Editorial

By and large, the technical aspects of teaching have not figured largely amongst the principal concerns of FORUM writers or readers. From line making with sticks in the sand, to chalk on slate, wax crayon on paper and the electronic bells and whistles of the present day whiteboards, mark making and meaning have been an assumed given with its advantages and drawbacks. ICT has speeded up many processes and opened up new possibilities but none pose basic questions about education or human values such as truth, compassion, tolerance or fairness. Nor is it expected that they should: we use our tools as we will and if they serve our purposes in helping to ask such questions or encouraging our children to ask such questions, so much the better. The creative and imaginative uses of ICT, particularly and appropriately for older children, can be most impressive.

This is the point where educationists may take their eye off the ball, however; in welcoming, adapting and using new technologies to serve the interests of educating their children, the increasing administrative use of ICT is just seen as an additional onerous chore. Specious data collection is resented as time wasting on the part of teacher and pupil alike, the repeated testing which generates much of the data being known to have a downward spiral effect on motivation, particularly on groups of their vulnerable pupils such as those with low self esteem.

Teachers grit their teeth though, deliver the data and try to turn to more constructive uses of their time but it is essential that this side of ICT is seen as becoming more and more dangerously influential in shaping what actually happens in schools. Electronic technology is becoming the engine that drives the curriculum. Learning becomes performance. It doesn't ask the big questions, because in its 21st century version of Gradgrind's approach to 'education', there are none to be asked. It can only ask the little questions that can have numbers attached, but it asks them loudly and insistently until they sound important.

To those in the present Government to whom micro-management is seemingly the ultimate and unquestioned goal, it is presenting a level of unprecedented control that should be creating increasingly deep unease amongst all educators, to say nothing of all citizens. Only pre-World War II Germany and Soviet Russia have seen bureacratisation refined to such an exquisite degree.

Thus it is that Tony Blair can promise 'greater dialogue with parents and to address the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the individual in a more customised fashion'. (*Guardian,* March 3, 2005). This is not just vote-grabbing. His civil servants have told him that schools and teachers now collect, indeed have to collect, sufficient computerised data on each pupil, primary and secondary, so that this 'customisation' is now possible. Children and teachers are now effectively electronically tagged. It can tell us that Darren is still confused about colons and semi-colons but it will never be able to tell us that he knows the names and ways of all the fresh water fish in the rivers around South London. Saheel may be failing on her grasp of clause analysis but tests say nothing about her exquisite Arabic calligraphy. Subsequently parents are to be encouraged to think that the trivial is all that matters; it must be important, we have the print out. Would that it stopped there though.

Another side to this control now offered by electronic devices over school children's lives is no longer the stuff of over-heated imaginations. Many larger secondary schools use swipe cards for registration, dinners, etc. but a recent technology conference by the Specialist Schools Trust (*Times Educational Supplement*, March 4 2005) was informed about a device, up to now used by industry, called radio frequency identification (RFID). The potential for monitoring practically every aspect of a child's, and indeed teacher's life, is quite breathtaking and creditably it was suggested by the managing director of one of the leading multinational networking companies, Bill Fowler, that schools actually need to grapple with the ethics of this potential before they use it. Ah, yes, ethics – a dimension that does not appear to have occurred to the Government in the similar contexts mentioned above. But perhaps in the area they are wont, and indeed have a fondness for, calling 'blue-sky thinking' they already have their sights on the ultimate solution. Where America leads it has not gone unnoticed that Tony Blair is unaccountably, quite pathetically even, drawn to follow. A solution by an American company, Applied Digital Solutions, (already given approval in the USA) is to insert such a radio controlled device, the size of a grain of rice, under the skin of every pupil. Sounds outrageous? So did league tables once….

Annabelle Dixon

Big Business and School-exams: 'catching Johnny before he falls'

PATRICK YARKER

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For Pearson, the value of knowledge is measured by our financial and market progress and by the broader progress of our customers toward satisfying their need for knowledge in this year and beyond.

Should school-students be able to take exams in any recognised academic subject of their choosing? Put it another way. Say, for example, you belong to the Young Archaeologists Club and like to spend your Summers digging around in fields for evidence of the way we used to live; will you be able to take a GCSE in Archaeology when the time comes? You are highly motivated to complete the course. You have your own trowel, and the cash to cover the exam-fee. Your bog-standard local comprehensive employs a member of staff who has been teaching the course for several years. All systems go? Apparently not. The only Exam Board currently offering a specification for Archaeology GCSE has decided, without consultation, that it will cease to do so in June 2006. There will then be no way to obtain a GCSE in Archaeology in this country. What might have contributed to this decision, and what might the broader implications be?

There are currently in England three remaining 'unitary awarding bodies', more commonly known as Exam Boards: AQA, Edexcel and OCR. Each has its own history and house-style, and each has assumed its present shape as a result of mergers over the past two decades which have seen the number of Exam Boards more than halved. According to the BBC News website, '(T)his consolidation was caused by the drive to put vocational qualifications on a par with academic ones – the same trend which saw the Departments of Education and Employment merge.' OCR and AQA are limited companies with charitable status ('exempt charities'), operating on a not-for-profit basis. According to OCR's annual report for 2001 (at the time of writing the latest available from their website) the company's income in the year 2000/01 was £69M, its surplus or investment income is ploughed back into specification development, research and examination administration.' The income earned by AQA in 1999/2000 was £93M. The website lists the uses to which the fees it charges are put, and contains a short statement explaining how the level of fees is arrived at. The site also notes the financial pressures facing schools. AQA's income derives from fees and past investments. Exam fees are paid by schools from public funds, at a current cost of some £380M (Guardian 10 September 2004)

Odd Board Out

The odd Board out is Edexcel. Edexcel is part of Pearson Plc, which is not a charity. Pearson Plc is a multi-national publishing and media conglomerate which, though based in Britain, originated in the USA where it began as a building-firm set up by a British expatriate. According to one account, 'C.S.Pearson and Son, forerunner to the present day Pearson Plc, started as a general works contractor in the l860s and emerged as a global enterprise mainly on the strength of public works contracts undertaken for the Mexican government between 1889 and 1906…. The very favourable terms achieved by Pearson and the fact that he built all the largest public works projects, suggests that he enjoyed a virtual monopoly over this kind of contract in Mexico. (Business Week Online 1 June l998) The Company's own website has a slightly different take on its early years claiming that : 'In an otherwise exploited Mexico, Pearson introduced the concept of 'fair treatment and a fair wage'' The site doesn't record what the workers thought about either their treatment or their wage. In keeping with the company's professed commitment to 'public works with social conscience' its website is also prepared to claim: 'We're responsible for helping children learn and checking that they have.' Its ethics page is slightly more circumspect, admitting that: 'Pearson companies conduct business in many of the poorer countries of the world where living standards are low. Where Pearson companies directly control their activities in a country, we ensure that our people have satisfactory wages and working conditions, and that there is no exploitation of labour'. (Pearson Plc website) Quite what 'satisfactory wages' and 'no exploitation of labour' might mean in human terms is left unspecified. Elsewhere the website is highly specific about what investors and shareholders really want to know: how profits fatted (up 13% in 2003), invested-capital returns augment (from 4.6%; in 2001 to 6.3% in 2003) and dividends rise (from l7.4p per share in l997 to 24.2p per share in 2003).

Today Pearson's CEO is Marjorie Scardino, a Texan who (according to articles in Business Week Online and Timesonline from which the following draws) is 'making a splash on both sides of the Atlantic with her moves to remake stodgy Pearson into a media and education juggernaut…' Initially the way to do this is through selling assets and buying up educational publishers. Expanding the US side of the business, Pearson bought Simon and Schuster Inc.'s educational business in May

l998, instantly giving the company 27% of the US college textbook market and making it an industry leader, rivalling McGraw-Hill in the provision of schoolbooks. Already the owners of Penguin Group, with it huge catalogue of reference and other materials, Pearson bought Dorling-Kindersley Holdings Plc, gaining access to 2 million and more digested images ready-made for educational scrutiny, and a little-known American education-testing company called National Computer Systems (NCS). The sums spent by Pearson in acquiring these new assets were colossal: an overall figure of $7.5 Billion has been suggested. Behind the getting and spending lay a longer-term game-plan: the development and promotion of online technologies in the field of education and training from nursery school to graduate school and beyond (for example with several US government departments including the Pentagon.) As well as generating income from online testing in the USA where it is the leading company in the field, NCS provides 40% of US and Canadian schools with software for payroll management, the tracking of students' attendance and other information and will sell teachers online lesson-plans and the tests which NCS will also mark. NCS4 Schools enables students to check grades, access teacher-comments and download recommended materials for an annual fee. Finally, Pearson bought Family Education Network and used it as the core resource for Pearson's Learning Network which offers a wide range of materials from homework help, teaching 'aids' and training-programmes for professionals. The company aims to interest US school districts in sharing advertising revenue on the website, and so establish a profitable relationship with local schools. Pearson Education's operating profit in 2000 was $504M, up over 30%. By 2003 the annual report was pointing to an operating profit of $620M, or £313M. The schools element accounted for about 40% of that figure (£127M) The 2-3 Annual Report also notes that London Qualifications, which trades as 'Edexel' and 'BTEC', generated revenue of £89M.

Edu-business

Edexcel provides the majority of GNVQs and (in part for historical reasons which doubtless made it attractive to Pearson) offers more vocational exams than the other two Boards. As at November 2004, the Board of Directors of London Qualifications Limited include the Chair of Pearson Plc, the President of Corp Pearson Inc USA, the President and CEO of Pearson Assessment and Testing, and the Chair of the Financial Times Group (which is owned by Pearson). Other Board Members include the Corporate Director-Education, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, and the Head Teacher of Thomas Telford School who is also Chief Executive of Thomas Telford

School Online Ltd. Edexcel's incorporation via London Qualifications (set up in July 2003) as part of a company essentially dedicated to making 'profits in the conventional sense' seems to me to raise questions once more about the use of public money to bankroll the private sector. An intensification of the involvement of edu-business companies if schooling is taking place around the world, with significant consequences not only for the destination of public funds but also for the nature of teaching, learning and assessment. Of related concern are the multiplying ways in which the needs of businesses, employers and the owners of capital now bear upon the provision of

educational qualifications for many students, and hence on the educational offer students are made and the parameters of the education they experience. With 14–19 educational provision in England a live debate, with re-structuring certain and with important voices in government promoting a decisive division between the so-called 'vocational' and 'academic' pathways, such questions are sharply posed.

The three 'awarding bodies' in England devise 'specifications' for their exams in line with requirements laid down by the qualifications and Curriculum Authority

(QCA), which according to its website had '…a pivotal role in helping the UK become the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world'. The involvement of the representatives of private capital at this level inside the state's machinery of educational oversight is significant. Members of QCA's governing board are appointed for three years (and may then be re-appointed) by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. At the time of writing they include: the Deputy Chair of BT and former Chair of Guinness plc, Chair of Unilever (and also of the National College for School Leadership), former Managing Director of Jaguar, the Director of the Human Resources Group of Tesco, and the Master (sic) of Marlborough College who is also chair of the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference. All the board-members are White; only three of the thirteen are women. Board ;members include four Head Teachers or Principals and a university Vice-chancellor, but no representative from a classroom-teachers' organisation (still less a union) nor any student or parental representative. Several Board members hold positions within the CBI, an organisation whose spokespeople routinely decry the allegedly-low level of 'basic skills' school-leavers present when seeking employment.

Commercial Considerations

Along with the price of the trowel a GCSE course in Archaeology will cost you around £200 on the internet, or £100 at night-school excluding the £33 examination-fee. In its report on the latest syllabus, first examined in 2003, AQA noted the appearance of 'a new kind of student' for the exam, surmising that 'less able' students were entered in Year 11; and noting that these students did achieve a grade. When news broke that the exam would no longer be offered, Don Henson, Education Officer for the Council for British Archaeology, argues strongly in defence of the continued availability of the subject at GCSE level. 'A general reason for disquiet about the decision taken by AQA is that purely commercial considerations are being applied to the nature of the curriculum at 14-19. This cannot be right for education. A more specific cause for concern is the way the decision was taken – in total secrecy with no consultation or involvement from the relevant AQA Subject Committee or the subject community.' (Council for British Archaeology website: www.britarch.ac.uk)

ULEAC (now merged into Edexcel) offered the subject along with the NEAB (subsequently AQA) until l992/3. Numbers taking it peaked at about 600 in l998 and l999, falling to 350 in 2003. The Young Archaeologists Club has around 3000 eight-to-sixteen year old members, testifying to the growing popularity of the subject, fuelled in part by TV shows like *Time Team* . Numbers taking the GCSE would rise, it is argued, were there more qualified staff available to teach the subject. Lobbying commenced to

prompt AQA to reverse its decision, and a legal challenge remains possible because there are no alternative providers for the GCSE. (Guardian 26 August 2004) But Archaeology is only the most extreme example of the way so-called 'marginal' subjects are at risk of evaporating from the educational offer available in schools because of the blight of the bottom line. AQA's public plans include the scrapping of classical Greek, Russian, and Accountancy exams. The take-over of one Exam Board by a commercial corporation intent on promoting online testing (and learning) and maximising its market-share is bound to make an impact on the practices of the remaining two Boards. Tensions are likely to continue to develop between the 'charitable' aspect of providing examinations and the commercial considerations of profitability, if not survivability, in the changing market. What price Archaeology GCSE?

Writing an endpiece in a supplement to the NUT's house-journal, Bruce Guthrie, a headteacher and council-member of AQA, raised concerns about the possible impact e-testing (that is, online examination and marking) could have on the curriculum and on students' experience of exams. He notes high levels in the current dispensation of teacher-involvement, not only as markers and moderators but also as members of subject-committees and therefore with some influence over the setting of questions. With the accreditation-culture firmly established and the number and costs of annual examinations soaring, today's system is showing acute signs of strain. Schools now cite the cost of examinations as one of their highest annual expenditures, with some Head Teachers claiming money which should have been spent on teachers and resources has had to be diverted to meet the exam-bill(*Guardian l0 September 2004)* Mr.Guthrie advocates that teachers 'protect their involvement with the assessment of student-learning that is close to actual classroom practice.' He suggests that one danger with e-learning will be that assessment will be driven by what he terms 'commercial interests' towards cheaper, ready-made alternatives. Another is the exclusion of teachers from the entire process of devising examinations, further reducing teachers to the status of deliverers of pre-packaged courses and materials which have been constructed beyond schools and which fail to take as their starting-point the realities of classroom-learning. 'If assessment is to become no more than a centrally-regulated commercial activity, teacher professionalism will be the loser. We should resist any reduction in teacher involvement in the examining process (*Teacher to Teacher*, Autumn 2004)

Mantra

In an interview at the start of the new century Marjorie Scardino spoke about some of these issues. Eyebrows had been raised in the business world when Pearson Plc bought National Computer Systems, but Scardino believed she took a calculated risk. 'The significance of having their (i.e. the NCS) system is it generates data about students and their schedules and their teachers. With that data, you can learn a lot about how a kid is learning, why he or she isn't succeeding. You can take that and couple it with assessment because that is sort of the mantra of the American school system now and increasingly all over the world….How can you tell if a person is learning or not? You can only tell if you give him (sic) a test and see if he answers the questions right. If you couple the data you have on a kid with how he

has done on a test, you can figure out what he is learning and not learning.' (Business Week Online 22 January 2001) Scardino is a very highly-paid businesswoman, not a teacher; in keeping with her version of the value of knowledge (as quoted at the head of this article) her theory of learning likewise suits her company's aims. But the view she takes of teaching, learning and assessing has too often been echoed by those who are expected to have a wider understanding and more fully-formed approach. Scardino went on to talk about the products her company intends to create and market; '…products in which you have a math course where assessment is embedded. So instead of a big test every two years, you have a test after every chapter. So if you apply this via computer, you can figure out if Johnny caught on the last lesson, and you can catch him before he falls. That is the dream of education because you can then do away with this horrible one-size-fits-all education we have in America and help each child learn at his (sic) own pace.' (ibid)

Much of this has come to sound all too familiar, particularly the beneficent spin – *catch him before he falls* –given to a strategy designed to corner the market and maximise profit, or in the government's terms to cut costs by enabling the use of unqualified staff as teachers. The easy availability online of pre-packaged or ''convenience'' lesson-plans and forms of assessment will work against teachers. They will find it harder to lay claim to adequate time in the school-day for their own creative preparation which derives from and responds to the unique daily contact they have with individual students and classes. The logic of teaching-as-delivery – McTeaching – will be strengthened.

The incumbent Chair of Pearson Plc is Lord Stevenson of Coddenham, who as Dennis Stevenson headed in 1997 a commission set up by the future Prime Minister to examine the role of Information Technology in Schools, and who was (until September 2000) Mr.Blair's Special Advisor on the application of ITC to education. Policy recommendations later published in the Stevenson Report featured in New Labour's Manifesto in l997. In and around government, significant momentum has built up behind the drive towards online assessment as technologies to transmit certain kinds of testing have become more widely available. Such assessment is seen as vital in the construction of 'personalised learning'. Interviewed in the Online section of the *Times Educational Supplement* at the beginning of 2005, Martin Ripley, Head of e-strategy and innovation at QCA. was blunt. 'When e-assessment comes it could bring in the most fundamental changes to teaching and learning that we have seen so far…. Assessment systems have a huge impact on what is taught. You can look at some phases of education where assessments dictate the curriculum experiences that students have. It also dictates the pedagogy, the way that teachers prepare students.' (TES 7 January 2005) There is no questioning here of whether it is acceptable or proper that educational experience in school, and the practice of teaching itself, be 'dictated' by the kinds of assessment QCA envisages.

Bargain Basement

As part of 'personalised learning' the growth of online assessment will open up still further the market in educational materials and 'content' provided for profit by private companies. An increasing proportion of the

public funding given to schools will line the pockets of private shareholders and boost profit-margins, enriching the few. Such a future is already anticipated in the USA. As the 'Performance' page of the Pearson Education section of the company website indicates, Pearson Plc looks forward to even-higher profits through appropriating a share of increased US federal budgets dedicated to the implementation of President Bush's 'No Child Left Behind' plans, which are found on testing and become mandatory this year. In a presentation given to the Sanford Bernstein Pan-European Strategic Decisions Conference in September 2004, Ms.Scardino drew attention not only to the increasing amount of testing taking place in US schools but to other factors which would, in her view, strengthen her company's marketing-leadership. Top of the list was 'personalised learning'. Pearson's Interim Report 2004 briefly surveys the UK market thus: 'We have begun to introduce our testing capabilities in the UK, successfully marking more than one million GCSE and A-level scripts on-screen this summer. In addition, the UK's National Assessment Agency has recently awarded Pearson a three-year contract for the National Curriculum or Key Stage Tests. KnowledgeBox, our digital learning programme launched last year, which contains content, assessment and lesson plans, is now installed in more than five hundred primary schools…' The small-print accompanying the Report warns, roughly translated, that a company can go bust as well as thrive, and it may yet be that Pearson's 'bet on education' (Scardino's own words) will prove a failure in her company's terms. All the more reason to restrict rather than encourage the involvement of private capital in maintained education.

