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for promoting 3–19 comprehensive education

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**Whose Morality?
The New Education Bill
Comprehensive Education and New Labour
School Discipline
The Exclusions Crisis**



Contents

VOLUME 39 NUMBER 1 1997

Editorial. Morality in the Classroom	3
BRIAN SIMON. The Tory Bill	4
RICHARD HATCHER. New Labour and Comprehensive Education	6
LEONE BURTON. Contempt for Evidence	10
ROB WATTS. Comprehensive Schooling: a personal perspective	12
CHRIS SEARLE. Demagoguery in Process: authoritarian populism, the press and school exclusions	14
GLENN RIKOWSKI. After Dearing: the review of 16-19 qualifications	19
DOUG NEWTON. Assessing Design and Technology	22
BOB TURNER. Local Learning Partnerships: the Birmingham experience	24
MIKE WATTS & ARNALDO VAZ. Bridging the Gap: physics and the primary scientist	26
BRIAN SIMON. Nanette Whitbread	29
Edward Blishen (1920-1996)	29
Book Reviews	30

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The Summer issue of *FORUM* will include articles which reflect a wide range of issues concerned with comprehensive education. **Margaret Spencer** writes about how children read to learn in a climate where getting, storing and using information is acquiring the force of a new doctrine. **Clyde Chitty** analyses the changing concept of the neighbourhood comprehensive school, and **Audrey Osler** looks at black teachers' professional and political identities. **Dave Hewitt** writes about mixed ability mathematics teaching; **George Varnava** describes the achievements he saw when visiting schools across the country during his term as president of the NAHT; and **Neil de Reybekill** presents a study of the use of vouchers in Denmark. **David Hopkins** and **Alma Harris** describe innovations in classroom practice which are having a positive impact on students and **Ian Duckett** examines core skills in the light of the Dearing Review.

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Morality in the Classroom

Back in 1830, Lord Macaulay wrote: “We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality.”

Since the appearance of the Autumn number of *FORUM*, there has been much talk of ‘morality’ in political circles and in the media; and it is apparently to be found in all manner of unlikely places. Even the economic and fiscal policies of a Chancellor of the Exchequer can, it seems, be described as ‘virtuous’ – indicating that all those who work at the Treasury are not only to be respected as expert forecasters and managers but can also be included in the ranks of the morally good. “I am,” said Kenneth Clarke in his recent Budget speech, “a man of the world. I realise that virtue doesn’t always bring its own rewards. But this virtuous Budget will bring rich rewards to hard-working men and women.” So now we know: there is virtue to be found in the Government’s management of the economy.

But leaving this aside, it is once again the schools which are being looked to for the systematic transmission of so-called moral values. And it is once again the schools which are being blamed for the apparent poor state of the nation’s moral health.

So teachers have to be given a list of essential moral propositions that can be dispensed from the front of the class, as if they are correct spellings or rules of arithmetic.

At the end of October 1996, after months of deliberation, the 150 members of the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community distilled the values they thought society could agree on – the ones that schools should pass on to children. And this remarkably brief statement of values – on just two sides of paper – was published at the start of a major consultation exercise embracing schools, parent and governor associations, churches, faith groups and business organisations.

The authors of the statement did not set out to be controversial. Their opening paragraph reads:

We value truth, human rights, the law, justice and collective endeavour for the common good of society. In particular, we value families as sources of love and support for all their members and as the basis of a society in which people care for others.

Yet within hours of its appearance, the code was being attacked by right-wing fundamentalists for the omission of marriage as an essential element of a moral society; and Gillian Shephard complained that “more emphasis should

have been placed on the value of the family as a bulwark of society.”

At the same time, the Rt Rev Vincent Nichols, the Catholic Bishop of North London, pointed out that the document raised a number of serious questions about the way business and public life in this country were conducted:

The values promoted in our society in practice are success, self-interest, successful deception, acquisition of wealth and winning at all costs. That is part of the dilemma.

It can, of course, be argued that the idea that morality is teachable is itself absurd. Not only is there precious little consensus, within society at large, as to what constitutes ‘morality’, but also the approach itself is likely to prove pretty counter-productive.

A recent editorial in *The Independent* (28 October 1996) stood out from sanctimonious and time-serving pieces in the rest of the media by arguing precisely that “morality is unteachable”. It went on:

If the notion is to be left with any meaning, it must embrace choice. A morality which is imposed is not moral; it is merely someone else’s belief system. Without choice, there is no right or wrong. We are not attracted to the right and the good because we are told we should be. We learn by example.

It seems clear that the moral climate in our schools, and in society as a whole, is not going to be transformed by a return to ‘traditional’ moral values. Resorting to moral absolutism will do much to discredit classroom teachers in the eyes of teenagers who are far too knowledgeable and sophisticated to accept all the old moral precepts without question.

What we can do in the classroom is discuss a whole range of moral, social and health issues to enable children to make their own informed choices. Young people will benefit from adult guidance, but they prefer to formulate individual moral codes for themselves.

Good example has its uses because it helps to create an aspirational climate. But providing such an example is not the responsibility of teachers and parents alone. It would be a nice beginning if our political leaders could strive to follow the new code and make “truth and integrity priorities in public life”.

Clyde Chitty

The Tory Bill

Brian Simon

In this keynote article, Brian Simon looks at the likely effects of government policies outlined in the White Paper *Self-Government for Schools* and in the recent Education Bill stemming from it.

The social solidarity of the whole nation is more important than any of the defects to which a comprehensive high school may be subject.

This far-sighted statement, by Godfrey Thomson, made nearly 70 years ago [1], resounds with a new significance in the light of the crisis in education at Halifax, reaching a climax as I write (early November 1996). The Ridings School, a so-called 'comprehensive', has been closed among scenes which are unprecedented in the history of English education – and here I speak as an historian. The educational set-up at Halifax is an epitome of the fractured and divided system comprehensive education was designed to overcome, exacerbated by new divisions deliberately imposed by succeeding Tory governments over the last ten years and more. This whole structure is now blowing up in their faces – and not only in Halifax. The responsibility for this situation rests squarely in the hands of succeeding Tory administrations.

The cause lies in the imposition of a market system on education, and in all the measures taken to enhance that system. In a fine leader comment, *The Times Educational Supplement* (1 November 1996) warns against the escalating breakdown attributable to this policy. "There were plenty of warnings, in this paper and elsewhere", the Editorial states, "that the creation of City Technology Colleges, Grant-maintained Schools and specialist schools with selective streams would lead to local hierarchies, with those schools without privileged status struggling at the bottom of the heap".

That is the situation at Halifax. Although the city finally 'went comprehensive' a few years ago, the two local grammar schools (one voluntary aided) were able to preserve their selective status by opting out, so creaming off the top 30% ability group and retaining their pupils for themselves. The rest of the schools are not and cannot be 'comprehensive' in any meaning of the term, even if so categorised by the DFE and by the local authority. They are secondary modern schools and take the 'rejects' from the grammar schools. But two of them, on the same site as the North Halifax grammar school, have also become grant-maintained and so also operate their own admission procedures. The Riding School, formed by the amalgamation of two of the remaining local authority secondary modern schools, both experiencing falling rolls, recruits the children left behind or rejected by all the other schools in the city.

There is no authority which is seriously in control of the schools in Halifax – neither the Calderdale Authority itself nor the grant-maintained quango. Further, Tory legislation has frozen the situation, so that no radical change is possible. Here we have a school system deliberately manipulated to benefit the better-off sections of the population at the expense of the deprived. Who can wonder that these fail to respond? This situation is not unique. It is mirrored all over the country. Worse, by the Bill, the

Tory Government, far from seeking to overcome these divisions, is deliberately setting out to exacerbate them. That is the charge against the Education Bill of 1996.

I would argue that we, in *FORUM*, have every right to draw attention to the real outcomes of Tory policy. From the start, we have opposed the attempt to force a market system on the schools, pointing out its likely divisive effects. We led a strong campaign against Baker's 1988 Act, culminating in a massive 'demonstrative conference' at Friends House, Euston, where, supported by no less than 24 leading educational organisations and others, we pledged to continue the fight for comprehensive education.[2] We opposed the establishment of City Technology Colleges, Grant-maintained Schools, specialist schools, pointing in each case both to their divisive implications and to their significance in terms of destabilising local authorities. But in the years that followed, the Government's machine rolled on, involving yet further divisive and centralising measures. This new Bill has precisely such an objective.

Of course there are clauses in the new Bill in addition to those enhancing selection. These are important; but they are not matter for this article which must focus very precisely on the measures to extend this malign practice for, if this Bill passes into law, and if this Government wins the next election (which is possible), these measures will be legally enforceable on the school system as a whole. They imply the end of comprehensive secondary education and the transformation of the whole system back into a selective system with the categorisation of all pupils, as in the 1950s, at the age of 11 into 'selective' and 'non-selective' types. This, the Tories see as 'progress'.

More than this, if the Tories win the next election, the way would then be clear for them to impose even more firmly a sharply demarcated system of education. The Bill permits Grant-maintained Schools to select up to 50 per cent of their pupils on grounds of ability (or whatever). At present such schools can, after gaining permission, select up to 10 per cent of their pupils on these grounds. So by this Bill this limit is suddenly quintupled. What is to prevent the next Tory Government increasing this 50 per cent to 100 per cent, so, at a stroke, preparing the way for all or many such schools becoming completely selective – and so achieving Major's stated aim of "a grammar school in every town", by the back door, as it were? But in fact this Bill also includes a clause enabling the Funding Agency for Schools to propose the establishment of new Grant-maintained Schools in areas where there are no opted-out schools. What is to stop any such schools imposing a selective entry?

