

# Editorial

## Examination Overhaul

Once again last Summer (2003), there was much talk in the media about the future of the exam system for older students in both state and independent secondary schools. Stripped of all the extraneous material, this discussion, much of it covering familiar territory, can be dealt with under FOUR main headings: the future of the GCSE; the timing of the universities admissions procedures; the question as to whether or not A Levels are getting 'easier'; and the desirability or otherwise of introducing on a nationwide basis a British version of the International Baccalaureate. These topics are, of course, all related to one another; and there is often a particular vision of the future of education underlying the way in which each one is presented.

(1) The future of the GCSE as a common system of examining at sixteen-plus is very much tied up with the possible future structure of a single Baccalaureate-style diploma; but the discussion that began in the national press in August had a quite distinct and separate provenance.

It was in *The Daily Telegraph* of the 4 August that a story appeared by John Clare with the headline: 'Eton leads way in abandoning 'dumbed-down' GCSE exams'. The clue to the whole tenor of the piece lies in the use of that term 'dumbed-down', for the main point of the story was that leading independent schools were preparing to jettison the GCSE – believing that 'continuous dumbing-down' had made it 'too easy for able pupils'. In the view of Tony Little, having just completed his first year as Head of Eton: 'It is just like Boy Scouts collecting badges. ... One has to ask what the educational value of it all is.' Boys admitted to Eton in September 2004 would bypass GCSE and move straight on to AS Levels which they would be able to take in at least five subjects a year early, at the age of sixteen. They would then have two years in the Sixth Form to study a range of subjects in depth, including as many A2 subjects as they might need 'to secure entry to the best universities'.

This story was followed up by an interview given to *The Times* by Dr Ken Boston, which appeared on the 11 August, in which the Chief Executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) stressed that *all* schools were free to abandon GCSEs completely, if they thought that was a good idea. Dr Boston said he was quite happy to let individual headteachers decide whether teenagers should sit any GCSEs at all or move instead straight on to AS exams as part of their A Level courses. In his view, pupils were 'over-burdened' by sitting GCSEs, AS Levels and A Levels between the ages of sixteen and eighteen; and the whole system had to be made less rigid: 'if a school wants to offer only a few GCSEs or not hold them at all and go straight to AS and A Levels, then that is perfectly open to them. ... It shows flexibility in the system, which is admirable.

Not surprisingly, after pressure from the Government, Dr Boston felt obliged to rein in his comments, and he was soon reassuring a BBC interviewer that the GCSEs were 'robust, internationally recognised, flexible qualifications' and that 'the QCA would not be doing anything as crude as dropping them'. Meanwhile, Education Minister David Miliband spent the 11 August touring radio and television studios stressing that reform of the examination system was a long-term project and urging people not to be distracted by the unfortunate and ill-informed debate triggered by Dr Boston's remarks.

As long ago as the Spring of 2000, I wrote an article for this journal with the headline: 'Why the GCSE should be abolished' (Volume 42, Number 1, pp. 28–30). My argument was that the GCSE had failed to become a comprehensive and liberating system recognising the abilities and talents of all pupils. The importance of league table success had led many secondary schools to develop new ways of identifying and encouraging those pupils who might, with the right sort of support, manage a C grade in a number of subjects, while neglecting those youngsters thought unable to contribute to the all-important A\*-to-C grades benchmark. The GCSE had, in fact, become like the O Level it replaced in 1986, an exam for the 'most able' pupils. This year's results, published on the 21 August, revealed a worrying trend where the overall pass rate – grades A\*-to-G – fell from 97.9 to 97.6 per cent, while up to 60,000 pupils were estimated to be leaving school with no qualifications at all.

These seem to me to be legitimate reasons for wanting to see a radical overhaul of the fourteen-to-nineteen exam system which we will return to later in this Editorial. There is certainly a case for moving towards a situation where *eighteen* is the effective school leaving age. What worries me about hasty adoption of the Eton plan is that it could result in the GCSE being viewed, in the words of John Clare of *The Telegraph*, as 'an exam for the less academically able'.

(2) Somewhat less controversially, a story appeared in *The Observer* of the 10 August which talked about plans for a 'shake-up' of university admissions whereby teenagers would apply for universities places only *after* receiving their A Level results. In the view of Professor Steven Schwartz, the chief government adviser on university admissions and Vice-Chancellor of Brunel University, this major change to the admissions procedures would encourage youngsters from 'a broader range of social backgrounds' to go to university. It would give more flexibility by allowing youngsters to apply for courses based on *actual* rather than *predicted* results. Those who received unexpectedly good results – often from 'less privileged' backgrounds – would then not be at a disadvantage. Unusually, the new scheme appeared to have the backing of private school heads and of the

Conservatives – despite the fears of university admissions tutors that it risked causing huge upheaval.

(3) Our third major story takes us back to the question of standards and to the English obsession with identifying and cherishing elites. A story appeared in *The Times* of the 14 August (and where would we be without this wonderful harbinger of terrible times ahead?) headlined ‘Pass rate soars as pupils chase ‘easy’ A Levels’. On the day that the A Level pass rate hit a record 95.4 per cent, it was reported that students were shunning ‘traditional academic subjects’ in favour of ‘less demanding A Levels’ to help them win a place at university. Damian Green, the Shadow Education Secretary, called on the QCA to carry out an inquiry to ensure that all A Levels were of equal difficulty. ‘This would avoid the worrying phenomenon of students dropping languages, maths and sciences for other allegedly easier A Levels’, he said.

Four days later (the 18 August), a story appeared in the same newspaper reporting that Oxford and Cambridge were turning their back on A Levels and reintroducing their own entrance papers after being ‘overwhelmed’ by candidates with top grades. A new two-hour paper for medical students, to be introduced in the Autumn, would be used as the template for separate entry tests in a range of other subjects.

Cambridge actually abandoned its own entrance papers in 1987, followed by Oxford in 1995. At that time, the universities were responding to pressure from some headteachers who were arguing that the system unfairly advantaged carefully-coached students from the independent sector. They also argued that preparation for these entrance papers took too much time out of A Level studies. Now we seem to be contemplating putting the clock back and creating these iniquities all over again.

(4) After all this, it is something of a relief to turn to the current debate about positive proposals for a reform of the public examinations system.

In January, the Government launched a major review of qualifications for students aged fourteen to nineteen, to be carried out by Mike Tomlinson, the former Chief Inspector of Schools. At the time of the launch, David Miliband criticised those who talked of reform in terms of the lowering of standards: ‘It is a credo suited to the 19th and not the 21st century, a credo of weeding people out of education, rather than supporting them to succeed. Our challenge is to show that the potential of all our young people *can* be realised. They will not all achieve the same;

but they can all achieve their potential’ (reported in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 24 January 2003).

Mike Tomlinson’s initial proposals, which were published on the 16 July, included plans for a broad ‘baccalaureate-style’ diploma at four levels of difficulty. The entry level would be equivalent to the standard expected at fourteen; foundation level would be the same as the lower grades at GCSE. The Intermediate Diploma would be roughly equal to five GCSE passes at Grade C or above; and the Advanced Level would be roughly equivalent to existing A Levels.

The Tomlinson plan did not *explicitly* call for the abolition of GCSEs and A Levels, but simply presented that as one of two options. Alternatively, the old examinations could survive as component parts of a single diploma, rather than as free-standing qualifications.

The publication of these initial proposals signalled the start of an important debate on an English Bac. But this debate has to be about more than the ‘scrapping’ of A Levels and GCSEs and the precise structure of an inclusive system of diplomas from entry to advanced level. Among the many advantages claimed for the Bac, it is argued that it will broaden sixth-form studies, improve parity of esteem between academic and vocational courses and lead to more young people obtaining worthwhile qualifications.

Writing in *The Times Educational Supplement* of the 15 August, Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours argued that reform of fourteen-to-nineteen qualifications was not merely about widening access to higher education: ‘The aim of an English Bac is not simply to funnel more young people into university, but also to improve vocational education so that more fourteen-to-nineteen year-olds will become the highly skilled workers our economy needs. ... A major challenge is to provide a curriculum and qualifications ‘climbing frame’ from fourteen-plus to motivate more young people to continue learning, rather than dropping out.’

Back in 1990, David Miliband was one of the authors of *A British Baccalauréat*, a report published by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) advocating a new, unified system of education and training leading to a single ‘Advanced Diploma’ or ‘British Baccalauréat’. It is good to see that there is at least one leading New Labour figure who has not abandoned all his ideals on assuming high office.

**Clyde Chitty**

# War and Peace and Race Equality Issues

---

Two Essays by DAVID ROSENBERG

The author teaches at Hanover Primary School in Inner London and is a member of the *FORUM* Editorial Board. He formerly worked for the Runnymede Trust where he co-authored (with Paul Gordon) *Daily Racism: the Press and Black People in Britain* (Runnymede Trust, 1989).

---

## 1. War and peace in the Classroom

### Introduction

The build up to war with Iraq generated unprecedented direct action protests by school students in Britain. Outraged at the arrogance of America's leaders and the obsequiousness of Tony Blair, a generation frequently stereotyped as unable to be concerned about anything beyond their own bedroom demonstrated courage, conviction and a keen awareness of the political and international legal issues at stake. They descended in droves upon Parliament Square, although I don't suppose this form of active participation was what the Government had in mind when it introduced citizenship to the curriculum.

### Work in the Classroom

But what of primary age students? I teach Year 3. No longer designated infants, their thoughts, self-confidence and ability to express themselves visibly mature each week. Would they be able to assimilate the enormity of what was happening around them and respond to it? This quandary began to preoccupy me in the first weeks of the 2002-3 school year back in September 2002. Our main topic was the Ancient Romans, a subject that contains so many elements that appeal to children's imagination and interests, from military battles to exotic foods, astonishing buildings and structures and imposing styles of dress. But I was acutely aware that, as I was recounting tales of conquest and military occupation, a huge and powerful empire devouring its enemies in search of economic gain, the unshakeable beliefs of their never-to-be-questioned leaders, the past was not so distant as it appeared.

By October 2002, the likelihood of war with Iraq loomed as an immediate possibility, but I was determined that my class would not get the message that 'might is right' and that they would have a language with which to discuss it. I started to turn the aggressive and dynamic features of Roman society on their head.

We looked at Roman life and achievements through the eyes of slaves, through the eyes of girls and women denied status and rights, and through the eyes of those, like Boudicca's Icenii, oppressed by occupying forces. I raised questions about war and peace. I did not seek to deny the interest, particularly evident among the boys, in Roman soldiers and their way of life but I questioned the value and values of a society that owed so much to its military prowess and the enslavement of others. By the time we came to present an assembly to the other classes about our Roman studies, it was peppered with songs questioning the

military imperative. As children dramatised Boudicca's last moments, hidden in a wood with her daughters, making a poisonous suicide potion from the flowers growing freely, the class rose to sing. It was 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone?' – a song whose anti-war logic is so clear and powerful and well able to be assimilated by seven-year-olds. The Assembly closed with a rousing and animated version of 'The Mighty Song of Peace', penned in the 1960s, which promises that 'freedom, friendship, justice, unity and peace will soon be ringing all over this land.'

Intermittently we returned to these songs as the backdrop changed. Out with the Romans, in with the ancient Egyptians, fascinating for children for their elaborate way of death rather than an aggressive, all-conquering way of life, but coming nearer geographically to our current scenes of conflict. In a worsening international political climate in which the mass media were making simple equations of Muslims and terrorists, I didn't think it would do any harm to teach my class peace greetings in Arabic that could be heard in Cairo today – and in Baghdad. But as we changed topic to 'Weather in the World' the storms brewing over Washington, London and Baghdad were invading the children's consciousness. When I taught my class Dylan's 'Blowing in the Wind' and asked the children for two reasons why they thought I had taught them that song, the replies came swiftly. Hot on the tails of 'Cos we're doing about weather', came 'because of the war with Iraq'.

The first explicit discussion of what the War meant for children here came spontaneously in a 'show and tell' interlude. A child recounted fairly routine weekend events, playing in the park, buying sweets, eating a pizza, then she concluded 'Oh, and I've got a new whistle. I got it on the march.' This met with a chorus of 'I was on the march' from a third of the class, who then recounted their memories, impressions and experiences of an unforgettable day at the start of half-term when two million people flooded the streets of central London. I felt that, in some small way, I had contributed to their consciousness and participation, and it gave me confidence that we would be able to continue to address the War openly. I was acutely aware that for two children in my class there would be an immediate impact. Both have fathers working for the media covering international affairs and they were due to fly out soon. It was heartening to see the concern for these two children expressed in hugs from their friends.

Monday March 17th. Bush and Blair have given up on the second resolution. With no sign of backing down, or face-saving compromises from US or British leaders in the face of colossal domestic and external opposition, the

countdown to a devastating war had truly began. Out of my own sense of impotence, and not feeling confident at controlling my own anger, I steered clear of the subject that day but was cheered in the afternoon as a group of children painting scenes from a traditional story spontaneously began to sing 'Blowing in the Wind'. That night Bush issued his 48-hour warning.

The next day I explicitly opened discussion on 'war' and 'peace'. I asked children which words they associated with these concepts. We began with war. The first contribution belonged to a Somalian refugee who volunteered 'sadness'. There was no shortage of words; the children were extremely knowledgeable and perceptive of the reality. When we switched to words associated with peace, there came 'happiness', 'joy', 'freedom' and many more.

The children, acutely aware that their grandparents had first-hand experience and memories of war, were clearly frightened that they might be affected directly. I reassured them by locating the region where the battles would be fought on globes and maps and showed them how far it was from London. Looking more closely at the globe they saw where Iraq was in relation to Britain and the USA and considered their relative size. They understood why neighbours might be at war but found it hard to comprehend why America would travel halfway across the globe to launch war and why the American people felt antagonistic to Iraqis. We discussed the differences between peoples and governments. I explained that if I had an argument with the teacher next-door I would try and sort that argument out with that teacher; I wouldn't encourage the children in my class to be horrible to the children next-door. They understood this very well. I asked them to think about which people here might be especially worried about the War. We talked about the two fathers covering the War for the media, parents and relatives of soldiers, and Iraqis living here with family there. One half-German child, proudly supported Germany's opposition to the War and talked movingly about an Iraqi family friend who would be fearful for his family and friends back home. But what was really so striking and hopeful was how my class were able to put themselves in the position of their counterparts in Iraq – children, parents, old people, soldiers.

Most members of the class contributed to the discussion, and those who didn't speak listened with an intense concentration that the National Curriculum rarely evokes. I set them an open writing task. On the board I wrote '48 hours to war' and some words – hopes – prayers – feelings – thoughts – and suggested they write either from their own point of view or the imagined point of view of a child in Iraq, or a soldier (from Iraq/USA/UK) or an old person in Iraq. Their responses were so moving, so knowledgeable and so full of human empathy:

*'I feel worried that if Saddam Hussein does not leave Iraq the world will not have peace for a long time. I'm just glad that it is not happening here in Europe!'*

*'I am very worried because lots of innocent people will die. Why do they want war?'*

*'I am a child in Iraq. I have heard what George Bush has said. I am not in school because it will be a war. I know Saddam Hussein is a bad man so I'm packing up to go away. I am happy and sad too because my relatives are staying in Iraq.'*

*'I just got to school. I didn't really listen or learn. It was lunch. I was too scared to eat. Then I thought I might eat something because I might starve in a week. I did not get to sleep. I was too scared.'*

*'If I was a soldier I would be very sad and it would be hard to not think about my family. Each night I do three prayers and last night all of them were 'Dear greatest God if you stop the war I will be very grateful.'*

*'I hope I am not going to be bombed. Maybe some people might want war but I don't because you wouldn't like it if you were living in Iraq.'*

*'I am very scared. I wish every person in the Government would resign, so there would not be a war, and then come back. I hope it is a draw.'*

As they read them to each other, the discussion continued, and they brought in elements of debates at home so parents' views were included too. One child said: 'My dad said that peace is nice but sometimes you have to have war in order to get peace.' I tried to answer every question as honestly and unevasively as I could. We returned to our peace songs agreeing that whether or not we thought there should be a war now, in the longer run we wanted peace and a world that was determined to settle its disputes in peaceful ways. Clearly the children found the songs comforting and supportive of their developing thoughts. I collated five of the songs we had learned on a sheet and suggested that we could take our songs to other classes. I asked for volunteers anticipating that some children would be shy and reticent. Every member of the class put their hand up. We divided into three teams of singers who were very much appreciated by every class that received them.

## Conclusion

It didn't stop the cruise missiles raining down on the cities in Iraq but may help these children to become the kinds of citizens who will ask questions, who will seek peace and who will want to take action to stop the Blairs and Bushes of tomorrow from riding roughshod over the will of the people they are supposed to be serving.

## 2. Equal Rights and Wrongs

### Introduction

One reason why New Labour continues to divide those who voted for it is because its policies and practices are often self-contradictory. A government that has brought down unemployment and brought in a minimum wage condones massive salary hikes for business 'fat cats' and the concentration of wealth in fewer hands. A government that has reduced the influence of hereditary peers in the name of democracy shields so many of its actions from democratic scrutiny behind a veil of spin. A government that can claim to have significantly increased investment in health and education has nevertheless allowed more and more of the material benefits to accrue to private companies who have been greatly encouraged to step in to 'rescue' the public sector from its inevitable 'inefficiency'. Small wonder that the Government's approach to racial equality in schools should have a similarly schizophrenic nature.

## The Need for a Race Equality Policy

Last year, schools, along with a host of other public bodies, were presented with a deadline by which to have a Race Equality policy in place: on the face of it, a good idea. Many schools, particularly in areas of Britain where visible minorities are thin on the ground, have shied away from the whole issue, as if their pupils were to remain cocooned in comfortable, culturally homogenous enclaves for the rest of their lives, and as if they have little need to learn about the history, cultures and experiences of others who share their country. It is only right that they should address race equality issues with their counterparts in multicultural cities. As for the schools already addressing racial inequalities, the insistence on a policy provided an incentive to review their approach and practices and evaluate their successes and failures to date.

And yet, among those more closely attuned to the range of issues around equality in schools – discrimination, stereotyping, low expectations of certain groups, exclusion levels, racial bullying and violence, access to language support, employment of staff from minorities – were teachers who greeted the government's diktat with deep cynicism. A government that professes its commitment to racial equality has overseen riots in major towns rooted in sustained racial inequalities which it has apparently lacked the will or imagination to combat, especially in housing and education, and has been confronted by the most significant growth in representation of the Far Right in local government for decades. The single factor that has most propelled the Far Right's fortunes has been the issue of refugees and asylum seekers where the rhetoric of government and media have converged to 'demonise' those arriving at Britain's shores and airports, fleeing war and persecution, whose faces do not fit.

The manifestly straightforward business of valuing every human being equally regardless of superficial matters such as ethnic origin, religion or lifestyle, has become much more complex and fragmented. Not only has a divide been drawn between settled ethnic minority communities and the most recent arrivals but further distinctions are thrust by the media and government between 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers' and those absurdly branded with the basest of motives – 'economic migrants'. The very newspapers who, not so long ago, admired Norman Tebitt's advice to the unemployed to 'get on your bike' and who lauded Thatcher's stream of invective against the 'work-shy' to pull their socks up and seize economic opportunities, have themselves launched a pitiless stream of invective against those who abandon longstanding homes, family settings, familiar languages and culture to seek their economic fortunes elsewhere.

Working in inner-London for anti-racist organisations in the 1980s and as a teacher from the 1990s I have witnessed dramatic changes in attitudes among many young White people towards the earlier immigrants from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent and their British born children. I don't doubt that there are many levels on which discrimination continues to limit opportunities for these minorities and there is a long road still to travel towards equality, but at a cultural level, notwithstanding the recent waves of 'Islamophobia' that have spilled over from global political issues, there is a far greater level

of acceptance, a breakdown of the ghetto walls and a diminishing of racist attitudes even amongst those with previously very hard and narrow views about 'Blacks'. However, this increasingly prevalent 'live and let live' attitude does not apply to refugees and asylum seekers who are the butt of straightforward venom and hatred.

So when faced with the Government's apparently hypocritical diktat regarding race equality policies I was concerned that in developing a policy, and in making that policy live and breathe, our school would have a complete agenda for equality for the old and new victims of racist hatred, that could be understood and subscribed to by the whole school community, including the parents.

## Drafting an Inclusive Race Equality Policy

I attended a session organised by the LEA on drafting a race equality policy. This neatly summarised the legal requirements, highlighted a number of issues to consider and provided a rather bland model policy which was faultless in terms of its commitment to countering racial discrimination but there was no sense of where racism came from and the range of potential victims. It also lacked any positive statement about immigration.

I drew on the model policy, my background knowledge from my earlier professional anti-racist work, some ideas from other schools who have been developing equal opportunities policies and my sense of the nature of the contemporary debate about race, culture, nationality and identity and the realities at street level, to formulate a draft policy. The teaching staff, keen to support enlightened attitudes but overburdened with paperwork, nodded it through without much detailed engagement. Some of the Governors took a more thorough approach and offered useful suggestions.

The two pillars on which the policy rested were explicitly stated:

### *Introduction*

*The children, parents, teachers and support staff who comprise the ... school community are culturally and ethnically diverse. They are representative of a society that continues to benefit from and be enriched by immigration. The school welcomes this diversity as a positive strength.*

### *Racism and Xenophobia*

*We acknowledge that racism is not just a matter of individual prejudices but has a long history in Britain with many roots, including Britain's colonial past and its role in the African Slave Trade. Over the centuries and in recent decades, different minority groups have been received by British society with varying degrees of acceptance or hostility, and today, while many British people support pluralism and tolerance, racism against a range of ethnic and cultural groups in Britain persists, both in overt and covert forms. We acknowledge, too, that inequalities, injustices and conflicts around the world continue to create refugees. The school opposes all forms of racism and xenophobia, including those against broad generalised categories such as refugees and asylum-seekers. The school recognises that societies benefit from immigration and is committed to supporting pupils'*

*families encountering difficulties with the immigration services and with racial violence.*

In the course of formulating the final version of the policy I learned that our then Chair of Governors, who of whose children I had taught, whom I assumed was rooted in the local white English/Irish working class, was in fact descended from the Huguenots – persecuted French protestants whose desperate flight to English shores in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought the French word ‘refugee’ into our lexicon. I realised then that one of the ways to enable children of the majority culture to appreciate the situation of those who have made their homes in Britain much more recently is to encourage all children to examine their roots and their own more distant migrations.

In spring this year (2003) I co-organised an INSET session on race equality issues for the whole staff which provided an opportunity to discuss the principles contained in the policy in greater depth, to develop appropriate responses to common situations and to work towards an action plan for the coming year. Emboldened by the response to this I set about a more ambitious project in the summer term.

### **Organising a ‘Refugee Week’**

In the year 2000 the United Nations declared a ‘Refugee Day’ (June 20th) as a means of enlightening the wider public, especially in the more affluent world, about the plight of refugees. Since then, various forward-looking arts organisations and public bodies, including a growing number of schools, have organised events around ‘Refugee Week’. I proposed that our school had a ‘Refugee Week’ to highlight these issues and make the links between racism, immigration and asylum, and the celebration of cultural diversity. Making the decision was easy – doing it, in a school where a previous headteacher’s peculiar interpretation of the admissions policy meant that the school population considerably under-represented the number of visible minority children and children of refugees in the locality, seemed considerably harder.

I circulated the teaching staff with a paper outlining the themes which a Refugee Week could work around: that our school, the locality and the wider society has been, and continues to be, enriched by immigrants and refugees culturally, intellectually, artistically, linguistically and economically, despite fear, ignorance and negative stereotyping of refugees; that the world belongs to all its peoples and we are responsible for each other’s welfare; and that we should all be good neighbours – locally and internationally. I set out some of the basic facts, as the teachers are not immune from the lies and distortions that (dis)grace media ‘debate’ about refugees and asylum, and suggested a number of age appropriate activities from the Foundation Stage through to Years 5 and 6 including a set of questions that teachers and children could try to answer: for example, which words have come into English from other languages/what does ‘sanctuary’ mean? I then set about contacting people who work with refugees to bring speakers into school. I was determined that some of the speakers should be children as that would make their situations much easier to identify with. We struck lucky. A 12-year-old whose parents fled civil war in Eritrea and a 16-year-old whose family fled similar circumstances

in Somalia told of their collective experiences including their treatment on arrival in Britain, first days at school and the Kafkaesque circumstances around obtaining and maintaining their housing after they had been accepted as refugees. Our children listened with great interest and respect and asked probing questions. A teacher brought in a video that belonged to her student daughter about the exodus of Kurdish refugees from hostile forces in 1991. It was the perfect backdrop for another guest – a Kurdish refugee poet and writer who herself fled at that time. She organised writing workshops for the oldest classes around themes of displacement. The children she worked with, including those exposed to distinctly racist worldviews at home, wrote some stunning poetry, empathising fully with refugees. One child wrote:

*Mama tells me my country stands tall and proud,*

*Mama tells me my country is beautiful*

*Mama tells me my country has women who sing all day long*

*Mama tells me my country has men who hum all night*

*Mama tells me in my country is a place called Home*

*I ask Mama ‘Where is my country?’*

*Mama doesn’t know.*

Two teachers took responsibility for turning a corner of our Assembly Hall into a Refugee Week display. Mixing children’s art, poetry and prose with testimony from refugees and artefacts from around the world, an imposing display was formed. But I knew it was important too to give a positive message that being exposed to other cultures can be pleasurable and open up new experiences. I booked a Nigerian author to come in and lead a day of workshops celebrating African culture through stories, song and dance. Another visitor ran a stall selling African jewellery and music and one afternoon was dedicated to a ‘global bookfair’ with an emphasis on stories and non-fiction from and about the wider world.

