Editorial

'You're playing with words!' (David Miliband, Interview Radio 4, July 9th 2004

Well, at least it can be said that Miliband and his masters know the name of the game, although there's evidently an assumption that only one side should be allowed to play it.

It has not gone un-noticed that New Labour's five year plan for education relies heavily on that category of words, the abstract noun. One of the rules of the game is that you should take otherwise creditworthy words such as 'choice', 'freedom', 'excellence' 'opportunity' etc. etc. and devalue their coinage by certain calculated moves so that they can all be scooped up successfully when they arrive in the so-called 'Community Chest' and be made to serve your own ends.

By the time the words have got to the point where they only bear a passing resemblance to their original meaning, the fun can begin. All that is neeed is a gullible public for whom the words had, in their original form, certain attraction and persuade them that these indeed are what they're going to be given and examples will be rapidly and unceasingly passed before them so that it can be seen what these words might mean in practice. For instance, Sheila Dainton, writing in this issue of Forum, examines the contemporary meaninglessness of so-called 'personalised learning'. The more thoughtful will come to see that some words they thought they understood just demonstrate they have been labouring under a delusion, for example 'comprehensive' actually means 'academy', 'non-selection' actually means 'selection', 'choice' actually means 'restriction' and so on.

For the game that is being played is the one dangerous to all and any civilisation; take the words that represent its deeper structures, words that have taken long experience to have meaning within the society and trivialise them for passing political ends by giving them an entirely surface structure. This was the dichotomy Noam Chomsky applied to his analysis of language and grammar but it can easily be applied, metaphorically, to many other situations and circumstances.

A telling example, and one that bears no little relevance to the above 'game' is the recent report (*Times Educational Supplement*, July 4 2004) by educational researchers at the University of Warwick. They found that children given the choice to use the internet for research into the history of bicycles did so with great gusto although there was a curious and disappointing similarity to their eventual work. Asked about the topic a few weeks later it seemed the children 'could remember little of what they had learnt'(the assumption that they had ever learned anything in the first place was seemingly not queried but it appeared an indisputable fact that they had enjoyed using the internet). A machine that gives an apparent sense of control and a contrived liveliness is naturally going to have an appeal. A publicity machine that revs up the attraction and appeal of new 'educational choices' is going to have the same effect and the same shallowness is going to be observed – in one case the children didn't learn anything and in the other case it's fervently hoped the electorate won't either.

Annabelle Dixon

Distinctive Education Policies in Wales

JANE DAVIDSON
Jane Davidson is the Welsh Minister for Education and the following article is based on the lecture she gave for the second Brian Simon Memorial Lecture in February 2004 at the Institute of Education, University of London.

This article outlines the vision for the development of education policy in Wales, and I shall be referring in particular to the steps the Welsh Assembly Government has taken in partnership with schools, local authorities and other key organisations to develop a distinctive education agenda for Wales. The agenda has as its focus raising standards of achievement in every school in Wales and encouraging learning throughout life.

The Learning Country

The Welsh Assembly Government published 'The Learning Country' in September 2001. This document is the first long term strategic statement on education ever issued in Wales and sets out our vision for education and training in Wales over the decade to 2010. The Learning Country describes our goal of establishing Wales as a world class education and training provider: with provision distinctive to Wales and addressing needs in Wales. We want to:

- give every child a flying start;
- put the needs of learners first;
- support practitioners;
- provide a more rounded and flexible curriculum;
- enhance social inclusion;
- and remove barriers to learning

In short, to create a skilled nation with opportunities for all – based on policies made for and in Wales. It is not a plan for one term of office – it is recognised that changes in education take time to achieve and that a long term approach is needed.

A Distinctive Approach

The Education Act 2002 was extremely significant. For the first time a single piece of legislation for Wales and England has allowed policies to be taken forward in quite distinctive ways in the two countries. In a real sense this was an 'Act' for Wales. Over three-quarters of the measures in the Act apply to Wales. Much of the detail lies in secondary legislation, for which the Assembly has responsibility. Effectively the Assembly has the same powers that Parliament has for England to decide when provisions should be implemented and how. Decisions for Wales are taken in Cardiff and they follow extensive consultation. But our plans are not about the Welsh Assembly Government going it alone. There is close partnership working with local education authorities and the teaching profession. These partnerships drive the improvement agenda. As a matter of policy, reliance on the private sector has been ruled out in Wales. So has the introduction of Specialist schools – in Wales schools have for a long time been encouraged to build on their strengths and there is growing provision of education through the medium of Welsh. I am happy to say in memoriam to Brian Simon who was known for his lifelong advocacy of equal secondary opportunities for an all through comprehensive schooling that we remain committed to a dynamic all-ability comprehensive system, with an emphasis on the school being embedded in its local community.

I firmly believe that for schools to be places where:

- learners' interests come first;
- there is wider access and opportunity for all; and
- lifelong learning is a reality

There has to be a successful and close relationship between the community and the school which it serves. Also in our focus on achievement, we have been trying to collect evidence about what strategies work well in those secondary schools that are performing above expectations. This project is called 'Narrowing the Gap in the Performance of Schools'. The report of Phase 1 of the Narrowing the Gap study, published in October 2002, demonstrated that:

- encouraging adults back into learning can change the culture of a community by raising the profile of learning;
- getting the community engaged in learning raises collective self-esteem;
- a community focus has an impact on pupils' attainment – raising their aspirations and their determination to progress to further or higher education, training or employment.

The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee of the National Assembly in its report on schools of the future published in 2003 laid great stress on the need for community focused schools. The report stated that the school of the future in Wales would:

- provide high quality and inspirational teaching and learning;
- provide a broad and stimulating curriculum offering choice;
- allow learners to develop at their own pace with attainment targets and methods of assessment designed to recognise a wider range of achievement;
- Incorporate social inclusion, sustainable development, equal opportunities and bilingualism into all aspects of school life.

The Committee's vision accords with my own but I feel there are significant areas where we need to make change

if we are to secure the vision. And the changes are the following:

Early Years and Foundation Phase

Early years is one of the areas where we are creating a distinctive Welsh approach.

Educators of our youngest pupils have long argued that the years before formal schooling are critically important to a child's personal and social development and to their attitudes to learning later in life. The responses to consultation in 2003 confirmed that we should press on with pilot projects, and subject to successful outcomes, introduce a Foundation Phase for 3-7 year olds building on existing good practice.

We want to enhance and extend the learning experiences of our youngest children. There is evidence that children do not have enough opportunity to learn through well-planned play. Best practice in Wales involves a broad and balanced curriculum based upon areas of learning rather than separate subjects. Children learn through practical activities that necessarily challenge and motivate. Well planned practical activities help children to develop their curiosity and independence as well as their knowledge, skills and understanding. However, this is not reflected in all settings and classes.

An appropriate curriculum for young learners in the Foundation Phase in Wales should be made up of integrated and overlapping areas of learning. There should be a balance between learning through child-initiated activities that help children to develop their personal and social skills and those directed by adults. The most effective early years programmes emphasise exploration, problem solving, active involvement, language development and different types of play.

But the focus throughout must be on learners and their needs. High quality teaching, with support and training delivered by well-informed providers, in all settings, is essential to the achievement of an effective Foundation Phase. We are working with LEAs to establish pilots across Wales. We want to ensure that a wide cross section of schools take part – large, small, urban, rural, denominational, Welsh and English medium as well as a cross section of non maintained settings. Through the pilot projects and ultimately in all settings we are looking to:

- Enhance the quality of provision;
- Provide appropriate curriculum and experiences that will help young children develop positive attitudes to learning, attain high standards of achievement, and
- Help children develop and understanding of their roles as future citizens of a bilingual and multi-cultural society.
- The project also involved a focus on:
- The development of an all Wales Training Framework to meet the needs of all personnel working with our youngest children;
- Maintaining positive links between the home, and the providers of education and care;
- Sound monitoring and evaluation to ensure consistent and focused review of developmental strategies; and
- Assessment systems that better support learning and effective practitioner intervention.

Alongside the development of the Foundation Phase the Assembly Government is committed to providing at least half time early years places for all three year olds whose parents want them. That will be achieved in September 2004. I firmly believe that the provision of a solid foundation for social and intellectual development at an early age allows children to derive the greatest benefit from their subsequent education in school and beyond.

Class Sizes

One of the key pledges of the incoming Labour Government in l997 was to reduce class sizes – in particular infant class sizes. The evidence is that the youngest children benefit most from being in small classes. We have delivered on that – moving from a situation where there were 30% of pupils in classes of over 30 in l998 to a situation where all infant classes now comply with the 30 pupil statutory limit. But we believe that there are benefits for pupils and teachers in having small class sizes at junior level also and we have moved on to tackle junior class sizes – a policy made in Wales. We have set ourselves the target of reducing all junior classes to 30 pupils or less. In this instance there is no statutory limit, but additional funding is being provided. The percentage of junior pupils in classes of over 30 has fallen from 29% in September 2000 to 13% in September 2003.

Momentum will be increased on this initiative in 2004-2005 and I hope that very few classes over 30 will remain by September 2004. As a result of additional funding from the Assembly Government, Local Education Authorities in Wales have already invested around £39 million in support of this policy over the last 3 years and a further £19 million is being made available in 2004-05.

Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative

Another 'Made in Wales' policy for primary schools is our Free School Breakfast Initiative. Breakfast has long been recognised as the most important meal of the day and evidence has shown that successful breakfast schemes in schools have led to positive attitudinal changes – improved attendance, improved behaviour, fewer discipline problems and greater sustained concentration. The initiative is intended to complement work already being done on healthy eating and nutrition through the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS).

The Welsh Assembly Government made a Manifesto commitment (in our elections in 2003) to provide all pupils of primary school age registered in maintained primary schools in Wales with the opportunity to have a free, healthy breakfast at school each day.

The Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative will be introduced incrementally on a pilot basis starting in the most deprived areas of a small number of local authorities in September 2004. The evidence gathered will inform the subsequent staged rollout of the programme to all primary schools in Wales. Schools in the most deprived areas in all local authorities will be involved by September 2005.

Alongside the Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative is a wider Welsh Assembly Government initiative to provide pupils with access to water. There is good evidence to show that performance at school can be helped by drinking water regularly. Pupils concentrate better because they don't feel thirsty, tired or irritable – all signs of dehydration. The provision of water in schools links well with learning programmes such as thinking skills and accelerated learning. I formally launched the new

water coolers initiative recently and work on installing the water coolers will get underway in September in almost 400 schools in deprived areas. The pilot scheme will be evaluated and the possibility of extending it will be considered. Thus we are committed to creating the right kind of learning environments for the children of Wales so that they can maximise their learning potential.

Abolition of Key Stage 1 Testing

The proposal in The Learning Country which secured the greatest response – almost all of it favourable – was my proposal to discontinue tests at the end of Key Stage 1. It has been apparent for a number of years that teachers are comfortable with and extremely competent in the assessment of this age group, so I was confident in being able to remove this element of teacher workload. Key Stage 1 tests were undertaken for the last time in Summer 2002. Results of teacher assessment in 2003 maintained the high levels of performance in previous years with over 80% of pupils achieving at least level 2 in each subject.

Literacy & Numeracy – Primary Schools

The decision on Key Stage 1 testing was also born out of the significant progress achieved in raising standards of attainment in primary schools. One of our principal goals – as in other parts of the UK – has been to raise standards in literacy and numeracy in primary schools. We recognised that there was a considerable amount of good practice and professional skill already in our schools and decided against prescribing national strategies. Instead, we have worked with LEAs to raise standards through the development of local strategies, drawing on evidence of effective teaching of these skills and other guidance materials produced jointly with Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales) and ACCAC (the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales.) Our approach has been vindicated. Since 1996 achievement in English, Welsh and Maths at Key Stage 2 has risen year on year and our national targets set for 2002 were achieved. This is tremendous progress and we all, and our partners, take a great deal of pride in the results of this co-operative approach.

Key Stage 3

Our goal now is to ensure that the success of our distinctive approach in primary schools is emulated and built on by secondary schools. While there has been some good progress in levering up standards in Key Stage 3 – and last year's best ever results are very encouraging – it is clear that performance at this level is not fully capitalising on the achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2. Once again, we are addressing this concern 'our way'. Many secondary schools have devised and implemented their own strategies for the development of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Based on the evidence of good practice, the Assembly Government, Estyn and ACCAC, have worked to produce specific guidance and support for secondary schools and local authorities. The first elements in our programme of support have already been published - –under the general title *Aiming for Excellence in Key Stage 3* – and focused, primarily, on the development of whole-school and cross-curricula strategies for enhancing literacy and numeracy skills. The point we are keen to stress is that the development of literacy and numeracy skills should not be seen as the responsibility of language and maths teachers but can – and should – be addressed by all school departments.

Key Stage 2/3 Transition

Another of the drivers in improving attainment at Key Stage 3 is to improve the transition of pupils from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 – another 'Learning Country' priority. There is a loss of momentum in learning at the transition point and underachievement in Key Stage 3 as a result. Too often the tremendous improvement in pupils' progress at primary level years is not sustained on transfer to secondary school. We need to ensure that there are effective arrangements to promote continuity and progression. There are excellent examples of secondary and primary schools coming together to agree a coherent and all-embracing strategy for transition. Such strategies set out how the schools involved will work together to :

- plan and deliver the curriculum across Key Stages 2 and 3;
- agree and exchange data on pupil achievement;
- establish effective pastoral links to meet pupils' personal and social needs; and
- learn from each other so that there is continuity in teaching and learning methods.

Our target is that all school groupings should have a coherent, well planned approach in each of the key areas underpinning transition, with current best practice the benchmark for all schools. Recent guidance published jointly by the Assembly Government, Estyn and ACCAC entitled 'Moving on … Effective Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3' will help to drive development. In addition the Assembly Government has Wales-only powers in the Education Act 2002 which require secondary schools and their feeder primary schools to put into place effective arrangements for transition. In 2004, consultation proposals will be brought forward for the transition plans schools will have to draw up under this provision.

Scrapping of Secondary School Performance Tables

Another example of where we have done things differently in Wales is the decision to end the publication of secondary school performance tables (often called 'league tables') – such tables have never been published for primary schools. In 2001 we carried out a consultation exercise to determine the future of the secondary tables. The outcome of the consultation confirmed that they were not right for Wales – in particular, the tables were seen as :

- incomplete, as they did not take into account differing socio-economic factors;
- divisive and demoralising to staff and, in certain circumstances, to pupils;
- damaging to communities where schools regularly appeared to be under-performing; and
- encouraging parents to make unfair and simplistic comparisons between schools.

But we haven't hidden this information. Schools in Wales continue to publish performance information through their School Prospectuses and Governors' Annual Reports – these provide a proper context for the information and allow parents to make informed decisions about their children's education utilising whole school information

in prospectuses rather than crude information of results alone.

Review of Assessment of Key Stages 2 and 3

One of the most exciting and important pieces of work currently being undertaken is the review by Professor Richard Daugherty of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, of the assessment arrangements for Key Stages 2 and 3 in Wales. Last summer I asked Professor Daugherty to bring together an independent review group to undertake a full and thorough review of the current arrangements in Wales. Explicit in their remit was a requirement that any proposed system should have as its focus the interests of pupils and a path to productive lifelong learning. I received the Review Group's Interim Report – *Learning Pathways Through Statutory Assessment* – in January 2004. I believe it contains a number of exciting and well-judged proposals which have due regard for all stakeholders.

The report proposes a system with the pupil very much at its heart and which, through assessment for learning, would provide opportunities for the whole child to develop and flourish. The system would make good and effective use of teachers' own judgements and the report suggests ways in which these become more robust and consistent. The report also envisages changes to the nature and purpose of the Key Stage 2 Tests. The provisional view of the Group is that at the end of year 5 pupils should take diagnostic 'tests' of literacy, numeracy and enquiry skills. The information derived from these 'skill tests' would be used by the Year 6 teacher to prepare pupils for the transition to Key Stage 3 and by secondary schools in receiving pupils at the start of year 7. Year 6 teacher assessment would be retained.

At Key Stage 3 it is likely that we will move away from national tests and put greater emphasis on teacher assessment. We will also introduce a system which awards schools with accredited centre status to support this new approach. Moving the statutory assessments as proposed in the report to a date earlier in Year 9 or possibly to Year 8, will enable the results to be used when pupils make their Key Stage 4 option choices. This is still very much 'work in progress' and Professor Daugherty's Group has a great deal more to do before presenting its final report in April 2004, but I am very encouraged by the proposed direction of travel and in particular the emphasis being given to the transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 and, indeed, from Key Stage 3 to 4.

Learning Pathways 14-19

Another of our key 'Made in Wales' policies is the Learning Pathways 14-19. Last April the Assembly debated the outcome of a consultation on developing appropriate provision for this age group. The consultation was born out of the view that 16 is an inappropriate break point in education – that 14-19 should be seen as one phase. The result is our 14-19 Action Plan, which sets out a route to the introduction of Learning Pathways for all 14-19 year olds in Wales.

Developing Learning Pathways is about raising standards and widening opportunities for every young person in Wales. It is about developing a variety of learning routes geared to the individual needs of young people. These will embrace:

- a balance of academic and vocational provision with parity of esteem between them;
- a prospectus of opportunities for young people to develop creative, entrepreneurship, personal and social skills;
- support so that young people can grasp opportunities and look to the future with confidence.

We are working in partnership with all those with an interest in 14-19 provision. Our objective is to develop the potential of all our young people, whatever their talents and abilities so enabling them to make an effective and sustainable contribution to their communities and the future prosperity of Wales.

Extending Entitlement

The work on 14-19 sits alongside 'Extending Entitlement'. Another 'Made in Wales' initiative,'Extending Entitlement' covers all elements of young people's learning, economic and recreational activity. It also has implications for their health and wellbeing and for the wellbeing of the communities they live in.

Young People's Partnerships have been statutorily established in each of the 22 local authority areas. These partnerships consist of a range of organisations – schools, Youth Offending Teams, voluntary and statutory youth services, careers services, police and many more. All the partnerships are working to put in place arrangements for young people to access the support, advice and learning opportunities they need. The involvement of young people themselves is central and each partnership is developing participation arrangements. The Partnerships are expected to deliver 10 basic entitlements for young people and provide opportunities for young people to develop into confident adults – independent, able to make choices, able to participate in the democratic process.