It was made very clear in the White Paper *Self-Government for Schools* that the Government favoured a general return to selection and were preparing to implement such a policy. In September Gillian Shephard announced that the proposed Bill would try to accommodate "as much

selection as possible”, mentioning the figures of 20%, 30% and 50% for local authority, specialist and Grant-maintained Schools as finally formulated in the Bill. In October, at the Tory Conference, she pledged to establish more new grammar schools which “may even” meet John Major’s aspiration for “a grammar school in every town”, while also increasing the number of grant maintained schools and selection (*The Guardian*, 11 October 1996). Major also committed himself to this proposal at the conference. “And if parents want grammar schools in every town, well then so do I and they shall have them” (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 18 October 1996). And so we could go on. Energetically to impose a divisive system on the population as a whole is *the central objective* of Conservative policy. That, surely, is and must be absolutely clear. The clause in the Bill insisting that governing bodies consider *every year* whether they should introduce greater selection is simply a means of attempting to win governors to carry through the Major–Shephard policy. The clause giving the Secretary of State powers to prevent schools introducing greater selection in cases where the result would leave ‘less academic’ pupils without a school place is little more than a wry comment on the possible effect of the massive, market-oriented deregulation that this Bill encapsulates.

Outright government support for a full-blown return to selection is a high-risk policy, seized on by the Tory Government as a result of particular events over the last year which seemed to put Labour at a disadvantage on this particular issue. We will come back to this shortly, but in the meantime what evidence is there that this is a popular policy? According to Demetri Coryton, Chair of the Conservative Education Association but *not* a supporter of all aspects of Conservative educational policy, the most accurate poll on selection was that carried through early in 1996 by ICM for *The Guardian*. The sample was asked “What is the best way of running state secondary schools? (1) All schools are comprehensive and take a mixture of abilities, or (2) Some schools take only high ability children and the others take only low ability children?”.

Overall the results showed that 65% favoured the first alternative, 27% favoured a selective system. Labour supporters results showed 76% to 20%, Liberal Democrats 69% to 24%, and *Conservative* 50% to 45%. Selective schooling gained most support among the old; comprehensives among young people (including many Conservatives who support comprehensives). Coryton concluded that a Tory policy of supporting selection would result in Labour’s long lead as the party with the best policies in education being extended even further (*Education Journal*, October 1996).

The White Paper was published for consultation – responses to be in by early October. No notice, of course, was or could be taken of these in drawing up the Bill but a glance at their nature might have given the Government cause to re-think their proposals. Both the NAHT and the SHA were reported as “united in opposition” to the proposals allowing secondary schools to select “grammar-school streams”. One outcome, they both argued, would be a reduction in parental choice. Further, to concentrate on the few at the expense of the many would disintegrate into a ‘free for all’ and inevitably damage standards for the majority. Both claimed that there was no clamour for such changes – the outcome would be “a nightmare for parents” given the range of admission procedures that would be involved. According to the Secondary Heads Association

the proposals were incoherent, unfair, divisive, and cost-ineffective. The result would be the creation of “sink schools largely filled with disaffected and demoralised boys” (and girls, one might add, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 11 October 1996).

The Society of Education Officers was equally outspoken. The Government’s determination to increase selection, they claimed, “risks wiping out almost a decade of educational achievements”. Selection lowers expectations of schools, inhibits improvement strategies, reinforces poor performances. A major weakness since World War II has been with the average or below average children. But the largely non-selective system plus the National curriculum since 1989 has seen “substantial and unprecedented growth in exam performance”. Particularly impressive has been the number of average or below average pupils gaining qualifications. It therefore “make no sense at all to put these educational gains at risk by encouraging schools to introduce selection and foster the British weakness for admiring only high achievements and having low expectations of the rest” (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 11 October 1996).

Even the grant maintained sector was reported as having little enthusiasm for increased selection – a recent article by Glenys Kinnock pointed out that only 41 of the 600 secondary schools which have opted out have sought to take advantage of even the existing powers to select by ability (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 18 October 1996). Even in leafy Surrey, a Tory heartland, *The Times Educational Supplement* reports at best “half-hearted support” for the Government’s selection policy. Just recently the county’s Education Committee unanimously backed further debate on a motion strongly supporting comprehensive education (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 11 October 1996). Talk of a grammar school in every town was simplistic, according to the Conservative group leader; its spokesperson stressed the very good results achieved by some of their comprehensive schools. “There is no point in turning over the whole system and starting again”, she added. “There is a feeling that everything was well in the halcyon days of the grammar schools”, said Peter Halls-Dickerson, founder chairperson of the Conservative National Education Society, “But I remember the problems ... a huge number of young people would have benefited if they had been in comprehensive schools at that time” (*ibid.*). Two Surrey GM schools, which are planning to introduce partial selection, have met with massive hostility from their opted-out colleagues, resulting in over 300 statutory objections. A local GM head, in response, put the same issue very clearly:

For schools to want to select children on academic ability in 1996 with 2000 approaching is depressing beyond belief. Selection is divisive, unnecessary, and destructive ... It is all about improving results in league tables (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 11 October 1996).

There are, then, deep division within the Conservative Party itself on this crucial issue, but the main conclusion must be acceptance of the need to mount a campaign with massive popular support to prevent these clauses of the Education Bill being carried through Parliament. Such a campaign must be mounted both inside Parliament and outside. All those concerned in the comprehensive battles of the past – teachers, parents, the Labour movement and others – must participate. The Government’s tenuous majority in the Commons must be exploited, and every effort made to

ensure the rejection of this Bill – or, rather, of those clauses designed to enhance selection which, if they are allowed to pass, could lead to the destruction of the educational system as we know it.

It is no good relying on the leadership of the Labour Party to carry through an effective battle in Parliament and in the country generally on this issue. The Party has not, historically, a good record on education having missed various opportunities over the last half century to make radical changes. The leadership's present support for comprehensive education has been half-hearted, ambiguous and ineffective. The Party's draft manifesto is totally uninspiring on this issue, playing it down as a matter of little importance. Tony Blair may have a 'passion' for education but not, apparently, for its comprehensive variety.

That the leader of the Labour party should deliberately send his son to a selective opted out 'comprehensive' school ten miles from his home is almost unbelievable. The shock waves from this decision had hardly abated when Harriet Harman, shadow Cabinet Minister, in her turn rejected all local comprehensives in favour of a selective grammar school in an outer London borough. A few weeks later we were told that Michael Barber, apparently Blair's closest educational adviser, in his turn also rejected all local comprehensives to send his 11-year-old daughter to a private girls' school in Hackney.

Back in the 60s, as Circular 10/65 was coming in, both the Benns and the Croslands at least sent their own children to the local inner city comprehensive, so reinforcing their standpoint by their own actions. This has not been the case today and the Tories have naturally seized their opportunity to press home their advantage using the charge of hypocrisy. Supporters of comprehensive education, faced now with a crucial battle for the future of education, have to recognise and come to terms with these actions.

But, as I have argued elsewhere, [3] comprehensive education has always been essentially a grass-roots movement – sparked by a surge of opinion from below which was not only unexpected but so powerful as to

overwhelm *both* main political parties. This potential popular support can be harnessed again for the current struggle, and here we must rely on both Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs and peers to fight this issue in both Houses with the utmost energy. Many of them, as we know, are strong believers in the theory and practice of comprehensive education, whatever the ambiguities of certain leaders.

Here we have a discredited government, tottering on its last legs, attempting, through its Education Bill, to write one more inglorious page into the history of English (and Welsh) education.

This must be prevented. The central issue was highlighted 70 years ago by Godfrey Thomson. A healthy society needs a healthy education system; one which excludes and downgrades no one. The school system must be so constructed as to reinforce social solidarity. This can be done only by offering full and equal opportunities to all, and certainly cannot be achieved by the deliberate exclusion of millions of young people from the age of 11, as proposed in this Bill. In the long term interests of Britain, both this Bill and the Government that promotes it must go to the wall.

Note

Owing to the failure of the (privatised) HMSO to expedite a copy of the Education Bill to Leicester in time, this article had to be written without the author having a sight of the Bill itself. Reliance has been on press reports (and on a careful study of the White Paper).

Notes

- [1] Godfrey Thomson (1929) *A Modern Philosophy of Education*, p. 274. London.
- [2] The conference was reported in full, by Edward Blishen, in *FORUM*, 30, No. 3, Summer 1988.
- [3] Comprehensive Education, a seismic change: process and interpretation, in Geoffrey Walford (Ed.) *Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal* (forthcoming).

New Labour and Comprehensive Education

Richard Hatcher

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Tony Blair and David Blunkett have stated their commitment to the comprehensive school. For New Labour, the old grammar/secondary modern system, which the Conservatives now propose to resurrect, is an anachronistic mechanism of past class divisions. But while New Labour is against a return to the 11-plus, it is not against the *principle* of selection. The difference between the parties is over what forms it should take and at what ages. While the Tories favour selection at 11 into a two-tier hierarchy of schools, and streaming within the schools, Labour favours a more flexible and discriminating system of selection.

Secondary schooling is to be comprehensive, but differentiated both *between* and *within* schools. David Blunkett has strongly criticised comprehensive schools for enforcing drab uniformity in the name of fairness (speech to the Social Market Foundation, February 1996). According to Tony Blair (in a speech entitled 'Realising Our True Potential', June 1995), it is not only the dogma of the Right, selection at 11-plus, but also the dogma of the Left – uniformity of provision – that has perpetuated low working-class achievement.

Against this, I want to argue two things. Firstly, that

New Labour's version of selection will perpetuate working-class inequality in education. Secondly, that New Labour's declared educational aim of raising standards is being subordinated to and distorted by economic and political imperatives.

Grant-maintained Schools

The solution proposed by New Labour to the problem of grant-maintained schools has provoked more opposition than any other of New Labour's education policies. It represents the abandonment of the comprehensive principle. Labour's proposed 'foundation' schools are not just GM schools under another name. The ending of 'double funding' of GM schools deals them a serious blow, but it is not a fatal one. Their new status as 'foundation' schools will still tend to perpetuate division and privilege. Simply being *different* will tend to be seen as being *better*, and that will become a self-fulfilling prophecy in attracting parents. Roy Hattersley was right to say that 'While foundation schools remain separate, they will appear superior and enjoy all the advantages that apparent superiority provides'. This image is underpinned by real advantages for the 'foundation' schools. They, not the LEA, will own their buildings and employ their staff, and they will have fewer LEA and more parent governors. Even the names themselves, 'foundation' and 'community', echo the status hierarchy of grammar and secondary modern.