From a negative epithet the word ‘refugee’ became a positive, a word of value, and an experience to appreciate and admire. My class warmed to the issue very much and we integrated it into our history topic focusing on the locality. We presented a class assembly about the history of Islington through its migrants and refugees, starting with 1666. They didn’t come very far, but with fire shooting through the city of London, and 13,000 homes destroyed, a good part of the homeless and desperate fleeing the ‘Great fire of London’ headed north and made a temporary encampment at Moorfields, about half a mile from our school grounds. A trawl through some of Islington’s famous residents in history included those from the Italian community like the clown Joseph Grimaldi, after whom clowns are called ‘Joey’. In the 19th century the Irish came. Many of the children who populate our school and see themselves as part of the ‘us’, the dominant group, come from Irish backgrounds. It was an opportunity to face children whose families question whether other people should come to live here, with their own family histories. We concluded the Assembly with a catalogue of all the ways in which Islington has become a brighter, more colourful and more significant place as its social and ethnic base has become broader.

The positive energy that gathered in Refugee Week seemed to stay with the children until the end of term. As the children set off with their families on summer holidays, perhaps some of them will see the world they visit for a few weeks and the people round them with new eyes; some will question racist attitudes. And when they come back, together we can work on broadening our policy and approaches to counter sexism and homophobia and the

way that class prejudices limit equal opportunities, and to counter conflict within and across different minority groups. But valuing the diversity of common humanity and empathising with others across false and arbitrary social and political boundaries, in spite of successive governments' nefarious meddling, must be the bedrock on which this can take place.

# Music in Key Stage 2: training and supporting the non-music specialist class teacher

---

**HEATHER BREWER**

Heather Brewer is music co-ordinator at Longmeadow Junior School, Stevenage and a part-time PhD student at Goldsmiths College, researching the training of student teachers to deliver the primary music curriculum in mainstream state-sector schools in England, from 1900 to 2003.

---

Let me introduce to you the Key Stage 2 information and communication technology co-ordinator. He is mildly interested from a theoretical point of view in the value of modern technology in primary education, but, unfortunately, does not actually have any personal expertise in the subject. To him, the esoteric vocabulary is a closed book; he has heard of a search engine, but believes it to be an additional piece of equipment which he has never come across, whilst e-mails and the functions of a mouse are unfathomable mysteries. He can type, slowly and with one finger, but does not know how to correct his own mistakes. In view of the limited and inappropriate training in the subject that was offered to him during his course of initial teacher training, he expected that following qualification he would either be allowed to attend INSET which would, in effect, be remedial, or that he would always be fully supported by a specialist colleague. His first school, however, had no ICT co-ordinator; his headteacher, required to send such a postholder to a day conference, told him that he had been assigned to the position because '...someone's got to do it'. He now eagerly anticipates financial recognition of this new responsibility.

An unthinkable scenario? Of course. Experience indicates that at the beginning of the 21st century qualified and student teachers are well versed in the use of modern technology, an area of education currently considered to be of great importance and accorded great respect. Extensive INSET opportunities are on offer for the ICT co-ordinator to develop personal expertise which, in turn, may be cascaded to colleagues. To have a co-ordinator so obviously lacking in the basic 'tools of his trade' would be totally unacceptable.

It is surely beyond question that the co-ordinator responsible for any area of the curriculum should be able to demonstrate a high level of subject knowledge; however my research into the training of student teachers to deliver the music curriculum to children in the age range 7 to 11 years, with primary-source data spanning the period 1948 to 2003 obtained by means of a questionnaire and interview survey, has uncovered evidence of a substantial level of inappropriate and inadequate preparation to teach the subject, with real-life examples of music 'co-ordinators' as ill-equipped to offer advice and support to colleagues as our fictitious ICT co-ordinator.

A non-music specialist taking part in my survey and having qualified to teach in 1988, unable to play any

musical instrument and assessing her training to teach the subject as having been quite poor, stated that at one point in her career she had, by default, responsibility for the subject throughout the school, through virtue of being a senior member of staff and there having been no response to an advertised specialist post. In 1996 a third-year student teacher on placement with my Year 3 class was taking music as her minor specialism with no musical skills beyond absolute beginner on the piano; she, with a number of fellow-students, had been encouraged to enrol for this course in order to ensure its survival, the only prerequisite being an interest in music. The ability to recognise notes on the treble stave, a concept readily grasped by my Year 4 beginner recorder group, was not required of these potential 'music co-ordinators'. In yet more recent years I attended INSET to which every school within an extensive area was required to send their music co-ordinator; one representative from a school having no such postholder informed me that she had no musical expertise, but had been told by her headteacher on the preceding day that she must attend the course. By the end of the day she, together with others in the same position, was seriously demoralised, having become acutely aware of her own shortcomings in the teaching of the subject. These real-life examples raise a question of great importance: is it, in fact, essential to have a competent music specialist in every school, or is it sufficient to have a 'co-ordinator' in name only?

## Music in ITT

The research project which I have recently completed was designed to give a 'voice' to forty-one serving, retired and student teachers representing thirty-three training establishments and having years of qualification spanning the period 1948 to 2003. Data gathered from this sample showed that 54% of the total number and 66% of those not having taken music as a major or minor specialism considered their training to teach the subject to have been quite poor or totally inadequate. To find, in the light of the high expectations of the National Curriculum for Music, that over 50% of respondents qualifying or expecting to qualify to teach between 1990 and 2003 placed their training to teach music within these two categories was not entirely unexpected, but nevertheless is arguably a cause for considerable concern.

These findings add weight to the case that may be made for the training and funding of specialist teachers



who would be appropriately equipped to undertake the role of music co-ordinator, able to offer advice and support to colleagues well aware of the requirements of the Key Stage 2 music curriculum, yet perceiving themselves as being inadequately prepared by their training in the subject to implement those requirements.

Data supplied by my respondents strongly indicated that over a period of more than half a century, no trend emerged that would indicate either a steady improvement or a gradual deterioration in the standard of music provision in ITT, particularly in the case of provision for non-music specialists. Throughout this timespan 'centres of excellence' have existed alongside establishments offering training considered to have been poorly-structured and lacking in coherence, with no apparent standardisation of minimum course provision and scant evidence of response to externally-imposed expectation.

Concern was expressed by respondents representing every decade that precious time in courses lasting only a matter of a few hours was given over to seriously inappropriate provision, particular dissatisfaction being expressed on the subject of the 'one-off' playing of musical games in the role of children, with no advice as to how the game might be developed and extended into a simple curricular programme. Equally deplored was the widespread practice of distributing to non-music specialists lists of songs appropriate to the age range, with no suggestion being offered as to how these songs might be taught by a class teacher with neither instrumental nor vocal skills, together with the omission of any training in the use of broadcast resources or, in more recent years, of any introduction to good-quality songbooks with accompanying cassettes or CDs.

Realistically, it must surely be acknowledged that it is virtually impossible in a course severely constrained by time, resources and finance to equip a non-musician student teacher to implement with confidence the full requirements of the music curriculum; this viewpoint received a substantial level of support from respondents to my survey. Numerous respondents reported that they had been obliged to draw on previous musical experiences, including the teaching of songs by rote in Sunday School or to Brownies, and their pre-ITT ability to play a musical instrument, particularly the descant recorder, in order to attempt to teach the subject.

### **Potential Ways Forward in ITT Music Provision**

As we enter the new millennium, the teaching profession at every level has been increasingly subjected to destructive and negative criticism. In drawing conclusions from my research, however, the intention has been to make positive and practical recommendations for ways forward, drawing on the data in order to identify existing areas of concern. With this aim in mind, it is suggested that a minimum time- and resource-constrained course of non-specialist music in ITT should at the very least comprise the following elements:

- (i) An introduction to the effective use of schools broadcasts on radio and television, with materials for listening, viewing and evaluation.
- (ii) An introduction to the use of published schemes, comprising teacher's notes, photocopiable worksheets and recorded examples addressing the requirements of the National Curriculum for Music, together with

an introduction to a range of song books having accompaniments provided on audiotape or CD.

- (iii) An introduction to a good basic list of resources for listening and appraising, including music of non-western cultures.
- (iv) Practical suggestions for developing simple composition activities.
- (v) A short practical 'demystification' of the technicalities and vocabulary of music.

Although such provision might be seen as little more than a 'taster', yet it should have the potential to enable non-music specialists to gain a degree of confidence in their ability to deliver adequate class music lessons, should they find themselves at any time either to be responsible for the subject in their own class, or required to play an active part in the teaching of the subject in a specialist-supported programme.

### **Class Teacher or Music Specialist?**

The proposition is frequently to be heard at conferences and INSET that class music in the age range 7 to 11 should be taught by the class teacher, in order that the pupils should not perceive the subject to be in some way 'different' from the rest of the curriculum. Experience would indicate that this viewpoint gains widespread support amongst the musically-competent, many of whom appear unable to empathise with the anxieties and poor self-confidence of the non-musician; their argument being that having a specialist music teacher must inevitably lead to the deskilling of the class teacher. How is it possible, however, to deskill the essentially unskilled?

It was of interest to learn that, of the respondents providing information concerning the teaching of music in their first class and representing a broad timespan from 1948 to the present day, 67% were fully relieved of the responsibility by a staff or peripatetic music specialist; in further instances respondents were expected to offer only very limited input. In the light of these data it may be inferred that at school level it has been widely and realistically recognised that few non-music specialist student teachers are adequately prepared by their course of ITT to take unsupported responsibility for the teaching of the subject.

In the earlier years of the period covered by my survey it was frequently the case that the staff music specialist, usually a teacher with generalist class teaching responsibility, was expected to undertake the teaching of music throughout the school, to the potential detriment of their own pupils' education. This model, familiar to many long-serving colleagues, was my personal experience for much of my full-time career, until the demands of the wider Key Stage 2 curriculum forced a reappraisal of the situation and led to its phasing out in the mid-1990s. Since a significant number of respondents qualifying in more recent years have reported a substantial level of specialist support in music during their first year of teaching, the inference must be that on their own initiative schools have taken the enlightened and often-costly step of appointing a part-time specialist music teacher.

### **Alternative Models of Specialist-supported Class Music Teaching**

It would be most undesirable to suggest that music specialists should take full control of the subject, excluding

class teachers from potential opportunities for professional development through active participation in the musical experience of their pupils. Throughout an on-going career spanning forty-six years I have never encountered a class teacher who has expressed a dislike of curricular music, or even shown indifference towards it; on the contrary, I have found universal support for the belief that music is of great importance in the academic, social and spiritual development of every child. Even amongst colleagues with a very low level self-confidence in music I have found a most encouraging willingness to play an active part, no matter how modest, in the teaching of the subject.

With this in mind, two models of specialist-supported co-operative class music teaching have been devised, implemented and refined in consultation with my colleagues over a period of seven years. The stated aim in each instance has been to provide expert input whilst encouraging every class teacher to become involved in the teaching of the subject at an appropriate level, promoting positive motivation through the minimising of any perceived 'threat'.

Both models are proven to have the means to address the problems experienced by colleagues considering themselves to have been inadequately prepared during ITT to teach class music, providing practical support and a high level of specialist input, whilst maximising the potential of the class teacher who has been well-prepared to teach the subject.

#### **Combining the Role of Generalist Class Teacher and Music Co-ordinator: the development of a practical model**

Towards the end of my career as a full-time teacher, in response to the growing demands of the wider Key Stage 2 curriculum and an imminent Ofsted inspection, it became necessary for me to act increasingly in the role of music consultant, rather than undertaking personal responsibility for the subject in every class as had previously been accepted practice. It was also recognised that finding a replacement music specialist teacher following my retirement could not be guaranteed.

In the first instance a series of meetings was held with the teachers in each Year group, to establish the level of individual support that would be required and to investigate the potential use of existing resources which included a collection of broadcast series recorded on audiotape, with accompanying sets of pupils' pamphlets and teacher's notes. Amongst those who had been non-music specialist student teachers, several expressed a lack of confidence in the use of even the most basic technical language of the subject; in some cases this proved to be a significant disincentive to active participation.

Initially, the solution to this specific problem appeared to be a resource list of centrally-stored reference books; however it was clearly preferable to have the information immediately to hand in a user-friendly format. The eventual solution was to produce a customised music handbook, with a copy to be held in every class. This handbook contained a detailed scheme of work for each Year, with a Rudiments of Music section explaining every musical term and expression to be found in the scheme, further clarified by examples on audiotape. This concept might easily be adapted according to specific local requirements and used both to support the less-confident teacher of class music

and to enhance the implementation and understanding of a whole-school approach to the music curriculum.

Following a period of development and consultation which included a 'hands-on' INSET session allowing colleagues to familiarise themselves with the full range of available resources, together with advice when required on the use of broadcast schemes, there was a reasonable degree of confidence that, with an appropriate level of support from the co-ordinator, colleagues would be able to play an increasingly active part in the teaching of class music; the implementation of the plan confirmed that this was a viable way forward.

With my approaching retirement in 1997, the post was advertised; although it was hoped that a new music specialist would be appointed, realistically the advertisement contained only the very modest suggestion '... ability to play the piano an advantage'. It was arguably symptomatic of the current dearth of colleagues well-prepared to teach the subject that none of the applicants had the ability even to play a simple hymn for assembly, much less to take on the role of specialist co-ordinator; in consequence the post of part-time music co-ordinator was established, in which I continue to serve some six years after 'retirement'.

#### **Specialist-supported Co-operative Class Music Teaching**

With the consultancy model working well in practice, it was felt to be of great importance that, whereas I was able to offer a much greater level of support through no longer having the responsibilities of a generalist class teacher, input on the part of the individual class teacher should continue to be encouraged and maintained through the development of a modified programme of specialist-supported co-operative teaching.

The school is three-form entry; therefore it has required careful planning in order to ensure that I have each class for a minimum of two sessions in every three-week period. An important aspect of my input is Musicianship through Voice, promoting the understanding of a wide range of musical concepts whilst developing good-quality choral singing. During the week in which I do not work with a class, their teacher will implement an appropriate musical activity; this might be an aspect of music in ICT; a pre-recorded schools broadcast, using the resource bank of teacher's notes and pupils' pamphlets; a composition project; dance or listening and appraising. Colleagues are invited each term to indicate their chosen input, maximising personal interest in order to promote motivation.

It has been greatly rewarding to observe colleagues gaining confidence in, for example, rehearsing songs for a class play or assembly using an audiotape; often one which I have pre-recorded with their pupils. To cite a very successful example, a Year 5 class was chosen to take part in a local Schools Music Festival; participation involved pre-learning a number of original songs, supplied on audiotape. Their teacher was a recently-qualified colleague who had taken part in my research project; having been asked to comment on the training he had received in music during his ITT course, he stated that provision had been 1½ days in block, but due to illness, he had missed it. Understandably he had little confidence in his ability to carry out any musical activity; however he was encouraged to play an active part in working with the children as they

'sang along' to the tape. Finding this to be well within his capabilities, he expressed surprise at the discovery that not only could he implement a successful music lesson, but also that he was beginning to approach the sessions with some degree of anticipation instead of apprehension.

Whole-school music sessions, including Hymn Practice and 'live' performances given by the various instrumental groups, together with School Choir, treble and advanced descant recorders and Rhythm Band, all continue to be a specialist responsibility; however three beginner recorder groups are taken by colleagues who draw on their pre-ITT experience of learning to play the instrument.

The sharing of the music curriculum is essentially a matter for on-going negotiation. It is essential to have flexibility, with a willingness on the part of both the music specialist and the class teacher to work in co-operation. Efficient communication is essential; ongoing informal feedback is supplemented by a written summary provided for each class teacher at the end of term. This summary is filed, together with the teacher's own record of music activities, to provide a record of progress across the Key Stage.

At the end of each term colleagues are provided with a forecast sheet on which to indicate forthcoming topics in other areas of the curriculum, in order that cross-curricular work may be developed. It is considered to be a matter of great importance that music should be seen as an integral part of the wider curriculum, and not as a subject in isolation.

More than one respondent taking part in my survey made the important point that if classes are timetabled to attend a music lesson with a specialist teacher, then that lesson is guaranteed; however when the class teacher has sole responsibility for the subject, then realistically it must be acknowledged that there is considerable potential for the lesson to be postponed or even cancelled. Evidence suggests that such omission would not be confined to avoidance strategies on the part of the inadequately prepared non-music specialist, but might well be the response even of the musically-competent class teacher to the more-pressing demands of the core subjects. One respondent stated that older colleagues having had experience of both the specialist-supported and the personal responsibility models of class music teaching had advised her that they would invariably opt for the former.

These models of class music teaching have been tested and refined over an extended period, and are proven to offer practical and realistic ways forward for the implementation of the requirements of the National Curriculum for Music in the 21st century. In particular, evidence provided by respondents, together with extensive personal consultation with other colleagues, would suggest a very high level of support for the part-time specialist-supported model. Class teacher involvement according to personal self-confidence and aptitude is seen as being a potentially valuable means of professional development, indeed, a provision of ongoing in-school INSET.

### **Looking Towards the Future**

Research based solely on the literature addressing externally-imposed expectation might well lead to the belief

that throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century every child in the age range 7 to 11 years in mainstream state-sector schools in England has been guaranteed access to a programme of high-quality musical experience, from the early-20th century requirement that every child should be able to sing at sight, to the very specific demands of the National Curriculum for Music. Probing the reality in the light of primary-source data obtained in the course of my survey and spanning a period of fifty-five years, however, reveals a yawning gulf between explicit high aspiration and the content of a significant number of courses in ITT preparing student teachers to implement the teaching of the subject; whereas this investigation could in no way claim to provide definitive evidence, nevertheless it may arguably be seen as indicative of issues giving cause for considerable concern.

Informed by this primary-source evidence, it may be strongly contended that if music is to continue to be recognised as a foundation subject for children in the age range 7 to 11 years, taught at least to an adequate standard in every classroom, then it is a matter of the greatest importance that attention should be accorded to the scope and content of courses in music education during ITT. A guaranteed standard minimum provision should be established, preparing the non-music specialist at least to play an informed part in a programme of co-operative class music teaching, whilst those student teachers taking the subject as a specialism should be provided with a standardised course of training equally appropriate to their needs as future co-ordinators.

In an ideal world, a prompt and significant increase in the allocation of time and funding for the teaching of primary music in ITT and the provision of well-structured INSET for all serving teachers should be considered as a matter of urgency. It must be accepted, however, that the implementation of such a proposition is virtually impossible, given the realities of severe financial limitation which characterise education at every level in the early years of the 21st century. It was most informative to find in the course of my survey that there was a very high level of support for the proposition that a recognised training course should be established which would prepare musically-able student teachers for eventual employment as centrally-funded specialist support teachers working in a co-operative context in consortia of schools.

It is surely beyond dispute that knowledgeable, well-prepared music co-ordinators and specialist teachers, able to devise and to implement programmes of co-operative teaching and willing to offer ongoing expert support and regular INSET to less-confident colleagues, should be as commonplace in the field of music education as in any other area of the school curriculum; yet such a proposition has very considerable financial implications. If, however, HM Government is serious in its stated intention that every child in Key Stage 2 should have guaranteed access to a programme of well-taught class music; indeed, if music is to survive as a foundation subject, then the problems created by a significant level of inadequate music provision in ITT across a period of several decades can no longer be ignored.

# Didactus Interruptus: or, why the Key Stage 3 English Strand should withdraw (and what should happen next)

---

VIV ELLIS

The author is a lecturer in education at the Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford.

---

From the outset, I need to say that I am not fundamentally opposed to continuing professional development (CPD) that is intended to improve standards in literacy or support teachers in developing new knowledge and skills. I am not – as I know some are – opposed to an increased emphasis on language (in particular, the structures of language) in English teaching. I agree that the ways of teaching and learning English and literacy are diverse and that what Bernstein referred to as ‘visible’ or explicit pedagogies (Bernstein 1975, 1990) should become part of a teacher’s repertoire. I also support the view that pedagogy is accretive and differentially emphasised according to teachers’ knowledge and their assessment of learners’ needs.

It’s important to say all this as a preamble because anyone who adopts a critical position towards the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) or Key Stage 3 English Strand (KS3ES) is often dismissed on one of those grounds. My argument in this piece is that fundamental aspects of the KS3ES are seriously flawed, that its link to numerical target-setting is counter-productive and that there is good evidence from recently devolved Wales that ambitious targets for attainment in tests of literacy can be met by investing in innovation, developing good practice and supporting network-building at the level of communities rather than monolithic, top-down gravy-trains that are ‘rolled out’ in a one-size-fits-all funding frenzy. Nobody can deny the enormous investment the government has made in the KS3ES and the NLS before it. I want to argue that the money is being wasted and that the government’s recent experiences with New Opportunities Fund (NOF) ICT training for all teachers – and, indeed, the lessons from the evaluation of the NLS – should make it realise that there needs to be an immediate withdrawal of all new KS3ES training folders, videos, meetings, ‘objectives banks’ and all the other paraphernalia that arrives by articulated noun phrase in schools and training institutions on an almost weekly basis.

I write this from the perspective of someone who has worked in teacher education (upper primary and secondary) for the last 6 years and was a head of department in a comprehensive school before that. I have also worked within the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) since 1989 and was Vice Chair from 2000 to 2002. In the course of this essay, I will refer to my experiences

within NATE in recent times, although the views I express here should not be taken as those of the Association. I am also aware that I might be criticised for dealing only with the English aspect of the KS3 Strategy. My response is that my general impression of the ways in which the other aspects of the Strategy have been taken up at Key Stage 3 are rather different and that those coming from other subject areas regard them with some interest or at least less irritation. I would also agree that the Literacy Across the Curriculum materials and the materials about teaching pupils with English as an Additional Language are useful for those teachers and schools who have managed to avoid even a brief consideration of these important areas since the publication of the Bullock Report in 1975. My argument is with the English-specific aspect of the Strategy – beginning with the proliferation of flawed materials within a flawed model of CPD.

## A Flawed Model

There are at least four features of the KS3ES as a model of CPD that are seriously flawed and that should cause concern. The first is that, like the NLS before it, the KS3ES is focusing on classroom routines and practices rather than teachers’ underlying knowledge of language and literacy development, assessment and pedagogy. Teachers are told that a three or four part lesson (the ‘right’ number of parts seems to vary) is a good thing and that this should involve ‘interactive starters’ followed by some modelling or demonstration, ‘guided’ activity and a plenary. Time is fairly important, it says, or rather ‘pace’ (misinterpreted as speed), although I suppose we should be grateful that, unlike KS1 and KS2, there isn’t a clock to stick to. There is no serious attention to the pedagogic rationale for these routines nor to the implicit theories of language and literacy development. This may be because there is no proper rationale (why ten minutes for a starter? why at ‘word and sentence level’? why unrelated to the main lesson?). But in the brief examples I’ve given above, one can imagine a thoughtful programme of CPD that tackled the underlying pedagogic issues: encouraging experimentation at the opening of lessons to engage pupils’ interests, to build on previous understandings and develop new knowledge; modelling written composition with particular attention to *field* (the words and phrases associated with a particular topic) and *tenor* (the relationship between the writer and

the reader) and how this relates to *mode* (the form of the communication). This approach would take language and teaching a lot more seriously than the pressure to make a 23rd attempt at identifying adjectives on the lid of an ice-cream tub (mini white boards have suddenly become rather expensive) or teaching genre as a fossilised form of language utterly disconnected from social relationships.

Serious attempts to raise standards in literacy and English pay serious attention to what teachers' know, how they interpret what their pupils know and how they can extend their teaching repertoire to meet their pupils' needs. This is a lesson that should have been learned from the NLS, as the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) evaluation confirms (Earl et al 2003: 91–96).