We are currently analysing reports on the first 18 months of operation of the Partnerships. Whilst they have made a promising start, there is still a long way to go in joining up what goes on locally to meet young people's needs. This coming year, the Partnerships will be focusing on action to meet needs in terms of sexual health advice, transport and access to services and facilities. We are looking to see demonstrable outcomes to all Partnership activity, in terms of real improvements to young people's lives.

Welsh Baccalaureate

In parallel with the 14-19 plans we will continue with the Welsh Baccalaureate pilots. These are currently running in 18 schools and colleges, with more coming on board in September. I am particularly delighted that Wales is seen to be leading the way in developing a new broad qualification. UCAS (The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) has recognised the Welsh Bac Core as an individual qualification in its own right with 120 points in the UCAS tariff – the same as an A grade at 'A' level.

The Core of the Bac encapsulates those wider aspects of learning that are often undervalued – key skills, work and community experience. As can be seen the shape of the curriculum in Wales is evolving. There are strong linking themes in the Foundation Phase and the 14-19 Learning Pathways directed at all round development of pupils' abilities. This approach needs increasingly to span

the intervening 7-14 period through provision for the progressive development of learning skills and attitudes.

Pupil Participation and Schools Councils

The Welsh Assembly Government regards pupils as the most important stakeholders in education. Their future is determined to a very great extent by what goes on in schools. In the school of the future pupils must have a voice on issues that affect them. We consulted recently on making school councils a statutory requirement for primary, secondary and special schools. We also invited views on guidance for governing bodies and LEAs on consulting pupils about decisions which affect them. Many schools already have substantial good practice in these areas. For others it will mean very significant change in the way pupils are involved in decision making.

We still have a long way to go. I want all organisations across Wales, large and small, which provide services to young people to listen to those young people and involve them in decisions. This is in line with the recommendations of our Children's Commissioner – the only such post in the UK which was one of the first distinctive decisions of the Assembly Government.

Narrowing the Gap

Earlier on I mentioned, in the context of community focused schools, the Narrowing the Gap in the Performance of Schools study, the findings of which I regard of key importance in raising standards in schools. The study was initiated in response to the fact that in Wales, whilst standards of attainment have risen in all schools over the last 10 years, the gap between the best and the least well performing schools has not changed – it has neither diminished nor grown. It also grew out of a belief that in Welsh circumstances closing and reopening schools under a fresh start approach was not appropriate. Rather we needed to improve standards in the least well performing schools and look to break the link between poor performance and deprivation – in line with other policies the Assembly Government is pursuing to address deprivation. A joint task group drawn from the Assembly, The Welsh Local Government Association and key education organisations, looked at the issue of the gap in secondary school performance. We started from the knowledge that there are schools which demonstrate that deprivation and poor performance do not have to go together. The study identified that these successful schools:

- have key personnel who are able to drive forward school improvement;
- reflect on the ways that pupils learn; and
- make effective use of assessment data to improve teaching and learning.

The study findings have been widely disseminated and we are currently undertaking a similar study for primary schools which is due to report later this year. The range of measures we have in place for the continuing professional development of headteachers and teachers is helping to address the conclusions about schools needing key personnel to drive forward school improvement and the need to reflect on ways pupils learn. The work of Richard Daugherty and his group will also help to develop the use of assessment to improve teaching and learning.

LEA/School Partnership Agreements

I have already referred to the role of local education authorities in developing successful local literacy and numeracy strategies with their schools. The following is a brief comment on the importance we attach to the relationship between LEAs and their schools in driving up standards of attainment. One of the Wales-only provisions in the Education Act 2002 seeks to strengthen this partnership by providing for LEAs to enter into partnership agreements with their schools. The LEA undertakes its role of supporting and challenging schools in a number of ways, but too often there is uncertainty about what individual LEAs should provide for their schools and what schools are expected to deliver. This understanding needs to be sharper if LEAs and schools are to drive forward the school improvement agenda. Partnership agreements will help to deliver that.

Post-16 Provision

My brief for the lecture was to focus on Assembly policies for the education of 3-19 year olds. As I indicated earlier, we are moving to the development of a 14-19 phase of education but I ought to say a little about development in post-16 education in Wales in its own right.

In February 2000 the National Assembly voted to support the principles of the Education and Training Action Plan. At the heart of these was bringing together the diverse parts of the post-l6 sector including school 6th forms, FE colleges, work-based learning and adult community learning. The National Council for Education and Training in Wales came into being in April 2001 charged with bringing together these elements into a coherent whole with the needs of the learner centre stage. Central to that is the creation of a common planning and funding system for all post 16 learning, other than higher education. As can be imagined this is not an easy task, but it offers immense opportunities to increase learning opportunities and enhance the quality and breadth of post-16 learning. I look forward to the growth of exciting collaborative work between schools, colleges and other providers over the coming years – work which focuses on learner needs and not the aspirations of individual institutions or providers.

Higher Education

We are also committed to developing opportunities in and widening access to higher education – we have achieved some notable successes through our strategy, *Reaching Higher*. Higher Education institutions in Wales already consistently outperform UK averages in attracting a wide social mix of students and working with groups and communities that are under-represented in higher education.

A key theme of Brian Simon's work was educational opportunity – and this informs how we use our devolved powers. We are the only part of the UK to have introduced Learning Grants for further and higher education students. This followed the recommendations of our independent Commission on student hardship chaired by Professor Teresa Rees, Equal Opportunities Commissioner in Wales. Introduced for the 2002/03 academic year, the ALG was a new scheme of student support uniquely for Wales. It provides a guaranteed source of additional targeted financial support for eligible students in higher education, and,

for the first time, in further education as well. The grants are available to Welsh-domiciled students wherever they choose to study in the UK. The ALG provides support on top of the current statutory provisions in higher education, such as student loans, and also applies to substantial part-time courses. It means that learners who would otherwise find it difficult, if not impossible, to commit themselves to a course of further or higher education, can now enrol knowing that they will receive a certain level of guaranteed support in advance of their courses.

We have negotiated with colleagues in Westminster certain provisions in the Higher Education Bill which will devolve to the Assembly full powers over student support and the tuition fee regime. Oddly, we are the only part of the UK not to have the power to determine our own fee regime at the moment. England, Scotland and Northern Ireland can. I intend to ask Professor Teresa Rees of Cardiff University to work with us again to carry out a further independent review into how we can best use these powers for the benefit of the HE sector in Wales and Welsh students. The review will look at access and participation. The devolution of powers in the Bill will therefore put us on the same constitutional footing as Scotland and Northern Ireland, and will allow us to take a whole system view of the sector. And we will look at all aspects of higher education – developing research, increasing third mission opportunities, enhancing educational opportunity and tackling shortages in public sector graduate entry areas – in using these powers.

Iaith Pawb

Running throughout all these plans is the commitment to supporting the development of Welsh Medium Education and the teaching of Welsh as a subject. 20% of people in Wales speak Welsh. All our pupils learn Welsh to the age of 16 in school. The first strategic plan for a bilingual Wales 'Iaith Pawb' was published in 2003. Iaith Pawb sets out our vision of how we shall continue – and enhance – the work we have been doing in support of the language. We are taking the plan forwards through providing extra funding to support the training needs of practitioners working in early years Welsh-medium settings; extra curriculum resources; and intensive Welsh immersion pilots for older pupils in English-medium primary schools and looking to create further Welsh medium opportunities in the further and higher education sectors.

Finally –

The Learning Country is a hugely challenging education agenda, because it does mean doing things differently in Wales – building on our success but prepared to tackle failure. I want to see the vision of Wales as a learning country realised – where learners come first, where the experience of learning is broadening and enriched, where standards are high, teachers are equipped to work effectively and headteachers are able to drive forward improvement. But a vision takes time to achieve and has to be worked at. Sometimes it is hard to live in the vision, especially when it involves changing the way things are done. We have to ensure that our policies are evidence based, that they secure social inclusion and that they drive forward equality of opportunity and new access routes to learning for all.

In short I am committed to making Wales a place which others look to for effective good practice. As a learning country we will continue to want to learn from others wherever they are as we build our vision. Some of our early years planning has been informed by Finland and New Zealand; and some of our bilingual development proposals have been informed by Canada and the Basque Country. Our assessment and teacher development agenda is also being informed by New South Wales. I hope that in the future, some other countries' educational developments will be informed by Wales.

KS3 SATS: alas, poor country…

PATRICK YARKER
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Tests act as a touchstone against which teachers can validate their professional judgement. David Miliband to ATL Conference April 2004

> *In Macbeth, Banquo warns Macbeth about the Witches' influence.*
>
> *You give advice in a magazine for young people. You receive this request: 'I have recently moved school and made some new friends. I like spending time with them, but my form-tutor thinks my work is suffering. What should I do?" Write your advice to be published in the magazine. (20 marks including 4 marks for spelling)*

KS3 Shakespeare Paper: *Macbeth* Writing Task May 2004

Macbeth is a play: write a play.

Alternative KS3 Shakespeare Paper Writing Task. English Department. Forest Hill Boys School, TES letters, 28 May 2004

Now that invaders and rebels surround Macbeth again, just as they did at the outset, my year 9 class are predicting what might happen in the end. I'm listening with only half-an-ear because it has suddenly come home to me that the last person to die at Macbeth's hands is a child. Not so new upon the earth as Macduff's bold-spoken boy, that *young fry* of treachery slaughtered first in the massacre, and older perhaps than Banquo's Fleance, but presented to us deliberately as Young Seward, son of a warrior-father, on the cusp of adulthood. This time around the whirligig of SATs I have been drawn in to thinking how the Scottish play has to do with children or the lack of them. Macbeth is childless but the absent child, the phantom child, the child Lady Macbeth breastfed and who does not appear in the flesh, seems to me an important presence across the text. Why have I not thought so before? That Banquo is a father and Macbeth is not must weigh somehow upon their friendship. (*Your children shall be kings! You shall be king!)* Say the Macbeths had a child, a son and heir, who died in infancy just before the play begins; might that not motivate something of the savagery and heedless courage Macbeth shown in the opening battles? As the play develops, how might such a loss explain his actions as well as those of his wife? How might it illuminate the moments in the play when Macbeth speaks of or sees children, infants, *a naked new-born babe ….. An apparition of a bloody child…* When it comes to living children Macbeth has no pity. He kills Young Seward. But how much to make of his half-line epitaph for the boy: *Thou wast born of woman…?* And how to make any of this available to my students, beyond (as I do) telling them what I've been thinking?

Fitting then that such a play continues to be used for the English KS3 SAT; a play which represents how adult men (Macbeth, Banquo, the Murderers, Macduff, Duncan, Seward) treat and mistreat their own or other men's children. And characteristic of the whole instrumentalist, summative, brusque and soulless approach to assessment embodied by SATs that none of the ideas, insights, speculations or possibilities which were generated in my classroom from the consideration of children in *Macbeth* could possibly be of any use in the actual test. The parting of the ways between a view of English teaching, especially the teaching of text, as conditional on the creation of a space for meaning-making by and with students in ways which are unpredictable, indeed which precisely allow for something to come out of the blue to one or other of us in the room, and the view which would have student inducted into prior 'subject-knowledge' and instructed for a test, is demonstrated most concisely in the Shakespeare paper for SATs at KS3. The fatuousness of the writing-task related to *Macbeth* this year did bring forth some fine ripostes:

- Macbeth and Banquo are both men. Write a story about men.
- Macbeth has a crazy wife. Write an advice-leaflet for men with crazy wives.
- *Banquo and his son Fleance have funny names. Write a story about a person with a funny name.*
- *Your best friend meets three witches. Write an advice sheet on how to choose friends more carefully.*
- *There are three witches in Macbeth Write a magazine article offering style advice.*
- *At the end of the play Macbeth is decapitated. Write about a time when you or someone you know 'lost their head'.* (TES Letters, 21 May, 28 May 2004)

But in truth these were Parthian barbs, for our students should not have been doing the wretched tests at all. No Useless Tests! Read the t-shirts at the NUT Conference 2003. Splat That SAT! said the stickers colleagues and I gave out across the Summer and Autumn to eager students in Charles Clarke's home town. Yet a year on, at the NUT Conference 2004, it was touch-and-go whether there would even be a fringe-meeting on the issue. The energy generated behind the campaign drained startlingly fast once the failure of the NUT's ballot to enforce a boycott was announced at the back-end of the Winter term. In the face of the relentless assault from New Labour there were more than enough new battles to be joined: on pay, pensions and the day-to-day quality of the education service through pursuit of the so-called 're-modelling' agenda. But what had happened to the issue of SATs? What went wrong?

After the unanimous vote at Conference 2003 the NUT moved slowly towards a boycott ballot of KS1

and KS2 SATs. Doug MacAvoy wrote to all members. Material calling for a 'Yes' vote was posted to schools and made available on the NUT's website. Arguments in favour of the boycott were printed in the NUT's house journal. It appeared to activists long used to equivocation and inaction from the leadership (in ten years as General Secretary Doug MacAvoy never led the union to take national industrial action) that the union's leadership might actually want to win this ballot. And the ballot was won, by a huge majority 30,452 (86.2%) of those casting a vote supported the boycott. Over thirty thousand Infant, First and Primary teachers indicated they were prepared to take industrial action. 4,875 (13.8%) voted against, which represented a slightly higher proportion against than in the previous boycott ballot some ten years earlier when SATs were being introduced. But the turnout of 35,327 (34.03%) was well short of what the NUT's own rules require for action to proceed. Never mind that such a turnout was high for a postal ballot, that it almost matched the turnout for the important and recent Brent East by-election which first signalled how deeply New Labour had been electorally damaged by the Prime Minister's stance on the Iraq war, or that it well exceeded the turn-out for recent union General Secretary elections: Tony Woodley of TGWU had been elected on a turnout of 21% and Mary Boustead of ATL won by a tiny margin on a turnout of only 16% of her members. Rules were rules, and the mass abstention of members meant that the NUT's campaign at street level was running on empty.

Some activists called for the union to boycott anyway, since the result met the criteria for lawful action required under the government's harsh anti-union laws. Thirty thousand teachers boycotting KS1 and KS2 SATs would galvanise the rest and help win them to action! Others argued that the NUT leadership could not be won to endorse such a position in the time available, nor members convinced and organised to take unofficial action. Some blamed the decision to go for a joint KS1 and 2 ballot, arguing that a better strategy would have been a boycott of KS1 first, where support amongst both teachers and parents was most substantial. Too late for that, however. Yet others blamed the lack of participation (and hence the inability to move to a boycott) on the timing of the vote, remotest in the school year from the concerted preparation and relentless practising ahead of actually sitting the SATs.

Certainly the seeming indifference of a hundred thousand members to the issue raised many questions. Has the decade of over testing effected its own remodelling of the workforce, so that there are thousands and thousands of teachers who not only have never participated in industrial action but who do not know what we would teach or how we should assess without the guiding star of SATs to light our way? Are we just too cowed to do more than grumble and, as ever, make the best of it, thereby perpetuating what we should replace? Almost afraid to know ourselves, have we learned to like SATs? The ballot effectively asked teachers to take on the government directly over a key plank in its education policy. A decision to do this required a willingness to assert ourselves as a profession which manifestly is not there at present. Perhaps the failure of the FBU to achieve a breakthrough by industrial action towards the end of 2003 played a part. Perhaps local associations were generally not robust enough to instil a confident sense that the boycott could be made to work. Some steps were taken in the immediate aftermath of the vote to keep the campaign alive: activists from various local associations wrote to the NUT's General Secretary making clear our continued opposition to SATs, renewing the call for a future boycott campaign and outlining what could be done by the union to ensure a successful re-ballot. KS3 teachers were surveyed about our views in January, but the union made no move to ballot for action at KS3.

Instead, the NUT leadership's public response to the result was to remind the government that it had not won the argument over national curriculum tests and that an independent and fundamental review of national curriculum assessment was required along the lines of that being conducted in Wales by Professor Richard Daugherty of Aberystwyth University, a member of the influential Assessment Reform Group. Together with ATL and PAT, the NUT presented an alternative set of proposals for national curriculum assessment to Charles Clarke in February 2004, drawing on a substantial body of research evidence. But the government, predictably, has ignored this so far as state education in England is concerned. Wales itself has become a different matter. The Daugherty report is being studied by Jane Davidson, the Welsh Minister for Education, who seems minded to act positively on its recommendations. This could lead to the abandonment of SATs at the end of KS2 and KS3 (the Welsh have already scrapped KS1 tests). Teacher assessment will replace the end-of-key-stage tests, though a new set of tests will be brought in at the end of year 5. The exact nature of these is not yet clear, but Professor Daugherty suggests they will be generic rather than subject-specific, and substantially different in intention and application from the current KS2 SATs.

According to Bethan Marshall of King's College, London, speaking at the second anti-SATs Alliance Conference in June 2004, the new tests are likely to be formative and to focus much more on students' learning skills. The need is to work from a notion of student *preparedness*, to look forward to what a student will be facing next rather than to look backwards at what they supposedly have already learned. Professor Daugherty himself has pointed out that tests at KS3 are a waste of money, that well moderated teacher assessment is a much better way forward and that tests taken at the end of KS2 distort the curriculum and should go. (Bethan Marshall, *The Independent*, 5th February 2004) Doug MacAvoy welcomed the professor's report, saying it would be 'incomprehensible' if ministers ignored it. Mary Bousted, ATL General Secretary, said 'Where Wales has gone, England should follow. Teachers do not need to test children at 11 years of age to know the standards they have achieved or where to go next in their learning. England is the only country in the UK to continue with the path of testing to destruction…'(*The Guardian, 14 May 2004)* Even on the island of Jersey there are no KS1 tests, an alternative KS2 pilot test and optional SATs at KS3. The exceptionalism of the English testing system could hardly now be clearer.

But none so blind as those who will not see. Whenever called upon the DfEE repeats the Party line. The BBC reported in the Spring that two parents were withdrawing their daughter Ella from the tests after her happy attitude to schooling was undermined in the face of the approaching SATs. 'In her earlier years her enthusiasm for school

and learning was a joy to behold,' said Andrew Green. 'However, if she were to use one word to sum up this year it would be the word 'boring'. Nearly every day she complains of being bored, and longs for the weekends. In the mornings, she often goes back to bed after dressing, in an effort to postpone the day for as long as she can. She is desperate for next year and the chance to start secondary school.' (BBC website, 7 May 2004) Cue DfEE spokesperson: 'National tests provide objective evidence against a national standard of what children have learned…. The school has a statutory duty to administer the tests and tasks and parents cannot withdraw their child from them…' Presumably because absence from the SATs would be seen as constituting an 'Unauthorised Absence', which might leave parents open to prosecution and a large fine. So the government implies it is prepared to use the force of law to make a child sit tests in the state's schools against the wishes of the child's parents. At the same time such parents as can afford it may pay for their children to avoid the same so-vital tests by sending their children to private schools, which are exempt from having to administer them. So much for the claim that SATs are a 'national' test.