Admissions Policy

One of the criticisms levelled by Roy Hattersley at *Diversity and Excellence* was that it left the door open to 'social selection' – what he has called 'the middle classes' habit of talking their children into what they believe to be the 'best schools'. In his reply at the 1995 Labour Party Conference, David Blunkett was at pains to deny this, pledging "no selection either by examination or interview under a Labour government".

But New Labour's refusal to put forward a national admissions policy of 'nearest first' leaves the door open for schools to adopt admissions policies based on other principles, as happens already under the Tories. Benn & Chitty (1996, p. 205) show how many oversubscribed comprehensives select, either deliberately or inadvertently, on the basis of interviews, addresses, or primary school reports. There is no commitment by Labour to end these covert forms of selection by either a national policy on admissions or by the ability of LEAs to insist on egalitarian admissions policies, because under a Labour government, if the schools disagree with LEA guidelines, the final decision is made by 'independent arbitration', not by the local elected authority.

Specialisation

Not only does New Labour leave open the possibility of discreet under-the-counter social selection; it actually facilitates it by its encouragement to schools to specialise. The education policy document *Excellence for Everyone* (1995, p. 26) says 'schools should be encouraged to develop specialisms'. Schools are invited to 'play to their strengths' and recognise children's particular aptitudes. Admissions policies can include selection based on the child's perceived aptitude. According to *Diversity and Excellence* (1995, p. 11), "So long as this does not exclude or deny equal opportunities, we would see this as an acceptable part of an agreed admissions policy".

It may seem very positive that schools should recognise children's aptitudes and foster them. But there are two real dangers. One is the idea that 'aptitudes' can be identified at 11-years-old and are sufficiently well-formed at that age for them to shape a child's whole future education. The other problem is that in a class-divided and competitive society specialisms are not equal – they become ranked in a hierarchy of status. At the top would be schools that specialise in an academic education leading on to high-status jobs. For those schools, 'aptitude' becomes a code-word for 'academic ability', which it is well-established has a built-in middle-class bias. Those schools, if oversubscribed, will be selecting predominantly middle class pupils.

These objections are shared by the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education, in their response to *Excellence for Everyone* (26 April 1996). They "have very strong reservations about Labour's specialist schools policy". "We believe most parents want their children to have as wide an education as possible, delaying specialisation so as to allow for many possibilities for further and higher education. There seems to be wide agreement that post 16 our young people should not have an education which is narrowly focused. How can this equate with the intention to encourage eleven year olds to specialise?"

The Funding System

There has been a great deal of criticism of the lack of fairness of the Conservative's arrangements for funding schools. The straitjacket of formula funding provides little opportunity for LEAs to compensate by positively discriminating in favour of disadvantaged schools. The climate of competition between schools induced by *per capita* funding and league tables has led to many schools excluding pupils who are perceived as undermining their position in the education market-place. Exclusions of African-Caribbean boys in particular have risen substantially. All of this takes place in a context of low funding and cuts in spending which have forced schools to seek money from parents and other outside sources, resulting in widening inequalities between schools in working class and middle class areas.

The question for New Labour is what steps they are going to take to remove these powerful mechanisms of social class selection. Yet New Labour is almost silent about how they propose to fund the schools. It has given no commitment to increase funding or to redirect funding to those schools most in need. *Diversity and Excellence* simply says "We also recognise that there have been concerns about the existing funding formula ... and would wish to review the system in office to provide greater fairness and flexibility' (p. 10).

Selection Within Schools

David Blunkett says that "diversity within one campus must be the goal of a truly comprehensive system" (speech to the Social Market Foundation, February 1996). The meaning of 'diversity', a key word in New Labour's education vocabulary, has become very clear. It means ability grouping of pupils. Blunkett and Blair have both recently attacked mixed ability teaching. According to Blunkett (in the same speech), "The comprehensive school should have focused on every pupil reaching their full potential instead of developing an unfortunate association with rigid mixed-ability teaching". Blair continued the attack on mixed

ability teaching in his speech in Oxfordshire on comprehensive education on 7 June 1996.

The question of how to group pupils within the school seems to be purely a question of what is educationally most effective. But New Labour's attack on mixed ability teaching is *not* based on the evidence about either how prevalent or how effective it is.

Firstly, mixed ability teaching is actually quite rare in English secondary schools after Year 7 (the first year of secondary schooling), especially in core and 'academic' subjects, as Caroline Benn & Clyde Chitty's recent large-scale survey of British comprehensive schools demonstrates.

Secondly, there is no evidence that pupils grouped by ability achieve better than pupils who aren't. In fact, in many of the countries which are often held up for comparison as having more successful education systems mixed ability teaching is the norm. One need go no further than Scotland, where 73% of schools use no ability grouping in Year 8, compared to 17% in Britain as a whole, and where in Year 9 25% are still all mixed ability, compared with 6.5% (Benn & Chitty, 1996, pp. 256-257). In fact, there is evidence that mixed ability teaching particularly helps the performance of lower-achieving pupils. Bob Moon, Professor of Education at the Open University, surveying the evidence about mixed ability teaching, concludes that 'The research ... shows that the practice had no detrimental effect on high attainers but improved the performance of low attainers' (*The Guardian*, 5 March 1996).

New Labour advocates setting by subject as the model for secondary school organisation. (And not just the secondary school. David Blunkett wants to see baseline assessment at age 5 as the basis for fast-tracking of the most able (*The Guardian*, 22 July 1996)). The majority of secondary schools already employ subject setting as a preferable alternative to across-the-board streaming. But there is good reason to ask whether setting may still be responsible for perpetuating and even accentuating social inequality in education, rather than reducing it. In the view of professors Paul Black and Margaret Brown at King's College, London, leading experts in the field of assessment, setting is socially divisive, working class pupils under-perform, and overall performance is lower (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 June 1996). Margaret Brown argues that while ability grouping "was easier for teachers and popular with parents it is not necessarily the best method for children". Similarly, David Gillborn, co-author of the recent Ofsted report on *Recent Research on the Achievements of Ethnic Minority Pupils*, has warned that "research suggests that the use of setting and other forms of internal selection often disadvantages ethnic minority pupils. There must be concern that many politicians see selection as an unequivocally positive step" (*The Guardian*, 6 September 1996).

Academic and Vocational Streaming at 14 Years

Current Conservative government policy for provision for 14-19-year-olds is based on the Dearing review. Labour Party policy (*Aiming Higher*, March 1996), also largely accepts the Dearing framework. The traditional split in English education into academic and vocational streams will remain. Labour takes some steps to overcome it, by creating a new umbrella certificate at 18, called an Advanced Diploma, which can be made up of A levels or vocational qualifications (GNVQs, which are renamed 'applied A

levels', or NVQs). But just as long as A levels remain, they will be seen as the highest status – the academic – qualification and vocational ones will be the poor relations.

While selection into academic and vocational tracks can be accommodated within the same school, some influential advisors to New Labour, such as Will Hutton, Professor Alan Smithers and Professor David Reynolds (author of the recent *Worlds Apart* report) are calling for selection at 14 into separate types of institutions. Blunkett has already taken a first step in this direction with his proposal for a new mechanism of selection for the lowest achievers, who will be able to leave school part-time at 14 and continue with a vocational education in FE colleges and workplace placements.

Why New Labour Means 'New Selection'

We need more discussion and research on the best ways of grouping pupils. Mixed ability *grouping* on its own is not enough; it requires mixed ability *teaching* to make it work, and there are resource implications too. But New Labour's attack on mixed ability teaching is not based on the evidence that is available, and it is intended to foreclose any debate, not encourage it. The rationale given by Blair and Blunkett is in terms of raising education standards, but the effect of selection mechanisms is the very opposite: they label children as failures and create self-fulfilling prophecies among teachers and within peer cultures. However, the real motivations for New Labour's enthusiasm for differentiation both between and within schools, which distort and subordinate their concern for raising standards, are the needs of the market economy and electoral considerations.

The employers expect the education system to produce a suitably educated workforce to meet the needs of the economy. That does not mean 'excellence for everyone'. From their point of view, to educate everyone to the same high standard would be unnecessarily expensive and would result in too many over-qualified school-leavers with unrealistically high career aspirations. What the employers want the schools to produce is a hierarchically stratified labour force roughly corresponding to the occupational hierarchy.

In the 1920s and 1930s employers were happy with a rigidly segregated system of grammar and elementary schools leading to different destinations in the labour market. By the 1960s they had swung round to support for the end of the 11-plus and the introduction of comprehensive schools. Changes in the nature of work, which are even more evident now, 30 years later – a decline in unskilled manual jobs, more technology, more rapid innovation, an increase in 'people-processing' jobs, a more complex and flexible work process – have meant that the rigid two-tier system couldn't deliver an appropriately skilled and stratified future workforce. An internally selective comprehensive school system can, as has been shown by many other countries with more successful economies than Britain, from the United States to Japan.

Electorally, New Labour regards selection in education as vital to gaining the support of the middle class. New Labour is against a return to the grammar/secondary modern model not just because its working-class base doesn't want to be ghettoised in secondary modern schools but also because middle-class parents are afraid that some of their children might end up in them too. Middle-class parents are content to send their children to comprehensive schools

provided they are confident that the relatively privileged position that education delivers to them will be maintained. When Blunkett says that “diversity within one campus must be the goal of a truly comprehensive system”, he is sending a clear message to potential middle class voters that they needn’t fear that New Labour will do anything with the comprehensive schools to undermine the relative advantage they confer on the majority of middle class pupils. Setting will ensure that, by and large, though they must be under the same roof as working class pupils, they won’t have to be in the same classrooms.

Defend the Comprehensive Principle against Undermining by Selection

What should a Labour government do to defend comprehensive education?

Its principal aim should be to establish a common system of provision for all young people from 11-18, leading to a common qualification. Such a system would combine a common core curriculum with electives to create a balanced education with an appropriate element of student choice. The breaking down of the academic-vocational divide would be facilitated by the creation of a common school-leaving qualification based on courses which combined so-called ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ elements.