The second flaw in the KS3ES model is what I have referred to as its monolithic, one-size-fits-all approach, delivered (always 'delivered', sometimes 'rolled out', never, for example, 'developed') by an enormous number of consultants and regional coordinators, sometimes excellent teachers attracted to the job by higher salaries and the possibility of a break from the classroom. As a member of NATE's management committee and as a teacher educator, I have been told about and have myself observed umpteen occasions when English departments (and in some cases whole schools) have been subjected to the worst aspects of this model: for example, a day-long 'death-by-overhead' scenario in which questions from the teachers – 'if there really *must* be questions' – have to be written on post-it notes and stuck on the wall during coffee time, the consultant selecting which questions to answer. Or the mechanical reproduction of the prepared script (training manuals always come with a script as well as the overhead transparencies) by consultants who are unable to answer the questions posed by teachers because the answers aren't in the script and they are either too frightened or too ignorant to venture a guess. These experiences leave teachers bored, frustrated and angry and it would seem important that teachers shouldn't feel like this if they are to work at their best with pupils. But these occasions also indicate a flawed model because they don't take any account of what teachers already know and do well and what *they* would like to know more about in order to make improvements. No, the KS3ES doesn't work like that at all. Teachers all receive the same training and pupils, all pupils, should receive the same teaching routines. I say 'should' here because my impression is still that the vast majority of English teachers don't do as they're told. Thank goodness.

At NATE's annual conference this year there was a lively debate on the motion that the NLS and KS3ES had contributed positively to English teaching over the last five years. The motion was passed by quite a margin but my impression was that the speakers for the motion were indulging in a little rhetorical foreplay and weren't really convinced by their own arguments. One speaker talked about the excellent work of some consultants and regional coordinators in mediating the KS3ES and how they selected the best from what was on offer. This speaker talked of teachers' 'mind-forged manacles' in relation to the KS3ES, that those who were critical were seeing illusory restrictions on their professional autonomy. I couldn't disagree more. Although I recognise that some local authority advisory teams have made their own interpretation of the materials, they are just that

– exceptional and selective interpretations that ignore the intent of the KS3ES inscribed by the government and interpretations that are inevitably situated within this flawed top-down model. Recently – and in stark contrast to the pilot and the NLS – the government has proposed some 'flexibility' in interpretation, although this has usually come down to acknowledging that some lessons needn't have starter activities and that when there are starters they can in fact be related to the rest of the lesson. This isn't genuine flexibility; it is a weak response to feedback from the pilot and it perpetuates a chain of authority and a hierarchy of knowledge that always puts the government and its KS3ES documents at the top. Suggesting that teachers be 'more flexible' gives no guidance to people who have been told that they must be guided.

One would have thought that the experience of the NOF ICT initiative and its evaluation by Ofsted would have given the government pause over yet another initiative that seeks to *transform* teaching and learning (a key principle of the KS3 Strategy as a whole). There are some significant similarities in design: a massive injection of public money (£250 million from the National Lottery in NOF's case); high levels of coercion on schools and teachers to take part; a set of national, uniform 'expected outcomes' of the training; an army of trainers organised nationally through a system of training providers. Of course there are differences: there was no curriculum prescription involved for pupils with NOF; the trainers were employed by private companies that schools contracted to undertake the training; NOF training had to be undertaken outside the school day, and so on. But the lesson of NOF is that you can blow an awful lot of public money on top-down, national training without having much impact at all on pupils' learning or standards in schools (Ofsted 2002).

The third feature of the KS3ES that marks it out as a flawed model is that, rhetorically, it consistently rewrites or erases the current and previous achievements and successes of English teachers. This is sometimes the most ridiculous aspect of the Strategy – in order to give significance and meaning to the enormous work involved (I don't deny that the KS3ES people work very hard) and the huge amounts of money invested, those with some responsibility for or allegiance to it frequently pretend that before the KS3ES's existence, there was some kind of intellectual and pedagogical vacuum in English teaching that it has filled with newly-discovered delights. Consultants and coordinators are often heard to say, 'We all know English teachers weren't very good at this', meaning some aspect of explicit teaching about language. These comments frequently carry a veneer of credibility because these people were once English teachers themselves and often very good ones – which compounds the tragedy because they have been removed from schools, where their work was of such direct importance to other teachers and pupils, to spout this sort of revisionist claptrap in the basements of four star hotels. It becomes even more fallacious when a picture of standards in literacy and English teaching before the Strategy is painted that attempts to show what massive improvements in achievement have been made since its introduction.

Philip Pullman was the keynote speaker at NATE's national conference in 2002. He was highly critical of the NLS and the KS3ES. A week or so after the conference, a short extract from Pullman's speech appeared in the *Times*

*Educational Supplement.* The reaction in the Opinion and Letters pages was predictable. Indeed, the National Director for the NLS and the Director of the KS3ES readily respond to criticisms in the press. Their letters indicate not only a general hostility to any sort of criticism but also reveal a particular frustration with what is seen as any attempt to interrupt or interfere with the *control* of teachers' behaviour and the *control* of the history of English teaching, rights that are seen as exclusively those of 'The Strategy'. They are often supported by their local consultants. Appearing in the same edition of the *TES* as letters criticising Pullman's piece was an article by a 'literacy strategy manager' from Milton Keynes. Declaring Pullman's criticism to be 'colourful but misdirected' (how generous), we were offered the following 'revised' version:

*It is worth remembering exactly what the literacy strategy was designed to change. Before 1998, the teaching of reading and writing (and speaking and listening) in English primary schools was a lottery. Across the country was a hit-and-miss, incoherent situation, with enormous time given to much practice of writing and general acquaintanceship with books (mostly narrative fiction, with alarmingly little non-fiction), but where virtually no teaching or learning of those vital skills took place beyond key stage 1. A few teachers planned challenging, progressive programmes of language and literacy development, but in insufficient numbers. (Dean, 2002, p. 23)*

There is no evidence to justify this assertion. I can find no research programme that could claim to generalise its findings to such a degree. And, if we regard the Ofsted database as another reliable source of information, the inspection evidence doesn't support this assertion either. In fact, the annual HMCI reports for the years immediately prior to 1998 would appear to support the view that English was taught well in the primary and secondary phase and – compared to some other subjects – the standards observed were fairly consistent and, at KS2, rising. (And yes, I do recognise that this was no reason to be complacent). This is a good example of the rhetoric associated with the recent national interventions in literacy and English teaching. To be charitable, this could be interpreted as simply another aspect of the ongoing attempt to re-brand English teaching in the NLS/KS3ES mould. A critic might argue that this insidious blend of commodification and revisionism is profoundly anti-democratic.

Moreover, these rhetorical strategies of revision and erasure on the part of the KS3ES are damaging for reasons similar to those I outlined earlier: to work successfully with pupils in classrooms and to raise standards of achievement, teachers need to feel that they are knowledgeable and skilful; to make improvements in practice, teachers need to connect with an existing knowledge base, informed by research, practice and scholarship over many decades; any CPD should acknowledge that there are different ways in which teachers might work for improvement and that these will often depend on factors that are local and specific. Teachers have the right to draw on their professional history and identity. The professional development of teachers – and curriculum development – should work from what teachers already know well and do well and what the evidence tells us about the achievement and engagement

of pupils. There is no need to rubbish or excise significant prior achievement on the part of English teachers nor any need to try to re-fashion the profession, to create a new model army who judge their success by their degree of rhetorical compliance. A national, top-down intervention that prizes uniformity, that expects obedience, that is not interested in changing minds just behaviours, and rewrites history to justify its actions – now where and when have we seen that before? You might think that to use the 't' word in this context is putting it too strongly; others would disagree and, indeed, Henrietta Dombey used 'totalitarian' in relation to the primary NLS a few years ago (Dombey 1998). I think that there are aspects of the KS3ES that give the same impression. The difference, in my view, is that in secondary schools these strategies are often likely to look ridiculous.

The fourth feature of the KS3ES that marks it out as a flawed model of CPD is its linkage to apparently arbitrary, national targets for expected achievements in the end of KS3 tests. I will come back to this issue of target-setting later in this essay but will now turn to a consideration of the KS3ES's training materials.

### **The Flawed Materials**

Even if one supported the KS3ES model of CPD – as a necessary short-term measure that made a few targeted interventions across the whole of the English-teaching population – there should still be serious concern over the quality of the materials that are arriving in schools on an almost a weekly basis. Early training videos for the KS3ES were so obsessed with emphasising the Strategy's misinterpretation of pace and interactivity that several of the featured teachers were put in the awkward position of being represented as finger-clicking monsters. I recall one video in particular in which a class of less fluent readers and writers in Year 7 was being taught how to write a recipe. On the tables in front of them, they were presented with a wide variety of recipe books from many different authors. Their teacher asked them to consult these texts to familiarise themselves with 'the features' of recipes – and gave them just two minutes to do so! Such a rich collection of resources merited serious attention and I can only imagine that the pressure to demonstrate 'pace' obliterated everything else. The teacher then taught that recipes consisted of a series of imperative sentences. If only the children had had time to look through recipe books by the likes of Jamie Oliver, Nigella Lawson, Delia Smith, Mrs Beeton, Elizabeth David, etc., then I'm not sure that the lesson would have focused on imperatives. Again, I can only imagine that the pressure to make a little grammatical knowledge visible (to the class and on video) pushed the teacher into this position.

One can speculate about why the materials vary in quality so much – the small number of people involved in producing them, the rapid turnaround time from draft to publication, etc. – but there have been some truly appalling examples. There has been much concern recently over the new format for the end of Key Stage 3 tests in English published by the QCA. Less attention, however, has been paid to the 'Year 9 booster kit' (DfES 2003), provided as preparation for the test by the KS3ES and I now want to look briefly at this resource as another example of the kind of flawed materials I am talking about.

During the Spring term of 2003, I spent a good deal of time in Year 9 lessons observing extremely good student teachers using parts of this kit. A main focus is on preparation for the Key Stage 3 Reading paper. In a series of pre-planned lessons, it is suggested that teachers teach the techniques of skimming and scanning. In one example, they are asked to apply these techniques to an extract from an Ian McEwan novel. I saw this lesson four times.

It became obvious to the pupils in the lessons I observed (and to their teachers-in-training) that the technique of 'skimming' – reading the first sentence of each paragraph, focusing on words in the centre of the page – simply isn't useful in relation to narrative or literary texts. Skimming and scanning were developed in the 1970s with reference to information texts; the structure – syntactically and discursively – of information or non-fiction texts often allows readers to extract the gist in this way. It is difficult to skim or scan literary fiction for anything other than the name of a character or place. In the plenaries to these strange but well-taught lessons, the pupils themselves have usually voiced these concerns:

*'Miss, this doesn't work with a story. It would work with a holiday brochure or an instruction book but not a story'*

Insult is added to injury in that during the allotted fifteen minutes reading time for the Year 9 Reading paper (a sample of which is provided in the 'Booster' pack), the pupils are not allowed to see the questions. Skimming and scanning is for a given purpose; if pupils are not allowed to know the questions, how can they possibly tell what it is they are to 'extract'? And, for the moment, let's ignore the farce of using an extract from *Enduring Love* for this purpose (although I'm tempted to suggest a spoof question that requires scanning a passage from *The Waste Land* to find out the name of the hotel at which Mr Eugenides wanted to spend the weekend). In short, is this the kind of critical understanding of culture we wish to teach? Isn't something very important, something that should be at the core of the enterprise, missing here?

If the issue is the design of the test or test preparation – the kind of questions that can be marked easily and consistently, the amount of reading to be completed within the time allotted – then there is a problem with the test. The Year 9 Booster pack should not attempt to offer bad 'solutions' that Year 9 pupils themselves can see through. We should surely resist any further attempts to develop a closed system of poorly designed tests supported by flawed materials. If the issue is the importance of meeting national targets for pupil achievement in English at Key Stage 3, then the problem is with the way in which target-setting is currently abused.

### **The Uses and Abuses of Target-setting**

During my period as Vice Chair of NATE, I was approached by an English teacher in an urban comprehensive school who was having a little local difficulty with her headteacher over pupil grouping and an appropriate curriculum for less able pupils in Year 7. The headteacher wanted English groups set by ability from Year 7 (all teaching had previously been mixed ability to Year 9) and a bottom set created in which all those pupils who hadn't achieved level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 would receive a curriculum consisting entirely of the KS3ES Literacy Progress Units (LPUs). These progress units, as I mentioned before, have been criticised over their

content and method, particularly the dubious assumption that if struggling readers haven't been 'cured' by phonics at Key Stage 2 they should be withdrawn and have more of the same until somehow it just clicks. To be fair to the KS3ES, the LPUs were never intended to be used in this way with whole classes and the headteacher in question was eventually persuaded by the Head of English that this was the case and also that the disapplication of the National Curriculum in English to a vast group of nearly 40 pupils in Year 7 would be a tricky issue to manage.

The school in question, however, and in particular its headteacher, was coming under enormous pressure from the local authority to raise what were seen as low standards of achievement in English at Key Stage 3. Over-ambitious yearly targets were set by the English advisor, the prescribed method of achieving these was a very literal interpretation of the KS3ES, and the school's and the department's progress would be closely monitored by the LEA. Although the issue of whole class LPU usage had been won, English teachers in the school did gradually change the way they taught English at KS3 (and *what* they taught) and used the Framework as much as they could. For whatever reason, they found that pupil behaviour worsened and that the pupils seemed disengaged from English, a subject that had previously been a popular and relatively successful one. Teacher morale declined. A key indicator of low morale in this department was that nobody wanted to do the school play.

I am not trying to establish a causal relationship between the KS3ES and the anecdotal evidence I have presented from one school about declining morale and worsening pupil behaviour. But I want to suggest that the kind of numerical target-setting associated with this initiative is often most oppressive and counter-productive in schools where standards are seen to be low in relation to national averages but which in fact work extremely hard to add value to pupils' achievements in English against a background of social disadvantage. Should children who are reluctant or less fluent readers at KS3 be extracted from lessons to undergo twenty minute sessions of 'identify the consonant digraph' just because a national target is hanging over an English department and the school's headteacher? Or should their teachers feel empowered to 'depart the text' and try out something exciting and imaginative in relation to the individual pupil's needs, something that the pupil won't have sat through many, many times before?

In the first few months of 2003, two official reports were published and a speech made by Ofsted's Chief Inspector that offered constructive criticisms of the government's approach to target-setting in education. The OISE evaluation of the first three years of the NLS concluded that:

*The high political profile of the 2002 national targets probably skewed efforts in the direction of activities – some of them misinformed and counter-productive – that were intended to lead to increases in the one highly publicised score . . . We caution that setting even higher national targets may no longer serve to mobilise and motivate . . . (Earl et al, 2003, p. 7)*

I would suggest that the skewing of the English curriculum at KS3 is already apparent in many classrooms and schools, the misuse of the LPUs and the Year 9 'booster pack' being just two examples. The de-motivating and

morale-sapping aspects of mechanically applied targets were also criticised in the Ofsted Chief Inspector's speech to the North of England Education conference when he observed that targets now operated 'more as a threat than a motivator' (Shaw 2003: 21).

For the last five years, the argument has been that the process of setting ambitious targets and 'rolling out' a massive intervention programme was the most effective way of raising standards of attainment. The 2002 KS2 target of 80% of pupils achieving Level 4 or above has still not been achieved in England despite the enormous efforts of the NLS. And in Ofsted's evaluation of the second year of the KS3 Strategy, there is the stark judgement that:

*There is as yet no evidence of widespread, significant improvement in Key Stage 3 test results in English and mathematics in the schools involved in the pilot since September 2000. (Ofsted, 2003, p. 3)*

In May this year, in what can either be seen as a devastating admission of failure or a shrewd political manoeuvre, Charles Clarke scrapped the 2004 KS2 literacy target of 85% of pupils achieving level 4 or above, postponing it to 2006 (presumably after the next General Election). At KS2, it seems, they've finally realised that the numbers game is a dangerous and silly one.

So, in England, there is no evidence of meeting these national targets in either the primary phase (NLS) after three years or in the KS3 English pilot schools after two years. And in the opinion of the OISE team evaluating the NLS and Ofsted's Chief Inspector, targets are now seen to be operating more as a stick than a carrot and, most importantly, are leading to misinformed and counter-productive activities in classrooms. Surely the time has come to ditch these flawed, anti-professional strategies at KS3 and to seek alternative ways in which to raise standards and to fulfil the government's stated aim of transforming teaching and learning?

### **Devolving English**

Throughout this essay, I have referred to a 'national' initiative in relation to the KS3ES. In the context of the United Kingdom as a whole, this isn't true of course and never has been for Scotland and Northern Ireland. The case of Wales is rather different, however, and since the first devolved assembly government was formed in 2000, the contrast between education policy in England and Wales has become increasingly stark. For the purpose of my argument here, though, I want to concentrate on the different means by which the English and Welsh have sought to meet the same target for improvements in literacy at KS2, that is that 80% of pupils would achieve at Level 4 in English by the end of Key Stage 2 in 2002. The failure to achieve this target in England has been associated with Estelle Morris's decision to resign as Education Secretary and had to be explained away rather carefully. In Wales, the same target was met – and from a lower starting point. And the NLS can make absolutely no claim on this success as the NLS has never operated in Wales. So how did the Welsh Assembly support this improvement in standards of attainment at KS2?

Without wanting to set up Wales as an educational nirvana, it is possible to discern several important differences in policy. The Welsh Assembly has invested in a National Basic Skills Strategy aimed at improving

skills 'from the cradle to the grave'. This strategy has been implemented by the Basic Skills Agency, a national (UK) organisation with acknowledged expertise in this area and one that has supported useful research into implementation of the NLS in England. In terms of literacy, the Welsh strategy has invested in family literacy initiatives such as 'Books for Babies' and 'Language and Fun'. They have worked with the Welsh Books Council to develop the 'Read with me' programme, providing advice and support (through a wide-scale programme of advertising and publications) to parents and carers of 3 to 7 year olds who want to help their children learn to read and enjoy books. The Assembly has also supported schools to learn from each other by providing funds for network-building, and professional development and study leave for teachers. The Welsh strategy has also promoted, and funded work towards, the Basic Skills Quality Mark (in relation to the teaching of literacy and numeracy) for those schools that *opt* to follow this scheme. Official documents have been slim, have provided examples of good practice and have suggested *questions* that schools and LEAs should ask of themselves. Other key changes in policy also indicate a rather different emerging educational culture: KS1 tests have been scrapped and examination league tables are no longer published in Wales.

At KS3, the Wales Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning has recently announced the development of the 'Aiming for Excellence' initiative, a collaborative enterprise between the Welsh curriculum council (ACCAC), the Welsh inspectorate (Estyn), the Basic Skills Agency and the BBC. 'Aiming for Excellence' will draw on the experience of practitioners, working with advisers from LEAs, to develop new strategies for improvement based on local strengths and needs. It is early days yet to be examining the detail of this initiative or its success. It is clear, however, that it is a fundamentally different model of CPD that will be developed, not 'rolled out'.

Of course, one doesn't have to turn just to Wales to find successful and engaging large-scale CPD. There was a proud tradition of influential and successful teacher and curriculum development in England during the 1980s through the National Writing and National Oracy Projects. Significantly, these projects also operated a 'devolved' model, with local or regional projects taking on different aspects of the projects' work and responding to local strengths and needs. By way of conclusion, I would like to argue that attempts to raise standards in literacy and transform the teaching and learning of English in England should learn from some of the recent experiences in Wales and the history of previous large-scale curriculum and teacher development in England, abandon the link to arbitrary and inflexible national targets and stimulate change through local innovation.

### **Re-professionalising English teaching**

I am arguing for a complete withdrawal of all KS3ES training and monitoring for a period of time that would allow for reorganisation and critical reflection on current practice. Following this, I am proposing a fundamentally different model of CPD for English teachers. However, I think it is important that schools, teachers and pupils are not rushed into new developments with the same hasty coercive action that has characterised previous initiatives. The period of complete withdrawal on the part



of the KS3ES and its consultants should be long enough to allow for reflection, consolidation where appropriate and careful analysis by English departments of their strengths and development needs. I would want to acknowledge that some English teachers and departments may have experienced positive outcomes from aspects of the KS3ES and that these outcomes could be developed further and teachers' understanding of their success deepened without the constant pressure of new initiatives.

I would also want to acknowledge that the KS3ES has managed to recruit some extremely able English teachers, lured from the classroom by the prospect of doing something different and sharing their expertise. This real expertise and local knowledge would be vital to the success of the new model I am proposing. Additionally, the distribution and communications infrastructure that has supported the KS3ES thus far would also be extremely useful to any new initiative and allow for local innovations to be considered nationally. Thus, I am not proposing that we 'throw the baby out with the bath water'; my point is that the water should be drained and the baby encouraged to walk and to talk for itself.

During this period of withdrawal, the consultants and coordinators themselves should also undergo a free and unconstrained period of reflection that develops into further education and training, tapping into the rich store of research and scholarship that has guided the profession and even, in a partial and limited form, has been used as a *post hoc* justification of the KS3ES. There is an obvious role for university departments of education here –resources that are readily available and have been increasingly marginalised in recent years. There would also be time for consultants to teach in different classrooms to the ones from which they were recruited.

In this way, once the 'withdrawal' period has come to an end, the consultants are ready to work with schools in a very different way – as critical friends, experts and facilitators who are able to draw upon a broad range of knowledge and experience in supporting the professional development needs of English departments. No more folders, videos, overhead transparencies, specifications, just someone who is able to understand the schools they work with and the communities they serve; who is able to see how poverty and disadvantage can affect attainment in literacy and English and has the nous to see that it isn't just a 'school problem' and the networking skills to do something about it with other agencies; someone who can listen and reflect and isn't merely required to deliver and monitor; someone who has the funding (released after the termination of all further training materials) to support

individual departments' work and to seek support from national and international networks when appropriate; someone who is able to reactivate and invigorate the tradition of professional inquiry and educational action research whilst simultaneously contextualising and historicising this work; someone, at bottom, who recognises that there isn't one right, 'scientific' answer but who can enable teachers to formulate their own questions. This would be important work, a move to re-professionalise teaching and to re-connect teachers both with the children and communities with whom they work and the professional knowledge-base. I recognise that time-scales and funding are important, that this kind of distributed, networked professional development is expensive and cannot last indefinitely. The fact of the matter is the funding is there but is being spent differently. Time is the issue and that is why change needs to happen now.

The KS3ES, like the NLS before it, has been an attempt to artificially inseminate the profession with a prescribed method and to control the curriculum and pedagogy by focusing on the specification of what teachers and students should do. Does the government have the gumption to spend our money differently before the opportunity has passed? Fundamentally, does it have the courage to conceive of teaching as a profession once more?

#### References

- Bernstein, B. (1975) *Class, Codes and Control. Volume 3: towards a theory of educational transmissions*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bernstein, B. (1990) *Class, Codes and Control. Volume 4: the structuring of pedagogic discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Dean, G. (2002) Not such a joyless exercise, *Times Educational Supplement*, 22 February, p. 23.
- DfES (2003) *Year 9 booster kit: English 2002/03*. London: DfES.
- Dombey, H. (1998) A Totalitarian Approach to Literacy Education?, *FORUM: for promoting 3–19 comprehensive education*, 40, pp. 36–41.
- Earl, L., Watson, N., Levin, B., Leithwood, K., Fullan, M., Torrance, N. with Jantzi, D., Mascall, B. & Volante, L. (2003) *Watching & Learning 3. Final Report of the External Evaluation of England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.
- Ofsted (2003) *The Key Stage 3 Strategy: evaluation of the second year*. London: Ofsted.
- Ofsted (2002) *ICT in Schools: the impact of government initiatives*. London: Ofsted.
- Shaw, M. (2003) Hate Targets? So Does Ofsted', *Times Educational Supplement* 28 February, p. 21.

# The Hours of Folly: settling accounts with SATS

---

## PATRICK YARKER

Patrick Yarker teaches English at Taverham School in Norfolk and is a member of the FORUM Editorial Board.

---

*I do remember the teacher coming in and saying 'We're going to be doing a little test today' and we were sat down and it was really really quiet...*

*We did practice tests and our teacher always seemed worried.*

*I was really scared.*

*I was terrified in Year 9.*

*Students quoted by Non Worrall: 'Testing, testing, testing...' FORUM, 43(1), Spring 2001.*

*The basic tests... for key stage 2 equip children to deal variously with similar tests throughout their lives...*

Charles Clarke, House of Commons,  
November 15 2002

*The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock; but of wisdom no clock can measure.*

William Blake  
*Proverbs of Hell*

When Pat sat the SAT she thought she'd get good marks. But she had problems. Early on in her English Key Stage 2 reading test she was asked who was telling the story on which she was being tested. That was easy, but she got it wrong. Later she had to 'Choose three of the words below which best describe the Asrai...' and explain her choices. The Asrai were 'mysterious' and 'beautiful', Pat was certain, but she was equally sure none of the remaining adjectives applied. Another mark dropped. Towards the end of the test she was asked 'Do you think...' However, although it was very clear she did think, what she thought turned out to be incorrect and gained her no marks. After the SAT Pat said she thought such a test encouraged children to be less subtle and thoughtful readers than they could be, or than many of them already were. The SAT, she said, was less about reading than about guessing what the tester had in mind as the right answer. 'We are robbed by this kind of test of the unique qualities which literature can offer an individual,' said Pat. 'If children are really trained like this they have little chance of becoming better readers.'

