Editorial

The changes recently announced by the Government with respect to targets and target setting should only be given a cautious welcome; for example only time will tell whether the (retained) KS1 test will actually lessen in importance. It should also be remembered that the new primary strategy issued in May 2003 states that the government *still* expects that 85% of all eleven year olds will achieve Level 4 by 2006. Is the chance for schools to take charge of their own targets merely a matter of a political moratorium for two years in order to buy time before the next election? Any new targets will anyway be subject to LEA and Ofsted scrutiny and in their turn these are ultimately beholden to government directives. Their present targets are very unlikely to show much alteration unless it can be demonstrated that the new relaxation is more than just a temporary holding operation. Whose targets are going to have to take precedence after 2006? Are schools then going to have to drop their own ones to return to the inappropriate government targets? The document seems particularly, and some might say significantly, reticent on this point.

Changes are also planned for secondary schools but they too will call for close examination to see whether the target-setting culture in which these schools currently exist has not merely been re-structured and called by another name. It is to be remembered that the present government is not one that lightly gives away any measure of control.

The editorial of this edition of Forum reflects the viewpoint that at base the government's tight oversight of its inappropriate targets, however temporarily 'relaxed' they might appear in the short term, is likely to remain as long as league tables continue to exist.

Inappropriate Targets: square pots made on round wheels?

Just for the sake of argument, suppose everyone agrees that square pots are what we should all be making. The government thinks they are important, the populace agrees and teachers support the idea. All know the material out of which they are to be made, although some are distinctly better informed when it comes to understanding the varying nature of different clays. The job of making these square pots is given by government to trained and experienced potters who know how you go about making square pots. These potters know the correct consistency of the clay before it can be moulded, how long it should be dried and how to stick on the awkward bits like handles. They also know the temperature at which it should be fired and how to apply the glazing. They also know that each hand made pot is subtly different. Unfortunately this expertise is not necessarily appreciated by their employers.

This is demonstrated when, much to the potters' horror and amazement, the government decrees that all square pots should be made on a revolving potters' wheel. 'Everybody' knows that's how potters should do it; otherwise it simply doesn't count as pottery. Anyone who protests that there are other ways of making pots, and in particular square pots, are denounced as ignorant trouble makers, despite the fact that the potters have no argument with the actual notion of having square pots.

Bureaucracy conveniently overlooks this and accuses the potters of deliberately trying to sabotage their plans and bring back round pots, (which are so very yesterday). The skill and experience of the potters is overlooked, indeed it is even brought into question: who can rightly call him/herself a potter who cannot make square pots on a revolving wheel? Stands to reason they don't know what they're talking about. Consequently the government bureaucrats will have to tell them how to do it. The fact that none of them have ever been potters is considered to be entirely beside the point. After all, in their private opinion, it's a comparatively low level skill. In fact it could very possibly be undertaken by the pottery-room assistants who prepare the clay and unpack the kilns; a lot cheaper, and they *do* so love their work.

The potters have tried to do as they have been bidden; they have taken to all kinds of subterfuges but the main one has been to slow down the wheel when no one has been watching (OfPOT pay rather frequent visits though). The result has been a substantial number of misshapen pots which has annoyed the bureaucrats a great deal.

It has therefore been necessary to set potters detailed targets. The chief bureaucrat privately welcomes a zero-tolerance approach, with potters who cannot 'hack it' being 'taken out'. (his very words) The potters find it hard to decide which they despise most: the sentiments, or the resort, in a civilised country, to Al Capone-type street slang to describe Government policy.

At first only fifty percent of pots had to match the very exacting criteria demanded by squareness. Statisticians had told the Government bureaucrats that that was a reasonable expectation given the normal curve of distribution. Unfortunately most of the Bureaucrats had only ever done rows of sums, not statistics, and even the word average had had them baffled at one time. So it was that one day a young bureaucrat with vision, a.k.a. ambition, suddenly said why stop at 50%? Why not 70%? 80% 85%? That would mean more square pots than our European competitors and well, wasn't that the point?

The potters did what they could under the most difficult of circumstances; square pots after all have many more potential problems. Each face is separate and has to be joined carefully to the next one which is where cracks and distortions so often occur. And that was making them normally, let alone attempting to make them on a revolving wheel. Potters muttered under their breath that there were far fewer problems when pots were made as a round whole. Those bureaucrats who overheard them reminded them how much harder that made their job: square, flat things being so much easier to measure than round ones. Suddenly the potters saw what it was that really mattered

to their masters. It wasn't square pots that they took delight in, it was measuring them that enthused what passed for the official soul. The Chief Measurer did in fact admit that he had very precise ideal measurements in mind for each size of square pot and he would readily reward those who pleased him by producing assembly line perfection and there was also more than a hint of punishment for those who didn't. Those that said they didn't actually care were the particular targets of his wrath. 'Don't care was made to care' said he, quoting his old nanny, and told the potters they would be put into something called, not unsurprisingly, 'special measures' if they didn't toe the line.

However many of the better potters decided they had had enough and left off being potters and turned to something else like gardening…. No problem, said the Government bureaucrats, plenty more where they came from, we'll just have a recruiting drive for more young potters. This only worked up to a point though – very soon two-thirds of those who were newly trained potters left the job saying they were being treated like robots. 'Ah, robots' said the Chief Measurer, who was never at a loss for a new initiative, 'now *that's* an idea….'

Annabelle Dixon

Student Leadership: creating learning communities

ELISE ALEXANDER & PHIL SANDELL

This article is based upon an evaluation of a Conference on Student Leadership held at the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in Nottingham, December 2, 2002. The conference was organised by the Bedfordshire Schools Improvement Partnership (BSIP) and we acknowledge the support of BSIP and NCSL in the writing of this article.

The Conference on Student Leadership was held on December 2nd 2002 at the National College for School Leadership in Nottingham. Workshops were run by eleven schools, with a twelfth workshop being a focus group directed by two students representing the Bedfordshire Schools Improvement Partnership (BSIP). Each of the schools involved in presenting a workshop set up a display in the West Atrium of the college and also prepared a summary of student leadership activities that was currently happening in the schools. From analysis of our evaluative data, holding conversations with delegates and listening to presentations at the Conference, we heard about many different types of student leadership from traditional roles such as prefects and team captains to more innovative and sensitive roles such as students as researchers, mediators and counsellors.

In the past, student leaders in schools have traditionally been appointed by teachers to carry out the functions that they, the teachers, wish to be carried out. Student leaders have been given responsibilities to organise other students in ways that serve the systems schools have put in place for control (e.g. prefect systems), or to represent the students in the school in a formal, often ceremonial role (e.g. Head Boy, Head Girl). Another well-established leadership role is one where high performing students in particular subject areas, are required to galvanise teams of students into action to try and achieve victory in competitive situations, often against their own peers (e.g. Sports captains, house captains). Such roles usually have clearly defined parameters that present little opportunity for students to engage with issues, which are seen as the province of other school leaders who are not students. These roles are only ever granted to the selected few. In choosing students for such roles, criteria for choice is frequently in the hands of a few key staff and made on the basis of academic achievement and conformity rather than on broader constructions of leadership potential.

The Student Leadership Conference offers a radically different construction of students as leaders. Here, student leadership is viewed as an important element in a powerful process of democratisation in schools, a process in which all students are entitled to participate. In his opening remarks to this conference David Jackson of NCSL (2002) put forward the view that

> *leadership is democracy in action where the multiple voices that make up the total experience are valued*

and added

> *everyone has both the potential and entitlement to contribute to leadership*

In this paper we refer to the new vision for student leadership proposed by the Conference, a vision that we share and one that places leadership within the grasp of all pupils and engages them with real issues connected with the future of their schools and the well-being of the school community. We consider the climate that is necessary in schools if student leadership is to be fostered and some of the issues to be addressed in order to sustain it. In particular, we examine the differences in students' perceptions of student leadership compared with teachers' perceptions.

A Significant Voice

We see student leadership as a concept in which students evolve a significant voice in order to make a difference. Student leadership is not simply having the power to speak and the right to be heard; it is a commitment to work for the well-being of others in and even beyond the school community. Leadership is not just a privilege for the committed and articulate students but the prerogative of all. Above all, it is not a role that is bestowed by teachers or others in positions of authority but a democratic right of students. However, we consider it vital that students and teachers together are offered training opportunities so that they can exercise that right effectively.

Student voice is at the heart of student leadership. Schools, that have created opportunities to listen to students'OfSTED opinions have found that 'pupils' views can make a substantial contribution to classroom management, to learning and teaching, to the school as a social learning place' (MacBeath et al. 2000).

Some schools have already set up opportunities for their students to contribute to improving the quality of teaching and learning by evaluating lessons and giving feedback to teachers or acting as student researchers in collecting evidence about issues with which students are concerned. In response to questions posed at the Conference, two students who had taken part in such initiatives, when asked what they got out of them, commented:

> *It gives me a sense of power and I know I have the ability to change things for the better.*
>
> *I could see how other people learn and what could be done to improve their learning. (Responses to question posed at Student Forum).*

From these comments, we infer that there is great potential for personal development when students are given opportunities to speak about matters which affect their own learning, in particular to see themselves as part of the

decision making-process and to bring about improvements in schools.

Giving students opportunities for genuine leadership is important to students because these opportunities tell them that their views are valued, their contributions worthwhile and their participation seen as part of the solution as well as part of the process of improving schools. Fink (1995) coined the phrase 'invitational leadership', a term that he defines as 'sharing power and authority in order to develop the vision'. Initiating student voice in powerful learning contexts in which real opportunities are provided for students to exercise their democratic voices authentically and engage with other members of the school community in considering real issues, is key to student voice becoming the foundation for student leadership.

Developing Student Leadership in Schools

The vision of student leadership described above will only flourish where conditions in school are propitious for it to become established and grow. We suggest that where student leadership is embedded in the school's vision and shared and owned by the whole school community, then genuine student leadership is possible. One school that participated in the Conference cites the importance of student leadership in its handbook for parents and expresses it in terms of four aims:

1. To develop the leadership potential inherent in all students.
2. To promote initiative, ambition and service to others.
3. To develop skills and qualities to secure quality employment opportunities.
4. To provide opportunities to develop leadership, management and enterprise skills. (Edgware School Brochure).

It is inspiring to see a school in which the staff believe that all students have the potential for leadership and personal growth and can identify with such clarity the skills and qualities that will be developed. Extending these skills beyond the school community into the world of work demonstrates the importance given to student leadership as a stepping stone for a successful launch into life beyond school.

Beyond aspirations, practical strategies are important to ensure that growth and development in student leadership takes place. Another school at the Conference has established what it calls 'non-negotiable principles' for student leadership. These are:

- that there should be forums for students to present their views
- that staff listen and respond to what students say
- that the school provides training for student leadership
- time is given over to action planning
- use is made of external expertise
- funding is made available
- principles underpinning new ways of working are established and shared (Hastingsbury School Conference presentation)

Accordingly, student leadership has a high status on this school's development agenda and the obvious commitment to leadership principles should lead to an agreed understanding between staff and students about the process of school improvement and the contribution of both staff and students.

The importance of training to the development of student leadership has been identified by Raymond (2001), who points out that it is insufficient to train only students as researchers or as leaders. She sees staff and students training together as crucial in securing co-operation and shared values between both groups, and in breaking down barriers and creating a shared language of leadership.

The move towards a culture in which student leadership is central to school improvement can, unsurprisingly, be problematic. Where a school is moving towards an inclusive culture in which students are envisaged as having a more pivotal role in school improvement, it is highly likely that the new roles demanded of both teachers and students may, at first, appear threatening. The shift towards student leadership should be sensitively planned in a way that enables teachers and students to work together, trying out the new roles being created collaboratively and in a supportive environment. This is where external facilitation is valuable. In the support BSIP provides in training schools to initiate Student as Researcher programmes, teachers work with their students under the guidance of a trained facilitator to learn how new collaborative relationships will work and what must be done to make the new initiatives successful.

One of the major issues identified through our research at the conference was the problem of how to create partnerships between students and teachers, particularly in view of the different ways that these groups appear to perceive student leadership. We turn now to what students and teachers said about student leadership at the conference.

What Students Said about Student Leadership

Students' responses to the evaluation questionnaires we issued at the Conference indicate a mature approach to student leadership, although there were naturally some examples of more radical, possibly unrealistic, notions of what student leadership can achieve. In response to the question 'What did you think student leadership was about before today?', these are some of the replies from students who seem to show a mature understanding of student leadership and its inherent possibilities:

> *Students have an opinion which if accessed in the right way can change schools for the better.*
>
> *I have learned that student leadership isn't just about individuals wielding power. I saw student leadership before today as a much more low-key affair that didn't really produce any results because there was no means to do so. I have now learned of many ways that student leadership can be incorporated with school life producing positive impacts.*
>
> *It's a democratic process, open to all and accessible to all, not just leaders.*

Some of the more radical responses are exemplified by these comments:

> *Students are equal and are the same as teachers.*
>
> *Students have equal rights with teachers.*

These responses suggest that some students see student leadership as a means of adjusting unequal power relationships in their schools, perhaps of rectifying perceived injustices, whereas some of earlier quotes

indicate that some students see leadership as a collaborative venture, undertaken by students and staff working together with the common purpose of somehow making school better. The distance between these two constructions of student leadership is populated by the vast majority of students who responded to our questions during and after the conference.

The students in between are generally highly motivated by what they saw and heard at the conference. They have visions for the future which differ from the visions of their teachers, discussed in the next section, in striking ways. However, some of the students' visions for the future are rather nebulous and embryonic. In response to the question 'What possibilities do you see for yourself in the future? (re student leadership), these replies have been selected:

We will benefit immensely. It will give us more skills, a better improved repertoire (sic).

On a more pragmatic note:

Good education, good job. No graffiti, better facilities.

These constructions of the potential benefits of student leadership appear to be rooted in the notion that if only students had a say, the world would be an infinitely better place, with improvements to the environment and better job prospects. This is a tall order, and it is clear that for student leadership to become a reality in these students' schools and, importantly, for disillusionment to be averted, some kind of external facilitation or training may be required.

In general, the students' responses to the evaluation questionnaire were positive and indicate that most of them are resolved to go back to their schools and raise the profile of student leadership as a means of school improvement. Approximately 20% of the responding students mentioned the need for training in their responses, and we think this is an important way in which the BSIP approach can support the development of student leadership. The areas of training mentioned by students include training for students as researchers and training for school councillors. Furthermore, underlying the students' requests for training, we discern a desire for mentoring and support in student leadership activities, particularly in the light of students' comments above about relations with staff. Raymond's (2001) helpful description of training for students as researchers including staff, mentioned earlier in this paper, may indicate a way forward, particularly in the light of Fielding's (2001) conviction that shared training programmes create a shared language between students and teachers. We believe that an external presence in the form of outside trainers, plus the collective experience of the training process and the opportunity to develop a shared language, may facilitate communication between students and teachers and may also prevent misunderstandings arising in future.

What the Teachers Said about Student Leadership

The teachers' responses to the evaluation questionnaire were generally less visionary and more rooted in practicality than those of the participating students, with many focusing on students taking responsibility in schools. In response to the question 'What do you understand by 'student leadership'?', some of them answered:

Students voicing their opinions about schools and also taking on responsibility within the school.
Students taking responsibility for their own learning and development. Taking part and working with staff to improve their school.

Close analysis of the teachers' responses reveal some interesting and potentially challenging areas of divergence from the responses of the participating students. 28% of the teachers replied in ways that suggest that they see students leadership as, at best, delegated or gifted by teachers to students or, at worst, as a means of off-loading their responsibilities onto students. A sample of these responses to the same question as above is:

Partnership with staff to allow students to have views heard and to become leaders of their own community.

Students participating in all aspects of the school community. Student involvement in the things identified by staff.

Lots of opportunities to delegate responsibilities to students.

The clear message from these responses, and another five similar ones, is that a significant minority of teachers at this conference see student leadership as something over which staff must maintain control. This finding appears to add weight to the students' concerns, discussed above, that some relationships between students and staff may act as barriers to effective student leadership.

Encouragingly, approximately a further third of the teachers responded to the question with a more positive construction of student leadership. This set of responses generally focused upon democracy and the benefits to students in terms of their personal development as well as the advantages to their schools. A sample of these responses is as follows:

'Providing all students with opportunities, empowerment and diversity so that they can move forward on a personal and school level.'

'Enabling students to use their full potential in shaping new ways of teaching and learning/school ethos, to ensure full inclusion and motivation of all'.

'Students democratically organised to enable them to genuinely participate in shaping the school's direction'.

Phrases such as 'full potential' and 'genuinely participate' imply that these teachers are committed to the principles of student leadership represented at the Conference. It is striking that the three teachers quoted above appear to construe student leadership as playing a part in teaching and learning, a topic that Fielding identifies as a 'largely forbidden area' for students, in which questions and concerns are 'invariably identified and framed by teachers for teachers' (Fielding 2001:101).

Some other teachers' responses, however, suggest that they are most comfortable with a model of student leadership that poses no challenges to existing hierarchies. Some teachers, it seems, are happy for students to participate in decision making as long as it is for the benefit

of the school as it is *now*, as these responses to the question 'What possibilities do you see for the future?' Illustrate:

> *Extend and develop existing opportunities for students to learn to lead.*
>
> *School council. Improved student voice is key essential if our school is to raise achievement.*

The first of these responses suggests that it is a good idea to extend and develop existing practices, but probably not to try anything too dangerously radical. The second response raises an important point in that it indicates that raising achievement is the priority, and that 'improved' student voice is the key. It is interesting to juxtapose this second comment with the rather Utopian comments made by students who, as we saw above, appear to construe student leadership as an almost universal panacea. Perhaps this teacher has a similar construction, but it is possible that the problem to which the panacea is applied is rather different. The students appeared to believe that if they had more say in the running of their schools then problems would be sorted out and everyone would be happy. The teacher's comment above could be interpreted as a suggestion that if students had more say in the running of the school, they might work harder and then achievement would be raised. Clearly, there are other interpretations of the comments of both teachers and students, but these examples serve to highlight an important issue: teachers' construction of what 'a better school' might look like, and students' constructions of 'a better school' may be very different.

It appears from the evidence of the data that the participating teachers generally have more conservative, possibly more pragmatic views about student leadership than the participating students. A possible explanation for this difference could be that that students are swept along by the impetuosity of their youth in a tide of zeal and enthusiasm for leadership; they are in a hurry. Teachers, on the other hand, could be expressing more cautious constructions of student leadership because of their wisdom, age and experience and also because of their professional concerns for the academic achievements of their students. Teachers generally want to take things slowly, gradually. Whatever the explanation for this difference in approach, an important temporal point is embedded in the gap between teachers and students. Students only have short careers in school; teachers usually have many years in post and can afford to take a much longer view of changes within the school. We think that it is vitally important that this point is not lost, as slow progress in the development of student leadership inevitably means that some students will not have the opportunity to become leaders in their schools. On the other hand, it is important that teachers' concerns are properly understood and addressed because without their goodwill and commitment, student leadership may well never happen. To be successful, student leadership requires true partnerships between students and teachers.

Conclusion

To summarise, the key issues we identified that must be considered if the vision of student leadership represented at the Conference is to be realised, are:

- Barriers in the relationships between students and teachers, perpetuated by preconceptions of their roles in the school. The breaking down of barriers may lead to the renegotiation of roles within the school, which will certainly require the commitment of all participants.
- The creation of a shared language of leadership in the school community. As we discussed earlier, the creation of this shared language is facilitated through shared training sessions.
- The issue of trust in student leadership: teachers having the confidence that students will act responsibly in their leadership roles and students having confidence that their voices will be heard and that they will make a difference. This issue could be addressed through the preparation and training of teachers and students together in leadership and research skills.
- The creation of powerful learning communities so that student leadership can be learnt, developed and applied in and beyond the school community. Disseminating good practice that has supported the development of powerful learning partnerships will be crucial in giving schools confidence to take this forward.
- The creation of networks of learning communities in order to facilitate training and mentoring of students and teachers in the development of student leadership, and to share experience and ideas. In addition, we believe that the presence of an interested outsider, or a critical friend, is important in the development of the new leadership roles envisaged at the Conference.

The model of training developed by BSIP, in which teachers and students work together to develop a shared language of leadership, is a creative starting point for the creation of real learning communities.

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Assessment: servant or dictator?

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Assessment pervades school life. It should be our servant, supporting learning and teaching, and yet too often it seems to be dictating the curriculum, our use of time, and the emotions of teachers, pupils and parents.

What does assessment in English schools look like at the moment?[1] How did we get into this situation? What are the consequences of our present position? Where are we heading and what can we do about it? These are the questions I address in this article. But first I need to clarify my use of the word 'assessment'.

What Do We Mean by Assessment?

For some, 'assessment' is a process integrated into the everyday activities of learning and teaching. For others, assessment is characterised by the tyranny of the 3Ts: targets, tests and tables. The distinction is often made between assessment *for* learning (AfL), emphasising formative functions, and assessment *of* learning, emphasising summative functions. This distinction can be useful, helping to alert us to the vast range of activities that are encompassed by the term 'assessment', from everyday classroom interactions to occasional external examinations. However, we should not set up a false polarity between them, as both have roles to play and the relationships between them can be quite complex (Harlen & James, 1997; Black et al, 2002). Nor does the distinction necessarily imply different methods of assessment. Rather it is often more about timing and purpose. As Bob Stake, Professor of Education at the University of Illinois points out, when the cook tastes the soup it is formative, but when the customer tastes the soup it is summative (Stobart, 2003).

'Assessment of learning' is perhaps not a very accurate description of much of our current testing. Tests too often tend to be the assessment of *performance*, concentrating upon the assessment of outcomes of learning as demonstrated on a particular day in a prescribed and restricted way, rather than on assessment of the complex process of *learning*.

What is distinctive about assessment for learning is that the information gained is *used*, by both the learners and their teachers, to help decide where the learners are, where they need to go, and how to get there (ARG, 2002).