In 2002 Pearson Plc gave to charity cash-donations of half of one per cent of pre-tax profits, a bargain-basement fig-leaf and little enough, but serviceable as cover for the company's daily business of taking money wherever it can from the public sector just as it has done since its inception, whether through exam-fees paid from schools to London Qualifications or as a slice of the £100M the government served up to establish the National Assessment Agency and help make sure the SATs run on time. Whether by stealth or by government fiat, market-driven practices make increasing headway in our schools. These practices, and the processes which accompany them, should be debated in public and in depth, and if necessary prevented. It is not only a matter, vital though this is, of keeping public money out of private hands. It is a matter of whose political and ethical values shall inform and underpin state education.

Academies and How to Beat Them: 'our pits, our jobs, but not our schools'

MATT BAILEY

Matt Bailey has taught for six years at Northcliffe School, Doncaster, where he is the NUT representative, and Head of Science. A member of the NUT's national working-party on academies, he outlines here the first successful campaign waged by a local community to thwart the imposition of a privately-run Academy in place of their existing comprehensive school.

Northcliffe School is an 11-16 comprehensive that serves the former mining communities of Conisbrough and Denaby Main in South Yorkshire. It was to one of the most socially-deprived electoral wards in the country that the Emmanuel Schools Foundation turned its attention last year with the proposal to close Northcliffe and replace it with an academy. Having achieved in successive years the best-ever exam results at both KS3 and KS4, and secured school-achievement awards for improvement in 2001 and 2002, it was a great shock to parents and staff when the school was placed in special measures in November 2003. It felt even more like a betrayal when within eight weeks, before the school had had a chance even to draft an action plan, the elected mayor of Doncaster, Martin Winter, approached the DfES with intimations of a plan to close the school and replace it with a gleaming, state-of-the-art academy fit for the 21st century. This multi-million pound project (costing roughly twice the average amount of a new build for a maintained school) promised a long awaited Sixth Form for the community, ultra-modern sports facilities and a new building with state-of-the-art ICT equipment.

Imagine then the bravery of the community in taking a principled stand for their school and turning down this offer.

Many of the early plans to impose the new academy were drawn up by the LEA behind closed doors, so that when the proposals became public knowledge in May 2004 a sponsor had already been found and a timeline for Northcliffe's closure drawn up. Staff in the school were quick to respond, and a joint union meeting was held to discuss the implications of the proposals. We shared information about the precise nature of the academy and its sponsor, and it quickly became apparent that staff were almost unanimous in their opposition.

Parents were equally quick off the mark. Within days a leaflet appeared on the staffroom notice board announcing: 'They took our pits, they took our jobs, don't let them take our school!'. Many staff joined with parents and students at the first of three public meetings held in different parts of the community. Hundreds of people attended, and the campaign was launched. The fact that there were parents active in the community who were passionate about the future of their children's education and prepared to act to defend the school gave staff the confidence to organise.

Reciprocally, parents were supported by knowing that the staff almost unanimously welcomed their campaign. The link between school-staff and parents was a key element in the campaign's success. Parents brought a great deal of energy and imagination to the campaign and were able to organise students in a way that would have been difficult for teaching-staff to do on their own.

Our campaign used many tried and tested methods: door-to-door leafleting, fly-posting, street stalls and lobbies of councillors. More innovatively, we put the school up for sale on the internet auction-site Ebay to highlight the ease with which a school could be bought. A union-supported local demonstration was well-attended, with speakers at the rally representing teachers, parents and students. Students made banners and placards for the demonstration, and organised a debate at school.

From the outset the campaign maintained a high media profile in both national and local press as well as obtaining local and national TV coverage. We set up a professional website to facilitate democratic discussion and debate. The use of regular press releases and stunts drew the support of such notables as Richard Dawkins and the Bishop of Oxford, who published a joint article supporting the campaign in *The Times*.

At the forefront of the campaign were the issues of local democratic accountability and the governance of the school. Despite the media's keen interest in the proposed sponsor, parents and staff were clear from the outset that the most central issue was the attempt effectively to privatise the school. The removal of the school from LEA control and the transfer of public funds to private control was unacceptable to a community which had learned its political lessons twenty years earlier in the miners' strike of l984–85.

However, the Christian fundamentalist nature of the proposed sponsor could not be avoided. All we initially knew of the Emmanuel School Foundation were reports that it banned Harry Potter books on account of their supposed satanic overtones, made students carry bibles around at all times and subjected the student-body to 'fire and brimstone' assemblies on a regular basis. The Foundations' first educational establishment in Gateshead hit the headlines in 2002 when it was criticised for teaching that the notions of seven-day creationism had equal validity with the Darwinian theory of evolution. The Foundation

was defended in the House of Commons by none other than Tony Blair who played down the significance of the Foundation's fundamentalist views. Concerns of parents and teachers were confirmed during the campaign when the views of key figures in the Foundation became fully known. Their schools operated under a strict moral code in which the denier of a girl's tights was specified as well as the style in which students wore their hair. There would be no tolerance of smoking; the punishment would be permanent exclusion after a single warning. Schools were encouraged to promote the extreme and reactionary views of the Foundation leaders on such issues as homosexuality, sexual abstinence and abortion. The Foundation's website once declared (but has since removed) the view that 'God intervened into history in the person of Christ and he has the power to allow or frustrate man's aims. In this context, it becomes important to peruse why Hitler paused at the English Channel when an immediate invasion might have led to a swift victory. Could it be that God was calling a halt to this march of evil?' When challenged to answer how the Foundation could present this opinion on the course of World War Two while remaining silent on the contemporaneous question of the plight of the European Jews, John Burns (the educational advisor for the Foundation) was characteristically evasive, as he was about the Foundation's attitude towards gay teachers or students.

It was under such a regime that the Foundation opened its first academy in September 2003. Almost at once it excluded 28 students and encouraged many more to leave before they were pushed, an exclusion rate ten times the national average. Such an uncommonly Christian act of tolerance in any other school in the land would have brought OFSTED to the door and seen the school lose in excess of £100,000 in funding, a fate Blair's academies are permitted to escape.

The prospect of an academy run by the Emmanuel Schools Foundation which would neither be a community school for their children nor have an ethos which could be shared by the rational-led majority of parents to resist the proposals.

In the absence of a genuine process of consultation of the community by the LEA, the campaign gauged the feelings of the community in its own way. One parent stood in the local elections as an independent against the Academy and polled over 800 votes, whilst a longer-term petition gathered around a thousand names. The flawed consultation-process engineered by the LEA with glossy leaflets and videos was nevertheless conducted on the campaign's terms. When the LEA and the Emmanuel Schools Foundation held meetings they were faced with a room full of staff wearing badges expressing their opposition. When the parents' turn came, the same badges were displayed. Anticipating that individuals would be allowed only one question each in these meetings, 'chains' of questions were distributed amongst the audience so that a line of questioning could be sustained. Neither the LEA officers, the elected mayor nor the Foundation had anticipated such a response, and having declared himself 'abused' by the community, David Vardy withdrew his support and that of the Emmanuel Schools Foundation for the proposed academy. The LEA kept this quiet whilst they searched in vain for another sponsor, delaying the announcement of the Foundation's decision first by weeks and then by months. The decision to withdraw in the face of 'opposition from parents and teachers' was eventually announced by the DfES, who nonetheless continue to claim academies are 'local schools for local people' (*Guardian,* February 19, 2005). The campaign to save Northcliffe School thereby became the first to succeed in preventing the erasure of a comprehensive school and its substitution by an academy.

The announcement was seen as a triumph by campaigners, but their first decision was to continue the campaign's existence in order to support other anti-academy campaigns and to channel the huge interest in education generated by the campaign into positive support for the school. As one parent said, 'It feels like we've been given a second chance. We nearly had our school taken away from us. Now we've got the chance to show that it was worth fighting for.'

Network Leadership's Balancing Act: contrivance or emergence?

CHRIS KUBIAK & JOAN BERTRAM

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That we learn much of what we know through our network of relationships and through shared discussion and activity is well understood. A logical extension of this idea is the growing prominence in the UK of where formal school-to-school networking such as Education Action Zones and Excellence in Cities has been established. The National College of School Leadership's (NCSL) Networked Learning Communities (NLC) development and research programme is one of the larger networking initiatives involving 137 networks – approximately l,000 schools, 20,000 staff and 500,000 pupils. Schools form into a network to provide opportunities for school-to-school enquiry and shared professional development. Becoming a member of an NLC is seen as a way to catalyse the development of schools as communities of continuous enquiry and improvement (Jackson, 2002). To become part of a network is to contribute to and share in, a collective resource of capacity (whether in terms of knowledge, resources, support or critical friendship) that can be drawn on for school development.

That NLCs are strategically governed entities with an organisational structure is important to grasp. NLCs are strategic in that they configure around a shared purpose. While ideas of school-to-school collaboration or teacher enquiry were often compelling enough to bring schools together, the NCSL programme required the NLC leadership to identify a specific learning focus (e.g. improving pupil literacy or developing a 'connected curriculum'), have budgets, strategic plans and reviews. These networks also include an 'architectural' or structural element. The networks of schools are led by steering groups, and provide opportunities for participation by creating forums for teachers to work together. These 'creativity forums', 'cross-school enquiry teams,' 'action for learning groups' are spaces for teachers to meet around an issue of mutual concern – to conduct enquiry, engage in peer mentoring, develop workshops for their colleagues or to discuss subject-specific teaching.

Some find that the strategic and structural elements with their administrative demands and increased meetings for teachers appear to obscure the informal, bottom-up and interpersonal nature of networks. Skidmore's (2004) concept of the 'holding space' provides a useful perspective on network structure and strategy. He explains that networks of organisations may mobilise their staff into *holding spaces* to bring people together to learn and to generate knowledge that will meet particular organisational goals. Such holding spaces are useful for two reasons. First, as Worrall (2003) notes in her case study of the Cambridge Super network, the practicalities of teacher time and release from classrooms are fraught with difficulties, not all of which can be solved by either personal determination or even additional funding. The nature of school structures as embodied in teachers' timetables seem innately inimical to teacher-to-teacher communication whether within one department or school, let alone across schools. Such holding spaces may help transcend these constraints by providing space for learning.

The second is that by bringing teachers together repeatedly over time, they develop relationships of trust and support. As Fukayama (l995) argues, if individuals interact with each other repeatedly over time, they develop a reputation for honesty and reliability. Repeated contact is necessary to develop the trusting relationships, the shared vocabularies and perspectives, in other words, the social capital that Hargreaves (2002) suggests makes up a learning network. So, the structure and the strategy of NLCs are not the network but rather they are the conditions that allow these to grow.

The Network Growth, Structure and Leadership Project

It was with a particular interest in the structural and strategic elements of networks and the network leaders' role in relation to these that the Network Growth, Structure and Leadership project was launched. Nineteen network activists from twelve networks playing a key role in the initiation and development of their networks were interviewed. In the interviews, Co-Leaders mapped out the structure of their network, their leadership activities, knowledge flow and key developmental points.

In our interviews, strategies (and failed strategies) for creating these network-building holding spaces, clustered around three foci – attention to purpose, to structure and to people, as summarised below:

- A structure that repeatedly brought teachers together
- A compelling purpose for collaboration that resonated with personal passions and interests
- Participants who were typically volunteers, with enthusiasm and passion and also a vested interest or

Figure 1 (left box):

Structure	Participants
* Time and space for teachers to work together * Resources to support networked activity including administrative support * Opportunities to embed learning within and across schools	* Enthusiastic and 'buzzy' * Problem solvers, like tackling challenges through innovation * Sense of self confidence and openness * Self selected or voluntary * May have specific responsibilities or roles

Purpose
* Directed towards concrete changes in practice
* Open to personal choice and allows an evolving focus and participants to learn
* Taps into personal passions and school needs
* Draws from professional knowledge of "chalk-face" peers
* Focused on improving pupil learning

Figure 1

knowledge in the area
(a more detailed description is presented in Figure 1)

The idea of strategically creating or contriving networks seems antithetical to the commonly understood idea of networks as organically growing, naturally evolving 'bottom-up' networks. While teacher collaboration and networking is unlikely to happen without some contrivance (see Toole and Louis, 2001) it is problematic. Put simply, unless participants want to work and be together, learning is unlikely to happen nor will the ties of trust and mutual obligation form, as described below :

I always knew I could go to the Heads' meetings and say, 'right my Maths Department': I've got a problem there, you know, anybody in a really strong department can help me out. I mean two schools seconded their Head of English for a day a week to me for a year to help, so there was a lot of strong support at that level. It's a very close knit community and we've paid back now that we're stronger.

Professional discretion can languish in compulsory or formally structured and bureaucratically regulated structured situations (Hargreaves, 1997) Compliant work may occur in contrived networks but not the personal meaning making and strong identification with practice that Wenger (1998) considers the stuff of learning. In essence, learning can not be conscripted. Networks can not be commanded to grow.

However, the emerging theme from the interviews was that while network leaders could create these opportunities for collaborative learning – bringing together the *right people* around the *right purpose*, supported by the *right structure* – they accepted that how that work actually occurred was out of their hands. As Wenger (1998) argues, designing for learning means that organisations can create conditions that support interaction but remaining open as to how that participation actually occurs or emerges. Similarly, leaders in our interviews described themselves as providing breathing spaces for the *emerging* qualities of the network – that is, what teachers actually focused on, how they worked together and the types of artifacts, research projects or workshops they eventually developed. As the title of this article suggests, network co-leaders are *leaders who follow* where the network takes its work and its form. In the following sections, the way in which this

process played out in the co-leader descriptions will be described.

Structure

The designed organisational structures supporting teacher network extended within schools and across the network (Figure 2).

While some co-leaders and headteachers refer to '*standing back and allowing teachers to lead*' their descriptions of their place in the structure suggests more connection than that. Leaders acknowledged the organic and evolving nature of network groups. They describe themselves folding formal structure around what emerged by:
● establishing formal communication protocols between network groups that
● have developed some permanence and profile;
● officially recognising the teacher roles that have emerged through management points for their work, status by management, budgetary control or increased training;
● providing entitlements to represent the network to external bodies or at events;
● requesting the development of 2-3 year plans so emerging groups become institutionalised;
● providing release time for teachers to use their own discretion to decide when to work with colleagues in other schools and for what reasons.

The characteristics of designed structure can now begin to resemble more closely the emergent structure as leaders learn 'what works'. Indeed, the way in which the emergent characteristics of the network become formalised and then evolve beyond this formalisation mirrors how some of the networks came into being. Some NLCs had their origins in regular but informal networks of headteachers who had decided to formalise and expand their network. This formalisation legitimised their networks:

Figure 2:

Within-school level	NLC level
• Funding to provide teacher release time;	* Funding to provide teacher release time.
• Management points to reward networked activity;	* Regularly scheduled meetings with adequate time for both task and relationship building work
• Headteacher enables permeability of school boundaries - for example, facilitates teachers from other schools undertaking classroom observations	* Formalised roles at the network level – for example, "lead learner", "ICT innovator"
	* Funded administrative support;
• Opportunity for network level learning to be drawn down into individual schools - workshops for staff; scheduled observations of lead learner in action, satellite enquiry groups	* Network conferences with external experts to establish enquiry activity; * Network conferences to cascade learning to colleagues

Figure 2

I think that sense of purpose was validated by officially becoming a Network Learning Community and having a national recognition from the Network Learning Group….It was almost subversive before and doing things that maybe we shouldn't'.

Participants

While Figure 1 does suggest some common characteristics of the teachers drawn into NLC groups, a coherent picture of which teachers became involved and how they were drawn in proved elusive. Workplace equality suggests all should have had the opportunity to participate in NLC activities and in some networks, open invitations were made. In other NLCs shoulder tapping and supportive 'pushing' occurred as well as pragmatic selection – if pupil learning in reception needed attention then reception teachers were brought together.

However, in the interviews, self-selection and volunteerism reflected the emergent nature of groups. The participants' willingness to co-operate and actively participate may have arisen through a personal belief in a cause or shared perspective with others in the group. As this co-leader argues:

What made it real was that this wasn't somebody from the school down in the Southeast or in Manchester or wherever, who's context you don't know. These were actually colleagues working in similar schools in the same area, but who were actually performing minor miracles because they were using this learning style or they had this practice… it was actually very, very real, very powerful and there was actually a demand to repeat it. (Co-leader)

Moreover, to move to a position where teachers are *initiators of change* requires an element of personal choice. Harris et al (2003) argue that connections between people do not arise solely out of common identity or shared vision. Rather connections can be developed by drawing on a teacher's enlightened self-interest, their need for self fulfilment and development. As such, network leaders recognise and harness individual enthusiasms by creating opportunities for these to be expressed. Network leaders would also design opportunities to spark enthusiasm. High profile speakers, launch events signalling that the NLC is different from what came before, intervisitations between schools and pupil voice activities were described as mechanisms that could spark or bring enthusiasms to the surface.

Purpose

Networks configure around compelling purposes (Lieberman and Grolnick, 1996). Compelling purposes are unlikely to be top-down but personally generated and owned – in other words, emergent. Co-leaders described their NLC steering group establishing a strategic top-level purpose for network groups that responded to felt needs for school improvement. The teacher group would be given their '*brief'* and directions for delivery (for example, workshop, tool-kit, requirement to coach and mentor colleagues). However, participants determine the 'what' and the 'how' of the work itself. Enquiry foci may diversify and narrow as each member finds an approach that has some personal resonance. For example, in this following quote, a deputy headteacher describes the first meeting of his enquiry group:

'*And I said to them* (the teachers at the meeting) *this is a blank sheet of paper here. This is where we go. Very quickly people started to chip in, with most of them saying 'well that's actually it', 'that's exactly what we're seeing', 'that's exactly what we've been thinking about.' All of a sudden staff from a variety of schools realising that we all had a common theme. And then there would be another knock-on, and so the conversation grew. And from that, by the end of the meeting we had our focal points, what we wanted to look at in the next session, and very quickly we were able to book in half termly meetings which then is the motivation that came out of just some time in the afternoon. The meetings were from 2 until 4, so the actual energy that was created there was very sustaining.* (Deputy Head)

We argue that this process creates a mutually negotiated compelling idea – one that Lieberman and Grolnick (1996) describe as motivating prospective participants to commit to what is after all, still another activity. As such it provides a common point of reference for participants which Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) argue enable common understandings and vocabularies to support the growth of connections between participants. Moreover, by allowing the focus to emerge, offers the potential to build the personal meaning-making and strong identification with practice described by Wenger (1998), that underpins a sense of belonging to a learning group.

Interviews describe this process as '*messy'*, '*chaotic'*, '*ambiguous'*. Co-leaders reported that teachers may find the ambiguity inherent in the freedom and flexibility of their emergent group anxiety-provoking. Teachers may look to formal structuring for direction:

And so the messy bit was them then saying 'well what are we here for?' 'what are we doing here?' 'Why aren't they telling us what to do?' Well we didn't want to tell them what to do, that wasn't the idea. (Headteacher)

While teachers taking the networks' agenda forward was described as a key tipping point by leaders, it should not be considered unproblematic. In one case the governing headteachers' group found themselves at odds with the focus of a networked enquiry group, for example. In other interviews, the way in which the learnings of network groups are drawn down into schools was a challenge. As Lieberman and Grolnick (1996) note, a potential tension lies in the need for network leaders to link these local purposes to network-wide purposes.