Sour grapes, you might think. Yet Pat has better reason than most to feel angry about the reading test and its reductive disabling set of questions, because the story she was tested on came from her own collection. Who was the storyteller? She herself: Pat Thomson, encouraged by her publisher to try out this year's Key Stage 2 SAT. No surprise then to find her name among the one hundred and

more Authors Against SATs who have refused to allow their work to be used in any more national tests.

When Michael sat the SAT he didn't feel too nervous. He was good at writing: so good he'd become Children's Laureate. Yet so off-putting was the task and so alienating were the conditions under which he was expected to perform that he found the Key Stage 2 writing test 'enormously difficult'. 'Run away!' his friend Philip advised him, from 'a task of stupendous futility'. Many another SAT-sitter was equally decisive; the SAT was 'dull', 'boring', 'sexist.' Rachel sat it, then did some real writing. 'Dear Sir,' she wrote to David Miliband, the Schools Standards minister, 'I am writing to express my concern about the longer writing task called 'The Queue' which all Year 6 pupils had to write for their SATs. The title of the story is boring and the planning arrangements we were given gave insufficient time and were appalling... it is hard to write an exciting story from such a bad title. It would be hard to get a good mark as it is difficult to think of an imaginative plot... Also, you had to write 'The Queue' even if that title does not appeal to you. It is hard to write a good story without a choice of title and many people could lose marks because of it...'

After Simon sat the SATs he stood up and made a speech about what the experience had been like. He'd already taken a lot of practice-tests before the real ones, he said. His parents helped him get ready, but he knew that some parents didn't or couldn't help their children. Some of his friends were ill worrying about the SATs. He didn't think this was fair. The government should listen to children.

We thought so too. There was huge applause for Simon from almost two hundred parents, carers, teachers and writers gathered to formalise what will be one of the driving-forces behind the campaign to abolish national testing. The Anti-SATs Alliance has begun to develop and disseminate material to add momentum to the NUT's national campaign against SATs, a campaign which will see NUT members surveyed again on our attitude to SATs and then balloted in the Autumn on a motion calling for us to boycott SATs at each Key Stage. The ballot will help coalesce the opposition to SATs evident in schools and homes around the country, opposition which has grown as the effect of SATs has become increasingly plain. In 2002 the NUT helped articulate the basis for that opposition by producing a leaflet, 'Not Good For Children', outlining the main arguments against the current regime of national testing in England. That regime narrows the educational offer being made our students, particularly at Primary level where in the terms leading up to Key Stage 2 SATs the

time for non-SATs-related activities is drastically curtailed and students may be subjected to batteries of practice-tests week-in and week-out. SATs results are used to compile the published League Tables of schools, and as a consequence directly influence the way the school is publicly perceived. So high are the stakes that teachers are forced to cram students: to teach-to-the-test rather than to educate. In the face of the pressures generated by the national testing regime some colleagues have been found to cheat. SATs are ministerially excused or defended as being merely another form of testing, and schools have always tested. But testing and assessment are not the same. Assessment for learning, formative and diagnostic and enabling professional judgements to be made about how best to help a student, is one thing. SATs are about grading. They are summative, are received as final judgements, and carry that spurious authority throughout the student's time in school. Other judgements are made on the strength of SATs, most notably in the apportioning of students to so-called 'ability' sets, which in turn will lead to wide variations in the kinds of educational experience encountered. This labelling-function, this ability to collate a cohort of students into different 'levels' in ways which pretend to be objective and to reflect 'ability', is the beauty and value of SATs in the eyes of government. It allows New Labour to claim that 'standards are rising' and that targets in the field of education are being met.

In November 2002, for example, Charles Clarke made these standard claims about standards in a speech to the House of Commons until challenged by Nick Gibb, Conservative MP for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton. Mr Gibb brought to the Secretary of State's attention research evidence from Durham University's Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre which seemed to indicate that there had been no statistically-significant improvement in literacy-levels in year 6 students since 1997 despite large rises in SATs scores. Professor Peter Tymms, deputy director of the Centre, had already cast doubt on the feasibility of so dramatic a rise in literacy-levels as the government were continuing to claim: 'At face value the improvement in national test scores is an amazing rise. It would be better than any rise seen through any policy in the world which has been properly evaluated.' (Daily Telegraph 5 November 2002.) Other research likewise undermines official claims for the benign effect of SATs in raising standards. Evidence from the National Federation for Educational Research shows that results obtained from their own reading assessment tests for years 6 and 7 have remained unchanged for the past four years. Harvey Goldstein's analysis at the Institute of Education demonstrates that there is no methodological validity to the government's claims of year-on-year improvements based on the comparison of SATs statistics.

Twinned with its leaflet the NUT produced a petition against national tests which activists have been using to gather support. So great is the concern at what the SATs regime is doing to their children that queues of parents form to sign the petition and talk about the corrosive effect of SATs. Families are put under unnecessary stress. Children grow over-anxious; some lose sleep or begin to show signs of eating-disorders. In August 2001 the Institute of Public Policy Research found that students' mental health problems were directly linked to pressures connected with testing. When the BBC opened a message-

board on its website earlier this year to facilitate internet-discussion of the issues, parents responded with powerful accounts of what their children were enduring: 'My son started talking about suicide when told that his handwriting could lead to a bad result in his SAT test. He was seven at the time. My daughter was advised to start revising for the SATs she took when she was eleven, four months before they took place', wrote Kath. L. Dale wrote: 'My daughter was ill for a week after she took her SATs test aged seven.' Mark Adams wrote: 'My six year old is already crying himself to sleep at night worrying about his SATs, and we have not mentioned it to him once, other than to say we don't care how he does in them.' Ms. Catherine Briscoe wrote: 'My son took his Year 2 SATs last year and the build up to them was torturous for him. He literally counted down the days until the time came for him to sit his test. Despite my reassurances that he only had to try his best he seemed to feel the pressure terribly... I dread the Year 6 tests.' Far from being merely anecdotal or partisan, such writing samples the common experience of students, parents and teachers after a decade of national testing. SATs damage, dull and demotivate, making children less eager to attend school and harder to engage within school. Students begin to doubt their own ability to learn. They label themselves failures at 7, 11 or 14. When they see that a campaign is under way to end SATs, their faces light up. They want to be part of it.

Around England different pressure-groups are mobilising against a testing-regime which has no credibility left. Why should English students be the only students tested in these ways at these ages? In Wales there are no key stage 1 tests, and moves are afoot to abolish key stage 2 and 3 tests within two years. In Scotland there are no SATs, and no published performance tables; in the North of Ireland no key stage 1 SATs and no performance tables. And in England's increasingly inegalitarian education-system the rich of course can buy their way out of the SATs experience: public schools are entitled not to waste time on them. Given these contradictions, it is not surprising that opposition within the English state system is spreading. Birmingham LEA has applied to opt out of national curriculum testing at Primary level under the 'power to innovate' clause of the 2002 Education Act. According to Tony Howell, Birmingham's Chief Education officer: '...tests skew the curriculum which results in teaching to the test and does not tell teachers or children anything they do not already know.' (TES July 18 2003) Primary Heads in Hampshire want to put together an alternative assessment system based on teacher-assessment. Individual Primary Heads are beginning to take a clear stand against SATs. In Camden one described the key stage 1 SATs as 'Unnecessary and totally inappropriate. What country sits six-year-olds down to take complex tests that take them three or four weeks to prepare for? The tests have got to go next year. I would be personally willing for my children not to do them.' In Birmingham another declared: 'I am going to make a stand and completely boycott these exams no matter what they do to me. They can sack me if they like but I am never doing these SATs again... We don't have enough money to pay salaries and buy materials and yet all this money is wasted on printing, publishing and posting these papers and then paying people to mark them.' (The initial total cost of Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 SATs in 2001-2002, including production, printing, marking and

moderation, was officially put at £27.4M.) The Primary Education Alliance is campaigning against key stage 1 SATs because as a result of them children become: 'disillusioned, demotivated and disaffected.' The London Association of Teachers of English, mainspring of the first SATs boycott which resisted the original imposition of the tests, has stepped up its anti-SATS activity, calling on teachers not to work as markers for SATs and for the unions and professional associations to organise a national boycott, as well as on the government to abolish SATs at all key stages in favour of a system of properly moderated teacher-assessment. LATE also calls for the abolition of league tables. Such a call is echoed by the Socialist Alliance and the Liberal-Democrats, who plan to scrap tests and tables. It is bolstered by academic research which details the detrimental effect the testing-culture has on students' motivation for learning, and their progress. Far from raising standards, the reality for many students is that the constant testing fostered by the SATs regime actually prevents them from making the progress they otherwise might make and leads to lower attainment. The Assessment Reform Group, which has been considering issues of assessment for over a decade and whose members have published a number of influential papers, recently put out a summary of a review of research on 'assessment for learning'. Its findings demolish the arguments advanced by ministers for retaining SATs on grounds of educational benefit or the raising of standards: 'low achievers become overwhelmed by assessments and demotivated by constant evidence of their low achievement. The effect is to *increase* the gap between low and high achieving pupils.' ('Testing, Motivation and Learning' ARG 2002 p.4 my emphasis.) Furthermore, 'Lower achieving pupils are doubly disadvantaged by tests. Being labelled as failures has an impact on how they feel about their ability to learn. It also lowers further their already low self-esteem and reduces the chance of future effort and success... Instead of motivation increasing with age, older pupils feel more resentment, anxiety, cynicism and mistrust of standardised achievement tests. Girls are reported as expressing more test anxiety than boys. Girls are also more likely to think that the source of success or failure lies within themselves rather than being influenced by external circumstances. This has consequences for their self-esteem, especially when they view their potential as fixed.' (ibid p5). The NUT's 2002 survey involving over three thousand teachers revealed overwhelming recognition among its members that SATs had a negative effect. A mere 2.3% of teachers saw the tests as helpful. Fewer than 10% believed the tests were appropriate for their students and/or an accurate reflection of students' achievement. More than 80% of teachers expressed doubts about the accuracy and reliability of the external marking system, and 90% of NUT members were prepared to boycott SATs.

In the March 2003 edition of the NUT's house-magazine 'The Teacher', an anonymous columnist reported that the union was advising members 'they may wish to defer preparatory work in support of Key Stage tests until after the union's national Executive meeting' later in the month. 'That meeting will consider the issue of a boycott of national curriculum tests at all key stages,' said NUT General Secretary Doug McAvoy. 'This decision will be taken after the union has held meetings with other teacher organisations and parent and governor groups.'

The Executive duly met, and (tellingly) voted by a narrow margin *against* a boycott in 2003. How out-of-touch those of the Executive majority were with the feelings of the union's membership was demonstrated graphically a few weeks later. Scores of delegates arrived for the SATs debate at Conference sporting t-shirts reading No Useless Tests, and the call for a boycott of all SATs won unanimous support. The anti-SATS tide inside the union is strengthened by the need to elect a new General Secretary in 2004, and none of the three contenders can risk backsliding on the anti-SATS campaign. Ex-President John Illingworth, who'd moved the motion calling for the original SATs boycott at NUT Conference and who maintained a boycott as head of his Primary School, has always continued to speak powerfully in its favour. 'It is high time teachers took a professional stance against the SATs. If a boycott is the only way of stopping them we must not shirk from that step. For many teachers new to the profession this may be a difficult step, but it is a nettle we have to grasp. We have boycotted tests before: the sky did not fall in! The boycott can benefit children and benefit teachers.' (Campaign Teacher June 2003) At the Anti-SATS Alliance Conference he reminded us that it had been grass-roots pressure from teachers and parents which prompted the NUT to join the original boycott, and that the union's leadership had looked for and found the quickest possible exit from that boycott. This time around it would be vital to make parental support visible to teachers. We had to involve all teachers, not only those in the NUT, or those teaching years 2, 6 and 9. He spoke of the shame felt by many in the profession at inflicting on students under the guise of a professional duty something as anti-educational as SATs. To make the boycott succeed we must not leave it to the union's top officials. We need to be active organising meetings of staff, students and parents inside schools to discuss the issues and garner support. We need to use the NUT material and other materials available at the campaign websites. We need to petition and leaflet. We need to get on TV and into the newspapers. We need to hold public meetings and involve Authors Against SATs as well as students, teachers, governors and others opposed to the national testing regime. We need to present viable and better alternative assessment models. And we need to keep our nerve when the government starts to wave the big stick of the law at us. The legal status of any boycott will be determined in large measure by whether or not our campaign is well-founded enough to mobilise wide public support and to ensure militancy within the profession.

The government understand they are vulnerable now. Charles Clarke's speech at the end of May 2003 was widely spun as signalling both an end to testing at Key Stage 1 and a softening of the target-setting culture. In reality his speech did neither. 'Some people will ask whether giving schools more control means 'freedom' from targets, tests and performance tables. It does not...Targets, tables and testing are here to stay.' Clarke rejected as sentimental those who oppose testing at Key Stage 1: 'testing for tots' as he dismissively termed it. And he held to a defence of testing which is contemptuous of teachers: 'Tests are our guarantee that children's results are based on good, objective measures of what they can do. They help teachers judge children's abilities and plan learning for them that takes account of what they can do, and what they can't.' In other words, teachers who spend months with their



students and see what those students can (and can't) do across a sustained period of time in a much wider variety of contexts than can be replicated in public tests cannot be trusted to give 'good, objective' indications of the capacity of their students. Only SATs can 'guarantee' to do that. More: teachers need the direction SATs give to be able to 'plan learning' for their students. In fact the SATs regime exists precisely to *prevent* us planning learning. The SATs regime imposes what is to be learned, and increasingly how it is to be learned. We must teach to the SAT. The distrust of teachers which has tarnished education-policy from at least Kenneth Baker's time continues with the current Secretary of State. 'We ask teachers to use standardised tests to give an extra guarantee of rigour, and we will continue to do so. But we propose to trial a new approach to assessing seven-year-olds where tests underpin teacher-assessment rather than the two running alongside each other.' In other words Clarke makes clear that teacher-assessment will continue to be regarded as untrustworthy and (far from 'asking') he will require it to be 'underpinned' by tests. If our judgement does not replicate the judgement of the tests, it is our judgement which is at fault. The tests will remain, they will remain judgmental, and they will remain more credible than teacher-assessment. Mr Clarke seems to have learned nothing from his encounter just before this speech with over a hundred of his own constituents at a Norwich Primary school. Here he was visibly taken aback to see just how many people were waiting to have their say on SATs,

and to hear that the only person in the room with a good word for them was the Secretary of State for Education.

Out of that meeting and others like it around England has come the Anti-SATs Alliance, determined to build the boycott-campaign by involving other teacher-unions than the NUT, by bringing in governors and Heads and by organising parents to declare their backing for teachers and to signal that if necessary and as a last resort they will withhold their children from the tests. SATs are a symbol of everything that is wrong with the government's view of teaching and learning. Hours of folly, they remind us year on year how much control over what we do in the classroom has been removed from us as teachers, and how accommodating we have been to practices which the vast majority of us know in our bones to be educationally damaging. No wonder we feel ashamed at short-changing our students with the pap of SATs. Our students can be (if they are not already) more subtle, nuanced, curious and involved readers of text or engagers in science or maths than the 'rigorous' and 'objective' SATs either allow them to show that they are or enable them to be. By boycotting SATs we have the best opportunity in a decade to change for the wiser what happens in our classrooms. The children who took SATs in 2003 must be the last children ever to have to do so.

For when Rosa sat her Key Stage 2 SATs she wouldn't tell her parents much about it. And when she duly got her level fives, she wept.

# Justice, Inclusion and Comprehensive Values: three essays on comprehensive education

---

## DAVID HOWARD

Until the end of 2002, David Howard was Headteacher of Ferndown Upper School in Dorset. He is now Key Stage Three Consultant (Behaviour and Attendance) for Somerset. He wishes to make it clear that he is writing in a personal capacity.

---

### 1. Justice and Fairness: restating the aims

Leaving is always a time for reflection. In November 2002, as I was preparing to leave my position as Headteacher, after twelve years in post, I read of the death of the philosopher John Rawls. His major work, *A Theory of Justice*, first published in the early 1970s, argued a strong and necessary commitment to justice and fairness in society, and that, together with his challenge to the excesses of individualism, had helped underpin my own beliefs in a career dedicated to comprehensive education. I decided to use Rawls' ideas as a means of asking students and staff, in one of my last assemblies, to reflect on the meaning and purpose of comprehensive education. It was too, I hope, a recall both to the sense of idealism and optimism which was the vocational impulse for so many of us and to ideas that are, at present, deeply unfashionable. For the students, it was at once an attempt to instil a sense of pride and belonging and also a setting down of a marker relating to equality and justice.

This is what I said:

*'I want to put you in an imaginary situation.*

*Imagine that you know nothing.*

*You do not know what place in society you will occupy – rich or poor, powerful or powerless – you do not know.*

*You do not know what your class or status will be.*

*You do not know what talents or abilities you will possess, nor how or if they will be rewarded.*

*You do not know what you will believe about life, nor what your aims will be.*

*You do not know what your character will be.*

*You do not know what sort of economic, political, social or cultural order you will inhabit.*

*All this is hidden behind a veil of ignorance.*

*What sort of society would you then choose?*

*For me, it has always been clear. An ideal society would have to be based on equality, justice and fairness.*

*We do not live in such a society. Although in this country we are luckier than most, there are still too many examples of inequality, injustice and unfairness.*

*Perhaps, given human nature, the ideal is impossible, at least for a long time. But just because we have only a dim vision of how things might be, or because the road ahead is dark and full of potholes, is no reason for not moving forward. It is no reason for not seeking improvement. The alternative is to sit back and accept the inequality and injustice. That seems to me a degrading position to adopt.*

*A comprehensive school like this is based on the idea that we can move forward to that ideal of equality and justice. To us it does not matter whether you come from a house worth £300,000 or a house worth £70,000.*

*To us it does not matter whether your parents earn £100,000 a year or £10,000. To us it does not matter if you are talented in sport, music, science, mathematics, languages, or whether you struggle in some of these. Whether you are able or disabled.*

*Whoever you are, wherever you come from, we value each one of you as an individual. Each one of you is 'of worth'. Each one of you deserves the very best that we can offer.*

*In a very real sense, it is a matter of respect.*

*It is also a matter of generosity, of sharing.*

*I want you to be proud of this school. I want you to be proud of yourselves, and to do those things that make you proud.*

*Take pride in yourself, your friends, your school.*

*Good education is not just for people from posh houses. A comprehensive school exists so that we can share our talents and our potential, and celebrate our differences. By working together, by showing each other the dignity and respect that every human being*

*deserves, we can try to live that ideal of equality and justice and fairness.*

*Behave the way you want it to be.'*

It has been standard fare at educational meetings and conferences for teachers from the private sector to say to their state school colleagues how pleased they are to be sharing in the discussions because, after all, 'we are all in the same business'. I am ashamed to say that, all too often, a sense of politeness has held me back from expressing my real belief, namely that teaching in a state comprehensive is *very different* from teaching in a selective or private school. You cannot compare the easy teaching there, where students know that they can be thrown out if they do not conform, with the challenges of a comprehensive school, where only a proportion of the students are initially motivated to learn (though many are inspired and encouraged to do so by the enthusiasm and expertise of their teachers). I should have responded like this:

*'No, we are not in the same business; in fact, I am not in a business at all. You are in the business of providing children with access to the higher echelons of society (or keeping them there), provided that their parents can pay. My task is to educate all children, no matter what their social status or the depth of their parents' purse. Your definition of education is exclusive; it is for some children only. My definition is inclusive, and offers hope and opportunities to all. You believe that those with greater resources should be able to buy what you call a 'better' education, so that they can maintain their grip on those resources. I believe that a just and fair society demands open access for all, and that a decent society can be based only on cooperation and sharing. The very structure of a divide between private and public as it exists in this country shows that you are judged by your wealth rather than your character. You would not be prepared to countenance a society in which all could enjoy an equal freedom, since it would destroy all positions of privilege and supposed superiority. Your definition of freedom is, in fact, only about freedom to pay. The freedom that I strive for is more open and generous; it is not cash-constrained. You value a few children and seek to maintain their privileges. I value all children, and seek to give them both the confidence to believe that all things are possible and the skills to make those possibilities real. Your values are oligarchic; mine are democratic.'*

If, as I believe, comprehensive education represents an ideal of justice and fairness to which a decent society should be committed, what is it that makes it so hard for the proponents of that ideal to convince society as a whole of the benefits to be gained from commitment?

I would suggest that there are two key problem areas. The first relates to inclusion, which is a defining characteristic of comprehensive education, but is far from being accepted by many key players. The marked increase in behavioural challenges posed by young people, both in number and range, has damaged the debate about access, provoking understandably defensive attitudes in teachers and increasingly intolerant attitudes in concerned parents. This then relates to the second problem, that of wider social trends, but in particular to the growth, over the last thirty years, of a consumerist, 'me first' attitude. With education

now seen as a 'high stakes' area, genuine parental concern can easily tip over into neurosis; the pressures on both schools and the young people themselves are plain to see. League tables, targets, and the establishment of a hierarchy of schools serve only to feed these developments.

It is these themes that I shall want to explore in the two subsequent essays.

The challenge for the comprehensive movement is now to find strong voices who will themselves challenge current educational policy. We need people who live their beliefs, and who do not see choice as simply a matter of lifestyle, or who seek to obtain advantage for themselves or their families despite their apparent stated convictions. What, for example, are we to say of teachers and headteachers in comprehensive schools who choose selective education for their own children? They must believe that the education that they provide for young people in their schools is not good enough for their own children. How can professionals live with themselves if they believe their own professional skills and those of their close colleagues to be inadequate?

The beliefs that teachers hold about education and about society are crucial to the ethos of the schools in which they work. They cannot but affect the relationships with their students and their colleagues, and it is on these relationships that the potential for learning, for good or ill, is based.

There is a political task to be undertaken. New Labour's mantra of 'standards not structures' must be exposed for the sham that it is: a deliberate attempt to de-politicise arguments about education. Who can argue against the wish to raise standards? Is that not what every teacher tries to achieve every day? In recent years advocates of comprehensive education have been sidetracked into narrow issues of effectiveness – important as they are – while forgetting broader issues of social justice, and this is linked to the reductionist view of a 'good' school being basically one which achieves high examination results. The OFSTED model for judging schools only reinforces the one-sidedness. We need to restore the balance, to re-define what is meant by 'good', and that can be achieved only by re-connecting educational and social values.

At the same time we must re-assert the importance of structures. As Rawls argues strongly, structures matter because the incorporation of the principles of justice and fairness in institutions is essential for the maintenance of self-respect and the mutual self-respect on which any decent society depends. By creating just and fair institutions we create a better society, one that does right by all its citizens. A fully comprehensive system of education would be such a system; it is a key feature of a just and fair society.

Education has always been, and must always be, about the sort of society which we wish to live in or create. It is never simply about the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Comprehensive education is about social justice. It is time we raised the flag again.

## **2. Including Everyone: the problem for comprehensives**

In the first essay in this series, I outlined the ideals of justice and fairness on which I believe comprehensive education to be based, using John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* as a starting point. In this essay I wish to spend

some time discussing an issue which, in my opinion, has caused considerable difficulty for comprehensive schools and which has been allowed to damage parental perceptions of comprehensive education. Although the overwhelming majority of parents continue, despite the spite and bile of the media and our tame politicians, to show confidence in their local comprehensive, it is nevertheless true that comprehensives do not always attract the same level of affection as other schools do or have done. Parental attitudes, encouraged by wider trends in society, cause a fundamental problem, in that comprehensive schools have, by their very nature, to include a number of students with a range of disaffected behaviours who the majority of parents do not want to see sharing an education with their own children.

While the inclusion debate appears to centre now on how to save money by educating, in mainstream schools, children with a wider range of physical or learning difficulties, the tougher issue of how to address the behavioural challenges of children already in mainstream schools is pushed to one side. Yet there can be little doubt that this issue, for most schools and the teachers within them, as well as for parental perceptions of what makes a good school, is a very high priority.

For any school, the issue of creating a positive whole-school ethos is central to its success. How difficult this is, or not, depends crucially on the school's situation, on how it is perceived, both by parents and the wider community, and on a whole raft of assumptions about the value accorded to education as such.

For a selective school, the task is relatively simple. Perceived as being at the top of the tree, students are assimilated into a culture of superiority, which is reinforced by the threat of being 'sent down' to a less prestigious establishment if they do not keep up to the mark. Parental gratitude for the student having 'got there', together with satisfying vistas of the achievements anticipated for the future, combine to create a homogenous culture of high expectations, which requires little extra effort from the staff.

For those not selected, the reverse is true. Students are left feeling inferior; self-doubt rules; the brutal realism of rejection undermines any feelings of self-worth; parents are disappointed or resigned, and all too often choose this as the point to 'switch off'; teachers have to make superhuman efforts to re-build confidence and self-esteem, without which learning becomes difficult if not impossible. For a significant number of students, who are not resilient enough to cope with major disappointment in their lives, it is easier to opt out. Learned helplessness characterises their attitudes. We have a situation where students who have the most to gain from school are more often than not the ones who fail in their schooling.