Whether the DfEE would be brazen enough to prosecute parents for withdrawing our children from SATs remains to be seen. Yet with the NUT not readied for the necessary fight, Ministers continue gung-ho. David Miliband stated: '…we think it is important that there are independent, objective, national benchmarks of success at age 11. …I have got to back a system ….in order to drive up those standards.' (*The Guardian,* 14 May 2004) Calling the SATs regime too narrow is, for the Minister, 'pure prejudice'. Insulting teachers even as he purports to be supporting us, the Minister maintains that SATs provide the necessary validation of our professional judgement, which cannot in itself be trusted. SATs are the 'touchstone' against which the counterfeit of teacher-assessment can be made good coin.

The rigorous 'national' benchmark standards exemplified in the SATs start to look somewhat less firm and trusty on closer acquaintance with the actual questions and their mark schemes. This year's KS2 Science test reportedly contained at least one blatant error, where arrows supposedly depicting a food-chain were printed the wrong way round (TES letters, 28 May 2004). The mark scheme for the KS2 Science SAT was also criticised in ways that English teachers can recognise all too clearly: the range of answers deemed acceptable is frequently too narrow, excluding entirely justifiable responses without any explanation. As previously argued in FORUM, SATs continue to fail to begin to assess the range, variety, depth and complexity of the kinds of work students and their teachers are doing across year 2, year 6 and year 9. Far from raising standards SATs work to depress them, widening the gap (as the Assessment Reform Group has shown) between the lower and higher attaining students. SATs are a burden and a fear. They constrain teachers because they are intrinsically high stakes: League Table positions depend on the scores, and League Tables visit the plague of publicity upon schools.

Governors pressure Heads to 'improve' the school's League Table position. At least one Head Teacher who tried to take a stand against this year's tests was threatened with dismissal by her LEA and condemned by her school's governors. The pressure is passed on by Heads, not least through the system of Performance Related Pay and the rationing of Upper Threshold payments. Teachers feel forced to teach-to-the-test week after week; a kind of cheating. Some even feel compelled to cheat outright, altering answers or giving assistance beyond the letter of the rubric. The entire system beds down, becomes routine, is naturalised. The failure to oppose it successfully leads to compliance, obedience, abstention. And the test themselves carry on failing to assess the most vital area related to learning, that of talking and listening. No 'touchstone' here to comfort David Miliband with the thought that however untrustworthy the teacher is the SAT-score sets them straight. He'll just have to take my word for how articulately and effectively my students talk.

Each January, February, March and April year 2, 6 and 9 students could be learning (and we could be teaching) something new instead of being made to re-visit the old in preparation for writing answers to narrow, limiting, unimaginative, tedious and downright laughable questions designed to rank-order those same students and inflict on many a sense of failure. Even the QCA has begun to worry about the extent of the drilling going on in schools as the SATs are prepared for, sometimes as much as six months in advance. The consequences of such an approach are becoming increasingly apparent in the lives of many students and their families. The audience at this June's anti-Sats Conference unexpectedly heard apologies for non-attendance from a representative of Save The Children. Jon Berry, anti-SATs Alliance convenor, had talked at length to a spokesperson from the charity who made it plain that many of those working in the area of child-protection (Barnados, NSPCC, STC) were very concerned about the impact of SATs on the young people they encounter. Joint campaigning with these organisations should be pursued. Teachers, parents and students should not rely on Miliband, Twigg and Clarke to come to their senses in the face of the mounting research evidence that SATs worsen standards, deaden and narrow the curriculum, demotivate, dull and damage many children. An independent review of the system will show as much, which is why men from the Ministry currently won't sanction one. We need a wider strategy to scrap the SATs and restore to teachers, schools and students control of what is taught, how it is taught and how it is assessed.

Since the failure to move to a boycott, the Anti-SATs Alliance has refocused its efforts. A motion calling on the NUT both to help develop alternative forms of assessment and look to implement these in school was passed at this year's Conference. Emphasis has begun to be placed on presenting again the educational arguments against SATs and for a reclaimed curriculum with teacher assessment a vital component. The June Conference heard from Jay Rosner of the Princeton Review Foundation in the USA and from Richard Hatcher of the University of Central England about alternative models of curriculum and school organisation which liberate the talents and abilities of some of the most deprived students in New York City. We heard from parents, governors, Head Teachers and other staff about this year's SATs experiences and we looked ahead to the next phase of the campaign.

The profession has changed since the inception of SATs in the early 90s, and younger teachers need to be given confidence in working outside the constraints imposed by the SATs regime and all too often buttressed by local

Advisors. A second publication is being prepared along the lines of the Alliance's successful 'Why We Must Stop The SATs', which sold l2,000 copies. This will advance more beneficial approaches to the curriculum, to assessment, and to the presentation of information about student progress. It will offer a much needed alternative vision. But research evidence and the presentation of alternatives will not in themselves be enough to move the government in the right direction. Such work must be supported by a renewed street level and school based campaign. To win, such a campaign will have to be led effectively and determinedly. The incoming NUT leadership must be pushed to take a decisive role. The context for such a campaign remains good, especially after the serious defeat inflicted on the government at the local and European elections.

New Labour is looking to save huge sums in the public sector by watering down the provision of fully qualified teaching inside the state education service through the so-called Remodelling Agreement. If the government has its way, unqualified staff will take whole classes in the absence of teachers, or to enable teachers to access the soon to be statutory minimum amounts of non-contact time. It is an extension of the idea with which we began a decade or more ago, and which underpins the worst aspects of the National Strategies and the National Curriculum: that teaching can be reduced to delivery. The delivery can be 'modernised' through scripted or downloadable lesson plans, so-called 'Booster kits' or entire schemes of work, and tailored to the National Strategies which encourage such poor practice in the first place. It can be spun as 'personalised learning'. But it remains 'delivery', not education. SATs will be vital to this brave new world in schools, since tests police the system and those working inside it. Teaching-to-the-test will become even more widespread and frequent. The living human relationship upon which true teaching is based, and within which students can make the most progress and have the most educative experiences, will be further weakened by this money-saving model. The Higher Level Teaching Assistants primed to 'deliver' such work will be paid significantly less than qualified teachers. They cannot be expected to establish the necessary kinds of long-term and vital relationships when their contact with individual classes will be intermittent and when they have no ownership of, or role in creating the tasks they are assigned to do.

In William Nicholson's novel *The Windsinger* , the inhabitants of Aramanth must sit the city's annual test as a family, to establish which section of the city and which part of its hierarchy they shall occupy (for no test without rankings, no SAT without levels, no student without an ability label, no image for education so misconceived as that of a ladder….) When Kestrel rebels against the tests she must face the high and mighty Chief Examiner, Maslo Inch, who will punish her and her whole family.

> *'I'm going to say something that may surprise you,' the Chief Examiner said to Kestrel. 'Your father used to be cleverer than me at school.'*
>
> *'That doesn't surprise me', said Kestrel*
>
> *'Doesn't it?' said Maslo Inch evenly. 'Then why am I Chief Examiner of Aramanth, while your father is a sub-district librarian?'*
>
> *'Because he doesn't like exams,' said Kestrel 'He likes books.'*
>
> *(The Windsinger, William Nicholson, Hyperion, 2000)*

That dichotomy speaks, well, volumes. You can like books, or you can like exams, but increasingly you can't like both. This year's KS2 English reading SAT contained no fiction to read. Authors Against SATs continue to be vocal about the erosion of reading-for-pleasure evident among today's SAT-moulded students. In Aramanth, liking books is less socially rewarding in terms of power and rank than liking exams and wanting to maintain the status quo and its testing system. But in the face of catastrophe a high test score won't help. At the end of the novel what saves the city, in more ways than one, is music and an alternative tradition, and who saves it are children. Part of the rescue entails the Chief Examiner learning, very belatedly, what it is to be a father. When he has learned this he asks forgiveness of his child. Maintaining the SATs regime and all it has done to damage students and teachers represents something unforgivable in the education policy of this government. We must find the way to rid our schools of SATs and all they embody, and replace them with something more worthy of our students and ourselves. It may be that we cannot do this unless and until we challenge the current climate of fear, conformity and obedience evident in a state education service which sustains the manifestly unjust and damaging assessment regime founded on SATs and League Tables. When these are gone, then we may say : The time is free!

Personalised Learning

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Once in a while, or perhaps once too often these days, a bright idea finds its way into the language of education. It is not so much a new theory of learning based on a critical analysis of the very best of what is known about an aspect of pedagogy, but a seemingly new idea, rooted in politics rather than pedagogy, and most commonly articulated in two or three golden words, or a catchy buzz phrase. The bright, new idea assumes a self-evident worth. It speaks with the voice of authority, and it has instant appeal.

Thus the introduction of the national curriculum led to talk of 'continuity and Progression'; and the Ofsted framework for inspection was accompanied by our old friends 'pace and rigour'. New Labour struck on the mantra of 'standards and effectiveness' without ever really explaining what each word meant; the 2001 White Paper *Schools Achieving Success* spoke of 'individual learning approaches'; and the new primary national strategy talks of 'excellence and enjoyment' (interestingly, not excellence *through* enjoyment).

The latest conjunction constructed by ministers and those who advise them is 'personalised learning'. Those who draft ministerial speeches give each word an authoritative capital letter and insert the two words in inverted commas. These important little 'rabbit ears' in which the words are somewhat self-consciously and protectively contained suggest two things: either that there is something rather peculiar about the way in which the words are being used; or that those who are using this new conjunction are still struggling to give it any meaning. Or both.

Such is the appeal of this newly-contrived conjunction that it is fast catching on. Personalised learning trips off the tongue with breathtaking ease. Suddenly it is everywhere. It is most definitely the latest, most seductive political Big Idea for the future of the teaching and learning in schools. Its roots can be found in the Prime Minister's focus on reforming public services by promoting the concept of personalisation right across the board. According to Peter Riddell (The Times, 14.05.04) this appeal to middle England is now Tony Blair's main justification for staying in office. [1]

What Exactly is Personalised Learning?

As defined in June 2003

Like many political-conceived ideas, personalised learning has been subjected to a good deal of *post-hoc* rationalisation. When the Prime Minister mentioned it in his speech to the Labour party conference on October 2003, very little was known about what it might mean in practice. Four months earlier, in an article in The Observer, School Standards Minister David Miliband described personalised learning thus:

'The theory is simple: every child needs schooling personalised to his or her needs… Every teacher works with colleagues to assess pupils and **deliver** teaching to match.

Every head of department reports to the governing body on the different **performance** of each class.[2]

Under the sub-heading 'A new tailor-made learning scheme can be a **powerful weapon** for **fighting** underachievement', the Minister went on to explain that 'The technical term is 'Assessment for Learning'' and that 'every school will, at the click of a mouse, be able to compare and contrast the **performance** of individual pupils against other pupils'. (my emphasise)

At the click of a mouse. So, it is that simple.

The minister then spells out five 'key aspects' necessary to make the most of Assessment for Learning:

- a curriculum that is inspiring and interesting
- the need to embrace the potential of ICT
- the need to recognise that individual pupils need individual attention
- the need to ensure teachers have time and support to use assessment to design and develop support for pupils
- the need to recognise that pupils have special needs.

Putting to one side for the moment the language of performativity and delivery, the most illuminating aspect of this article is that, according to the Minister, the technical term for personalised learning is 'Assessment for Learning'. The good news was that the Minister for School Standards was at least familiar with the term. The bad news was that, in terms of how he went on to describe it, the Minister's understanding of Assessment for Learning bore very little relation to the meticulously crafted definition of Assessment for Learning arrived at by the Assessment Reform Group.[3] The Minister's definition was largely dependent upon data-driven 'outcome measures', and heavily weighted towards the 'performativity' end of the learning spectrum. The original idea, rooted in research and based on evidence, had been misunderstood (perhaps intentionally so) and most definitely misappropriated.

Thus the reward for the success of Assessment for Learning, as developed by the Assessment Reform Group and in particular by the work of Professors Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, was that the brand name became attached to something ministers wanted to sell. Behind the scenes, this may well have been a compromise finessed by civil servants so that Assessment for Learning could be kept on the DfES agenda provided we accept that the standard tests are part of it – because the Prime Minister is adamant about their value.

As defined in Spring 2004

Nearly a year on, we have a somewhat different definition of personalised learning. Writing in Human Scale Education's

Spring 2004 newsletter, David Miliband explains that it is simultaneously and educational aspiration, an educational strategy, an approach to teaching and learning and a system of education.[4] Much of what is contained in this short piece was first announced by the Minister in his speech to the North of England Education Conference in January 2004.[5] We learn that Assessment for Learning is no longer the 'technical term' for personalised learning; rather, it is one of five main components of personalised learning. These are:

- assessment for learning that engages pupils fully in their learning through shared objectives and feedback
- teaching, learning and ICT strategies that build on the learner's experience, knowledge and multiple intelligences
- enabling curriculum choice to allow pupils a learning experience that balances entitlement and personal relevance
- organising the school for personalised learning stresses the importance of using grouping arrangements imaginatively to enhance learning, emphasises the role of the learning mentor, and also focuses on creating an empowering culture and ethos
- tackling barriers to learning with the community and beyond positions the school at the centre of the community.

Unlike the 2003 definition, there is no mention of special needs, support for teachers or giving pupils individual attention – although the latter is perhaps implicit. Interestingly, there is also no mention of the six core principles for teaching and learning set down by the DfES in 2003 [6] or of the relationship between these principles and the five components of the personalised learning. And the definition does not even begin to explore the communal nature of the personal. There is, however, a new emphasis on pupil grouping, the role of the learning mentor, the culture and ethos of the school, and on community involvement.

The Minister concludes by confirming that personalised learning is based on the best of what goes on in schools, and that it is neither a new policy nor a new initiative. So, if personalised learning is indeed to be the 'defining feature of our education system' what, precisely, is it – and how will we know when we see it.

When I use a word …..

In the oft-quoted conversation between Alice and Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carrol's *Through the Looking-glass,* Alice suggests that 'The question is … whether you *can* make words mean different things'. Humpty Dumpty responds that 'The question is ….which is to be master – that's all.' Having explained that : 'When I use a word… it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more than less' Humpty goes on to explain to Alice that when he makes a word do a lot of work, he always pays it extra. By all accounts, the words 'personalised learning' have been working very hard indeed. If Humpty Dumpty were around today, he would doubtless pay them handsomely. However, although we know beyond any shadow of doubt that we can make these words mean different things, we still do not know who is 'master' – though we might well make an informed guess.

Recent developments suggest personalised learning can indeed be made to mean just what we choose it to mean. Earlier on this year, Human Scale Education (HSE) invited nine people from the world of education to say what personalised learning meant to them. The responses, published in the Spring 2004 edition of Human Scale Education News, included a short but helpful piece by David Miliband setting down 'The rationale for and definition of personalised learning' which has been mentioned earlier. Other contributors had their own ideas. Personalised learning could mean anything from 'education of the inner life', 'creativity in all its aspects', 'a philosophy of autonomous education' or 'a school of human scale' to 'a catchy, well-spun phrase' or 'a conjunction struggling to find a meaning'.[7]

Possibly spurred on by HSE's initiative, the DfES magazine *Teachers* staged two fora of teachers (one primary, the other secondary) to seek their views on personalised learning.[8] Coincidentally the key question was exactly the same as that asked by HSE: what does personalised learning mean to you? In each case, a small panel were being asked for their definition. According to the leader of the DfES policy unit on personalised learning, it means '…making sure the child is the centre of everything that happens. And that it makes sense from the child's perspective.' Is that not beginning to sound dangerously Plowdenesque and child-centred, an idea that would not normally dare pass the lips of a Departmental official? Other members of the two fora described personalised learning variously as being about 'a system that has the child at the centre', 'leadership and creating a visionary organisation', 'relevance and engagement for the pupil', 'formative marking' and 'reconciling excellence and equity, standards and inclusion, and addressing the needs of the whole child'.

Rhetoric and reality

When it comes back to first principles, is there anything here that the overwhelming majority of teachers and schools have not struggled hard to achieve over many, many decades? Translating the rhetoric of personalised learning into a genuinely transformative process in schools and colleges across the land requires an act of faith and several leaps of the imagination. What, for example, do we really know about the potential of pupils? How do we gauge it? Do we base our decisions upon the rather dangerous assumption that some children and young people have more 'potential' than others? Who decides what the pupils' needs are, and upon what basis? And how much store can we continue to invest in the intuitively appealing idea of learning styles, when recent research has revealed serious weaknesses in the instruments that purport to measure them?[(9]

Then there is the question of how personalised learning translates across different phases of education. On the one hand, the interim report of Mike Tomlinson's working group on 14-19 reform would appear to be a step in the right direction.[10] It is abundantly clear that the principles underlying 14-19 curriculum and qualifications design put the learner at the heart of the system. The emerging framework promises considerably greater flexibility than has been the case in the past, with much more scope for 'customisation' and learner choice. Only time will tell whether a target-driven government and continued

ministerial insistence on a rigid, top-down, data-driven accountability framework will stymie Tomlinson's objectives.

But when it comes to earlier learning, the scope for flexibility and 'personalisation' is considerably more limited from the foundation stage through to the end of key stage 3. Although there is arguably more flexibility in the foundation stage, and although a new primary national strategy nods towards more creativity and wider curriculum coverage, key stages 1 to 3 are still characterised by a prescriptive curriculum, an increasingly prescriptive approach to pedagogy, high-stakes national tests and school performance tables. So far as the latter are concerned, there is now an abundance of evidence, not least from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and from Ofsted, that the current national testing system and the publication of school performance tables narrows curriculum coverage. But in spite of the evidence the tests and school performance tables continue. With all the rhetoric of excellence and enjoyment, this stubborn, proven fact that national tests and educational league tables skew curriculum coverage will not go away.

