence. David Blunkett's cynical 'Read My Lips' comment is properly revealed by Professor Chitty as a historic change of educational policy; the decision to retain grammar schools flaunting just how far New Labour had capitulated to class-privilege. Professor Chitty quotes his own study, co-authored with Caroline Benn: 'Selection at secondary-school level did *not* render comprehensive education impossible or deny it to parents and children; what it did do, however... was decrease comprehensive education's effectiveness *for the majority*- and, in some cases, severely depress outcomes in neighbouring schools.' [p. 100, original emphases]

However, as Professor Chitty wryly remarks, '[T]he Labour government, like its Conservative predecessors, has shown little inclination to take account of those research findings that do not support its own educational agenda'. His penultimate chapter contextualises some recent changes to conditions of service and to our responsibilities as teachers. He presents sharp arguments against PRP and foregrounds the issues of bullying and child-protection in school. He rounds off by raising issues of equality and social justice, and the place -if there is one- which education has in advancing both. It is salutary to be reminded just how recently issues of sexism, heterosexism and racism have been foregrounded by researchers, and how inadequate have been governmental and institutional responses. Key recommendations of the Macpherson Report are presented, along with powerful criticism of OFSTED for failing in its duty to examine race equality practice during school inspections. Students and teachers are quicker on the uptake; at least one OFSTED Inspector has had to be removed from an inspection-team for making racist remarks in their hearing. Professor Chitty points in particular to the work of Gillian Plummer, who breaks the silence around the underachievement of working-class girls. 'The educational failure of working-class girls is hidden. First, by interpreting statistics recording the substantial rise in achievements of middle-class girls to represent 'all girls'. Second, by the persistence of serious concerns about the deviant

behaviour and particular poor performance of many working-class boys. In ignoring the educational failure of working-class girls, we ignore the many problems that underlie their failure and which manifest themselves in harmful behaviour-patterns: self-exclusion, withdrawal, depression, anorexia and early pregnancies.' [Quoted p. 135] Homophobia especially from the media and its impact on schools, notoriously through the erroneous perception that Section 28 of the 1988 Education (No. 2) Act has statutory reach over the activities of teachers in school is also highlighted. The attempt by New Labour to return to full-blooded selection and to re-stratify state schooling (aside from extending sectarian or 'faith' schools) via a so-called 'ladder of schools': training, specialist, beacon, advanced beacon, and most august of all schools too good to be called schools any more, the City Academies, is set against some clear evidence of the success (and on the cheap, too) of genuine comprehensive education. Like its companion in the series, Professor Chitty's text contains at the end of each chapter a guide to further reading and suggested activities. His book's final activity is a blank-paper exercise of the kind which became popular a decade and more ago: 'If you were given the task of sitting down and constructing, from scratch, an educational agenda for the new millennium what would that agenda look like and what would be its priorities?' [p. 155] With all the caveats it is necessary to voice ahead of such a task, not least the inescapable need to reckon with the historical circumstances so authoritatively and cogently delineated in this book along with the need to intervene in them on the side of progress in order to re-make the future, such a task undertaken with colleagues of strong if differing views can be just as bruising an encounter (or kinaesthetically-educative) and almost as much fun as 'passing the clap'.

Alex Moore's book in the same Key Issues in Teaching and Learning series (of which he is the Editor), *Teaching and Learning: pedagogy, curriculum and culture*, begins with a consideration of how children learn. Such a focus is all the more timely given the continued concentration on teaching, and on a particular and narrow model of teaching at that, emanating from DfES publications, videos and ministerial pronouncements of the 'we know what works' kind. Dr Moore observes the link between Piagetian ideas of learning-stages and the yet-more-rigid linear development model of any child's progression embedded in the NC, and offers a resume of the difficulties with such a model. He reminds us too of the centrality to Piaget of the view of a child as an active maker of meanings, someone who makes up her own mind: 'I do not believe...that new concepts...are always acquired through adult didactic intervention. This may occur, but there is a much more productive form of instruction; the so-called 'active' schools endeavour to create situations that, while not 'spontaneous' in themselves, evoke spontaneous elaboration on the part of the child...' [quoted p. 14] Dr Moore clarifies how Vygotskian ideas can inform the uses of the NC for certain kinds of formative assessment. The importance of Bruner's analysis of how culture and social conditions will affect learning is summarised, and teachers are invited to reflect on how we ourselves learn and have learned, in order to improve our practice as teachers. As with Professor Chitty's book, key points or fertile lines of further inquiry are signalled by handy

presentational devices in the text such as emboldened headings, bullet-points and shaded boxes, and the contents of texts for further reading are again outlined. The main ideas of every chapter are condensed in a concluding summary. It would be hard to find an approach more helpful in renewing our acquaintance with this central body of theory.