Conclusion

Network leaders are *leaders who follow*. That is, they can create opportunities for networks to develop but the need to allow for the emergent qualities of how the work actually occurs, means they follow where the network takes them. As Church et al., (2003) argue, the core business of a network leadership is process: '*relationship-building, facilitating, enthusing, enabling, circulating resources, adding value where needed'*. Sensitive network leadership appears to attend to the emergent needs of the group and its emotional needs, creates connection to the wider network and maintains the focus on core tasks.

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School Transformation Through Community Values: Imperial School, Mitchell's Plain, South Africa

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Introduction

Shared values, capacity building and a powerful focus upon learning and leadership (at all levels) would be inter-related elements of many consultants' recipe for school and community regeneration. Add to that collective alignment around core purposes, enquiry processes and collaborative working norms, and you have a powerful combination of improvement forces. The problem with good theory, though, is that it has to be interpreted and enacted within the dynamically complex real world of schools. Operationalising theory – in particular in environments of unusual challenge – is often insurmountably difficult.

One of the ways in which coherence and meaning can resolve this tension, is to draw the shared values set from the synergies between school aspirations and community purposes – to house school transformation within community regeneration.

Quite recently I worked on three occasions in South Africa – with staff teams from a network of schools in extremely challenging and challenged communities. During one of the first workshop sessions, we asked the groups to negotiate shared values for their work together – within schools and between the schools in the network. The agreed values were these:

We want to improve our schools:
- Because we love children
- To change learners' lives for the better
- To help teachers to be more optimistic, passionate and enthused
- To support our teachers to feel empowered rather than victims of external reforms
- Because we want the joy that comes from growing, learning and developing together
- *To be a regenerative force within our communities*

The case study is drawn from one of the schools in this project – a school which sought to integrate community and educational purposes in a mutually regenerative process.

The Case Study

The case study arose from research undertaken in three schools participating in the SEED Project in the Western Cape of South Africa. SEED was a systemic restructuring programme. Within the overall project was housed a school and leadership development programme in a number of pilot schools. These pilot schools were seeking to utilise theoretical understandings about school improvement, local management, distributed leadership and networking – all housed within 'learning organisation' constructs – to learn and to problem-solve together the challenges of contemporary schooling in South African township contexts.

This is an account of Imperial School (although it draws also from the work of the Project). It is an exemplification as much as a case study, in that it is composed of a selection of positive characteristics, strategies and events. Everything written is real, but in total is less problematic than reality! Readers would need to connect with the context fully to understand the challenges.

Imperial School's work has four core characteristics which might be of interest more widely to school improvement endeavours in contexts of high challenge.
- It is a school which has embraced school-based management with a vision of how this might enable and facilitate development – not only in the areas of finance and resources but, more importantly, in terms of clarity about its own values and purposes, about teaching and learning, the development of staff and relationships with parents, the wider community and the role of the governing body.
- It is a school that sees school-based management as something which serves the greater goal of providing leadership towards the school's vision of itself as a safe and powerful place for young people and teachers to learn, and as a beacon of hope for the future of its community.
- It is a school where the understandings about school improvement and what is meant by a learning organisation, are shared by the whole staff and not just the leadership team
- It is a school that is well on the way to becoming a learning community, both internally and as an energy source for community regeneration.

The School's Context

In 1999, at the time of the first period of study, Imperial School was a large primary school of approximately 1,500 learners and 38 teachers. There were also three 'governing body appointments' (extra staff employed directly by governors), one for the provision of a nursery school

teacher, which is consistent with the school's long-term strategic vision, set out more fully below. (Three years later in 2002, it was almost 2,000 pupils including a large nursery provision) Although the ratio was l:40, actual class sizes varied between 45 and 48 learners. The communities surrounding the school are poor, with high unemployment and levels of crime and gangsterism well known within the area. It is a particularly challenging community context.

Despite this, the school had a fee level of R100 – then approximately £10 per pupil. (It is a feature of contemporary South African schooling that all government-funded schools are expected to supplement the basic allocation with parental fees.) Although some of Imperial's families are unable to pay these fees, the school is active in seeking sponsorship from local companies and individuals for those families that cannot afford their contribution.

The school principal had been teaching in the school for approximately ten years, but had been the principal for only four years, internally appointed with a strong mandate from the staff, he was attracted to the post because of the cohesive internal culture of the school and the potential that he knew was present among the staff, waiting to be released.

The Role of Vision and Values – Community

On taking up his post, the principal was clear that the founding priority and the route to cohesion for the school lay within the theme of community. The school had a long history of disruption and vandalism caused by local gangs and the sense of threat from outside the school damaged the feelings of security within it. For these reasons the vision of the school was built around three strands of commitment to community:

● Developing ownership of the school by parents and the local community through active involvement
● Building a strong sense of internal community within the school between learners, learners and adults, and among teachers
● Creating strong networks and educational links between the school and its local community
● This vision found its expression in the values of the school in a multitude of ways, and was deeply understood by all members of the school community. Phrases from interviews with teachers at Imperial included:

'We want children to feel safe and loved – that the school cares…'

'…we want school to be a safe place – our children live in danger.'

'…we are a strong community of teachers; sharing and caring is what we do here. We motivate one another…'

'Motivation comes from contributing to the community. We want to see our school as a beacon light shining in our community.'

Initially, momentum was initiated by holding a number of meetings through which staff, the community and the pupils (described in South Africa as 'learners') were brought together. Parent meetings were held during which the vision for the school's future was shared, and it was made explicit how much the school needed parents and other community members to contribute if this vision was going to be successful. The school backed its commitment to involving parents in practical ways. For example, a weekly newsletter goes home to the parents of all 1,500 learners.

Although the newsletter was originally criticised (a waste of money, a waste of time, too challenging considering the very high levels of adult illiteracy) the principal persisted, believing that only through knowledge about the school could the parents develop a sense of ownership. One effective device involved ensuring that there was some essential information in each weekly newsletter (eg the starting times of school, which vary, during the next week). This ensures that all parents have to read the letter – or have it read to them by their children.

Networks from school to community were further strengthened by asking all staff to become involved in some form of community activity. Each teacher has links in some way with an activity, which may involve learners in after-school sessions, or may involve learners with parents, or parents alone (eg computer classes for adults on Saturday mornings, or a Mothers' Prayer Group which comes into school to work with a teacher). Heads of department are asked to write quarterly reports for the principal on the work of the teaching staff in their teams. This involves both classroom work and also their areas of additional community involvement. There are very high expectations for staff commitment to the community. A first port of call for any student welfare or discipline problem would be a home visit. As one teacher put it: '*You have to understand the child within their home circumstances in order to be able to provide support*'.

In addition to this link with the community outside the school, developments have occurred to strengthen the internal community. Staff at the school spoke about the programme of extra-mural activities, saying that all the staff do other things at the school outside the classroom: '*Our learners succeed because they are involved in the community of the school. We give children opportunities, not just in the classroom but beyond the classroom.*'

In response, the community has become progressively more involved in the work of the school. Vandalism has virtually disappeared and parents have committed to keep the school environment and facilities safe. A number of parents are involved in projects within the school. Parents cover for absent teachers, as do governing body members, so there is a regular adult presence in the school from the community other than teachers. There is a children's play area, for which the school submitted and received project funding, which was built by community members. A new vegetable garden has been developed and is maintained by community members, again using funds won because of the power of the community/school partnership. Unemployed parents have built a concrete play area for the children at the front of the school; another group of parents has built an artificial cricket pitch on the school play area. Rooms have been decorated and converted by community volunteers. The community's growing pride in the school, its facilities and the success of its children is progressive and regenerative. '*If you are unemployed in our community, the school can provide a beacon of hope, not only for the children, but for the parents – something successful and important to become involved with.*'

The Growth of Culture: caring and learning

Culture is a very difficult concept, even in theory. In practice, it is profoundly problematic to describe. What follows is an attempt to portray some of the motivational indicators in the school and some of the norms, values, expectations, celebrations and rituals that are part of the school's sense of its own self and its pride in what it is doing.

In terms of leadership, the deputy principal spoke of the strength of personal relationships and of valuing all people – of the democratic ethos and of people's rights, too. There was stress on the need for leaders to 'walk the talk' and to symbolise the importance of links with the home, the community and parents in their everyday actions.

The principal has tended to be in charge of the learning and development side. He is often the person who suggests new ideas and presents them for staff consideration. He is a storyteller and will regularly share with the staff ideas and thoughts from his own reading or from his life experience. Staff described how he will share proposals with the whole staff about possible new initiatives. He will invite staff to consider these ideas as a focus for the school and to come up with suggestions. When they do, they see him as the person who creates the conditions for implementation, or makes it possible, or makes things happen.

Such initiatives will tend to be consistent with, and contribute to, the school's visions and values. For example, a recent push on literacy within the school began from a real story that the principal shared with the staff about the problems that an adult without literacy skills had encountered during the course of his life, being excluded from employment and other opportunities and having his self-esteem damaged. This led to a number of initiatives within the school, based around the leitmotif of 'How can we ensure this does not happen to any of our children?' It involved work both with the children and with parents to embrace the importance of literacy development work within the community as well as within the school.

The principal has high expectations of staff, as they do of one another. There is much talk about professional learning within the school. Comments from staff at the school included:

We want to learn more. If you learn something new, you share it with your colleagues. Grade teachers get together almost every afternoon and share. We talk about teaching and learning – we grow together. We keep a record of what we discuss, so that the principal can also learn about the conversations that we have had, as can other teachers.'

'The principal values learning, too. He is open to change. He is a learning exemplar. The principal encourages teachers to learn. He tells us about everything going on outside to make us richer, but the onus is on us to want to learn.

Co-operative decision-making is highly valued, although a repertoire of styles of decision-making is clearly understood both by the principal and by staff in various roles. The principal sees occasions when a variety of different modes of decision-making might operate, ranging from the autocratic, to leadership team decisions, to consultative decisions and democratic decisions. Staff are clear that they understand why there are these different types of decisions. Reasons are explained to them, so they are involved in the decision-making process, even on occasions when the principal is explaining to them that he has made a particular decision himself – and why.

The School Improvement Group

Initially, development at Imperial School was driven by the principal. However, as ownership of the values and the vision spread amongst the staff, it was clear that a more broadly-based group was needed, both to oversee and to act out improvement activities. With this in mind, a group was established containing key members who were viewed as being 'change agents' within the school. It also had a number of staff whose roles involved them working with a variety of important school and community groups. It was also, though, thought to be very important that the School Improvement Group (SIG) had on its staff those who represented a cross-section of the school community – age, gender and disposition towards change activity. Most were very positive towards the direction in which the school was moving, but at least one member of the group was someone who was viewed by the wider staff as being grounded in staffroom opinion – someone who would need persuading before committing other staff to more work!

The School Improvement Group became the energy source for improvement activity within the school. The principal made sure that the group had time together and that they received professional development support. This included theoretical elements about school improvement, leadership training, support with the development of enquiry skills and planning time. This last element – time to plan together, to learn together and to develop team identity – was viewed by all members as being particularly important to the SIG's success.

Unlike other structures within the school, which tend to be in place on a more permanent basis, the School Improvement Group was set up as a 'temporary membership group'. The principal made it clear that the School Improvement Group was there to stay, but that membership would change on a periodic basis, so that some people might be members for a few years, but others might change at the end of the first year. In this way, all staff would have access to working on the School Improvement Group over a period of time, but the group could still retain a composition that enabled it to succeed.

The issue of leadership of the SIG was a complex one. Because, historically, the principal had provided the dominant leadership for school development activity, he was aware that this might still be expected of him – that he would lead the School Improvement Group. However, he wanted to broaden out the base of leadership within the school; to encourage other staff to have significant leadership roles. With this in mind, the principal became a member of the SIG, but did not lead it. Instead, he set up a co-leadership arrangement. One of the co-leaders was his deputy principal, the other was a younger member of staff with five years' experience, but someone who had developed respect within the staffroom for her commitment to learners and for her knowledge about teaching and learning. The School Improvement Group, therefore, operated on three levels:

- The co-leaders, whose responsibility was the planning for the group, the professional development of the group, and ensuring its connections with the wider staff and community

- The group itself, who had a shared responsibility for ensuring that the SIG was successful on behalf of other staff and the wider community
- The whole staff, who had been asked to approve the establishment of the SIG and to support their work and findings. In turn, the SIG had to ensure that the whole staff was fully informed and involved at all times

To begin with, it took some time for the group to develop ways of working. One of the problems was that the whole concept of having a group whose sole purpose was to improve the school was a new one. How should they go about the work of finding out more? How did they decide the areas of focus? How could they find enough time? The pressures of holding a school together in a strife-torn community are so great, how can staff be expected to make enquiry and improvement activity a priority? Was it their job or the job of others to implement changes? Who needed to know what they were doing, and at what stages did they need to know? How much improvement could the group lead, and how much could the school manage? How did they ensure that they kept everyone on board with their work and their recommendations? How would they be able to know if they were being successful?

As well as these many questions about the way the group worked, there were some wider questions that are probably common to most school improvement approaches of this kind. Some of these questions could be summarised as follows:
- Who should lead the School Improvement Group and what are the characteristics of leadership for improvement?
- All members of SIG need to be leaders of other staff – how does this work in practice?
- If the group is to be seen a representative, rather than 'exclusive', how does it communicate with the rest of the staff and keep everybody fully involved?
- How does the group design school-based enquiry and what role does it play in school improvement work?
- How does the group manage the data from enquiry activities? How do they process the data, and who processes it? Who makes decisions about the data and its implications for school improvement?
- How does the group manage the data from enquiry activities? How do they process the data, and who processes it? Who makes decisions about the data and its implications for school improvement?
- If there are a number of enquiries going on at the same time, will staff feel that too much is happening and that there is too much of a workload issue?
- Enquiry is a part of the learning commitment to study practice, but changes also have to be implemented. Who does this and who decides?

It was clear that the group itself would need to develop some understandings about leadership. At the same time as the co-leaders needed to develop ways of working with the team, so the other team members had to involve wider groups of staff in their work, or they could not be successful for the whole school. Each year one of the tasks that the SIG set for itself was to revisit their understandings about leadership of this empowering way of working.

At the end of the day, what the SIG team actually learnt was that there are no simple answers to any of these questions. In some ways, each school is forging its own answers and developing its own theory about what works and what does not in its own context. At the same time as enquiring about the school and improvements that can be made, the SIG group also began to see itself as enquiring into what works and what does not in terms of their own ways of working. They began to develop 'grounded theory' – theory arising from their own practice.

At the time of the study, the work of the SIG was built into the rhythm of the school's life. It was no longer just a group of eight members, as it was in its first year, but each of those members worked with other teachers, governors or parents in small groups, leading improvement activities with this wider group of people (so, there was a Group and an Extended Group). Learners (pupils), too, are involved on some of the groups and their voice is heard through the enquiry activity which is a foundation of the way the SIG works.

The Role Of Enquiry and its Relationship to Planning

Before the SIG was formed, the principal was the person who did most of the strategic planning and the more detailed planning, in partnership with the governing body. These plans then had financial implications, academic details, professional development needs – and so on – added. They were completed six months in advance of implementation, so that all staff had adequate time to prepare for effective implementation. The staff then agreed the plans together and, once this was done, it was expected that everyone would own the plan and be involved in its implementation.

This form of planning did not totally disappear, but the school now sees that continuous development cannot be achieved just by producing a plan once each year. In order to broaden out the base of leadership and decision-making, other approaches need to be adopted, so that the improvement group could also be continuously involved in identifying ways in which the school might develop.

Enquiry provided the solution, or the way of working.

Enquiry activity as seen as something that could 'open doors from the inside'. Enquiry activity helped the SIG to get to know the school and community better, the strengths and the areas that would benefit from an improvement focus. Because enquiry generates evidence, it proved to have a more powerful impact than improvement endeavours that had happened before in the school, which tended to involve only people's opinions being debated. Instead, the School Improvement Group could produce evidence around which personal meanings could be formed and agreement could be reached about ways of improving. As one SIG member said :

'If you don't start with evidence and data, how can you have an intelligent conversation?'

The SIG adopted a simple model for its enquiry activity:
1 clarify the issue of interest;
2 research what is actually happening in the school or wider community, including different people's understanding of it;
3 share good practice, and suggest changes that might be made or improvements that could be put in place to narrow the gap between what the enquiry has shown

and what teachers, learners and parents would like to see happening;

4 use the above process to involve people and to build alliances to undertake the development activity;

5 research further the effect of the changes and their impact on students' learning and the school.

What the SIG soon found was that they were not the only ones who could undertake enquiry activity. Although SIG members planned together the early enquiries, soon the effectiveness of the approach was taken on board by other staff and by some of the parents who were closely connected with the school, who asked for help in undertaking their own 'action enquiry' activities. Some of the enquiries took place within classrooms, others were related to wider educational issues or conditions within the school. Some were undertaken within the wider community of parents and local residents. In these enquiries, one or two members of the governing body also became involved, as they were able to see that they had a legitimate role in these areas, as members of the Extended SIG.

One example of an early enquiry at Imperial School related to the literacy initiative mentioned earlier. It was decided to test all children to find out which ones were encountering difficulties with literacy. At the same time, two teachers and two parents formed a small SIG team and designed a very sensitive enquiry in order to invite parents to reflect on their own literacy needs in supporting their children's education. Although this was a voluntary enquiry, quite a number of parents responded (over 50%) and the SIG team gathered some interested parents together to form a group, some of whom had literacy skills and were willing to share them with others, whilst other parents were there because they wanted to improve their literacy skills.

The initial enquiry, therefore, led both to this parents' support group and to additional literacy work being undertaken with those children who were finding literacy difficult. Six months later, further research was done with those two groups to measure improvements – which were considerable. Even more powerful, though, were the stories that resulted from this second research. Children talked about the difference it had made to their confidence and to their achievement in other subjects. Some of the parents talked about the changes it had made in their lives and in their feelings about their effectiveness as a parent at this time in their children's lives. They talked about being able to help with homework and being able to read the school newsletter and to feel partners in the school. The original group of parents recommended other parents and, by the beginning of the second year of the SIG group, a second mutual support group of parents was set up. Increasingly, parents who had never before felt confident to visit the school were visiting twice each week to share in the literacy activities. Some of these parents then continued their work in the school by supporting young learners with literacy work, too. A third enquiry was set up in year two to evaluate a peer support literacy initiative pairing, older with younger learners. This, too, produced powerful data – both about literacy improvement and wider educational gains. The peer tutors, too, reported real benefits and satisfaction from their role.

This extended enquiry was just one example of the SIG's work. Two members of the SIG group began and led this enquiry, which they did for two years involving other staff, parents and learners in their work. By that time, what had started as an enquiry-led school improvement initiative became a part of the way the school worked and was no longer the responsibility of the SIG group, but had appointed its own literacy co-ordinator.

Other Characteristics of the School

A key element in the early improvement within the school was the leadership role of the principal. What is unusual now, though, is how little negative talk there is amongst the teachers. Few see the problems of lack of resources or the many national initiatives as a barrier to their development. They were much clearer about the way initiatives can be incorporated within the vision for the school's development. One teacher talked about Outcomes Based Education as having brought changes to teaching and learning, and welcomed the way the curriculum and pedagogy was developing so that the teacher became more of a facilitator. This had led to more collaboration and sharing between teachers and they had learnt from one another about how to introduce this innovation.

At Imperial School, teachers have become more interested in their own professional learning as a result of the school and community improvement activity. A number have enrolled on award bearing, long-term courses at the local university which will both feed into their work in school and also improve their qualification-base.