Even though every school is vastly different, the government has forced the system towards homogeneity by promulgating the idea that one size fits all. Thus in pursuit of something ministers call 'standards', and the instrumentally driven, narrow, functional standards agenda, we still have a national, subject-based curriculum, a national testing regime that is deeply embedded in the system and upon which much else depends, national strategies, a national regime for initial teacher education (content, competencies, standards), Ofsted school inspection criteria, and a system designed to ensure compliance and external control. Here is the real hypocrisy in the government's appeal for personalised learning.

If personalised learning is to be genuinely a new opportunity rather than merely yet another bright idea, there will need to be some trade-offs. Personalised learning cannot begin to take root in a highly centralised system.

Notes

[1] Riddell, P.(2004) Forget the what ifs … John Smith would not have transformed politics like Blair, *The Times,* 14th May

[2] Miliband,D. (2003) Every schoolchild is special, *The Observer,* 1st June

[3] Assessment Reform Group (2002) *Assessment for learning: 10 principles* http://www.assessment-reform-group.org.uk

[4] Miliband,D.(2004a) The rationale for and definition of personalised learning, *Human Scale Education News,* Spring

[5] Miliband, D.(2004b) Personalised learning: building a new relationship with schools, North of England Conference, 8th January.

[6] DfES (2003) The Core Principles: teaching and learning; school improvement; system wide reform.

[7] Miliband, D. (2004a) *op cit*

[8] DfES (2004) What does personalised learning mean to you? *Primary School Teachers,* March

DfES (2004) What does personalised learning mean to you? *Secondary School Teachers,* March

[9] Coffield, F. (2004) Learning styles for post 16 learners – what do we know? Learning and Skills Research Centre.

[10] Working Group on 14–19 Reform (2004) 14–19 *Curriculum and Qualifications Reform, Interim Report of the Working Group on 14–19 Reform* *http://*www.14-19reform.gov.uk.

Values Education at Greenfield Lower School: the seamless robe

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It is a warm spring morning in 2004. Children stream into the hall, where 'Fanfare for the Common Man' is playing. They sit in class groups arranged in segments around a semi-circular space, quietly waiting for the deputy-head to speak. The whole school sings a song, 'Good Morning to You'. Then they begin an interactive assembly in which contributions from the children are welcomed and listened to respectfully. The discussion is about the subject of forgiveness. The children's comments, examples below, show that they have clearly thought a great deal about forgiveness:

Sophie: When you quarrel with your friends, it's better if you can forgive.

Sam: But some things are easy to forgive; other things are harder.

John: If people are always saying sorry but still doing wrong things, then you can't keep forgiving them. You have to think about your behaviour.

The deputy head, Annette McCullion, asked the children to reflect upon a time when they had forgiven someone, and how it made them feel. Once again, there was a range of responses:

Danielle: It makes you feel happy.

Lorenzo: You feel better, if you forgive someone.

James: When you forgive someone, you forget the wrong thing they did.

Annette then read a version of The Prodigal Son to the children, discussing the values represented in the story. Contributions came from all classes in the school, even the 'Robins', the reception class. The children made connections between the forgiveness shown by the father in the story, and their own forgiveness and of their parents forgiving them. The assembly ended with a prayer and a song.

The assembly described above is part of a whole-school values education programme. Greenfield Lower School is a small village school close to the rapidly expanding town of Flitwick. Many of the parents in the area commute to London for work. There are about 120 children on roll. The children seem happy and standards are high. Indeed, OFSTED had commented on the good ethos of the school, but in the spring of 2001 the headteacher, Diane Thomas, was concerned. She believed that there was something not quite right in her school: there were regular squabbles between children in the playground and the lunchtime supervisors struggled to maintain order. Teachers did not like being on duty at lunchtimes because they spent all their time sorting out arguments and disputes. The children complained that others broke their toys and playthings, took things from each other without asking and some children were bitterly upset when they were excluded from playground games. These arguments were often ostensibly trivial, but Diane was disturbed by their frequency.

Diane was puzzled about what might be underlying reasons for the disconcerting atmosphere in her school. The children's attitudes to each other, to their teachers and to other adults were discussed regularly at staff meetings. The school's Behaviour and Discipline Policy was reviewed many times, and staff went to INSET sessions on behaviour management. Circle Times were emphasised; rules for in and out of class were agreed and 'owned' by everyone in the school. But there was little progress. Then, by chance, Diane attended a conference about stress reduction for Head Teachers focusing on the importance of caring for themselves and others. The conference included a presentation by Neil Hawkes, senior advisor with Oxfordshire LEA, on values education. Diane explains the impact of Hawkes' presentation:

'This was it! It was as if someone turned a light on! Suddenly I could see what the problem was in my school, and Neil's work showed me how to try and put it right. It was a long time since I had felt so positive and excited.'

Hawkes' presentation was about encouraging positive values in schools. He talked about how the development of a positive school climate is the main indicator for a successful school. Diane was thrilled: she had always thought of her school as successful, but now she realised that the positive climate that she envisioned for her school was a real possibility.

In his work in Oxfordshire, Neil Hawkes promotes a positive school climate as vitally important for the wellbeing of a school community, and also central to the education of individual children. In his blue-print for values education, he states the purpose of values education as:

To help the school community think about and reflect upon positive universal values and the practical implications of expressing them in relation to themselves, others, the community and the world.

To inspire individuals to chose their own positive personal, social, moral and spiritual values and be

aware of ways for developing and deepening them as world citizens (Hawkes 2002)

Hawkes argues that his vision of a positive school climate is based upon an agreed set of values, which must be held with conviction, that underpin every aspect of school life. As such, the implementation of values education is incumbent upon all members of a school community and should be espoused by everyone if it is to prove to be effective.

On her return to school, Diane talked to her staff about what she had learned, and found that they agreed with her judgements about the need for another approach in the school. They bought (and read!) Frances Farrer's *The Quiet Revolution* a book about encouraging positive values in an Oxfordshire school. The teaching staff held meetings to discuss and share information and quickly involved non-teaching staff and governors.

For the changes to have any effect in the school, Diane recognised it was important that everyone should work together. In his blueprint, Hawkes identifies the role of the headteacher as crucial:

'Values education is most effective when the headteacher acts a role model and ensures that it is at the heart of the school's philosophy (Hawkes 2002)

The staff at the school discussed the values that they felt should form the heart of the new ethos in the school. They began with the values identified in Hawkes' blue-print, and then added a few of their own. The values identified by Hawkes are given, with their definitions, in the table on the facing page. The definitions are particularly helpful because they set out exactly what is meant and so form a basis for discussion and agreement between staff and also between children.

The next thing was to discuss the new ethos and values education with the children, and with parents. Then there was an informative discussion meeting for staff, parents and governors. Diane recalls that sensitivity was needed when talking to parents about values education:

'It was important that the parents did not feel criticised. It would have been so easy to upset them had we not introduced the scheme gently and explained it in terms of partnership, working together. The last thing we wanted was for parents to think we were having a go at what they were teaching children at home'.

But she need not have worried: many parents expressed their support for the new ethos and supported the changes in the school enthusiastically.

They all agreed to try out Neil Hawkes model of values education to see whether it would improve the school climate. Values education was introduced to the whole school in January 2002. *See table right.*

Once the values cycle had been agreed, a united approach was discussed and implemented. These included:

- A monthly topic, or value, referred to in every area of the curriculum and
- used as the basis for school assemblies.
- A reward system linked to the values being lived and discussed in Assemblies and PSHE sessions.
- The reward system in Diane's school was based upon the school symbol, a tree.

VALUES EDUCATION
Twelve values and their definitions

Co-operation Co-operation is helping one another Co-operation is working together with patience Co-operation is collective effort to reach a goal	**Happiness** Happiness is knowing I am loved Happiness is giving everyone good wishes Happiness is love and peace inside
Responsibility Responsibility is being fair Responsibility is doing my share of the work Responsibility is taking care of myself and others	**Simplicity** Simplicity is natural and beautiful Simplicity is putting others first Simplicity is appreciating the small things in life
Freedom Freedom is choice Freedom is living with dignity Freedom is when rights are balanced with responsibilities	**Unity** Unity is togetherness Unity is collective strength and harmony Unity is personal commitment
Peace Peace is when we get along Peace is having positive thoughts for myself and others Peace begins within each one of us	**Respect** Respect is knowing I am unique and valuable Respect is liking who I am Respect is listening to others
Love Love is caring and sharing Love is feeling safe Love is wanting good for others	**Tolerance** Tolerance is accepting myself and others Tolerance is knowing we are all different Tolerance is being understanding and open-minded
Honesty Honesty is telling the truth Honesty is trust Honesty is being true to yourself and to others	**Humility** Humility is accepting everyone Humility is self-respect and self-esteem Humility is courage and confidence
Trust Trust is being relied upon Trust is not giving in to temptation Trust requires courage and faith	**Appreciation** Appreciation is not taking things for granted Appreciation is awareness of ourselves, of others and of the world we live in
Sharing Sharing is lack of selfishness Sharing is enjoying the company of others	**Safety** Safety is our right Safety is a feeling of security and trust
Understanding Understanding is showing empathy Understanding is knowing oneself Understanding is recognising the feelings of others.	**Friendship** Friendship is understanding ourselves and others Friendship is the act of giving to others.
Patience Patience is being able to wait contentedly. Patience is the acceptance that the time for things is not always now	**Quality** Quality is using best materials Quality is doing the best with those materials Quality thoughts lead to quality words lead to quality actions
Courage Courage is to feel the fear and face it Courage is to overcome difficulties Courage is to stand up for what is right	

- Children nominated for rewards are given a leaf on the tree, which is presented and attached ceremonially during assemblies. When a leaf is presented, the child receives a certificate to take home, once again reinforcing the partnership between home and school. Some children were awarded leaves for their actions and behaviour in school, during class and also at playtimes and lunchtimes; others received their awards for things that they did outside school, at home with their families.
- Circle times for every class in which values were discussed with the children in a safe environment.
- Twice-weekly PSHE lessons in which values education was taught to all the children.
- Every class has a Values Board, and there is one for the whole school in the Hall
- All the school computers have the current value as a screensaver.
- Values are presented on the school website and in the monthly newsletter.

To support the introduction of values education, teachers visited Stonesfield Primary School in Oxfordshire in February, and Neil Hawkes visited Greenfield Lower School in May 2002. These shared experiences were tremendously valuable for all at Greenfield, enabling them to develop a clear picture of the kind of school they wanted to create.

In their planning, Diane and her team thought long and hard about which of the values should be the first to be taught. Should they begin with happiness? Or perhaps with unity? After some discussion, the team concluded that the arguments between the children stemmed from lack of respect; they did not appear to respect each other, each other's possessions or even the adults in the school. So respect was the first topic, and the results were dramatic.

The first change that the teachers noticed was that in school assemblies, which have become increasingly enjoyable, interactive and reflective. The atmosphere in the school is calmer. Children listen attentively to the music. Their listening and speaking skills developed, and it is now possible to discuss and debate during assemblies. The children take responsibility for their own class assemblies based upon the current value.

The children engaged with the new curriculum at once, asking thoughtful questions and really listening to each other. Then, after a few weeks, the lunchtime supervisors noticed that behaviour during the lunch break was also changing: they commented to Diane that the children seemed to be calmer. There were fewer arguments and the children seemed able to resolve the few disputes that arose themselves. The atmosphere around the school improved. And attitudes to work changed, too. Parents reported that their children came home keen to carry on with work they had started in class, finishing off work in their own time with enthusiasm. The children themselves noticed a difference. Philip explained:

> *'The playground used to be a battleground and the teachers used to hate doing lunch duty. They did, they said so! Now it's much better. We sort out our own problems and the teachers are more relaxed. They seem to like just talking to us now.' (Philip 'Eagles' Class)*

The children in the school are very clear that values education has improved the school. Conversations with children in Year 4 suggest that they do indeed try to live the values education programme. James, who says that he used to spend a lot of time in Mrs.Thomas' office because he had done wrong things, appears to be a reformed character. He says:

> *'I used to be in trouble a lot. But values make you think about what you're doing…. When we first started doing values I still used to get into trouble sometimes. One day I threw a stone and it hit Emily and then it bounced and it hit Sophie too. That was bad! I felt terrible, really ashamed. I thought 'Why did I do that?' Now I hardly get told off at all. And I don't get told off so much at home either (James 'Eagles' Class)*

Sophie, the victim of the stone-throwing incident, is quick to point out that it didn't really hurt very much, and that she's forgiven James a long time ago.

Philip, a friend of James, says that he's much more confident now than at the beginning of values education.

> *'I used to be really nervous in school. When the teacher asked me to sing I couldn't do it. Last Christmas, my teacher asked to sing a solo for the school play, and I knew I could do it. I knew that everyone would listen to me with respect.' (Philip 'Eagles' class)*

Sara also gained confidence through values education:

> *'I was too scared to join the football team, but then we did courage in values and I was brave enough to join. Now I'm one of the best defenders.' (Sara 'Eagles' class)*

The other children have noticed changes in each other too. Another Sara says:

> *'Philip is on the school council, and we voted for him. We'd never have voted for him before values education, but now we know that he's really good at being on the council.' (Sara 'Eagles'Class)*

The children talk about the reward system as a very good thing. They see getting a leaf on the tree in the hall as a high achievement. Sophie explains:

> *'Once you get one leaf on the tree you realise how proud of yourself you are and you want to get more and more (Sophie 'Eagles' Class)*

Sara agrees:

> *'You feel really good when you get a leaf on the tree. My sister is at middle school now and she always asks about values. You know, what we're doing now, and have I got any more leaves We've all got at least one.' (Sara 'Eagles'Class).*

These awards seem to mean a great deal to the children. All the children leaving the school at the end of Year 4 to move on to the local middle school, were asked to identify the most important thing they had experienced at Greenfield School. One boy, who had had a chequered career in the school before values education was introduced, said 'The best thing was getting a leaf on the tree'. He received his leaf for Cooperation and Unity because he had learned to

work and play with others, recognising the importance of the whole group/school approach.

Teachers have noticed other changes that have made significant improvements to other areas of the school. Annette identified an important extra benefit to the values education programme:

'You've heard the level of discussion in assembly. That's what I've really noticed, as well as the improvement in behaviour. I think the values education programme has given the children the language to talk about their feelings and about values we all share in a way that they just didn't have before. It's really made a difference'. (Annette McCullion, Deputy Head).

The words that the children use in their conversations, illustrated above, are also used in their written work. At first, teachers noticed that the children were 'seasoning' their writing with these new words, peppering them liberally through their texts. But now they are using these words appropriately and imaginatively, giving a richness and vibrancy to their writing. Circle times are better, with a greater level of participation, better listening and more discussion. All the teachers in the school believe that values education has been a great success in terms of the children's behaviour, their learning and the general ethos of the school. The crucial factor, they believe, is that the whole staff works together, creating a united community in which the children feel the values are universally important.

The introduction of values education has not been completely unproblematic, however. As Diane explains:

'We experienced a near-disaster at the start of our values work because someone misunderstood our rationale for introducing values education. This person spread the misunderstanding round the playground to parents, and there was a very negative response…I think this was one of my lowest points. I felt angry and despairing, and also that I had failed to put across effectively something I felt passionate about. Our other major concern was that the children initially only paid lip-service to the values, forgetting one as we moved on to the next ….but we've got over both those things.'

So, in the Spring of 2004, Greenfield Lower School is a very different place. There are few raised voices in the school, very little negativity and no cynicism. The staff work together as a team and all of them acknowledge the importance of acting as role models for the children. The children's behaviour is much improved; indeed, Diane thinks that there are no real behaviour problems in the school these days. The children talk about values in their day-to-day lives, and there is evidence in the playground of a community of children that is supportive, united and calm. A bonus is the average 7.1/2% points increase in Key Stage 2 QCA results this year.

When asked if she had any reservations at all about values education, Diane responds:

'No, none at all. I can honestly say that values education has made this school a much better place to be, for the children and for the staff too. I think that all the improvements that have been made are due to values education. Values underpin everything we do in the school. It's made me think hard about how I want the school to be, and it's given us a means of working together to make it better…..I'm glad I went to that conference!'

Values education in this school is seamless in that it continues through generations of children, enveloping everything that happens in the school. Diane is retiring this year but is confident that values education will continue at Greenfield for long into the future.

Choice and Diversity of Schooling Provision: does the emperor have any clothes?

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Politicians have been fascinated with choice and diversity in schooling provision for more than a decade now and this intense interest shows no sign of abating. If anything the political debate is intensifying, with on the one hand the Conservatives' plans for an even greater emphasis on the market including every school becoming its own admissions authority, and on the other Fiona Millar, former No. 10 adviser, arguing that every child should have the right to go to their local comprehensive school. As he made clear in a recent public services 'summit', Tony Blair is as committed to choice and diversity as ever (Blair, 2004).

Although a great deal of research has been done on school choice in recent years, very little of the debate has been informed by it. However two parliamentary committees, the Commons Education and Skills Committee and the Public Administration Select Committee, have been attempting to look at the issues in a more detached way. The former published its excellent report on diversity of provision in secondary education last year (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2003). The latter is sitting as I write and its inquiry has a wider remit, looking at choice and voice in the public services. This article, which offers a brief overview of issues and evidence, is a revised and expanded version of material which I submitted to both inquiries (see also Hirsch *et al.,* 2004, in press).

Choice

The principal elements of the education quasi-market in England introduced by the Conservative government's Education Reform Act of 1988 have frequently been described (for example: OECD, 1994; Whitty *et al.,* 1998; Tomlinson, 2001). There was a considerable extension of parents' rights to choose a state school for their child ('more open enrolment'). Schools became funded by formula based largely on the number of pupils on roll and were required to manage delegated budgets including staff salaries. Crucially these market-based measures were complemented by a strong form of performance regulation, including a national curriculum, frequent testing and the publication of school test and performance tables. A national system of regular inspections controlled by a government agency, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), was instituted in 1993.