One distinction that we should be clear about is between 'assessment' and 'testing'. Contrary to the way the words are too often used, they are not synonymous. Testing is a subset of assessment, one of a number of particular approaches to assessment. Assessment is much broader than testing, encompassing not only testing but also marking, on-going judgements, oral feedback, self and peer assessment.

Where Are We?

It is no surprise that 'assessment' is so often translated as 'testing', when pupils in English state schools are among the most tested in the world. It is estimated that they will each take up to 105 tests and exams during their time in school (*Times Educational Supplement*, 28 March 2003). With public examinations, statutory end of key stage tests, optional tests, progress tests, and other tests such as reading and cognitive ability tests (CATs), pupils face a barrage of tests every year. Even in the reception class teachers are making judgements in relation to over 100 statements for each child for the end of foundation stage statutory assessment.

All this testing means that we are data rich, but sadly too often information poor. Attainment data are analysed, displayed and used in a whole variety of ways, for different purposes, but not necessarily in a helpful or informed manner. Does missing a level 4 by a few marks really mean that children are leaving primary school 'unable to read and write', as the media headlines would have us believe? Do the key stage 1 results for a year 2 child give the year 3 teacher sufficient information about strengths and learning needs for her to plan her teaching, even when they differentiate between reading and writing and use 'thirds' of a national curriculum level (2a, 2b or 2c)? Does the emphasis placed upon GCSE grades and national curriculum levels take into account that as many as 40% of students may be awarded higher or lower levels than they should be due to the unreliability of the tests (Wiliam, 2001)? How many professionals in education, yet alone the general public, understood the complexities of 'maintaining standards' and fixing grade boundaries which lay behind the A level problems of last year? Do school performance tables enable parents to judge how well suited a particular school may be for their individual child? It is only with a clear understanding of the data, where they have come from, what they represent, and what they can and cannot be used for, that we can derive some benefit from the extensive testing that is taking place.

Alongside the huge growth in testing, there are also currently significant advances in everyday assessment practices, prompted particularly by the work of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998a,b; Black et al, 2002). Many teachers and schools, often working in conjunction with local authorities and universities, are drawing upon principles based on research to develop assessment for learning practices in their own contexts. Pupils are being

involved more fully in the learning process through a range of strategies: questioning designed to reveal their understanding and support their learning; peer and self assessment; making explicit learning intentions and success criteria; and feedback which provokes thinking and improvement. Teachers are excited and invigorated by the difference such practices are making to the pupils in their classrooms. They are finding that the whole climate of the classroom changes, that pupils' learning is improving considerably, that teachers are talking more about learning and teaching, and sharing their classroom practice. One particular teacher postponed and then returned from retirement because of AfL, and an elective mute started to contribute to class discussions.

With good news stories like these, and hard evidence of improved attainment (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, b; Black et al, 2002), it is little surprise that assessment for learning is being promoted more and more. It is incorporated into the national strategies from the DfES; QCA supports it through their website (www.qca.org.uk/ca/5-14/afl) and publications (QCA, 2003).

How Did We Get Here?

Considering how the present situation with assessment in English schools came about may help us understand it more, and assist us in thinking about how we should respond.

The heavy emphasis on testing, and the associated targets and tables, can be seen as a reflection of a phenomenon that goes well beyond education. Michael Power (1999) depicts the audit society as one where central government devolution of responsibility for public institutions has led to complex systems of regulatory checks and audits. A growing lack of trust in professionals and established institutions (O'Neill, 2002) is accompanied by demands for measures and reporting of performance. More public information about schools' performance is considered necessary for parents to be able to exercise choice. Worries about international competitiveness, even though the story is not always as clear as media headlines or politicians' soundbites make out (Wilkins and MacBeath, 2002), have helped fuel the demands for ever higher 'standards'. Targets for LEA and school performance, scrutiny of teachers and schools by Ofsted, and performance management, all create a climate where tests in mathematics and English in particular assume very high stakes.

The present system can be seen in part as an unintended consequence of reactions by the teaching profession to previous policies and proposals. Key Stage 2 tests are externally marked because of teacher action over workload at the time of their introduction, and so they have come to mirror secondary forms of external examination, with associated issues such as test security. The high stakes involved and consequent teacher worries to 'get it right' when making judgements about teacher-marked Key Stage 1 tests have resulted in these tests and their marking schemes becoming more and more closely defined. The single foundation profile, replacing many different baseline assessment schemes based on local practice and experience, can be seen as a response to demands for fairness and the judgement of schools not just on raw scores but on value added.

In contrast to the externally imposed, top-down, emphasis on tests, assessment for learning has been much more of a grass roots, bottom-up development. Teachers and schools have seen assessment for learning as something they want to incorporate into their practice. They have often been aided by university academics who have supported and reported projects to develop assessment for learning. Very importantly, individual teachers who discover the positive effects of involving pupils through assessment for learning talk to other teachers and spread their enthusiasm and expertise. Perhaps most powerfully of all, pupils come to expect and demand a particular way of working. '*You have forgotten to discuss the success criteria for this piece of work', 'With our regular teacher we give each other feedback at the end of a lesson – are we going to with you?'* and *'Wouldn't that question be better if it asked……?'* are all comments made by pupils who have been used to assessment for learning practices.

What are the Consequences of the Present Situation?

Both assessment for learning and testing appear to grow exponentially. The more assessment for learning approaches are adopted in the classroom, the more teachers and pupils want to develop them further. The more emphasis that is put on end of key stage tests, the more other tests proliferate (for example, optional tests used to check whether pupils are on track for the high stakes statutory tests). Reflecting upon the consequences of this growth in assessment, it is tempting to chant, in paraphrase of Animal Farm, 'assessment for learning good, testing bad', and perhaps with good reason.

Assessment for learning is undoubtedly having a profound and positive influence on pupils' learning, on their attitudes to and skills of learning, on the nature and quality of classroom discourse, on teachers' satisfaction and motivation, and on the outcomes of pupils' learning as measured by tests (Black et al, 2002). It is not however a quick or easy panacea. Assessment for learning often requires quite fundamental changes in the behaviour of teachers and pupils, and this takes time. Sometimes a strategy can be put into practice inappropriately, so that for example self-assessment becomes yet another meaningless writing exercise rather than a reflective thinking process. Teachers' actions can have unintended effects, or be misinterpreted by pupils, as in the case with young children attributing power to cartoon characters (used as classroom displays to make learning intentions and success criteria explicit), rather than beginning to take responsibility for their learning (Clarke, 2002).

The consequences of the heavy emphasis on targets, testing and performance tables are very much less benign. In an audit culture, Goodhart's law – in essence *'what's counted counts'* – has significant effects. The focus is upon achieving pre-determined measurable outcomes. Primary teachers know that the emphasis on pupils' performance in end of key stage tests has resulted in a concentration on literacy and numeracy, to the detriment of a broad and balanced curriculum (still required under the 1988 Education Act). The evaluators of the national literacy and numeracy strategies express deep concerns about the narrowing of the curriculum, which they attribute to targets and high stakes testing (Earl et al, 2003). Another study (Galton & MacBeath, 2002) similarly identifies the

curriculum distortion resulting from national curriculum tests, and also points to the effect on teacher workload and stress, which in turn have consequences for recruitment and retention. Other studies illuminate another effect of high stakes testing – that teaching methods tend to be more didactic rather than practical, which disadvantages and lowers the self-esteem of pupils who have differing learning preferences (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002).

There is also more and more evidence about the damaging effects of over testing on pupils themselves. Non Worrall, in an article for *FORUM* (Worrall, 2001) gave an account of a generation of young people who by the time they face their GCSE and AS level examinations feel they have been 'tested out'. Harlen & Deakin Crick (2002) have found that repeated testing, including practice tests, reinforces the low self-image of lower attaining pupils, which widens the gap between higher and lower attaining pupils.

When performance in particular tests becomes the main concern, rather than the learning itself for which the tests are meant to be proxy indicators, pupils aided by their teachers can become quite skilled at 'working the system' and scoring well on the tests. However, this 'performance' orientation is associated with extrinsic motivation sustained by rewards and competition, and is antithetical to the attitudes and motivation required for lifelong learning (Stobart, 2003). A recent report by NFER (Twist et al, 2003) suggests that English 11 year olds may be technically quite proficient at reading when compared with youngsters in other countries, but they have little love of reading for its own sake, or confidence in their own abilities.

The emphasis on school performance as measured through pupils' test and examination results can mean that schools are unwilling to admit pupils with learning or emotional and behavioural difficulties, often with far reaching consequences for the youngsters themselves. Teachers in special schools can feel that their efforts and the particular circumstances of their pupils are neither recognised nor understood.

The financial costs of the testing system, to the state and to individual schools, are staggering. The figure currently accepted is more than £200 million per annum (*Times Educational Supplement* 28 March 2003), but there may well be many hidden costs not accounted for in this figure. It is a huge undertaking in practical terms and, as we saw last year, the system may be beginning to collapse under its own weight.

What Next?

In contemplating the future of assessment there is no question of a return to the 'good old days', if ever such a time existed. Indeed, much of considerable value would be lost if we wound back the clock 15 years to before the 1988 Education Act. The evidence base for, and interest in, assessment for learning would be missing. There would be no systematic measuring of individual pupil performance (although the Assessment of Performance Unit had a well regarded and established approach to monitoring schools). Expertise in using assessment data for school improvement would be undeveloped. Expectations for individual pupils and whole cohorts may be too low. Information about schools' performance would be very limited. There is no going back.

So what does the future hold for assessment in English schools? There are a number of arenas to which we can turn to gain some insights.

Technological

The emphasis on ICT in assessment has been for more efficient operation of the current system of testing. Companies are exploring ways of marking and analysing large numbers of exam scripts quickly and accurately, and are developing on-line testing. These developments have their place, but we must beware the false appeal of doing more of the same, however efficiently.

Perhaps the greater promise lies in using ICT to deepen our knowledge and understanding of pupils' capabilities, and enabling pupils to be creative in their learning. Stephen Heppell, the director of Ultralab, argues that by not embracing the opportunities of technology we place constraints upon pupils when asking them to show what they can know and can do. As a simple example, most extended writing is composed at a keyboard, yet pupils' writing is assessed through pen and paper (Heppell, 2003). ICT can also help us understand the complex processes of classroom interactions (Gallimore & Stigler, 2003), and so support the development of assessment for learning.

Technology can be useful in presenting complex information in an accessible form, as demonstrated by the 'police performance monitoring diagrams', which cannot easily be translated into ranked league tables. Whether such approaches to publicising performance are adopted in education depends not so much on technology as on political will.

Political

There is no doubt that the monitoring and accountability aspects of assessment will continue, and that there is a need for a reasonable system of checks and balances in the system. However, I am equally sure that we cannot carry on as we are, proliferating the testing culture. Many influential voices also seem to be coming to this view, and expressing their concerns publicly. Reference has already been made to a number of research studies that have exposed negative effects of the current testing arrangements. In addition:

- David Bell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England told a conference in York on 27 February 2003 that
  one of the things inspectors find is that an excessive or myopic focus on targets can actually narrow and reduce achievement by crowding out some of the essentials of effective and broadly-based learning. They also find teachers, heads and local authorities for whom targets are now operating more as a threat than a motivator, more as stick than carrot. Moreover, the harder the targets become, the more tempting it is to treat them with cynicism or defeatism. I have a very real concern that the innovation and reform that we need to see in our schools may be inhibited by an over-concentration on targets.'
- Ken Boston, head of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, in an interview with the BBC at the beginning of December 2002, said that he wants to cut the number of exams that pupils sit, and is critical of a culture in which assessment is an end in itself.
  I think that the QCA itself has fuelled the assessment frenzy by putting so much effort into the optional tests.

They may well serve a very useful purpose, but if they are simply used as a training programme for further assessment then they are not fulfilling the fundamental purpose of assessment for learning, which is basically what assessment should be about.

- The Liberal Democrats published the pamphlet, 'Stressed At Seven' in December 2002, which concluded that tests for seven year-olds were '*believed by both teachers and parents to be unnecessary and potentially damaging for these children'.* The pamphlet calls for the abolition of tests for seven year-olds and their replacement by teacher assessments.
- The National Union of Teachers is campaigning to end national curriculum testing (www.teachers.org.uk).
- Mike Tomlinson, former HMCI and currently chair of the government's working group on 14-19, told the RSA on the 26 March 2003 that one of the group's terms of reference was to '*seek a reduction in the burden of assessment'*.
- Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education talking to the House of Commons' Select Committee for Education, showed that he had begun to doubt whether the tests were having a positive educational impact. In response to a question about year 6 pupils being taught to the target he said '*it was a familiar criticism and one which has some weight'.* He said also that he could '*imagine a different process of testing'* (*The Teacher*, March 2003, p. 15).

In a statement that could be seen to contrast with these voices, Tony Blair said that '*Testing is playing an important role in raising standards'* (The Teacher, December 2002, p14). In addition, annual performance management for teachers will inevitably focus upon pupils' test results, which seems to be at odds with Ken Boston's desire to reduce the use of optional tests. Nobody knows how the balance of influence will work out, but there are certainly many prominent people expressing concerns about the present testing of pupils in England. Perhaps English policy and practice will be influenced by the other nations of the UK. Wales has abolished testing at 7 and has no school performance tables or national targets; the situation is similar in Northern Ireland, while Scotland has never had national testing and has recently abolished national target setting.

The Scottish Executive is, however, systematically supporting assessment for learning. In England assessment for learning is in both the key stage 3 strategy and the primary strategy, and is supported by QCA and Ofsted.

It is important to remember that assessment for learning and testing are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, making formative use of summative assessment is one of the key approaches in assessment for learning. Nevertheless, there is an uneven relationship between the two aspects of assessment. Assessment for learning improves performance in tests: Black & Wiliam's review of 1998 found an effect size of between 0.4 and 0.7 (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, b), while it was 0.3 for the King's Medway Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project (Black et al, 2002). However, an over-concentration on high stakes tests undermines the attitudes, qualities and practices fundamental to assessment for learning. This leads to the conclusion that the balance between assessment for learning and testing should be weighted in favour of the former.

Professional

So what, as educational professionals, can and should we do?

We need to continue using assessment data for school improvement, making full use of the data that we do have, but only collecting sufficient for our needs. We need to develop our assessment literacy (Swaffield & Dudley, 2002) so that we know what can, and cannot, be inferred from a set of data. We need to develop the assessment literacy of parents, politicians and the wider public so for example, it is understood that the more we push for reliability, the less likely the assessment is to be valid. Explaining to parents that chance graphs are not predictions, that the assessment of almost everything meaningful involves a judgement, and discussing changes in classroom assessment practices, all help develop an understanding of assessment.

Using our assessment literacy and professional judgement we need to examine and come to an informed opinion about our present assessment arrangements. If there is something wrong, we must, as Richard Stiggins urges, do something about it. '*Just sensing a problem is not enough. Those who care about students make or demand changes in unsound assessments.'* (Stiggins, 1991). Each of us will decide upon our own course of action. For some, that might be through the professional associations. Whatever we choose to do, it is important that we try to anticipate what might be the actual outcome of our actions, which as has previously been noted, may be different from the effects we intended.

Being aware of actual outcomes, as opposed to intended effects, is crucial to a reflective approach to developing assessment for learning. By observing and listening to pupils we can judge the way they perceive changes in classroom practices, and adapt accordingly. Assessment for learning, engendering as it does deep changes in attitudes, relationships and interactions, takes time, and so it is important to be patient and persistent. The rewards can only be gleaned by each teacher developing this way of working with his or her pupils, but individual practice gains enormously from being supported, through discussions with colleagues and encouragement from school leaders.

Conclusion

These are interesting assessment times. There are many exciting, some burdensome, and some counter productive, developments. Some polices are contradictory, and some practices conflict. Assessment is very versatile, and wields enormous influence, for good and ill. We must stop it dictating to us, and instead use it as a servant for long-term enhanced learning and teaching.

Note

[1] Assessment arrangements and practices are different in the four nations of the United Kingdom. This article focuses upon England.

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Key Stage 3: strategy or strait-jacket?

SHEILA DAINTON
Sheila Dainton is education policy adviser for the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. In this article she reflects on issues surrounding the Key Stage 3 National Strategy and looks at events leading to the implementation of the Strategy. She writes here in a personal capacity.

This is a story about the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. It does not claim to be a definitive account. Rather it is based on one individual's perceptions and reflections on why the Strategy came about and how it was implemented.

The story is written from the perspective of a policy adviser and former primary teacher who has worked in the field of education policy for over 15 years and who entered the national education scene at the time that GERBIL (the Great Education Reform Bill of 1987, which let to the 1988 Education Reform Act) was being debated in parliament. It is written by someone who is employed by what is often described as a 'traditionally moderate' teachers' professional association and who was at the North of England Conference when, in January 2000, the then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, announced his intention to 'transform' secondary education by launching a national strategy for Key Stage 3.

Why the Language of Strategies?

Although there is now much talk about 'strategies' and 'strategic approaches', the use of this sort of management speak is a relatively recent phenomenon in the world of education. Schools have always had plans, policies and programmes of one sort or another, but the notion that they should also be 'strategic' is an interesting one. What does being 'strategic' add to the plan, policy or programme? After all, 'strategy' is most commonly defined as 'the art of war'.

And with the language of strategies come a welter of other metaphors of war that are increasingly being used when politicians and civil servants talk about education. We hear endlessly of targets, bullet points, action zones and zero tolerance. When a problem arises, a 'task force' is set up to address it. Over recent months, 'field force' has crept into the DfES lexicon to describe the 'army' of consultants and others who are out in the field, shoring up the 'delivery' of the national strategies. And in February of this year, speaking about Key Stage 3 at a conference on business and education, the School Standards Minister, David Miliband, proclaimed that: 'Boredom is the *recruiting sergeant* for disaffection, truancy and bad behaviour.'

Just what sort of a mindset is it that produces these images? Sadly, it would seem that, for education ministers, and for some of the civil servants and political advisers who write their speeches, education is indeed being conceptualised as the art of war: them against us; using 'weapons' to raise standards; I win, you lose. For the educator, and indeed for the learner, such language is surely anathema.

Why a Strategy for Key Stage 3?

Back in 1999, rumours had been circulating for some time that, having 'sorted' Key Stages 1 and 2 by introducing the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (NLNS), ministers were eager to have a stronger say over what was taught in the first three years of secondary schools and, importantly, over how it was taught.

Those who worked on GERBIL back in 1987 will remember only too well the lobbying that went on and the debate surrounding the clause of the Bill that became Section 4(3)(a) of the 1988 Education Reform Act. In essence, the Section states that the Secretary of State cannot determine how or when subjects should be taught. However, by introducing the NLNS at Key Stages 1 and 2 (and, incidentally, a whole raft of end-of year 'optional' tests in addition to the statutory tests in Years 2 and 6), and with Ofsted inspecting how it was taught, ministers, civil servants and, importantly, the new breed of government adviser that was populating the DfES in increasing numbers, had found a powerful way of influencing pedagogy in primary schools. By the late 1990s, primary schools in England were coping not only with the statutory ten-subject National Curriculum and the tests that accompanied it, but also with 'optional' end-of year tests and the non-statutory but quasi-compulsory NLNS. The same was about to happen at Key Stage 3.

By the end of the 1990s, concern about Key Stage 3 was focussing on five basic themes:

- the rate of progress between 11 and 14 was disappointingly low (and, it was claimed, the key stage 3 test results could now bear witness to this)
- there was a dip in so-called 'performance' at the beginning of Year 7
- the anticipation and excitement of starting secondary school quickly faded for many students, disaffection establishing itself in year 8
- Ofsted reported that teaching was less good in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4 (although usually taught by the same teachers).

Concern about Key Stage 3, and particularly about the so-called 'dip' in Year 7, is nothing new. Local authorities and partner schools have been involved in primary/secondary transition programmes since the age of 11 became the main point of transfer in the school system. During the passage of the 1988 Education Reform Act, the then Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, and those supporting him, argued persuasively that, as well as guaranteeing 'breadth-and-balance', the National Curriculum would promote 'continuity-and-progression'

year on year and across the traditional fault lines in the school system (infant to junior, primary to secondary, first school to middle school, and so on). There was much talk of 'seamless cloaks', and claims were made by politicians and civil servants that the National Curriculum was to be the key instrument for bridging the gap between primary and secondary schools.

More than a decade on, we can see only too clearly just how naive and fundamentally misconceived that idea was. While it could be argued that curriculum continuity between primary and secondary schools is perhaps better than it ever has been, there are many reasons why, of itself, the National Curriculum could not entirely bridge the gap. To name but a few: there are basic cultural, social and organisational differences between the two sectors; primary and secondary teachers are trained differently; the temptation to give pupils a 'fresh start' when they go to secondary schools is often (and, understandably) irresistible; pupils expect (and indeed look forward to) the rite of passage – they genuinely want things to be different.

It is argued here that, in spite of the original legislative intention behind the 1988 Education Reform Act, National Curriculum assessment (which, according to the wording of the 1988 Act was a part of the curriculum, not separate from it), when accompanied by the publication of school performance tables and the pernicious effects of Public Service Agreement targets, has probably done more to damage any chance of a smooth transition between primary and secondary schools than any other single factor.

The current reality is that, like it or not, it is extraordinarily difficult for Year 6 teachers to resist the overwhelming pressure from all quarters, including the DfES, LEAs and, not infrequently, headteachers, to spend much of the year, cramming, revising and 'boosting', in order that children do well in the Key Stage 2 tests. Of course, for at least some of the time some children may be learning effectively, and some of the learning may be genuinely embedded, but for too many, learning in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in Year 6 has become a case of revising, remembering and then quickly forgetting. And for many Year 6 children, the 'breadth-and-balance' to which they are legally entitled only starts once the SATs have been administered in May. It should also be remembered that at least one third of any Year 6 class will still be 10 years old by this date. Summer-born children have always remained at a disadvantage.