To achieve this aim, a Labour government would need to take the following measures:

- It should abolish the existing grammar schools and integrate them fully into the comprehensive system.
- It should abolish all distinctions between the grant-maintained schools and LEA schools and integrate them fully into the local authority system.
- It should establish a national admissions policy based on the principle of ‘nearest first’. No school should be able to select pupils on the basis of ‘ability’ or ‘aptitude’.
- It should replace competitive funding by funding according to need.
- It should discourage forms of grouping of pupils which reinforce patterns of social inequality in education, and encourage those which reduce them.

Adopting this aim and taking these initial measures would create the context for realising the full potential of the comprehensive school. We could then begin the *real* debates that the Labour Party should be having about comprehensive education.

Rethinking Comprehensive Education

On its own the defence of comprehensive education against selection is not enough. We want to end by arguing why we also have to rethink what we *mean* by comprehensive education.

There is a tendency on the Left to restrict the agenda for reform to that of a well-funded comprehensive system from nursery education to school-leaving, and a reluctance to go beyond opposing Conservative education policies and embark on a critique of the limitations of comprehensive schooling itself.

Of course the campaign against Conservative policies is crucial. But to recognise the huge historical gain that the comprehensive reform (albeit uncompleted) represents over the selective system, and to want to defend that, should not mean idealising it as the end-point of educational reform.

The reality is that the comprehensive school, while a big improvement on the secondary modern, is still a place that reproduces class inequality. That is why right wing governments as well as social-democratic governments can be advocates of comprehensive education. (Even Gillian Shepherd was when she campaigned against the grammar school as a local councillor in Norfolk in the 1970s).

Working-class pupils certainly achieve more in comprehensive schools than in secondary moderns, but the social class gap still remains. In their survey of British secondary schools, Benn & Chitty compared mainly working-class comprehensives with mainly middle-class comprehensives and found that the percentage of pupils getting five GCSE A-C passes was twice as high in the middle-class schools (1996, p. 188). They point out that between 60% and 80% of differences in attainment can be due to social class. Conservative policies may have exacerbated class inequalities in education, but they did not invent them.

Those who restrict the agenda for reform to opposing a return to the grammar/secondary modern model are in effect accepting these massive social class differentials in educational achievement as inevitable. Of course, there are limits to how far reforms of schooling can compensate for the inequalities of a capitalist society, but is it right to think that those limits will have been reached, even if all the mechanisms of selection we have discussed so far are removed?

I would argue that much more can be done to challenge working-class inequality in education, but to do so we have to go beyond the more obvious structural mechanisms which reproduce inequality and question also other processes of inclusion and exclusion in education, in the *content* of the experience of education, and in the way in which *power* is distributed within the education system. These are issues on which New Labour has little to say. Yet it is vital that we do: indeed, it was the twin fundamental weaknesses of the social democratic model of the 1960s and 1970s – the continuing reproduction of class inequality in the school system and the exclusion of popular participation in it – which rendered it so vulnerable to the offensive of the Right, which initially met with little popular resistance.

So we have a dual task in education today. We have to build the broadest possible movement in defence of comprehensive education against attempts to reintroduce and reinforce forms of selection, by whatever government, while at the same time rethinking among ourselves, on our terms, how to deal with the ways in which comprehensive education continues to fail working class pupils.

Note

I have drawn on the pamphlet *Is comprehensive education safe in New Labour's hands?*, published in 1996 by the Socialist Teachers Alliance. A more extended critique of New Labour's education policy is ‘The Limitations of the New Social-democratic Agendas: class, equality and agency’ by Richard Hatcher, in *Education after the Conservatives*, edited by Richard Hatcher & Ken Jones, Trentham Books, 1996. Caroline Benn & Clyde Chitty's book (*Thirty Years On: is comprehensive education alive and well or struggling to survive?*), published in 1996 by David Fulton, is an invaluable up-to-date survey.

Contempt for Evidence

Leone Burton

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One feature of 'silly' seasons seems to be the frequency with which they feature reports about pupils in English schools achieving less and less in mathematics. Sometimes the comparison is made historically, we are doing worse now than in..., and sometimes it is made geographically against pupils in other countries (except for the USA). With unfailing regularity, results of international comparisons, or reports undertaken internally, speak of falling 'standards', poor levels of 'numeracy', inadequately prepared undergraduates, and so on. The most noticeable part of such reports is that they fail to define what they mean, they fail to ensure that the basis for comparison is sound and they fail to provide evidence which is robust and testable against the claims being made for it. Large-scale generalisations are frequently made about *negative* results. For example, one of the most recent furores was about teacher education and the so-called criticisms made both by trainee teachers, and the headteachers in the schools where they are placed, about their inadequate preparation to deal with mathematics and English. Contrary to this, the Modes of Teacher Education Project (see, for example, Whitty et al, 1992) demonstrated from a large data base that, where there were criticisms, these were about no more than 10% of the teacher trainees. Celebrating the positive impact of their training on 90% of teacher trainees would not, however, provide a sound foundation for introducing a curriculum and further controlling measures on teacher education institutions. Since that appears to be the political agenda, the justification is found by exploiting innuendo, hearsay and anecdote rather than utilising well-founded research to build effective policies which address justifiable concerns about education.

Examples of Contempt for Evidence

The contempt for evidence is of two kinds. One, already mentioned, mis-uses what evidence exists in order to justify a negative message. An example of this is the annual hare which is set running about results in GCSE and 'A' level examinations. If they improve, standards are falling. If they deteriorate, teachers are failing, the constituency of candidates is 'worse' in some sense not explained and, in any case, standards are still falling. Indeed, it would appear that standards can only fall which leaves one wondering what such 'standards' are. The second kind of contempt ignores the requirements for evidence at all and relies upon assertion and stereotype to build an argument which then becomes part of the public domain. An example of this was the report *Tackling the Mathematics Problem* (LMS, 1995). In this report, assertions persistently carry the weight of substantiated statements. For example:

During the same period we have also seen implicit 'advice' (from HMI (1985), from OFSTED (1994), in the wording of the National Curriculum, and from elsewhere) that teachers should reduce their emphasis on, and expectations concerning, technical fluency. This

trend has often been explicitly linked to the assertion that "process is at least as important as technique". Such advice has too often failed to recognise that to gain a genuine understanding of any process it is necessary first to achieve a robust technical fluency with the relevant content. Progress in mastering mathematics depends on reducing familiar laborious processes to automatic mental routines, which no longer require conscious thought; this then creates mental space to allow the learner to concentrate on new, unfamiliar ideas (as one sees, for example, in the progression from arithmetic, through fractions and algebra, to calculus). (authors' emphases, p. 9)

There are three statements here for which, if made by my students, I would require evidence. First, who *are* all these people, and which public reports, recommend a reduction in technical fluency? Second, whose assertion is quoted? In which context? How is it justified? Third, what evidence demonstrates that automaticity is a necessary condition for understanding and that automaticity is a function of practice? Choosing to use would certainly appear to be a function of understanding the implications of that choice and, consequently, is unlikely to happen in the absence of some contextual understanding unless we comprehend use only in the context of repetitive practice of textual exercises. The authors of the LMS report would, no doubt, support repetitive practice but the results of such decontextualised classroom habits are to be seen in the boredom and rejection of mathematics by many pupils, even those who can succeed at gaining correct answers to the exercises. Jo Boaler (1996b) provides both in-class and examination evidence that the pupils from classes which use such techniques are *dis-abled* when it comes to attempting problems for which the signposts are not clearly demarcated. Dave Hewitt (1996) presents an argument for the development of skill fluency rather than automaticity, through the subordination of the skill to different mathematical challenges. This ensures that a skill is always practised within a mathematical context which carries meaning for the pupil.

One of the difficulties with mathematics is that, as a body of knowledge, it is assumed to be international and, consequently it is believed by some people if a child is asked to perform a calculation in Korea, that is identical to asking another child to perform the same calculation in England or, indeed, identical to asking another child in England to perform the same calculation twenty years later. This is to fail to appreciate that schools are social institutions, constructed and organised to meet conditions which are local both in time and space and that mathematics is, itself, a social construct. Hence, inevitably, in different countries, or at different times in the same country, pupils are likely to perform better or worse on aspects of tests which are emphasised or discounted within their settings. For many years, it has been argued that attempting to compare the

performance of pupils on apparently identical mathematics tests ignores such differences and must end up in non-comparable results. However, there is now a huge industry which implements such tests and a strong political interest in making use of their results. Arguing for non-comparability, therefore, is very unfashionable even though there is considerable evidence to support such arguments. For example, Margaret Brown (1996) has pointed to the distorting effects on international comparisons when the target group in some countries does not contain low-achieving pupils either because they are held back and not promoted into it or they are taken out of mainstream classes altogether. Differences in amount of schooling and styles of schooling also lead to non-comparability. She demonstrates that "the differences between countries are very small compared with the range within each".

More importantly, it seems to me, that in allowing such comparisons to be the basis for making policy about schooling, we are not only denying the importance of evidence to inform social decision-making but also saying that the only thing that counts in the education of our citizens is their ability to pass such tests. This is even though promoters of these tests themselves are extremely restrained in what they claim for them and their critics have become more vocal:

Traditional examinations and tests have few friends. Though there are often deep reasons for the dislike and fear of formal examinations, they are open to criticism on several grounds: their artificiality (too limited a basis for judgement), unreliability (variation between markers and pupils' performance), lack of validity (over-dependence on examination technique, memory and writing skill) and primarily the limiting influence of examinations on learning and teaching. (Nisbet, 1993, pp. 31-32)

Internationally, there is a movement towards the use of so-called 'authentic assessment' as a way of trying to make a closer match between what happens within school classrooms and the uses to which pupils can put their learning outside the school. (See, for example, Birenbaum & Dochy, 1996, and Torrance, 1995.) The evidence on mathematics is particularly worrying. Even those pupils, in this country and internationally, who achieve in mathematics at school and university appear to be able to make very little use of their learning. In a comparative investigation of physics and English teaching in three universities, Kim Thomas found that physics students:

were not, generally, required to discover for themselves; the point of experiments for example, was to illustrate a received 'truth' rather than to allow students to make findings. Dissatisfaction with this method of teaching came largely from the very high achievers and the very low achievers ... Unlike physics, English was constructed by staff and students alike as 'uncertain' and 'subjective'; it was also seen by some as allowing access to artistic and universal truths about human behaviour" (1990, p. 173).