The Labour government first elected in 1997 has retained the essential elements of this system. 'The main structures of the quasi-market are still in place – parental choice, open enrolment, funding following pupils, school diversity and publication of league tables' (West and Pennell, 2002, p. 218). It has however made some adaptations. For example, the market emphasis is being enhanced through encouragement for successful and popular schools to expand and to take over weak and 'failing' schools (Blair, 2002). On the other hand there is now increased regulation of the school admissions process through a code of practice and an adjudication system. Projects such as 'Excellence in Cities' (DfEE, 1999) designed to target resources to areas with high levels of disadvantage have been established. Value added measures have been introduced to school performance tables. There is a strong emphasis, which was not present under the Conservatives, on partnership and the sharing of expertise between schools. Perhaps of particular significance is a much enhanced focus on school diversity, particularly through a large expansion in the number of specialist schools: 'This greater diversity is good for pupils and parents and will ensure there is more choice and innovation in the school system' (Morris, 2001, p. 7). The rationale for this emphasis on diversity and innovation may be understood from a brief discussion of one of the major research studies of the operation of the quasi-market under the Conservatives.

A substantial longitudinal (1991-96) project – the Parental and School Choice Interaction (PASCI) study (Woods *et al.,* 1998) – contained three inter-related sets of findings of particular relevance to subsequent policy.

First, the study noted a tendency for schools to 'privilege' the academic aspects of their provision as a response to more market-like conditions. This appeared to be less a reflection of parental preferences, since most parents do not emphasise the academic over and above personal and social factors, than of the policy environment which provides strong incentives in this direction through, for example, the published performance tables accentuating academic performance. Second, the tendency for schools in England to appeal to a broad grouping of potential parents and pupils rather than to differentiate themselves sharply in order to focus on a specific *niche*, noted in the OECD's (1994) report on school choice in six countries, was confirmed. This tendency towards homogenisation arose both from central prescriptions such as the national curriculum and also from market incentives promoted by *per capita* funding and more open enrolment. Third, and closely connected to both the previous points, there was little evidence that the competitive arrangements established

in England in the 1990s had encouraged innovation within the system. Where innovation did take place it was running counter to the centralising trends of policy, and there were indications of it being curbed sometimes by a reluctance to appear to step outside the dominant model of the high status school.

These are of course broad generalisations drawn from the detailed study and need to be understood as such. We will return later to the issues raised by the findings.

In the later 1990s the English research on choice became increasingly quantitative, including attempts to probe the connection between the competitive system and educational outcomes. The PASCI study had already found that the most consistent improvement in exam pass rates over a four-year period took place in the least competitive of its three case study areas, which was in a semi-rural location. However, a later study based on a more quantitative methodology found some evidence of a link between degrees of competition in local areas and rates of examination improvement over time (Levaï, 2001). In a sample of over 300 schools, a statistical association was found between heads perceiving that they were in competition with at least five other schools and performance in the 'headline' performance measure of 5 or more grade A* to C in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination. The author suggests that 'this is due both to greater stimulus to improve and maintain the school's position in the local hierarchy and to more opportunities for co-operation and emulation related to product quality' (*ibid.,* p. 40). However, as the author indicates, the finding must be interpreted with caution. First, another key indicator – the degree of competition as perceived by the head – was not found to be associated with performance improvement. Second, it relates to only one performance measure: the limitations of this particular measure as an indicator of the achievement of all pupils in a school have been widely recognised, despite the political significance that has been accorded to it.

Gorard and his associates pursued a different issue through quantitative analysis: whether choice and competition increases polarisation. Analysing data for every state-funded school in England and Wales over a twelve-year period, they found that overall segregation in terms of poverty had declined between 1989 and 2001: although it began to rise after 1997, in 2001 it remained below the 1989 level (Gorard *et al.,* 2002a). They attributed this finding to three sets of factors:

- local social geography, such as the pattern of local housing
- school organisation at a local level, including closures and mergers of schools (which tend to decrease local segregation) and selection and school diversity (where higher levels of segregation tend to be found) and
- school admission systems.

With regard to the latter, the authors' data suggest that local education authorities (LEAs) which use catchment-area based systems, and LEAs in which a large proportion of schools are their own admission authorities (such as voluntary-aided and foundation schools) have higher levels of segregation. One of the authors' overall conclusions is that 'Choice policies do not appear to have either the clear benefits their advocates had hoped or the dangers of segregation their opponents feared' (*ibid.*, p. 36).

This study has generated a bitter academic and methodological dispute. For example Gibson and Asthana (2000) published data indicating that, within local markets, initially high-ranking schools have been drawing to themselves the most advantaged pupils and improving their GCSE performance fastest. They claim this gives solid support to the thesis that competitive markets in schooling promote social polarisation. Noden (2000) criticised the Gorard *et al.* study for using an inappropriate measure of segregation and proposed an alternative. Using his alternative as well as Gorard's measure he concluded that there had been a slight increase in social segregation between 1994 and 1999.

From a smaller-scale study of the secondary school transfer process in London, Noden *et al.* (1998) found that middle-class families gained access to significantly higher scoring schools in terms of GCSE passes. There was little evidence that this was due to where they lived ('selection by mortgage'), but appeared to be because they could afford to travel further in order to flee low-scoring inner city schools and because some schools had adopted admissions policies favouring more privileged applicants. More recently a government-sponsored survey of parents' experience of school choice drew attention to the role of cultural capital as a resource for promoting access to desired schooling (Flatley *et al.,* 2001). Better-educated mothers were much more likely than others to say they knew how pupil allocations to popular schools were carried out. Owner-occupiers and mothers of white ethnic origin were also particularly likely to assert that they understood the technicalities of the allocation process. This study also indicated that parents in London were least likely to be offered a place in the school they most wanted (nearly 70 per cent compared with 85 per cent nationally). London parents were also less likely to apply to their nearest school than those living in other areas (including other urban areas) and they were the least satisfied with the outcome of the application process.

From this necessarily brief and selective review of the substantial body of research on school choice in England, some general points might be made. There are evident methodological difficulties involved in investigating the effects of such a complex set of policy developments. These difficulties are rendered more acute when other reforms, some of which were intended in part to counteract the impact of marketisation, were being introduced at the same time, and when the changes themselves were and remain the subject of intense ideological debate. This cluster of factors may explain why the research results do not point unequivocally in one direction, for example over the question of polarisation. However an alternative explanation may be that even policy changes that appear radical when they are first proposed and implemented may have a much more limited impact than expected because of deep-rooted social and geographical factors and because of coterminous trends and forces that operate to reduce their effect. For example, Gorard *et al.,* (2002b) found no evidence of the predicted school 'spirals of decline', attributing this finding to school rolls being higher than they would otherwise have been because of a rising school population and school closures and mergers during the period in question. Despite his criticisms of the Gorard methodology, Noden makes a similar general point: 'The sustained population loss from some declining urban areas,

and in particular the loss of more advantaged families, may be of greater importance to changes in the social mix of local schools than any 'within-LEA' quasi-market effects' (Noden, 2000, p. 383). Subsequent research and analysis have tended to confirm Gewirtz *et al.*'s assessment in their pioneering study carried out in the early 1990s: 'The diversity of local settings and the particularity of their politics, social geographies and histories make it difficult to generalise about market forces in education' (Gewirtz *et al.,* 1995, p. 57).

Diversity

The Labour government has put great emphasis on an enhancement of school diversity, arguing that 'each school should have its own ethos and sense of mission' (DfES, 2002, p. 17) to combat the excessive uniformity which they claim the existing comprehensive system developed since the 1960s has promoted. However the research referred to above suggests that the reforms initiated by the 1988 Act were particularly strong drivers of uniformity and homogenisation.

This greater diversity is being achieved in large measure by a major extension of the Conservatives' 'experiment in specialisation' through plans to quadruple the number of specialist secondary schools between 2001 and 2006. More than half of all secondary schools in England have already gained specialist status (DfES, 2004) and it is intended eventually to be available to all schools that can submit convincing applications. Secretary of State Charles Clarke has said that '…Specialist schools lie at the heart of our drive to raise standards and offer more choice in secondary schools' (DfES, 2002b) and the aim is to create 'a new specialist system' (Department for Education and Skills, 2003). The specialisms that schools can bid for have been extended from technology, languages, sport and the arts to include engineering, science, 'business and enterprise', 'mathematics and computing', music and humanities. These schools have to set and meet targets in the specialist area and raise business sponsorship for a relevant project: they receive additional government grants, including an element for co-operation and sharing of expertise with other schools.

Diversity has also been promoted by providing encouragement for schools supported by the churches and other faith groups. A few Muslim, Sikh and Greek Orthodox schools have been brought inside the state system and are funded as 'voluntary aided' schools on the same basis as Church of England, Roman Catholic and Jewish schools. The government proposed changing the capital funding arrangements to make it easier to establish new schools of this type. This became a highly controversial proposal prompting fears of increased racial segregation and the teaching of contentious religious doctrines such as creationism (Branigan, 2002). While stressing the need for faith-based schools to be 'inclusive' (DfES, 2001), the government removed this feature of the diversity policy from relevant official documents (for example DfES, 2002a).

Given the salience of the specialist school model in current policy it is worth reviewing some relevant research. West *et al.* (2000) undertook a survey of existing specialist schools funded by the government. By far the most common reason cited for seeking specialist school status (by 51% of the headteachers responding) was the additional money it would bring from sponsors and the government. More than half the heads (53%) said that the specialism chosen for the bid was not the school's strongest teaching area. These two responses might suggest a predominantly tactical approach to the opportunity of specialist school status rather than a strategy born out of educational conviction. In terms of the requirement to benefit other schools, work with feeder primary schools was the most common form of collaboration (as would be expected in a competitive environment). With respect to other secondary schools, links tended to be with more distant schools such as other specialist schools, those with common sponsors or schools in other countries. In a parallel government-funded study based on case studies of twelve specialist schools, Yeomans *et al.* (2000) reported that across all their schools the weakest links were with neighbouring secondary schools. An evaluation by Ofsted (2001) concluded that specialist schools were weak in sharing resources and expertise with local schools and the wider community. This raises policy implications which will be discussed later.

The West *et al.* research indicated that specialist schools' GCSE performances have improved more than those of other schools, and a number of other benefits were reported by those involved with the schools. In addition, studies by Jesson (2001) for the Technology Colleges Trust (which is now called the Specialist Schools Trust and exists to develop specialist schooling) using value added methodology indicated that schools specialising in technology and languages added more 'value' in terms of helping pupils make progress towards GCSE than did non-specialist schools. Those specialising in arts or sport did less well: they produced value added GCSE scores very similar to those of non-specialist schools. These findings clearly strengthened the government's confidence in pressing ahead with extending the programme. However, as both reports acknowledge, there could be a variety of reasons for the superior performance of some of these schools. The bidding process may identify improving schools that would have made these improvements in any case, and the additional resources which inclusion in the programme brings are very likely to have a positive influence on performance. Further, such studies are of limited value as a guide to *national* policy unless they cover not just these schools' own performances but also how the schools have affected the performances of other schools in their localities. The Jesson research has also been heavily criticised on technical grounds by a respected expert in school performance analysis who maintained that this purported evidence for the success of specialist schools 'does not stand up to close examination' (Goldstein, 2002). Nevertheless, Jesson has undertaken the study annually since 2000 (see for example Jesson, 2004) and it is usually the only one referred to in government statements and, through skilful news management, in media coverage.

Despite their public prominence, there is a major problem with the Jesson studies. They are sponsored by and undertaken for the Specialist Schools Trust and are published by them. They are not published in conventional formats which incorporate peer review such as academic journals and books. The commentary on the data often reads like public relations material promoting the specialist school model rather than as a detached and balanced analysis of research findings.

The Commons Education and Skills Committee report criticised the government for relying on too narrow a range of evidence in this area (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2003). The accuracy of this criticism can be seen from a brief review of some other relevant studies. Further research using more sophisticated value-added methodology (Schagen *et al.,* 2002) indicated that specialist schools produced only a slight peformance advantage over non-specialists and this advantage was attributable entirely to two of the four existing forms of specialism, technology and languages. This study also provided some tentative evidence that specialist schools might be succeeding at the expense of neighbouring non-specialist schools. It also reported that LEAs with a high proportion of specialist schools (20 per cent or over) did not perform as well as those with a low proportion. 'There was thus no evidence to support the suggestion that an increase in the number of specialist schools would yield improvements in overall performance results' (*ibid.,* p. 45). The finding that (for whatever reason) specialist schools performed only slightly better than non-specialists was supported by a government statistical study. It observed that 'Differences in average progress were small compared to the spread of outcomes for pupils with similar prior attainment' (National Statistics, 2002, p. 33). A similar conclusion was reached by a study from the National Audit Office (2003).

The Schagen *et al.* (2002) study was also one of the very few to examine the performance of faith-based schools. Church of England schools were found overall to perform marginally better, but Roman Catholic schools no better or worse, than non-religious schools. (However the very small number of Jewish schools had significantly better results than either Christian or non-religious schools). The authors concluded that they had not found any clear evidence to support the view that, if these schools created a specially supportive and well-ordered environment, it provided a climate that led to high achievement.

Diversity and Choice: a new direction in schooling, or a buttressing of the old?

One of the government's key principles in 1997, as set out in its White Paper *Excellence in Schools,* was 'The focus will be on standards, not structures' (DfEE, 1997, p. 5). By 2004 it appears they have discovered the attractions of significant structural change. A major question is whether their present policy stance in the area of choice and diversity turns out to be a radical and visionary approach or a reinforcement of old and deep-rooted divisions. The government has sought to combine a major extension in diversity with an equivalent growth in collaborative practice between schools, even though the central characteristics of, and incentives relating to, the competitive system are still in place. In addition, there is a strongly articulated objective of enhancing equality of opportunity and also a strong focus on reducing the 'achievement gap' (DfES, 2001). It will be interesting to see whether diversity, collaboration and equality can all be significantly enhanced or whether the inevitable tensions between these distinct objectives will result in one or two of them becoming dominant. The research on specialist schools discussed earlier indicates that competition and partnership can make uneasy bedfellows. Numerous initiatives emphasising collaboration are underway (Glatter, 2003) and several of them are being evaluated.

Will the new diversity be built on a competitive or a genuinely pluralistic model? As the 1994 OECD report stated: 'Unlike some other nationalities, the English are used to the concept that routes to academic success may lie in centres of academic excellence rather than comprehensive neighbourhood schools' (OECD, 1994, p. 64) and that this familiarity derived from both the 'public' and the grammar school traditions. Like the City Technology Colleges (CTCs) and grant-maintained (GM) schools before them, specialist schools experienced a significant increase in their popularity following designation, and the majority of headteachers in the West *et al.* study (2000) attributed this, at least in part, to their new status.

The policy for specialist and other new types of school was originally presented as 'modernising' or 'overhauling' the comprehensive system. However, its many critics, conscious of the specific social and cultural context of English secondary education, regard it as signifying the death of that system and its replacement by a two-tier structure of 'winning' and 'losing' schools and communities. More recently reference has been made (for example in Tony Blair's speech to the 2002 Labour Party conference) to a 'post-comprehensive era' but retaining the comprehensive principle of equality of opportunity.

The prospects for achieving a pluralistic rather than an hierarchic/competitive form of diversity seem to depend on at least two key factors. First, in terms of supply, the models so far developed are relatively limited in number and fall far short of the possible range (see the typology of school diversity proposed in Glatter *et al.,* 1997, p. 8). The policy is heavily dependent on the specialist school model (curricular diversity in terms of the typology) and this dependence has been accentuated by the recent government reticence over faith schools. For example the new 'Academies' – publicly-funded independent schools sponsored by private and voluntary bodies and established in areas of disadvantage – are also required to have curricular specialisation. A more creative approach to developing contrasting types of school would be needed, and this would imply a greater willingness to relax central controls particularly in the area of performance regulation.

With regard to demand, there is a critical issue concerning the relationship between diversity and choice. The two terms have now been linked in policy discourse for more than a decade, since the Conservative government's 1992 White Paper, *Choice and Diversity: a new framework for schools* (DfE, 1992): the specialist schools policy has been explicitly presented in terms of enhancing choice (Blair, 2002). However the precise connection between them is very little understood and despite the significant quantity of research on choice and the quasi-market little attention has been given to this particular topic. The limited empirical evidence available suggests that, apart from preferences among relatively small proportions of parents for specific forms of religious education or for single-sex schooling there is no widespread demand for school diversity (see for example Woods *et al.,* 1998). Parents generally appear to be simply looking for a school which will deliver the 'standard product' well, whether or not it carries a 'badge' of distinctiveness. Of course this could change were a range of more distinct school types to become available, but Walford's judgement of some years ago that the (then) government's diversity policy '…has been largely generated by the government itself, and has

not been the result of pressure from parents' (Walford, 1996, p. 145) still holds true.

A pluralistic approach to diversity would require 'a relatively even spread of choices' (OECD, 1994, p. 42) so as to avoid the situation where some schools widely seen as the 'best' are heavily over-subscribed and there is a 'concentration of the most disadvantaged pupils in the least popular schools' (DfEE, 2001, p. 87). Such a spread of choices would be more likely to happen 'if parents have diverse 'frames of reference' placing different values on aspects of educational attainments' (Adnett and Davies, 2002, p. 202). Historical and cultural factors militate against such a development in the English context (Edwards and Whitty, 1997).

An important set of issues centre on availability and illustrate the intimate connection between supply and demand. A striking small-scale research conducted in the early 1990s in a single medium-sized English town demonstrated the logistical difficulties involved in increasing diversity (Brain and Klein, 1994). Parents were surveyed about their preferences among the more restricted range of school types available at that time, principally single sex/co-educational and church-linked/non-denominational. The authors calculated that almost twice as many secondary schools would need to be provided in the town in order to meet all the parents' preferences. They also pointed out that if the choice menu had been extended to cover different curricular specialisms and a wider range of faith-based options (as are now being offered) the logistical problem would have been considerably exacerbated.

Parental perceptions of availability are also a significant factor. The PASCI study conducted large-scale parental surveys in three contrasting areas of England. In a semi-rural area, only around one in four parents thought they had a realistic choice between three or more schools: the figure went up to just over half in a medium-sized town. Even in a heavily urbanised area a substantial proportion of parents – varying between a third and a quarter across the three years that the survey was conducted – considered that their realistic choice was limited to one or two schools (Woods *et al.,* 1998).

This raises the possibility that increased diversity may reduce rather than enhance parents' perception of the extent of choice open to them. For example, in the case of specialist schools it is an open question whether a choice between a small number of schools emphasising particular subject specialisms will be perceived as a more or a less attractive menu of options than was available previously under a more generalist system. For some parents and pupils, where the latter's specific talents and strengths are already clearly evident by the age of 10, or who are attracted not so much by the particular subject specialism as by the sense of 'special-ness' it confers, the offer may be welcome (assuming that they can gain admission). For others the particular mix of specialisms available may be perceived as unappealing or may provide an additional source of anxiety in appearing to require an early judgement about a child's aptitudes.