Is it any wonder then that when these same children start out on the secondary school career, having taken their Key Stage 2 tests well over three months earlier, and with the long summer holiday behind them, their secondary teachers are often somewhat perplexed by the Key Stage 2 SAT results (if, indeed, the results have arrived at the school, but that's another story) and start testing all over again. There are of course other problems such as the validity and reliability of the tests themselves, and the 'levelness' of the National Curriculum levels within and across both subjects and key stages. However, it is surely the sheer drudgery that is now all too frequently Year 6, and the valuable learning time that is wasted cramming, revising, remembering and then quickly forgetting, that is largely responsible for hindering rather than improving a smooth transition from primary to secondary school.

The Key Stage 3 Strategy

David Blunkett's North of England speech in January 2000 was greeted with cautious optimism by those present. The minister told his audience that : 'Too little is expected of pupils in the first year of secondary school, by the end of which around a third of pupils perform worse in tests than they did a year earlier.' He went on to remind the audience that Ofsted data reinforces this gloomy picture and that, although many schools are doing a good job ... 'eleven to 14 year olds are on the receiving end of more poor lessons than any other pupils according to HMCI's annual report'. In answer to a question from the floor, Blunkett confirmed that there would be no Key Stage 3 school performance tables , though as things turned out, from 2003 Key Stage 3 test results will be published by the DfES in a separate set of tables.

The new Strategy was to include:

- extending the national literacy and numeracy frameworks into Year 7
- 'voluntary' end-of-year English and maths tests for all Year 7 pupils from 2001
- statutory end-of-Key Stage 3 targets in English, maths and science to be set by schools for summer 2002
- a new programme of professional development for all secondary teachers, with a special focus on subject knowledge and problem solving.

Added to this the number of summer schools was to be doubled, and, at 16 plus, the minister promised summer camps similar to those in North America, providing an 'extensive programme of structured and challenging activity'.

My own efforts to find out more about the detail of the proposed Strategy from the DfES immediately after the North of England Conference suggest that the proposals were at a very early drafting stage. A number of civil servants across the DfES said they knew nothing about the Strategy. Several suggested that it was probably something to do with the Department's fast-growing and seriously influential Standards and Effectiveness Unit, headed up at that time by Professor Michael Barber. This later proved to be the case.

From the teachers' viewpoint, many responded angrily to the language of 'transformation'. It was widely perceived at the time that, rather than building on existing effective practice, ministers were using a deficit model. In any event, secondary schools had many other things to think about: new schemes of work in all National Curriculum subjects were due to arrive in schools in March 2000; there were to be changes to GCSEs; and there were likely to be major changes to the A level system. Yet ministers and civil servants continued to talk about 'Key Stage 3 teachers' without apparently recognising that, unlike their counterparts at Key Stage 2, the very same teachers taught at Key Stage 4 and often beyond.

When more details finally became available later in 2000, it was clear that the Strategy had been neatly packaged into five 'strands' (English, mathematics, science, ICT and TLF – teaching and learning in the foundation subjects) and four 'key principles' (expectations, progression, engagement, transformation). It is interesting to note that the TLF strand started out as Thinking Skills and was later known as TTL (transforming teaching and learning). It is now simply known as the Foundation

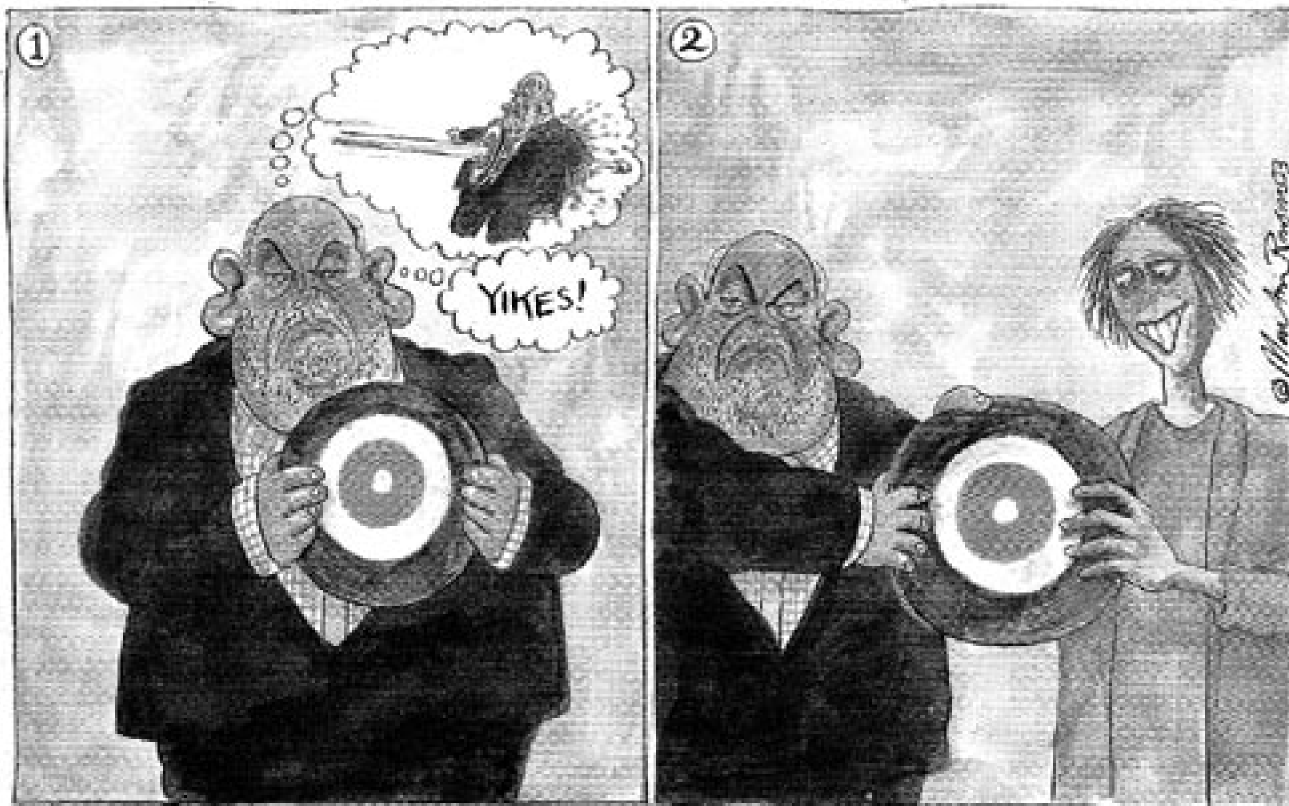
Subject strand (which, incidentally, includes Religious Education, which is not technically a foundation subject). The story of this strand would also warrant an article in itself. Suffice it to say that Thinking Skills (and the variety of views thereon) proved too hot to handle at the time – and those designing the Strategy realised somewhat late in the day that in presentational terms, 'teaching and learning', or even 'transforming teaching and learning' should be seen to underpin the whole of the Strategy, not just parts of it.

This is perhaps the most significant design flaw in the Strategy. Rather than start with teaching and learning across the Key Stage 3 curriculum, those who designed the Strategy took the pragmatic decision to extend the NLNS – or at least a version of it – into Key Stage 3, and then bolt on the rest. Although possibly conceptualised as a whole school strategy at a national level, at school level it has, by and large, been experienced as a series of piecemeal subject-based initiatives rather than as a whole-school teaching and learning strategy.

The most worrying addition to the existing five strands is a new one focusing on 'behaviour', to be introduced from September 2003. Here again, the reason why the behaviour of pupils has suddenly come to the top of the political agenda, and ways in which this initiative is linked with the Government's Public Service Agreement targets to reduce street crime among teenagers, would yet again warrant a separate article. But the very fact that 'behaviour' has its own, separate strand with its own separate LEA consultants, and the implication that 'behaviour' is something that is necessarily 'bad' or needs 'dealing with' shows a fundamental misunderstanding about the links between learning and teaching and the way learners behave. Behaviour does not come vacuum packed.

Is There an Alternative?

The answer must surely be 'yes'. The Key Stage 3 National Strategy has not been a wholesale disaster. On the contrary, it has raised the profile of this Key Stage and many teachers have engaged critically and constructively in new conversations about teaching and learning. However, the Strategy was imposed upon schools without consultation, negotiation or any general agreement about first principles. It was imposed on the acceptance that those designing the Strategy and the endless stream of ring-binders that accompany it, knew best. It was imposed without any clear, published evidence base that what was being proposed was firmly rooted in evidence about effective practice and what works well. It is as if, in an otherwise democratic, pluralistic society, the government has now become the self-appointed arbiter of 'best' practice. It was also imposed without any serious effort to quantify the demands already being made on a seriously over-stretched teaching workforce, and without taking account of issues such as teacher shortages (a particular problem for many mathematics departments). And it was imposed when the two-year pilot project was only half way through. It was also imposed without any debate about whether the traditional, 19th century subject-based grammar school curriculum is relevant to the lives of young learners in the 21st century Most important of all, it was imposed without engaging in a dialogue with the young people for whom it was designed, about their learning needs, expectations and aspirations.



Pioneering the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme in Hertfordshire

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Victoria Rataj-Worsnop is Vice Principal of Hockerill Anglo-European College in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire. She completed her PhD in 2001 under the supervision of Professor David Bridges. As this article demonstrates, she has a passionate interest in post-sixteen education in general and the International Baccalaureate Diploma curriculum in particular.

The purpose of this article is to give a flavour of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma programme, which is an alternative course of post-sixteen study to that of A-Level.

My aim is to give a brief outline of what the IB Diploma is, its history, philosophical underpinning and content, and also a little about the IB Diploma in action at Hockerill Anglo-European College, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, an 11-19 co-educational, state day and boarding school, and the only maintained boarding school in this country that offers this rigorous and exciting course of post-sixteen study.

Personal Background

My interest in the IB started in the early 1990s when the Cambridgeshire Village College where I taught and where I was later to become Director of Post-16 Studies, decided to offer the IB Diploma programme in the Sixth Form. One of the reasons why we decided to introduce the IB Diploma into the Sixth Form was because we believed that A-Levels provided too narrow an education for young people. We felt that young people needed to be multi-skilled in a rapidly developing global society and that the IB curriculum would enable us to move forward with our vision of post-sixteen education. However, because of historical circumstances and financial implications, we were not in a position to become a solely IB Sixth Form so we taught A-Levels and A/S Levels and the IB programme side by side. Where the syllabuses allowed, we taught A-Level and IB students together in the same group. They were great times for us as a Sixth Form – exciting, challenging and sometimes frustrating for staff and students alike. Parents had made an act of faith to send their sons and daughters to us and we worked hard to establish the IB Diploma as part of our culture. By the time I left in 1998 to join Hockerill Anglo-European College as Vice Principal, the IB Diploma programme was well established in the Sixth Form with students achieving excellent results.

It was not until 1998 and my appointment to the post of Vice Principal to Hockerill Anglo-European College that I was able to realise my dream: responsibility for starting a school Sixth Form which only taught for the IB Diploma programme. I had longed for the opportunity to do this although it was alongside taking on a wide range of roles as Vice Principal, organising an Ofsted inspection and starting a Sixth Form. In addition, I was also in the middle of completing my PhD in applied curriculum philosophy. The focus: post-sixteen education and the IB Diploma curriculum.

What is the IB Diploma Programme?

Students taking the IB Diploma programme are required to study six subjects, three at Higher Level and three at Standard Level. They have to follow a course in their own language or 'best' language (Language A1), a Modern Foreign Language (Language A2, B, *ab initio*) a Humanities subject, an Experimental Science, a course in Mathematics and take an Elective. The Elective may be an Arts subject such as Visual Arts, Music or Theatre Arts or students may wish to take another Modern Foreign Language, Science or Humanity or follow a course in Computer Science. The subject choices fall into groups within a prescribed framework that reflects Peterson's (1960) concept of four 'modes of activity'. Alec Peterson (1908-1988) was central to the development of the IB Diploma examination. I will return to him and the four modes of activity later in this article.

To continue with an outline of the IB Diploma programme: in addition to the six subjects which constitute the 'core' of the IB Diploma programme, students take a further three mandatory components. They write a four thousand-word study on a topic of their own choice (Extended Essay), follow a course in the Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and undertake creative, sporting and community service (CAS – Creativity, Action and Service) activities.

A maximum of forty-five points is available to each student with twenty-four points (and no failing conditions) constituting a Diploma pass. All six subjects and the three mandatory components must be completed in order to be awarded the Diploma. Each of the six subjects is graded from one to seven, with seven being the highest a student can obtain in each of the six subjects. There are three bonus points available for the Theory of Knowledge and the Extended Essay. Making comparisons between A-Levels and the IB Diploma is not wise: they are very different educational experiences. Nonetheless, to provide a rough guide to the grade seven, the top IB Diploma grade in each subject – a seven is roughly equivalent to an A grade at A-Level. It is more realistic, however, to think of a seven as a 'super A' or A* which of course does not exist at A-Level.

A Brief History of the International Baccalaureate

One of the principal driving forces behind the IB Diploma examination was Alec Peterson (1908-1988) [mentioned above] who was to become Director of the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Oxford (1958-1975) and subsequently the first Director General of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), (1968-1977). However, it was as Headmaster of Dover College in the early 1950s that Peterson's strong interest in international education was kindled and indeed, fired, led by the conviction that

> *… it was time education began to break down the barriers of national prejudice and prepare young people for life in an independent world. (Peterson, 1987, p.1)*

This conviction led him to start an international Sixth Form at Dover College and work with Kurt Hahn and European educational reformers like, for example, Jean Capelle, Madame Hatinguais and Hellmut Becker, towards the establishment of an international post-sixteen school leaving examination.

1962 to 1970 were crucial years in the development of the IBO and the IB Diploma examination. During that period of time the IB Office was established in Geneva (1965), the first trial IB Diploma examinations were held (1968) and the first 'real' IB Diploma examinations that would secure university places for the candidates were held in 1970. Much water has flowed under the bridge as we reflect upon those early days of the development of the IB Diploma. From the twenty-nine full-diploma candidates in 1970 the IB Diploma candidature has grown to well over fourteen thousand. It is taught in one thousand, three hundred and ninety five schools and colleges in one hundred and fourteen countries worldwide.

Educational Philosophy and Aims

The educational philosophy that underpins the IB Diploma programme supports the development of the whole person by providing a liberal and general balanced education which avoids the encyclopaedism of some of the European systems, for example, the German Arbitur, and, certainly before the advent of Curriculum 2000, the early specialisation of the English system. It also addresses what Peterson (1987) referred to as the 'physical, social, moral, aesthetic, and spiritual aspects' (ibid. p. 33) of human development through two of the three mandatory aspects of the IB Diploma programme – Creativity, Action and Service (CAS) and Theory of Knowledge (TOK).

Initially the IB Diploma programme was created to meet the practical needs of a mobile international community. It was intended to provide a curriculum and an examination that would have universal currency and prepare young people for university entry, principally to the universities in their own countries.

As mentioned earlier, each IB Diploma student has to take six subjects, three at Higher Level and three at Standard Level. This constitutes a balanced curriculum consisting of

> *… a first and second language (Language A and Language B), mathematics, one subject drawn from the 'exact' or 'experimental sciences, one drawn from the 'human sciences' or 'study of man', and a sixth subject at free choice. (Peterson, 1987, p. 38)*

The overall purpose being

> *… not the acquisition of general knowledge, but the development of the general powers of the mind to operate in a variety of ways of thinking … (Peterson, 1987, p. 41)*

Peterson (1972) said, 'we cannot, in deference to the needs of common humanity, neglect the moral and aesthetic (ibid. p. 36). This is why, in addition to the six subjects, each student has to follow a Theory of Knowledge course (TOK), write an Extended Essay (of four thousand words) and participate in a Creativity, Action and Service (CAS) programme. The latter two elements of the IB Diploma were strongly influenced by Kurt Hahn's philosophy with regard to the importance of experiential learning in the educative process.

The Organisation and Structure of Knowledge: Peterson's 'four modes of activity'

Peterson (1960, 1969, 1972, 1973), like Phenix (1964) and Hirst (1965) recognised that there was a range and structure of different types of knowledge. This was, after all a long established notion – Aristotle being one of the earliest classifiers. Peterson argued for four modes of activity which Sixth Form students should be initiated into so that they develop 'intellectual capacity and range' (Peterson, 1960, p. 14). In *Arts and Science Sides in the Sixth Form* (1960), which seems to have provided much of the rationale for the IB Diploma programme. Peterson identified four main modes of activity (ibid. p. 14): logical, empirical, moral and aesthetic. However, it is important to note that whereas both Phenix and Hirst did not choose to work on the practicalities of curriculum design, Peterson (1960) was very much concerned with showing how the Sixth Form curriculum should be structured and organised. He argued that the four modes were represented in the following subjects: the logical mode manifests in Mathematics and Languages; the empirical (experimental) mode in the Natural Sciences with 'possible contributions from History and Geography' (ibid. p. 16); the moral mode in the Literature of one's own language and also in Science, History and Religious Knowledge. A study of Literature, Music and the Plastic Arts were the subjects which, according to Peterson, developed the aesthetic mode (ibid. p. 16). He did not argue for a philosophical mode of activity (whereas Hirst, 1970, included philosophical understanding as a form of knowledge). However, Peterson acknowledged the importance of philosophical activity in a 'complementary course' of study for all students about the unity of knowledge, based on the Classe de Philosophie (ibid. p. 18). In the IB Diploma programme curriculum this complementary course became the Theory of Knowledge component (Peterson, 1972, p. 41) to which I have already alluded.

Peterson (1960) argued that initiation into the four modes of activity would provide a 'sufficient level of skill, knowledge and understanding in the different disciplines to preserve until the end of the school career, freedom of choice between as many as possible of the main university studies' (ibid. p. 14). He added that such a curriculum based on the four modes would also have value

for all Sixth Form students whether they decided upon a university career or not (ibid.).

Let us reflect a little on Peterson's (1960) statement. In the first part of his statement there is a problem with what he meant by 'sufficient' in terms of acquisition of skill levels, knowledge and understanding. There is also the question of 'sufficient' for what purpose(s)? Perhaps he was referring to the word with regard to a broad spread of skills, knowledge and understanding as opposed to the narrowness of post-sixteen education which characterised the school Sixth Form curriculum in the 1960s. There will always remain a certain arbitrariness about the issue of 'choice' but Peterson's reference to 'freedom of choice' perhaps indicates that initiation into the four modes will give greater freedom of choice in terms of university studies but also the choice of when to specialise.

Peterson's rationale for selecting and organising knowledge into four main modes of thinking which were to provide a conceptual framework for the school Sixth Form curriculum, and ultimately for the IB Diploma curriculum (see Peterson 1972, 1987), was based on an historical premise with a solid philosophical underpinning. The premise was that over the centuries 'conceptual frameworks' (Peterson, 1969, p. 175) have been 'worked out by the human race' (ibid.) and those frameworks embodied in a 'public language' (ibid.). An understanding of the nature and structure of knowledge should enable curriculum planners to make, as far as possible, a selection of knowledge based upon rational principles thus enabling human beings to (better?) understand each other and the society they inhabit.

Thus, Peterson's (1960) aim of initiating students into the four modes of activity was to avoid the narrowness of specialisation, give some element of subject choice within a prescribed framework and provide a general education with the intention of developing the intellect to a fuller capacity than that of specialised study.

Educating for international understanding

The IB Diploma is an *international* qualification and so it is important to touch upon what education for international understanding means.

To define in detail what is meant by an 'international education' or educating for international understanding is complex and would require more space than is available to me here. Nevertheless, it is important to address the concept of international education, albeit briefly, in order to provide further understanding of the aims of the IB Diploma programme.

In the final chapter of *Schools Across Frontiers* (1987) Peterson raised some important issues about the concept of international education. Broadly speaking, my interpretation of what Peterson meant by 'international education' is an understanding, appreciation and tolerance of other cultures. A student's ability to move from 'international knowledge' to 'international understanding' and thereby achieve the aim of 'international education' is complex but let us work from the assumption that 'international understanding' can be made explicit. Given that assumption, reaching that aim will vary, depending on, for example, the student's personality, background, experience of other cultures and the educational environment and ethos of their school (international or national). The shift from 'international knowledge' to 'international understanding' may have been implicit to Peterson but this seems to be, perhaps, a rather naïve view when taking into account the many factors that influence and contribute to a person's knowledge, understanding and education. Nevertheless, the aim of educating for international understanding is highly important when considering the type of curriculum and educational experience that the IB Diploma propounds.

The IB Diploma was envisaged as a lifelong education, developing, for example, certain attitudes such as tolerance and compassion towards other nationalities and cultures and developing awareness of self and others – these are all part of an IB Diploma student's education. The international aspect of each IB Diploma student's education can be identified in terms of curriculum content but to provide adequate evidence of terms of a change in a student's attitudes towards other nationalities and cultures may prove to be more of a pedagogic challenge. Nevertheless, at least the IB Diploma curriculum aims to make explicit the need to teach students to be responsible citizens and to engage sensitively and responsibly with the global issues of our time.

> *The purpose of the International Baccalaureate Organisation is to educate young people to act intelligently and responsibly in a complex global society.*
>
> *Through the high quality of its curriculum and assessment, the IB seeks to ensure knowledge of traditional academic disciplines and of the individual's own heritage, while fostering inquisitiveness and openness to new ideas.*
>
> *Participation in the IB should equip students with a genuine understanding of themselves and of others (sic), heightening the capacity for tolerance and engendering respect for different points of view. (Annual Report, IBO, 1992/1993, p. 3)*

Education for international understanding promotes tolerance and respect for other peoples and cultures. It is clearly significant in terms of the IB Diploma curriculum model but its significance is much greater in terms of the contribution it makes to a view of citizenship education and its place within the Sixth Form curriculum as a whole.

Liberal Education

In *Schools Across Frontiers* (1987) Peterson wrote that one of the aims of the founders of the IBO was to develop a curriculum that was 'liberal and general' (ibid. 1987, p. 194). In an earlier work (Peterson, 1969) he argued that the two concepts 'liberal' and 'general' were interchangeable (ibid. p. 166) although he acknowledged that historically they had been regarded separately on the grounds that liberal education was deemed the opposite of vocational training and general education, the opposite of a specialised education.