On the other hand, when a shift is made from a curriculum domination of facts and skills to an enquiry-basis where learners are seeking to know and apply their mathematics (other than on disconnected, abstract test items) results are very much better. Interestingly, when enquiry has been the basis of the curriculum, the pupils can achieve more than those who have had a limited mathematical diet, even on

tests which are constructed to suit transmission teaching (see, for example, Boaler, 1996a, p. 12).

We have developed a schooling system which is highly individualised and dependent upon a review of knowledge which is commodified – something to be acquired. This encourages us to operate in classrooms using a style of teaching which can then "blame marginalized people for being marginal" (Lave, 1996, p. 149). Such an approach to education has failed generations of pupils in every country in the world where evidence has been collected. Its only success lies in the covert, and sometimes overt, blaming of inadequacies on individual students, teachers or parents, rather than a reconsideration of the demonstrable systemic failure.

Inequality of achievement is seen as the fault of schools or of society in general or as the result of student inadequacy: never the inadequacy of individual departments or institutions (Thomas, op.cit., p. 180).

I would go further and say that the systemic failure can be located in the ways in which we understand mathematical knowledge, the transmission and testing curriculum which is a consequence of belief in 'objective' knowledge and the accepted practices of using school achievement on external tests as a way of funnelling opportunities.

A Way Forward

Again, there is some evidence that there are other, and better ways of conducting mathematical education. (See, for example, de Lange, 1987, a report of substantial changes in Dutch mathematics teaching, learning and assessing and Burton, 1994, an overview of experiences of assessing mathematics at the end of compulsory schooling in ten European countries). However, to take advantage of them, we have to decide what it is, mathematically, that is of greatest use to our future citizens and which school conditions are most conducive to its acquisition. Then, finally, what evidence on acquisition everyone concerned, pupils, parents and teachers, and subsequently employers, regards as convincing. It seems highly unlikely that lists of content would meet such a requirement, if only because they change, despite the fact that such lists are the ways in which we currently conceptualise the school curriculum.

There is little mathematical content which must be reproducible by everyone and most of that is at a level of simplicity that familiarity will come from frequent use in context rather than decontextualised practice, and lack of use will consign it to the memory garbage bin. Much more important to acquire in school, it seems to me, is an attitude towards learning, a competence to investigate and establish and question results, and the recognition of the power of reflection to affect a consideration of what is known but also what is not. Our schooling system is not well equipped to convey any one of these at present. In demanding that school leavers can reproduce particular content, politicians and our mathematics colleagues are falling into the trap of thinking that skills and knowledge acquired without purpose are available for use whereas there is no evidence that this is nor ever was the case and there is growing evidence that it is not.

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Comprehensive Schooling: a personal perspective

Rob Watts

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When the Leader of the Labour Party pledges that the three priorities of his first government will be 'education, education, education', supporters of comprehensive education might be expected to cheer. Unfortunately, however, Tony Blair shares with Gillian Shephard the view that comprehensive education has failed our children. However, much they may qualify that criticism, it provides the rationale for the educational plans of their parties. Both Labour and Conservative would retain grant-maintained schools (although Labour would not allow any new ones). A Conservative government would retain grammar schools and aim to provide more; a Labour government would abolish existing grammar schools only with the consent of parents. The Government has included in the Queen's speech proposals to allow increase selection in grant-maintained schools; Labour, whilst opposed to this, nevertheless wishes to see increased streaming and setting within comprehensive schools to combat their perceived failure.

Is There Evidence of Failure?

In the light of the above, the question has to be asked: are comprehensive schools failing their pupils? On the face of it, the very suggestion of failure seems odd, given that performance at GCSE continues to improve and is dramatically better than it was ten years ago. The claim of failure, however, arises from the comparison of schools in relation to their place in GCSE league tables and it is compounded by the expectations of parents which have been raised by a continuing emphasis on parental choice. Yet it is surely logically indefensible to claim that a 'good' school can be distinguished from a 'poor' one simply by comparing examination performance. Furthermore, attacking the alleged poor performance of some comprehensive schools provides a spurious justification for those who wish to educate their children in a 'good' (i.e.

middle-class) school some distance from their home rather than in their nearest 'poor' (i.e. predominantly working-class) school. Increasing selection, whether through creating more grammar schools or by in-school streaming, is a high price to pay for the salving of middle-class consciences, including those of politicians.

It is argued, too, that 'bright' working-class children who flourished in the tripartite system have been particularly let down by the comprehensive system. Yet the idea that the existence of grammar schools in the post-war era ensured the advancement of bright working class children in a way in which the comprehensive system cannot match is surely a romantic one. The argument runs that comprehensive schools with their supposed attachment to egalitarianism, political correctness and levelling down have damaged not only the British economy but the individual prospects of generations of able youngsters. If this argument is accepted, of course, then it is easier for politicians on the Right to advocate John Major's dream of "a grammar school in every town" and even for those on the Left to ignore the disparities created by grant maintained schools (which will not change simply by calling them foundation schools) and to insist on selection within the comprehensive system through setting and streaming as the way to address its perceived failure.

Selection may be supported or opposed, of course, as a matter of principle but also, on the grounds of its inaccuracy. Selection might be less vigorously opposed if it could be ensured that it was always the most able (by what measurement is a separate issue) who were chosen. That, however, is impossible to guarantee. Nor has the feeling of rejection felt by those who are selection out, with its consequent effect on performance, been adequately addressed. Failure to make the top stream in a comprehensive school at the age of 11 years may not be as bad as failing

the 11-plus but failure it nevertheless is as far as the children themselves are concerned, not to mention their parents.

My opposition to selective schooling was reinforced in the early 1980s when I was privileged to be head of an 11-16 comprehensive school in Chelmsley Wood. Chelmsley Wood is a very large council estate built in response to Birmingham's housing shortage. Since 1974 it has been part of the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull, the leafy suburbs of the latter sitting very uneasily with their working class neighbour. In my day only 7% of Simon Digby School's pupils were obtaining five or more GCSE 'O' level or CSE grade 1 passes in the early eighties, at a time when the national average was well over 20%. Clearly we were a failing school judged in terms of examination results. But then so was every other school in Chelmsley Wood, using the same criterion.

Equally, schools in the town of Solihull and its nearby villages were incredibly successful, some of them producing figures of over 50%. The disparity between the results in the north and south of the borough was the justification Tory councillors, none of whom represented Chelmsley Wood, were seeking for the reintroduction of the 11-plus. They had not anticipated the vociferous opposition to selection which immediately came from the middle-class parents of the 'successful' Solihull schools. Their children were doing very nicely, thank you, in the comprehensive system. There could be no guarantee that they would gain a place in even the largest of grammar schools and if they did not then they would be stigmatised as secondary modern pupils in a bi-partite system. If less vocal, Chelmsley Wood parents were no more impressed by the 11-plus proposals, even though it was the brightest of their children who were supposed to benefit most from it. Why? Because it was clear that next to none of them would succeed in gaining a grammar-school place. The educational apartheid of the north/south Solihull divide would be perpetuated. Nevertheless, it was the voters of Solihull and its neighbouring villages who brought about the scrapping of the LEA's plans and not the residents of Chelmsley Wood.

The most interesting aspect of the whole affair in many ways was the LEA's attempt to demonstrate that comparisons between the two parts of the borough were fair. It undertook a fairly crude value-added exercise which attempted to link expected performance at sixteen with NFER scores at eleven. Although it was clearly designed to show that Chelmsley Wood schools were failing their pupils, what in fact it revealed was the reverse. They were 'adding value' to a degree not matched by their more advantaged neighbours, and this despite the fact that the percentage of pupils with special needs in their schools averaged forty on a conservative definition of special needs. The success of the Chelmsley Wood schools would have been even more dramatic if social deprivation as a factor in examination performance had ever been acknowledged. Unemployment, to take just one aspect of it, was well above the national and dramatically above the borough average on Chelmsley Wood. The schools were succeeding against the odds but not, alas, in a way which raw examination scores could demonstrate.

It was hard, therefore, for us at Simon Digby to be portrayed as a failing school because our daily experience told us the opposite. True, we faced some almost intractable problems: discipline could never be taken for granted and had to be worked at constantly; we were teaching classes of thirty and above in which at least a quarter of children

had reading ages more than two years behind their chronological age. Yet we had a well ordered school in which pupils were well presented and often proved very rewarding to teach. Our success with children with special needs was remarkable, yet no league table ever acknowledged that success and none does so now. The vast majority of our pupils performed up to and beyond their level of ability as indicated at eleven and went on to greater success in other institutions after the age of sixteen. The few very able youngsters we taught were encouraged to have a strong sense of their own worth and to believe that academically anything was possible for them.

Many continued their education beyond sixteen with great success. Nevertheless it would be true to say, I believe, that they were sometimes held back because we could not devote to them the resources necessary because of our constant struggle to provide adequately for our least able pupils. A genuine 'top' set in English or maths in years 10 and 11 would have been impossible to achieve by any definition of 'top' which would have been accepted by schools in more favoured areas. We could have done better by them, but not by creating a selective system where most would not have gained a grammar school place, but by teaching them in smaller classes had we been given the resources to do so. Tony Blair and David Blunkett need to understand that setting, even if embraced as educationally desirable, will not be a panacea for inner-city or estate schools without the proper resourcing. The problems we faced in Simon Digby exist in Chelmsley Wood today and in schools throughout the country, since few if any LMS formulae adequately address the question of special needs provision or the relevance of social deprivation, however defined, in the education of our children.

Comprehensive Success

There is of course no such thing as a typical comprehensive school, either in terms of intake or organisation. Some indeed should not use the name at all if they co-exist with a local grammar school. Even in areas where no grammar school exists, parental choice and demographic factors make for a very uneven composition of pupils within individual schools. The perceived 'failure' of some schools may be seen differently when put into this context, although that is not to deny that some schools do not succeed in every respect. What most do succeed in, however, is in imparting a sense of individual worth to all pupils regardless of their ability. They succeed in raising the sights and ultimately the performance of many children who in an overtly selective system would be written off at eleven. Over a long career I can recall so many children for whom the encouragement of teachers and the supportive ethos of their school were instrumental in raising expectation and performance. A high proportion of these had failed the 11-plus in areas (Walsall, Sutton Coldfield and Nottingham, for example) where grammar schools still existed. The very fact that they attended schools that were designated 'comprehensive', despite the creaming off of a significant proportion of bright children, led them to have aspirations which might well not have surfaced in a secondary modern school. They could have done even better in a truly non-selective system.