Staff in the research saw the school as being very demanding of teachers but also as being a very rewarding school because both teachers and learners achieved their goals. They felt proud to be involved, both within the school community and in a school that served its wider community. They talked of the motivation of working there as being the joy of working with children and seeing results – *'seeing the flower opening up'*. Even the thoughts about the future tended to be phrased in positive terms – *'We're developing a library and a research area so that the children can find things out for themselves....we want the school to be more secure... discipline is good but most always be a focus... we want to get the children to share our care... there is always lots to learn.'* The latest initiative, appraisal, was also seen in these terms. It was viewed as part of the continuing development of classroom practice, something which will help 'teachers to grow'.

Leadership

Although many issues related to leadership are either explicit or implicit in what is written above, it may be worth distilling some themes from the case study that might have particular relevance for School Improvement Groups.

Leadership in Imperial School

● Leadership and management are viewed as separate functions. *Leadership* operates in the realms of envisioning futures, articulating values, inspiring and motivating others (teachers, parents and students) problem-finding (enquiry) and problem-solving (rather than externalising blame), developing the capacity of people and creating contexts for sustained adult learning.

● The *vision* for the school is absolutely clear to all staff, students and parents – and it finds its expression repeatedly in both real and symbolic ways. The

school sees itself as a regenerative force within the community.

- The *values* of the school (the shared beliefs that are culturally binding) are explicit (about caring, sharing, inclusiveness, optimising potential, challenging, having high mutual expectations … and so on)
- The principal is seen as the *lead learner*, someone who takes responsibility both for his own professional (and personal) learning and that of his staff.
- The principal 'disseminates eloquence' – he takes opportunities to *verbalise* around the vision and values, to tell stories, to paint pictures, to keep the flame of enthusiasm burning for his teachers, children and community.
- The staff have *high professional expectations* of one another. Collaborative (democratic) decision-making requires responsible teachers, not just to make the decisions, but to live them out, and to do what it takes to make them work.
- This means that *accountability* is strong too. Staff are given the responsibility and authority to act and they are expected to do so.
- The principal does not just lead, he develops *leadership capacity*. He gives away leadership and supports people to be successful. He does not delegate (tasks), he empowers (giving roles and scope).
- The school's leadership encourages enterprise, creativity and *risk-taking,* for teachers of all levels of experience, knowing that whatever staff do will be consistent with the school's vision and values.
- Contexts for *adult professional learning* are fostered as the staff know that there is no improvement for students if teachers do not continually learn and improve, too. Staff share and learn together – both with and from each other – and the principal builds this into working structures (such as staff meetings and after school time), procedures (such as follow-ups after courses to share outcomes) and informal collaboration (staffroom conversations). Teachers talk about teaching and learning.
- *Leadership cares about people*, staff, learners and the community, and finds ways of showing this on a day to day basis – sometimes caring enough to be tough with people!

Leadership of the School Improvement Group

As mentioned earlier, it was decided that the SIG team would have a co-leadership arrangement. The reasons for this were shared with the whole of the staff and were as follows:

As a model it offers:
- Mutual support
- A dialectic around improvement issues
- Dialogue opportunities
- A discipline for planning
- Potential for co-facilitation
- Cover for absence
- Succession planning
- Cross-hierarchical potential
- Opportunities to partner complementary skills

Understandings have evolved at Imperial School from the shared study of leadership in action. Each year one of the tasks that the SIG sets for itself is to revisit their understandings about leadership – what they are learning individually and collectively from their work.

Final Thoughts: the writings of teachers at the school

One of the things that has happened at Imperial school is that teachers have become more interested in their own professional learning as a result of the school improvement activity. As mentioned above, a number have enrolled on award bearing, long-term courses at the local university which will both feed into their work in school and also improve their qualification-base. Below are some extracts from the assignments of teachers at the school, which describe some aspects of their work.

Teacher 1 – 'Continuous Enquiry – Change as a Hypothesis'

The knowledge-base about educational change is shifting. The concept of 'Managed Change' as an appropriate vehicle for substantive school improvement is becoming increasingly questioned. More recent studies are suggesting that change is largely unmanageable. It is rather messy and uncertain.

In their UK study of 'movingness' (schools which had made notable improvement over time) Hopkins et al (1994) found that these schools tended to exhibit characteristics contradictory to the planned change/school development planning/rational model – but more consistent with those of learning organisations. These improving schools did not plan rationally, have clear starting points or use sophisticated school development plans. They 'muddled through', acted intuitively and uses complex, interrelated and interactive approaches.

Similarly, in their study of urban high schools, Louis and Miles (1990) conceptualised the improvement encountered using the image of a braid in which the various strands became melded and interwoven. This image of change is satisfyingly complex.

It is a logical step, then, to find in more recent writing on school development, the concept of data-driven improvement. Enquiry leads to data production and problem analysis. Dialogue around this analysis shifts assumptions and questions historical practices. Alternative ways of doing things (change) become hypotheses to be tested and further researched as active monitoring of the implementation (Eastwood and Louis, 1992) The Concept is: act and study the action; change as a hypothesis (Joyce, 1996)

This has led to the view of school improvement as 'action enquiry' (Fullan, 1994) – which involves enquiry both inside and outside the school. King (1995) terms it 'action evaluation'. In this formulation, school renewal is seen as collective enquiry to improve knowledge-in-practice; change as a continuous, fluid hypothesis supported by enquiry. Glickman (1993) actually goes further. He believes that schools should not act *unless* they are able to study that action, claiming it is irresponsible to act without determining whether such expenditure of time, energy, enthusiasm and belief are having desirable effects for students: 'Studying a school is part of taking action in that school'.

Effective collaborative enquiry processes focus simultaneously upon student learning and achievements;

upon teacher skills and teaching and learning contexts; upon the school as an educational and social community; upon the school as an organisation system – so it can continuously be redefined and reinvented. Teachers (and students) who are expanding their knowledge and skills in this way become increasingly comfortable with enquiry and learning as a way of life, and obtain enhanced professional satisfaction from the process.

Schools committed to internal enquiry also used to draw from outside knowledge. If internal enquiry leads to school level issues being explored, external enquiry draws from research and the wider professional knowledge base to inform future directions (Glickman, l993) The use of external knowledge also becomes more akin to research and driven by the improvement issues being explored within the school.

Examples of external knowledge sources include:
● Research reports and educational literature
● Visits to other schools
● The use of consultants
● Links with university personnel and university research base
● Conferences and INSET activities
● Further degree assignments
● IT links (email and the Internet, etc.)

Such regular interconnections serve both the needs of the school and the learning needs of teachers.

Teacher 2 – 'Research and Enquiry at Imperial School'

The Imperial School approach to school improvement is built upon a commitment to research and enquiry processes. Through working on a school improvement project linked to university staff, we benefit from the evolving knowledge base about school improvement, which can be fed back into our own activity.

Beyond this, though, we are both researching our own school improvement practice and generating new knowledge about aspects of the process.

In an article entitled 'Pursuing Equity Through Teacher-led Enquiry Based Classroom Improvement Strategies' (Frost l998) David Frost has used a project school's work as a case study, describing it as being:

School-focused in that they address concerns, priorities and issues which are particular to a single school; they are teacher-led in the sense that the focus for enquiry and development is identified by the individual teachers who take the initiative; they are enquiry-based in that they are constructed as investigations and they enable teachers to use data to inform professional judgements. What is most significant is that the data is largely the views and responses of students themselves

rather than data generated by teachers about students. The process is unusual in that it involves quite a large school improvement group. This means that all teachers in the school are touched by the project in some way. In engaging in this kind of work, teachers become 'change agents' who are beginning to make explicit their 'moral purpose' to improve educational provision. (Fullan, 1993)

Frost's analysis is very positive. He goes on to state that what we may have is an interesting picture of a culture in which values are shared, which is not to say that they are necessarily held in common, but that they are opened up, talked about, known about and mutually examined. So what we have is an enriched discourse, an increased tolerance of questioning and a high level of involvement in experimentation.

Frost goes on, though, to argue for a need to look more carefully at the planning stages of enquiry at the strengthening of the strategic dimension. School-based research is not pure research; its ultimate purpose is to improve the school, and one of the points that he is making is that we cannot implicitly assume that those engaged in leadership of an enquiry partnership have an equivalent management or leadership knowledge about wider school improvement issues.

Frost's study of the relationship between data generation and school improvement activity harmonises with our own internal generation of theory around this theme. Our work together has led us to an expanded understanding of data analysis, beyond the conventional stage of data reduction, exploration/explanation and interpretation to a consideration of the additional elements that need to be incorporated into 'data analysis for school improvement'. Our work has shown us that there are both ethical and theoretical distinctions between data analysis for academic research and that designed to drive school improvement activity. These additional dimensions include:
● Reapplying inferences from the data to test out their practicability within the school context;
● Further exploring inferences with other stake-holders within the school;
● Translating 'findings' from research into images of practical preferred alternatives;
● Designing action steps which can lead to school improvement;
● Using the data to engage others in action.

The work is useful in developing understandings, but it may also have replicability for other schools engaged in similar work – a practical theory.

Extended or Restricted Childhood?

COLIN RICHARDS

Colin Richards is Professor of Education at St Martin's College, University of Lancaster, and a former HMI.

The Government's proposals for 'extended' primary schools announced by Charles Clarke at the Labour Conference and featured as an important element in the recently-published five-year plan for education, are to be welcomed, but only if they enable the children to make the most of their childhood.

On its announcement extended primary schooling was 'spun' by the DfES as a major contribution to helping working parents with childcare, to raising standards of attainment by the provision of study support, to raising standards of parenting through family learning and even to helping reduce obesity through the provision of healthy meals. If the Government's plans work out, by 2008 at least 1000 primary schools will be offering what it comfortingly describes as '48-week-a-year 8am to 6pm wrap-around child care' – 'delivered' (what an ugly word!) in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors and with employers.

In its five-year plan for education the Government does not indicate how it envisages that partnership to work and how far other non-school agents and agencies involved in child care and education are likely to be involved – if at all. It will be important for those agencies to keep a wary eye on these developments lest their distinctive contribution be ignored or downplayed.

Very significantly, the Government does not have much to say about the kind of experience to be offered by such schools or by those in partnership with them. It betrays a woeful lack of understanding of what children need, especially in the early years. In a section of its plan dealing with under-fives it suggests 'sport clubs, extra art, maths clubs, or music'. How many under-fives do you know who need or want membership of such clubs?!!!

Nowhere is 'play' suggested as an important experience to be provided – either in relation to early or later years provision in 'extended primary schools'. No doubt many older children would benefit from extra art or music, too often squeezed during the normal school day by the so-called but mistakenly named 'basics' (provided they are not coerced); no doubt some would benefit from extra study support (provided this is not just another semi-compulsory dose of yet more literacy and numeracy). No doubt some would benefit from a healthier diet (provided this is not literally rammed down their throats). But older children also need to be able to play between 8 and 9am and between 3.30pm and 6.00pm. Otherwise, when else will they?

Of course younger as well as older children need a variety of play activities. They need the kind of play activities where adults (not necessarily teachers) suggest the activity, provide the materials and take part in structuring the process. They need the kind of play where adults suggest an activity and provide the materials but do not intervene so as to free up the children's imagination. But they also need free play activities where they have the time, space, materials and freedom to create and imagine *on their own terms*. Children can sometimes be the best judge of what they need to experience and how they should play – as sensitive early years workers and reception class teachers have always appreciated.

Extended primary schools and those working in partnership with them need to provide a variety of experiences including a variety of *play* experiences. Extended primary schools should be extending childhood, not restricting it to meet the Government's raising attainment agenda. The ultimate criteria for the success of such schools should be the increased happiness, involvement and fulfilment of the children, not help for working parents, not tackling childhood obesity and not providing extra study support to help already over-assessed children meet arbitrary test requirements.

Special Needs – Special Boxes

ELIZABETH JURD

Elizabeth Jurd has taught at North Primary School and Nursery in Colchester for more than 15 years. She was Simms School Mistress Fellow at Lucy Cavendish College in 2000 and since then has completed an M.Ed at Cambridge. The following short article gives one a considerable insight into the realities of a present day primary classroom in her description of how she meets the special needs of one particular child and by so doing helps to meet the needs of others in her class.

I am struggling to load a huge box into my tiny car outside the supermarket. Ex-pupils are circling on their bikes making unhelpful suggestions. Surely I have more important tasks?

Like many primary teachers I make great use of boxes. Cereal boxes can become lorries and houses while shoe boxes are particularly useful to contain views of space or an underwater scene. Alone or in groups children produce tiny versions of rain forests or an industrial scene. If they replace the lid and use a torch and pinholes it adds to the atmosphere created. Mixing paint half and half with white glue will cover most surfaces including sticky tape.

This enormous box, however, is destined for a different fate. I will not give instructions or directions as to how it is to be used. All such decisions are down to one child, called Gary.

You know a 'Gary' I am sure (and it is invariably a boy at top junior age). He scowls as he enters the classroom, kicks the table, snarls at you and hurts someone before the bell rings. None of this is a deliberate action, it just reflects how he feels.

Gary knows that he can go straight to his box and do exactly what he likes with it. He has total freedom to paint the box, cut it, add materials or just sit inside it. My stapler and wires and batteries are allowed if he seems calm when he asks permission but the craft knife (so useful for making doors and windows) only as a special privilege under adult supervision.

One box in its time has been a car, boat, train, house, castle and a space craft on subsequent days. The draw-bridge was particularly clever with coins fixed with blue tack on the underside so that it lowered itself when the strings were released.

You might think that other children would be jealous of the freedom given to Gary but I find that they show considerable understanding of the situation. They realise that their learning will be hindered if Gary is disrupting the class. They are happy to concentrate on the lesson knowing that they will get a choice of creative activities later in the day.

Yet Gary is not excluded from the class. He is busy painting but is also listening to the introduction. As his anger diffuses he often makes a contribution and finally leaves his painting (without attempting to clear up!) and joins in the task.

It is impossible to teach children if their emotional state is totally negative. Trying to force Gary to sit down and conform is counter productive for him and for the class. A choice of practical and creative activities of all kinds helps the children's emotional development and builds up their self esteem.

Working in a pair or small group is an essential experience both from a social and a creative perspective. However that is just too difficult for Gary first thing in the morning or at the beginning of the afternoon!

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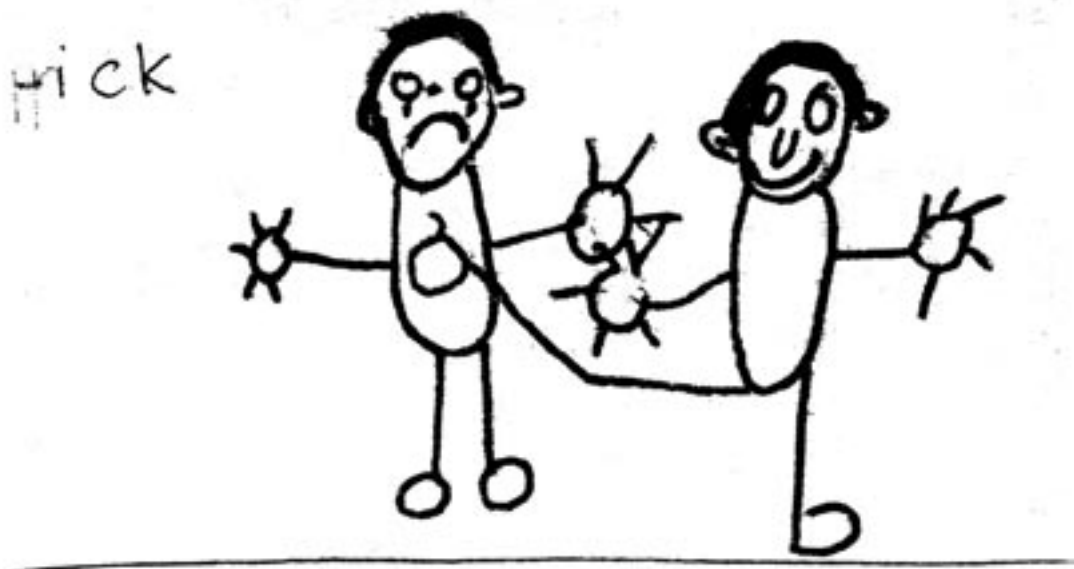
Homophobia approached by a Theatre Company: small steps …

CLAIR CHAPWELL
Clair Chapwell is Joint Artistic Director of the Spare Tyre Theatre Company.

Spare Tyre Theatre Company has been creating theatre about gay issues including homophobia since the mid-nineties. We have worked with a variety of groups and over the years have aimed our projects at a younger and younger age group. With the three year **Pink Project** for ages l6-25 the clear message from participants was '*it all started for me at school*'. Several years later we took Danny Braverman's play **Other People's Shoes**, aimed at KS4, on a two year tour of London secondary schools. Again, the message was clear, particularly from teachers; '*so glad to have this message – but it all starts much earlier*'. We had originally planned a tour of a year only. However the level and intensity of homophobic behaviour within schools frankly shocked us. One of our funding officers came with us to a school's performance. '*Do you think we could run another tour of this?*' I asked. '*It looks like you could tour it forever,*' she replied.

We have just completed our latest schools' tour of **Burning**, for KS3. Written by me and directed by my co-Artistic Director Arti Prashar, the show toured to 4000 pupils in schools throughout Greater London. It sold out quickly; we had a long list of schools we had to disappoint. As a result of that and of obvious need within schools for information on the subject and strategies for dealing with homophobia, we have undertaken to run a second tour of **Burning** for autumn '05. The tour will run for seven weeks in London and three weeks outside it.

Arti and I were clear when we talked about creating the show that we didn't want our gay character to be the classic 'gay victim'; beaten up in the showers, name grafittied in the toilets etc. We didn't want the pity of the students. In doing that there's a separation between that character and the students. We wanted them to identify with him, for him to be the leader of the pack. We wanted the girls to want to go out with him and the boys to want to be with him.

Burning is a simple story. Leo is that character, the coolest guy in Year 9, his posse adore and try to emulate him. And having established this coolness, Leo falls madly, secretly and desperately in love with Ash, a loner, someone outside the crowd who is independent, doesn't buy into the pack mentality and has his own agenda. This obsession is not a feeling Leo welcomes and he struggles internally with the homophobic language of his crew and of his own Asian culture. He struts and proclaims his heterosexuality. But the audience sees how he really feels on a video projected across the set: in his fantasy world he touches Ash on the face, dances with him, kisses him.

The show is accompanied by a workshop run by the actors, which takes place just before the end of the show when Leo has to make his decision. Our audiences are small, never numbering over 70, as dealing with sensitive issues for an entire year group is unworkable. The workshop is structured so that virtually everyone who watches the show is able to speak, not just the keen beans who always speak. We look at identity, culture, where your ideas come from, etc. The actors play out two endings and look at each with the audience.

Leo denies his feelings: What are the repercussions? If he doesn't come out it's better for his crew – but possibly worse for Leo.

Leo accepts his feelings - difficult for the crew, incredibly scary for Leo. Now what? How can he find support?

We talk about how Leo would fare at school where the show is being performed. Answers were sadly pretty standard : (*bullied…no friends…grafitti everywhere*). '*He'd be tortured,*' said one boy. '*I'd torture him*' he added helpfully.