> *In terms of contemporary usage, however, I believe they have now come, or should have come, to mean the same thing. (ibid.)*

Peterson's (1969) concept of liberal education was expressed thus:

> *It is an education which enables a man (sic) to realize, in Matthew Arnold's words, his own best self. In so*

far as a man's best self is, in the society we know, realized in social and economic inter-dependence with other men and not merely or primarily in isolation, it may include elements that are related to social and economic activity, but only in so far as these are included in order that the individual may realize himself and not in order that he may 'serve' the needs of society. Finally, it is an education which frees a man from the domination of received and uncriticised ideas or second-hand and superficial emotions, so that he may choose his own thoughts, and, so far as possible, his own actions as a morally free individual. (ibid. pp. 167-168)

In using the term 'liberal' education, Peterson claimed an historical precedent for the IB Diploma programme, perhaps in part to give it educational status. However, he was also keen to advocate a curriculum which aimed to move away from encyclopaedism towards a curriculum which freed the mind to engage in a number of different ways of thinking based on (for him) the four modes of activity.

Peterson said that it is a fundamental element of the concept of liberal education that education is for the good of the individual rather than society but 'that the pursuit of the first is the best way to pursue the second' (Peterson, 1969, p. 168). However, would this argument also apply to, for example, a new nation escaping from a colonial past? It seems that Peterson (1969) was arguing that if a person can reach, insofar as possible, realisation of self through a general and liberal education as he conceived of it, they will have achieved, insofar as possible, liberation from 'superficial and uncriticised ideas' (ibid. pp. 167-168) and be able to make life choices insofar as possible as a 'morally free individual' (ibid.). I am somewhat puzzled by what Peterson (1969) meant by 'moral' freedom. Although I believe that being a 'morally free individual' is probably impossible and certainly undesirable, I think Peterson was actually suggesting that to be 'morally free' meant that through a general and liberal education a person could reach, insofar as possible, some type of objectivity with regard to the 'thoughts' and 'actions' (ibid. p. 168) involved in making life choices. A liberal education is principally characterised as the development of 'rational' mind, an ability to think in different 'forms' or 'modes' assumed to be available to us. These forms or modes are not arbitrary but logically and socially organised. They are conceptual frameworks of knowledge, which have been developed by human beings over the centuries and achieved historical, social and philosophical meaning and legitimacy.

At this juncture, let us pause for a moment to reflect upon the international aspect of the IB Diploma curriculum that we have already visited, and to what extent it forms part of the cohesive curriculum that the IB Diploma curriculum claims to be. How does it 'fit' with liberal education, for example?

Educating for international understanding is an integral part of liberal education. Oakeshott (1974) used the metaphor of a conversation for different aspects of a liberal curriculum and advocated that if each human being was to understand themselves and others around them, they should participate in a 'culture'. For Oakeshott (1974) 'culture' was an amalgam of, for example, thoughts, feelings, ideas and perceptions which people share as they participate in a 'conversation'. It is that type of 'conversation' that teachers of the IB Diploma curriculum are keen for their students to participate in. Educating for international understanding is important because it propounds tolerance, shared community responsibilities and encourages cultural exchange. This clearly links it with liberal education, and our growing sense of globalisation.

If It's So Good, Why Aren't We All Doing it?

It is abundantly clear from this article that I am a firm advocate of the IB Diploma programme. Indeed, the term 'messianic' has been levelled at me – and I am rather proud of that. I hope that by the time you have read this far you will agree with me that the IB Diploma is educationally and philosophically well thought out. It provides the type of all-round (holistic) education that I believe prepares young people for the challenges of a rapidly changing world. However, it would be nonsense to pretend that there are no problems or threats to its advocacy. On a pragmatic level, it is expensive in terms of staffing and resoucing when compared to, for example, A-Level. However, there are three particular challenges to its advocacy in contemporary education that may pose just too many challenges (or threats) to the Government and therefore affect decisions about changing post-sixteen provision at Sixth Form level. I would like to share these challenges with you:

1. **A narrow-minded vocationalism**. The IB Diploma curriculum is founded fundamentally on the principles of a liberal education. It has no explicit 'vocational' element to it in a narrow sense of offering training for a particular vocational pathway. For strong proponents of vocational education in the narrow sense of preparation for a particular vocational pathway, the IB Diploma programme would not recommend itself as a particularly good choice of post-sixteen study. However, the IB Diploma programme embraces a wider interpretation of 'vocation' as a call or an invitation to learn. Peterson (1972) advocated that the primary function of education is immersion in the four modes of activity and not a preparation for a vocation in its narrow sense. I would argue that this is a sensible view of education because immersion in the four modes of activity provides students with the tools they will most probably need in the future to make informed life choices – life choices that are also likely to include vocational/career choices.
2. **The demand for flexibility and choice: the 'cafeteria' curriculum.** I have recommended the IB Diploma programme for its coherence. However, there are many trends – in higher education as well as post-sixteen education – towards fragmentation of the curriculum and flexibility in the way in which quite small modules of study may be combined. There is some choice for students within the six groups of study but the IB Diploma curriculum is fairly inflexible in terms of mixing it with A-Level GCSE for example, although some schools have offered IB certificates in separate subjects as a means of adding breadth to their A-Level curriculum. Fundamentally, the IB Diploma programme is not designed to be a cafeteria curriculum – its philosophical and educational underpinning is based firmly on the principle of curriculum coherence.

3. **Narrower rather than longer social/political identities**. The IB Diploma curriculum explicitly cultivates an internationalist cosmopolitan political identity and ethic. Some of the globalising tendencies in contemporary society support that identity – but these are also accompanied by narrower and more parochial identities – the reassertion of nationalism, sub-nationalism, regionalism. It remains to be seen which of these tendencies will become dominant. The broader perspective of the IB Diploma curriculum, for example, education for international understanding, seems to me to be a crucial dimension of our educative processes – more particularly in the later stages of schooling – but it is challenged by what can often emerge as violent forms of local tribalism.

I believe that the IB Diploma curriculum has something very important to offer as a curriculum for sixteen to nineteen-year-old students, but that it offers this in a context in which some of its central principles are subject to serious challenge.

The Future of Post-sixteen Education?

In the early 1990's there was little if any reference to the IB by the media. However, when New Labour came into power, it began to feature more prominently in people's thinking as the twentieth century drew to a close, and particularly so because it was being championed by the then Education Secretary, David Blunkett. By December 1999, Blunkett was singing the praises of the IB Diploma, hailing it as 'The Six Star Qualification' (Halpin, 1999) and proclaiming that were the IB Diploma programme to be adopted by schools in England, an 'almost Renaissance education will start to emerge but it needs to be done with an absolute emphasis on quality. That's why the IB is good because it is quality' (ibid.).

After the recent A-Level fiasco, talk of a baccalaureate style examination is once again in the news. I just hope that whatever lies in store, it will be a quality model. If not the IB Diploma as we know it then a curriculum that is carefully thought out by respected educators, a curriculum that is based upon a solid educational rationale and a curriculum that provides breadth, depth, balance and cohesion.

The International Baccalaureate Diploma programme at Hockerill Anglo-European College in the 21st Century

At Hockerill Anglo-European College, over a space of five years, we have built up a Sixth Form of one hundred and forty IB Diploma students but we started off with a small cohort – just over forty from varying educational backgrounds and cultures and with a wide range of abilities. To begin with, not all the students stayed for the full two year IB Diploma programme, opting to return to their native land or, in one or two cases, change their educational pathway. We worked hard to nurture our first cohort of young people through their IB Diploma programme. I was delighted in July 2000 when in our first small IB Diploma cohort one of our students achieved a forty-two point Diploma (out of a possible forty-five) – a great boost to our dedicated staff and incoming students. Results have gone up in leaps and bounds since 2000. Our best score to date has been forty-four points which put us easily into the top five percent in the world.

Our students gain entry to the top universities in this country and abroad and study a range of subjects from Medicine to Modern Foreign Languages. As you can imagine, I am extremely proud of their achievements.

As I write, my 2003 cohort of IB Diploma students are well into submitting their final coursework assignments, taking oral examinations and preparing for their written examinations which commence on May 2. As a Sixth Form, we continue to grow and flourish and are once again heavily over-subscribed for September 2003 entry. In 2002 we had eighty four percent IB Diploma pass with fifty of our students achieving the highly prestigious Bilingual Diploma. We are achieving at the international average and aim to beat it this year. In November 2002, when we were inspected by HMI our IB Diploma work was described as 'inspiring'.

My personal target for our Hockerill 2003 IB Diploma cohort of students – one hundred percent Diploma passes with a forty-five point Diploma amongst them. Why not aim for the stars. As Robert Browning said 'a man's reach should exceed his grasp.'

In our Sixth Form at Hockerill College we have built a vibrant community of international students who are a joy to work with. I have been a teacher for almost twenty-three years and I have taught the IB for well over a decade now but still I never cease to feel humbled by the young people who join the IB Diploma programme. They come with so many talents in addition to their academic gifts – musical talents, talents in the field of sport and also talents that Gardner (1989) classes as 'interpersonal' and 'intrapersonal'. Gardner (1989) claims that there are seven forms of 'intelligences'. The IB Diploma programme allows students to develop them all (and any others you can think of) thereby adding to their already considerable store of knowledge and abilities. The IB Diploma curriculum provides breadth and depth and gives students the opportunity to think critically and creatively. It saddens me that the changes to post-sixteen education in this country have been so piecemeal and the 'vision' of the Government so incredibly myopic.

Hockerill College were pioneers in post-sixteen state education in Hertfordshire and our pioneering spirit continues to prevail, not just at post-sixteen but in other Key Stages and other areas of curriculum development. However, that is another story – and another article.

I hope that the spirit of Alec Peterson smiles upon us at Hockerill as we continue to work towards understanding and collaborating better with our 'fellow human beings across frontiers' (Peterson, 1987, pp. 195).

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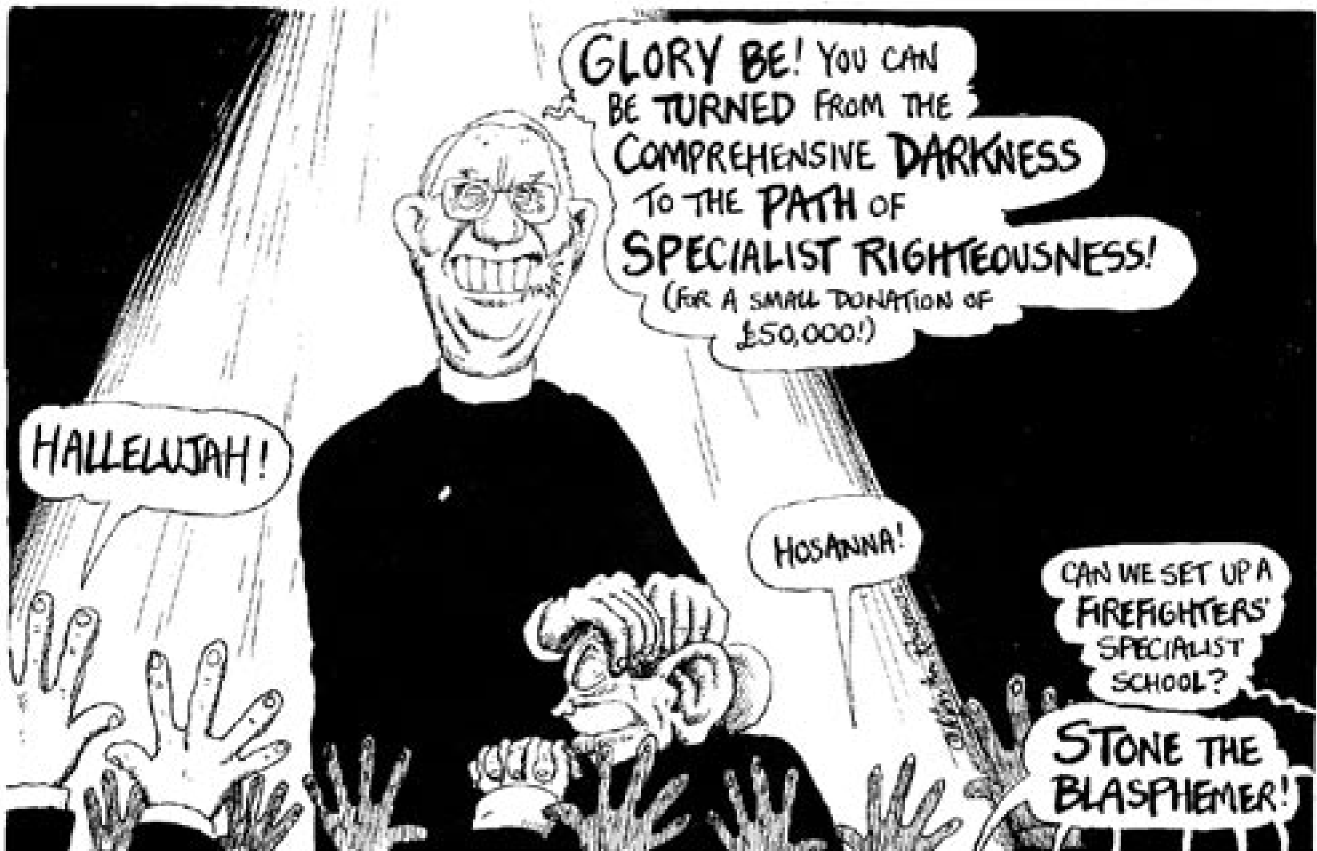

A Chance for an Inclusive and Unified English Baccalaureate System from 14+

ANN HODGSON & KEN SPOURS

The authors, both senior lecturers at the Institute of Education, University of London (School of Lifelong Education and International Development), propose an inclusive and unified English baccalaureate system from 14+ in which all learners can achieve to their full potential in lifelong learning, the aim being to extend the concept of comprehensive education at least to the age of nineteen years.

An Historic Opportunity for Reform

We are at a critical moment in educational reform with an unprecedented and possibly unrepeatable opportunity to transform upper secondary education in England. The Labour Government has accepted, at long last, the case for a fundamental restructuring of education and training for 14-19 year olds. The education profession has argued for this type of reform since the late 1980s and, in the 1990s, there was a growing consensus for a decisive move towards a more inclusive and unified curriculum and qualifications system (e.g. Finegold et al, 1990; Royal Society, 1991; NCE, 1995; NAHT, 1995; NUT, 1995). Despite this pressure, the traditionalism and selective logic of the English system, focused around the A Level 'Gold Standard', still held sway, even under Labour Administrations. It took the instability of the *Curriculum 2000* reforms and the examinations crisis of Summer 2002 to break the stranglehold of A Levels and to allow a new reform logic to find its place in national government policy. It is this system reform logic which now permeates the long-term vision in *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence* (DfES, 2003), the Government's 'next steps' paper on 14-19 education. The Government now recognises, and rightly so, that the selective nature of current 14-19 qualifications erects barriers for learners, thus undermining their aim of increasing levels of participation and achievement.

However, while there may be a consensus that curriculum and qualifications reform is required for the 14-19 phase, an agreement around the principles and architecture of a new system still needs to be forged. In this article we make the case for an inclusive and unified English Baccalaureate System from 14+ in the spirit of contributing to this debate. Our main proposition is that we need to develop what we call 'a 100 per cent system' in which all learners can achieve to their full potential in lifelong learning. The aim of such a system from 14+ is to extend the concept of the comprehensive education at least to the age of 19.

Building on System Strengths and Tackling System Barriers

System Strengths

It is traditional for reformers to start from a position of measuring system deficits and, in the case of 14-19 qualifications and curriculum reform, it is tempting still to do so. However, at this point it may be more productive to start from an assessment of strengths in the English system, because of the possibility of harnessing these in a longer and more gradual change process.

The traditional strengths of the English education system are, not surprisingly, associated with its élites. In particular, our system of higher education has low drop-out rates, given the level of participation we have in this country (NAO, 2002). Moreover, the A Level system, which combines subject choice with specialist study, can produce a minority of highly motivated and skilful students for higher education.

But our system has developed other strengths arising out of years of reform attempts in the area of pre-vocational and vocational education. There is a strong tradition of learner guidance and formative assessment, despite the emphasis of successive governments on external examinations. Teachers, pressurised and faced with constant change, have developed a capacity to mould reforms to make them workable. Schools and colleges, within what has become a marketised system, have learned to cope with change and to make an innovative response in order to help learners progress and achieve. The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), in the late 1980s, has been seen as a classic case of 'bottom up' reform which both developed and harnessed institutional capacities and assisted the professional development of a generation of teachers and lecturers (Yeomans, 1996).

In addition, while reforms over the last decade or so can be criticised for not fully addressing many underlying problems, some changes have contributed to system 'capacity building'. Due to the development of GNVQs there are now more 'applied' courses in schools and the *Curriculum 2000* reforms have led to larger programmes of study at advanced level (Hodgson & Spours, 2003).

A major conclusion arising from this analysis of 'system strengths' is to design a reform process which

allows space for teacher interpretation, local development and innovation. At the same time, the reform process must also take into consideration influential system inhibitors – qualifications barriers, league tables and over-assessment – all of which have prevented this kind of local innovation from having a decisive national impact in the past (Hodgson & Spours, 1997). We will argue here that there are four major issues which 14-19 reform through the introduction of an English Baccalaureate system has to resolve.

The GCSE Barrier

To many, GCSE is remembered as a great educational success. The introduction of the new 'common 16+ examination' in 1987/8 led to rises in attainment at 16+ compared with the old O-Level; to significant rises in post-16 staying-on which then fed through to improvements in A Level participation and attainment (Gray et al, 1993). However, this changed in the cutting back of internal assessment; the tiering of exam papers and the introduction of school performance tables which accentuated the importance of A*-C grades. Rises in GSCE attainment rates slowed markedly during the late 1990s as did post-16 staying-on rates and A Level attainment.

Currently about half of all 16 year olds are achieving 5 A*-C grades, the basic threshold for progression to advanced level study. This means that half are not. In the current system, those falling below the threshold feel that they are failing at Intermediate Level rather than succeeding at Foundation Level. Moreover, their post-16 options are very limited. For those who do succeed at GCSE, the experience is not always positive. Learners spend their time pursuing up to 10 examination results with relatively little time for skill building and personal development. In this sense, the current GCSE programme is neither a good curriculum experience nor is it a good preparation for advanced level study which requires learners to be able to work independently beyond the classroom.

The GCSE system is, therefore, fundamentally flawed; no Foundation Level; too much examination and external assessment and little room for skill building. In addition, the current way that performance tables are compiled means that schools value those learners who attain 5A*-C grades by the age of 16 more highly than others.

Fragmented and Low Status Vocational Provision

While the GCSE barrier, in its current form, is a relatively new problem for the English system, the issue of fragmented and low-status vocational provision is long-standing and deep-seated (Steedman & Green 1997; Steedman, 2002). Despite numerous reforms over the last two decades, vocational qualifications have continued to suffer from low status and marginalisation. In 14-19 education they have traditionally been associated with the less able; they are fragmented into different types because they have tried to serve many diverse and possibly conflicting purposes and the majority have very limited support from employers. For these reasons, vocational qualifications have neither effectively served as a broad general education for those not participating in the selective GCSE and A Level track nor as a strong vocational programme supporting high levels of skill in the workplace. Vocational provision in the 14-19 phase is in urgent need of structural reform so that it becomes mainstream, relevant and respected.

The Limitations of the Curriculum 2000 Reforms

The third major problem that any reform of 14-19 education has to tackle arises from the limitations of the *Curriculum 2000* reform process to date. As a result of these changes to advanced level qualifications, the majority of advanced level learners are now taking more subjects in their first year of study and are, thus, on fuller timetables than prior to the reforms. Many are also studying key skills and a small minority is mixing general and vocational qualifications. These developments can be seen as quantitative gains over the old A Level system. (Hodgson & Spours, 2003). However, most students under *Curriculum 2000* have not opted to broaden their advanced level studies beyond taking a further subject. Their choice of the 'fourth' AS subject has generally been cautious and there is little incentive for them to take contrasting subjects (Ofsted, 2003). Engagement with key skills, particularly in schools, is sporadic and there has been a decline in the up-take of extra-curricular activities. In addition, the Advanced Certificate of Vocational Education (AVCE) has not become an attractive award because it has neither achieved parity with A Levels nor has it provided a rich vocational experience. Perhaps most worrying is the poor quality of learning at advanced level with research suggesting that the design of the AS, in particular, has encouraged a more didactic approach to teaching, a superficial approach to learning and a greater emphasis on teaching to the test (Hodgson & Spours, 2003). Moreover, the increase in assessment resulting from modular qualifications has led to year-on-year examinations and an awarding system which has become unstable and unsustainable.

The Lack of a Curriculum Framework 14-19

The fourth major system problem is that the current 14-19 education system, divided between a compulsory and post-compulsory phase, has little explicit sense of curriculum, skill development or purpose. The emphasis on qualifications rather than on curriculum in the 14-19 phase has led to a fragmented approach to learning. Different types of learning are promoted according to the type of qualification. Broad vocational qualifications have tended to promote more skill building and learner-centredness, while academic qualifications have encouraged a more knowledge-based, subject-based and theoretical approach to learning. NVQs, at their most extreme, are not designed to promote curriculum or learning experiences as such, because their central principle is the accreditation of competence in the workplace. This has meant that there is nothing to ensure equity of experience for learners on different routeways within the English system.

Principles of Reform for an English Baccalaureate System from 14+

If a unified and inclusive curriculum and qualifications system from 14+ is to build on the strengths and respond to the long-standing or new system weaknesses outlined above, it will need to be founded on a number of key principles. We outline these below and suggest that what is needed is an English Baccalaureate System from 14+.

Promoting Inclusion through a Single System

One of the major criticisms of baccalaureates that have been voiced in England has been that these awards cater for a minority of learners because they exist only at advanced level and focus primarily on general education. There are some baccalaureates or leaving certificates, for example, in Sweden and France, which do include both general and vocational education at advanced level. However, in the English context, which has traditionally been so divided and élitist, we believe that inclusion would need to be a high priority within a unified award structure. The English Baccalaureate System, which we will describe in more detail below, attempts to be inclusive in two ways – by employing a multi-level ladder of progression for all learners 14-19 and by including all types of learning, both general and vocational. In this sense, the proposed inclusiveness of the English Baccalaureate approach is based upon the premise that every learner has a place – hence the concept of a 100 per cent system.