The success of young people such as these should be celebrated and if we are to make comparisons it should not be of comprehensives with grammar schools nor between comprehensive schools in differing social areas but of the combined performance of schools in the fifteen years

following the 1944 Education Act and the totality of comprehensive schools now. The success of the comprehensive system then becomes apparent. If politicians would cease to play football with comprehensive schools and acknowledge their achievements whilst addressing their genuine problems, then the improvements which they say they wish to see might come about more rapidly.

Teachers and parents have a right to demand that if politicians make judgements about the success of schools they should base them on wider criteria than the achievement of five or more higher grade GCSE passes. Although their resources have declined year on year, comprehensive schools have nevertheless achieved remarkable success not only with pupils with special educational needs but with those whose performance falls short of the magic (but nonetheless arbitrary) five higher grade passes. When politicians cease to regard anything less than that as failure we might begin to increase the self-esteem and thereby the achievement of such pupils and establish a virtuous circle of improvement.

The 'tough' education policy of 'new' Labour favours wholesale setting and streaming as opposed to the mixed ability system which it assumes, without any supporting evidence, the majority of schools operate to GCSE level. They do nothing of the kind, of course. There are very few schools indeed who so do and there are many who have no mixed ability classes at all. Moreover, there is no appreciable difference between them in terms of examination success and therefore mixed ability classes do not, in fact, provide the right stick with which either Labour or the Conservatives can justly beat the comprehensive system. Furthermore, many schools would be able to claim success where mixed ability classes exist right up to the age of sixteen. In my present 'successful' school in South Derbyshire results at GCSE began to improve as the first cohort of children taught in mixed ability classes for the first three years of their secondary career took their GCSE exams. In years 10 and 11 we have some mixed ability

classes not as a matter of policy but from expediency since as a very small school it is inevitable that some option subjects at GCSE will contain a wide spread of ability. Where this occurs the comparison with subjects which are settled is often very favourable: in geography for example results well above the national average have been registered every year since the introduction of GCSE despite or perhaps because of the fact that classes in a subject taken by over 60% of pupils are mixed ability in composition. It is perhaps significant, too, that many of our students who achieved only one or two passes at C or above did so in the very subjects that were not settled.

We who work in comprehensive schools should cease to be defensive about what we collectively achieve. Those of us who teach in schools that can claim success according to the crude criterion of examination success owe it to our 'less fortunate' colleagues to speak out on their behalf. The quality of teaching certainly matters; of course it does. I know, however, that this was as good at Simon Digby School as it is at my present school, and yet Granville produces examination results which Simon Digby could never have hoped to match. The leadership provided by headteachers also matters; no one would wish to deny that. Yet the man who now heads a 'successful' school is the same one who ran Simon Digby ten years ago. The A38 which links these two schools was not my personal Road to Damascus: my principles, opinions, enthusiasm and style of leadership are now what they were then.

We need to look beyond factors such as these, relevant as they are, if we are ever to understand why some schools perform 'better' than others. If government, whatever its colour, is to improve the education and the prospects of all children, but particularly those who are most socially disadvantaged, it must recognise the importance of proper and differentiated resourcing of schools. Political parties must recognise that there is a cost to be met. The price of the failure to meet it is certain to be very much higher.

Demagoguery in Process: authoritarian populism, the press and school exclusions

Chris Searle

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Whenever politicians fall back in their rhetoric upon the values of 'common sense' and their words are echoed by the establishment press – either 'tabloid' or 'broadsheet', then it is time for us all to beware. Whether it is the words of Tory or New Labour conservatives, such invocations invariably lead towards ideas and practices which are steps backwards towards a 'better time', which, for the majority of the population, never truly existed.

Education is the favoured context for such declarations, and since the education of working class and black children is so precious to their parents, they are the cause of much anxiety and concern to them. The social conservatives know this well, and frequently use the press to probe and provoke these potential worries, casting themselves as the purveyors of the 'common sense' of the nation in the process. The tabloid press in particular, knowing that such demagogic

statements and diktats raise worries and raise readership, become their enthusiastic messengers and endorsers, as backward and authoritarian ideas, given the confirmation and legitimisation of print and a high journalistic profile, are accepted as right, proper and sound – and of course, to be agreed with as representing the mainstream of right and sensible – thinking people.

August 28 1996 gave the British public a typical example of this process. The *Daily Mail*, well-known for its sympathy towards fascist demagogues in the thirties, from Hitler to his British cover version Sir Oswald Mosley, became the mouthpiece for David Blunkett, the shadow 'New Labour' Secretary of State for Education. According to the *Daily Mail* Blunkett was speaking enthusiastically for the restoration of school uniforms in "every secondary school to restore discipline and a sense of pride".[1] A uniform for school students was no longer a burden, no longer a means of social control, declared Blunkett, but "the salvation of the poor". It helped to create "a culture of learning" and raise academic achievement, he added. For the people of Sheffield his words would have raised confusing reactions, since Sheffield City Council (of which Blunkett himself was a past leader), through its Education Department, had argued for years and through several generations of school students, that uniforms were irrelevant and even an encumbrance to good learning as a mode of suppressing initiative and controlling individual creativity.

Perhaps remembering the thirties, when uniforms were certainly to the fore, the *Daily Mail* editorial writer picked up Blunkett's words with great interest – while acknowledging their authentic source and inspiration:

Well, three cheers for him ... even if, this time, Labour really is stealing Tory clothes. Political larceny can be the sincerest form of flattery and, in this instance, most people will consider it no more than sound, old fashioned sense. For there is now general acknowledgement that the come as you like, do as you please, anything goes ethos of the sixties played havoc with academic standards. A smart blazer won't turn a dunce into a swot. That's true. But school uniforms help to create an orderly atmosphere in classrooms where learning can take the place of anarchy.

The key words are all there, and the leader writer has shuffled them obligingly to reinforce Blunkett's demagoguery: 'most people', 'sound, old fashioned sense', 'havoc', 'anarchy', 'orderly atmosphere' and the conventional myths about the sixties – ironically the period of a heyday of school uniforms across almost every school in the country. From both Blunkett and the *Mail* editor, it is a smart and fast use of 'spin' language, pulling out all the stereotypes and myths – but it is at its heart dishonest, irrational and cynical. It threatens young people in the way regimental sergeant majors would threaten drafted raw teenage recruits for the first drill of their national military service and extends the menace to teachers too – for, according to the editorial, "slovenly children and scruffy teachers are given a stern dressing down" by the New Labour spokesman. For it is the authoritarianism of the past that is being dredged up by this alliance between two demagogues, and one designed to cause the maximum fear of the present. 'Scruffiness' is bad, free choice of clothing is anarchistic, the only rectitude is of convention, of uniform, of a repressive and false nostalgia, the habitude of meekly sitting in a classroom and accepting the tidy 'delivery' of the National Curriculum. For in these classrooms 'delivery' is all, creative

teaching becomes a distraction, and the last and prohibited form of school behaviour must be divergent, rebellious, questioning or unorthodox. The narrow gauge of the National Curriculum and the learning of predicted outcomes must be adhered to as the 'standard' in all respects and reinforced in all respects, including apparel. It is convergent discipline from the outside-in, from uniform clothes to uniform behaviour to uniform minds – the classic means of social control.

The Boy They 'Can't Tame'

In the same issue of the *Daily Mail* and echoed across the rest of the nation's tabloid newspapers on that same day was, as the *Mail*'s headline put it, the story of the boy 'they can't tame'. It was another story of a threatened strike by teachers – members of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) as a part of a campaign of refusal to teach a particular student – in this case a ten year old boy. Matthew Wilson had been 'permanently excluded' (expelled) from Manton Junior School in Worksop, but reinstated by the schools' governors after an appeal. The teachers had refused to accept the boy's reinstatement and were threatening to strike from the beginning of the new term. No principles of inclusive education underlaid their practice, neither that of their union. As far as the Chair of Governors, Eileen Bennett was concerned, Matthew, like many of his school mates, was a "challenge" but a "bright and nice boy: He even carried my bags for me when he has seen me in the street". The parent governor, Caroline Morison, judged that "he is no pushover – he answers back. But if you reason with him, he is perfectly all right". And a school meals' assistant answered that "he can be a little monkey and a bit of a handful, but he is not on his own at the school in being like that".

Yet this boy headlined as untameable in the *Daily Mail*, a "yob pupil" in the *Sun* [2] and a "little horror" in the *Daily Express*, [3] and the details and intimacies of his life at school, which should belong to his family and the school alone, have been released to the press and paraded as a part of these particular teachers' and their union's attempt to target and expose him as an example of a primary school pupils showing 'chronically bad behaviour'. The NASUWT General Secretary indicated how much his Association was demeaning teacher trade unionism by launching a threat to publicly release Matthew Wilson's confidential school files: "We might have to release the whole dossier", he declared to the *Guardian* correspondent, who reported his words on 4 September 1996: "We don't want to do that because it makes his life more difficult, but we might have to". Referring to the ten-year-old as if he were a carrier of some infectious disease, he added that the only acceptable solution would be one guaranteeing that "our members are protected and don't have anything to do with him, teaching, in corridors or at playtime".

This is a particularly grim incidence of a backward teachers' union pandering to the worst aspects of tabloid and public opinion – another recent example was members of the non-TUC Professional Association of Teachers (PAT) calling, at their 1996 conference at Cheltenham, for the withdrawal of child benefit from parents who miss parents evenings or fail to ensure that their children attend school – but it is much more than this.[4] When some teachers' unions and their groups of members abandon their traditions of struggling for the social benefit of their students and

their communities, and turn their attacks from parsimonious and increasingly rightward government policies to working class students themselves and their families and communities – it is a signal that the authoritarian populism being pursued by the government and mirror-imaged by its New Labour opposition, is entering into the fabric of schools themselves and those who work within them. And this becomes a state of affairs that the establishment press will seize upon and relish, in the way in which they have in their reporting of a number of incidents involving exclusions from school.