If Rawls is right that 'a sure confidence in the sense of one's own worth is perhaps the most important primary good', how can one defend the injustice of institutional arrangements which violate a basic entitlement in a decent society?

Where there is a clear division (and discounting the secondary modern or high schools which boldly call themselves comprehensive when they are clearly not), it is easy to see the costs, both social and educational which accompany a divisive system. Those who seek to defend selective education by appealing to the necessity

of providing differentiated institutions according to supposedly identified 'abilities' or 'potential' wilfully underestimate the negative impact – both social and personal – on the young people involved. But it is also more straightforward to be able to argue against such a system on the grounds of fairness and justice, when all the odds are stacked in favour of a small elite, most of whom come from a relatively secure and comfortable background in the first place.

For a comprehensive school, the situation is altogether more complex. It does not choose its students; they and their parents choose it. This involves the school in a huge expenditure on marketing, a task then made infinitely more difficult by the limited measures of success imposed by the government and enjoyed by the media. A truly comprehensive school cannot simply focus on the simplistic notion of 'academic excellence' (whatever that means) and always runs the risk of appearing to want to be all things to all men. The fact that so many in comprehensives succeed in so many areas of their work, despite having to compete on a sloping pitch, is a tribute to the quality of their staff, but one must not underestimate the challenge that they are facing. (This is thrown particularly into focus in those areas of the country where comprehensives have to cope with a direct challenge, through 'creaming off' by neighbouring grammar schools.)

It is, of course, the very variety of experience and attitudes brought by students which presents to the comprehensive school and its teachers a challenge which is unknown to those in selective schools. (It is also, paradoxically, why good comprehensive schools provide a richness of education that other schools cannot match.) Comprehensive schools include a significant number of students for whom the idea of academic achievement is a non-starter and whose behaviour reflects a lack of concern for and a lack of engagement in 'normal' educational activities.

For many of these students, it is not simply a matter of providing alternative or vocational courses or mentoring, which, though often useful, can sometimes be just a sticky plaster for the system. Just being in school is not important to them (and often to their families) and they resist strenuously any attempts to make them conform to the standard expectations of the school.

We are talking here of a sort of moral dislocation. The young people appear purposeless, swamped with immediate emotions, unable to say what they want to do with their lives, and, even if given a plan or direction, lacking either the individual willpower or the parental support to see things through.

Teachers are, therefore, given the extraordinary task of either bringing such children 'on board' or at least 'holding the line', while at the same time knowing that their behaviour, attitudes and (under-)achievement contribute significantly to the perception of the school in the community, and so detract from its ability to compete for the more motivated students. It is worth noting that one of the most damaging effects on teacher morale is the way in which their 'learning' and the standards of behaviour which they cherish are rejected by the very people they want to help make something of themselves. The tensions that arise from this are central to any understanding of behavioural issues in the classroom, and go far beyond the normal teenage testing of boundaries. It is no wonder that



the exclusions issue has been central to concerns in recent years.

There can be little doubt that issues of student behaviour have increased in extent and severity. Many commentators have noted the changes in society which have contributed to where we are now: the breakdown of patterns of deference, consumerism, and the demand for instant gratification have combined to undermine the older, more patient, more tolerant and more reflective virtues on which education was based. Children who have been brought up on a diet of Saturday morning television find classrooms 'boring'. When they become teenagers, it is not surprising that the buzz of the streets holds more attraction than the formality of school. Place an 'in your face' teenage culture within a general social context of self-indulgence, and you can begin to understand why pupil behaviour is the way it is.

For some schools, the Headteacher and SMT are so overwhelmed with firefighting that they simply do not have the time for consideration of wider strategy, for development planning, new projects, or schmoozing with sponsors. They will then be criticised by OFSTED for not doing so. A few individuals will succeed, of course, but they serve only to emphasise the extraordinary difficulties faced by the rest.

What is a school to do? How to create an ethos of achievement when teachers are having to deal, day in day out, with students whose experience is so disrupted and disjointed that their lives appear, in the words of one of my former senior staff, to be spiralling out of control?

It ought to be very clear to everyone concerned that the measures that schools are pushed into adopting serve only to reinforce the negative attitudes that such children bring to school in the first place.

First you have setting, officially promoted by OFSTED and the Government, ostensibly in order to promote differentiation and hence achievement, but used by school as a way of keeping 'difficult' students away from their more motivated peers. In how many schools is setting by ability really setting by behaviour or parental background? How little emphasis we have seen in recent years on collaborative classroom practice where students can help and learn from each other, and where levels of achievement (for all students!) can exceed those achieved in the stratified schools of the present day!! Research which shows that students are not disadvantaged by mixed-ability teaching is usually ignored as people seek to maintain their prejudices.

Second, you then bring in an alternative curriculum for the bottom set, to keep them occupied and out of mischief. This is not to decry the value of differentiation and the need for vocational courses; it is just that as they are now introduced, and given the persistence of the academic/vocational divide, we are in danger of developing within schools the same division that marked out grammars from secondary moderns. There is a tightrope to walk, stretched between provision of appropriate learning opportunities and maintenance of equal value. How can schools counter the long-standing prejudice of society against the practical and the technical?

Schools may indeed have to cope with the realities of life as they find it, but one must surely ask the question about what sort of social issues we are storing up for the future if we are recreating in our schools the same model

of hierarchy of wealth, access and opportunity which disfigures our current society.

There are some key choices for schools to make.

'Citizenship' gives schools a tremendous opportunity to re-connect to an ideal of education in society, to re-focus and perhaps sharpen up the often *ad hoc* nature of community involvement, helping young people to learn actively what it means to be a citizen. The methods adopted are important. It is sad that some schools, driven no doubt by short-term concerns about OFSTED, believe that they have solved the citizenship issue by putting students through a textbook course. It is sad, too, that Citizenship is not attracting the level of resourcing of, say, Literacy and Numeracy. For all its protestations, the Government clearly hopes that citizenship will be 'absorbed' along the way.

Yet, here is an opportunity for schools to think imaginatively about their curriculum, to link subject areas, to link classroom experience with the local community, to develop student participation through a student council, and to link that to wider democratic structures. This is about whole-school ethos; student involvement and parental involvement are just two sides of the same coin.

Primary and secondary schools should be working together on developing a complete community agenda, offering both support and involvement. It will require time, effort and real generosity of spirit – a move away from the enclosed, inward-looking attitudes of the last twenty years. There is a significant agenda here for the LEA – an opportunity to foster and encourage, but also to ensure that ideas and initiatives are maintained over years.

Learning how to relate to others, both within school and beyond, is just one of the many intelligences that schools must commit themselves to developing in young people. Emotional intelligence, with its focus on managing one's own emotions and one's relationships, and on motivation, must be a key component in any comprehensive school curriculum, and a number of schools are now developing or applying explicitly courses which seek to promote skills in this area, in both staff and students. In Ferndown we used programmes developed by the Pacific Institute, and were struck by the impact on emotional and mental health and well-being. In the wider Dorset community, the ISECCA Programme (Improving Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem and Confidence of Children and Adults) is having a valuable impact in promoting self-efficacy and positive attitudes across the range of public services – education, police, health and social services.

What makes such programmes different is that they cannot be 'bolt-on' extras. The approaches have to be integrated into the fabric of the school ethos. If they are, then schools can model a well-ordered society, based on mutual respect, justice and fairness, and give students the confidence to plan a positive future for themselves. A comprehensive school provides the ideal environment for young people to practise the virtues. School that do not consistently challenge young people in this way will find themselves continuing to deal with all the myriad problems which arise from the chaos of disordered lives.

There is a real challenge involved here, in encouraging students to take responsibility for their own life and learning. Campaigns for lifelong learning are predicated on people coming to believe that not only is this important, but that it is up to them to make a commitment, and, having done so, they can see it through and achieve. The beliefs

and attitudes which make this possible are best fostered at an early age. No comprehensive school should be without a strategy which links effective learning in the school with lifelong learning and learning in the community.

This is, of course, another inclusive programme. Learning and achievement are for all, not just for the privileged few. The challenge is to motivate young people who give every appearance of not wanting to learn, or at least not wanting to learn what the school is offering and the way it is being offered.

The good news is that, all over the country, in comprehensive schools, teachers have taken up this challenge. It is sometimes quite staggering to behold the confidence and self-assurance shown by so many who leave our schools. Their experiences have been significantly different from those of previous generations, but there is no doubt in my mind that comprehensive education has prepared them effectively for the diversity of life in the twenty-first century. We need to assert that young people who have gone through comprehensive schools have received a better education precisely because they have been educated alongside their more challenging peers. How could it be otherwise when a 'good' comprehensive, by its very nature, responds to, celebrates and works with the diversity of 'intelligences' which make up human nature?

The issues that we still need to address, and which are made more difficult for us by the self-contradictory policies of the Government, should not blind us to the successes. Despite everything, comprehensive schools have maintained a vision of justice and fairness, and the children in their care are the better citizens because of it.

### **3. Morality and Justice: comprehensive values in society**

In the first essay in this series I suggested that the comprehensive ideal was based on a desire for justice and fairness, and that these two qualities were necessarily denied by selective education (whether grammar or private schools).

In the second essay, I proposed that the implementation of the comprehensive ideal had been endangered by perceptions in the public mind of its necessary concomitant, inclusion. As education became an increasingly 'high-risk' environment, fostered by the Government's obsession with targets, ambitious parents became less and less tolerant of anything which might be perceived to be threatening the 'progress' of their children. Other children who challenge, disrupt, or are less committed are best consigned to outer darkness, or better still, the 'sink' school in the Government's new hierarchy. This represents a real challenge to the idea of equal value. How can one address these attitudes?

In this essay I want to address the social perceptions themselves, and re-assert the principle that comprehensive education cannot be pushed into the sidings, where it can be 'modernised' at will, but is a key political issue, which relates to our conceptions of the sort of society that we wish to live in.

In an article in *The Guardian* (10 February 2003) the Prime Minister wrote that the Government was motivated by values of social justice, equality and solidarity. He then went on to outline how public services need to be customised to fit the needs of the consumer. What is

striking is the failure to realise how the emphasis on consumerism inevitably and necessarily undermines the values to which he says he is attached. Put quite simply, consumerism and choice are options only for those with wealth. People living on benefits do not have the luxury of perusing the pages of *Which*.

If you push consumerism as your policy of choice, then all you do is confirm the gross inadequacies which exist in society in the first place. It is a strange fact that, whereas teachers emphasise to children that they cannot have just what they want or do as they please and that deferred gratification is the name of the game, in adult society now the reverse is true. 'I want it now' is joined with 'It's my right' and 'You can't stop me'. Since, increasingly, these are found in the language of pre-school too, it is not altogether surprising that schools find it difficult to maintain what they believe are appropriate moral standards.

Parents show themselves to be caught up in inconsistencies and contradictions, often wanting their children to work hard and make progress, while denying by their very lifestyle the very qualities which might serve as an example to those children. Lifestyle issues are now of central importance. Nothing must impinge on access to immediate material satisfaction, symbolised in house, new car, regular holidays (now often taken in term time) and an active social life, but at the same time concerns about children's progress and achievement have never been so acute. The tensions are palpable.

For example, parents apparently choose schools for the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered, but leave the games teacher struggling to put together a netball team, encouraging their children instead to seek part-time employment. Advice is constantly sought as to what computer, software, books, private tuition to purchase, in the belief that acquisition will bring results, rather than effort and commitment. Society is based on what you buy.

Choice becomes the number one principle, and yet there is a reluctance to accept that choice brings both responsibility and consequences. Both are often avoided. On a wider perspective, it can be argued that more choice brings greater possibility of disappointment. As choice has become *a right*, people have become, understandably, less willing to put up with existing situations. The demand for immediate satisfaction makes the problems more acute, particularly for education, where change is inevitably gradual, and the important results may not show themselves for years.

The same tensions over individualism can be seen in the application of consistency. Headteachers grow resigned to dealing with parents who want uniformity in the application of behaviour policy, for example, until it comes to the parents' own child, who must be treated as a special case. The same argument applies to admissions and setting arrangements, as other examples. However much people might appear to believe in fairness, they also want to secure advantage for themselves whenever possible. Fairness has come to mean fairness for me or my children. There is no wider conception of a fair community or society. The balance of society has tipped so far towards a culture of individualism that the idea of the common good has lost all currency. This is a process which has been encouraged by successive governments and their media friends, who, at the same time, berate schools unfairly for the anti-social behaviour of a minority of young people, whose problems

stem from the fragmentation of their lives and their communities. In short, the whole tenor of society today works against any conception of the need to cooperate and share, and indeed denies that we might be richer, both as individuals and a society, by learning together. The notion of education as a joint enterprise, from which all can benefit, has been relegated to the dust of the stock cupboard. A ruthless 'devil take the hindmost' attitude rules. Seen in this light, the reinforcement of selection and the introduction of a hierarchy of schools could be just ways of responding to society's wishes and countering parental resistance to inclusion. Meritocratic thinking is allied to a defence of the status quo. Is government policy simply a means of responding to the social snobbery which hates the idea of children from 'nice' homes having to sit next to those from social housing? Far from leading on a matter of principle, the Government is going with the flow. Indeed, it does not even appear to know that there might be a matter of principle involved. Even more seriously, no-one appears ready to spell out the social consequences of unbridled, individualistic consumerism. For these reasons, Tim Brighouse's imaginative proposal of developing a 'collegiate' of schools, welcome as it is, (see *Forum*, Vol 45, No 1) might well founder on the rock of parental preference. All too many schools nowadays, fearful of negative perceptions, are ruled by the parental 'We hold what we have'. Children from better-off families are three times more likely than their poorer classmates to gain five good GCSEs. What is there to gain for the parent of a child at a favoured school diverting any of its resources to the 'collegiate'? At the very least the 'win-win' notion inherent in a cooperative approach needs to be articulated even more forcefully.

At present, there seems little likelihood. For all its fine words about inclusion and access, the Government has introduced education policies which work against these and has resolutely refused to address the structural issues which at present create a divided society. The emphasis is still that of the majority of governments throughout the ages: keep the majority reasonably happy, so as to gain re-election, and maintain the privileges of the few. Inequalities of wealth, such as we have seen growing in the last thirty years, put equality of opportunity in jeopardy and undermine the cohesiveness of society.

The cynicism bred by such attitudes, together with the ruthless imposition of often ill-considered policies, has played its part in undermining the optimism and idealism of a generation of teachers. Government 'reforms' have been a calculated strategy to move teachers away from questions about the purpose of education and the nature of society.

If teachers are now mere operatives, who deliver a pre-packaged curriculum (however well they do it), there is no space, either for creative thinking or for the independent-minded challenge to existing patterns of thought, which has been central to three thousand years of European tradition. We must ask the question: Is education there merely to 'fit' young people for their life in a pre-ordained social structure, and in particular as economic producers and consumers, or is it there to foster a wider and more generous conception of human life and, in so doing, to encourage a potentially critical attitude to the limited and limiting views of the proponents of the dismal science?

It might well seem that, in pushing comprehensive education, we are, in fact, telling people what they should want and how they should live their lives. This would be the accusation from the neo-liberals who have dominated political thinking in recent years and to whom any criticism of market-based individualism is anathema. What we have been coming to realise, particularly in the anti-globalisation debate and with the help of writers such as Thomas Frank and George Monbiot, is that this right-wing stance was just a smoke-screen to disguise the extent to which the rich are oppressing and exploiting the poor.

The real problem is that, in terms of the main political parties, there appears to be no choice, and no-one is presenting a coherent alternative to the right-wing ideology of the market. One might argue that this is, ironically, another version of the 'one size fits all' idea. However, there is an alternative, and it is about enabling citizens to become full and free people, rather than just consumers. It defines wealth not simply in terms of income, but in terms of what we share. Wealth is our capacity to make use of and enjoy our freedoms. In this new concept, public servants – objects of derision by politicians for the last thirty years, because they are not 'wealth creators' – contribute fabulously to the wealth of a society. They are the glue that holds society together. They provide the bedrock which allows individuals to make the most of their opportunities. Without them, we are all impoverished. Neo-liberalism, with its emphasis on individualistic money-making, is parasitic on the good will and commitment of public servants.

In an alternative vision, comprehensive education, with its model of cooperation and its stress on the valuing of all members of a society, must figure strongly. This is about learning to be active citizens, and recognising the contribution that each person can make to society, rather than measuring the size of someone's wallet. Justice has to be seen to be done through the institutions of a society.

In the first essay in this series, I published the text of a school assembly given on the theme of justice and fairness. It might be profitable to see what the reverse might be:

*You are the elite. That is why you are at this school. Wealth, power and influence are yours for the taking. Your future is bright.*

*There will be many who look at you and your position with envy. And so they should. You are the role models for our society. Your achievements will be an inspiration to others. With hard work and good fortune, a few of them will join your ranks. Welcome them. We believe in opportunity.*

*Do not feel sorry for those less fortunate than you. Such feelings will only weaken your resolve. Society as a whole will benefit from your privileges. The wealth will trickle down, and all will be richer.*

*Do not underestimate the cost to yourselves: the cut-throat competition, the stress of betting millions on the markets, the boardroom battles, the hard fighting of merger and takeover. Through all this you must keep your focus on your own advancement. You will be rewarded handsomely.*

*Do not be seduced by the pipe-dreams of the bleeding hearts. This is a competitive world, and you must fight. Those at the bottom of the pile must accept their lot in*

*life, and for those that do not, there is an expanding prison building programme.*

*Do not be ashamed of being better. You are here at this school to achieve and maintain a position of superiority.*

*We must remember the words of the hymn, as true now as it was when it was written in 1848:*

*The rich man in his castle,*

*The poor man at his gate,*

*God made them, high or lowly,*

*And order'd their estate.*

*Nothing has changed, and there is no reason why it should.*

Of course, few would say this, at least not openly. How could you incorporate greed and selfishness, a disregard for others, an emphasis on social division and the maintenance of privilege into Personal, Social and Health Education or into a policy for moral education?

And yet, this is precisely the message preached by the structure of selective education. You have only to experience – fortunately rarely – the supercilious and arrogant attitude of those from so-called elite schools to realise how their ‘separate’ education conditions them into first accepting their supposed superiority and then into trumpeting it loudly for all to hear. Their gracious offers of a few scraps from their rich tables should be seen for the patronising nastiness that they are.

In the last thirty years, politicians have been adjusting education to fit more closely the needs and aspirations of a re-created hierarchical, class-bound society, which is nineteenth-century in its assumptions. Education is in danger of becoming again a means of compelling people to know and accept their place in society. It should surprise no-one, as George Monbiot has argued (*The Guardian*, 8 January 2002), that the present Government sees education as a marketable commodity. Francis Beckett (*New Statesman*, 16 September 2002) is right in showing how education is in danger of being taken over by corporate business values. As we now see only too clearly, Mrs Thatcher’s emphasis on Victorian values has been continued by her successors.

For the remaining battered supporters of the comprehensive ideal, there are still key questions to ask.

How can we create an education system for a democratic society, particularly if that society is moving quickly away from the ideal of a participative democracy? In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls made the following contrast between the principle of a decent society and the political pressure to increase unfairness:

*When society is conceived as a system of cooperation designed to advance the good of its members, it seems quite incredible that some citizens should be expected, on the basis of political principles, to accept still lower prospects of life for the sake of others.*

Yet this is precisely the situation that we now have; precisely what the proponents of selective education and hierarchies of schools now argue for.

We are at a difficult point. Comprehensive education has not failed. The overwhelming majority of comprehensive schools are successes. The young people that they educate are as well-equipped to face the challenges of the future as any generation has ever been, and probably better. What is more, by building into their work a strong programme of citizenship, based on justice, fairness, and mutual respect, and by emphasising multiple intelligences, with particular attention to emotional intelligence, schools can battle against the selfishness which disfigures so much of society, and can re-assert the values of co-operation and mutual respect.

Comprehensive education, so vilified in recent years, has fostered rising standards at a time of increasing social division. But beset by the continuing lies of the media and its attendant politicians, it has had to defend itself as if standards were falling. The lies have become the new orthodoxy, and have been used to impose a utilitarian straightjacket on teaching and a neo-liberal structure on schools. As the Government pulls us inexorably towards the idea of education as a saleable commodity, we need to challenge the direction, as Tim Brighouse did so memorably in his nightmare vision of 2022 in his Brian Simon Memorial Lecture.

One thing, though, is clear. If we do not re-connect the ideal of comprehensive education to wider ideals about a just and fair society, education will be dragged further down the route of narrow managerialism and corporate strategies. That future for our young people would be bleak indeed.

# Floor Targets Will Cause Schools to Fail

---

DAVID BROWN

The author of this article has recently retired from a headship in 'Anyshire'. We have given him a fictitious name in order to preserve the anonymity of the schools he describes.

---

School performance can be readily and validly compared by means of a scattergraph relating average GCSE scores to average intake attainment scores. This chart contains real data for Anyshire, which is a real LEA with a GCSE performance close to the national average. The chart shows and compares the 2002 GCSE performance of every state secondary school in Anyshire. It plots the average GCSE score per pupil for each school against the average score for the same cohort in the standardised NFER tests taken in October of year 7 on entry to the school in 1997. This analysis is possible because Anyshire has a policy of testing all pupils in year 7 and using the results to drive its Special Needs budget formula.

The chart includes a regression line and its formula. This is potentially a very powerful tool for judging school, department, and pupil performance. The formula suggests that, *on the basis of the Anyshire data*, a 'benchmark' GCSE point score for *any pupil or group of pupils* can be calculated as follows:

$$(\text{GCSE Average Points score}) = 1.4 \times (\text{NFER CAT score}) - 94.8$$

This relatively simple method using standard software enables powerful comparative data to be *locally* produced based on any form of pupil or school grouping. Its adoption can be under *user control* thus providing benefits in terms of promoting targeted enhanced learning without risking suspicions associated with DfES direction and control. This is likely to be the next major issue on the agenda of the government and this paper presents an alternative and more effective approach.

The chart shows a high correlation between the NFER CAT score and GCSE performance confirming the predictive power of the NFER data, which represents the results of thousands of pupils collected over many years. As, unlike KS2 SATs, the NFER test is not related to government targets, is not the basis of school league tables, does not change from year to year, pupils do not prepare for it, and the results are statistically standardised, it provides a good baseline measure for comparing GCSE performance. The resulting chart provides a true 'value added' indicator for comparing schools on the basis of prior attainment. The greater the perpendicular distance of the school, above or below the regression line, the better or worse the performance of the school. Schools on the line are performing in line with the LEA average.

It is important to note that this analysis does not separately include any allowance for social deprivation factors. It is based entirely on the test scores of pupils shortly after entry to secondary school. This suggests that a school with a much lower intake than the Anyshire

average, on account of extreme social deprivation factors, should find it more difficult to meet the average Anyshire performance than schools at the other end of the distribution.

In Anyshire all but two schools have average intake NFER scores in the range 88–103. The two schools outside this range are therefore of interest. The school with the lowest average intake NFER score (84.5), Gas Street Comprehensive, is the only school in the LEA that fails to meet the DfES floor target of 25% 5+A\*-C. In common with all such schools it is under great pressure to improve its results on the assumption that it is a weak school. The chart shows quite clearly that this is not the case. The school at the other end of the range with an average intake NFER score of 109, Hightown Grammar, is selective and is a good school with 'beacon' status. The DfES expects Gas Street Comprehensive to learn from Hightown Grammar even though Gas Street Comprehensive is an even better performer and operates in an utterly different social context. Under the Leadership Incentive Grant initiative Anyshire, like all other LEAs, has been compelled by the DfES to appoint a head from another 'successful school' to lead Gas Street Comprehensive in confessing its inadequacies in a suitably abject manner so as to qualify for the grant and avoid enforcement action against the governors and senior staff. In Anyshire this designated institution, which is also a good school, is nevertheless on the basis of the chart a poorer performer than Gas Street Comprehensive.

It is not in doubt that Gas Street Comprehensive is in trouble. It could not be otherwise with such a low entry attainment profile. Without league tables and given its good local reputation it might have a small chance of improving its market position and recruiting the more able pupils that its performance deserves. With league tables and a constant stream of highly public criticism by Ministers, including the Prime Minister, as a 'school with unacceptably poor performance' it has no such chance.

Gas Street Comprehensive is an inner-urban school with three good neighbouring schools serving more affluent catchments. Gas Street Comprehensive is losing the local competitive struggle for the more able pupils even though the chart shows that it is the best performer of the four. It does however recruit a far higher proportion of first choices for children with Special Needs on account of its excellent local reputation in this regard. The admissions rules have a further implication for Gas Street Comprehensive. When oversubscribed, as it was before the floor target initiative, the Anyshire Admissions Policy limited admissions to those pupils who lived closest.