Developing a Curriculum and Qualifications Framework 14–19

We suggest that it would be important to lay out a framework of requirements and entitlements for each of the four levels of diploma within the English Baccalaureate System (Entry, Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced) to secure a 14-19 curriculum framework for all learners for the first time in the English education and training system. The curriculum framework accredited by the diplomas provides a means of securing both breadth and depth of achievement. For each level of diploma (we envisage that only the advanced level diploma would be termed a baccalaureate) curriculum demands would be specified in the form of a common core of learning and options for specialisation and breadth. The English Baccalaureate diplomas would not be based upon a 'one size fits all' model, but would attempt to combine common learning with a high degree of customisation and personal choice – a strong feature of the English system which deserves to be built upon. The diplomas also need to be flexible enough to be able to respond to future learning needs as the system evolves. Such a system of diplomas would, therefore, represent a compromise between the traditional free-choice nature of A Levels and the highly prescriptive International Baccalaureate.

Creating a Ladder of Progression

While there would be design principles based on the concept of breadth and common learning, which would be germane to all the diplomas, the design and requirements of each level of diploma would reflect its different purposes. The Entry Level Diploma would be the first level in the English Baccalaureate awarding structure at 14+ and would provide basic, practical and life skills alongside project work to motivate learners, including those with special learning needs. The role of the Foundation and Intermediate Level Diplomas would be to mark a stage of development for the majority of learners and an exit qualification for a minority. These lower level diplomas would be designed primarily to motivate learners to progress to the next stage of education, although for some they would be used as the basis of preparation for participation in the workplace. The intention would be to provide a balance of breadth and specialist study, to create the space for learning skill development and practical activities, to reduce the examinations burden associated with GCSEs and to promote progression and genuine employability. The main function of the Advanced Level Diplomas (the Bacs) would be to provide broad programmes of study with enough specialisation to prepare young people for higher education or for high-skilled employment.

Involving Stake-holders in the Development of a Single Set of National Awards

The use of the title 'diploma' for all post-14 awards could be seen as a form of qualifications rationalisation and would provide clarity for and recognition by, end-users. The diplomas (both general and specialist) within an English Baccalaureate System could provide a single set of high-trust qualifications outcomes around which the various stakeholders could collaborate. It is important to stress that these new awards would, like the International Baccalaureate, comprise specifically designed credit-bearing units and would not simply be a cluster of existing qualifications contained within an overarching certificate. This would involve re-engineering current qualifications blocks and designing new ones in order to provide not only the clarity of a single system of awards but the curriculum and learning space that current qualifications and programmes of learning presently lack.

Moreover, the development of an English Baccalaureate System would provide end-users with a concrete and simple point of involvement in the curriculum and qualifications reform process. While employers and higher education providers should not dictate what is taught and learned at the previous phase, they obviously do have a stake in the outcomes of upper secondary education, not least because they need to build upon it. As a matter of principle they should, therefore, be involved in its design. Moreover, their involvement would help to secure clear progression pathways for learners taking the new diploma awards.

Securing Standards and 'Fitness for Purpose' Assessment

The existence of a grouped baccalaureate-style award would remove the need for all individual components of the qualification to be externally assessed, as is currently the case with all qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework. Standards would be secured in a number of ways. First, as now, there would need to be external assessment of some components but not all. Second, there could be moderation and internal assessment of other areas of learning, such as the proposed specialist research study in the Core. Third, there could be an institutionally-derived grade representing the overall performance of the learner over time. This three-fold approach to assessment suggests that the concept of standards is found not simply in the individual components of the award, but is ultimately secured through the diploma package as a whole and the requirement to complete all its aspects. At the same time, when making these demands it will be important to employ a wide range of assessment tools to ensure validity, to recognise all types of learning and to promote skill development.

A New Approach to the Reform Process Based on 'Strategic Gradualism'

One of the most important principles underpinning the development of a new English Baccalaureate System is the need for an open, consensual and carefully-planned reform process. We use the term 'strategic gradualism' to describe such a process, in which there would be a clear future goal and stages of development towards its attainment. One of the major lessons to be learned from the *Curriculum 2000* reform process was how complex it is to implement changes to the qualifications system in this country and how important it is to actively involve teachers, learners and other key stakeholders in this process. It will be vital to have a clearly articulated vision of the future so that teachers, learners and end-users can see what they are working towards, what changes will be necessary and what steps they will need to take to make this vision a reality. Alongside this, there will need to be careful consideration of the intended and unintended effects of key 'levers and drivers', such as funding mechanisms, performance indicators and inspection regimes, on the reform process.

The Proposed Architecture of the English Baccalaureate System

As can be seen from Figure 1 above, the English Baccalaureate System we propose and which is built on the principles already outlined, is a unified curriculum and qualifications system that includes all types of study from general full-time education to occupationally specific modern apprenticeship programmes. We believe that it is important to embrace all types of learning within a single framework that recognises not only breadth but different forms of specialisation in order, amongst other things, to raise the status of vocational education. The System also extends from compulsory secondary education for 14-16 year olds to post-compulsory education and training and covers five levels of study – Entry, Foundation, Intermediate, Advanced 1 and Advanced 2.

As indicated in Figure 1, we currently propose that there would be four types of diploma within this unified system – General; Specialist 1 (domain-based); Specialist 2 (broad vocational); and Specialist 3 (occupational). Diplomas would be awarded at four levels – Entry, Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced but Specialist Diplomas would only be offered post-16 and at Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced Level. All diplomas would contain elements of study at more than one level (like the International Baccalaureate) in order to ensure access, breadth and depth.

In addition, all diplomas would have a prescribed Core of learning, comprise credit-bearing qualifications units at specified levels and would be of a prescribed volume. Beyond the Core, in many of the diplomas there would be a high degree of subject choice. The Core would comprise three components flexibly applied to all levels of diploma: a specialist research study related to the learner's programme as a whole; underpinning taught elements (e.g. at advanced level, critical thinking, theory of knowledge, people and organisations) and wider activities and experiences (e.g. experience of the world of work, Duke of Edinburgh Award, sport, drama and music). The Core would need to be supported by individual guidance, mentoring and supervision. If the Core, which would be compulsory, is to be accepted and valued by learners, it would also need to contain an element of choice and specialisation. This would mainly be achieved through the choice of specialist research study and wider activities and experiences, but could also be supported through the customisation of the underpinning taught components by schools, colleges and employers/training providers.

Conceived in this way, the Core potentially supports six major principles within the English Baccalaureate System – breadth, progression, motivation, skill-building, pedagogical innovation and responsiveness to future demands of the education and training system.

It is important to stress that the English Baccalaureate System illustrated above does not assume that all learners would move in the same way or at the same pace. There would be the facility for both vertical and horizontal progression and the possibility for learners working mainly within one level also to undertake units of learning at a higher level in areas in which they had a particular aptitude or interest. Most learners would pass through Entry and Foundation Levels as part of compulsory education and the majority would be expected to be working towards either an Intermediate or Foundation Diploma between the ages of 14-16. However, this would vary according to ability and interest. Beyond the age of 16 there would be the freedom to continue with a more general education programme, such as that offered within the General Diploma; to specialise in a particular combination of subjects (e.g. the natural sciences or the humanities) by working towards a Specialist 1 Diploma; to specialise in a broad vocational area (e.g. Business, Leisure and Tourism) by working towards a Specialist Diploma 2; or to enter the

Adv.2	Advanced (General)	Advanced Specialist (Domain)	Advanced Specialist (Vocational)	Advanced Specialist (Occupational)	Advanced Diploma (The Bac)
Adv.1					
Int.	Intermediate General (pre & post 16)	Intermediate (Domain)	Intermediate (Vocational)	Intermediate (Occupational)	Intermediate Diploma
Found.	Foundation General (pre & post 16)		Foundation (Vocational)		Foundation Diploma
Entry	Entry Level Provision (pre & post 16)				Entry Diploma

Figure 1. The English Baccalaureate System from 14+

workplace as a Modern Apprentice and work towards a Specialist Diploma 3.

We refer to the learner's individual progression path within the unified system as their 'personal routeway'. This personal routeway represents the balance between compulsion, coherence and clarity of outcome, on the one hand, and individual flexibility and choice on the other.

Key Milestones of Reform

In moving towards an English Baccalaureate System, it is important to avoid two major mistakes – to tinker yet again in a complex and piecemeal way or to go for a 'big bang' approach without adequate preparation. From the perspective of 'strategic gradualism', there would appear to be six major milestones in the transition from the current curriculum and qualifications system to a new English Baccalaureate System from 14+.

First, there would need to be an extended period of open and inclusive debate about the end goal of reform; steps and stages to its attainment; and the principles and design of the new system. Such a debate would not only cement the professional consensus for reform but would also raise awareness more widely among stakeholders about the new system and its implications. We see the formation of the Tomlinson 14-19 Reform Group as a necessary first step in this direction.

Second, the Government would need to commit itself in its next election Manifesto to the building of an inclusive and coherent 14+ curriculum and qualifications system, such as that outlined above, in a third term of office. This action would be taken by all major stakeholders as a signal of genuine political will for change and the desire for a lasting settlement.

Third, it would be necessary to set in train a process for designing the architecture of the new system which involves all major stakeholders so that they see the emerging system as 'their reform'.

Fourth, it would be important to establish a programme of piloting for the new Diplomas involving the testing of new components re-engineered qualifications and whole programmes of study. In all cases, the learners involved would need to be protected in terms of the quality of their learning programmes and the recognition of new awards by employers and universities.

Fifth, no fundamental reform of this type could take place without consideration of key levers and drivers, as well as wider contextual and shaping factors in the education and training system. It would, therefore, be necessary to ensure that factors such as teacher recruitment, training and professional development, performance tables, funding arrangements and planning mechanisms, were also reformed to support the establishment of the new system.

Finally, there would be a need to design a formative evaluation framework to underpin and inform the whole reform process and to facilitate a virtuous cycle of 'policy learning'.

Even with a ten-year reform programme, we do not underestimate the transformation that such a process would entail. At the same time, we are equally aware of how inadequate and unstable the current curriculum and qualifications arrangements are for 14–19 year olds. We believe that a process of strategic gradualism could bring steady change without upheaval. The enduring message from *Curriculum 2000* is that piecemeal reform with no clear future direction has the potential to cause the greatest turbulence of all to the education system, because of the way in which it produces unpredictable complexity and lack of transparency. What is needed now is clarity of purpose and direction, beginning with an inclusive and open debate based on policy learning and vision so that we can get the policy process right over the next decade. It's time we stopped harking back to qualifications designed for a small elite in the 1950s, moved beyond A Levels and focused instead on creating a modernised and inclusive curriculum and qualifications system for all 14-19 year olds in the future.

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Target Setting: the need for re-appraisal and re-structuring

ANDREW THOMSON

Andrew Thomson, Principal of Long Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge, and Acting Principal of Daventry Tertiary College, still sees the outcome of the present underlying culture of target setting as being particularly complex, resulting in unintended effects and possibly proving counter productive to the whole enterprise of education.

Targets. Can you remember life in education before the modern world of targets? When I was growing up in the l960s, 'targets' had something to do with Blue Peter appeals, darts and not a whole lot else. I went through state infant, junior and comprehensive schools and on to sixth form college and university with large numbers of others, in the care of many teachers, and throughout this time 'targets' was a common enough word but one that didn't have any particular connection with the processes of education. It genuinely didn't occur to me that the word might one day come to imply a whole slice of predominant educational philosophy. And what applied to my own education also held for much of the common experience of life until about fifteen years ago: you could generally carry on successfully without ever having to measure your own performance against pre-set targets. Even governments seemed to manage, somehow. But not any more: the public sector is driven by them and education is no exception to the guiding rule that targets are essential to raising standards of public service.

Recently, Ofsted, an agency which formerly one could reasonably expect to take a firm view that targets are indispensable in raising educational standards, raised the point that maybe the culture of target-setting, that springs from this assertion, could be counterproductive. The Ofsted proposition was that the need to hit targets might be having an impact on the way teachers were teaching and learners were learning. This should not come as a surprise, since the whole purpose of setting targets is to affect these very things. The problem is, though Ofsted may not go this far, the ramifications of the culture of target-setting is complex, not confined to the intended effects and may even be counter-productive to the enterprise of education.

Let me be clear: the idea that working closely with those who are learning, to devise targets which will inspire them to greater achievement, is essentially good. Giving learners clear aims, related to their abilities and learning needs, and expressing these targets, can be very helpful for any learners' motivation to learn. All of which helps explain why there is some good practice in the education sector in the use of targets to raise standards of educational attainment.

However, it is not always that simple: institutional and individual levels of activity in the culture of target setting do not always rest so easily together and the benefits for learners, parents, teachers, and institutions are rarely either wholly cost-free or wholly co-incident. At one kind of extreme, good, experienced teachers are being driven to distraction by the effects of the target-setting culture and leaving the profession, citing as a reason the adverse impacts of targets for achievement on the students in their care. The aim of setting targets is to raise standards: the loss of committed professionals defeats the cause. The issue this raises is what we need to do to the culture of target-setting so as to minimise the adverse consequences.

We could of course consider abolishing target-setting altogether and there may be some who feel this is exactly what should be done. After all, if the culture is the problem the culture needs to change and this seldom happens without changing the essential principles. To see if that is what is needed we need to understand some more about the problems.

Abolishing target-setting (or more realistically, returning it to being something which was more ad hoc) would have considerable merit if it were supposed that we just could not help ourselves overdoing things or messing them up when it comes to putting relatively good ideas into practice. In the particular case of targets, if we could not help multiplying the work to an unworkable degree it means we are locating power too far away from responsibility. I think the two major parts of the current problems about targets in education are both capable of being tackled. The problems are that there are simply too many of them; and that the ones that really matter are set by the wrong people.

More is being made in recent years of the creativity and autonomy that has gradually evaporated from the professional lives of teachers and indeed headteachers over the past two decades. This is a consequence of the prevailing political philosophy through which power has tended to centralise and responsibility to decentralise, particularly in the sphere of education, through the Great Education Reform Act of 1988 and subsequent legislation. The key Act gave us the lasting reforms of Ofsted, performance league tables, the national curriculum, attainment tests and the generation of the market-place in education (originally encouraged by the Grant Maintained schools initiative). Two key assertions underlying these reforms were that there would no longer be a 'secret garden' of the curriculum and that it was going to be possible to measure success in schools principally through external examination results. In this context, target-setting was an idea whose time had demonstrably arrived.

The reason why it is safe to speak of a 'culture' of target-setting is interesting. We do not, for example, readily speak of a 'culture of achievement', yet it is achievement that is the aim, target-setting the means. And there is the answer: what we do in our culture tends to define it for

people rather than what we aim for. It has come to be the case in education that we notice we are doing things because of target-setting sufficiently for it to have become a dominant part of the culture.

The culture of target-setting in education grew up as a product of the new world of league tables, Ofsted inspections (and, later on, Further Education Funding Council inspections) and the incipient orthodoxy that emanates from centralising initiative-taking and a national inspection agency. This is the critical reason why the culture has a problem: those charged with responsibility for helping learners achieve targets need to be instrumental in setting the targets and responding to them: the risk is they become instrumental only in responding to them. Gradually, the target-setting culture has spread to include most activities in schools and colleges and along with this has grown the associated practices of action-planning. To every action there is an equal and hopefully not opposite target, which multiplies the workload for those responsible for taking the actions (and completing forms to prove they have done so). The net effect is that those responsible for the delivery of the education service at the local level, experience the culture of target-setting directly and the twin forces of 'ownership' (often perceived as others') and 'coverage' (of too many activities) that the culture brings with it. The success of the culture for those in their care depends critically on the particular meaning of this culture in each location.

So what is this culture of target-setting capable of doing for learners, teachers and parents?

One of the most obvious characteristics of targets these days is the received wisdom that they must be SMART – an acronym for five qualities that happen to spell a catchy word, luckily enough. And the crucial one is M for measurable. Crucial because it is this that is the most contentious, relating as it does to the broader and ancient question about whether the real value of education can be measured effectively – sometimes put the other way, i.e. that the really valuable parts cannot be measured. With measurability to the fore, what has happened with the culture of target-setting is that the really important ones have become the students' achievement ones – for SATs, GCSEs, A levels – that contribute to 'league tables' data. There certainly is no shortage of data, given the increasing frequency of testing. Building on the meagre diet of one sitting (at 16) and any post-compulsory tests such as A levels in l986, our learners can now expect to be tested at 4, 7, 11, l4 and 16 and pretty much every year after that. The tail really does seem to be at least partly wagging the dog here, as successive Secretaries of State have shown great interest in targets for improvements in education by adding national assessments against which such targets can be set.

My perspectives as a parent of children aged 7, 11 and 13, as a school governor and also a college principal, are that the culture of target setting is capable of being very helpful for learners. Teachers taking time with individual learners to discuss their progress and their work, consider ways of making improvements and setting targets to aim for in order that they should achieve their best, is a good thing which benefits learners. The crucial point is to recognise that this is only part of the story. We need to ensure that the ongoing process of education is one that must include other matters of great weight in addition to success in SATs, GCSEs, A levels etc., that the learner is fully clear what target setting is for, how it is supposed to help, and be properly able to participate in the process; and, that the culture does not lead to some children losing their right to a decent education as attention increasingly focuses on group targets.

Thus where there is less likely to be a problem for the learner in the culture of target-setting, is through the work we do with individuals. On the other hand there is a greater likelihood of problems through the wider implications of the culture. At one level, there is the issue that the target culture is now very much part of the testing culture and the concern here is that education is being turned into a set of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related Targets (to spell out the acronym), creating a process whereby learning is priced (i.e. worth the certificate's value) rather than valued and students are consequently denied their entitlement to an education where testing is secondary to learning.

At another level, there is the pressure on institutions to hit targets. While this may well be mostly in the best interests of the learners, it need not necessarily be so. An example would be the way pressures on schools to improve SAT results can lead to the 'grooming' of sub-cohorts of children who are near to a border-line. You have to ask if this is good either for these children or for others who miss out on the additional help they could have received.

There is, of course, another salient point: too much attention to targets and tests can mean that essential learning may be overlooked. In the world of post-16 education this has been partly responsible for the relative decline in enrichment activity not delivered through the examination curriculum; in the primary phase this can sometimes be too little time for the vital work of creative activity and learning as the KS1 and 2 SATs are concerned with such a small area of education. So, while the Government pleases itself with the attainment of targets for numeracy and literacy, there may be some adverse consequences of this achievement elsewhere in the long term interests of society and the economy.

Enabling teachers to do their best for their pupils and students is indispensable to the interests of both learners and parents. This is of great consequence in the culture of target-setting as this culture can sometimes make teachers feel that they are doing anything but helping to bring out the best in their charges. The form-filling, the targets which do not appear to have a direct bearing on education, the pressures sometimes brought to bear from the institutional level -–these can each militate against making good use of time and undermine the essential fibre of commitment of teachers to education.

I suspect the things which make the culture of target-setting most likely to work are clear identification of the basis for targets to be set to raise achievement (so that targets are neither too low nor too high) and a real belief that the teacher is able to contribute effectively to the agreement of the targets in question, and, which should be the more important part of the process, the means of achieving them. This might be very much a part of the practice in such activities as individual learning planning, group or department achievement targets, etc., but where targets are imposed or appear not to relate very clearly to raising achievements or otherwise improving education, they can cause many more problems for teachers and

hence for learners and the overall aims of target-setting in the first place. The problem is that there are often too many targets for people to cope with at once and that they are sometimes counter-educational.

In practice this means shifting the emphasis in target-setting in three important ways. First, so far as assessment is concerned, we need a proper system of measurement of added value, and this needs to replace aggregate exam scores per pupil as the main measure in 'league tables' (should such tables need to be continued). This will mean that all children get their fair share of attention in that all can add value (in a proper system) and will get away from the 'coaching' problem associated with 'borderline' pupils. Second, we need to reduce the overall scope of target setting by getting used to the better world that exists when school and college plans are scaled down to what matters and are written on the basis of including only what is absolutely necessary and not what can be planned for. And third, we need to focus attention on assuring quality of pedagogy and not assessment. This means setting clear targets for added value (involving staff in so doing) and then asking the simple question of all teachers and managers: what two or three main things are you going to do this coming year that will improve the education we offer? The idea is that if we answer this we gain the improvements required in grades etc. For far too long we have concentrated on grade improvement targets and focused too little on the pedagogical developments needed to achieve them.

It is also not very clear that the target-setting culture always benefits parents. Mostly we, as parents, want to be sure of the education our own children are receiving. Once in a school or college, league table data is generally meaningless for us. What we do notice is our children's experience and what we mostly want is for our children to 'fulfil their potential' at school or college as we engage with the process of education. The question is whether the culture of targets is invariably a good thing for all our children and equally so for all their parents.

At a recent governors' meeting in a primary school the headteacher expressed the understandable view that parents would not like it if the school set a lower target for SAT results than those required by Ofsted through the local inspection service. All the parents present countered this with the view that too much effort to push children too hard was not a good thing: the school should set the targets, not the inspector. The anecdote is worth repeating because it reflects a view I come across frequently as both parent and professional: don't push the children too hard for their own good. The subtext is usually: why are we having to do this? The answer which many people assume is that it is the Government trying to prove its worth by constantly raising standards – not an unreasonable aspiration for politicians but one where unforeseen consequences may make its pursuit something we should closely consider for all our futures.

It can come to seem for the headteacher that it is all trees out there : there is no wood. We need to refine our target setting culture so that managers can focus more on education, teaching and learning quality and less on the more bureaucratic and counter-educational aspects of the culture. We need, as learners, teachers and parents, to make the case for the three big cultural changes : focus on value-added measures of achievement; reduce the targets by reducing the scope of school and college plans; and change the focus of attention to teaching and learning in the first place and achievements in the second place. In doing all this, we should take very seriously the main message of Professor Ken Robinson's report on creativity, 'All Our Futures' . This is capable of liberating us from the present culture in which target-setting is so prominent and evidently a part. It is a more radical idea than simply adjusting the targets culture but it strikes me in the last analysis that it is the heart of the culture that causes us to value the most measurable parts of our rich curriculum over all the others which leads such great numbers of people to feel that what they *could* do never came up at school : they didn't matter.