Then we poll them:
'Who would bully Leo?' Usually about five hands go up – but the more that go up, the more others are encouraged.
'Who thinks it's his business?' The majority
'Who would be brave enough to support him openly?' Usually a few but when asked how they would support him they become more confident and vocal

Each school receives a teacher's pack full of practical ideas for lesson plans and teachers can carry on pursuing the ideas in subsequent classes.

So what do we think after the **Burning** tour? Sadly, homophobia is alive and well and living in London schools, (but I don't need to tell you that). Compared to other 'parallel oppressions' – race, disability – it is less profiled and there are far fewer resources for schools to draw on. In fact there are virtually none: Section 28 of the Local Government Act has taken a toll which may take a generation to correct. Even though schools were never included in their aim not to 'promote homosexuality', teachers and schools generally seem to have felt its pressure strongly: '*I'm an old ILEA teacher',* said the Assistant Head Teacher at my son's secondary school. '*I feel comfortable dealing with gender and race issues – but*

with gay issues I'm totally at sea. There's no sense of a methodology. You have no idea of what other teachers are saying or how the school as a whole feels about the issue or wants us to approach it.'

What we have found time and again in our visits to schools is a real lack of a whole school approach. There are mechanisms in place now to deal with a teacher who is found to be openly racist. However, currently only 6% of schools include mention of homophobia in their Equal Opportunities policy. For this reason we also offer an INSET for schools entitled **Dealing with Difference.** It uses drama to look at the issue throughout the schools and how it impacts on various areas: from homophobic language in the playground to the teacher trying to support a gay student, to the staff room, to a Governor's meeting.

It's an interactive approach and gets the issue out there in front of all members of staff.

The good news is that things are finally beginning to change. Stonewall has launched 'Education for All', a forum for groups who are developing policies and publications on gay issues for schools. The most recent publication is 'Stand Up for Us' published by the DfES.

And on a personal level, my 14 year old son came home from school the other day, delighted. '*Someone threw some paper at the bin in class today and missed'* he said,

'*Someone else shouted 'Gay shot!'* And the teacher said : '*That's homophobic language. That's not acceptable at this school'.*

Small steps …
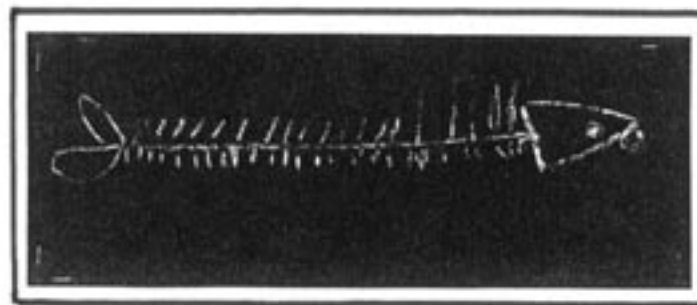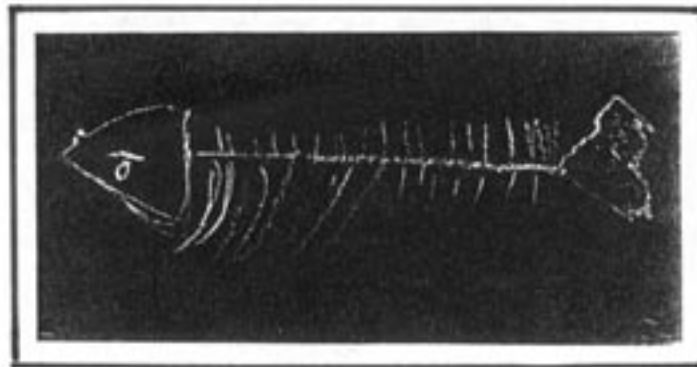
Andy
Age 6.

Two dead fish

An Educational Exploration of Homophobia and Sexism in Rap and Hip Hop: homo-thugs and divas in da house

NICHOLAS CHIU
Nicholas Chiu lives and works in Vancouver, Canada. This article is based on research he carried out in 2004 for his MA degree at Goldsmiths College, London.

Introduction

I remember one day when I was around twelve or thirteen I was at my friend's house and some of us were sitting in the living room, listening to music. I picked up one of the CD cases. 'New Edition', it read, with a picture of seven or eight black men all dressed in white suits posing on the CD cover. 'What is this?!' I asked with a rather condescending tone as my prior musical experiences had consisted of listening to popular songs sung by Cantonese pop artists. As my friend was feeding a CD into the stereo, he said, 'This stuff is really good! Listen to this song, it's *so* good!' I sat there listening to a violin introduction and when the singing started, I laughed. Being the immature self that I was, I was making fun of how the lyrics compared someone's lover with all the members of his family: *Girl you are close to me you're like my mother/ Close to me you're like my father/ Close to me you're like my sister/ Close to me you're like my brother*. Annoying some of my friends by poking fun at their favourite song, 'All my Life' by K-Ci and Jo Jo, I decided to remove myself from the room. On my way out I saw another CD. It was called 'My Way' and the artist was called Usher. I thought to myself, 'What kind of name is 'Usher'?!'

Despite my attitudes towards such music, I did grow up with it. As most of my friends were immersed in it, I could not escape it. However, as I grew up with it the music also 'grew' on me. I remember the one moment and the one song that changed my views forever. I was sitting in my room with my friend; she told me that I must listen to this song because it was 'hot'. The song was amazing. The beats were powerful yet relaxed, the male artist's vocals were smooth and soothing and the rap at the end of the song done by a female artist was one of the most jaw-dropping things I had ever heard. And that was it. From that moment on, my ears were open to a whole new arena of music, of hip hop, of rap, of R&B. That song was like a magnet, pulling me towards it. That song, 'U Know What's Up', was done by Donnell Jones with the late Lisa 'Left-Eye' Lopez on rap. Because of that song I am still pulled by that attractive force of hip hop and rap music.

However after that one defining moment, the infatuation with the music progressed into an infatuation with the culture that came along with the music. I started watching their music videos on MTV and BET (Black Entertainment Television) and reading magazines like 'The Source' and 'Vibe'. My friends even got me a year's subscription to 'Vibe' as a Christmas present. I started paying attention to the artists' fashion styles, admiring (and wanting) their large Sport Utility Vehicles that they 'soup-up' with DVD players, chrome rims, and tinted windows, drinking the alcohol that they rap (or advertise) about in their songs and even calling my friends (albeit gently and in a loving way) 'bitches' and 'hoes' or not getting offended if my friends were to use similar words to address me. To me then, everything and anything about rap and hip hop was just 'dope'.

As I got older and entered University, I studied Psychology and took a lot of courses related to gender development. I was able to take the concepts I learned in lectures and apply them to various aspects of my life, including my music. With a more critical mind, I was able to remove the blindfold and was no longer blinded by the 'cool' factor of rap and hip hop music and the culture. Often I read the lyrics or watched the videos and asked myself, 'What do the women think about all this? As much as they seemed to enjoy dancing and shaking their 'booty', I'm sure they would have something to say about the way women are treated and viewed in some of the songs and videos; and even magazine advertisements'. Another regular thought was 'Why is hip hop and rap so *straight*? Where are all the gay and lesbian artists hiding?' I was able to step back and scrutinise some areas of hip hop and rap that I had once adored and admired. Luckily, in the role of a student, I am able to transform my critical senses into writing and share what I have to say…

… which brings me to the present. I decided to explore deeper the connections between a somewhat worrisome trio: hip hop and rap, sexism and homophobia, and children and teens. I want to use this article to look at the implications or potential consequences of sexism and homophobia within the music and media culture of hip hop and rap. With this, I want to focus on how it affects young viewers and fans in terms of gender (identity) constructions of themselves and others. I also want to make an attempt to place this discussion in relation to education and schooling.

I also want this discussion to serve a second, 'by-product-like' purpose. I hope this discussion will address or highlight the need for more current analysis and critical

research of hip hop and rap music and cultures with relation to sexism and especially homophobia; as some of the literary resources used are out-of-date by about a decade. Hopefully, my writing here will emulate some of the existing literature that looks critically at hip hop and rap as an artform.

The following discussion will unfold as follows. I first want to set the stage by providing a rather short content analysis of some hip hop, rap and R&B lyrics, images from magazines and music videos to address the issues of sexism and homophobia. Then I will consider the implications and consequences of the sexist and homophobic messages within the hip hop and rap medium with regard to young people's gender and sexuality development and how all this infiltrates mainstream education and schooling. I want to end on a positive note by looking at the new directions of the hip hop and rap communities in relation to sexism and homophobia.

Before I go any further with my discussion I want to make clear that when I talk about the misogyny and homophobia within hip hop and rap, I am referring *only* to the artists or lyrics that bear such messages. I am by no means suggesting that the entire genre and culture of hip hop and rap is sexist or homophobic. Also, I do want to make explicit that hip hop and rap culture does *not* equate with 'Black' culture. It is important that we see these as 'distinct entities' (Kitwana, l994, p.13). Finally it should be evident that while the anti-women and anti-gay messages (in hip hop and rap) may be transmitted by Black individuals, it does not mean that Black people and culture are reflective of such messages 'simply because the transmitter is black'.

The Low-Down on Sexism

Over the years, there have been many studies in the media that looked specifically at the frequency of women on television and how they are portrayed. Conducting content analyses in various media such as magazines and television advertisements, television programmes and music videos, researchers have uncovered consistent themes. As women are continually being underrepresented, whatever representation that they do receive in the media is often stereotypical (Gunter, l995). Women are presented as submissive, subservient, passive, highly sexualised and only there to serve the purpose of decoration (Gunter, l995; Crawford & Unger, 2000) In music videos, with reference to rap and hip hop videos, these authors not only notice the above findings, but they also note that in such music videos, men are always exhibiting dominant or controlling behaviour over women. As rappers like Nelly or J-Kwon shoot videos in a club full of barely-dressed women, women are seen yet again as decoration, dancing along side men.

Just like music videos, within the business of rap, hip hop and R&B, male artists run the show (Keyes, 2002). As a result, on the lyrical front, the image of women is not all that different. Lyrics of some rap and hip hop tracks often suggest discrimination and insult towards women (Crawford & Unger, 2000; Kitwana, l994). Women are often called 'bitches' and 'hoes' and no matter how much love you say those words with, it does not yield much respect towards women; usually, Eamon, Twista, or Jay-Z do not say those words with much love. While doing some of my own content or lyrical analysis of recent or current

hip hop, rap and even R&B songs, I noticed some common themes and views of women that continue to perpetuate the ten year-old notion that women 'hold less value than drugs, and are only worthy as sexual objects to be conquered, used, traded and given away'. (Kitwana, 1994, p. 52)

First it was common for lyrics to view women as visual objects of display. In other words, J-Kwon or Chingy refer to women only as hips, thighs and legs or other parts of the exterior body; something visual that a man's eyes can see. A second 'popular' theme is having Mario Winans or Lemar sing about cheating and unfaithful women with Eamon's distinctive sound and hatred towards women, he loudly sings: *Fuck you you ho/I don't want you back.* A final theme that I noticed while doing my analysis was that women were constantly being portrayed as money-hungry, superficial and materialistic. While Wyclef Jean and Lil'Jon and the Eastside Boyz rap about luring prostitutes with money, what adds to this issue is that some songs sung by women suggest something similar, as female group Destiny's Child wants a man who pays the 'Bills, Bills, Bills', TLC wants 'No Scrubs' and Issys is torn 'Day and Night' between a man she loves and a man who provides her with a *private beach, shopping sprees, diamond rings/ All the things that (she) can't get at home.*

When men dominate the music business of rap and hip hop, sexism does not only show through in the lyrics. Within the business itself, new male acts are constantly being pumped out while female acts like Blu Cantrell and Issys are often 'One-hit-wonders' and their album sales usually trail behind their male colleagues (Smith l995). However, female acts are gaining more momentum and are marking their territory on the Hip Hop stage (Keys, 2002) such as Missy 'Misdemeanour' Elliot, Foxxy Brown, and Lil'Kim. But within the communities of hip hop and rap, it seems as though female acts have to work harder and work under hard-to-achieve criteria in order to gain the respect of their male counterparts. The first criterion seems to require that the lyrics be heavily loaded with 'sexplicit' innuendos; as Lil'Kim has a *designer pussy* and her *shit come in flavours so high class niggaz got to spend paper.*

In classifying the different types of female acts Keys (2002) distinguished between 'Fly Girls' and 'Sistas with Attitude' and she notes that female acts today are a hybrid of the two. The 'Fly Girl' is someone who is fashionable and makes statements with her hair, clothing and accessories as well as emphasises her body and curves. She is seen as an 'erotic subject rather than an objectified object' (Keyes, 2002, p. 195). The latter, 'Sistas with Attitude', challenge male patriarchal authority with their 'aggressive, arrogant and defiant' stance (Keyes, 2002, p. 199) Today's hybrid, or 'fly girl with attitude' is a female artist, like Lil'Kim, who is eroticised yet fuelled to challenge the existing male system. While singing songs in reaction to the notion that women are just mere objects who should have no voice or their own opinions, as noted by Kitwana (l994) today's 'fly girl with attitude' may have taken a wrong turn on their road to empowerment. In referring to Lil' Kim's definition of an empowered woman, Keyes refers to *Essence* magazine's research editor, Akissi Britton. If doing everything that a male is allowed to do (going out and partying, doing drugs, having careless sex) is the definition of an empowered woman, Britton 'Charges that Kim (Lil' Kim) is not making a fashion statement but is instead caught up in a world of make-believe, movie-

stardom, superficiality – sex, money and power…' (Keyes, 2002, p. 205)

The second criterion that female artists have to abide by, in order to guarantee higher album sales, is *not* to rap like a 'man' as (male) fans and listeners do not want to hear hard-core rap beats done by women or hear about aggression from a woman (Smith, 1995) Female rappers are thus often stuck in an unachievable double bind where she 'has to be soft but hard; sweet but serious; sexy but respectable; strong but kind of weak; smart but not too loud about it'. (Smith, l995, p. 127) But female artists who have denied the double bind and exerted their hard, serious, respectable, strong and smart sides to win the respect of their male colleagues often find themselves being denied the image of a real woman by her fans and musical communities. Rappers and artists like Missy 'Misdemeanour' Elliot are often being rumoured or labelled as a lesbian (or not a 'real' woman) because of her talented rap and musical skills that have landed her an equal footing with other male artists.

This 'not-so-women-friendly' realm of hip hop and rap is not only seen through its videos, lyrics and business. Some fans and listeners also have a bias towards women artists and rappers as 'women's lyrics are often still viewed by men and women themselves, as not valid – or simply 'wack'' (Smith, l995, p.126). As the quality of female hip hop and rap is questioned, women artists are accused of trying too hard to be 'hard-core' or trying too hard to be men. Also, what is a bit disheartening is that when women rap or sing about their realities, such realities are often questioned for their validity; whereas it is more acceptable to hear about a woman's perspective through a man's interpretation, as only then are they considered truer.

Homophobia on the Down-Low

The hatred towards or fear of gays and lesbians seem to be an infamous criticism of the culture and music of rap and hip hop yet such an issue is still largely absent and still not written about within academic literature. It is also commonly conceived that the Black communities in the United States are more homophobic than is the case with any other community (hooks, 2000). But why is that so? In addition to asking why this perceived notion of 'Blacks as anti-gay' is so prevalent, a related issue to contemplate would be the origin of the Black man as a 'hetero-sexual superstud', with a 'larger penis, a greater sexual capacity and an insatiable sexual appetite' as hyper-masculinity has many times been paired with the Black man as that is how 'he is perceived in the public consciousness, interpreted in the media and ultimately how he comes to see and internalize his own world' (Staples 2001, pp. 410-411). How does one come to terms or explain this supposed hyper-masculinity that we see in Black men? Staples (2001) and Marable (2001) suggest that slavery has caused black men to devalue themselves and deny themselves of manhood. Feeling devalued and emasculated, Black men feel inadequate to live up to the mould of what a 'real' man should be like; a mould prescribed by a white society (Staples, 2001; hooks, 2002; Hutchison, 2000) Therefore, ' in a vain attempt to recapture their denied masculinity, many Black men mirrored America's traditional fear and hatred of homosexuality'. (Hutchison 2000, p. 3) As a lot of anti-gay messages are put forth by influential figures in the Black community, such as Afrocentrists, Black ministers and Islamic leaders, the 'anti-gay feeling runs so deep among many African Americans that there is a virtual blackout of any discussion or activities of Black gay men'.(Hutchison, 2000, p. 5) Another reason why I think homophobia may seem more prevalent in Black communities is found in the writings of bell hooks (2000). hooks (2000) notes that poverty and racism were strong forces that brought the black people together as a cohesive unit where family was central. As a result, black men and women who happened to be homosexual remained within these tight-knit communities because of the hostile racial climate outside. But because of anti-gay messages already existing and the fear of being ostracised by a community that is supposed to provide comfort and protection, gay men and lesbians may feel that they have to suppress their true identities ever more so, or as hooks (2000) writes, that homosexuals have 'created a way to live out their sexual preferences with the boundaries of circumstances that were rarely ideal no matter how affirming' (p.67). As black gay men are faced with a double minority of being black and gay and black lesbians are faced with the triple minority of being black, lesbian and female, it poses some interesting politics of identity constructions and formations.

Homing in specifically on rap and hip hop, homosexuality is also blacked –out and excluded. While it seems as though homophobia within rap and hip hop circles can stem from the reason discussed about that 'black masculinity remains equally threatening, powerful and fragile', so that the Black man must 'keep up with his legendary dick' (Toure, 2000, p. 317) Kitwana (l994) points the finger and blames the commercialisation of rap music where the commodification of rap, hip hop and 'Blackness' maybe have created an image where homosexuality is left out. However Toure (2000) disagrees with Kitwana (l994) and would argue that homosexuality is actually prevalent throughout rap and hip hop, as hip hop is a 'public celebration of the intense black male-to-black male love' (p. 316). While there are songs about male bonding and brotherly love, I do not really agree with Toure (2000) that this form of love can mean *homosexual* love. Furthermore, to support his idea of widespread homosexuality in rap and hip hop music and culture, Toure (2000) suggests that homophobia is really a mask of gayness and goes to the point of drawing connections between hip hop and drag. Although noting the 'hidden' homosexual messages in hip hop as experienced by writers like Toure (2000) make for an interesting read, the issue still remains; where are the openly explicit (and positive) gay references in rap and hip hop?