The Specialist School Model: what is it for?

These considerations direct attention to a key question concerning the specialist schools policy: what is its purpose? So far as I am aware, no other country has put such a strong emphasis on distinguishing schools by subject specialisation, and this focus has been explicitly rejected in both Scotland and Wales. The 'brand image' is somewhat unclear because emphasis is also placed on the schools' obligation to comply in full with the national curriculum. On the face of it the policy would seem to be designed to promote parental choice, as Tony Blair has confirmed (Blair, 2003), but the DfES testimony to the Commons Education Committee noticeably played down this objective in favour of that of enhancing school improvement (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2003, Ev. 107-108). As has already been discussed the suggestion that specialist schools are more successful than other schools because of their specialist status cannot be sustained by the evidence.

More recently the two goals appear to have been combined within the concept of 'personalised education' (Miliband, 2004). 'Personalisation' is a new label designed to signal the importance of enabling public services to meet the needs and wants of individual users more effectively and thus promote a new social contract between the state and the citizen. Despite some cynical responses, this focus may prove productive and attempts are currently underway to provide greater definition and identify implications (Leadbeater, 2004; Policy Commission on Public Services, 2004; Wright and Ngan, 2004). However it is not clear how specialist schools are meant to contribute to it, notwithstanding the DfES's (2004, p. 1) claim that they are 'a key element of the Government's drive to personalise education around the needs, aptitudes and aspirations of individual pupils'. Patients attend specialist hospitals after a medical diagnosis and assessment of their needs, but no equivalent process is applied to 10-year-old children applying for specialist schools except for the selection by aptitude which a small proportion of the schools operate.

Given the huge emphasis on specialist schooling in current secondary education policy in England and the very substantial funding which has been applied to it, a more coherent rationale is surely needed, particularly to explain precisely how the specialist school model is thought to be so well suited to meeting pupils' individual needs. Unless such an account is developed it may appear that the Emperor has no clothes, and that it has been simply a branding exercise designed to develop a political construct without thoroughly examining either its educational or social implications.

Conclusions

I have suggested that the precise connection between choice and diversity in schooling provision is very little understood. The relationship between them appears subtle and ambiguous. Just as choice has tended not to lead to greater diversity, so diversity may not produce perceptions of increased choice.

The discussion also indicates that neither choice nor diversity is an end in itself, though they are often presented as such. They are both means intended to contribute to wider goals, such as enhancing parent and pupil satisfaction over school allocations and achieving a good fit between the school allocated, the child's educational and social needs and the family's preferences in an equitable manner. Whether and how policy and practice over school admissions contributes to such goals has rarely been examined and requires close attention.

Current policy on school diversity is heavily focused on one specific and arguably narrow form of diversity, namely subject specialisation. There are also indications of a 'pecking order' of specialisms developing which could reinforce existing hierarchies. If the specialist school model is to remain as central as it is today, it needs a more coherent account of its claimed advantages, informed by a much wider range of evidence.

There is little evidence that greater choice has led to improved educational outcomes, while the context of uniform standards and the need to appeal to a broad 'market' has on the whole discouraged schools from voluntarily seeking to differentiate themselves sharply. With regard to the impact of choice on equity, there is some disagreement but overall it appears that any tendency towards greater polarisation may often have been blunted by the influence of other factors such as demography or school reorganisation. The wide variety of local contexts and the many ways the various influences play out within them make generalisation hazardous.

Finally there is a puzzle about policy-makers' intense and continuing interest in between-school choice and diversity when there is no evidence of a widespread demand for them from the public. Parents generally appear to be simply looking for a school which will deliver the 'standard product' well, though this could change were a range of more distinct school types to become available.

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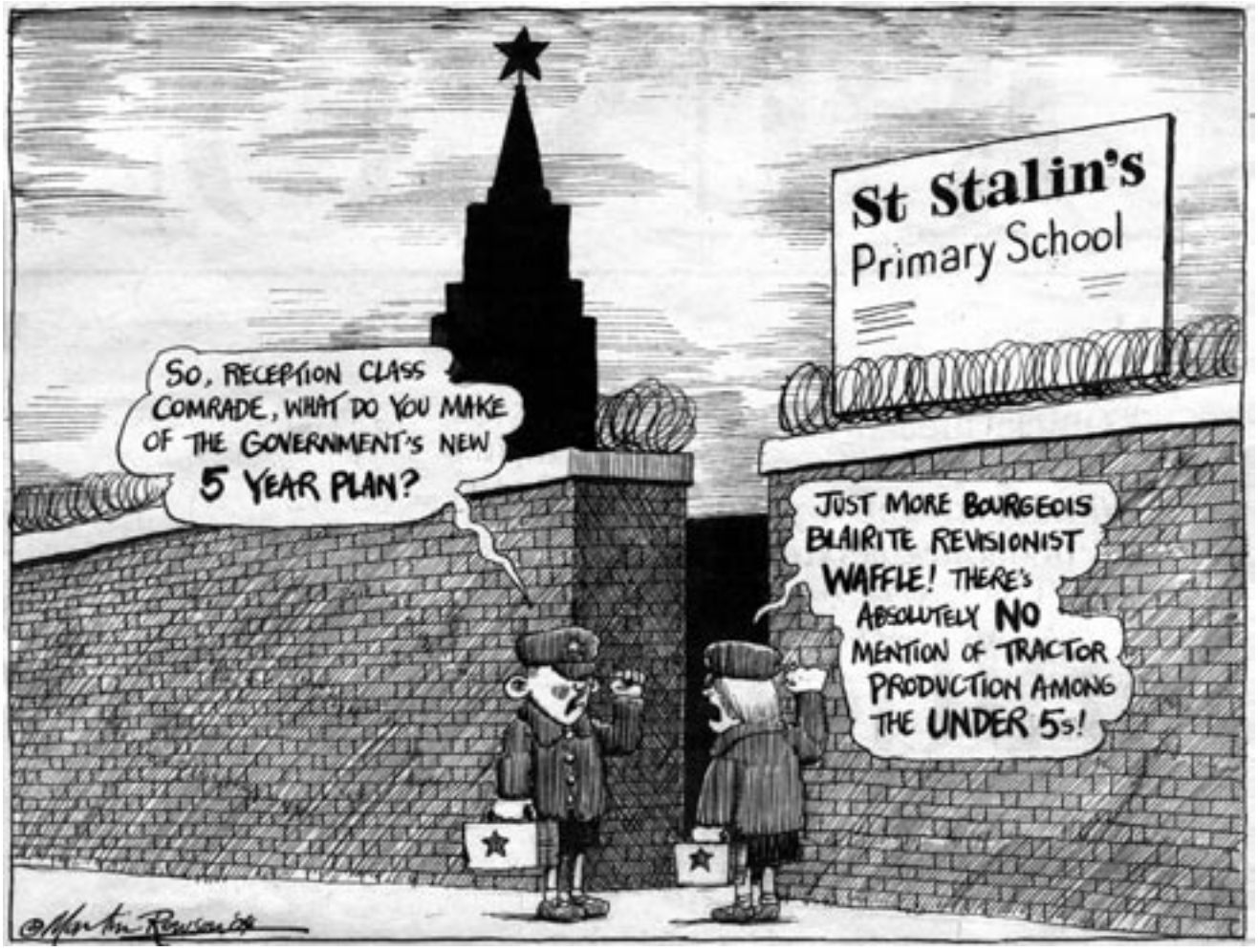

The Small Schools Movement

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The need for small human scale learning environments in which young people have the chance to learn what it means to be human, in other words to become educated, has never been more pressing. Notwithstanding current governmental claims that the 'Blair generation' will be the best educated in history, we know from a recent study by the New Economics Foundation (April 2004) that students in secondary schools are not happy, are bored and have stopped learning. There is also the alarming figure of 25% of young people who suffer mental health problems, of 20% of 16 year olds who leave school with no qualifications and other statistics which show that many young people are not flourishing in the state education system as it is currently constituted.

The Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke, has acknowledged some of the advantages of smaller learning communities and declared himself in favour of small secondary schools. At a Labour party Big Conversation event in May he backed the idea of 'human size' structures within schools, stating: 'I am absolutely certain that one needs to build up small schools within existing secondary schools', referring to the American schools which had established the 'schools within a school' approach. Such measures would, Clarke maintained, give students a sense of belonging which in turn would improve both behaviour and academic performance.

Why is the idea of breaking large schools down into smaller units 'barely known' in the UK, according to Clarke? Is it because those large comprehensive schools that did restructure into small learning communities in the 1970s – namely, Countesthorpe, Bretton Woods, Madeley Court and Stantonbury Campus – are forever associated with those 'trendy', progressive – even Deweyan – ideas condemned by James Callaghan in his Ruskin College speech of 1976 and by Conservative Education ministers from 1979 on?

It is time to rescue 'small size' in education from the condescension of politically motivated critics. This article will review the progress of the American small school reform movement, consider the lessons that teachers and policy makers in the UK might learn from it and draw attention to some significant developments taking place over here.

In the United States, the perceived advantages of small schools and of smaller learning communities restructured out of large schools – the 'schools within a school' model – have been explored extensively by university education departments, by education reform movements, by charitable foundations and by school districts. While there is some disagreement amongst American educators as to what counts as 'small', there is a general consensus that the days of the 'giant' American high school are numbered. Craig Howley, of Arizona State University and a long time defender of small rural schools, sees 400 as the maximum number for a small school, as does the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation , the most generous private funder of the small school movement in the United States. Ted Sizer, founder of perhaps the most prominent of the American school reform movements, the Coalition of Essential Schools, sees 200 as the right size, a view shared by Patricia Wasley, Dean of the College of Education, University of Washington, Seattle, who led the Bank Street College Study of new small schools in Chicago in the 1990s.

The case for small schools is compelling and is expressed succinctly on the Small Schools Project website at the University of Washington, Seattle: 'After 18 years of serious attention to school reform nationally, the creation of small high schools and the conversion of large comprehensive high schools to smaller schools appear to hold the greatest promise of substantially increasing student accomplishment'. The research supporting smaller learning communities is clear: they are safer; the student achievement gap between poor students and the well-off is narrowed; discipline problems and drop out rates go down and student attendance goes up, as does participation in extra-curricular activities; teacher and parent satisfaction and student affiliation increase; college-going rates increase; the cost per graduate (from high school) is lower.

These are strong claims and are not without their critics. The issue of cost is particularly controversial. One of the arguments for the big school , here as in the United States, is that they enable economies of scale to be made. Small school proponents have turned this around to argue that the large American high school is now more likely to come with *penalties of scale* in terms of student distress and disaffection, high drop out rates and underperformance. These negative outcomes, which can lead on to low wage earning capacity, unemployment, increased need of public assistance and greater likelihood of incarceration cost society dear, and, it is argued, should be borne in mind when considering relative costs. Small schools and small learning communities have on the whole a much higher graduation rate than large schools. A classic example is the Julia Richman Education Complex in New York. As a 3,000 strong high school in the 1990s it had a graduation rate of 37%; today the same building is home to a consortium of small schools each with no more than 300 students and has a graduation rate of 90%. If you look at costs from the point of view of outcome, that is, graduation rates, then small schools are in fact *cheaper*.

What most of the American research studies reveal is that the smaller the school or learning community the greater the benefit to 'at risk' students – that is, students

from ethnic minorities and impoverished backgrounds who find it hard to flourish in the traditional American high school. There is an alarming statistic of a 75% drop out rate amongst the Native American community and in some run-down urban communities drop out rates can be as high. Craig Howley, writing in 'School Reform Proposals: The Research Evidence' edited by Alex Molnar (2002), recommends that the smallest schools should be built in the most impoverished communities.

But small size is not enough. The four leading small school champions all of whom have founded and run small secondary schools, Deborah Meyer of Central Park East Secondary School, New York and now of Mission Hill School, Boston , Ted Sizer of Parker School, Massachusetts, Ted Littkey of The Met in Providence, Rhode Island and Ann Cook of the Urban Academy, The Julia Richman Education Complex, New York, have all reached the conclusion that while smallness is a helpful precondition for high quality schooling to take place, on its own it is not the answer. What smallness does is enable the teacher really to know the student, to appreciate his or her interests, background and learning needs and to tailor a learning programme accordingly. Central to the Coalition of Essential Schools' reform programme is the belief that 'one cannot teach a student well if one does not know that student well' and that ' the heart of schooling is to be found in relationships between student, teacher and ideas'(Ted Sizer 1996). School reformers maintain that it is only possible to achieve this quality of relationship when teachers teach students for longer periods of time. In the large American high school where learning is structured into subject-based fifty minute blocks, most teachers teach up to 150 students a day . In the small learning community where students work on multidisciplinary topics over an extended period of time and where pastoral and academic concerns are fused , teachers work with approximately 80 students a week. In this context, it is possible to create a learning community where students do not slip through the cracks and where, in Patricia Wasley's words 'their improved learning becomes the collective mission of a number of trusted adults'(2002).

Central to the success of small schools is a focus on student learning. If small schools merely graft on the structures of the traditional large school – streaming, separate subject departments, the division of academic and pastoral concerns – and carry on with the delivery model of learning and teaching, then they will fail as learning communities. The small school offers the possibilities of pedagogical approaches that transcend these outmoded concepts. The many reports now coming through of new, exciting and successful pedagogies developed by small learning communities suggest that they are breaking new ground. Personalised learning, an emphasis on critical thinking , mixed ability learning groups, varied forms of assessment, the involvement of adults and other agencies outside the school, an emphasis on activity learning, are all elements of an innovative and rigorous approach to learning.

In Boston, Chicago and New York, small schools are becoming the dominant model for secondary school reform. Federal grants for restructuring big schools and the huge injection of private money – some $590,000million – from the Seattle based Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have given an enormous impetus for the small school movement across the nation. In September 2003 the Foundation gave $51.2 million in grants for 67 small high schools prompting the Mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, to state that within two years one third of secondary school students will attend small schools. In Boston, thanks to Gates money supporting the existing network of innovative small schools, within four years a similar proportion of school students will be attending small, purpose-designed high schools.

However well-funded and despite the acknowledged benefits of small size to students and teachers the road to reform has not been easy. It is taking longer to 'turn around' the culture of existing schools in the restructuring process than anticipated and for this reason reformers are favouring the strategy of founding new autonomous small schools. It is, however, too early to tell which of the two approaches will ultimately prove more successful: for such conclusions to be reached more research is needed. During the 1990s some important research studies were carried out. Two outstanding examples are the Bank Street College study in Chicago entitled 'Small Schools, Great Strides' (2001), which looked at the progress made by autonomous small schools founded in Chicago between 1990 and 1997, and the seven year study of the Coalition Campus Schools Project(CCSP) in New York City. The CSSP study documented the restructuring two large failing high schools, Julia Richman High in Manhattan and James Monroe High in the Bronx, into eleven small schools. The two large school campuses were redesigned to include the new small schools and other service and community agencies. While acknowledging that more in depth research studies of this kind are needed for an evidence based policy change, it is hardly fair of Craig Howley to suggest that the quality of research on the 'schools within a school' model is 'negligible'(2002). There is a mass of research evidence available from NCREST, the National Centre for Restructuring Education, School and Teaching at Columbia University, NY and also from the National Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, Seattle.

While many of these developments in the American small school movement are not yet widely known in the UK, there has been marked interest in government circles in the idea of small schools. Charles Clarke has responded with interest to approaches from Human Scale Education and currently the Innovations Unit and Human Scale Education are jointly compiling a Register of small (under 500) secondary schools in the UK, with a view to developing a bank of information on curriculum, pedagogy and school organisation. One common response to the suggestion that we might have something to learn from the American experience is that their 'small' schools are more or less the same size as our 'average' comprehensive school of 500 to 600. This ignores the fact that many of the American small schools, either restructured or new, have between 200 and 300 students and that this number makes possible the innovative pedagogic approaches that will excite young people and keep them on track.

Bishops Park College in Jaywick Sands, Clacton, is an example of one UK school that is seizing the opportunity to transform student learning and the quality of schooling by 'going small'. Bishops Park is a new 11-16 school – at present in temporary accommodation and due to move to permanent buildings in May 2005 – which has been

designed and is being built on the 'schools within a school' model. It comprises three small (300) learning communities within one large building and will share its building and grounds with other community agencies. The learning communities are semi-autonomous and each will have its own dedicated team of staff who will be responsible for 85% of the curriculum. Blocked timetabling, team teaching and interdisciplinary studies enable each teacher to work with no more than 85 to 90 students a week, allowing the development of closer relationships and making possible a personalised approach to learning in which students have a voice in what and how they study . In its second year of existence Bishops Park has a waiting list of prospective pupils and the Year 7 and 8 students are eager to learn and committed to the school community. As one of them said of the school: 'it's hardworking, fun, exciting and it's got a cosy atmosphere'.

Will Bishops Park break the mould of English schooling and transform the learning experience of young people in the 21st century? Certainly its Headteacher, Mike Davies, is planning for it to do so.

Resources

Center for Collaborative Education. www.ccebos.org

Center on Reinventing Public Education. University of Washington, Seattle. The Small Schools Project. *www.smallschoolproject.org*

Coalition of Essential Schools. *www.essentialschools.org*

National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching, (NCREST). Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. www.tc.columbia.edu/~ncrest/home.htm

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Portland. Oregon. *www.nwrl.org/scpd/sirs/nslc.pdf*

Small Schools Workshop. University of Illinois in Chicago. *www.smallschoolsworkshop.org*

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Comprehensive Schooling: in need of definition?

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Comprehensive secondary schooling is currently beset by changes and challenges. The creation of specialist schools and emphasis upon league tables and parental choice appears to be undermining comprehensive schooling. Inequalities within the current system are highlighted by increased variation of perceived quality between schools, the existence of a minority of state grammar schools, the independent sector and ongoing concerns regarding access to higher education for state school students. These conflicting and contradictory aspects of current secondary provision suggest an urgent need for a re-evaluation of the idea and value of comprehensive schooling.