We surely should be prepared to think big thoughts of long term significance if we are to address the state of education in order to improve it for more people. It is difficult not to see the culture of targets as any more than improvement for some people and some parts of the education process at the expense of others. What we need is to make things better for most – and we need to change the culture to do this.

Pupil Transience: another twist in the 'spiral of decline'?

NEIL DUNCAN

Neil Duncan, Senior Lecturer in Special Needs and Inclusion Studies at the School of Education, University of Wolverhampton, argues that the problems arising from pupil transience are often overlooked and particularly effect less popular schools in poorer areas.

Recent research by Gorard et al (2002), found no evidence that competition between schools had increased social stratification, rather that good stewardship by LEAs has enabled comprehensive schools to become more socio-economically heterogeneous. Gorard et al further believe that there is no evidence that parental choice of schools was linked to 'spirals of decline'. This article questions that view, suggesting that large-scale quantitative projects can miss important indicators of spirals of decline.

From the Education Reform Act (1988) onwards, open enrolment, freedom of parental choice and reduced LEA powers over admissions, were expected to establish a greater fluidity of pupil movement across wider areas, thereby decreasing social segregation by catchment area. Encouragement to operationalise freedom of choice came from the publication of the new standardised performance indicators: test results, attendance figures, and inspection reports.

One fear of such freedom was increased numbers of middle class pupils moving to the highest performing schools reinforcing 'the existing hierarchy of schools based on academic test results and social class' (Whitty et al, l998, p. 117)

Throughout the years since l988, defenders of state comprehensive education have been vigilant in identifying and highlighting the failure to maintain equality across the public sector (Woods et al, l998) They have pointed to the increasing polarisation of schools into those which are perceived as successful, with secure staffing, predictable funding and public approval of their work, and those deemed failing, 'sink', 'bog-standard' or recently 'bargepole' (*Times Educational Supplement,* 2002)

To describe the fluctuating fortunes of schools, some commentators use the imagery of 'a spiral of decline' to convey a sense of negatively interacting factors that force an institution into ever-increasing difficulties, ending with closure or radical intervention.

Gorard et al define spiral of decline as:

> *…a condition in which a school both loses pupil numbers and increases the proportion of socio-economic disadvantage in its intake. The spiral stems from the relationship between these two characteristics in a market driven by pupil-funding and raw-score performance indicators. (2002, p. 368)*

Gorard, et al's research reported no evidence of competition sending schools into such a spiral, but highlighted the success of comprehensive schools' increased social integration of the past decade or so (Gorard, 2001). To those closely connected to comprehensive schools – staff, parents, governors and LEA officers, this absence of market casualties may come as some surprise. Whilst the indicators of numbers on roll, proportion of pupils with special needs, entitlement to free school meals (FSM), etc, are undeniably important in regard to a school's situation, there are other less obvious but important qualitative factors that, if taken into account, would render a different picture.

In a recent small-scale research project in one LEA (Duncan, 2002), I encountered one such factor, pupil transience. Gorard, et al (2002) acknowledge this phenomenon in passing, but it deserves a closer look, as the interaction between an unstable pupil population, discipline, attendance and other factors, might well be considered if not a spiral of decline, then certainly a real handicap to school improvement.

Singleborough LEA is a geographically compact authority in the midlands of England with 13 secondary schools. Eight of these have community status, three are foundation and two are voluntary aided. Other provision within the LEA boundary consists of special schools, two independent schools and a City Technology College. My project concerned the link between school attendance and girls' bullying, thus involving close contact with Education Welfare Officers (EWOs)

The EWOs strongly held the view that a three-tier system of secondary education existed in the borough, with three elite high-performing, over-subscribed schools, five competent and highly regarded schools, and five schools struggling to improve their reputations and fighting for survival.

The bottom tier of schools was seriously under-subscribed, with all the disadvantages this situation brings. Three of them were only 80% filled Ofsted, 2001) and feared closure from LEA rationalisation. The EWOs stated that a substantial number of pupils on roll at these schools were the 'hardest-to-help' pupils, and that mid-term transfers were usually even more problematic:

> *EWO I: There's places in every year, so they're never in a position to say 'no' we can't admit you' (…) but their resources are becoming absolutely exhausted because all the kinds that are transferring need to tap into all the resources the school has got (…) every single kid that transfers here comes with a package of problems.*

Many of these pupils came from homes where parental choice of school was low priority, education not especially valued, and whose parents themselves had had unfortunate and negative school experiences (Golden et al, 2002)

From Ofsted reports of the schools and LEA, school records of attendance and exclusion, and from interviews with EWOs, parents and pupils, the phenomenon of pupil transience, or mobility, emerged as an important problematic phenomenon related to bullying. The term 'pupil mobility' has been established only recently by Dobson & Henthorn to refer to:

> *Children joining or leaving a school at a point other than the normal age at which children start or finish their education at that school, whether or not this involves a move of home. (1999, p. 1)*

The two research schools in Singleborough belonged to the bottom tier as described by the EWOs, and both had plenty of available spaces. From September 2000, to May 2001, Blunkett Rise school showed that 33 pupils had joined the school after the official beginning of that school year, making up around 5% of the total number of pupils. Only seven of these pupils were from outside the LEA, and in addition to those already admitted by May, a further 20 pupils were awaiting a decision on their request for transfer to Blunkett Rise.

The second school in my project, Morris View, had even more dramatic statistics on pupil movement. In interview, the Head remarked that his audit of school leavers in 2001 showed that 45% of those young people had not started their secondary education there.

Interviews with bullied girls indicated that most had moved schools more than once; one girl had attended four secondary schools by Year 10. This suggests that the number of pupils on roll hides another figure of those who have arrived then moved on, leaving no official trace of the work, effort and disruption caused by their transience.

The disruptive effects of vast pupil movement in and out of schools can hardly be considered a 'good thing' for children's education. In terms of workload alone, simply admitting and inducting new students must become an onerous bureaucratic burden for pastoral staff in particular, but even greater is the burden of supporting the social and behavioural difficulties of these transient pupils.

Moreover, this burden is both a symptom and a cause within a spiral of decline, affecting, as it does, only unpopular schools. Those with few or no spare places after September can close the doors and get on with the job; those, like the Singleborough examples with 80% occupancy, can look forward to admitting an unpredictable flow of pupils throughout the year.

The more popular schools can also afford to exclude pupils who do not meet their standards of behaviour or achievement. Frequently these exclusions are hidden (Osler et al, 2002; Gordon, 2001) in that they are unofficial:

> *EWO II:…schools like St.Kevins', and they are very good at it, persuading parents 'your child would be better off someplace else'.*
>
> *EWO I:…they are even advised to look for other schools if they take them out for holiday, because it affects their attendance (figures)*

These children will find difficulties in being accepted by another popular school. Over time, the less valued pupils gravitate towards unpopular, under-subscribed schools that have vacancies and must admit them for economic and legal reasons.

As these schools take in an ever-higher proportion of aggressive or distressed pupils, some of the more academically motivated pupils suffer greater disruption to their lessons and social life and are driven to move out, possibly taking the places recently vacated in the popular schools. This cycle of movement operates like a valve, letting less valued pupils flow into a few 'sink' schools, and floating the more valued children out of the 'sink' schools and into the popular schools.

Although the Singleborough bullying research project was small-scale and never designed to explore spirals of decline, it is hard to imagine that Singleborough is unique in the UK. Almost certainly, where a LEA has one or more schools with surplus places they will become a repository for the more difficult-to-teach pupils, where staff are tasked by pastoral challenges before academic engagement can even begin.

In Singleborough, the quantitative socio-economic indicators were similar across most of the schools, but a school's inclusiveness cannot be measured by social de-stratification alone. Whatever one's definition of 'working class', that definition is inadequate to understand the important differences that individuals within it may have (Reay, 2001)

There are strong correlates between social class and educational disadvantage, but huge differences between the educational success of a disaffected, aggressive pupil whose family holds schooling in low esteem, and that of a family of working-class 'Blair clones' (Gewirtz, 2001) whose contributions to the success of the school are at least equal to those of most middle class families.

In any social stratum there will exist pupils whose behavioural characteristics are antithetic to the standardised aims of state schooling, and in the model described above, those students will be directed, covertly and overtly, into concentrations in specific schools. It is, therefore, perfectly possible for two schools in the same authority to have a high number of transient pupils with social and behavioural difficulties, and the other to have a critical mass of ambitious and stable pupils.

Numbers on roll can establish crude 'market share', and social deprivation indices can usefully help illustrate broad trends such as the increase in schools' social mix, but the devil is in the detail. At the level of individual schools, turbulence from the 'wrong type' of pupil can indeed tip a school into a spiral of decline.

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Small School Collaborative Working in Cumbria

COLIN RICHARDS

Colin Richards, Professor of Education at St Martin's College, University of Lancaster, and former HMI, describes the features and effects of six projects involving collaborative working between small schools in Cumbria.

It is not often the government gives money to help schools develop their own initiatives. But in the Standards Fund for 2001–2 there was an element to enable LEAs to develop a programme of innovative approaches to joint working in small schools. Cumbria LEA funded 73 projects involving 190 schools. This article describes the features and effects of six of these projects.

The various projects involved:

1. Seven primary schools (and a secondary school) developing a music project focusing on the use of percussion instruments, involving the deployment of professional musicians and culminating in a joint sharing of the children's work.
2. Seven primary schools employing a specialist ICT teacher and a computer technician to foster the development of ICT, especially in those areas of the curriculum where schools lacked specialist expertise and/or equipment.
3. A consortium of four schools developing further a wide range of collaborative work begun some years previously.
4. Four schools establishing an early intervention reading programme with boys in Key Stage l.
5. A pair of schools developing pupils' geographical and ICT skills through carrying out a locality study and building a collaborative linking web site.
6. A group of five schools collaborating with a newly designated beacon school and an educational consultant to raise attainment in writing across Key Stages l and 2.

The Work of the Collaborative Projects

The activities pursued were many and varied. The following list includes some, but not all, of the activities but does illustrate the potential of collaborative working unleashed by the availability of the funding and the creativity of heads and teachers when given some degrees of freedom in terms of planning their own professional development in tune with the needs of their children and schools. Work included:

- three full day workshops on writing for Key Stage l and similarly for Key Stage 2 – spread over the school year provided by an outside 'expert', attended by almost all the teachers in the consortium and held in comfortable surroundings;
- in-school development work, e.g. on writing and music;
- accreditation of professional development work carried out in relation to a project;
- deployment of a specialist teacher for aspects of control technology using software purchased by the consortium for joint use;
- deployment of an ICT technician to 'trouble shoot';
- joint INSET. e.g. on percussion and on setting up web-sites
- specialist teaching of music by 'real' musicians;
- joint celebration of children's achievements;
- purchase of equipment, e.g. percussion instruments, computers and software;
- joint project work (in one case involving ITE students)
- joint web-site development
- funding of Reading Intervention training for support assistants;
- Reading Intervention focused on boys;
- Observations of classroom practice in consortium schools;
- Production of portfolios of moderated assessment in the core subjects;
- Joint governor training;
- Joint policy development;
- Meetings of teaching assistants and secretaries from consortium schools;
- Sharing of resources (including in one case 'an Ofsted survival package').

The Outcomes of the Projects

The effects of such projects could not be directly *measured* but they could be assessed. What *could* be demonstrated were firstly the positive attitudes towards collaboration and the belief that the projects 'made a difference' which was exhibited *without exception* by those heads and staff interviewed and secondly the enjoyment reported by a sample of children.

The children appeared to have benefited in a wide variety of ways. In particular many were able to have access to specialist expertise which (usually!) generated their enthusiasm, providing them with a wider, more 'adventurous' range of experience than their hard-pressed class teacher could normally provide and gave them opportunities to work with other adults, frequently male. They were often taught by specialists in small groups, thus benefiting from closer, more focused tuition, more nearly matched to their current attainments. Simultaneously, class teachers were released to focus on small groups for their own teaching. There were many references to children gaining in confidence, expecially when the activities involved learning new skills (e.g. in music or ICT) and having an opportunity to demonstrate them in a real-life context. A number of children were reported as showing unexpected abilities as a result of the experiences which

were offered by the projects. In a number of schools the work involved peer group teaching and learning – with Key Stage l children reported as learning from Key Stage 2 pupils and vice versa! Where the children met others from consortium schools they developed their social skills and enjoyed the social contacts; the oldest ones in particular appreciated being able to make friends who they would meet in the secondary school. However, the use of e-mail to build on such embryonic friendships was not well developed.

In their questionnaire responses the children were enthusiastic but not uncritical. They were clear what they had enjoyed: for example:

'making up the songs and picking my instruments'

'listening to other schools and looking at all the instruments'

'fiddling around on Paint and going on the internet'

'going on Hyperstudio and making stacks of information and putting them on a CD'

'going on Map Detectives because it was exciting to find out who the criminal was'

'the willow weaving and the salmon eating'

'making the fish catchers'

'watching the salmon being gutted'.

Although some said that they 'enjoyed everything', others reported things that they did not enjoy: for example:

'getting ready for the performance and putting it all away'

'the noise'

'our teacher changing our instruments last thing'

'Model shop because I prefer programmes with more mysteries'

'Toon Talk because we couldn't understand anything that the alien said'

'doing the spread sheet because it was really hard and boring'

'waiting for the salmon to be cooked'

'catching the fish which was disgusting'

All, however, reported wanting to learn more, for example about:

'survival skills and willow weaving'

'flint chipping'

'putting pictures on my web page'

'connecting cameras into computers and doing actual music on them'

'playing better at the drum kit'

'playing the electric guitar'

Heads and teachers pointed out a large number of benefits arising from project working. In particular, like their pupils, they appreciated being able to work with, and observe, specialists – whether these were specialist teachers, non-teacher musicians or technicians, or, as in one case, an educational consultant with national expertise in the teaching of literacy. There was a feeling in some projects that more systematic INSET from specialists would have been helpful so that the 'adventurous' work the specialists had introduced could be continued, at least to some degree, after their departure. Teachers greatly appreciated being able to meet with colleagues from different schools, especially if they were teaching in relatively isolated communities. Sharing of experience, discussion of common problems, observation of one another's teaching, more highly developed skills and increased self-confidence were all cited as major benefits. Schools appreciated the help they received from each other (and from specialists) to meet government and LEA demands including providing effective coverage of problematic aspects of the national curriculum such as control technology or musical composition. The projects had provided the basis for an effective support structure or had strengthened such a structure if it had existed previously. Many felt pleased that the projects had given them a licence to depart, at least for a while, from national strategies and targets. There is no doubt that collaborative working had had a strong motivational effect. One head commented that it had not only reinforced the tradition of consortium schools working together but also the sense of trust and mutual support among colleagues.

Conclusion

If the work of these six projects was replicated in other schools in other LEAs receiving DfES funding, then LEAs nationally have a fund of expertise and experience on which they can draw. Both they and the DfES need to find more potent ways of recognising, celebrating and sharing that expertise. They also need to ensure the continuance, or preferably enhancement, of this kind of funding in the future.

FORUM is pleased to be able to print the following letter which was originally offered to the *Times Educational Supplement* by Professor Colin Richards

Dear Editor

In the light of Stephen Twigg's view (TES January 10) (2003) that 'The most immediate need is preparation for teachers and pupils for the changes in the 2003 Key Stage 2 tests' the minister might learn from a report published by his department some seventy years ago. In l93l Examinations in Public Elementary Schools stated that

'Preparation for the scholarship examination at age 11 produces:

- overpressure upon the children
- excessive homework:
- the organisation of a special scholarship class in which attention is concentrated upon the more mechanical aspects of English and arithmetic;
- the special coaching of the scholarship candidates both in and outside school hours; and,
- the allocation of the best teacher to the part of the school that contains the scholarship candidates.'

There are clear parallels with current practice. At the time the Board of Education deplored these effects. Seventy years later the government endorses them. Should policy have changed? Should current policy be re-considered?

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Is UK Education Exceptionally Unequal? Evidence from the IALS and PISA Surveys

ANDY GREEN

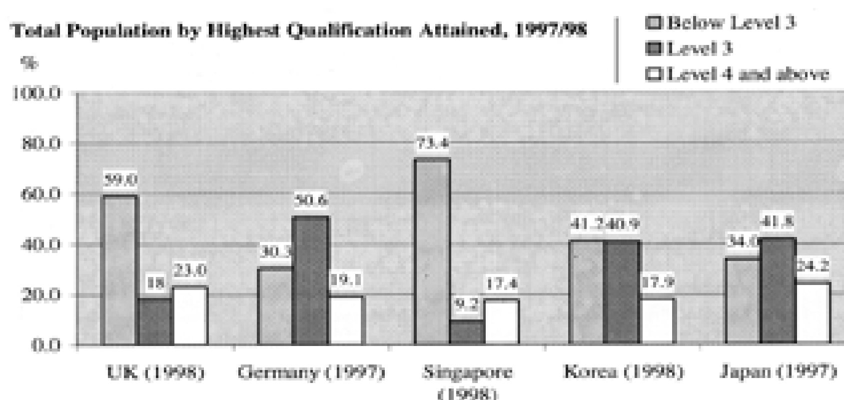
Andy Green, Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London (School of Lifelong Education and International Development) argues that the picture of relative social equality in English schools by Smith & Gorard in a recent *FORUM* article, may give a misleading impression and closer inspection of the situation is merited for a number of reasons.

R. H. Tawney once remarked that 'the hereditary curse of the English educational tradition was its organization along the lines of social class' (1933, p.142). His argument was that education in England was particularly socially inequitable, even for a class society. Many subsequent commentators on English education – and indeed on UK education as a whole – have echoed this contention, including myself (Green, 1990, 1997). Two recent international surveys by the OECD, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), now provide the best evidence to date to assess these claims. What do they tell us?

According to Emma Smith and Stephen Gorard, in a recent article in this Journal (*FORUM*, 44, pp. 121-122), the PISA data demonstrate that there is no British exceptionalism as regards school inequality. School intakes in the UK, on their reading of the evidence from PISA and on their own research evidence, are no more socially differentiated than in five other European comparator countries (including Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain). Thus the 'crisis accounts' which claim that UK schooling is more unequal than elsewhere in Europe are wrong and 'no evidence is, or can be, presented to support their claim' (p. 121). It would be good news if this were the case, especially for the less socially advantaged students in the UK. However, unfortunately, the story is more complicated than this. School intakes may or may not be more differentiated than elsewhere – Smith & Gorard only compare with five other countries, and two of these have selective school systems anyway (Belgium and Germany), so it is hard to draw many conclusions from this. However, what is clear is that educational outcomes are highly unequal relative to most OECD countries, as all the evidence in IALS and PISA shows.

Smith & Gorard are, of course, right to stress the importance of school intake mix since this can be a significant factor in determining overall levels of inequality. According to the OECD analysis, school status, measured in terms of the average level of parents' occupational level, wealth and 'cultural capital', has a major impact on the performance of individual students internationally – more even than the effects of the individual students' own background characteristics in many countries (OECD, 2001, p. 210). Sixty-one percent of differences in outcomes between schools in the UK can be explained by school social intake characteristics, which is a very high proportion relative to the OECD average of 34 per cent, but similar to that in other English-speaking countries (Australia: 64 percent; New Zealand: 70 per cent; US: 61 per cent; Ireland: 59 per cent – see OECD, 2001, p.197). However, intake mix is not the only relevant factor in determining degrees of inequality in schooling and it appears to provide only part of the explanation for the exceptionally wide spread of educational outcomes in the UK, both amongst current school students (as measured in the PISA survey of 15 year olds) and amongst adults (as measured in the IALS survey).

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (OECD, 2000) tested samples of the adult populations in 22 countries (and regions of countries) in the OECD (and two non-OECD) during the mid to late 1990s in three domains



of literacy: 'prose', 'document' and 'quantitative'. In terms of the mean scores of the samples in the three domains, UK performance was average to poor relative to the other countries surveyed (13th out of 22 on prose literacy; 16th on 'document literacy' and 17th on quantitative literacy). This was partly due to the relatively high proportions scoring at only the lowest of the five levels (see Steedman, 1997). In the quantitative domain, for instance, out of 22 countries, only five had a higher proportion than the UK scoring at the lowest level (Ireland – at 24.8 per cent; Poland at 39.1 per cent; Chile at 56.4 per cent; Portugal at 41.6 per cent; and Slovenia at 35 per cent; compared with UK at 23.2 per cent) (OECD, 2000, pp. 136-137).

The UK distribution of skills levels across the domains was also extremely wide relative to other countries. Using a simple average of the standard deviations for the scores in the three domains, the UK had the third widest spread of levels amongst all countries. Generally, the Nordic countries had rather narrower spreads of skills, whilst the Anglo-Saxon countries, with the exception of Canada, all ranked amongst the more unequal.

The IALS data show that the distribution of tested literacy skills in the UK is exceptionally polarized relative to a range of other countries. Cross-national comparisons based on the distribution of qualifications tend to tell the same story, although here one can only compare with a small group of countries due to the difficulty of benchmarking qualification levels. My research with Phil Brown and Hugh Lauder (Brown et al, 2001) on the distribution of qualifications in five comparator countries studied in the 'High skills Project' showed a similarly strong polarization of skills levels amongst the adult population in the UK relative to the other countries. Using data on highest qualification attained from respective national Labour Force Surveys for 1997/8, and benchmarking these qualifications against UK levels [1], figure 1 shows that compared with Germany, Korea and Japan, where most people are qualified at the middle level (3), the UK, like Singapore, has relatively fewer adults qualified at intermediate levels but high proportions with either high or low levels of qualification. The same pattern is evident amongst the sample for the 16-25 age group.