One should not be surprised that when references to homosexuals are made in the lyrics of rap and hip hop, they are not mentioned in a positive way. In her writings and research, Rose (l994) notes that some rap songs by women will refer to men with words that bear homosexual connotations such as 'fruity' or 'punks' as a way to emasculate them (p. 151). In a similar vein today, rapper Eminem has been a house-hold name for gay and lesbian activists who accuse the rapper of discrimination against homosexuals; he uses the words 'faggot' or 'fag' in his lyrics as well as directly attacking homosexuals in his songs. However rap and hip hop's 'fellow traveller in the killing fields of homophobia' is Jamaican dancehall music (Ross, l995, p. l90). Certain artists of reggae and dancehall music have been accused and shunned for being

overtly homophobic and lately, it has attracted a lot of press attention. Even during the summer months of 2004, as I am researching and writing this article, there has been at least one article a month (if not more) dealing with issues of homophobia in Jamaica; from considering the laws and origins of homophobia in Jamaica (Guardian 3 July 2004) to hearing about Jamaican lesbian perspectives of homophobia (*Guardian,* 2 August 2004). Among all this press coverage, Dancehall music seems to get part of the blame for sustaining and perpetuating such hatred towards the 'battyboy' (gay man). In an article in the *Guardian* (26 June 2004) the reporter noted a song by Buju Banton called 'Boom Bye Bye'. In the song, it calls for battyboys to be shot dead in the head. Other songs such as TOK's 'Chi Chi Man' suggests a similar idea of burning 'chi chi men' or homosexuals. Perhaps the one dancehall or reggae artist who is well known even to those who are not avid listeners of dancehall or reggae is Beenie Man. Known for his collaborations with Wyclef Jean, Mya and Janet Jackson, Beenie Man is also known for the homophobic lyrics in some of his solo work. In his song 'Badman Chi Chi' the chorus is a direct attack on gays and lesbians and later in the song, he disrespects gay rappers and DJs. Such song lyrics led to the cancellation of a concert that was scheduled in 2004 in an East London club (*Guardian,* 3 July 2004). While only negative attitudes are attached to the references of homosexuals in certain song lyrics, it was settling to find no anti-gay images in music videos or magazines; homosexual references are just completely absent.

Let's Break it Down Now: the impact of sexist and homophobic messages in hip hop and rap for children and adolescents

Emerging from Brooklyn, New York in the 1970s (Naison, 1995; Kitwana, 1994); hip hop and rap spent thirty years building up a reputation and culture that is now deemed one of the most powerful influences on children and adolescents (Rock & Pop Confidential, 1995; Naison, 1995, Koza, 1999; Sewell, 1997) Kitwana (1994) further suggests that rap has become a musical artform that 'reflects social reality' (p.8) Because hip hop and rap have gained such influential momentum in recent years as a popular culture form, it is important that we (begin to) assess the implications and impact it leaves on children and adolescents. In an account written by Reverend Butt (1995) critiquing the rap and hip hop communities for its sexist music, he refers to various black women in history, such as Rosa Parks and Harriet Tubman and said that they 'did not struggle and jeopardize their lives to give young black music artists the temerity to refer to black women as 'bitches' and 'whores' and, with abandon, characterize African people as niggers' (p.76). Concerned that these kinds of music and lyrics may damage the young, the infuriated Reverend not only made a statement by dumping a truck load of rap CDs and tapes in front of the office of a major record label, he also said that he would like to meet the rap artists to make them realise the 'impact their negative words have on African-American young people, in particular, and the black people in general' (Butts, 1995, p. 77). Naison (1995) and Kitwana (1994) also voice similar concerns. In reference to sexist messages that some lyrics may convey, Naison (1995) sees such acts as 'symptoms of a disease that is undermining communities, families and the quality of personal relationships (p. 131)

and Kitwana notes that a question one seldom asks before releasing potentially harmful media to the public is 'Is this best for black people?' (p. 55)

The Influence of the Media

In this section I want to explore how the media in general affects young viewers before I look specifically into how sexism and homophobia in the hip hop and rap medium affect the youth. To end this section I will begin to explore the relationship between music culture and its infiltration into education and schools.

Children are active recipients of the messages conveyed through the media (Takanishi, 1982). While writers like Takanishi (1982) and Spurlock (1982) both suggest that television is a strong socialising agent, I do believe it is not the *only* socialising agent for children. Likewise, I think music, print media, such as magazines, also play a socialising role. While referring only to television, Takanishi (1982) suggests that 'in order to understand how television influences the child, we must understand how the child understands the content of television programming' (p. 88). Here, I think we can discard the word 'television' and replace it with a more encompassing word: 'media'.

As the media is woven into our everyday social processes, we should begin to look specifically at how sexism in the music and culture of hip hop and rap can affect young viewers. When media acts as a socialising agent, it has direct relation with our development of self-esteem (Spurlock, 1982; Takanishi, 1982). In their literature regarding minority representation in the media, these two writers suggest that discrimination of ethnic groups in media may result in low self-esteem among young minority viewers. Perhaps this idea can translate across to our explanation of sexism. As girls watch or listen to media that degrades and insults them, it may eventually take a toll on their self-esteem. In referring specifically to music videos, Crawford & Unger (2000) raise concern that when videos present women as only 'the object of explicit, implicit and aggressive sexual advances', it may convey the message to young women that 'romance, sexual attraction and sexual suggestive activity are the only important human activities' (p. 51). Furthermore, when women's bodies and physique are constantly mentioned (as we noted earlier in the lyrical analysis as well as images in magazines), it can give the impression that a woman's body, weight and shape are among the most important things about a woman (Crawford & Unger, 2000). As women begin to accept these gendered and stereotypical images and messages about themselves, it may 'inhibit women's desires for achievement (p. 54). Sewell (1997) also noted that the media's impact on young adolescents as he refers to a rap album that was promoting adverse messages about sex. Not only does this album give the impression to young men and women that women are objects and condones the violence towards them, it also 'teaches young males a new sexual technique, which is meant to be pleasurable to men but painful to women' (Sewell, 1997, p.153).

With regard to homophobic messages, the discussion about the media as a socialising agent that has affects on self-esteem may hold true. Literature on the discrimination of gays and lesbians suggests that there may be psychological implications for those who are gay and lesbian (Meyer & Dean, 1998). 'Minority stress' or a conflict between the minority group and the dominant

society, may transform into 'internalised homophobia' where the homosexual individual may expect to be rejected, and develop 'poor self-regard' and negative attitudes towards himself or herself (Meyer & Dean, l998 p. 161). This notion of 'self-stigmatization' may be even more taxing for a black gay male. Hutchison (2000) explains that black gay men suffer 'the triple burden of being Black, male and gay' since they are rejected by the Black community while not being fully integrated with the white community; therefore, 'many Black gay men feel trapped, tormented and confused by this quandary'. (Hutchison, 2000, p. 5). But within the communities of hip hop and rap, it is not only the misrepresentation of homosexuals that is an issue, but also the lack of (positive) representation. Powell's (l982) work revolves also around minorities in the media, and she suggests that 'invisibility may be more destructive to minority group children's self-concept because it denies the importance of their existence' (p. l72). While Powell refers to 'minority group' only within the boundaries of ethnicity, I am going to extend the definition of 'minority group' to include other marginalised groups such as homosexuals and women.

Though hip hop and rap music and culture may at times be anti-gay and we have already discussed some of the repercussions above, enjoyment of hip hop and rap may sometimes be 'useful' as a cover for black gay men. As I was reading literature regarding homosexuality, I came across a couple of articles that suggested that some gay men constructed a masculine, straight 'front' by joining competitive sports (Messner, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2001). As 'heterosexuality is considered to be a rock-solid foundation' of masculinity, these men decided to 'perform straightness' to avoid being labelled or revealed as gay (Messner, 2001, p. 405). As sports serve as 'typical masculine pursuits' (Savin-Williams, 2001, p. 131), perhaps 'performing' hip hop and rap has the same affect for gay black males, as a way to fool others and conceal their sexual orientation.

Finally, I want to begin looking at the relationship between the music culture of hip hop and rap and schooling and education. Music and popular culture does infiltrate into the school gates and play a predominant role in the student's identity (Sewell, l997; Mac an Ghaill, l994). In both Sewell's (l997) and Mac an Ghaill's (l994) research, school boys were categorised in order to 'make sense of students' masculine formation in terms of their own *intercultural meanings* within the local conditions of secondary school' (italics added for emphasis) (Mac an Ghaill's, l994, p. 54). I italicised 'intercultural meanings' because I want to suggest that music (hip hop and rap) is a form of intercultural meaning shared among the students. Sewell refers back to the time when Rastafarianism and reggae music were popular among certain youths and how this culture and music became the basis or ethos for an anti-school group named the 'Rasta-Heads' (Sewell, l997, p. 145). The 'projected image of toughness' and machismo of the Rasta-Heads began to switch forms as rap and hip hop began to replace the influences of reggae and Rastafarianism (Sewell, l997, p. 145); however this shift of music style also shifted the former ideals of 'social justice and Black redemption in Africa' to 'gun machismo and Black male Sexual prowess' (Sewell, l997, p. 147). It seems that as hip hop and rap gained popularity with the youths, some youths brought the hip hop and rap to school with them. In separate studies, both Sewell (l997) and Mac an Ghaill (l994) noticed a specific group of boys that were anti-school. Sewell (l997) named them the Hedonists and Mac an Ghaill (l994) named them the Macho Lads. Both groups thought of school as meaningless and that teachers were in their way of displaying their manhood, which was defined through hyper-masculine standards of being tough, violent and displaying heterosexual prowess (Sewell, 1997; Mac an Ghaill, l994). As school was seen as a waste of time, thinking, mental work, and academic success were considered unmanly, feminine and gay. Mac an Ghaill (l994) also noticed that the boys' sex-talk was often misogynistic and heavily heterosexual and he voiced his inability to locate the source of such sexist discourse. Here it is where I would say that it is the influence of certain aspects of hip hop and rap's music and culture. Sewell (l997) notes that many black boys may have inherited such notions about masculinity and sex 'from both inside school and outside, through music …' (p. l69). A final connection that may hint at the importance of music (rap and hip hop) as an identity marker or predictor of school achievement within schooling is that students who do not identify with the Hedonists groups and actually achieve academic success 'felt they could not share the same music as the students who were anti-school' (Sewell, l997, p. 82).

When referring to violence, Kitwana (l994) suggests that hip hop is just a reflection of (American) society as a whole. If the rap and hip hop community is just a saturated version of the larger society, then this community is not the *only* one responsible for the misrepresentation of women, gays and lesbians. Perhaps the current educational curriculum is also responsible for the sexist and homophobic messages that children and teens adopt as Mac an Ghaill (l994) notes that there almost never any gay or lesbian role models present and children never learn about homosexuality and its history, lifestyles, communities and acknowledgements of their contributions. At the same time, popular culture such as rap and hip hop are also seldom mentioned and taught about in schools. Ignoring popular culture, just like ignoring gays, lesbians and women, 'sends elitist messages about whose understanding of the world does or does not count, both in schools and in the dominant culture' (Koza, l999, p. 65). When schools and education acknowledge popular culture forms like hip hop and rap it 'serves as a venue for cultural critique, specifically of institutions and the power regimes that support them'.(ibid) Furthermore, if a classroom were to look at hip hop and rap critically to recognise pockets of misogyny and homophobia, it would not only raise awareness within the contexts of the particular culture form but also would help 'desaturate' the curriculum by addressing issues such as misogyny and homophobia within an educational context; 'hitting two birds with one stone'.

Keepin' it Real: future directions

While some artists and songs continue to promote misogynist and anti-gay attitudes, other artists are 'fighting back'; making sure that their voices and attitudes are also heard. In this final part of my discussion, I want to look at some of the steps that are taken, and the new artists that are emerging within the hip hop and rap community. I will explore the themes of sexism and homophobia accordingly.

More female artists are now making their mark on the hip hop and rap stages, and have realised that their 'struggle to survive and thrive' in a male dominated business has rewarded them with the creative space to perform music that 'deliver(s) powerful messages from black female and black feminist viewpoints' (Keyes, 2002, p. 186). Fans are gradually being exposed to a new wave of music and a new wave of lyrics as female artists are given the opportunity to join the 'arena of sexual politics' by producing music that is 'sexually progressive (and) antisexist' to combat the notoriously sexist male rappers (Rose, l994, p. 147). As female artists of hip hop and rap continue to gain respect and credibility within the business they must use their feminist voice not only to confront the sexism but also use their contributions and achievements to break down the previous misrepresentations and the lack of representation (Rose, l994). However, while the building of a feminist voice comes with good intentions, Rose (l994) warns this 'male as sexist – female as feminist' dichotomy may backfire. She is concerned that such a distinction may give a 'battle between the sexes' impression whereby women are always against men and vice versa. Also, such an essentialist construction deletes the musical efforts that do not fall under the construction; not all male rappers are sexist and not all female rappers are feminist.

To address some of the new directions taken with regard to homosexuality within hip hop and rap, I will present three artists who are taking the lead in breaking down the 'notoriously homophobic' image of hip hop and rap. With her debut album 'My Melody' in the late nineties, Queen Pen was the first to come out of the closet and to label herself as a lesbian rapper; therefore she was also the first to ever sing about lesbian relationships from a *Black American* women's view point (Keyes, 2002). Not only was rapping about lesbians a breath of fresh air for some listeners, but it was also positive to hear rap that was not about killing and violence but about teaching women to feel free to be whoever they want (Jamaison, 2000). In response to her 'coming out', Queen Pen simply replies with, 'It's reality. What's the problem?' (Jamaison, 2000, p. 339)

While Queen Pen deserves much respect for coming out to be hip hop and rap's first openly lesbian artist, the 'reality' is not quite complete yet. Many fans and people within the business were still waiting for the openly gay male rapper. Twenty-three year old Caushun (pronounced 'caution') is the first gay rapper to come out to America and has been featured on MTV and 'Vibe' magazine. During an interview with *Newsweek* (June 29, 2001), Caushun explains that the 'supposed' mysogyny and homophobia in hip hop and rap is only manufactured within the studio where the hatred towards women and gays is only 'a persona that's created'. With his upcoming album 'Proceed with Caushun', he suggests that now the time is ripe for gay acts to start coming out as hip-hoppers are a little bit more open-minded, they're ready for something new' (*Newsweek*, 29 June, 2001) On the other side of the Atlantic, hip hop and rap listeners are making way for

Qboy, England's first gay hip hop artist. Born as Marcus Brito, the half Essex boy – half Spaniard wants to be the 'Run DMC of gay rappers'. Though he does acknowledge that some rap and reggae tracks are anti-gay, he shares similar views with Caushun that not all hip hop and rap is homophobic. It is just the media who places too much attention to the anti-gayness of hip hop that makes people think that all rap and hip hop is homophobic (*Metro,* July 28, 2004).

Releasing his debut EP in 2003 entitled, 'Even the Women Like Him', Qboy seemed to like the title of being the first gay act in England more than the music itself. He even hints at leaving the music behind if in the near future, more gay hip hop acts emerge; taking away the speciality of being uniquely gay.

Conclusion

This discussion was an exploration into the influence that hip hop and rap has on its young fan base; especially with regard to the sexist and homophobic messages that may be present within this musical and cultural genre. A context was set at the beginning of the paper as I illustrated the current sexist and homophobic situation with specific lyrics and examples. The discussion then proceeded by looking at the impact that these messages had on children and teenagers and how these messages of misogyny and anti-gay attitudes wove into educational settings. I then tried to end the discussion on a positive note by highlighting some of the new directions that hip hop and rap community are taking in terms of battling the accusations of being sexist and anti-gay. However, after noting Qboy and Cashun's views that homophobia is not as prevalent in hip hop and rap as some may have it, I am left feeling rather concerned. Have I just written an entire article exaggerating and problematising an issue that is not as dire as it seems to be? Have I jumped on the 'discourses of domination' bandwagon and produced a piece of writing that bashes rap and 'Black' culture as a way of maintaining a white status quo (Koza, l999, p. 66)? I hope not. I started this discussion with good intentions thinking that if 'music is part of our day-to-day reality', then music such as hip hop and rap should move and develop with that reality and in doing so, be aware of some of the messages that the music and culture is conveying or not conveying as well as including those, such as women and homosexuals, who are a recognised part of our society (Kitwana, l994, p. 9). Remember that my discussion served a second 'by-product-like purpose', which is to promote future critical analysis of hip hop and rap as a cultural musical form. Despite my concern, I believe that my discussion has been a good start in taking hip hop and rap more seriously. Only when 'hip hop criticism examines its subject from every angle' (Sexton, l995) can we begin to break down the inaccurate, negative preconceptions and build a stronger, more positive reputation; a recognised musical and cultural artform that reflects social reality.

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Key Stage 3:
an alternative strategy

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Introduction

According to the DfES Standards website, the Key Stage 3 National Strategy is part of the Government's agenda for transforming secondary education. It is a whole school improvement strategy which aims to provide 'a platform for professional development across the school through its emphasis on teaching and learning'; and to foster 'personalised learning' involving 'careful attention… to the pupils' individual learning styles, motivations and needs; rigorous target setting linked to high quality assessment; enjoyable lessons; supporting pupils by others well beyond the classroom.'

In its first three years 2000-2003, it is claimed that the Strategy achieved success by raising the number of pupils attaining various National Curriculum levels in core subjects by a few percentage points. In 2004-5 the priority will continue to be improving schools 'by supporting whole-school initiatives… which promote effective teaching … and pupils' learning skills across the curriculum'. There will also be an emphasis on promoting inclusion, strengthening the whole curriculum and supporting school leadership; and on the following interrelated themes – assessment for learning, ICT and literacy across the curriculum, and learning/thinking skills.

The Strategy has had some successes but so far the 'transformation' seems to have fallen well short of what was envisaged. It is difficult to see, for example, how learning has become more 'personalised' for most pupils, assessment more formative or the curriculum strengthened in a context where there is still too much emphasis on a rigid subject-based curriculum structure and formal testing. The limited impact is undoubtedly due to what Sheila Dainton describes as a 'design flaw' in the Strategy. As she points out in a previous issue of this journal: 'Rather than start with teaching and learning across the Key Stage 3 curriculum, those who designed the Strategy took the pragmatic decision to extend the NLNS (National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy) – or at least a version of it – into Key Stage 3 and then bolt on the rest.' (Dainton, 2003, p. 46).

In what follows I want to suggest a way in which the Strategy can be developed so that some of its stated aims can be realised. Whilst clearly the Strategy should not be imposed without consultation, I do not think we can leave the discussion there. At least some of the initiatives I have witnessed seem to be genuinely focused on whole school developments in teaching and learning rather than just bolted on to an extended NLNS. The problem does not seem to stem from being pragmatic but rather from not being pragmatic enough. The focus on teaching and learning is important but this has to be considered in context, in particular the context of the National Curriculum. Despite references to the need to strengthen the curriculum, there is no explicit analysis in the Strategy of the constraints of the National Curriculum as presently organised.

The National Curriculum: Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the many supposed strengths of the National Curriculum is that it is a broad and balanced curriculum which transmits knowledge in a way that produces well 'rounded', knowledgeable pupils who have acquired a range of skills. There is some debate as to whether this curriculum is appropriate to the needs of citizens and workers in the 21st century, but by and large it is felt that emerging needs (e.g. for citizenship, ICT etc.) can be added on to an existing essential core. Pupils are required to acquire knowledge, skills and understanding in a large number of discrete subjects.

As teachers will know, at Key Stage 3, all state schools have to teach thirteen subjects – English, maths, science, design and technology, information and communication technology, history, geography, modern foreign languages, art and design, music, physical education, religious education and citizenship. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) does not have to be taught but many schools choose to teach it. In most schools the curriculum is organised in terms of subjects so that each subject is given one or more curriculum 'slots' a week – the 'slot' may be a single or double period. The number of periods per subject varies but the following, based on the timetable of a pupil at Key Stage 3 in a comprehensive school, is typical – English 4, maths 4, science 4, history 2, geography 2, art 3, music l, languages 3, ICT 3, design and technology 3, religious education l, physical education 3, citizenship l.