Exclusion and Black Struggle

As black families and communities have for long been the major casualties of the process of exclusion and expulsion from British schools, so these communities have also been the prime focus of resistance. In 1971 the Caribbean Education and Community Workers Associations in conjunction with John La Rose's New Beacon Books, published the book *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System*. [5] This work of community-led scholarship by Grenadian teacher and researcher Bernard Coard, exposed with sharpness and a visceral clarity the violent reality of large and disproportionate numbers of Caribbean youth being removed from mainstream schooling and put into schools for the so-called 'educational sub-normal' (ESN). It was an example of black parents and communities using their own research to intervene in the school system on behalf of their own children, and defend them from victimisation and attack through school exclusion.

Coard's book symbolised the determination of black parents not to be rejected or marginalised, and defended the interests of all black and white British children who were being excluded from mainstream education. 'ESN schools' gradually disappeared from the state system (other more cosmetic labels came instead) but significant progress had been made and much encouragement generated to continue such campaigning. Thus in 1985, the black press exposed that black children in general were, as the *Caribbean Times* reported, six times more likely to be suspended from schools than were other pupils. In Nottingham, the black community organisation the UKAIDI Community Link Project, uncovered scandalous levels of school exclusions [7] among Afro-Caribbean students, and similar community research was conducted in the other cities, with comparable findings. Inner city black communities were mobilising themselves with democratic scholarship and action, long before the academics and university education departments began to take an interest in exclusions. In Reading the Black Parents Action Group were organising, in Bristol it was the Campaign Against Racism in Education and in the London Borough of Brent, the Parents Association for Educational Advance. In Sheffield, SADACCA (Sheffield and District African-Caribbean Association), pressurised the LEA to undertake research into exclusions. The results confirmed the national picture of a gross over-representation of black students.

All this activity was vital in preventing the demonising of black school students. By drawing attention to the injustice of the disproportionate exclusion rate for black children, LEAs were forced to adopt anti-racist policies, remedial measures or greater ethnic monitoring. But the NASUWT in particular were beginning to resort to other strategies that were far from tackling the causes and provocations of

racism. Instead they were concentrating upon targeting and blaming the children that were its victims. The courageous campaign of a black mother exposed their strategy publicly, when Isa Stewart, a ten-year-old Birmingham student was targeted by teachers at his school, Westminster Junior School in Handsworth. He was compelled to sit alone outside the Head's office for two weeks while NASUWT members at the school refused to teach him. His mother Pauline protested, demonstrating outside the school with Isa and 30 other parents from the African People's Education Group (APEG), holding up placards which declared: 'I have a right to be in school' and 'Justice must not appear to be done, it must be *seen* to be done'. As in other more publicised cases to develop in 1996, Isa had also won his appeal against permanent exclusion and the NASUWT were refusing to accept the decision. Having taken recourse to her democratic right of appeal and won through, Pauline Stewart told *The Times Educational Supplement* under their headline "Fury over isolated child":

What they are doing is unfair. I want him back in the classroom where he belongs. We won our appeal fair and square. The authority (LEA) said the school must take him back but it is refusing to do so.

The situation was diffused, rather than resolved, with the LEA bringing into the school a teacher specialising in 'behaviour support' to give individual attention to Isa.

Exclusions and 'Yob Culture'

Towards the end of 1994, the British press took up the cause of campaigning against 'yob culture'. This expression had been widely used by Prime Minister John Major, and was finally adopted by journalists and sub-editors as a pretext for hostile profiling and reporting of, in the main, working class and black youth. This was not limited to the 'tabloids'. On 25 October *The Times* ran a front page article headlined "Expulsions spiral as state schools battle 'yobs'". [9] Ben Preston, the education correspondent, wrote of the "dramatic increase" in exclusions from school as evidence of the "burgeoning yob culture". He reported the words of Nigel de Gruchy, General Secretary of the NASUWT, who said that "disruptive pupils were the highest barrier to raising standards". Thus the blame was being put on the students themselves rather than on the increasingly narrow and repressive school framework within which they were working since the enactment of the 1988 Education 'Reform' Act and the institutionalisation of the National Curriculum – not to mention the pile-up of social damage done to inner-city populations throughout the years of Conservative government since 1979. From de Gruchy's assertion can be followed the anti-student strategy of the NASUWT, as they increasingly targeted so-called 'disruptive' students and their 'undeserving' families for attack and vilification during subsequent years.

From 1993-95 there were many stories in the press about school exclusions, often prompted by surveys or reports from the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). In December 1993 inspectors reported on a worrying increase in the members of primary school pupils being excluded for bad behaviour. "Bad teachers", they argued were a part of the problem, in particular those who showed "a lack of preparation or organisation". [10] Their report was dismissed by de Gruchy as "a waste of space" that was "too pious for its own good". At the conference of the British Psychological Society in April 1995, a keynote speaker, educational psychologist and researcher, Andre Imich,

claimed that school students were being excluded more and more to “impress parents” and “boost schools’ reputations for strict discipline”, [11] while at the conference of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities of the previous January, it was reported that more and more pupils from the age of five were out of control of teachers, and were being excluded from schools.[12] Many of these exclusions were also being provoked by the “new requirements for league tables, truancy rates and unauthorised absences” that had been introduced in February 1993 by John Patten, then Secretary of State for Education. Increasingly, schools were expelling chronic truants as a way of ‘tidying up’ their truancy figures. [13] By September 1995, the number of exclusions was becoming so embarrassing for the government, that *The Times Educational Supplement* reported that ministers were involved in seeking to cover them up, after a government-sponsored report by Carl Parsons of Christchurch College, Canterbury showed that the number of ‘permanent exclusions’ in more than 100 LEAs across the country had reached 10,000.[14] Headteachers represented by the National Association of Headteachers, were now demanding stronger expulsion powers, as, they claimed, children were becoming “violent at an earlier age”. [15]

The Impact of James Bulger’s Murder

When two eleven-year-old Merseyside boys were convicted of the abduction from a shopping mall and murder of two-year-old James Bulger in November 1993, it was as if the tabloid press was offered the pretext to label an entire generation of children as ‘evil’. The ‘child’ became the ‘enemy’. The *Daily Mail* carried a 16-page supplement of the case, the *Daily Express* [17] an 8-page one. *The Times* [18] editorial of 25 November declared that “childhood has a darker side which past societies perhaps understood better than our own” and described three species of ‘evil’ – “metaphysical evil, the imperfection of all mankind; physical evil, the suffering that human beings cause each other, and moral evil, the choice of vice over virtue. Children are separated by necessity of age from none of these”. The two convicted eleven-year-olds were demonised as ‘monsters’ or ‘animals, or, as headlined on the front page of the *Daily Mirror* [19] under their school photographs, “freaks of nature with hearts of unparalleled evil”. They were branded as “the children from Hell”. On the day following convictions, the *Mirror*’s [20] editorial pledged the paper’s commitment to “wage war on the army of truants” – among whom were James Bulger’s “little killers”. To effect this there must also be “an army of truant officers. It is not just a matter of hand-wringing and head-shaking over the figures”. Thus the front page headline of the day after was: “Patrols to hunt truant terrors”. [21]

Thus suddenly, the demonisation that had been largely reserved for black children was now being accorded to all working-class children, black and white. They were all ‘evil’, all a part of a dark “army of children hanging around streets and shopping centres” as *The Times Educational Supplement* [22] put it, also on their front page. Quoting spokespersons from the nation’s second-largest police force, the West Midlands Constabulary, the article revealed that “in two days last month the force found that more than a quarter of the ‘truants’ stopped in the city centre were children who have been suspended or expelled”. These were the denizens of the new territories of the damned, like James

Bulger’s killers. “We were concerned at the high number of excluded children”, said Sergeant Jean White, the force’s public liaison officer: “Some can be out of school for up to two years and something needs to be done to occupy their time constructively”. The ‘children who roam the malls’ were becoming the new menace, and teachers, police, social workers and public were being given their firm commission to retrieve their lives. It was as if the aftermath of the death of James Bulger became, according to the pre demagogues, a signal of the final abandonment of approaching children as rational, thinking people – in school as anywhere. Instead we must all be on our guards against them, with teachers – particularly NASUWT members, becoming the prime sentinels. Any vestiges of child-centredness, or echoes of the theme of the Plowden Report of the late sixties: “At the heart of the educational process is the child”, must set aside the illusion of child-innocence which, after James Bulger, can have no place in the institutional mind of a school.

The Adventures of Richard

Tuesday April 23 1996 was certainly not a normal day for the students and teachers of Glaisdale School in Bilborough, a working class area of Nottingham. They awoke to find their school all over the front and inside pages of national newspapers. The cause – the exclusion of one student, thirteen-year-old Richard Wilding, his subsequent winning of an appeal and return to the school, and the refusal of its NASUWT members to teach him, threatening a strike if he were to return to mainstream classes. In the wake of the death of James Bulger, Richard – who according to the *Daily Mail* [23] “played truant and was often seen in the shopping parade” near his home, was soon, as he described it perfectly himself, “tarred by all of this”. The *Daily Mirror* [24] portrayed him as a “yob – a schoolboy thug”, the *Sun* [25] described him as a “boy lout, a yob of the form” who had brought his entire school “to the brink of closure”. The *Guardian* [26] questioned whether he was not “the worst pupil in Britain” under a full-page portrait in its Tuesday education supplement – while quoting a local education officer as saying “we’re stuck with him”. The *Mail* labelled him as “the boy who spells trouble”, telling its readers of a grim family pathology: “If you think this one’s unruly, you should see his brother”. Bernard Dineen, a columnist on the *Yorkshire Post* [27], recommended that Richard’s mother be sent on a compulsory “civic education” course to learn “how to become a mother”. For the *Daily Telegraph* the affair was a signal to sound the alarm for a swift to corporal punishment in schools.[28]

And what had Richard’s parents done? They had used their legal and rightful resource and appealed against their son’s exclusion, seeking to safeguard his entitlement to a mainstream secondary education. They did this correctly and successfully, and not without some effort, as his father – an ex-industrial cleaner, suffered from severe ill-health. When he was to collapse and die, a week after the mass of public exposure that surrounded his son’s case, the *Daily Mail* was to headline its report, simply and starkly: “Yob’s father dies”. His son had no doubt given his teachers some difficulties and offered them complex challenges. When, after their threats of strike action were over and the LEA had ‘resolved’ the issue by offering Richard a place at a ‘referral unit’, Nigel de Gruchy claimed that the affair demonstrated an example of “trade unionism at its best” and that “the entire nation ought to be grateful” to his

the next as if they were switching existences. Thousands of teenagers who have lived in, studied in and absorbed into their brainpower and consciousness, into their very beings, two cultures, two nations, two peoples, two lives and who manage every day to cohere and order them, yet still move in and out of them as two separate worlds. The result is a control over living and use of language that the suburban child, with all his or her effective routines of study and examination proficiency, will know nothing of and be unable to penetrate. It is the difference between the assimilation of narrow fact and official knowledge as education, and the living of life as education. Which is the greater achievement? Yet which counts for all in the presently organised state system of education, and which counts for virtually nothing? That is the reality of the class distinction, cultural insult and permanent racism that is at the centre of the way achievement is recognised: the denial of the creative language reality and syncretic genius of hundreds of thousands of inner city young people, a reality of mass exclusion and institutionalised ignorance.