Distributions of skills amongst adult populations are the product of a number of factors, including: differences in average levels of skill for different age cohorts; the accumulation of different distributions from the historical flows of school leavers at different times; distributions of qualifications amongst immigrants; differential rates of adult acquisition of new skills as well as differences in skill levels amongst recent school leavers. Clearly, only the last of these can be attributed to contemporary school systems in each country, and it is this, along with the distribution of adult learning, which must concern policy makers.

The OECD PISA survey of skills in reading, numeracy and science amongst 15 year olds in 32 countries provides the most recent evidence on how far different compulsory school systems generate equal or unequal outcomes in the performance of their students. The data show quite clearly that the UK currently has one of the more inequitable systems both regarding equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes, thus confirming the findings from numerous IEA surveys over the last three decades (except TIMSS) (see Green, 1997).

The OECD provide the standard deviations for scores between the 5th and 95th percentiles for students tested in each country in each of three domains (OECD, 2001: table 2.3a, p. 253, for the combined reading literacy scale; table 3.1, p. 259, for the mathematical literacy scale; and table 3.3, p. 261, for the scientific literacy scale). Taking a simple average of these standard deviations gives one measure of skills dispersal. The UK average represents the 9th widest distribution amongst the averages for the 27 OECD countries on which there are data. This is a better rank position than for the IALS survey where the distribution of adult outcomes may have been particularly high partly due to large inter-cohort differences resulting from the relatively late massification of upper secondary participation in the UK, and partly to relatively unequal levels of participation in adult learning. Conversely, Germany has one of the narrower distributions in IALS and yet the second widest in PISA. This discrepancy is probably due to the equalization effect on adult skills from the long-standing universalisation of upper secondary level education through the apprenticeship system, which serves to mitigate inequality generated through the selective compulsory school system.[2]

In the PISA results, the countries with the most unequal outcomes are (in descending order of inequality): Belgium, Germany, New Zealand and the USA. The most equal outcomes (in descending order of equality) are to be found in Korea, Mexico, Finland and Japan. This confirms earlier IEA survey data which generally show relatively narrow distributions in East Asian states (Green, 1997). The Nordic countries, with the exception of Norway, have relatively narrow distributions (rankings in descending order of inequality of outcomes: Norway – 10th; Denmark – 12th; Sweden – 17th; Iceland 23rd; Finland 25th). The English – speaking countries, with the exception of Canada and Ireland, have relatively wide distributions, (ranking in descending order of inequality of outcome: New Zealand 3rd; US – 4th; UK – 9th; Australia – 13th; Ireland – 21st; Canada – 22nd). With the exception of Austria, countries with selective secondary school systems are all ranked amongst the bottom half of countries in terms outcome equality (eg Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Hungary, Luxembourg). The only countries with at least nominally comprehensive systems that have more unequal results than the UK are Greece, the USA and New Zealand, and the latter two are amongst the more marketized of comprehensive systems.

In terms of equality of opportunity, the UK also performs relatively poorly compared with other countries. The OECD analysis of the PISA data shows how far in each country student performance is associated with social background (measured in terms of a combined socio-economic index for parental occupation, wealth and cultural capital). The slope of the socio-economic gradient (ie the effect of student background and performance) is steepest in Germany, Hungary and the Czech Republic (indexed at 60, 53 and 50 respectively), and flattest in Japan and Korea (indexed at 21). Most of the Nordic countries lie in the lower – more egalitarian – half of the country ranking (with Denmark indexed at 42; Norway at 41; Finland at 38; Iceland at 24); the English – speaking countries, with the exception of Canada and New Zealand, all lie in the upper – more inegalitarian – half; and the Mediterranean states are distributed across the range (OECD, 2001, p). The UK

is one of the most unequal, lying 4th out of 30, along with Switzerland and Lichtenstein (and indexed at 49 against the OECD average of 41).

Interestingly, the OECD analysis shows that it is possible for countries to combine high average standards with high levels of equity. Six of the 12 countries with above average mean scores, including some of the highest ranked (Canada, Finland, Iceland, Japan, Korea and Sweden) have well above average equity levels, as measured by the socio-economic gradients. Sadly, the UK, along with Australia and Belgium, are characterized by the OECD as having high average standards combined with high levels of inequality in student performance.

On most of the PISA measures, then, the UK shows a low degree of equity in secondary schooling, both in terms of the overall spread of outcomes and in terms of the association between student background and performance. So why is the outcome distribution so wide?

Degrees of variation in student performance in each country can be thought of as a product of both between-school variation and within-school variation. These two measures are usually inversely related in each country, so that systems with wide variations between schools, as is usually the case with selective systems, tend to have more homogeneity within each school. This inversion also applies to the UK. The level of between-school variation is below average (indexed at 22.4 against the OECD average of 36.2), whereas the level of within-school variation is relatively high (indexed at 82.3 against the OECD average of 65.1) (OECD, 2001, p. 257). So why don't these cancel each other out producing an average level of differentiation? The answer seems to be that both are somewhat high given the nature of the system, thus producing a high aggregate.

One would expect within-school variation in the UK to be high given that secondary schooling occurs in national systems three out of four of which still have predominantly non-selective state sectors (although admittedly now only about 40 per cent in England go to genuinely non-selective schools). However, in the UK differences within schools are high even for a largely 'comprehensive' system – overall the UK is 6th highest on this measure out of the 30 different countries. There are other countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, which have similar levels of within-school variation and remain relatively egalitarian overall. However, the difference is that the UK does not compensate for this high level of within-school variation to the same degree through low between-school variation.

In the UK case, between-school variation is well below average for the OECD. On the other hand, it is higher than in all of the other thirteen countries with at least nominally comprehensive systems, except Greece, Italy, Japan, and the US, and very much higher than in countries like Sweden (indexed at 8.9 as against the UK's 22.4) which have high within-school variation but still manage to retain high levels of equity overall.

The conclusion, then, is that UK does not have exceptionally high differentials in standards between schools relative to the OECD generally. This would be consistent with Smith and Gorard's claim that school intakes are not exceptionally segmented. However, the differentials are high compared with the norm for largely non-selective systems, and particularly given the exceptionally high level of within-school variance. The overall outcome is high overall inequity relative to the OECD average.

This level of inequality may be detrimental to the economy, producing a highly polarised labour market, which arguably in turn encourages a high skills/low skills dualism in company competition strategies, and lower overall productivity than in many competitor countries (see Brown et al, 2001). There is also growing evidence that it is detrimental to social cohesion. Recent work conducted by John Preston, Ricardo Sabates and myself for the Wider Benefits of Learning Centre at the Institute of Education certainly points in this direction. Using IALS data on adult literacy scores across countries to estimate skills distributions, and standard GINI coefficients on income inequality, we have confirmed the findings of Nickell & Layard (1998) and others, using different methods, that there is a strong correlation between skills distributions and income spread. Countries with wider distributions of skill also tend to have higher income inequality. Taking this a step further, we have developed a combined factor for national level social cohesion (using crime data, and World Values Survey data on aggregate national levels of social and institutional trust and other measures of civic cooperation), and find a strong correlation cross-nationally between skills distribution and social cohesion. As Figure 2 shows, excluding Norway and Germany, a negative and

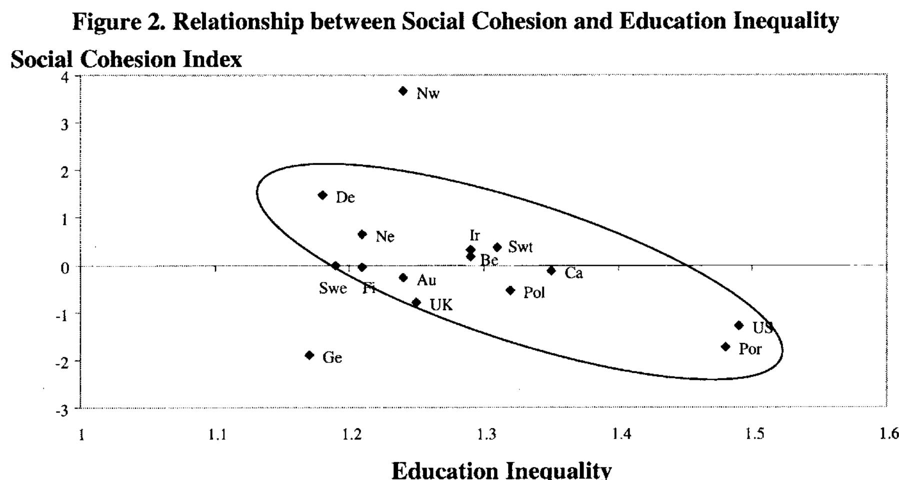


Figure 2. Relationship between Social Cohesion and Education Inequality

significant correlation of -0.765 exists between social cohesion and education inequality. More educationally equal countries tend also to be more cohesive on these measures.

Clearly these correlations say nothing about the direction of causality, and we would judge that this runs both ways and involves a range of different factors. Nevertheless, the results are highly suggestive – sufficiently so in fact to prompt OECD and World Bank researchers to undertake similar analyses. By applying our methods to PISA data they achieve similar results and, perhaps improbably, draw out the same conclusions in terms of national policy: improving skills distribution matters as much as raising average levels.

Three policy implications follow from these comparative findings. The first is that we should still be concerned about the high level of inequality in educational outcomes in the UK. This is economically and socially damaging, and it is unjustifiable on quality grounds. Despite the widespread belief that excellence and equity are incompatible, it is quite possible, as the OECD analysis shows, to attain high average national standards and remain fairly equitable. The second is that we should concern ourselves not only with the substantial differences between schools, but also with the relatively high differences in performance between students within schools. The third is that we should redouble our efforts to mitigate school level inequalities through a more equitable distribution of post-16 and adult learning. The German case suggests that this is not an impossible task.

Notes

[1] Using the method developed by Hilary Steedman (1997).

[2] I owe this observation to Hilary Steedman.

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Teaching Assistants: students or servants?

JOHN QUICKE
Professor John Quicke, former Professor of Education at the University of Sheffield, upholds and continues *FORUM*'s deep unease at the future role being planned for teaching assistants.

The use of learning support assistants to facilitate the inclusion of pupils deemed to have special educational needs is now common practice. Indeed many educationalists think that they are a key factor in bringing about even greater inclusion for this particular group of pupils (see Rose, 2000). In this article I want to examine the contribution of the inclusionary use of LSAs to the development of our ideas about the role and function of teaching assistants in general. The aim will be to clarify some important issues relating to the role of teaching assistants, particularly regarding the expanded role envisaged in an HMI/Ofsted report (2000) which lays the foundation for recent Government 'modernisation' proposals.

From the outset, it is important to note that there has been considerable variation historically across schools and LEAs regarding the title, job descriptions, etc of people employed as assistants (Aird, 2000). Categories include education assistants, classroom assistants, nursery nurses, teaching assistants and learning support assistants. In relation to special educational needs the term most frequently used is learning support assistant. The HMI/Ofsted Report (April 2002) uses the term teaching assistant to cover those currently employed as learning support staff in the usual sense as well as those largely involved in the implementation of Government initiatives like the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy.

Learning Support Assistants and Special Educational Needs

In the context of policies aimed at including pupils with special educational needs in the mainstream, the debate about the role of LSAs has revolved around issues to do with the management of LSAs; how support should be provided e.g. within the classroom or in withdrawal groups; whether the support should be focused solely on specific children to others in the class; and whether support was primarily for the teacher rather than the child. Richard Rose (2000) in his study of the use of support in a primary school with a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs concluded that the effective management of an LSA could provide benefits for all pupils, that collaboration between teachers and LSAs at all stages was essential but crucially that:

> *the allocation of learning support assistants to named individual pupils may lead to the creation of dependency and the denial of opportunities to develop independent learning skills. It may, therefore, be more appropriate to allocate LSAs to named teachers with whom they can develop more effective collaborative procedures for classroom management. (p.195)*

This model of support does not preclude working with individual children either inside or outside the classroom for part of the school day as long as this does not impede their development as independent and cooperative learners. But all decisions about the form and nature of support would be taken in collaboration with the class teacher with due regard to what was in the best interests of all the children in the class.

And so what abilities and skills does this more inclusive model of support entail? From Rose's description, an LSA must have:

- the ability to operate a 'roving brief' in the classroom; to identify pupils who required attention, to make judgements about what kind of help was needed, to intervene briefly and then move on.
- the ability to work with small groups of pupils with special educational needs or with mixed ability groups
- the ability to work with individual pupils, including those with 'challenging' behaviours
- the ability to collaborate with the class teacher regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of lessons.

But of course all this takes place in an interactive context where in addition to their usual skills, the teacher also needs the skills to manage learning support effectively.

Critique of the Model

This is certainly an advance on those models of support which overemphasise one-to-one contact with individual pupils in that it takes account of all aspects of the classroom context which may impinge on the teaching of an individual. Thus, for example, it is often the case that even if support is provided inside rather than outside the classroom, this will impact negatively on the pupil concerned because it will reinforce other pupils' perceptions of them as different. If all pupils can and, from time to time, do receive support, then the possible stigmatizing effect is minimised. I use the terms 'minimise' and 'reinforce' in order not to suggest that such negative labelling by peers can ever be completely overcome in this way. Such labelling is a function of wider aspects of social and education policy which are reflected in pupil culture in such a way that pupils would probably develop their own status hierarchies whatever support strategies were deployed. Nevertheless, in engaging with this culture (see Quicke, 1999) this is a good place to start.

Another aspect of the context taken into account by the model, relates to the importance of the class teacher interacting on a more regular basis with the special needs pupils in a one-to-one or small group situation. With more exclusive models, there is often a tendency for the

class teacher to hand over responsibility for support to the LSA at precisely those times when the pupil requires highly skilled individual help. The flexibility of the model enables the LSA to supervise the whole class allowing the class teacher at certain moments to focus on the needs of individuals.

However, there are at least two important issues which need to be addressed. The first relates to the teaching role of the LSA. Is it being suggested that the LSA is mainly a supervisor or a teacher? Rose (2000) uses phrases like 'oversee the work of small groups', 'supervisory role' and 'the provision of organizational guidance to individual pupils with special educational needs' but also describes the LSA's role as involving interventions to 'ensure understanding' and being trusted by teachers to 'make judgements about who needed help and what type'. These latter aspects of the role surely require a level of skill and reflection which are central to teaching?

A second ambiguity relates to the nature of the relationships between teachers and assistants. All descriptions of the LSA role in helping to make classrooms more inclusive refer to the importance of collaborative partnerships with teachers. This means involvement in curriculum planning and review as well as working together cooperatively in the classroom. As indicated above, the good LSA will be trusted by the teacher to make crucial judgements about interventions and pupils' learning needs. If the relationship is collaborative then this feeling of trust would have to be mutual but clearly it is the kind of trust that exists between unequals rather than equals. The issue here is not whether teachers and assistants can be equal, in the sense that their roles are interchangeable, but what kind of inequality is envisaged? It is unclear in much of the literature on the inclusion model whether this unequal relationship is like that between manager and managed or like that between tutor and trainee. Rose refers to the need for teachers to develop skills to manage learning support effectively but in addition it seems that teachers will have to play a major part in training their assistants.

HMI/Ofsted Report

If we now move to the wider picture, we can see that these ambiguities are still very much to the fore. They are conpounded in the HMI/Ofsted Report (2002) which is based on a major study of all teaching assistants in primary schools, not just those involved in SEN. It was carried out in the wake of the l998 and 2001 Green Papers where the Government set out its intention to provide resources, with funds available until 2004, for the recruitment and training of 20,000 full-time equivalent teaching assistants. The main purpose of this expansion was clearly to help with the implementation of Government initiatives like the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies.

In its conclusion the report contains the following paragraph:

> *The benefits which better trained teaching assistants have brought to primary classrooms have done a great deal to influence opinion about how teaching assistants can help raise standards. Although no one should pretend that teaching assistants are teachers, when they are more successful they show many of the skills characteristic of good teachers: an understanding of children and their needs and behaviour; and the ability to interact effectively with them to promote learning; and the ability to assess where pupils are in their learning and what they need to do to make further progress*
>
> *Making the most of such abilities should certainly not threaten the professionalism of teachers; rather, it should be encouraged and developed to the full. (para.65)*

Thus, despite the disclaimer about not pretending assistants are teachers, good practice as an assistant seems to involve the core skills of teaching. But if so, aren't assistants for all practical purposes teachers? Teachers themselves may have other roles but if the job does not include understanding, interacting effectively with and formatively assessing children then they cannot be said to teach. All other skills the teacher may possess are surely enabling skills aimed at facilitating the deployment of these core skills?

Rather than clarify the role and their relationship with the class teacher, the upshot of the report is that Teaching Assistants are left in an ambiguous position with no clear boundaries. On the one hand they are asked to give pastoral support and administrative support or are involved in 'tightly prescribed interventions' (see para 13) such as the catch-up programmes in Early Literacy Support (ELS), Additional Literacy Support (ALS) and Springboard mathematics, while at the same time working in 'partnership' with the teacher (para 3l) and developing 'sufficient subject knowledge to be able to challenge and extend pupils' learning.' And having 'good questioning skills' (para 3l). Throughout the report there are references to teachers as both managers and trainers. Thus para 47 refers to teachers being responsible for 'managing and organising the work of the teaching assistant' and later to TAS receiving 'informal on-the-job training' (para 58)

Why These Ambiguities?

Those who are unhappy with this role of 'better trained teaching assistants' and who suspect that the vast increase in numbers in primary and indeed secondary classrooms is about providing education on the cheap need look no further than this report. Perhaps half or maybe more than half the staff of every primary school will be TAs and thus paid as assistants, i.e. considerably less than teachers, but in fact will be doing a lot more than just assisting the teachers with administrative and other non-teaching tasks. They will also be doing a substantial amount of teaching. The reduction in teachers' workloads is highly unlikely. Although it will be claimed that teachers are now being assisted, they will have extra management and training tasks with no extra resources.

In addition to the question of finance and resources, there is also an ideological issue relating to the way all governments in recent years have sought to construct the nature of teaching and the identity of teachers. If assistants teach, then teaching is an activity which does not require a teacher to be autonomous, since by definition assistants are dependent. This definition of teaching serves the interests of those who want teachers to be both managed professionals delivering a prescribed curriculum as well as line managers to assistants. The link between good practice and autonomy is thus broken. In short, the debate about the role of assistants is part of the insinuation of managerialist assumptions into the very heart of the education process.

What is to be done?

The idea of good practice in learning support involving the 'core characteristics of teaching' has now become so entrenched, particularly in the primary schools, that it is difficult to see how policy could be reversed without upsetting existing inclusion practices. The way forward would seem to be to accept that since for all practical purposes assistants will be teachers, they should be trained as teachers and on taking up employment in a school should be required to register on a school-based modularised teacher education programme.

What are the implications of this proposal? One negative possibility is that this requirement would create a recruitment problem. Only a percentage of people who apply for jobs as assistants would want to go on to become teachers. The recruitment base typically consists of people, often local women with children, who want part-time work at the local school, and whilst they might welcome an induction course and some further training, do not envisage themselves becoming teachers. Selection criteria would inevitably have to be more stringent requiring formal qualifications and they would be put off from applying. The HMI/Ofsted Report indicates the take-up of existing induction courses whether internal or external to the school has been patchy. It might also be argued that there are many people who might do a reasonably good job as an assistant but who would not be suitable as a trainee teacher.

However, I would argue that, as far as recruitment is concerned, there always has to be a rigorous selection process, since working in classrooms at any level requires being able to relate appropriately to children in learning contexts. Formal qualifications in literacy and numeracy would not be required on entry but a satisfactory standard would have to be achieved before the end of the course, although whether or not GCSE English and Maths were appropriate qualifications would need to be considered. All assistants should receive an induction course which could quite easily be seen as a first year training course. If assistants did not want to go beyond this they could drop out and 'bank' credits. The situation would not be dissimilar to some existing arrangements but the crucial difference would be that assistants would not be assistants but trainee teachers. They would not train as assistants and then go on to train as teachers – a very lengthy process which can take up to ten years.

Another objection might come from teachers themselves. They might want adults in their classes who were just plain non-teaching assistants. Even if this were no longer possible, there may be a case for different kinds of teaching assistants, implying different levels of training depending on the nature of the duties. The nature of contact with children would be the key defining criterion. Levels might be characterised as involving only administrative contact (e.g. taking the register) and upwards through pastoral to learning support, and within learning support from highly prescriptive delivery to more discretionary forms of contact.

But it seems to me this implies a division of labour in the classroom which is unnecessary and basically exclusive. Interacting with all adults is a learning experience for pupils. What pupils may learn from their experience of different levels of support is that there is a status hierarchy amongst adults and there are some adults in the classroom who can only talk to them about certain things or to whom they can only address certain kinds of questions. Unlike a student teacher who has in mind the need to relate to the whole child as a learner, there are no such imperatives for teaching assistants, particularly those whose tasks are defined as mainly administrative.

Teachers may object to being educators/trainers but in fact, as indicated above, they would probably have an on-the-job education/training role anyway if their assistants were to become collaborators in learning contexts. Moreover, there is a qualitative difference between teacher/assistant and the teacher/student relations, with the latter being more functional for education purposes. The former might be interpreted as 'master/servant' and the latter as 'expert/novice'. Both imply a hierarchical relationship but there is one crucial difference – the former involves power over others solely to secure the attainment of pre-determined targets, the latter involves power over others to construct a relationship where the development of 'self' and 'other' is an intrinsic part of goal-directed action. In practice, the former involves a division of labour where the teacher defines the roles in a way that will secure outcomes irrespective of the development of the assistant's autonomy; the latter involves a changing relationship of collaboration which secures outcomes through the developing autonomy of the novice or student. The latter is a more inclusive idea if we define inclusion as action which empowers all members of school communities.

Recent Proposals

The recent Government proposals for higher-level learning assistants really only capitalize upon what already exists. Taking lessons while teachers take half a day for marking and preparation is only a slight extension of the good practice 'roving brief' of the inclusionary LSA. In fact, acting as a supervisor for work set by the teacher may not be as reflective or challenging as supporting learning through the accurate identification of individual learning needs and judgements about when and how to intervene, even if the teacher is present in the latter but not the former context.