The National Curriculum programmes of study are based on a view of knowledge which is quite explicit. Acquiring knowledge is not just about the acquisition of 'facts' and 'information' but the development of genuine 'understanding' and capacity for 'critical thinking'. In science, for example, it is expected that pupils will not only imbibe facts about 'life processes and living things', 'materials and their properties' and 'physical processes' but come to understand how scientific knowledge is constructed through enquiry (Programme of Study in Scientific Enquiry). Moreover pupils should be taught 'about the way scientists work today and how they worked in the past'. They should also think about science in its social and political context – 'the positive and negative effects of science and technological developments on the environment.' In addition pupils should also appreciate the dialogical nature of knowledge and development –

how it is important to 'take account of others' views and understand why opinions differ' and to communicate one's views clearly to others.

These aims seem to me to be entirely appropriate. They are reflected in the rest of the NC. In most subjects pupils are to be introduced to a tradition of enquiry which is relevant and 'worthwhile' and which, if taught in a way consonant with the above aims, is likely to facilitate the development of all the qualities and capacities we associate with the educated person e.g. critical thought, independence, emotional sensitivity etc. Knowledge is viewed as socially and historically constructed. Dialogue (e.g. group work), communication, understanding different perspectives are encouraged, as are exploration, investigation and application.

But are these aims really achieved in any subject in the current set-up, even by those pupils who obtain a C grade or above at GCSE? I do not propose to present detailed evidence here but one only has to examine the programmes of study themselves to see how challenging these aims are for teachers and pupils in the current curriculum and assessment context. It is doubtful if any pupil (other than the very high achiever) taking science, say, for four periods a week throughout their secondary school career up to the age of sixteen could ever become 'knowledgeable' in science in the sense defined above.

To understand the 'shortfall' in policy, we need to identify the essential requisites of teaching which would produce genuinely knowledgeable pupils. Acquiring knowledge requires a dialogical approach to teaching, an approach which models for the pupil a particular stance towards knowledge, one that involves probing assumptions, asking questions, communicating with others etc. But also implicit in this conception of dialogue for knowledge acquisition is a view of dialogue as involving something more than a pattern of cognitive interchange. Dialogue is personally and socially situated and necessarily involves communication between 'whole' persons. As Burbules (l993, p. 41) points out 'productive dialogue' involves more than intellectual factors. It thrives on 'emotions' or moral qualities in relations such as 'concern, trust, respect, affection and hope' which for him are crucial 'to the bond that sustains a dialogical relation over time'. In short a dialogical approach to teaching would require the teacher building up a certain kind of 'bond' with the pupil involving moral and emotional as well as cognitive aspects. Without such a bond, it is doubtful if the pupil's interest could be held over a period of time, since, as experienced teachers know, pupils often lose interest in the 'argument' of a topic. Appeals have to be made to other commitments (e.g. to self improvement, to aspiration, to the needs of others etc.) which usually rely heavily on emotional (e.g. affection for the teacher) and moral (e.g. trust of the teacher) factors.

I am suggesting that for genuine dialogical approaches to succeed the teacher-pupil relationship would need to be much 'closer' than is typically the case in teaching/ learning a school subject. 'Close' relationships would need to be the norm rather than the exception in the academic curriculum. Pupils would need to interact with teachers as 'significant' others i.e. others to whom the pupil was emotionally committed and who provided him or her with a vocabulary for self understanding (see Hargreaves, l972). Unless they become significant others, it is likely that teachers would make less impact on a pupil's identity (self image, self esteem) as a learner than peers or parents. But whilst it is essential for teachers to be significant others it is not a sufficient condition for 'good' learning. It is helpful for learning only if the commitment is grounded in relations of mutuality and reciprocity rather than, say, fear and coercion, since this is the only way to establish the genuine dialogical relations which are fundamental to the acquisition of knowledge.

Schools should be environments which empower these sorts of teacher-pupil relationships but we know that there are many barriers to the development of such relationships in schools. The Strategy identifies some of these but has nothing to say about others. In particular as indicated above it doesn't really tackle issues arising from the way the NC is organised. To appreciate the enormity of the problem consider this. The subject teacher is one of thirteen teachers who teach a class of pupils between one to four periods a week, say between forty minutes and two and a half hours in total. In that time they would have to 'bond' with the pupil dialogically, that is to work out 'where the pupil was at' on each occasion, to interact productively with mutuality and reciprocity, to 'scaffold' appropriately, to assess formatively, to 'stretch' the pupil, to handle emotional and motivational issues that might crop up etc. Without such relationships, 'knowledge acquisition' in schools would continue to be impossible.

Proposals

I am proposing a curriculum re-organisation which involves several subjects giving up some of their 'space' to revitalised and radical form of PSHE. English, maths, science, geography, history, citizenship, religious education would be the likely candidates. Although this might seem a radical suggestion, it is important to remember that the DfES itself has advised that all subjects do not have to be taught in separate lessons (DfES Website, KS3)

But why this particular curriculum vehicle? First, vis-à-vis the familiar issue of subject 'encroachment' it has more chance of being perceived as 'neutral'. Although prospective PSHE teachers would require further professional development, most of them would be drawn from the existing pool of subject specialists. Second, it has the advantage over the 'cross curriculum theme' model of not being seen as an addition to current workload within subjects. Third, its ethos has always been person-centred and enquiry-oriented, and it is thus a natural vehicle for nurturing a more personalised and 'thinking skills' approach to teaching and learning. Other advantages will become apparent in what follows.

The main function of the enhanced PSHE curriculum would be to provide an arena where what I have described as dialogical approaches to teaching-learning the National Curriculum could be put into practice. The process would involve moral, cognitive and emotional aspects of learning; the content would be taken from the NC Programmes of Study, particularly that content concerned with methods (e.g.techniques of data collection) and methodology (e.g. the provisional and fallible nature of knowledge, the role of beliefs, the social basis of knowledge etc.) PSHE would be an efficient way of addressing cross-curricular aims. There would be a reduction of duplication. For example, facilitating the development of group discussion skills would benefit all subjects and some aspects of methods of enquiry are common to all subjects. Curriculum coherence

would be realised through an emphasis on process (e.g.learning how to learn, study skills). There would be greater flexibility in the way content was organised, and more opportunities for developing links between subjects – links which were more 'organic' in that they emerged in the course of dialogue and enquiry.

The PSHE curriculum should therefore contribute *directly* to raising standards in NC subjects and would itself be evaluated in terms of this contribution. Although it would remain a non-examination subject, it would be clear that PSHE would in fact be examined as part of one or more NC subjects. The knowledge which it taught, under franchise so to speak from the NC (although this would eventually be a two-way franchise), would be identifiable. PSHE teachers would clearly need further professional development. Their existing subject knowledge would be of use, particularly the methods of enquiry aspects. They would also have to be prepared, as the need arose, to teach material from other disciplines, which at this key stage should not be a problem. They would also need a deeper understanding of the sociology, psychology and philosophy of knowledge.

It is important to stress that the PSHE would not be some form of *alternative* education. It would in fact be an education more consonant with the NC Programmes of Study than most actual lessons in those subjects. For example, studying scientific method in PSHE would be more faithful to the Programme of Study in Scientific Enquiry than what goes on in most science lessons. There would be time for teachers to develop the 'close' relations required for genuine dialogue, thus plenty of opportunities to engage with pupils' spontaneous ideas and to plan projects which connected with pupils' experiences. In relation to the NC subjects, it would enhance pupils' understanding of what it meant to learn within the framework of a discipline – that subjects were 'living' disciplines which were socially and historically produced and developed, and related to everyday life; that most subjects were 'open' to outside influence; that transfer and cross-fertilisation between subjects was important but nevertheless studying a subject was like joining a community – it involved working in a collaborative culture (even if one was physically alone) and thus looking at the world from others' point of view – and that the pursuit of knowledge involved the development of emotions (e.g. joy), virtues (e.g. patience, honesty), cognition (e.g. concepts and ideas, 'thinking skills'), in short a variety of human attributes and characteristics not just intelligence.

However, having said this, it is doubtful if a high level of pupil motivation, sustained concentration and commitment could be achieved without connecting with pupils' current cultural preoccupations and concerns (see Quicke, 1999). We are likely to find a situation where for many pupils these informal cultural aspects are more potent for identity formation than the formal culture of school subjects. Teachers would need the flexibility to construct programmes of study tailored to the needs and interests of their particular group of adolescent learners. Once dialogical relations had been established it would be easier to introduce content more directly associated with specific NC subjects.

Close dialogical relationships also require programmes of study which are more open ended so that pupils can pursue their enquiries wherever they may lead. The point

about dialogue is that, as far as possible, it should be allowed to run its course. This would suggest that the time devoted to a particular enquiry should also be flexible if the teaching-learning process were not to be undermined by rigorous adherence to a teacher imposed timetable of activities. A fluid, flexible, enquiry-oriented approach suggests a *project method*, where pupils would spend much of their time in PSHE pursuing lines of enquiry in areas of interest negotiated with and supported by the teacher. This does not contradict the above stated aims of teaching pupils about a subject. In dialogical education there is inevitably an interaction between knowledge and experience. Teachers would teach about science through 'conversations' with pupils about their enquiries.

The PSHE curriculum would take up a large number of 'slots' (the equivalent of one school day or more) and be taught by one teacher from the PSHE team for at least one term. The dialogical bonds established would act as a catalyst, generating expectations across the curriculum. And once pupils had experienced learning-through-dialogue it would make sense to talk of them developing reflexive, self regulated learning strategies because by then they would understand the nature of 'good' learning. As self regulated learners, they would probably need to spend less time interacting with teachers in other subjects.

In pursuit of all this it will be assumed that the 'academic' and the 'pastoral' dualism will collapse. The academic will be the pastoral and the pastoral academic. The 'bond' established between a PSHE teacher and a pupil implies a relationship which is in essence no different from that between a pupil and a tutor. It may not always be appropriate to address a pupil's personal problems in a particular 'lesson' of PSHE (if it is organised into lessons) but the PSHE teacher-tutor is well placed to address these at some point. They already have a close relationship with the pupil. Negotiating individual pupil motivation in all its diversity, including removal of moral and emotional barriers to learning is part and parcel of what is implied by the development of 'close' relationships. It would seem appropriate therefore for the PSHE teacher also to be form tutor. Most of what is now called the pastoral system would be the system of PSHE teacher-tutors. It also follows that the PSHE teacher-tutors would be the key workers for children with special educational needs. They would have more opportunities for developing a differentiated curriculum and relating to pupils as individuals. As a pupil's key worker they would identify needs for learning support and mentoring.

Conclusion

I appreciate that these proposals need further analysis and discussion. For instance, one would need to think carefully about staffing and staff development. Would any subject teachers want to be identified as this new kind of pastoral/academic polymath teacher-tutor! Aren't we expecting too much of any teacher? Isn't the existing division of labour set in stone? Aren't there just too many countervailing ideological and structural factors e.g. from neo-liberal policies to teacher shortages?

The view presented here is only a starting point but I feel it is consonant with other possibilities for change in the current context. There is a concern at every level for teaching/learning reforms which facilitate 'higher order' thinking and practical application; and which are more

person-centred. There is a concern for inclusion. There is an emerging consensus that assessment for learning is the way forward. In the Government agenda set out by Charles Clark in 2003 there are references to schools having 'more freedom and flexibility in the way they use resources, in the way they design the curriculum…' and to 'unlocking innovation', which would include schools having freedom 'to decide when and how national curriculum programmes of study are taught within each key stage'.

Of course there are many aspects of the Government's agenda and its revisionist view of recent history which need to be challenged. The idea of 'earned autonomy' smacks of giving more to him that hath… It is surely struggling schools which need the most support for innovation? The KS3 Strategy is based on a deficit model of schools and teachers. It seems to have been forgotten that some of the models of teaching and learning now heavily criticised were imposed upon teachers by this Government and the previous one! It was successive Governments not teachers who imposed an assessment system which was essentially summative rather than formative.

But I feel there are opportunities for a debate on a range of issues prompted by the focus on teaching and learning at Key Stage 3. Many of us are pleased that the difficulties experienced by teachers and pupils at this Stage have at last been recognised. Had the Government acknowledged long ago that it was not standards in primary schools which were the problem but curriculum and teaching in the first three years of secondary school then we would be much further down the road of constructing an education system to meet the needs of pupils growing up in the 21st century.

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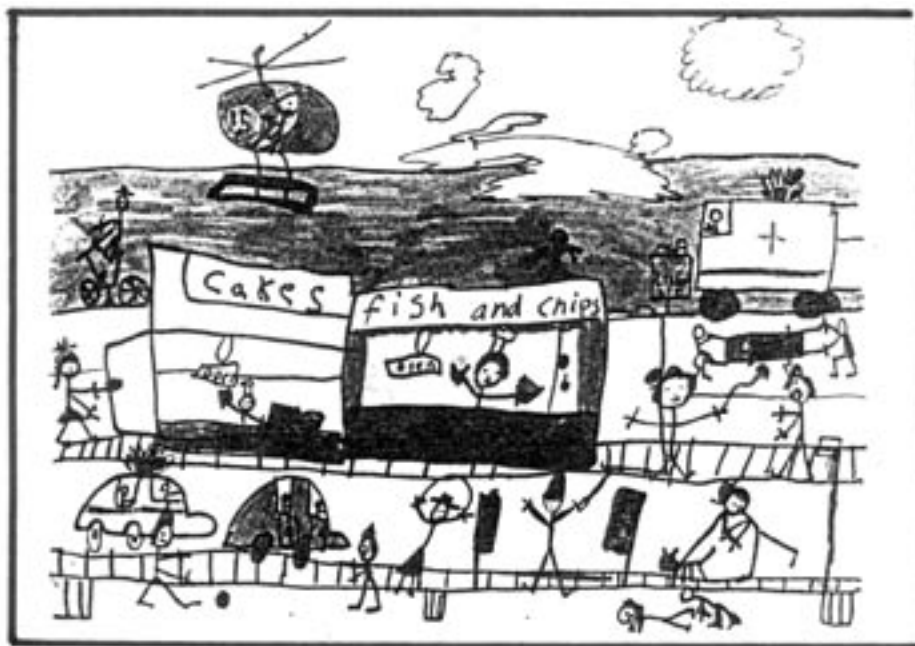
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Talking into Literacy in the Early Years

STUART BUTTON & PETER MILLWARD

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INTRODUCTION
Speaking, listening and literacy

Whilst it is clear that the move towards literacy is one of the ways in which school experience is likely to affect the child's language, it is also evident that the pressure to help children become effective readers and writers can mean that we lose sight of the importance of talk, and the significance it has for the children's development as language users (DfES, 2003a). The recently issued guidelines, *Speaking, Listening, Learning* have been published by the DfES partly in response to teachers' concerns that speaking and listening have been neglected in the NLS (DfES, 2003a). It is not just that talk is such a pervasive feature of our lives, and not just that it is largely through talk that our social experience is constituted, but that talk is, as well, the basis of literacy, and literacy is developed out of peoples' experience of interacting through oral language. It is not possible to attend to the children's reading and writing (or their knowledge and understanding of, say, mathematics or history) without attending to their talk, and in attending to their talk we are able to cultivate their development as literate members of a society.

Children Talking Purposefully

Before we can use children's talk as a way into literacy, we have to provide opportunities for children to talk purposefully. The language of the classroom can easily be restricted for children and we have to find ways of helping children to use language effectively in the classroom. Moreover, we have a responsibility to take care of children's development as talkers and listeners which reaches beyond our concern to help them to become literate. Children come to school able to talk and to listen. They stand upon the threshold of a new world, and as they move from the home in which they use familiar language in familiar ways, they encounter new and strange forms of language which are constitutive of school experience.

Children Talking their Way into School

This is inevitable, for life in the classroom is presented through classroom language. However, children are quick, generally speaking, to appreciate what they can do and soon find ways of contributing to classroom talk. By and large, they get on with talking their way into school, though a few may have to depend on language to cope with the terrors of the day (Knight, 1992). Unfortunately, and for all children, the language experiences of the school may not necessarily be as rich as that of the home (Labov, 1994). Whilst the language patterns of the classroom clearly reflect the special demands put upon a teacher they also reflect the teaching context and the distinctive areas of knowledge explored through the curriculum. The provision of the kinds of opportunities provided for children to talk purposefully in classrooms may not be an easy task. Children talk at home to get things done and they take responsibility for initiating topics and for developing these in ways which interest them. They come to school as experienced language users, used to talking and listening. They will have discovered that language works and that talking is effective.

Of course teachers have a responsibility to guide children into literacy, but their first task is to help the children to talk as effectively in school as they do at home, by 'giving a higher status to talk' in the classroom (DfES, 2003a). This is not just a matter of getting children to respond properly to the teacher's instructions and questions, but of helping them to use language in ways which allows them to express their interests and concerns and which enable them to take a positive and constructive part in the presentation of classroom experience.

It is important to show the children that we as teachers are interested in them and in their use of language. We should be finding out about the children's lives and about the language they use to make sense of their lives, and these should become topics of interest in the classroom (Corden, 2000). Teachers and children should be helping one another to understand and make good sense of being alive, and the point of contact lies in, and through, their talk. It is developed, for example, through their accounts, stories, discussions, conversations, and presentations. Engaging in talk based activities of this kind provide the context for literacy. Literacy is developed and made purposeful within a way of life, and that way of life is described as people talk and interact with one another.

Teachers Talking with Children

Teachers are bound to dominate the language structures of the classroom but the teacher's presence does not have to be an overbearing feature of the children's learning. If teachers are to provide children with the opportunities to engage in positive talk based experiences, they have to take an interest in the children's understanding of their experiences. Teachers have to want to know what children make of the world, they have to seek to understand the child's point of view.

A teacher, for example, exploring a child's attitude towards books through conferencing is helping the child to understand the nature of reading, to engage in reading activities and explore his or her reading of a particular book. The teacher is also providing an audience for the child's expression of reading. The conference is designed to describe a common interest within a shared in common experience (Barrs, et al 1988). Through the conference, the child and the teacher know more about each other

and more about the book they are discussing. Whilst their talk has helped them to understand the book, the book has become a topic for consideration in their talk. The relationship between talk and literacy is reflexive and each is developed through attention to the other. In exploring children's interests through our talk, we are encouraging children to take an explicitly active role, encouraging them to initiate, as well as to respond to, contributions.

Talking about Language and Literacy

Some children may have had little experience of literacy and many will have had few opportunities to talk and think about their language. These children will use language without a thought (but still, for the most part, in accordance with its conventions) and, as it appears, intuitively. It will serve them well in their day to day engagements, but it may not be helping them to become literate.

Children require teachers to develop their talk across a range of situations and through a variety of different forms. We should help them to talk thoughtfully, and we should help them to attend to the language they use. Through discussions and conversations, through accounts and presentations, through anecdotes and formal stories, and through reading, teachers can help young children get in touch with the literate forms of the language. This can be achieved through speaking and listening, as well as through reading and writing. Children should be provided with the opportunity and the encouragement to talk to good purpose, with listeners in mind. Children should also be helped to attend to the way they talk. These are the foundations of literacy. Literacy is a development of our experience of oral language forms, and we should keep this in mind when helping to develop children's literacy.