This corresponded geographically to the most deprived streets in the town. Applicants from more affluent families living in the more prosperous parts of town could not get in. Now that the competing good schools are over-subscribed the effect of the Admissions Policy is reversed and it continues to work to the further disadvantage of Gas Street Comprehensive whose governors now bitterly regret that their egalitarian principles prevented their applying for Grant Maintained status when they had the chance. This would have given them the power to set their own admissions rules and allowed Gas Street Comprehensive to compete fairly in the New Labour meritocracy.

Local opinion in informed education circles recognises the quality of Gas Street Comprehensive and its vital contribution to the town. How can the school be helped? First it is clear that the key issue is not standards of teaching and learning in the school. To begin to succeed against its neighbouring good schools in the local competition for pupils Gas Street Comprehensive would have to improve its raw GCSE results to a level that is plainly impossible with an average intake NFER score of 84.5 especially given that the more able pupils from the Gas Street area, that are missing from its intake, are now in the competing local schools and many of the Special Needs pupils from the more affluent parts of town are enjoying the excellent provision of Gas Street Comprehensive.

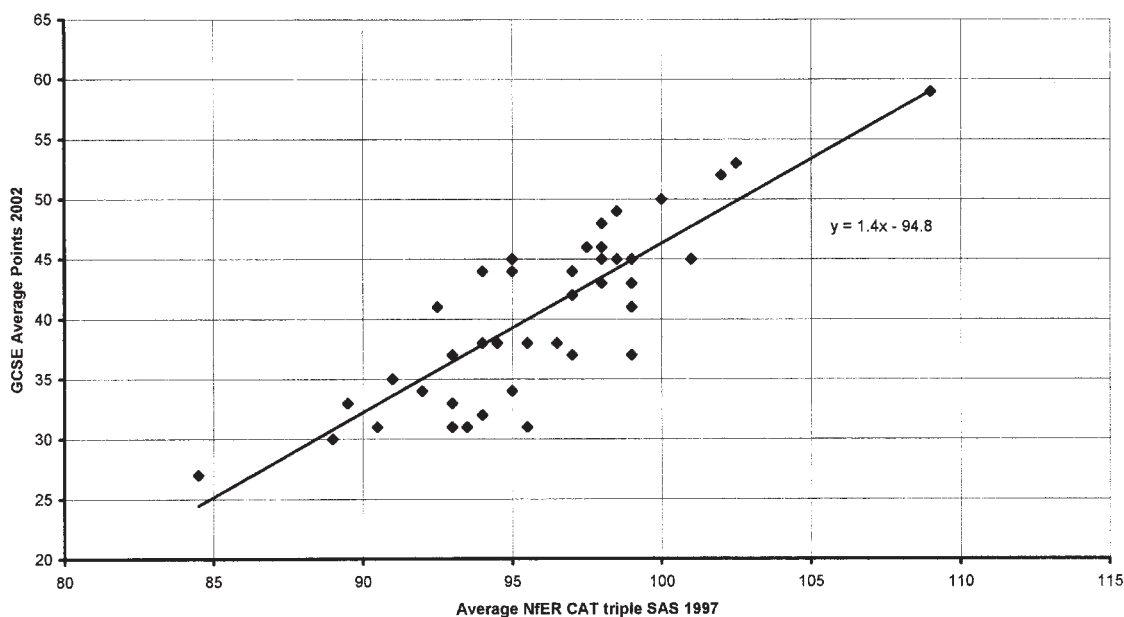
Now that Gas Street Comprehensive is the only school in town with surplus places it will be called upon to assist Anyshire's social inclusion targets by admitting a disproportionate share of pupils permanently excluded from other schools.

It ought to be obvious that Gas Street Comprehensive cannot be improved without *first* implementing measures to improve the ability profile of its intake. Within the constraints of the 1988 Act this can only be done by changing the admissions rules to the advantage of this school *and to the disadvantage of its local competitors*. This is possible through the use of a banded admissions policy but it could not be expected that the majority of the schools in the town would support this, so it would be very hard for the County Councillors of Anyshire to agree to this even if the Anyshire LEA saw the wisdom of such a policy.

It is also necessary for the DfES to abandon its floor targets, which are worsening the inequalities that are at the root of the problem, before the staff, parents and pupils of Gas Street Comprehensive finally abandon hope for the future and standards really do start to fall.

It would not be so important a matter if Gas Street Comprehensive was an exceptional case. How many schools 'in challenging circumstances' in other regions of England are experiencing a similar cycle of decline caused by the floor target policy? Surely the 'resistance to improvement' that so concerns Ministers should by now have caused some in the DfES to consider the conclusions set out in this paper.

Anyshire is an excellent LEA that wishes to support all its schools including Gas Street Comprehensive. It needs support, encouragement and the necessary policy changes from DfES to enable it to do this.



# Food for Thought: child nutrition, the school dinner and the food industry

---

**DEREK GILLARD**

Health experts are now seriously concerned that the diet of our children is unbalanced, with too much salt, sugar and fat and not enough fruit and vegetables. New Labour has sought to address the problem with a raft of ‘healthy-eating’ initiatives and nutritional standards for school meals. But is it doing enough? Derek Gillard recounts the history of the school dinner and offers some suggestions for future government policy.

---

## **Nutrition and Poverty in the 19th Century**

In the latter half of the nineteenth century concerns began to be expressed about the terrible conditions in which most people lived. Central government responded by passing laws to ensure clean water supplies, better houses and education. City Corporations began providing water and drains, refuse disposal and cleaner streets, parks, public baths, libraries and schools. These improvements made a significant difference to health and quality of life – there were no serious outbreaks of cholera after 1865, for example. Yet at the end of the century statisticians pointed out that the health of some people – and particularly children – was no better than it had been during the horrors of the Industrial Revolution. Child mortality was still 150 per 1,000 births. (Today it is about 8 per 1000).

The real problem was poverty. Charles Booth’s huge survey of the poor of London between 1889 and 1903 showed that about a quarter of the population simply didn’t have enough money to live on, and Seebohm Rowntree’s survey of working class families in York in 1901 reported that almost half of the wage-earning population of the city could not afford enough food to keep them ‘physically efficient’. As a result of this poverty, and because many parents didn’t understand nutrition, children were not getting a proper diet.

## **The First School Meals**

In 1879 Manchester began to provide free school meals to ‘destitute and badly nourished children’. In Bradford, School Board member Fred Jowett and his colleague Margaret McMillan lobbied for government legislation to encourage all education authorities to provide meals. McMillan argued that if the state insisted on compulsory education, it must take responsibility for the proper nourishment of school children. The London School Board and others began to provide cheap or free school dinners, as did the Salvation Army and other philanthropic organisations. They had all learned the simple fact that hungry children cannot learn.

(For more information about Bradford’s early school meals project, including some fascinating contemporary documentation, see Web Links below).

As is so often the case, however, little action was taken at a national level until the situation adversely affected Britain’s ability to fight wars. The army was

shocked to discover that more than a third of the young men volunteering to serve in the 1899 Boer War were too small, undernourished or ill to fight. There was enormous concern about how Britain was going to be able to fight wars in the future. A ‘Committee on Physical Deterioration’ was set up.

## **1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act**

The Liberal government of 1906 was committed to reform. This was partly because the newly-formed Labour Party had just had its first MPs elected and the Liberals were anxious to be seen to be meeting the needs of working people. One of the new Labour MPs was Bradford’s Fred Jowett, who used his maiden speech to launch a campaign for school meals. The Education (Provision of Meals) Act of 1906 allowed – but did not require – local authorities to provide school meals.

## **1921 Education Act – free meals**

The 1921 Education Act set out the circumstances in which children were to be eligible for free school meals but the new rules were immediately thrown off course by the miners’ strike of that year, which led to a threefold increase in the cost of providing meals – to almost £1m. The Board of Education introduced a rationing system in an attempt to limit the cost to central government to £300,000. This placed an arbitrary limit on the number of children who could have free meals – something a number of government officials suspected was illegal. The rationing system hit poor areas disproportionately hard. In 1935 Board of Education inspectors found that at Jarrow less than half of those considered malnourished received meals, at Gateshead only a third, while at Whitehaven only 55 of the 400 malnourished children received meals. (Webster 1985)

Local authorities had been very slow in responding to the 1906 School Meals Act. In 1936 a survey of twenty-six LEAs where unemployment was above 25 per cent showed that out of a school population of half a million, less than 15,000 children (2.7 per cent) were receiving free meals. Eight of the authorities had no meals service at all. As late as 1939 less than half of all local authorities were providing a meals service. 130,000 meals were being served daily, reaching about 3 per cent of the school population.

## World War II

Once again, war was the spur to greater activity. With the outbreak of the Second World War, 'raising the standards of the nation's health was recognised as an essential prerequisite for maintaining morale.' (Webster 1997) Food rationing was introduced in 1940 as part of the war effort, partly to ensure fair distribution of the food that was available but also so that the government could ensure a healthy nation and a productive war machine. The school meals service was expanded under guidelines issued in 1940 and 1941.

By February 1945, more than 1.6m meals were being served daily to a third of the school population. Of these, 14 per cent were free, the rest being charged at 4d or 5d, the cost of the ingredients. Local authorities were subsidised for between 75 and 90 per cent of the cost.

### 1944 Education Act

The provision of school meals and milk finally became a statutory duty for local authorities under Section 49 of the 1944 Education Act. In 1945 Lord Woolton told the Warwickshire Women's Institute 'The young need protection and it is proper that the state should take deliberate steps to give them opportunity ... Feeding is not enough, it must be good feeding. The food must be chosen in the light of knowledge of what a growing child needs for building a sound body. And when the food is well chosen, it must be well cooked. This is a task that calls for the highest degree of scientific catering; it mustn't be left to chance.' (quoted by Matthew Fort *The Guardian* 3 December 1999)

### Labour 1945–1951

The Labour government of 1945–51 wanted to provide all meals free of charge but eventually decided that this was unrealistic on grounds of expenditure. Universal free school milk was introduced, however, in August 1946.

By 1951, 49 per cent of the school population ate school meals and 84 per cent drank school milk. It was not all good news, however. Penelope Hall (*The Social Services of Modern England* 1952, quoted in Webster 1997) noted that 'too often the premises are makeshift and overcrowded, the supervisors harassed, the meal bolted and the children hurried out to make room for a second batch.' (Plus ça change!)

Despite food rationing (which lasted until 1954) children in 1950 had healthier diets than their counterparts in the 1990s, according to a study by the Medical Research Council. (James Meikle *The Guardian* 30 November 1999) Post-war four year olds had higher calcium and iron intakes through greater consumption of bread and milk, greens and potatoes. They ate and drank less sugar than children today. The government planners responsible for rationing and nutrition had done 'a stunningly good job' said the study's Director Michael Wadsworth. 'Not only did everyone get enough to eat, they got the right things ... This study shows that food and nutrient intake at the time was better than today. The higher amounts of bread, milk and vegetables consumed in 1950 are closer to the healthy eating guidelines in the 1990s. The children's higher calcium intake could have potential benefits for their bone health in later life while their vegetable consumption may

protect them against heart and respiratory disease and some forms of cancer.'

Post-war children had higher calorie and fat intakes than four year olds forty years later, 'but it is also likely that the children would have been more active and consequently would have needed more energy than children today.'

The typical daily diet of a child in 1950 consisted of eggs or cereal with bread and butter for breakfast; meat, potatoes, a vegetable and a pudding for lunch; bread, butter and jam, cake and sometimes biscuits for tea; and milk last thing at night. Strawberries and rhubarb were the most frequently consumed fruits; fresh peas, lettuce and tomatoes the most commonly eaten vegetables.

### Tories 1951–1964

When the Tories returned to power in 1951 they were disinclined to tinker with the social services set up by Labour. Indeed, in 1952 Financial Secretary to the Treasury John Boyd-Carpenter suggested that school meals were 'much the most socially valuable of all the Social Services'.

The price of a school meal was increased from 7d to 9d in 1953 – a move which led to a decline in uptake – but a circular issued in 1955 updated government advice on nutritional standards and stated that the school meal should be 'adequate in quantity and quality to serve as the main meal of the day.'

From 1956 onwards, however, the Tories began to look for cuts in public expenditure. The Treasury favoured charging the full economic price for a school meal – then 1s 9d. Minister of Education Quintin Hogg (Lord Hailsham) was eventually forced to raise the price from 10d to 1s in April 1957, breaching for the first time the principle that the price should be limited to the cost of the raw materials. Further rises were considered in the early 1960s but political pressures (including an imminent general election) persuaded the government not to implement them.

Thirteen years of Conservative government had thus 'made little difference to the nutritional services' (Webster 1997) in the sense that their structure and character remained in place. However, there had been little or no development of the services and the erosion of subsidies had begun.

### Labour 1964–1970

The return of a Labour government in 1964 did not prevent the Treasury from continuing its campaign for further reductions in government subsidies. Indeed, right from the start of the Wilson administration, it was clear that the Treasury 'was heavily committed ... to increasing the school meals charge as much as possible as soon as possible.' (Treasury memo, November 1965, quoted in Webster 1997) An early proposal for a large increase was thrown out, but in 1968 the price went up from 1s to 1s 6d and in the following year to 1s 9d. Also in 1968, the supply of milk to children in secondary schools was ended.

By the end of the 1960s, absolute poverty had diminished, but 'the extent of the disadvantage of the poorest groups was far greater than was acceptable, and campaigners on behalf of family support and the poor were vocal in their complaints about the response of the Labour administration to the problem of poverty ... It is arguable that the actions of the Labour administration in 1968, rather than Thatcher's more notorious snatching of



milk from primary schools, marked the beginning of the downward spiral of the nutritional programme.’ (Webster 1997)

### **Margaret Thatcher**

In June 1970 Margaret Thatcher became Secretary of State for Education in Ted Heath’s new Conservative government. The economic outlook was bleak and the Tories were looking for cuts to meet their election pledges on tax. Shortly after the election, Heath wrote to his cabinet, telling them ‘We shall need determination and a willingness among spending ministers to accept reductions in programmes which, from a departmental stand point, they would be reluctant to make.’ In August 1970, Thatcher responded to a Treasury demand for education cuts in four areas: Further Education fees; Library book borrowing charges; School meal charges; Free school milk.

For someone who later became known for her enthusiasm for cutting public spending, she seems to have been remarkably concerned about the public perception of any cuts. On the demand to end free school milk, she said ‘I think that the complete withdrawal of free milk for our school children would be too drastic a step and would arouse more widespread public antagonism than the saving justifies.’ She proposed that milk should be available only to pupils in nursery and primary schools, a compromise which was later accepted. On increasing charges for school meals she wrote ‘I think that we should proceed by fewer and larger steps so as to reduce the occasions for the inevitable recurrence of criticism whenever an increase is made in school meal charges. On this footing, I propose raising the charge to 12p next April and to 14p in April 1973; over the four year period 1971–74 this will produce £16m more in savings than would your own proposals.’

But at the Cabinet meeting of 15 September 1970 Mrs Thatcher was more enthusiastic about cuts to her department’s bill. The minutes record that ‘The Secretary of State for Education and Science said that she had been able to offer the Chief Secretary, Treasury, rather larger savings than he had sought on school meals, school milk, further education and library charges.’ The cuts were worth £200m – though some of this would be ploughed back into primary schools. Two weeks later the Cabinet accepted the package (except the proposal on library fees) and the Secretary of State earned herself the title ‘Thatcher Thatcher, Milk Snatcher!’ (BBC News 1 January 2001)

### **The Thatcher Governments 1979–1990**

Thatcher’s overwhelming desire to slash public spending became much clearer when she became Prime Minister in 1979. During her first year in power she finally killed off the provision of school milk. But she was to go on to do much greater damage.

Her right-wing government was bent on an orgy of privatisation of public services. Having disposed of school milk, the Tories went on to inflict a double blow on the school meals service itself. First, the 1980 Education Act abolished the minimum nutritional standards for school meals and removed the statutory obligation on LEAs to provide a meals service, requiring them only to provide food for children of families on supplementary benefit or family income supplement who were eligible for free meals. This disastrous decision was compounded by the introduction of Commercial Competitive Tendering, which

obliged local authorities to choose the most ‘competitive’ (for which read ‘cheap’) catering on offer. As a result, private companies took over many school kitchens and, in order to maximise profit and eliminate waste, they persuaded schools to go over to free-choice cafeteria systems. The result, according to the Coronary Prevention Group, was the ‘easy option of providing popular fast-food items such as burgers and chips.’ (Joanna Blythman *The Guardian* 23 July 1999)

Thatcher hadn’t finished yet. The Social Security Act of 1986 (which came into force in 1988) resulted in thousands of children losing their entitlement to free school meals.

### **Health Concerns Grow**

Thatcher couldn’t have destroyed the nutritional basis of school meals at a worse moment. The eighties and nineties saw a number of significant changes in British society. There were social changes, with greater mobility, more working mothers and Thatcher’s own emphasis on the individual rather than the group. There were technological changes, including big increases in the use of the freezer and the microwave (leading to a reduction in home cooking), and the video and the computer (leading to a more sedentary lifestyle for many children). Commercial pressures resulted in the rise of the big supermarkets and a huge increase in television advertising. There was a rapid widening of the poverty gap, caused by Tory tax cuts and by their cynical use of unemployment as a political and economic tool. In education, the selling of school fields led to a decrease in physical activity, while the National Curriculum’s effective abolition of Home Economics resulted in children leaving school with little interest in or understanding of food preparation. All these factors led to a huge change in the nation’s diet, with much less fresh food being cooked at home and a much greater reliance on ready-made (and higher profit) meals.

### **1997 New Labour**

By the time Labour – in the guise of ‘New Labour’ – returned to power in 1997, there was a mountain of evidence that the nation’s – and especially children’s – diets had become significantly less healthy, with excessive levels of sugar, salt and fat.

The National Heart Forum campaigned to increase the average daily consumption of vegetables and fruit from 250g to 400g a day and estimated that this would cut deaths from heart disease in the UK by thirty thousand a year. (Chris Mihill *The Guardian* 25 March 1997)

The Medical Research Council reported that sugar consumption in Britain had risen by more than 30 per cent between 1980 and 2000. The UK, it said, was now the fattest European nation, with 17 per cent of men and 20 per cent of women considered clinically obese. It concluded that today’s children were more at risk of developing osteoporosis, heart and respiratory diseases and some forms of cancer than their more deprived parents and grandparents. (John Crace *The Guardian* 23 May 2000)

Studies of children in Saudi Arabia and Canada showed that a diet of junk food and inadequate quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables led to an increased risk of developing asthma. (Tim Radford *The Guardian* 22 August 2000)

The Institute of Child Health reported that two-thirds of pre-school children had a poor diet heavily reliant on white bread, chips, crisps and sweets and that rates of obesity

among children had doubled between 1980 and 2000. (Helen Carter *The Guardian* 6 August 2002)

A report in the *American Journal of Paediatrics* concluded that 'a TV in the child's bedroom is the strongest marker of increased risk of being overweight.' (Kate Hilpern *The Guardian* 11 September 2002)

The National Health Service opened its first clinic to deal with the problem of childhood obesity. (Jo Revill *The Observer* 3 November 2002)

Doctors at Bristol and Southampton warned that the rise in obesity was leading to a growing incidence of diabetes among teenagers. (James Meikle *The Guardian* 21 February 2002)

Andrew Prentice, Professor of International Nutrition at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said parents might soon be outliving their children. 'Seriously obese children are losing up to nine years on average through diseases that were not as common among their parents.' (Kate Hilpern *The Guardian* 11 September 2002)

The Fabian Society urged the government to ban advertisements for sweets and fizzy drinks targeted at children, and called for subsidies for food shops in 'food poor' neighbourhoods, compulsory cookery classes in schools and regular government advice to households on nutritious foods. (John Carvel *The Guardian* 27 December 2002)

Labour's newly-created Food Standards Agency (FSA) warned that most children were eating more than the recommended levels of salt which could lead to health problems later in life, including high blood pressure. Processed food accounted for three-quarters of all the salt consumed. FSA Chair Sir John Krebs urged the food industry to cut added salt levels. 'While consumers can add less salt at the table and in cooking, they cannot change the amounts in processed foods, which make up the highest proportion of our salt intake. This is the responsibility of the industry,' he said. (Sarah Boseley *The Guardian* 15 May 2002)

Meanwhile, teachers viewed with increasing dismay the fat and sugar in their pupils' lunches and bemoaned the impossibility of explaining algebraic equations or irregular verbs to pupils who had gorged themselves on chips, doughnuts, marshmallows and cola. (Joanna Blythman *The Guardian* 23 July 1999)

### **1997 Survey of Children's Diets**

One of the FSA's first tasks, in partnership with the Department of Health, was to conduct a detailed survey of young people's diet and nutrition – the first such survey in Britain since 1983.

Seventeen hundred children aged between four and eighteen were questioned. The report, published in June 2000, said children were eating too much junk food, less fresh fruit and vegetables than ever before and not taking enough exercise.

On average, children ate less than half the recommended daily amount of five portions of fruit and vegetables. One child in five hadn't eaten a single piece of fruit in the week in which the survey was carried out. The only good news was that consumption of fat was falling.

Children ate mostly processed or convenience foods. White bread, savoury snacks, crisps, biscuits, potatoes and chocolate featured strongly in their diet. Nine out of ten drank fizzy drinks. This 'junk' diet contained excessive

amounts of salt and sugar. Children were getting a third of their energy from sugar. (The recommended level is eleven per cent). Boys consumed between 8.5g and 12.5g of salt a day. (The recommended daily intake is 6g).

Of particular concern, it was noted that children from poorer backgrounds had much worse diets, were fatter and did less exercise than children from better-off families. A survey by the Social Exclusion Unit had shown that on many low-income estates there was no access to shops selling affordable fruit and vegetables. FSA Deputy Chair Suzi Leather said diets increasingly indicated social exclusion. 'In some areas there is better access to, and more choice of, street drugs than fresh fruit and vegetables,' she said.

Responding to the survey, government ministers said they would ask food industry chiefs to 'tone down' the way they advertised fizzy drinks, crisps and snacks and help to promote healthy lifestyles instead. The industry was unimpressed. Its trade body, the Food and Drink Federation, said 'the ciabatta and sun-dried tomatoes set's patronising approach does not work'. (Cherry Norton *The Independent* 2 June 2000; James Meikle *The Guardian* 2 June 2000)

### **Nutritional Standards for School Meals**

The government announced that it would lay down nutritional guidelines under which school canteens must ensure a proper choice of four main categories of food – fruit and vegetables, meat and protein, starchy foods, and milk and dairy products. 'Children growing up on low incomes eat less fruit and vegetables than those on higher income, and they are more likely to be eating no fruit, vegetables or fruit juice at all,' said Public Health Minister Yvette Cooper. 'We need to make sure that fruit and vegetables are accessible and affordable to everyone.'

Education Secretary David Blunkett issued a draft of the new regulations for school meals in the autumn of 1999. The rules – whose aim was to ensure that children had a balanced diet – would, as suggested, be based on providing a balance of food groups – starchy foods, fruit, vegetables, meat and fish. There would also be specific guidance on certain foods – in primary schools, for example, baked beans should not be served more than once a week and chips not more than three times a week. Fish should be on the menu at least once a week. (David Ward *The Guardian* 15 December 1999)

There was widespread criticism of the government's approach. Unsurprisingly, the Tories didn't like the proposals at all and described them as 'Nanny Stateism'. But for almost everyone else, Blunkett's proposals did not go far enough.

The Commons Education Select Committee criticised the approach as too imprecise. 'The compulsory element of the regulations should be based on scientific, nutrient-based guidelines,' it said. 'Contracts with caterers should specify minimum nutritional standards which can readily be enforced. While we welcome the food groups approach as helpful, non-technical guidance for lay governors and parents, we are not persuaded that it is a suitable basis for statutory regulation.'

Food campaigners were not satisfied, either. Director of the National Heart Forum Imogen Sharp said it was not enough simply to specify food groups and restrict how often chips or baked beans were served. 'Nutrition-based

standards would safeguard the content of meals on offer, give caterers flexibility and can also be measured and monitored. Only this way will we ensure that the hidden fat in school meals is reduced and that children consume adequate levels of nutrients, such as iron and calcium.' She urged ministers to 'be prescriptive in nutritional terms but not in food terms' and allow for local flexibility and local interpretation. (David Ward *The Guardian* 15 December 1999)

Thames Valley University's Professor of Food Policy Dr Tim Lang said ministers had been seduced by the food industry. 'Parents don't want their children to eat a load of rubbish and they expect the government to set standards. It seems ministers are saying they cannot be prescriptive, cannot be seen to be nannies – when they are being astonishing nannies when it comes to the curriculum.'

Schools Minister Jacqui Smith responded 'While it is possible to strongly encourage the avoidance of unhealthy eating, it is not feasible to dictate precise nutritional portions or dietary prescriptions ... our standards will be flexible enough for caterers to provide the foods pupils like to eat. Parents can be assured that their children are able to have a healthy meal at school every day.' (David Ward *The Guardian* 15 December 1999)

The Local Authority Caterers Association was, understandably, happy that the government's approach was less than prescriptive. 'Selection by nutrient content at the point of sale is a more difficult task for children whilst selection by food group enables them to make more sensible, balanced choices,' it said.