This discussion, based upon philosophical work undertaken for my Master's thesis, considers the complexities of comprehensive schooling and asks whether there are any logical arguments in support of it. I begin by identifying the current ambiguity regarding any comprehensive principle. Secondly, I consider ideas of inclusion and equality as central features of a comprehensive ideal. Finally, I address some of the tensions and draw conclusions regarding the value of the ideas of social inclusion and equality for common schooling.

A Comprehensive Principle?

The problem with re-evaluating the ideal and position of comprehensive schooling is that despite frequent reference by governmental and other literature to a comprehensive principle or model there is little evidence of any well-defined guiding principle. Hargreaves (1982) commented on the need for more care, thought and agreement to be given to comprehensive schooling and the need to think out 'an agreed set of goals and purposes,' which has not occurred. Cornall highlights the disparity between comprehensive schools and the need for a common approach:

> *We must ensure that there is a fully argued intellectual basis for this system with the practical implications of the philosophy thought through and clearly stated (Cornall 1997 :37).*

> *The ideas underpinning comprehensive education are often neglected or encapsulated in 'vague slogans' which Ball notes ' are not open to strict practical interpretation or realistic evaluation' (Ball 1981:3)[1] Further, Whitty argues that:*

> *The term 'comprehensive school' has never had an entirely unambiguous meaning. Sometimes it has meant having carefully balanced intakes, at other times taking all-comers from the local neighbourhood. Balance has sometimes meant academic balance, sometimes social balance. (Whitty 2001:11-12).*

Terms and ideas associated with comprehensive schooling are used without any consensual understanding of their meanings. For example the current Labour Government's election manifesto in May 1997 stated that:

> *In education we reject both the idea of a return to the 11-plus and monolithic comprehensive schools that take no account of children's differing abilities. Instead we favour all-in schooling, which identifies the distinct abilities of individual pupils and organises them into classes to maximise their progress…In this way we modernise the comprehensive principle, learning from the experience of its 30 years of application (cited by Tulloch 2001:27).*

This statement raises the question of: *exactly what comprehensive principle is being referred to,* if indeed such a principle exists? No explanation or definition of the principle is offered and it appears unlikely that any clear idea was in mind. Consideration of government policy illustrates the lack of any well-defined terms or ideas used in relation to comprehensive schooling: this was exemplified by Mr Blunkett, Education Minister in 2001, when he told MP's that:

> *Our policies are designed to develop the potential of and to offer equality to every child whatever their background and whatever school they attend…'The comprehensive ideal is equality of opportunity, the comprehensive ideal is inclusion, ensuring that schools meet the needs of every child,[2]*

Here, the notions of equality, inclusion and equality of opportunity are used without any reference to what the terms actually mean. What definitions, if any, are implied and how do these relate to the increased emphasis upon school diversity, parental choice and specialist schools. Lack of clarity is again visible in an opaque statement by Mr. Blair, when addressing head teachers:

> *The introduction of comprehensive education had seen 'inclusion' becoming an end in itself, rather than a means to identify and develop the talents of each pupil,'. 'We want to make diversity not the exception but indeed the hallmark of secondary education in the future.[3]*

As the quotations illustrate, ambiguous notions such as equality and inclusion are frequently used in relation to comprehensive schooling whilst no clear definitions of

the terms are provided. The above statements make little reference to what their claims mean for practice. For example, how inclusion and equality are to be realised within a school culture of diversity and choice.

Establishing shared ground and common meaning regarding the ideas central to comprehensive education is, I think, an important priority before any useful evaluation may occur. Debate is necessary given the current situation, which appears antithetical to comprehensive schooling.

Comprehensive Education Defined?

Are there enduring aspects of comprehensive education or key justificatory, theoretical principles supporting the idea? Can logical grounds for the importance and defence of comprehensive schooling be deduced? [4]

Comprehensive schooling is a complex and problematic idea. Historical considerations (Ball 1998, Dean 1998) suggest a lack of any clearly identified comprehensive position. Figure 1 illustrates the ideas significant for comprehensive schooling and also ideas logically in tension with it.

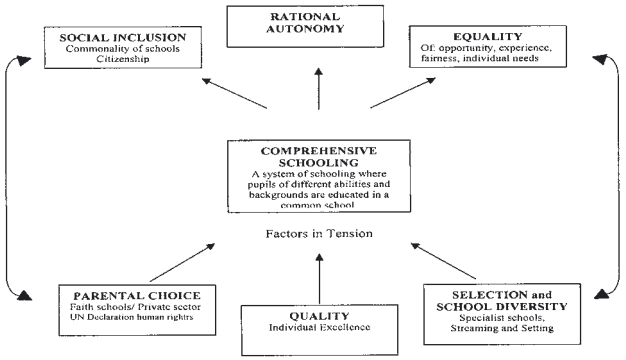

Figure 1: Comprehensive Schooling Ideas and Tensions

Equality of Opportunity

The idea of equal treatment, experience and opportunity is frequently mentioned in relation to comprehensive schooling. Equality must be understood both as an idea and in terms of its practical realisation. The notion of equality is complex as Figure 2 illustrates. There are a number of positions, and philosophical consideration of these suggests that a clear solution or universal definition of equality, which justifies the existence of comprehensive schooling, is untenable. However, a working definition of equality is necessary to assist further consideration of educational practice and comprehensive schooling. A shared definition is vital, since as Kleining (1982) notes there is a danger that 'like democracy equality tends to function as a propagandist slogan into which almost any context can be read.'

Equality cannot mean uniform teaching in a comprehensive school taking no account of the individual, nor the achievement of equal outcomes. Equality in relation to education seems best justified by recourse to a number of positions, which considered together support one another. R.S.Peters' notion of justice, requiring that equals be treated equally and unequals unequally, such that there are no distinctions without relevant differences is important. However, it does not provide sufficient support for comprehensive schooling. Peters' position needs to be combined with the idea of humanity having equal value such that any advantages gained by the individual are products of their own ability rather than of non-justifiable advantages. Finally Brighouse and Swift's more substantive arguments for educational equality and heterogeneity of pupils within schools need to be included.

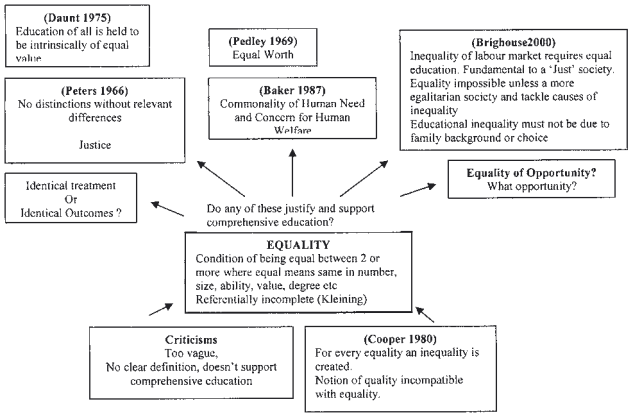

Figure Two:

My argument in favour of equality as a guiding idea for comprehensive schooling draws on the positions noted above. I deploy the argument that justice itself, implies that all children have the right to schooling, which seeks as far as possible to advantage no particular individuals over others and where there is advantage, that this is as far as possible the consequence of the ability and effort of the individual student. This implies the need for equality of educational opportunity. Secondly, such equality in an educational context means identical treatment for all children. Differential treatment is justified if the children in question require it in order to have equal access to the educational provision. For example children with special learning needs, or from particular social backgrounds may justly require differential treatment. Unfortunately this definition of equality cannot be any more precise.

Equality is an idea fundamental to comprehensive schooling but it does not provide sole support and defence of comprehensive schooling. In times past divisive systems such as eleven plus dictated grammar and secondary modern schools were supported by appeal to aspects of equality and catering for the needs of the individual.

Social Inclusion

Are there any enduring aspects of, or arguments in favour of social inclusion, which in turn support comprehensive schooling? Social inclusion may be defined as: the idea that all humans in a given society have an equal right to be involved in and benefit from the society in which they live. All people within a society should have an equal right to their needs being met and their rights protected within that society, regardless of their attitudes, dispositions, needs, abilities, social background and level of wealth. There are civic and moral constraints to this definition. For example, people who choose to opt out of their societal systems or those who have forfeited their rights in some way, perhaps through crime may not be eligible for inclusion in the fullest sense.

There are multiple tensions within the idea of social inclusion, particularly in relation to comprehensive schooling. Common schools necessarily require support

from the whole community in order to be common to all. Currently, comprehensive schools are not entirely comprehensive and socially inclusive because parents have the rights to choose schools and the option to opt out of the common school. Whilst the comprehensive school, in theory, seems central to social inclusion it is also necessary to consider how social inclusion really works in practice among students and facilitated by teachers within comprehensive schools. Indepth empirical research is required, to provide evidence regarding the extent to which social inclusion occurs in terms of both social class and ethnic groupings inside and outside the comprehensive school.

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, Article 26 contains at least some sense of education as a social right regardless of individual factors. 'everyone has the right to education'[5]However, the article further states the importance of parental choice over education:

> *Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights.3)*

There is tension between parental rights and the ideas of social inclusion and equality, raising the issue of the extent to which the state has the right to impinge upon parental choice in order to promote equality and inclusion.

Swift provides a useful contribution to this debate arguing against selective schools and the independent sector on the grounds that both are:

> *socially divisive, inimical to the value of community.... segregating children of different abilities into different kinds of schools would undermine the sense of common culture and shared experience. Second it worsens the education of those not selected, creating more unequal outcomes without any gain in standards overall (Swift 2003:35).*

Swift places the importance of social inclusion over and above equality in regard to education. There are strong arguments in favour of the idea of inclusion as central to comprehensive schooling. However these have to be balanced against parental rights to choose their children's education.

Autonomy

The development of Rational Autonomy is a further important and justified aim of education. In relation to comprehensive schooling autonomy is a significant ideal. Common schools with a diverse student body provide the opportunity for autonomy to be developed and citizenship nurtured. Autonomy is a necessary part of both equality and social inclusion yet it cannot alone provide justification for comprehensive schooling

Ideas in Tension with Comprehensive Schooling

Whitty identifies problems of self-exclusion at the top end of society, with parents opting to take their children out of the more socially inclusive state system in favour of an elite private education, which challenges the socially inclusive idea of comprehensive education. Brighouse's work identifies this problem:

> *The operation of the private sector is probably the single greatest institutional source of educational inequality, as well as of social inequality(Brighouse20 00:25).*

Brighouse sets out a number of practical steps to attempt to limit the private sector. These include prohibiting private schools from selecting on the basis of ability, withdrawing their charitable status and increasing funding to state schools to 'remedy factors which cause parents to opt into the private sector'. Brighouse's proposals, although supported by his previous arguments in favour of pupil heterogeneity and justice, do not address the rights and ideas with which his proposals conflict. Currently the DFES tells parents that:

> *You have the right to say which school you want your child to go to, whether the school is inside or outside the area you live in (www.dfes, 2003).*

Further, Michael Barber, Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit[6]is currently arguing in favour of a diverse education market of state schools which conflicts with any traditional sense of comprehensive schooling.

Consideration of ideals central to comprehensive schooling and the challenges posed by parental choice and a market-place approach suggests that we are currently at a critical time for secondary education. The DFES website makes little reference to comprehensive schooling implying that the time for comprehensive discourse is over, to be replaced by a discourse of standards, markets, choice and diversity.

There is an academic and practical need to challenge these assumptions and the radical shift in school discourse by asking searching questions concerning the ideas, which this discussion, has located at the heart of comprehensive schooling, namely equality of educational opportunity and social inclusion. How are these ideals, which are intricately interwoven with social justice going to be addressed by this new discourse?

Conclusions: A mutually supportive coalition?

I began by asking whether there are any ideals, which logically support comprehensive schooling? Having briefly considered some of the arguments and definitions concerning the ideas significant to comprehensive schooling it is evident that there is no single comprehensive principle, which provides logical and conclusive support for comprehensive schooling. Instead comprehensive schooling appears to be comprised of and supported by a *coalition of ideas and principles*, each idea forming part of a family of ideas underpinning comprehensive schooling. Each idea taken alone does not adequately support comprehensive schooling. However, considered in relation to one another the ideas seem to become a *mutually supportive network,* affirming the idea of comprehensive schooling and challenging ideas directly opposed to it. It suggests that none of the ideas considered are individually decisive but when considered together they establish comprehensive education as a default norm. It is the often ambiguous nature of these ideas which has resulted in a lack of clarity, general uncertainty and unsystematic consideration and development of secondary education in England. This lack of clarity and awareness of the central facets of comprehensive education has, I think, contributed to the ease with which choice and diversity of educational provision has come to the fore.

The valuable ideas of social inclusion and equity are easily overlooked by popular parental demand for what is best for their children. However the growing sociological evidence that parents are not equally able to choose a 'good' education for their children (see Gerwirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995), Reay and Lucey (2000)) implies the need for proper governmental and academic consideration of the ways in which the valuable and just comprehensive ideas of equity and inclusion are being effected by the current political movement away from the idea of comprehensive schooling.

There is not space here to address the practical aspects and implications of the ideas discussed, which also require consideration. I am currently concerned to examine any effects on comprehensive ideas of equity and inclusion at the school level. How are parental choice and local school competition spaces affecting school practice and teacher and student perceptions of inclusion and equality?

Notes

[1] Ball outlines the early NFER studies on comprehensive schooling commissioned by Anthony Crosland. He highlights the vague slogans and ideas referred to in relation to comprehensive schooling, which are both ambiguous and of little practical use. pp 2–5

[2] retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/1164906.stm

[3] retrieved from : http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/1166246.stm

[4] Here I summarise the conclusions drawn from my recent attempt to evaluate the notion of comprehensive schooling at the level of definitions.

[5] Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups,

[6] Fur further details see: http://www.tta.gov.uk/about/article/tta_agm.htm

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Research with the Pupils 'in the Middle' at KS3: 'Levels Just Show How Average You Are'

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Introduction

The number of educational research studies involving pupils is increasing (Consulting pupils website). Most studies are with pupils in a specific age group or concentrate on certain categories, such as special needs or the gifted and talented. However there have been few studies that involve pupils in the middle ability range of Key Stage 3. A research study into target setting (Dagley, 2003) sets out to identify and involve some of these 'middle' pupils. This article describes how this was done and discusses issues in relation to the definition of 'average' from the perspective of the pupils and the researcher.

Identifying the Average

According to the National Curriculum the attainment expected at age 11 is Level 4. This is often described as the average attainment level but it is not made clear if this refers to the mean, median or mode or how changes in percentages of children attaining this level affect the average. Nevertheless when this research began in 2001, Level 4 was accepted by the staff in the case study school, as that being achieved by the 'average' pupil: those who only reached level 3 were considered to have special needs and those who achieved level 5 or above to be more able.

The number of pupils required for the research was small, as it was a qualitative study investigating individual experiences, understandings and constructions of reality. A decision was made to attempt to identify a small sample of pupils who were in the middle ability range by using Key Stage 2 National Curriculum levels in the first instance. Lists were made of those who had scored Level 4s in English, maths and science. Surprisingly only 13 girls and 9 boys out of 120 in Year 7 and 13 girls and 9 boys out of 140 in Year 8 had scored these levels in all three tests.

When I had compiled my list of possible students I showed this to the Student Directors for the year groups and they suggested the ones who were 'very average, often overlooked'. A group of ten quiet, middle ability, average pupils, who were not receiving extra help with literacy, numeracy or behaviour, were identified but how accurate was the 'average' label?

Statistical Variations in the Average

The table below shows the variations in baseline test scores for the ten pupils.

Although all the pupils were awarded Level 4s, the actual SATs scores varied considerably. The Year 7

PUPIL	KS2 English	KS2 Maths	KS2 Science	MIDYIS band	Norfolk County Numeracy	Norfolk County Reading
Dawn	56	58	56	D	96	89
Becky	56	57	56	B	98	97
Emma	67	71	53	A	98	118
Billy	53	78	59	B	100	92
Phil	49	71	57	C	114	91
Daniel	47	69	58	C	93	85
Mark	50	64	60	N/A	88	106
Charlie	53	67	64	B	110	92
Anne	N/A	N/A	N/A	B	99	90
Sara	67	63	58	B	96	109

MIDYIS (Middle Years Information System – Durham University baseline tests) showed a similar variation, with the final bandings assigned to these pupils varying from the top A band to the bottom D, although most of them were put in the middle B and C bands. The Year 7 County numeracy and reading test scores show a comparable variation and also reveal individual strengths, with Phil and Charlie scoring much more highly in numeracy than reading and Emma and Sara performing more strongly in the reading test.

National Curriculum levels achieved at Key Stage 3 reveal further differences.

Pupil	KS3 English	KS3 Maths	KS3 Science
Dawn	4	4	4
Becky	5	5	5
Emma	6	5	5
Billy	5	5	5
Phil	4	6	6
Daniel	6	5	5

(The other 4 pupils had not taken the KS3 SATs during the research period)

Phil had reached above average levels in maths and science but stayed at level 4 in English, whereas Dawn had stayed at level 4 for all three subjects. However this does not mean that her actual scores had not improved but they cannot be compared as different tests were used. She may also have suffered from examination nerves. The KS3 SATs also revealed that Daniel had made the most progress in English, from the lowest score in Year 6 to level 6 in Year 9. He was also only two points short of a level 6 in science. The revision tests that he said he did at home may have helped.

The levels for the other subjects were all Teacher Assessments and revealed marked variations in how different teachers and departments assess levels but even so it was obvious from the figures and the teacher comments that these 'average' students performed below average in some subjects and above average in others.

I wondered how 'average' these pupils were in relation to factors other than National Curriculum levels. They were a mix of village and town children, some had older siblings and all except two of them received help from home with schoolwork. Six of them identified English as a problem for them at school.

Pupil	Attendance Yr. 7	Attendance Yr. 8	Attendance Yr. 9	Extra Curricular Yr. 7	Extra Curricular Yr. 8	Extra Curricular Yr. 9
Mark	92%	91%		8	10	
Charlie	94%	98%		3	9	
Anne	89%	96%		6	14	
Sara	100%	98%		2	3	
Billy		93%	85%		3	7
Phil		94%	95%		3	4
Daniel		95%	87%		6	2
Dawn		100%	99%		6	4
Becky		98%	95%		2	3
Emma		99%	88%		4	0

The table above shows that attendance patterns generally seemed quite high in Year 7 and 8, but there does appear that there may have been a decline in Year 9. However knowledge of the students suggested various possible reasons. For example Billy's absence was associated with a family bereavement and Daniel's was when his family took him on holiday. It is only Emma whose absences may be an early sign of disaffection. Similarly the common pattern of extra curricular activities – clubs, visits and charity collections, increasing in Year 8 is illustrated, but the decline of such activities in Year 9 is only marked for Daniel and Emma (Keys & Fernandes, l993)

Personal Variations on the Average

As well as collecting statistical data, the research described here included three individual interviews with each pupil over the period of a year. The primary purpose of the interviews was to obtain information about the pupils' experiences of and views about target setting, but they also exposed the highly individual personalities, strengths and weaknesses of these ten superficially similar pupils. The profiles below illustrate some of the commonalities as well as differences of individuals.