Dr Moore goes on to consider in turn and in similarly clear detail issues and theoretical analysis to do with the purposes of education, drawing attention to those ideas which advance critical thinking and the possibility that our students can contribute actively to the world's changing. As an experienced teacher of teachers, Dr Moore can see matters from our point-of-view. 'For teachers, the main challenge is in pursuing believed-in educational aims in believed-in educational ways, in situations in which they may sometimes feel supported by official discourse and policies and sometimes thwarted by them ... such difficulties have often led teachers towards a new kind of pragmatism, in which suspicious educational practices are ... sometimes subverted, and in which spaces are found within the curriculum shaped by official agendas to pursue educational agendas which could themselves be classified as 'unofficial'.' [p. 59]

We are pointed towards the many live debates to be joined around the important issues of language and culture in relation to teaching. Dr Moore's own previous work in schools with Bilingual students and his developed view of students he terms 'multi-cultured' powerfully informs some discussions of actual teacher-practice (for example around the generation and conduct of whole-class talk.) Within this we are likely to recognise elements –the good, the bad and the ugly- of what we do. Such writing reveals the shallowness and triviality of the competency-based model so beloved of OFSTED while simultaneously encouraging a reflective approach on our part. In particular, challenging ideas drawn from the work of Pierre Bourdieu are carefully outlined, their vocabulary opening up one alternative to the omnipresent language of 'ability' even if the conclusion arrived at is pessimistic: 'Once you are working as an active agent within the system, it seems – as one supporting the system through one's social position – you can do nothing to change the system from within.' [p. 100] Such a view does not have to be endorsed, and Dr Moore presents examples where teachers have found and continue to find ways to challenge 'the system' from within, for example over the biases inherent in current favoured modes of assessment, through anti-racist work and by validating students' cultural practices 'even when these run counter to dominant cultural practices enshrined in public syllabuses...'

Many teachers may turn straight to the last two chapters which are to do with 'what makes a good teacher' and with alternatives to the currently-prevailing orthodoxies of educational policy. We find in these chapters a complex siting of ourselves as individuals, both agents and, as part of an institution, subject to determining forces. The aim is always to have us look not only at ourselves and our work in specific moments but to recognise wider contexts and give these due weight. In considering the realities of our many daily interactions with different students and groups, Dr Moore is

sympathetically alive to the demands inherent in the job, the pressures we put ourselves under and the role our own personal histories, fears and desires may play in how we teach and think about our teaching. In considering teachers as reflexive practitioners, that is as people who reflect on what we do and also reflect on the ways we reflect and the biographical reasons we may have for so reflecting, Dr Moore seeks to enlarge our understanding of what happens in our classrooms, not least when things go badly. 'Reflexivity might suggest to the teacher, for example, interpretations which are not directly and exclusively embedded in a reification of *student* behaviour, but that may have as much to do with their *own psyche* and the relationship between that and the wider symbolic and social order in which classroom activity is situated.' [p. 138] While the language may occasionally challenge and demand (thinking and re-thinking being hard work), the sustained and helpful focus on ways to explain and enable further creative and constructive analysis is a hallmark of the book. In returning to the theme of 'pedagogic and curricular alternatives' to official policy, Dr Moore acknowledges the tensions existing for many at what ministers term 'the frontline' and indicates some considered ways forward, such as critical literacy, one of whose central tasks is 'demystifying the dominant ideology' or telling the truth, for example by the choice of texts used in class or the kinds of talking enabled there. He touches on 'multiple intelligences' and 'accelerated learning', looks at some current attempts to present alternative curricula, and reminds us of the return of the repressed: 'While we clearly do need to argue about how best to operate within the current education order and the current constraints that are thrust upon us, we must also remain wary of talking of lost causes, reminding ourselves that in education, as in life generally, things have a habit of coming round again as long as we remember to nudge them in the right direction.' [p. 174]

Both these books take teachers and teaching seriously. They serve to remind us genuinely, without flattery, glibness or show, of the complexity, importance, difficulty and value of what we do, and they will help us do it in a more fully informed, knowledgeable way. In short, they will help us do it better. Yet how many of us will read these books? Both have been enthusiastically reviewed in the TES, but it may have been all too easy to miss what was written about them there, and easier still not to part with the cover-price and so fail to gather the wealth of information so skilfully compacted or the gist of the debates distilled, debates which have of course matured since we left our Initial Teacher Education courses and became qualified practitioners, subjecting ourselves to the shaping pressures of daily life in school where there is precious little time and energy available to theorise what went wrong or right with a lesson or discuss the historical roots of New Labour's mis-named modernisation-drive. And yet there should be. It is worth reminding ourselves that: practice without theory is blind; theory without practice is sterile. What all too often passes for theory now or passes itself off as helpful practice is happening in a hotel near you on any one of the days Kenneth Baker purloined from us. Take back the day and put it to good use; read these books and talk the rest of the staff into reading them.