The nutritional standards for school meals – the first for twenty years – were eventually published on 12 July 2000 and became compulsory in April 2001. (The two documents – one for primary schools, one for secondaries – can be downloaded in PDF format from the DfES website – see Web Links below for details).

The new rules specified that chips or other fried potatoes must not be served in primary schools more than three times a week and baked beans no more than once a week. Secondary schools would be able to offer chips every day, though a healthy alternative such as pasta must also be offered. Cheese could be served 'freely as a main protein dish', fresh fruit must be offered at least twice a week and fruit in a dessert daily. Plans to restrict how much of such food could be eaten in school dining rooms were dropped, as was a legal limit on the number of times red meat could appear on the menu. (Rebecca Smithers *The Guardian* 13 July 2000)

The Child Poverty Action Group accused the government of selling out to the catering industry and said the guidelines should have been based on nutritional values. Campaigns officer Sue Brighthouse said 'We think the caterers have won the day because what they are saying is that it would be too difficult to implement nutrition-based standards.'

The first monitoring of school caterers to ensure they are meeting the national nutritional standards will be undertaken this autumn (2003) and the DfES says it plans to 'work very closely' with schools that are not complying with them. (Hilly Janes *The Guardian* 15 April 2003)

### **Other Government Initiatives**

New Labour has pioneered a myriad of schemes designed to get children eating more healthily, including the National

School Fruit Scheme, breakfast clubs, healthy tuck shops, improved access to drinking water, free milk for under-fives and a 'National Healthy School Standard' which encourages lifestyle-improving programmes. OFSTED and the FSA are to inspect school tuck shops, vending machines and neighbourhood chip shops, and monitor breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and school meals (including packed lunches) to see if they were contributing towards the growing problem of childhood obesity. There are to be trials of 'healthy drink' vending machines. Research is to be undertaken to improve lessons on food preparation, hygiene and the importance of a balanced diet, though, curiously, officials have stressed this will not be a return to home economics. (James Meikle *The Guardian* 23 December 2002)

So New Labour has certainly worked hard to be *seen* to be doing something about child nutrition. However, its many schemes appear to be 'about as joined up as a five year old's handwriting,' (Hilly Janes *The Guardian* 3 December 2002) and, as I shall demonstrate later, they have had little impact on children's eating habits. One of the reasons for this is that the government's efforts are being undermined by its own unwillingness to confront two problems posed by the vested interests of the food industry: the advertising of junk foods on television and promotional schemes in schools.

### **Advertising**

A few facts and figures illustrate the scale of the problem. In 2001 food firms spent almost £200m advertising chocolate, confectionery, crisps and snacks but only £17m promoting fruit and vegetables. (Jo Revill *The Observer* 17 November 2002) Of the top 20 British advertisers, five are food companies and McDonald's alone spent over £42m in 2002 – more than Nike or British Airways. The average British child watches ten food commercials every hour on television (nine of them for products high in fat, sugar, and/or salt) and swallows more than two hundred litres of sweet fizzy drinks a year. (Jo Revill *The Observer* 3 November 2002; Sarah Boseley *The Guardian* 9 January 2003)

Advertisers use sports stars to associate junk food with health. So David Beckham is seen drinking Pepsi, Alan Shearer eats at McDonald's and sales of Walker's crisps have more than doubled since it began using Gary Lineker in 1995. The Food Commission's Research Officer Kath Dalmeny commented 'It's a really damaging message to be sending out to children. But when even the Football Association and the Premier League don't see anything wrong with taking sponsorship money from the chocolate manufacturers and the soft drinks companies, it is hard to see how that will change.' (Claire Cozens *The Guardian* 10 May 2003)

Dalmeny also points to the use of other, more subtle images to create positive attitudes towards unhealthy foods. 'There's a campaign for Kentucky Fried Chicken that shows a family sitting eating a KFC meal while joking about the jumper granny has knitted for their father. That, I think, is a classic example. It's attributing emotions to the product that have nothing to do with Kentucky Fried Chicken. It's a highly insidious way of trying to persuade people to buy what is basically a very unhealthy product.'

Government ministers can't say they haven't been warned about the results of all this advertising. An

International Obesity Task Force report presented to the European Union summit on obesity in Copenhagen argued that the food industry should be prevented from targeting children with adverts for junk food and sweets, and that vending machines for soft drinks should not be allowed in schools. 'Officials are pretty terrified around the whole of Europe about how to confront some of these huge vested interests,' said Task Force Chair Philip James. 'The fast food and soft drink industries have enormous vested interests which we need to confront.' (Sarah Boseley *The Guardian* 13 September 2002)

And at first, it looked as though the government might be prepared to do just that. The FSA announced it would commission research into the promotional activities of the food industry and how they influence children's eating habits. (Jo Revill *The Observer* 3 November 2002)

But it quickly became clear that the government had no intention of restricting food industry advertising. A spokeswoman for the Department of Health said 'Nothing is being ruled in or out in future efforts to tackle obesity, but we are not currently considering restrictions on food advertising for children.' Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell (whose department regulates television advertising) went further and privately assured food industry executives that there would be no ban on food commercials shown during children's TV time because such a ban might 'adversely affect the quality of children's programming.' (Jo Revill *The Observer* 17 November 2002)

Her comments were greeted with dismay by the 130 Labour MPs who had signed an early day motion asking the government to bring in a ban on all advertising to pre-school children. Leading nutritionists were equally angry. Professor Philip James said 'I'm dismayed by this. We are condemning our children to be manipulated by industry, as part of public policy.' The government was seriously out of step with the public on the issue, too. A Guardian/ICM poll revealed that 82 per cent of Britons want food advertisements aimed at children to be banned or more tightly regulated. (Felicity Lawrence *The Guardian* 10 May 2002)

### Promotional Schemes in Schools

Schemes like those sponsored by Walker's crisps, Pringles and Cadbury's are supposed to conform to 'best practice' guidelines agreed in 2001 by the Consumers' Association, advertisers and the Education Department. A key principle is that 'materials should not encourage unhealthy activities'.

Walker's 'Free Books for Schools' scheme has been running for five years. In exchange for tokens printed in Rupert Murdoch's tabloids and on packets of Quavers, Monster Munch, French Fries, Squares, Footballs, 3Ds and Wotsits, schools can claim books published by HarperCollins. (Proprietor: R Murdoch). Walkers says it is aiming 'to make a real contribution to literacy' and claims that 'any impact on sales is secondary.' According to its 'Free Books for Schools' website, the scheme is supported by the government, the National Association of Head Teachers, the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations and the Literacy Trust.

Tim Minogue (*The Guardian* 6 January 2003) was horrified when his daughter was given a letter from her Head Teacher exhorting her to 'Be part of the six-month collecting frenzy!' Walkers' scheme clearly flouts the 'best

practice' guidelines. 'I couldn't tell a Walkers Wotsit from any other extruded bundle of E numbers,' he wrote. 'But I know I don't want my daughter eating this stuff. What job is it of her school to encourage her in a 'frenzy' of consumption of junk snacks?'

Cadbury's 'Get Active' scheme has caused even more anger. The scheme requires children to eat 160m bars of chocolate – containing almost 2m kg of fat – in order to swap the wrappers for 'free' sports equipment for their schools.

Incredibly, the scheme has the backing of the Youth Sport Trust and of sports stars Paula Radcliffe and Audley Harrison. It has even been endorsed by Sports Minister Richard Caborn. A Cadbury press release quoted him as saying that he is 'delighted that Cadbury is prepared to support a drive [which] could make a real difference to the quality of young people's lives.' The Department of Sport said it did not believe the campaign would encourage children to buy more chocolate. 'The campaign will encourage children to realise that when they eat chocolate they need to do it in the context of a balanced life and being active,' a spokesman said.

In a letter to *The Guardian* (5 May 2003) Chief Executive Officer of Cadbury Schweppes John Sunderland wrote 'All the informed authorities agree that the answer is a balanced lifestyle that combines sensible diet with sufficient physical exercise.' He admitted the scheme had 'commercial objectives' but insisted 'This is not designed to sell more chocolate.' (It would be interesting to know what commercial objectives Cadbury could possibly have other than selling more chocolate).

Consumer groups and health organisations are furious. Director of the Food Commission Tim Lobstein said 'The amounts of chocolate involved for these 'gifts' is quite astounding. It is ridiculous to combine a fitness campaign with eating chocolate.' British Dietetic Association spokeswoman Catherine Collins said the promotion went against all public health messages. 'We are running an Eat to be Fit campaign at the moment warning children of obesity. Activity is a vital part of staying fit and linking it with eating chocolate is not on.'

In a letter to *The Guardian* (5 May 2003) the National Consumer Council's Frances Harrison wrote 'The new National Curriculum citizenship programme ... aims to raise awareness of persuasive marketing forces. How far such initiatives can go in counterbalancing well-resourced marketing campaigns is a moot point.'

So junk food advertising on television and in-school promotions by junk food companies are real problems for those seeking to encourage healthy eating. But there are also tuck shops and vending machines full of junk food and fizzy drinks, and the activities of firms like JazzyMedia, which has already given schools millions of exercise books bearing advertisements for sugary drinks and is now planning to promote samples of drinks and crisps in school dining halls at lunchtime. (Hilly Janes *The Guardian* 15 April 2003)

### Two Years on: has anything changed?

Have the government's healthy eating schemes – and in particular, their nutritional standards for school meals – had any impact on children's diets?

In 1999, the most popular foods in school canteens were chips, pizza, sausages, hot dogs, spaghetti and

burgers. (Local Authority Caterers Association School Meals Survey quoted by Joanna Blythman *The Guardian* 23 July 1999)

Today, two years after the government introduced its nutritional guidelines, a survey for *Which?* magazine found that although school caterers are complying with the new rules, children are still choosing the least healthy options. (Felicity Lawrence *The Guardian* 6 March 2003) The most popular foods in school canteens are pizza, chicken nuggets and fishcakes, chips, potato-based 'smiley faces' and baked beans. The report says children between the ages of ten and fifteen are surviving on crisps, chips and chocolate bars washed down with soft drinks – a diet high in fat, sugar and salt, and low in fibre, iron, folate, zinc and other nutrients essential to growth.

Children are not getting vital nutrients because they are eating, on average, only two portions of fruit or vegetables a day – older boys only one portion – with school meals contributing less than one portion a day. They are consuming thirty times more soft drinks and twenty-five times more confectionery than they did in 1950.

*Which?* researcher Rachel Clemons said 'Children's eating habits are a real cause for concern. For many children their main meal of the day is the school meal. If they are not eating the right food there, it has a real impact on their health.'

The survey makes clear that health education alone is not enough to change children's eating habits. Most of those who kept food diaries for the survey knew which foods were good for them and understood that poor diets could lead to weight problems and diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer. But they still chose the fatty and sugary foods first.

### Why Worry?

Does any of this matter? Of course. Why? There are four fairly obvious reasons.

First, and most obviously, this is about the future health of the nation. Numerous studies show that food habits learned in early life persist for years. Children are learning at school eating habits which will predispose them to obesity and a range of serious diseases. (Joanna Blythman *The Guardian* 23 July 1999)

Second, many children eat little but junk at home. As we have already seen, pressure of work, changes in lifestyle, food industry advertising and a lack of food education have led to a culture in which few families sit down together for traditional meals. Many parents therefore assume – or hope – that their children are getting a decent meal at school. Three fifths of parents say school meals play a vital role in their children's diet and more than a fifth admit to relying on the school canteen to provide a nutritious diet. (Local Authority Caterers' Association survey quoted by Hilly Janes *The Guardian* 3 December 2002)

Third, a healthy diet actually makes a difference to children's ability to learn. Many schools have reported improvements in achievement following healthy eating schemes. Wolsey Junior School and Whitehorse Manor School in south London, for example, noted significant improvements in academic results following bans on junk food. (Joanna Blythman *The Guardian* 23 July 1999)

Fourth, a healthy diet improves children's behaviour. There is a wealth of international research into the effects of vitamins, minerals and other compounds such as amino

acids on brain chemistry. Among the nutrients known to affect mood and behaviour are zinc, essential fatty acids, vitamins B5 and B6, and calcium and magnesium.

A study undertaken at the Young Offenders' Institution in Aylesbury demonstrated significant improvements in behaviour when inmates were given supplementary vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids. (*British Journal of Psychiatry* 2002, quoted by Jean West *The Observer* 23 February 2003) Further work on the diets of juvenile delinquents is being done at the Cactus Clinic at Middlesbrough's Teesside University. And Janice Hill, an expert in behavioural disorders, insists that many of the restless, agitated symptoms displayed by children with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) are linked to the foods they have eaten. (Jean West *The Observer* 23 February 2003)

### So Where Do We Go from Here?

Responsibility for children's eating habits is shared between parents, schools and the government.

Of course it is primarily the duty of parents to see that their offspring are well fed. Right-wing politicians regard it as entirely a matter for parents and not something the state should get involved in. This will not do. As we have seen, many parents, through ignorance or through pressures of work and time, are not ensuring that their children get a decent diet. No responsible government can ignore the widespread development of unhealthy eating habits whose long-term effects on the National Health Service will be incalculable.

In our schools, education in nutrition and food preparation is sadly lacking. This is not the schools' fault. The government-imposed regime of National Curriculum, tests, targets and league tables, has all but killed it off through pressure to 'raise standards' in basic subjects. In twenty years' time we'll have a nation of obese diabetics – but at least they'll be able to read and write.

So, whether the Tories – or Blair's New Labour Party – like it or not, the government must legislate. The following areas need urgent attention.

- The nutritional standards for school meals must be made more rigorous.
- Competitive tendering and the use of privatised catering companies should be reviewed.
- There must be an increase in the cost of ingredients. Even a small increase from the present 40–50p per meal to, say, 60–70p would make a significant difference to the quality and quantity of food offered.
- The reintroduction of subsidies should be considered.
- Eligibility for free meals should be widened and take-up encouraged.
- Nutrition and food preparation must be made important elements of the National Curriculum.
- The promotion of junk food in schools through voucher schemes, vending machines and exercise books carrying advertisements must be banned.
- Television advertising of junk food to children must be banned.

If the government is serious about the diet of our children and the future health of the nation, it must do something about all the above. If it fails to do so, the long-term consequence will be a nation of obese people suffering serious diseases and imposing an ever-increasing burden on the National Health Service.

## Postscript

Since the above article was written, US food giant Kraft, faced with the threat of obesity lawsuits, has announced that it will reduce its portion sizes, cut the sugar, fat and calorie content of many of its foods, improve nutritional labelling, set guidelines for advertising to children and offer healthier snacks in school vending machines. (David Teather *The Guardian* 2 July 2003) A report by JP Morgan has identified Cadbury Schweppes as the European food manufacturer most at risk of obesity lawsuits (Michael Harrison *The Independent* 3 July 2003) and New York has announced it is to ban junk foods and fizzy drinks from its school vending machines.

## References

- Webster, Charles (1985) Health, Welfare and Unemployment during the Depression from the journal, *Past and Present*, 109.
- Webster, Charles (1997) Government Policy on School Meals and Welfare Foods 1939–1970, in David F. Smith, *Nutrition in Britain*. London: Routledge.

## Web Links

### *Derek Gillard's Website*

This article (and others) can be found in Derek Gillard's Education Archive at [www.dg.dial.pipex.com](http://www.dg.dial.pipex.com)

### *Guardian Archive Search*

Where a reference is shown to *The Guardian* or *The*

*Observer*, you can find the original article by going to

[www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/0,4271,,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/0,4271,,00.html)

Type in the author's name and select the appropriate date.

### *Bradford's early school meals project*

[learningcurve.pro.gov.uk/snapshots/snapshot29/snapshot29.htm](http://learningcurve.pro.gov.uk/snapshots/snapshot29/snapshot29.htm)

### *The Government's Guidance for School Caterers*

[www.dfes.gov.uk/schoollunches/default.shtml](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoollunches/default.shtml)

# Networked Learning: from competition to collaboration

---

**BARBARA SPENDER**

The author, a writer/researcher with the National College for School Leadership, describes the College's innovative Networked Learning Programme

---

During periods of rapid and widespread change it's easy to become so focussed on adapting to innovation that we forget to acknowledge the debt owed by newness to longer term processes of development and social change. As a GCE student in 1970 I was taught that the great reform age of the Victorians was governed by the different but parallel philosophies of the ruling parties – the Tories' interest in structural improvement and Liberal commitment to social advancement. This broad distinction in political thought could be said to have been replicated in the more recent history of education. The 1988 Education Act changed the structure of the education system to support government's emphasis on accountability and raising standards; subsequent innovation has been driven by a need for cultural change. The establishment of the National College for School Leadership's Networked Learning programme – in which groups of six or more schools bid for funding and support to create networks, each with its own learning focus – addresses this need. The programme is intended to develop cultural norms within education which are based on collaboration in learning activities, rather than competition based on pupil outcomes.

Networking is a familiar concept, long recognised as critical to success in many different contexts. Networked learning is a relatively new idea which has been explored in research literature but, until now, not enacted within a coherent and structured framework. The Networked Learning programme is essentially a large scale practical experiment designed to test the relatively simple idea that unmediated dialogue between research and the expertise of the classroom practitioner can generate valuable new knowledge. Networked learning provides a means of generating that knowledge and making it directly accessible to practitioners throughout the education system. The programme embraces the need and aspirations of a wide variety of schools, encouraging them to move from what has become a highly competitive, market forces based outlook towards a more democratic, responsive and collaborative climate which, at all levels, encompasses both practice and research into practice. It challenges schools and their partners in LEAs and Higher Education to think about their relationships in new ways, a process which is often uncomfortable but potentially productive. The programme's success will be visible in improved educational experiences for children, in a flattening of traditional hierarchical structures within and between schools and their partners and in the practical expression of its core objectives – distributed leadership, learning about learning and the creation of spaces within which individual

participants work together to reflect on practice and think creatively.

## **Distributed Leadership**

Part of the programme's agenda, in keeping with the College's overall remit, is to foster and promote distributed leadership. This signals a clear move away from the view of the headteacher as 'leader' towards a concept of leadership as an egalitarian and democratic collective responsibility in which all network members are both empowered to direct their own learning and encouraged and expected to have an input into strategic decision-making. The intention behind this conscious shift in thinking (so inclusive that pupils too are invited to become proactive learners and opinion-formers) is to facilitate the development of more dynamic and flexible organisational structures and to foster a culture which is supportive of individual innovation.

One of the most exciting possibilities offered by this open and responsive approach to leadership is the emerging impact of pupil 'voice'. In its early stages – the first fully funded networks began their work on this four year programme less than a year ago – the most significant developments have occurred at the level of the adult participant but already children too are beginning to experience a greater freedom in understanding and organising their own learning. Pupils are invited to participate in pupil voice conferences; their engagement from primary school onwards in the debate about learning marks a significant shift away from an educational climate in which children are implicitly an adapted or 'manufactured' output towards recognition of the pupil as an individual who needs to be fully engaged as a leader in his or her own learning.

For adults networked learning is based on participants' recognition of the strengths of colleagues facing challenges at all levels and on willingness to engage in open and honest conversation about problems and successes in an atmosphere infused with enthusiasm and support. Dialogue based on interest and expertise rather than status is essential as is the willingness to recognise the contribution each person at every level has to make to learning.

## **Learning about Learning**

An informed examination of how and why the programme acts to improve learning – the distinction between genuine 'value-added' and something not much more substantial than a manifestation of the Hawthorne effect – is an integral element in its design. Research and enquiry occupy a central position within the programme, a centrality which is replicated within each network. In networks it is assumed that individual practitioners have accumulated wisdom and

expertise which has the potential to benefit colleagues throughout the system but which too often remains behind the closed classroom door. Individual teachers and support staff know what works for them and for their pupils but often lack time and opportunity to investigate why or to articulate what they have observed so that others can build on their practice. Encouraging practitioners to engage in enquiry and research validates their experience and promotes the sharing and pooling of knowledge. The further addition of improved access to the existing research base – with University partners acting as guides rather than as intermediaries or gatekeepers – fosters the potential for creating new knowledge and allows the individual to identify more closely with a wider, independently creative teaching profession.

At the same time the College's Networked Learning Group, which acts as a central resource for more than 1000 schools in 84 current networks (more will begin work in September 2003) is using its access to the thousand networked schools already in the programme to build a picture of how networks work, how learning occurs within them and what conditions support and promote it. As the first major project in this field the Group's research is attracting a lot of international attention. Nowhere else has networked learning been attempted nationally on so broad and ambitious a scale. It's anticipated that this research will result in the presentation of diverse models for networking dependent on local and national circumstances and need. There will be no blueprint for networked learning. The entire programme could in fact be characterised as a multi-party learning dialogue; one which respects difference and diversity and which is based on equality and professionalism.

### **The Authentic Voice of the Practitioner**

Despite contemporary emphasis on the qualities of the reflective practitioner it is often difficult for school staff to find time and space in which to engage in reflection. At any networked learning event appreciation of the opportunities the programme offers for reflection is a strong recurring theme, coming second only to the value participants place on stimulating and challenging, but non-competitive, professional dialogue. The leadership and

research opportunities outlined above offer school staff the chance to reclaim the conscious professionalism which has been eroded by heavy-handed accountability procedures and rapidly changing expectations of the education system as the most significant mechanism for the production of a stable society. The programme offers independence, choice and self-evaluation rather than inflexibility and coercion. It is therefore in sympathy with the values and expectations of the post-industrial society which formal education systems are expected to support. The programme provides a reflective space within which can be heard the authentic voice of the practitioner, energised by collaboration, distributed leadership and research.

### **Conclusion**

At present all this may sound rather distant and Utopian, or, to the cynic, like a traditional school improvement programme disguised as cultural innovation. Persuading school staff to think differently – to think collaboratively rather than competitively, to be confident and assertive rather than insular and defensive – can be challenging. Many teachers and many schools have experienced a prolonged period of imposed change accompanied by forms of accountability too often expressed as threats. One of the major challenges is for schools to abandon hierarchies and structures designed to cope with these external impositions and to replace them with new, flexible and open structures which encourage free movement of professional and personal expertise across institutions. There is substantial evidence that schools actively want to participate in this cultural change. The 84 diverse, geographically dispersed networks already in operation are eager to seek ways of establishing links with each other. The voices of individuals who see networked learning as re-energising are beginning to be heard. Inevitably one might envisage tensions between the programme's creative flexibility and originality and the established rigidity of the governmental structures and expectations within which it operates. But it is precisely this fluidity and flexibility, the absence of visible horizons (letting go of the hierarchical control mechanisms which limited the effectiveness of so many previous initiatives) which offer the greatest prospect of success for networked learning.



# Learning Mentors: policy ‘hopes’, professional identities and ‘additionalities’

JOHN BATEMAN & CHRISTOPHER RHODES

The authors teach in the School of Education, University of Wolverhampton.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the relationship between education policy hopes for the new initiative of learning mentors and the development of their professional identities. The need to conceptualise the role of learning mentors in pursuing ‘additionalities’ over specific targets for school pupils is also recognised as a significant one. In order to understand the hopes for the emergent professionalism of learning mentors, the values underpinning ‘additionality’ will be examined, and that, in turn, has implications for how their identities can develop. In the process of their professionalisation, tension can be seen as emerging between ‘democratic’ and ‘managerial’ discourses that are polarised. The context of the policy ‘construction’ of learning mentors is a mini-action zone in the West Midlands that forms the background in which the relationship will be examined.

## ‘High’ Policy Hopes and Initiatives

The origin of this inquiry is focused on the shift towards using policy as the driver of educational change. This policy trend gained prominence in the 1990s identified in the school effectiveness movement, which was hopeful that the causes of school-based problems could be detected in order to improve the education system. Its legacy has informed the New Labour search for a way to ‘join up’ thinking that links educational practices with adequate policy, in the belief that larger problems such as social exclusion can be tackled through educational reform. More specifically, Barber (2001) has argued that ‘modernising’ policy initiatives like Excellence in Cities (EiC) have generated ‘high’ expectations that barriers to learning will be addressed. So it is important to examine how policy hopes determine new roles within schools that, in turn, alter their chances of effectiveness. These hopes have apparently been fulfilled in significant ways. According to a recent OFSTED report (2003) that examined the EiC initiative, claims were made that the newly constituted learning mentors were having an important impact on disaffected pupils in deprived areas. A more extensive analysis of the case of learning mentors as a policy ‘construction’ is therefore important in order to determine how far their practices are being embedded.