Children Talking their Way into Literacy

It is important to appreciate how oral language forms relate to literacy and why they are so important in developing the children's skills, knowledge and understanding with respect to reading and writing. On one level, the written or printed text is a representation of the language we speak. The words of our language have been encoded and preserved in written forms. Whilst this is a simple account of the text shared between readers and writers, it provides an explanation of written forms of language and points to a direct relationship between words as they are spoken and heard and words as they are written down and read. Our oral language is the stuff of our writing and though we are unlikely to be simply writing down words produced orally, we can always point to a word in a text and provide an oral version. There are secure relationships between words on the page and words in the air, and, whilst some forms of written text relate very closely to spoken language, all written forms of language connect with the spoken word. We feel that, historically and in terms of individual development, that oral language precedes written forms (DfES, 2003b).

Further, literacy forms can be identified in our talk, and children will be at an advantage in their quest for literacy if they have had experience of developing contexts through the structure of their talk. We should be able to appreciate, for example, that literacy implies reflecting on language, and we can think about our talk as well as about our writing. We should appreciate that literacy forms are developed from oral narratives, and that elements of literacy are embedded in our sensitivity towards oral language (our ability to discriminate sounds in the aural register, for example). We know that talk can be directed towards a general audience even as literary texts may be directed towards individual readers, and we routinely produce worlds in our talk, as well as our writing, that exist beyond our immediate experience.

Children who are used to recounting events, are already engaged with literacy forms of the language. Recounting these events, producing narratives, enables children to present a context which is removed from the context of their talk and this requires a constructive approach to language which is characteristic of literacy. In a similar way, children who, through discussion and presentations, have been asked to think carefully about what they want to say and the ways they might say it, are choosing words with particular purposes and people in mind. They are constructing language in a way that is characteristic of much writing and they are thinking about their words even as they are speaking them. Children should be aware of literacy forms and be able to include elements of these forms in their language well before they can read or write.

They should also be thinking about the way language works, they should be reflecting on language as they talk and listen. Generally speaking, teachers use oral forms of language to introduce children to reading and writing. It is not just that they have to provide examples of literacy forms through their reading, but that they have to talk about the purposes of literacy and the ways in which the spoken word is represented in writing. Before they can do these things, children should have their attention drawn to the sounds of the language, to the rhythms and patterns in speech (DfES, 2003b). It is important that they can relate these patterns to the orthographic record in meaningful ways, but also to the language as part of the value and meaning of a text (Thompson & Millward, 1994). Attention to the form and structure of the language is the basis of an aesthetic attitude towards language and this is grounded in talk. It depends upon listening attentively and upon being tuned into the patterns in the language as well as to the meaning of the language. It means developing a metalanguage to talk about language (Thompson & Millward, 1994) and it means talking about the children's shared experience of language, the language they bring with them from home and set about extending and elaborating in school.

TALKING THROUGH NARRATIVE
Everyday Narratives: a familiar form to children

Of the range of literacy forms found in talk (attendance to the text; narrative form; reflective attitude, for example), we are going to focus upon narrative. This is because narrative is familiar to children and because it is the way we routinely present everyday and fictional experience and because narrative structures are found in so many fiction and non-fiction forms.

The stories which we tell in school are about the things that have happened to us and what we have done. Sometimes we tell them in quite formal ways but mostly they are shared in the form of anecdotes. Most of these stories are recounted in the hurly-burly of everyday life and they give a substance and a presence to that life. It seems like common sense to say that we use language to describe our lives. We have to appreciate that the act of storying shapes our lives.

Fictional Narratives: worlds in story

There is a shared fictional world presented and sustained through the language of stories and it abides only in that language. When we contemplate this fictional world through the formal stories of children's literature, we are made mindful of the power of story-making language and what can be achieved with words. Even so, we are inclined to think that any one of these fictional worlds has a kind of existence beyond the words which are used to present it. It is far from clear how we might describe that existence, but there is a feeling that we are using words to describe this fictional place and characters. We present our stories as if they were accounts of a real world. We could not present them as fictions and still be interested, and we have to suspend our disbelief. This also means that we have to be able to recognise the make-believe, managed quality of the fictional world presented through our stories. It is quite clear that this world is contained only in the language used to bring it to life and that it is dependent upon our ability to use language to create fictional realities (Carter, 2000).

However, we should look beyond the stories of children's literature if we are to appreciate their full significance of the story form. We should consider the stories which seem to be about our lives, for these everyday accounts of what has happened and our ability to structure our experience in story form can help us to understand the stories which describe fictional realities. We might wonder, for instance, how it can be that people manage so easily to use language in ways which can indicate worlds beyond their experience. We could expect this to be a remarkably difficult thing to do, and yet very young children are able to make sense of fictional, non-situated accounts, and use them to create worlds which they could not possibly have experienced directly. It is also remarkable that they seem to have so little difficulty in developing the fictional world of the story and in presenting fictional 'distanced' accounts of their own. It seems as if they are used to using language to bring the world into view and make it meaningful.

The stories and anecdotes which we tell, are the means by which we make our lives ordered, patterned and meaningful. It is through these story accounts that are lives are presented as ordered, patterned and meaningful and these are features of the story accounts and only recoverable from our lives in that we can (through language) tell the story of our lives. We find the events of our lives to be visible and explicable in so far as they are constructed through a developing narrative. Our lives depend upon our ability to present the events of our lives to ourselves and to each other, in a clear and coherent narrative. This narrative is a feature of literacy rather than of life. Barbara Hardy describes this as a 'primary act of mind transferred from life to art' and demonstrates vividly the centrality of narrative to human experience when she writes,

> we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative (Hardy, 1977).

Whilst narrative might not be the earliest or the only 'primary act of mind' engaged by young children (Wilkinson, 1990), it is clearly at the heart of the child's experience of life. The scraps of stories which we share with one another are not simply about our lives, they are the very stuff of our lives and children have learned to make stories by weaving the story of their lives. They have been called to account from the moment their actions were treated as intentional by demands that they show their actions to be explicable. They present them as explicable by showing that they can be woven into a life pattern and they do this by showing there is a story to be told.

Stories in School

Teachers have always recognised the engaging quality in stories which keeps children involved in a 'congenial and compelling medium' (Bruner, 1988). They have always appreciated that stories provide a commentary on life and the opportunity for groups of people to reflect on the business of living. It is has always been accepted that stories enable us to share experiences, to come to terms with deeply felt and emotional aspects of our lives and to make sense of the inexplicable. The way in which stories can be used to explore human relationships and to deal with moral questions has always been understood. Teachers have known that stories provide models for language and literacy and the opportunity for children to reflect upon their language as well as upon their lives. Gordon Wells describes how, for all children, 'stories provide a real purpose for extending control over language' and that they are all the more effective because 'they also tap one of the child's most powerful ways of understanding, enlarging, and working on experience' (Wells, 1986). We seem to know that stories are a key link between speaking and listening and literacy.

It is through the language and actions of those involved that the everyday and fictional worlds are presented and made meaningful, and the ways in which people talk and act lead us to treat the presented reality as either everyday or make-believe (Millward, 1988). It is becoming clear that our lives are inextricably bound up with the stories of our lives, and there seems little point in seeking some mysterious existence which is really lived beyond our ability to account for our lives.

It is easy to treat storytelling or reading as an act of transmission. The storyteller passes on the story to the listener who may, subsequently, tell the story to others. Of course, the story will change in the telling: bits might be missed out or the sequence muddled. It is very unlikely that it will be remembered word for word and passed on as heard. Indeed, the new teller might willfully change aspects of the story. Nevertheless, this model always implies that there was some event, fictional or everyday, which the original story sought to describe and represent. It suggests that story telling is the act of matching words to events and relationships and that the teller's task is to find the most suitable words to describe these events and relationships. The reliability of the transmission depends upon the ability of the story teller to manage the match. The listener, within such a model, has to recreate the same events and relationships from the story and out of the words. Story tellers encode and story listeners decode using a shared in common language. Story tellers actively create stories and story listeners sit passively and receive them (Brown, 2001).

Everything changes, however, when the focus is put upon the story. The teller is using words to create events and relationships. The story is discovered in the telling and is characterised as much by the conventions of language

as by the conventions of everyday social engagement. The meaning is developed through the words and structures of the story (Ashworth, 1998), and not by reference to some real or imaginary world represented in the story. Bruner points out that,

The story's indifference to extra-linguistic reality underlines the fact that it has a structure that is internal to discourse.(Bruner, 1990)

The managed element in story telling and reading is apparent, and the storyteller is no longer presented as an earnest recorder striving to find the right words to describe a chain of events or pattern of relationships which existed before and beyond the telling. The storyteller is creating worlds out of words, whether the stories that he or she tells are true or make-believe.

But listening changes, too. The listeners make sense of the story as they take account of the flow of words and as they relate them to their experiences of language, literature and life. They are no longer seen as passive recipients of stories. The listeners are not hunting for some meaning behind the words but developing meaning out of the words. The story is not meaningful until the listeners make it so and every author, storyteller and story reader must remember that. The meaning of the story is developed collaboratively between tellers and listeners. They engage through the words to present a personal but shared in common story. The story is dependent upon the engagement developed through the language of the tellers and the listeners. The listeners may say nothing, but the teller has to be mindful of the listeners and take account of them, and the teller's words are spoken with the listeners in mind. The teller listens with the listeners and the listeners are a part of the telling.

Listeners are telling stories. They are producing stories out of the teller's words, they are creating narratives. The words are a part of the meaning making process and they provide indications. They are signs and pointers to a context, to what is going on, and there is always much more to the story than just the words. If the storyteller set out to describe in words every detail of an event there would be no end to the telling. This is not because life is endlessly complicated and that, to be accurate, a description would have to reflect that complexity, but because words are ever open to interpretation. If the story teller tried to wrap up the meaning in the story he or she would always need more words to account for the words already used. The meaning of words is not apparent and no amount of telling will make it so.

Teachers who appreciate the interactive involvement of tellers and listeners in producing stories approach story telling in a very different way from those who work with a transmission model in mind. They focus on the managed quality of the engagement and they treat the story as a process of shared meaning making. This contrasts with the storyteller who is concerned to pass on an everyday or fictional event through the medium of story and who will focus his or her attention on the subject of the story, on the selection of appropriate words and phrases and on the manner in which the story is delivered. For the storyteller, the meaning of the story is in the world the story describes and its meaning is discovered in the telling. It is important for the storyteller that the words carry this meaning and that the story is constructed and presented in a way which reflects the world of the story and which passes on this world to the listeners. The story is successful in so far as the listeners can reproduce a world it seems to represent. Listeners listening to storytellers are encouraged to seek out the meaning in the words on the assumption that the teller has worked hard to produce an accurate description of the world behind the story. All that listeners need to recreate this world and make sense of the story is contained in the words of the story and in the experience of their lives. The meaning is with the text but it is created by the listeners in the listening.

Part of the meaning is with the text, but the text can never be sufficient. The words of the storyteller would fall on deaf ears if the listeners only heard them. Tellers create worlds through their stories. Listeners create worlds from the teller's words and no amount of hearing could do that. The worlds that the listeners create are indicated by the words of the story but they range beyond the story. They are created to make sense out of the words of the story. The storyteller's words are meaningful only in the world constructed by the listeners to make them meaningful. The words indicate contexts which the listeners develop and through which the words are found to be meaningful. They cannot stand on their own and every storyteller has to remember this.

We have to remember, as well, just how much work children have to do in order to make sense out of stories. Story telling demands the active involvement of listeners and tellers in the creation of meaningful contexts which can be shared in common though individually constructed. People can talk with one another about the stories they have shared and children 'may gain from others' responses while preserving their sense of uniqueness as readers' (Benton & Fox, 1985). There is 'the reader's inner reality and the outer reality of the words on the page', and 'different readers' responses to a story have enough in common to be shared while remaining highly individual' (Benton & Fox, 1985). It is in the classroom, in the company of others, that this sharing takes place. The outer reality is the point of contact, but each person's inner reality is changed through the engagement.

Stories and Literacy

Stories require children not only to 'think in the narrative mode but also to think about narrative as a means of interpreting and verbalising experience' (Verriour, 1990), and it is clear that stories are at the heart of young children's development as literate people. The contexts constructed by listeners and tellers are disembedded from the context of the storytelling, and stories depend upon children's ability to treat language as if it describes other worlds and other times. Stories require the listeners and tellers to take a reflective view of life and to experience what happens. They also focus attention on the language of the story, on the words and structures of the story and invite those involved to consider how words can be used to construct familiar events and relationships (DfES, 2003b).

Stories are the link between everyday language and literate forms of language. The story told in the classroom provides the link between the two. It is the link which gives stories the power to be meaningful as the literate form connects with everyday narratives, and the link which helps the child to engage in literate forms of language whilst barely being able to read or write. Stories are the

'bridge between the concreteness of the here-and-now and the abstraction of other ways of coming to know', they provide 'pathways to literacy' (Wray & Medwell, 1991). Literacy is more than reading and writing, for as children become more critical readers and writers they develop as critical thinkers and learners (Bruner, 2002).

Conclusion

In so far as we want young children to talk about stories we want them to talk in ways which are meaningful for them, and in ways which will enable them to talk about stories throughout their lives. To do this they need experience of stories and the chance to share their thoughts and feelings about stories with others. Stories are about talking and listening rather than about writing and reading. Children should be helped to develop a personal response to stories which can then be shared with others as they talk about the stories they know. Before they can respond to stories, they need experience of language and experience of literary and narrative conventions and the talking will grow out of that experience. The children's interest in the stories will generate talk about the stories and it is when the children are talking about the stories which they know, and have shared together, that the teacher can helpfully enter the conversation and help them to see more in the stories by sharing his or her response with them.

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The mosque of Kuwait
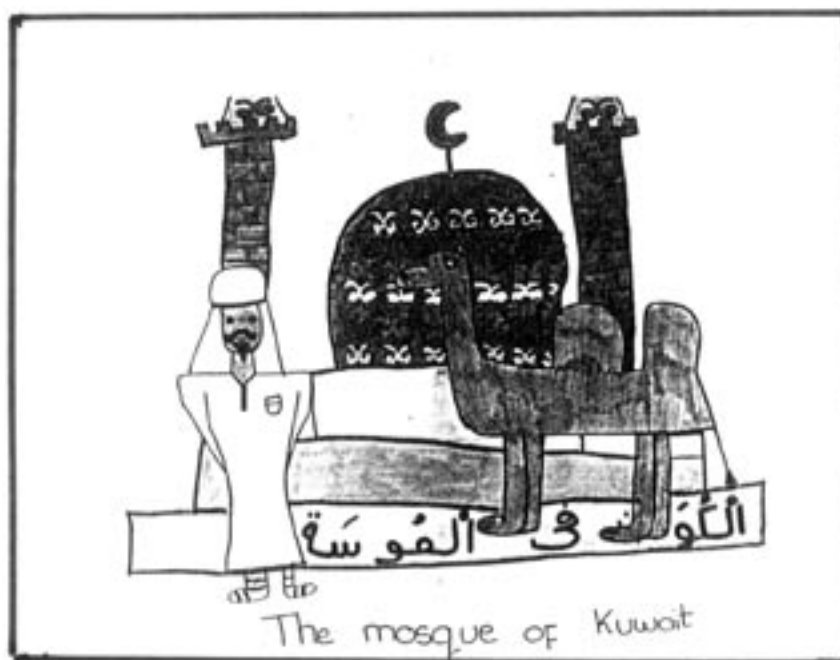
Jameelah. Age 6½

Ofsted: the keeping of curious company?

MARK EDWARDS
Mark Edwards is a former headteacher. He now works as a counsellor and freelance writer

I discovered the other day, almost by chance, that one of Ofsted's providers is part of a larger company that builds warships for a living, and has done so since the 19th century. The company supplies these and other military equipment all over the world and is cited as a major player by the Campaign Against the Arms Trade. It has, according to its website, been allocated a full quota of inspection contracts.

In the light of this knowledge, phrases such as 'doing battle with Ofsted' and 'setting targets' take on a different hue. There is nothing technically wrong with what this company is doing, but it feels unsettling. The Government has long sought a partnership between the private and public in education, but when this idea was first touted it was generally assumed that they meant local hardware businesses and suchlike, not arms manufacturers.

It seems state education is rapidly becoming an industry with potentially rich pickings for anyone who cares to play their hand. Never mind values or ethics, or even believing in something; education can now provide a healthy share dividend for investors.

The success of an inspection team presumably depends on the quality of its inspections, but do we know the criteria for awarding contracts to particular companies? The company in question haggles with the Government for contracts to supply army and navy helicopters to the UK; does it offer to bung in a couple of school inspections as part of the deal? Of course not, because the two wings of the company are separate. But it is a concern that their primary motive is to make money.

In the old days, when standards in education were low, schools were inspected by HMIs appointed by the Government. These were usually people who had had a substantial career in education. They were answerable to Government, which was responsible for delivering the education system, and that was that. Now we have private companies whose primary concern is to create an attractive portfolio for investors; as a result, the inspection process must surely be distorted.

Add to that the fact that the supply of arms and the supply of education services are being carried out under one umbrella. So the same education and training wing that inspects schools has recently been involved in the training of troops heading for Iraq. Again, it is unlikely that the people involved in this training are the same as those carrying out the inspections. But how do we know?

It is an observable reality that the values and beliefs held by those in power will make themselves felt throughout an organisation. Walk into any school and you will quickly detect an 'ambience' or 'ethos' which is not created by any policy, but by the mysterious way in which the values and beliefs of the head-teacher make themselves felt.

It is this that makes me uncomfortable about schools being judged by companies that supply weapons to the Middle East. I don't like arms dealers being involved in the education of our children. It is not just the issue of profiting out of state education; it is quite possible that monetary gain and education are not mutually exclusive. No, the main concern is a subtle transmission of militarist values into education.

The pastoral aspects of schools are being sacrificed to an obsession with driving up 'standards'. The word 'rigorous' peppers many an Ofsted report, and it fits nicely with the disciplined, highly structured world of the armed forces. So if your school complains of being 'invaded' by Ofsted next time it is inspected, I suggest you check out exactly who is doing the inspecting.

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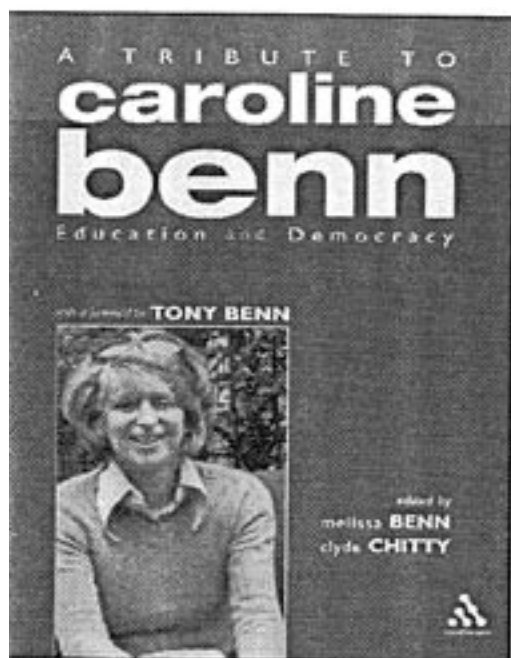
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Tony Benn, from the Foreword

MELISSA BENN
CLYDE CHITTY

with a foreword by
TONY BENN

Melissa Benn, daughter of Caroline and Tony Benn, is a writer and journalist who contributes regularly to *The Guardian* and other national newspapers and magazines. Her books include *Public Lives* (a novel) and *Madonna and Child: Towards a New Politics of Motherhood*.

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