Mark

Mark is an angelic-looking blond boy who lives with his parents and four siblings in a coastal village. He is very keen on sport and represented the school in athletics and cricket. When he was in primary school Mark was referred to the School Psychological Service because of behavioural, learning and concentration problems. After being assessed by the school psychologist and specialists at child psychiatric unit he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. He was prescribed some medication and follow up assessments report that his behavioural problems diminished.

In all our discussions Mark was very performance orientated, mentioning grades, plus points, credits and commendations, many times. These tangible examples of success may have been useful for him to show his parents to prove that he was working hard. His school reports were mostly good, with some improvements over the year. There were some mentions of behaviour, organisation and homework problems, but rather more comments about how well he was doing, with some comments indicating that staff were aware of past behaviour problems. He was keen for me to think highly of him, telling me about all of his successes and putting a positive spin onto any comments by staff that were not so good.

Mark said that he received a lot of help with his learning at home, from his father, who is a computer engineer and also from his mother and older siblings. He had begun to think about his future but had several different options in mind including computer games writer, artist, sculptor or soldier.

Cos my granddad was in the army and I'll do the same, that'll give me the discipline and that.

Perhaps the old worries about behaviour problems were still in his mind.

Charlie

Charlie is a small, dark haired lad, with a slightly scruffy, mischievous look about him, reminiscent of a Dickens character. He is an only child who lives with his mum and step-dad in a small village on the coast. His primary school had found him lively and enthusiastic but also silly, easily distracted and lacking in self-control. While his spoken vocabulary is impressive his written work is often untidy, which he thinks is because he rushes. He seemed to be doing best in practical subjects and foreign languages. There is a hint of a lack of concentration and distraction appearing in a few of the report comments but Charlie said his parents were pleased with his reports.

I had a feeling that Charlie might have been presenting me with a constructed image of himself as a good student. Several times in interviews he recalled good comments:

In my German book I've got quite a few good marks.
In my geography book I've got a lot of good marks.
In science I've got 'well tried' or 'good', also some 'untidy'.

I may be misinterpreting this however, because Charlie's reports were quite good and his Form Tutor was more positive in Year 8 than he had been in Year 7. His attendance had risen from 94% to 98% and he was taking part in a wide range of extra curricular activities, including representing the school at hockey. As far as his future goes he thought he might join the '*military',* probably the army, because he had '*seen a man on TV'.*

Anne

Anne is a quietly spoken, polite girl. She, her parents and younger brother have recently moved to Norfolk from Nottingham. Her previous school described her as

'*a lovely girl, a bit quiet'*. Although she seems quiet, Anne was the representative for her form on the student council and her tutor spoke highly of her contribution to the form and he awarded her the form prize for effort.

In the baseline tests Anne scored above average overall, with maths being stronger than reading. At the end of Year 7 the vast majority of her report comments were good or outstanding and teachers often commented about her good behaviour and homework. Several of Anne's teachers mentioned how quiet she was and that they would like her to speak out more. Some others however said that she participated well and her English teacher, while reporting that Anne '*showed little confidence'* in the spring of Year 8, said in the summer, that '*contributions to class oral activities have shown her to be a confident speaker'*. It could be that teachers have different expectations of levels

of participation or that Anne is more willing to speak out in certain classes with certain teachers. With the extra time on the timetable for English, Anne probably got to know her English teacher better than some of the others.

Anne's attendance rose from 89% in Year 7 to 95% in Year 8 and she took part in a very wide range of extra curricular activities in Year 8, including clubs, competitions, representing the school at rounders, cross-country and netball and she also went on a residential trip to France.

Sara

Sara is a pleasant, seemingly confident girl, who appeared happy to talk to me about her learning and was reflective about her lessons. Her primary school reported that she was conscientious, enthusiastic, polite and co-operative. She lives with her older sister and parents in a small coastal village. She seemed self motivated to improve and received help from home. It was her father's idea that she should have a computer and her older brother comes over to help her with it, while her mother 'nags' her to work.

Although she seemed quite confident in the interviews she said that she was not keen to participate much in class.

> *Well, sometimes I don't sort of participate in class, sometimes I am a bit sort of scared of going up to the front and speaking out loud just in case I do get it wrong, but like she says it doesn't matter if you do get it wrong if you're always trying your best.*

Although she did not take part in any extra curricular clubs or sports in Year 8, her tutor reported that she took a full part in form activities and she went on a residential sports trip to Scotland.

In her Key Stage 2 SATs Sara scored quite highly in English and in the Year 7 baseline tests, she also scored highly in vocabulary and reading, which put her above average for the year group. She was placed in the top set for most subjects in her band but she may have had to work hard to keep up with some of the others. At the end of Year 8, she was still assessed as being on level 4 for English, maths and science. Nearly all her teachers reported her effort and attitude as being good or outstanding and several of them said that '*it is a pleasure to have Sara in the group'*. There was some suggestion that she found the examinations at the end of Year 8 difficult and this is a problem that Sara was aware of.

> *My mum's always nagging me saying have you got your revision done yet and I say no because I want to get it to the last day so then I can remember it in my head because I'm not that good at remembering things at all.*

Billy

Billy is a friendly, tall, well-built boy who likes PE, especially basketball and athletics. He lives with his mother and younger brother. His Junior school reported that he was quiet, friendly and well mannered and should persevere with his spelling. His baseline testing on entry to High school showed that he was just above average in overall ability and that he was stronger in maths than in English. During Year 8 he moved from level 4 to level 5 in all three core subjects and at the end of Year 9 was awarded level 5s in the SATs and teacher assessments. Billy was vaguely aware of what the levels meant but he was unable to articulate how he could improve his learning. Sometimes he seemed to be ignoring suggested strategies, such as using a dictionary or his home computer spell checker.

During our meetings he seemed quite shy and often said that he was not sure in answer to my questions. However he identified spelling as a problem for him very early on and he had targets and strategies in his planner to attempt to address this problem. His tutor was an English specialist and she had helped him with this. His report comments in Year 8 were all good with some outstanding in PE and technology. By Year 9 they were a mixture of satisfactory, good and outstanding. However there was a marked change in his attendance over the period of the study, from 93% in Year 8 to 84% in Year 9. All of the absences were authorised from home and they were from one to three days in duration. Some of this change in pattern of attendance might have been due to family illness and bereavement.

Unlike most of the other students in the study, Billy seemed to have taken part in more extra-curricular activities in Year 9 than he did in Year 8. His membership of the technology after school model club was maintained and he joined the school's steel band. He also went on a history trip to the World War One Battlefields and a residential trip to the South of France, as well as joining in with charity fund-raising./ However his tutor still reported that he took only a 'passive role' in relation to form business even though she had tried to boost his confidence by making him form captain and by persuading him to help her put up a classroom display.

The very short answers in the interview transcripts show how difficult Billy found it to talk to me about his learning and comments from his tutor and subject teachers suggest that he did not find it easy to talk to them in class either. He identified his mum as being of most help to his learning, specifically when she tested his spelling.

Phil

Phil is a small, quietly spoken boy, who lives with his mother, father and younger sister on a farm. He went to a small village primary school. His baseline testing in Year 7 suggest that he was just below average in overall ability, but by the end of Year 8 he had moved from level 4 to level 5 in maths and science. English appears to be a weakness.

At our first meeting he seemed very nervous and kept moving his hands and looking away from me. He said that he was quiet in class and would not volunteer much information unless asked directly.

> *Phil: I should talk more*
>
> *Researcher: How could you do that do you think?*
>
> *Phil: Put my hand up more in class and … Answer questions*
>
> *Researcher: Yes, is that easy, would that be easy for you to do?*
>
> *Phil: Quite hard, I don't like speaking too much*

He said that he thought he participated in about half of the classes and wouldn't put his hand up if he didn't know the answer. When I asked him if he would ever guess the answer, he laughed and said no.

In Year 8 nearly all of his report comments were good but by Year 9 a distinction had appeared between subjects

such as maths, science, technology and PE, where his teachers said they thought that he could do better. There was also some suggestion that his behaviour was better in the subjects where he was more successful. One teacher suggested that Phil had stopped trying in her subject because he had not chosen to continue with it in Year 10. This may have been true but it also seems that his difficulties with English may have affected his effort and attitude in other subjects with a large written content. He said he hoped to go to agricultural college when he leaves school.

Daniel

Daniel is a tall, smartly dressed, dark-haired boy. Although he says he lacks confidence and is embarrassed to put his hand up in class, he expresses quite definite, strong views and can appear older than his years. In Year 8 he said that he didn't like cross-country running but he liked games and he took part in several after-school sports but by Year 9, he said that he ''hated''a lot of PE and he did not take part in any after-school activities. He did however, go dry slope skiing during extension week.

At our first meeting Daniel appeared nervous as he played with his black, plastic folder and looked away from the tape recorder. However he did tell me that he had a lot of help at home from his parents and siblings, particularly his older sister, who is at university. He had a computer that he used a lot for school work and he did the SATs quizzes from the Internet, even though it was at least 18 months before his tests. His family has a second home in France and Daniel has had time off school to visit it with them. He is sceptical about how much this could help him with French in school, but it did affect his attendance, which was 95% in Year 8, including 5 days holiday and 87% in Year 9, including 13 days holiday.

In his KS2 English SATs and his Year 7 reading test, Daniel scored the lowest of anyone in the study, but by Year 8 his English teacher, had graded him at level 5 and when he was in Year 9, Daniel achieved level 6 in the English SAT and 5s in maths and science. He could be quite critical of some of his teachers. For example he said that one teacher '*hadn't marked the books for ages'* and that staff were not helping him with targets. In spite of this criticism of some of his teachers, or perhaps because of it, Daniel took prime responsibility himself for his learning and target setting.

Several times during our meetings, Daniel referred to being shy and embarrassed about speaking in class.

> *He expects us to put our hands up. I hate doing that in front of the class, so embarrassed.*

However there did seem to be a change in his final report in Year 9, when no teachers made reference to him being quiet and his tutor, and teachers of English, French, German and drama all remarked on his useful contributions to the class. It may be relevant that his form tutor also taught him English and seems to have got to know him well during the year. She said '*Contributions to class oral activities have been witty and charming'*.

Dawn

Dawn is a very quiet, be-spectacled, studious girl, who can look like a frightened rabbit at times. She lives with her mother, stepfather, two older siblings and one younger brother. Her report from her Junior school described her as '*quiet, unobtrusive and lacking in self-esteem'*. At High School she has had some difficulty in making friends and relating to adults. There have been incidents when she has reported that she has been bullied and on one occasion her glasses were broken. Younger pupils have also reported that she has verbally and physically abused them.

When she first entered High School, Dawn came in the bottom quarter of the year group for general ability. In Year 8 she was aware of her National Curriculum levels and keen to improve her marks by working hard in lessons and doing all of her homework. Her school reports for Year 8 and 9 confirm this and her form tutor awarded her the form prize for effort. In spite of all of her efforts however she was again awarded level 4s in all three subjects of the Key Stage 3 SATs.

Dawn said that she was very quiet in class and didn't like to speak out but she was obviously anxious to please and to do what her teachers or parents suggested.

> *I do need to speak up more and have more confidence and not be afraid to put my hand up in class. Join in class discussions.*

Her school reports were full of comments confirming this such as *she should try to contribute more often,* and *needs encouragement to participate in oral work*. Some subjects however did not mention her being quiet, just very well-behaved, which may be the same thing! Although Dawn took personal responsibility for her own learning she said that her family helped her a lot with homework and revision. She had no idea of a future career but will probably go to college as her mum wants her to, because her older brother and sister went.

Dawn is a classic case of Pye's invisible child (1988). It is very difficult to have a conversation with her, as she gives very little back She seems willing to do whatever is necessary to improve her learning but just giving her targets or even strategies, has not seemed to help her.

Becky

Becky is a quiet, pleasant girl, who lives with her parents and older sister in a small coastal village. Her Junior school report described her as happy, tolerant, conscientious and responsible. Since she has been at High School her reports have been good, never unsatisfactory, but only rarely outstanding. Becky tends to keep her head down, to get on with her work in class as well as she can and she usually hands her homework in on time. Teachers like to have her in their class because she is no bother but she generally does little to make them notice her in either a positive or negative way.

She does not belong to any after school clubs or take part in any extra-curricular sports but she has a few close friends and goes roller skating outside school and sees her membership of the First Aid cadets as a way of making more friends. Her baseline tests put her at just above average in general ability and she achieved 5s in the maths, English and science SATs in Year 9 – again the average level. Becky herself says that she is an average and middle student – '*I'm like stuck in the middle'*. Is this view of herself as always average, a self-fulfilling prophecy?

Her greatest concern is her spelling. '*I can't spell at all. I'm the worst speller ever. I think I might have dyslexia I don't know'*. Although Becky mentioned dyslexia, she had

never been tested for it. In Year 8 she had some additional spelling lessons after school but by Year 9 these had stopped and Becky seemed resigned to the fact that she was always going to be a poor speller. This affected all subjects, with teachers often writing in her books, '*take care with spelling'*. Becky occasionally used a computer, but she did not see this as the answer to her spelling problems.

The support of her family for her learning was a strong feature of our discussions. Becky said they all reminded and persuaded her to complete her homework and her mum was specially helpful. She is planning a career in the Police Force and had chosen her options with this in mind.

Becky was generally thought of as a quiet and well-behaved student but there are variations. A few teachers reported that she contributed well to their lessons but a greater number said that she needed to contribute more. This may be due to their different expectations and perceptions, as much as to a change in behaviour by Becky, although she did acknowledge her lack of participation.

Researcher: Are there any lessons where you don't put your hand up?

Becky: Most of them…it would be rare for me to put my hand up.

Although she is naturally shy in a large group, Becky was reflective and talkative in a one to one discussion and if more learning conversations could be arranged in the future she might benefit.

Emma

Emma is an attractive girl, with a bubbly personality. She is interested in clothes, make up, friends and boys. She can be chatty and lacks concentration in lessons. Sometimes she blamed the '*other idiots'* in the class and says that she is often slow to start work because she cannot decide which pens to use. She has something wrong with her foot '*fallen arches or something'* and she did not take part in PE at all in Year 8 or 9.

She lives with her parents and older brother. Her parents have their own business and have never been into school to discuss Emma's progress. Emma says that they are too busy working or visiting her grandmother in hospital. When sorting the interview cards about who helped her with learning and target setting Emma did not choose any of her family.

Her Junior School report said she was shy, conscientious, polite, and '*a credit to herself and the school'*. Although achieving Level 4s in the Key Stage 2 SATs, Emma's scores in maths and English were quite high for level 4 and the baseline MIDYIS tests taken in Year 7 put her in the top quarter of ability for the year group. She is also one of the oldest in the year group, with an early September birthday, and of the ten students in this study, she showed most signs of under-achieving and being disaffected with school.

During our first interview Emma seemed nervous, wringing her hands together, pushing her hair back and laughing nervously. She was concerned about her behaviour. She said she chatted too much and didn't listen to the teacher but that she did want to learn. Her teachers often gave her targets on her reports such as *try to contribute more often* and *be more willing to be involved,* and her form tutor after reporting that Emma '*had not shown great enthusiasm for the (PSE) lessons'* said that she needed to '*show that she is determined to make a positive contribution to the life of the school'*.

Some of Emma's apparent lack of interest in lessons may be normal adolescent behaviour but there were some suggestions in the data that Emma's school work was deteriorating during Year 9. Although there were exceptions, many of her teachers said that she should work harder, behave better and contribute more to the lessons. Her attendance, which had been 99% in Year 8, was down to 88% in Year 9 and although all of the absences were authorised by home as medical, the number of 'lates' recorded also rose from 4 to 25. She was also not taking part in any extra-curricular activities in Year 9 and during our interviews Emma made some comments, which could be signs of disaffection

Sometimes I just sort of get up and go round the class and just say hello.

I just sort of start laughing and talking and stuff.

Given her scores in the baseline tests there are suggestions that Emma may be underachieving. In her Year 9 SATs she scored the average 5s in maths and science and 6 in English. Emma herself thinks that she could do better in school, and while sometimes acknowledging her own role, she also made many excuses as to why she doesn't. These included losing her reading glasses, not having the right text book needed to catch up with work, home computer broken, supply teachers for science and being unable to concentrate in the heat.

In spite of the difficulties mentioned above, Emma is obviously a thoughtful girl and she was keen to convince me that she wants to do well at school and that her work and concentration were improving but some additional data suggested otherwise. Her lack of obvious enthusiasm and participation in lessons may mean that she does not receive the individual help and learning strategies that she needs to succeed.

Conclusion

The profiles above illustrate that although there are similarities between the students, the differences between them and their uniqueness as individuals are paramount. Describing them as average students conceals a wealth of different academic and personal strengths and weaknesses and may have condemned them to play the part of the average student. Similarly describing them as quiet, non-partcipative students may have reinforced this self image for them and ignored the lessons and extra-curricular and home activities where they took a more active part.

Most teachers in the case study school did not appear to have a grasp of the strategies that could encourage full engagement of these students and the lack of learning conversations meant that their individual learning needs were not translated into useful targets and strategies for improving their learning. At the time of the study all the students were well behaved and generally seemed motivated to succeed at school but I wonder how long some of them will be able to sustain this, in the face of their perceived difficulties. There were certainly signs that Emma was becoming disaffected. The danger is that, particularly if they are without good support from home, some more of these students could become discouraged and disaffected, unless all of us -–teachers, parents and

politicians can find the time and the will to look beyond those 'average' labels.

As Becky said '*Levels on reports just show how average you are'*.

Note

[1] Pupils' names are pseudonyms and some identifying features have been changed.

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And what was being discussed by Forum Writers in 1976?

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