This analysis is partly based on a local evaluation of an EiC Action Zone recently completed that has provided empirical evidence on the changing nature of learning mentors (Bateman et al, 2003). The evaluation acquired data from questionnaires provided by parents, pupils and staff. Also interviews were conducted with a small number

of school staff that included: headteachers; ‘operational’ managers; teachers; teaching assistants; the Zone Director; and different learning mentors in the majority of schools. The following quotes are taken from the questionnaires and interviews highlighting the learning mentors’ contribution to resolving pupil problems, such as improvement of mentee behaviour:

*‘the appointment of a learning mentor has resulted in less disruption in classrooms’*

*‘they help with addressing bullying and other anti-discriminatory behaviour’*

*‘the learning mentor has worked with me to help me with behaviour’*

*‘I don’t lose my temper anymore ... lots of children are getting better’*

*‘(I would recommend this school) because we can say why we are upset now’*

*‘(the mentor) puts stickers on and stops people from fighting’*

Although the value of these claims cannot be ignored, they need to be approached with caution. The interpretation of the effect of the mentor raises questions concerning the nature of the discursive gap between the perceived impact of the learning mentor and the philosophies underpinning their work, which need to be analysed in order to deepen understanding. These issues will be addressed in relation to the emerging professionalism of the mentors.

## Professionalism at What Price?

Understanding the rise in the professionalism of learning mentors needs to be related to a broader context that implies they may have to pay a price for their newly-found status. The acquiring of professionalism has emerged as an important objective attained through preserving status, which has ideological connotations. Newman and Clarke (1997) have recently seen managerialism, deriving from new public management philosophy, as threatening the autonomy of the professions because they can be ‘colonised’ through subordination, displacement and cooption by management. The teaching profession provides a graphic example as more pressure was placed on them, due to demands of the National Curriculum and global economic shifts (Whitty, 2000). Increasingly the teacher’s performance was measured by competencies that placed them at risk of being ‘deprofessionalised’.

This also had ethical implications because teachers felt the need to resist the bureaucratic imperatives of target setting. The hope for 'reprofessionalisation' is derived from more collaborative, creative or even 'activist' professionalism.

These pressures on the education profession have been paralleled in the development of the learning mentor, which were detected in the evaluation of the zone. According to the interviews conducted, the process of professionalisation of the learning mentor has seen the schools replace 'volunteer' mentors with more experienced mature adults that offered more permanent full-time salaried work (Bateman et al, 2003). The pace toward professionalism quickened through more extensive training options offered for mentors. Although this early phase was constructive, there was a danger of it being superseded because training in itself cannot create capacity. The local training on offer included six one-day training courses that covered a range of topics such as anger management and practical activities such as circle time that was provided through Excellence in Cities. However, the fact that this will be replaced by off-site provision at a college may be inappropriate for a school's needs. Barber (2001) has argued that the development of professionalism will remain 'haphazard' unless the Government plays a regulation role to ensure accountability in a period of 'transition'. Where governments' additive policies have failed to tackle problems, discursive tensions arise that affect professional identities (Centre for Public Policy Research, 2001). However, a distinction can be made between the type of professionalism based on acquiring skills and everyday experience based on informal learning in the school (Hargreaves, A, 2003). Paradoxically, although acquiring and strengthening professional skills has taken place, the danger is that mentors could still pay the price if they are forced to neglect more tacit informal kinds of 'knowledge' due to imposition of constraints.

### **The Emergence of Mentor Discourses and Professional Identities**

The tensions inherent in the process of professionalisation of the mentor have been revealed in two conflicting discourses that are apparent in their practice in their respective identified in the negotiating of informal individualised agreements with 'disaffected' pupils to ensure that they participated in school. They contain attributes that were identified by the learning mentors such as: being a good listener; establishing trust; passing on wisdom; and counselling 'emotional' behaviour in a non-judgemental way on a one-to-one basis. In addition, the 'democratic' nature of their decision-making role has given them more opportunities, in conjunction with other staff, to develop pupils' interpersonal skills, which is very different to the role of Teaching Assistants. There was also evidence provided by the interviews of attempts to establish clear boundaries for mentors' work with teachers, headteachers, pupils' families, and, where necessary, external agencies. These boundaries were seen as essential in preserving their self-regulated professional autonomy. However, the demarcation of these has not been easy to put into practice due to the ascendancy of the second discourse.

A second discourse can be identified that has on occasion appeared to be overlapping with the democratic one, but is in essence a threat to it. This external 'managerially' derived discourse was revealed

as management in schools increasingly organised 'performance'. Mentors more formally set collective targets for the improvement of behaviour and attendance of pupils and periodically reported on progress that saw them take on the role of 'attendance officer'. In turn the 'lead' mentor contributed to assessing the level of the mentor's impact, by capturing the overall outcomes from the different schools. In order to demonstrate that targets had been met, some of the schools required the learning mentors to engage in 'surveillance' of targeted pupils. In one specific school, the mentor was placed on call through the use of a walkie-talkie, and required to respond to 'emergencies' over classroom incidents as they arose. This role, although apparently flexible, clashed with established 'one to one' pupil sessions that were part of their regular timetable. It caused a lack of continuity in the work with other pupils, and as a result it had obvious implications for sustaining trust relations with pupils. Paradoxically, even where the pupil sees the mentor as a 'buddy' rather than a figure of authority, mentors are still subject to the constraints imposed by this 'policing' role in the school.

The struggle for the ascendancy between these discourses can be seen as being played out on a daily basis in many of the schools and the effect on mentors' professional identities can be further emphasised by attention to 'additionalities'.schools, which have previously been identified in the teaching profession by Sachs (2001). First of all, 'democratic' discourses were

### **The Pursuit of 'Additionalities'**

The pursuit of 'additionalities' that has begun to take place needs to be understood in relation to the 'audit explosion' as management increasingly search for measurable targets through the use of quantifiable indicators (Power, 1997). Strathern (2000) recognises that although the 'audit' appears to reveal everything that can be measured thereby making it transparent to the public gaze, in practice it represents a 'tyranny' as it disguises the exertion of control over performance. It has been further argued that the 'poverty of performativity' can be identified at school level in the strengthening of the audit, which has undermined trust relations and creative activity (Elliott, 2001). Whilst the audit is used to determine the effectiveness of teacher performance and resources, pupil targets are demonstrated through monitoring. These targets have also come under attack as centrally derived 'managerial' assessment has been perceived as being at the expense of whole school development. These critiques have had a damaging effect according to Bentley (2003):

*'Government-by-targets is widely accepted to have reached its limit as a strategy'*

However, in spite of these changes, the national assessment of pupil performance is still operating. This assessment does take into account 'value-added' factors related to attainment that are monitored over time as indicators of school effectiveness. This would typically allow for the effect of factors such as socio-economic status to determine the rate of progress, rather than only relying on raw assessment data.

This emphasis on 'value added' underpins the focus on the use of 'additionalities' in the work of the learning mentors. However, what is distinctive in this context is that standards are determined through improvement in

behaviour and attendance over and above the current expectations for those pupils. These 'additionalities' were to be demonstrated by establishing the work practices of learning mentors, but their ensuing pursuit of 'additionality' can be seen as problematic for two reasons. Firstly, although the rationale for target setting for schools 'tracking' pupils is clearly defensible, the concern is that it is becoming an obsessive practice that consumes the time of learning mentors. This is resulting in pupils being denied the valuable time and space to articulate their problems because the targets in themselves become prerequisites for driving transformation. Secondly, any indicators of improvement related to behaviour and attendance in the schools cannot be clearly identified as an effect of the impact of learning mentors alone, as no attempt has been made in these cases to examine other variables. So the idea that the mentor 'additionalities' have made a difference on the zone schools has to be treated with caution.

Hopes of combating these 'additionalities' have rested on the emergence of a collaborative type of professionalism, whereby learning mentors would be able to embed their practices. Andy Hargreaves (2003) has identified the need for a shift in education beyond 'standardisation' towards identification within professional learning communities. It has been further argued that the development of professional 'identities' has to be strongly connected to the articulation of the democratic discourse within a community of practice (Sachs, 2001). According to David Hargreaves (2003), in order to change deep-seated practices and strengthen capacity these communities have to be constituted as an 'innovation network'. At their most effective those networks become knowledge-based that have the potential to articulate and disseminate good practice through their potential for 'high leverage'. The important question remains: how can the incremental changes taking place at school level be scaled up so as to impact on larger constituencies? In this context it is apparent that the expectation is limited, rather than the necessary 'radical' changes that Hargreaves advocates. In this context the development of a community of networks operating between schools has enabled learning mentors to deepen their understanding of professional identity, and has offered a sense of 'belonging' through regular meetings. However, the sustainability of learning mentors depends partly on their ability to engage with local knowledge to stimulate innovations, which is often a haphazard 'risk-taking process'. baseline data; for example, schools selected pupils who fell below the 90 per cent rate of attendance and set them new targets. This has resulted in changes to

### Conclusion

Contextualising learning mentors has enabled them to be seen within the bigger picture of intended policy transformation. Although they have undeniably had a positive impact, learning mentors like other policy interventions, have often failed to address the root cause of educational problems because they are not based on strong enough interactions with the practitioners involved (Fielding, 2001). Their celebration as a panacea by policy makers appears to contain false promises that may seek only to disguise the fact that schools are not coping

with their multiple problems. Another constraint is that, paradoxically, although the intention is to strengthen professionalism through skills training, learning mentors are increasingly under pressure to adopt a 'policing' role. Consequently the tension between satisfying democratic relationships and the demands of managerialism cannot easily be resolved. The danger instead is that the pursuit of 'additionality' will overwhelm learning mentors as an overload of targets pulls them in a different direction that interferes with having a strong impact on pupils. The result could be that, for all their recognition, learning mentors will be unable to maintain their 'status' as their potential for securing professional independence is compromised and the vitality of their impact is diluted. So the process of 'joined up' thinking has led down a route that has a narrow view of professionalism as outcomes. As their autonomy is eroded they emerge as 'artificial' rather than organic developments from within the school culture.

### References

- Barber, M. (2001) High expectations and standards for all, no matter what: creating a world class education service in England, in M. Fielding (Ed.) *Taking Education Really Seriously: Four Years' Hard Labour*. London: Routledge Falmer, pp. 17–41.
- Bateman, J., Rhodes, C. & Devlin, L. (2003) Wolverhampton EiC Partnership: Evaluation for 2002/03. Unpublished. University of Wolverhampton.
- Bentley, T. (2003) Foreword, in D. Hargreaves, *Education Epidemic: transforming secondary schools through innovation networks*. London: Demos.
- Centre for Public Policy Research (2002) Achieving Success? Discursive Strategies and Policy Tensions in New Labour's White Paper for Schools, *Education and Social Justice*, 4, pp. 15–24.
- Elliott, J. (2001) Characteristics of performative cultures: their central paradoxes and limitations as resources for educational reform, in D. Gleeson & C. Husbands (Eds) *The Performing School*. London: Routledge Falmer, pp. 192–209.
- Fielding, M. (2001) Target setting, policy pathology and student perspectives: Learning to labour in new times, in M. Fielding (Ed.) *Taking Education Really Seriously: Four Years' Hard Labour*. London: Routledge Falmer, pp. 143–154.
- Gleeson, D. & Husbands, C. (2001) (Eds) *The Performing School*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Hargreaves, A. (2003) *Teaching in a Knowledge Society*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Hargreaves, D. (2003) *Education Epidemic: transforming secondary schools through innovation networks*. London: Demos.
- Newman, J. & Clarke, J. (1997) *The Managerial State: power, politics and ideology in the remaking of social policy*. London: Sage.
- OFSTED (2003) Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones: Management and impact. HMI 1399. London: OFSTED Publications Centre.
- Power, M. (1997) *The Audit Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sachs, J. (2001) Teachers professional identity: competing discourses, competing outcomes, *Journal of Education Policy*, 16, pp. 149–161.
- Strathern, M. (2000) *Audit Cultures: anthropological studies in accountability and ethics*. London: Routledge.
- Whitty, G. (2000) Professionalism in new times, in D. Gleeson & C. Husbands (Eds) *The Performing School*. London: Routledge Falmer.

# School Governors

---

## JULIA BARD

Julia Bard is a freelance journalist whose work includes writing and editing educational websites, booklets and magazines for Channel 4 and Channel 5, as well as teaching on the Journalism MA Course at Goldsmiths College.

---

It wasn't a straightforward decision to stand for election as a parent governor at our local community comprehensive school. I knew that the governing body had an uncomfortable relationship with the then Head but as he had protected the school's progressive, student-centred education in the face of the Government's frenzy of 'new initiatives', I felt that I could be of some use in helping to continue the ethos of respect, mutual responsibility and liberal education that had attracted our children and many others to the school.

I wanted to support those members of the school community who saw students as pivotal and powerful members of the institution; not as statistics, cats, sats or borderline A to Cs, but as human beings preparing for an adult life in a complex and unpredictable world. In practical terms, this means increasing the significance of the school council, sixth form committee and exemplary anti-bullying campaign, ensuring that there are open channels of communication and promoting an informal, unthreatening atmosphere in which young people have the confidence to express their views.

I also felt strongly that governors should be supporting teachers who are increasingly under pressure from rapid-fire initiatives, being undermined ideologically and faced with the increasing demands of statutory tests, a prescriptive curriculum, inspections, bureaucracy, de-skilling and a concomitant reduction in their autonomy in the classroom and ability to influence the character of the institution.

My main worry was that in joining the governing body, I'd be putting myself in the position of having to implement government policies that I did not believe were educationally sound. Nevertheless, I thought it was worth having a stab at helping to give the school the confidence to assert its own ethos and argue the case to the Ofsted inspectors whenever they next turned up. What I didn't expect was to find myself silenced and out of my depth in an incomprehensible bureaucracy.

Our inner city Local Education Authority runs continuous courses for new and experienced governors. There I met other governors, and we grappled with such notions as being a 'critical friend' of the school, the subtle distinction between management and governance and the relationship of the committees to the full governing body. I learnt that we should have been supplied with a folder called 'A Guide to the Law for School Governors'. No one in our school office knew anything about it until someone remembered that there were some in the storage cupboard. There we found about 30 copies of this hefty document.

As we start the 2003/2004 academic year, I have never had an update, despite significant changes in the law about school governance. A lot of this document is in legalese that's very difficult for a layperson to decipher. Attempting

to use it is a bit like doing your own conveyancing: just about possible but you could end up with a house that's due for demolition.

I started to look round the internet to see if I could clarify any of it, and there is a great deal of material. GovernorLine is very helpful, and as well as a clear website, has a helpline with experienced and supportive advisors. GovernorNet also has a lot of useful information, though its 'Jargon buster' section, with pages of initials and some very oblique definitions, seemed to epitomise the problems facing governors. Here is just one example:

*'Jargon: Middle Deemed Primary phase of education*

*Definition: A middle school is deemed Primary if the difference between the age of 11 years and the lower age specified is greater than the difference between the age of 11 years and the higher age specified.'*

It was becoming clear to me that it is almost impossible to understand governors' considerable legal responsibilities and act on them in a fully informed way if you also have a full time job and children to bring up. And with changes in education legislation over the last 20 to 30 years, the complicated brief, the contradictory demands and the burden of responsibility placed on governors have all increased.

School governing bodies date from a time before compulsory education, when charities, guilds, churches and wealthy individuals set up schools. They usually had a board of trustees or governors to ensure that the finances were in order and that the ethos of the founders was not being compromised. In the 1830s, when church schools started to receive government funding, they had to have bodies of managers to monitor how the grant was spent.

The system, such as it was, changed with the provision of compulsory elementary schooling after 1870. The elementary schools did have boards of managers, but a new layer of management was also introduced: the local school boards which were the precursors of the Local Education Authorities. When LEAs were established in 1902, boards of governors were introduced for secondary schools but they were appointed either by the LEA or the church.

That's how things stayed for the next 75 years until, following the 1977 Taylor Report recommendations that governing bodies should be independent of LEAs and more representative of the community, the 1980 and 1986 Education Acts broadened their representation and increased their powers. The 1988 Education Reform Act further undermined the role of the LEAs by introducing Local Management of Schools (LMS) – individual schools now had much more control over their own budgets and it was the responsibility of governing bodies to ensure that the money was appropriately and legally spent.

What we have now is neither fish nor fowl. Though it spoke the language of choice, the motivation of the Thatcher Government was to undermine the strategic role of the LEAs. The result is that schools have to compete – for students, for money, for support from private businesses, for places in the league tables. And if they lose, they may start on a downward spiral from which some never recover. It is the responsibility of lay governors to avoid that fate, so it's little wonder that their relationship with the school's senior management is often fraught.

One way of mitigating this cut-throat system is to work with those in a similar position in other schools in the locality. There are networks of headteachers, chairs of governors and parents associations but when things look risky, governing bodies of big, relatively high-achieving, oversubscribed schools like ours have a vested interest in looking after themselves, even if that's at the expense of the struggling school up the road. In the chaos earlier this year, when LEAs found that they did not have enough funds to finance their schools, our governors discussed what we should do. When I suggested that rather than competing with other local schools, we should meet with the governors across the borough to mount a united campaign so that the big, influential secondary schools did not end up being funded at the expense of the small, relatively powerless primaries, I was round on by my colleagues. 'I think we should compete. It's our duty to make sure *our* school is adequately funded, not to worry about other schools', said one longstanding and generally thoughtful governor. And she was correct, if not *morally* right.

This doesn't apply just to funding – though that is the bedrock of many of the decisions governing bodies make. The league tables, Ofsted inspections, performance management, buildings, and now even behaviour improvement, all have financial implications that drive the school's decision-making.

One decision that would have generated a great deal of controversy in our school, had the students, staff and parents been given the chance to discuss it, was the proposal to have a police officer based in the school. This suggestion was sprung on us by the head, with the support of the chair of governors, in a full governing body meeting. Several governors challenged it and proposed that it should be discussed in the Student Support Committee (known in most schools as the Discipline Committee – a relic of our liberal history) and that the rest of the school community should be consulted. But although parents, teachers and non-teaching staff are 'represented' on governing bodies, they neither represent their constituencies nor have a right, duty or any mechanism for consulting them. And even if they invent a mechanism, the governing body and the head are entitled to ignore them.

In this case, the head and chair of governors warned us that there was money attached to the proposed arrangement that came from the Behaviour Improvement Grant 'pot'. If we didn't take it now, we would probably lose it. The governors fell for it: without any debate about what role a police officer might have in improving behaviour in a school, what information he or she might have access to about the students, whether he or she would be subject to school policies or police force policies and other profoundly difficult issues, the PC was installed.

On another occasion, the new head, with the blessing of the chair of governors, took a decision that, starting this term, two of the Year 7 tutor groups in this mixed comprehensive will be for boys only in an attempt to keep the proportion of girls above a 'critical' level in the other tutor groups. This is one aspect of a much bigger and very longstanding debate about how to tackle the situations of boys and girls in the school, and how to maintain a gender balance when a high proportion of girls from local primary schools opt to go to the two excellent girls' schools nearby and what the impact of a gender imbalance is on both the experience of the students and their academic achievement.

The parents were up in arms. They know that this is a subtle and complex discussion, which profoundly affects the ethos and atmosphere of the school and how their children feel about it. Governors who had discussed and rejected this very decision two years earlier were frustrated and angry. None of this was taken into account by the head. When he presented it to the governors – again in a full governing body, a matter of weeks before the end of the school year – he justified both the decision and the way it had been taken by arguing that it was a management issue, not a governance issue.

Which is it? Some of us were convinced one way, some the other. What I learnt, though, was not where the line between managers and governors is drawn but that the way the system is set up, both managers and governors need to be very strong and very independent if they are to put real education and the welfare and development of the students ahead of 'measurable outcomes' – results, and the money that follows them.

**GovernorLine** [www.governorline.info](http://www.governorline.info)

Tel: 08000 722 181

A free professional helpline offering e-mail and telephone support to school governors, clerks and individuals involved directly in school governance in England.

**GovernorNet** [www.governornet.co.uk](http://www.governornet.co.uk)

A big website with information, discussion board and links on all aspects of school governance.

# FORUM

the journal for promoting 3–19 comprehensive education

presents the second  
Brian Simon Memorial Lecture

**VISION FOR THE FUTURE  
SHAPING EDUCATION IN WALES  
(LESSONS FOR ENGLAND)**

**JANE DAVIDSON**

Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning  
Welsh Assembly Government

**2:30pm Saturday 7 February 2004**

Elvin Hall, Institute of Education, University of London  
Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

**ADMISSION FREE – all welcome**

# Review Article

## **Steve and Me: my friendship with Stephen Lawrence and the search for justice**

DUWAYNE BROOKS with  
SIMON HATTENSTONE, 2003

London: Abacus, £7.99, 311 pp., ISBN 0 349 11656 3

Duwayne Brooks, the teenage companion and close friend of the late Stephen Lawrence, survived the racist attack on the two black teenagers on the streets of Eltham in south-east London in April 1993.

Twentieth century and now twenty-first century writing is peppered with narratives of racist violence from many parts of the world. But it is unlikely that you will read an account more visceral and shocking of such an event, as the description of Stephen's death in Well Hall Road, SE9, set down in Chapter 3 'The Attack' of *Steve and Me*. As a narrative it compels and shocks with an horrific sense of direct witness, inevitability and recourse to detail, down to the ginger beer can that fell from the pocket of the murdered youth as his body was carried to the ambulance. This chapter should be read by British young people in classrooms throughout the country as part of a provocation to discussion around a pivotal case, which created a seismic national reaction to issues of racism and racist violence, together with related police inactivity and incompetence, judicial blindness and the final grudging acceptance, through the McPherson Report, of institutional racism at the heart of the British policing and judiciary systems.

Not that *Steve and Me* is a simple commentary on these issues alone, for it is characterised by the protagonist's life experiences and by what is often a bileful narration by Duwayne Brooks himself. For the account has a number of strands. There is the story of a young black boy from south-east London and his encounters with various social powers, from the education system, to the police, the courts and the prison system. There is the thread of his relationship with Stephen and his family. Close to his friend, he is apparently rejected by his friend's family as a bad influence and 'ragamuffin', and the cause of Stephen's mixing in bad company and pollution by bad habits. A familiar story perhaps, but rarely told with such terrifying consequences. And Brooks confesses that much of his story is provoked by the 'anger and madness' he felt as a result of this rejection. As he puts it: 'The way the Lawrences talked about me was so painful. After all, I hadn't wanted to be there that night. I have to live with that memory' (p. 69).

The infernal '17 seconds' described in the third chapter redrew the courses of many lives, with Duwayne Brooks's

life at their centre. For after Stephen's death there was only the all-consuming relationship that was forced upon him by the Metropolitan Police and the London courts. His story is of being mistreated as a central witness, targeted as a result of his protests, harassed and victimised, then wrongfully accused and remanded on a charge of attempted rape which proved impossible to sustain. But finally vindicated, not only by the outrageous failure of the false charges, but through the judgements and the unequivocal text of the McPherson Report: that he 'was a primary victim of the racist attack. He is also the victim of all that has followed, including the conduct of the case and the treatment of himself as a witness and not as a victim'.

There is much in *Steve and Me*, well beyond Brooks's story of racism, violence and police ineptitude and spite, that provokes discomfort and a prevailing sense of pain. 'Although my story is not a typical one', he writes, 'I feel that in many ways my life has been the typical life of a black kid who grows into a young man and discovers that racism is everywhere: on the streets, in the work place, in politics, in the media and in the justice system' (p. 301). But what creates most anguish in his story is the sense of isolation that permeates it. Brooks's story is of a victim already brutally isolated who is projected into even greater aloneness by his struggle for justice and who feels marginalised to an even more intense level during a time when he has needed solidarity and union.

Ironically, it is during a trip to Belfast, to address public meetings about Stephen's death and his own individual struggle, where he experiences and realises that essential sense of 'combination' for the first time. It becomes a crucial and profoundly formative journey for him. Thus in his final chapter, which he calls 'Reclaiming my Life', he can link-up his own resistance to that surrounding the deaths of other black men and women, like death-in-custody victims Shiji Lapite, Brian Douglas and Ibrahima Sey, victims of racist murder on the streets like Michael Menson, or the tribulations of black police officers facing racism like Metropolitan Police officer Guralp Viridi. At last he can put aside individualism: his struggle becomes a common one.

In his final two paragraphs, Brooks reminds us of how a police officer was dismissed from his force for being cruel to a dog, while even with the flow of Stephen Lawrence's blood and in the wake of McPherson, there have been no similar disciplinary actions within the Met. 'Even in 2003', he concludes, 'it's easier for a dead dog to receive justice than it is for a dead black man.' (p. 305). As a reader, you can only find yourself nodding your head.

**Chris Searle**

# FORUM

the journal for promoting 3–19 comprehensive education

presents the second  
Brian Simon Memorial Lecture

**VISION FOR THE FUTURE  
SHAPING EDUCATION IN WALES  
(LESSONS FOR ENGLAND)**

**JANE DAVIDSON**

Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning  
Welsh Assembly Government

**2:30pm Saturday 7 February 2004**

Elvin Hall, Institute of Education, University of London  
Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

**ADMISSION FREE – all welcome**