The 'quiet revolution' (see *Times Educational Supplement*, 3l October 2002, p.12) which will see the number of higher-level assistants rise to possibly 50,000 by 2005 will hinge on the success of a 50 days' training programme to be delivered in schools and on the internet. This may be enough for an induction programme but it is clearly only a small part of what would be needed if assistants were being trained to become qualified teachers. Even this amount of induction training in school would inevitably involve on-the-job training as assistants would have to collaborate with teachers in setting things up, feeding back on particular classes and reviewing teaching and learning strategies. In these circumstances it is highly likely that teachers' workload would increase rather than decrease.

But I feel we need to take this opportunity to develop an alternative route into teaching for those who may or may not have formal qualifications but show that they can help children to learn. The key to this will be the development of an apprenticeship model of teacher education where all practising teachers see themselves as teacher educators taking on students as an intrinsic part of their professional

identity. As indicated above many teachers currently see themselves in this way both in relation to students and assistants but it is a function which needs to be clarified and properly resourced.

Conclusion

The ideal role of learning support assistants in SEN has moved from a narrow, individualistic, caring role to a wider, more class group oriented, teaching role. This has been in line with what has been regarded as good practice in inclusion. It seems to have been considered an acceptable form of support by teachers of younger children with special educational needs because it has enabled them to include such children in the mainstream classroom. However, it has paved the way ideologically for an expansion of the role of assistants throughout the system in ways which are more problematical for the maintenance of teacher professionalism and thus for the proper education of pupils.

As indicated above, there are ideological as well as financial reasons for not clarifying the role of teaching assistants. The logic of the HMI/Ofsted Report leads to assistants being viewed as student teachers but if so they would eventually have to be paid as teachers, to say nothing of the resources required to develop a proper teacher education programme. And so they continue to be defined as assistants and 'no one should pretend that teaching assistants are teachers.' (para 65)

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Systems Thinking in Education

FRANK NEWHOFER

Frank Newhofer proposes there is an urgent need for 'systems thinking' in education if the present reductionist political approach is not to continue, with management by targets being inevitably counter-productive.

What is to Be Done?

> *Serfdom Russia in the l830s was characterised by a regime that believed only in the laws of national necessity. Consequently the prevailing culture was one where it was futile to rebel and where the creative life of the spirit was a luxury of privilege. Tom Stoppard [1]*

The problem with each successive piece of legislation on schools is that each is doomed to fail because the political zeitgeist has idealised teachers (and pupils) as vehicles for the aspirations of politicians. Each individual teacher has become a winnable target in some controllable order, untroubled by chance and ignorant of the passions, instincts and connectedness of real people living in complex organic systems. But I'm not talking about some Stoppardian philosophical meandering around the need to look at 'contemporary footprints rather than posthumous horizons'. Or am I?

The Need for Systems Thinking

An underlying concept of systems thinking relevant to natural systems and human-activity systems (like schools) is the *adaptive* whole. The whole has the ability to withstand changes in its environment. Everyday experience provides many examples of this adaptation, which is what makes systems thinking so important. For example, the human body can maintain its internal temperature within a quite narrow range while tolerating a wide variation of external temperature. An institution such as the army has continued to survive in a recognisable form even though the world in which it operates and the technology it uses has changed beyond recognition.

All living systems share the same principle of organisation known as 'autopoiesis'. An autopoietic organisation is a *network* of production processes in which the function of each component is to participate in the production or transformation of the other components in the network. In this way the entire network continually 'makes itself'. It is produced by its components and in turn produces those components.

Think about it.

But What If the Essential Features of the Organisation are Embedded Not Just in their Components but Also in their Interconnectedness?

> *The great shock of 20thC science has been that systems cannot be understood by analysis. The properties of the parts are not intrinsic properties, but can be understood only within the context of the larger whole. Thus the relationship between the parts can be understood only from the organisation of the whole. Accordingly, systems thinking does not concentrate on basic building-blocks but rather on basic principles of organisation. Fritjof Capra [2]*

The richness of interconnectedness means that not only has any one change several prior causes but in itself may contribute to further changes in these causes:

> *A right to buy council houses….. a lack of public sector workers in many cities…*
>
> *a prescribed curriculum ….. an innovation deficit …. poor economic growth…*
>
> *longer working hours ….less time with your children… popular schools getting larger…. alienated pupils ….distrusting professionals …. loss of respect …..*
>
> *allowing food additives …… disturbed behaviour …. formalised early learning….*
>
> *distorted social development ….. ill health ….high stakes assessment …. exclusion …*
>
> *stress …..selection…. sink schools ….. urban blight ….*
>
> *Education, health, welfare, social order, the economy …. when are the connections not important?*

It is precisely for this reason that a holistic or systems approach is essential in schools because the components cannot sensibly be separated, as the reductionist political approach assumes. It also means that the behaviour of the system is determined more by its own internal structure than by specific external causes. Furthermore a school's own internal structure will have evolved as a result of its *particular* history.

Today we know that most 'organisms' are not only members of ecological communities but are also complex ecosystems themselves, containing a host of smaller organisms that have considerable autonomy and yet are integrated harmoniously into the functioning of the whole. By viewing a particular (school) community, ecologically, as an assemblage of 'organisms', bound into a functional whole by their mutual relationships, we could facilitate a change of focus from school (or classroom) to community(ies) and back, applying the same kinds of concepts to different systems levels.

The politicians cannot really understand the relationship between different levels, they assume that in order to provide precision on what is required of managers and to check that progress is being made, it is essential to provide quantitative 'outcome' measures of performance and targets. Within complex adaptive (school) systems, however, the pursuit of any single quantified target is likely to distort the operation of the system and thereby reduce its overall effectiveness. How can we know what disturbs the dynamic of interconnected system levels and how any disturbance may knock on distortions into other systems?

We need to be sensitive to what keeps interlocked systems stable and how important the stability drives are.

The recent report by the National Audit Office on the NHS [3] rightly highlighted how health *delivery* is disastrously subverted by waiting list targets. The NAO found that to avoid being fined for over-long waiting lists, 20% of consultants 'frequently' ignored clinical priorities in their operations lists, performing simple routine procedures rather than complicated ones in order to make their target numbers. (So who is getting better at the complicated procedures?)

What the NAO could have pointed out, is that this is a generic problem with all management-by-targets, which is inevitably counter-productive. It systematically lowers quality, raises costs and wrecks systems, making them less stable and therefore harder to improve.

The implications for government by targets is clear. Target setting may be a short-term way to stimulate and focus efforts to improve performance. However, a specific target can encapsulate only one element of a complex organisation and its dominance is likely to undermine the other aspects of the organisation that are crucial to its general and long-term effectiveness.

There is a link between performance targets and heavy measurement in schools and the continuous difficulties faced by the school system in motivating and retaining qualified teachers. Forcing schools to prioritise one aspect of their performance distorts their general performance and impoverishes the broader education of their pupils.

> *In September 2000 Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the UN, addressed the assembled leaders of the world at the Millenium summit in New York. He concluded that if there was one thing that had been learnt in the 20th century it was that 'centrally planned systems don't work'. No one commented. It was self-evidently true. The world learns slowly, but ultimately it learns, or rather it unlearns its old dogmas. Unlearning, however, good start that it is, doesn't tell you what to do instead. Charles Handy [4]*

The learnt instinct with issues such as educational standards seems to be based on reductionist thinking, it is to troubleshoot and fix things – in essence to break down the ambiguity, resolve any paradox, achieve more certainty and agreement, and move into the simple system zone. (This may be the only zone that politics can inhabit?) But complexity and systems science suggest that it is often better to try multiple approaches and let direction arise by gradually shifting time and attention towards those things that seem to be working best.

Schools are more like complex adaptive systems than machines, so it is more appropriate to prioritise the *process of improvement* than a specific goal or target. Schon's reflective practitioner, Kolb's experiential learning model, and the plan-do-study-act cycle of improvement are examples of processes that explore new possibilities through experimentation, autonomy and working at the edge of knowledge and experience.

Variation is part of a natural continuous improvement process. This requires 'failures' to be acceptable; it will be essential to win the argument that experimentation and discovery are seen as a more effective route to improving system performance than centralised design.

But the pattern of comprehensiveness and effectiveness in management and planning is not just one of adding more variables or more date. Rather it is about restoring values that are the key to the practices of profession(al)s (and that have been systematically excised from them). One of the chief tenets of systems thinking is that it is essential that institutional and organisational change is undertaken by those within; only they appreciate the 'particular constraints, and ultimately it is they who have to implement and carry forward the changes. What is possible is that with a commitment to make change by way of the *learning of teachers*, there will develop sufficient flexibility to start managing complexity more effectively.

Summary I

School improvement means introducing learning processes rather than specifying outcomes or targets. The key to establishing better learning is an increased tolerance of failure, continuous feedback on effectiveness and a willingness to foster diversity, innovation and uncertainty.

ONWARD: So what is to be done? There are three areas for enquiry:

1. How do teachers learn about teaching in their school?
2. What do schools do to learn (organisationally)?
3. How do external influences enable the self-organising school to become more adaptive?

The questions we ask consciously contribute to the macro development of the systems we live in (and that we find very difficult to describe). This macro development belongs to the organism of the organisation itself, which grown and evolves and learns over many years.

> *When birds look into houses, what impossible worlds they see. Think. What a shedding of every knowable surface and process. She wanted to believe the bird was seeing her, a woman with a teacup in her hand, and never mind the folding back of day and night, the apparition of space set off from time. She looked and took a careful breath. She was alert to the clarity of the moment but knew it was ending already. She felt it in the blue jay. Or maybe not. She was making it happen herself because she could not look any longer. This must be what it means to see if you've been blind all your life. She said something to Rey, who lifted his head slightly, chasing the jay but leaving the sparrows unstartled.*
>
> *'Did you see it?'*
> *'Don't we see them all the time?'*
> *'Not all the time. And never so close.'*
> *'Never so close. Okay.'*
> *'It was looking at me.'*
> *'It was looking at you.'*
>
> *Dom de Lillo [5]*

The complexity of a self organising system lives up one level; it describes the system itself and not its experiential reception by its inhabitants. It has its own coherent personality, a personality that self-organises out of innumerable individual decisions.

A school is a kind of amplification system. Its 'departments' and classes are a way of expressing emerging patterns of behaviour – capturing information

about group behaviour and storing that information. But because those patterns are fed back within the school structure, small shifts in behaviour can quickly escalate into larger movements.

To understand a school's complex order you need to understand the ever-changing ballet that enables it to function; where parts of the school (or its individuals) have lost their equilibrium, you can not necessarily approach the problem with the expectation that re-organisation (or any 'elimination') will bring long term stability to the school as a whole.

Vital (effective?) schools have developed an innate ability to understand, communicate, contrive and invent what is required to combat their difficulties. They get their 'order' from below; they have become a 'learning organisation', pattern recognisers – even when the patterns they respond to appear to be unhealthy ones.

'Local' is the key term in understanding the logic which drives such schools. The individuals in the school pay attention to their colleagues and neighbours rather than just waiting for orders from above. When teachers think locally (re their classroom?) *and* act locally, their collective action can produce 'global' behaviour.

Local information leads to global wisdom. The primary mechanism of a learning organisation is the interaction between 'neighbours'; this could just be teachers stumbling across each other. The more interaction between neighbours the more an organisation, such as a school, will be able to solve problems and regulate itself more effectively. Without neighbourly interactions, schools are just an assemblage of individual organisms – like a 'swarm' but without the lever for transformation. They even think like a swarm.

There will be a difference in the way that schools are able to respond to their neighbours. (In 'nature' just think what happens when foragers from two colonies overlap and search the same places for food). Relationships in *emergent* systems are mutual; you influence your neighbours and your neighbours influence you. All emergent systems are built out of this kind of feedback, the two-way connections that foster higher-level learning.

School Life Depends on the Random Interaction Between Teachers that Changes One Individual's Behaviour and Then …

FLOW

Neighbours learn from each other when total strangers have opportunities to communicate and mix in random configurations. Neighbouring schools (and teachers) need the equivalent of 'pavements'. What matters is a primary conduit for the flow of information between organisations and people. But individuals only benefit indirectly from their pavement perambulations; the value of the exchange between individuals lies in what it does for the 'super-organisation' of the school. We need the 'pavements' to sustain the complex order.

Encountering Diversity Does Nothing for the School System Unless the Encounter Has a Chance of Altering Behaviour. Changes in Behaviour Depend on Feedback

In too many cases the channels that connect people in education are made to be one-way and hierarchical; they lack the connections to generate true feedback and there are too few interactions to create reverberations.

Tyranny thrives on reducing the capacity for feedback; a system where the information flows are made to be uni-directional is one where the participants are expected to be present and at the same time invisible. But the 'knowledge community' continues to exist; it becomes, however, a cancer of constrained over-development. If feedback isn't helping to regulate the growth of the educational community then there will be a 'climax' stage in its development.

The role of traditional senior management needs to change – be less concerned with establishing a direction ('vision') for the school and more involved with encouraging the clusters and developing the 'pavements' that generate the best ideas. Management becomes a feedback mechanism to those 'ever' shifting allegiances of innovative smaller groups.

Summary 2

We all need to learn how to 'grow solutions' in educational reform rather than be continually trying to engineer them (bake a cake, grow a garden). The art is to create the spaces in the system where intelligent interventions can grow and adapt; this is the only way to exceed the capacity that has been built into the organisations (schools). Emergent (school) systems are all about understanding how to live within the boundaries defined by the 'rules' (it is very important to understand these 'rules') but creating something greater than the sum of the parts of the system is about using the spaces between the boundaries.

We need an education system built on neural web-like organisational structures, breaking up the imposed insular and hierarchical layers of 'better' and not-so-good schools and building a more cellular distributed network at a local level. But emergent (school) systems always have a capacity to suddenly start behaving in unpredictable ways. It is this unpredictable quality that makes the principle of bottom-up intelligence the really tantalizing one for schools struggling to keep up with the 21st century pace of change.

Notes

[1] *The Coast of Utopia.* [2002] Tom Stoppard. National Theatre programme.

[2] *The Web of Life.* Fritjof Capra. Flamingo 1997.

[3] *Department of Health: inpatient and outpatient waiting in the NHS.* NAO, July 2001.

[4] *The Elephant and the Flea.* [2001] Charles Handy. Hutchinson.

[5] *The Body Artist.* [2001] Dom de Lillo. Picador.

also

Emergence. [2001] Steven Johnson. Allen Lane.

Systems Failure. [2002] Jake Chapman. Demos.

Review Article

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Foreday Morning
PAUL DASH, 2002
London: BlackAmber Books
ISBN l 301369 11 B, 22l pp, £12.99

An Exclusive Education: race, class and exclusion in British schools
CHRIS SEARLE, 2001
London: Lawrence & Wishart
ISBN: 0 85315 332 7, 185pp, £9.99

It is very appropriate that I should be reviewing these two books together; it so happens that Chris Searle wrote the Foreword to Paul Dash's autobiography; and Paul Dash is responsible for the illustration which adorns the front cover of Chris Searle's study of pupil exclusion. But more important than these incidental facts: both men are remarkable writers and passionate and courageous advocates of the concepts of human dignity and educability, regardless of race and class. Having been for many years their colleague at Goldsmiths College, I can also state, incontrovertibly, that both men are brilliant teachers and powerful and inspiring communicators.

Paul Dash's *Foreday Morning* is divided into two long parts of roughly equal length, headed 'Barbados' and 'Britain', and is indeed a story of two worlds, of two realities of childhood, both being expressed, in the words of Chris Searle's Foreword, in a narrative of 'uncommon insights and striking pictorial clarity'.

The extraordinary quality of the first half of the book reminds one particularly of the vivid poetry and prose of Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* and Richard Wright's *Black Boy;* and in his modest introduction Paul refers to both these books as being inspirational – of providing him with 'models of what could be achieved'.

In the middle of an early section on Christmas in Barbados, where Paul is talking about the choir his father conducted, there is a beautiful passage where he pays tribute to the people among whom he spent the first eleven years of his life:

> *Splendid people with big voices and bold hearts enmeshed in an ecstasy of music-making, while finding a universe of potentialities within themselves and giving it expression through their art….*
> *These people without material wealth make sound, carve wood, essay a cover-drive (a particular cricketing stroke), thus speaking of their wholeness and wealth as beings through their skills and sensibilities. Such experiences confirm the value of them, and the value of myself as a person, by the richness of their talents and skills.*

The mood of the second half of the book is more sombre, less enchanting. In September 1957, the eleven-year-old Paul (with his brothers Gerald and Levi) arrived in Oxford to join his parents who had migrated to Britain in December l955.

The Oxford in which Paul now found himself was *not* the Oxford we associate with ancient universities and the more picturesque episodes of Inspector Morse; his new home was to be 450 Cowley Road in the Oxford industrial suburb of Cowley. Within a matter of weeks, Paul and his fourteen-year-old brother Gerald were sent to the Cowley St.John Secondary Modern School, also on the Cowley Road. They had, of course, never taken the eleven-plus exam, and it was never considered possible that they might be 'worthy' of a grammar-school education. In this small and dreadfully inadequate school of around 280 pupils, each year was divided into two streams, A and B, and Paul was allocated a place in the B stream. Here were congregated 'the slow learners who needed remedial support, a few children who couldn't be bothered to stretch themselves academically, and a few misfits who posed real challenges for the staff.'

Paul does not gloss over the fact that corporal punishment had been an ugly and regrettable aspect of school life in Barbados; but nothing could have prepared him for the treatment he was to receive at the hands of his form teacher Mrs Harris at his new school in England. One afternoon during his second week at the school, she subjected him to a severe beating in full view of the rest of the class:

> *She fell on me in half-crazed violence and hate, hitting, kicking and snarling. She slapped my head, punched my shoulders and chest, kicked my bare shins. This was no mere scolding but a symbolic beating to death, an act of annihilation, a violation of my right to be. My Barbadian upbringing, my ingrained respect for teachers and awe of whites combined to paralyse me, to make retaliation or even evasive action impossible.*

Paul's 'crime' was to allow a wooden ruler to slip from his hand and fall to the parquet floor!

Paul was to remain in the B stream for most of his time at the school, rarely having his abilities and talents recognised and being subjected to a curriculum that was invariably narrow, stifling and dull. This was the young man who was to go on to train as an artist at the Oxford School of Art and Chelsea School of Art and then teach for more than twenty years in London secondary schools. This was the shy young 'outsider' who was to become a university lecturer and have paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy, Whitechapel and Highgate Galleries. The second half of this book is the inspiring story of a self-conscious but determined teenager who refused to allow himself to be defeated by exclusion and rejection and vowed to overcome his serious social and educational disadvantages by self-education.

Paul's early life would not have been such a struggle if he had gone to a secondary school which cared about the development of abilities; but at least he was not excluded in a *physical* sense . Chris Searle's book *An Exclusive Education* is dedicated to all those young people – a disproportionate percentage of them being both black and working-class – who have been excluded from school and have, despite this rejection, 'struggled to find their own pathways in education and in life'

His book starts from the premise that each child's life is precious, that no child should be treated as expendable – as 'part of the human waste of the education market, the detritus of league tables and of the frantic inter-school competition for results'

Chris Searle argues that the aim of any democratic society should be the promotion of a viable alternative educational strategy embracing the concept of 'the inclusive school' and of a system which caters for *all* our children.

Exclusion from school has now become firmly established as a major social and political issue, on both sides of the Atlantic. Chris reminds us that in the USA at the end of l999, ex-presidential candidate and civil rights campaigner Jesse Jackson was arrested and handcuffed while picketing outside Eisenhower High School in Decatur, Illinois. He was protesting against the permanent exclusion of six black students and the 'zero tolerance' regime of the local school board which was bearing down disproportionately on black students. 'It is an honour to be arrested for a righteous cause' Jackson declared as he was taken to jail in a police van, evoking memories of earlier struggles for civil rights.

In this country, concern about the high numbers of excluded children is often mixed up with fear of crime and the crisis in truancy. This book argues that exclusion and truancy rates are part of the same problem – the widespread failure to provide an educational experience which is sufficiently motivating and responsive to the needs of all children. Whether officially or unofficially excluded, children who reject education, often because it appears to be rejecting them, can so easily become involved in crime, with the Metropolitan Police estimating that 40% of robberies, 25% of burglaries and 20% of thefts are committed by school-age children during school hours.

Chapter 2 of the book provides an instructive and revealing account of Chris Searle's experiences as Headteacher of Earl Marshal Comprehensive School in Sheffield in the first half of the l990s, a school where he and many of his colleagues were determined to implement a 'non-exclusion' policy. This school, situated in an area of genuine disadvantage, served the families of ex-steelworkers and, in particular, the newly-arrived peoples of Pakistan, Yemen, the Caribbean and Somalia. While Chris was Headteacher, Earl Marshal was prepared to challenge the worst effects of a market system of schooling by remaining as loyal as possible to the principles of non-selective, inclusive and community education; and the governance of the school began to be truly representative of the local black and white communities. Governors reserved the right to exclude a student only if every possible alternative had been exhausted; and this right was invoked in only *one* case over five years. Yet it has to be admitted that this firm policy was not universally popular among the teaching staff, and outright opposition to it was organised through the NASUWT. As relationships deteriorated, the local Member of Parliament, David Blunkett, became involved and the outcome was that Chris lost his job, and the powers of the governing body were removed by the LEA.

One of the lovely features of this book is the inclusion of a number of very moving poems from school students which often bear testimony to a profound sense of alienation from mainstream society and a clear understanding of the many contradictions of urban communities with good neighbourliness existing side-by-side with violence and menace. Earl Marshal was actually situated in the centre of one of the most crime-ridden parts of Sheffield, and exclusion in real terms would have meant throwing a teenager directly on to the streets, at real risk of being sucked into a life of drugs and law-breaking. An essential part of the school's strategy for dealing with problems of student indiscipline and disaffection was to involve not only the parents but also the school governors and local community associations. The students understood what the school was trying to achieve – this much is clear from their writing – but regrettably this understanding was not shared by local politicians and Ofsted inspectors.