A Pakistani child who accompanies her mother to the DHSS and translates into Panjabi for her, unravelling the massive social inequality within the complex bureaucratic word-maze of her second language, and bringing it into meaning and sometimes additional benefits for her mother: what a testing! Yet what reward or recognition, beyond a service of love – while a middle class child of the suburbs gets an ‘A’ in a ‘modern language’ like French or German, which she learns dutifully through books and teachers but rarely speaks or uses in any organic, life-centred way. While a Yemeni teenager spends his Saturdays and Sundays every week teaching Arabic to younger members of his community in the supplementary school organised, administered and staffed by volunteers in his community – what acknowledgement is there for him in the qualification power-house of the system? What accreditation? How will his expert and committed work help his entry into university? Yet rote-learning and swotting in the suburbs, endless phrases learned by heart and put down again on an ‘A’ level examination paper – and university is yours!

Yet such living achievement has often reached a long way down a journey for the inner city student: the young man or woman who has arrived – sometimes having tramped across the scrubland of northern Somalia to cross a frontier and reach refuge from war – and those who have gone back in order to go further in their lives. Here a boy speaks of his coming, from a village in the mountains of southern Yemen:

Yesterday we had packed up everything. All our relatives were at our house, they were wishing us good luck. People like my Grandma and Auntie were crying because they couldn't bear to see us go. My Mum was really upset and worried at having to leave her family. Me and my brother enjoyed playing with our friends in the sand, but they knew that we were leaving. I felt nervous and very excited about what to expect to find and do in England.

My Grandma would say to us:

'Where is this country, England?'

I told her, 'Oh, it is an island, very far away.'

And my Grandmother said, 'what kind of country floats in water?'

I explained to my Grandma about it. She didn't understand, but I knew that she only asked these questions because she was deeply upset at having to say goodbye

to us. I also knew that I would miss my Grandma and friends. I knew I would be quite lonely as there was only my Dad who I knew in England.

Then the arrival in England, a time for the fusion of reconciliation and strangeness:

Then for the first time in three years I saw my Dad. He was waiting for us and I ran towards him and hugged him. He kissed me and then kissed my brother Nageeb. He gave us sweets and fruits. The sweets I didn't even recognise and they were not like I had tasted before. And I ate an apple and a banana, then my Dad took us to the taxi.

The people in England seemed really strange and different. They talked in a language that made me feel lonely as I could not understand what they were saying. My Mum found it really good and easy to cook and get the food, but she was very lonely as my Dad was working in the factory. She had no one to talk to but us. m en after a few weeks another Arab family moved into the neighbourhood and my Mum became good friends with that woman, and that took her mind off her mother and family.[3]

There is a lifetime of childhood here: an exchange of nations and peoples and the grasp of a deep learning experience at such an early age. The same is true for the child who returns. She finds a life and a country she had not expected under the myths that her new consciousness itself uncovers. It is an education of the mind and heart – as George Lamming wrote, “to make the mind feel ... and to make the feeling think.”[4] That is the process that thousands of inner city young people explore on journeys to and sojourns within the lands of their parents. For it is an affirmation found in a country which is now theirs too:

When I finally arrived in Yemen I was surprised at what I saw because I had imagined it like a great dump with snakes and insects everywhere you looked. My first impressions were beautiful as I felt the hot air hit my face. In the beginning I felt uncomfortable because I felt that people were staring at me, but my parents told me not to worry because I was surrounded by family and friends.

When I got home to my part of the city, I felt at home. I heard the ethane (the man in the mosque) calling for the people to pray. When I first heard this my heart skipped a beat. m e man's voice really touched me and the things he was saying really made me feel at home. I felt like a proper Muslim, even though I am one.

I felt free and happy all the time. The view from my bedroom window was enough to last me a lifetime. I could see the buildings. They were very different, high with lots of windows and I could see the blue sky and the green sea and the palm trees surrounding the mosque.

The first day we went out to the market and my father bought us some fruit. I was so surprised at the beauty of the fruit that it was enough to fill my eyes. m e people surrounding me were very friendly and I felt equal because I was at home.

Yemen is not a very rich country but I was surprised at how it had built itself up over the previous years. Women in Aden were so free that they could do whatever they wished, but I had to wear a headscarf and an abaya, which is like a long cloak.

One day me and my sister went to a friend's house. Her name was Safa. She took us to the beach and we walked

of human organisations – an inner-city school. It also had the full support and communicative means of one of the nation's foremost Tory newspapers, with a mass readership. And why? The game was given away in the editorial of the page opposite Blunkett's feature article, as the one recognised the other: "What does 'new' Labour think it is – the Tory Party?"

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After Dearing: the review of 16-19 qualifications

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When Dearing's eight volume 700-page *Review* appeared in March, all three major parties, the TUC, the CBI, the Association for Colleges and head teachers associations were very supportive. Initial reaction suggested that Dearing had played a sharp hand with some very poor cards. The terms of reference which launched the *Review* did not allow much scope for thoroughgoing reform. As Nicholas Pyke (1996b) from *The Times Educational Supplement* noted, Dearing was "hemmed in on all sides". Early signs were that Dearing had squared several circles and made numerous silk purses out of sows ears. David Hart of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) gave Sir Ron "high marks" for his attempts to bring off missions impossible. Judith Norrington (FE Now! 1996) of the Association for Colleges (AfC) believed that he had made a "good first step", whilst Ruth Gee (also of the AfC) thought the *Review* "... heralds major change." (1996). Even those who pointed to contradictions, wishful thinking and silences within the *Review* acknowledged that it was well-researched, detailed and meticulous (see Green, 1996). However, in the last few months, Dearing's *Review* has been viewed in a more sober light. From the "... revolutionary system of tertiary education for all children ..." as eulogised by Pyke (1996a), it has increasingly been seen as a transitional document,

bolstering long-standing social class and curricular divisions and ducking hard decisions in order to forge a superficial consensus (Green, 1996). Such a critical note is sounded throughout Green's article which focuses on two issues which have been opened up once more for debate through Dearing's *Review*: the academic/vocational divide; and the role of core skills in the 16-19 curriculum. These issues have particular resonance for those concerned with forging a common curriculum for 16-19 students and clearing away old academic/vocational divisions.

The Academic/Vocational Divide

As Ken Spours (1996) notes, there is a strong 'tracking' element within the *Review*. For Spours, 'trackers' are those who believe that there should be distinct qualification 'tracks' or pathways, so that the needs of students with different abilities and orientations to learning can be accommodated. Dearing has provided a simple three-track scenario: the academic (GCSE/AS/A-level) track; the 'applied' education (GNVQ) trajectory; and the work-based training (NVQ) pathway. This strong tracking element is strengthened by comments about the need to set out guidelines for ensuring that these three tracks remain distinct in terms of purposes and aims (Dearing, 1996a, p.9). More

ominously, Dearing suggests such guidelines should also include principles for determining the allocation of particular subject areas to particular tracks – presumably to curtail such developments as science GNVQ, which appears to be invading territory designated as “academic”. In an interview in the ATL Report in June (O’Connor, 1996), Sir Ron justified his three pathways approach by indicating that children started to view themselves as either interested in the sciences or arts or the ‘practical subjects’ by age 14. Similar justifications had been used in relation to the old tripartite system in secondary schooling. On the other hand, there are two proposals which seem to make gestures towards breaking down the academic/vocational divide: the proposed overarching National Diploma and National Advanced Diploma; and, a cautious nod in the direction of modularisation and unitisation.

The shadowy National Diploma and the less opaque National Advanced Diploma are attempts to encourage students to attain breadth of attainment and to equalise the status of qualifications within the three tracks. The National Diploma has been largely ignored by commentators and analysts. It seems that the National Diploma is an overarching certificate awarded at Intermediate level comprising either: a minimum of 5 GCSEs at grade C+, including Welsh or English, mathematics and IT; or, a full GNVQ at Intermediate level; or, a full NVQ. In the latter two tracks, where students have not achieved GCSEs in English or Welsh, mathematics and IT, then they must attain competence in NCVQ units on communication, application of number and information technology – all at Intermediate level.

Dearing sets discussion of the National Advanced Diploma within the context of various past attempts to reform A-levels (Higginson Committee, 1991 White Paper) and makes a case for broadening the scope of A-levels. Basically, the National Advanced Diploma involves students getting two A-levels, or a full GNVQ or NVQ at Advanced level/Level 3, complementary studies and key skills (application of number, communication and IT). Key skills are to be covered to AS level; either through a new AS Key Skills, or by embedding them within A-level syllabuses, or through equivalent NCVQ units. Complementary studies have some overlapping aspects and also partial differentiation as between the three tracks. For the A-level pathway, the complementary element aims to ensure breadth. Students would need to take in study in four curriculum areas: the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics; the arts and humanities (including English/Welsh); modern languages; and, the way the community works (social sciences). An appropriate package of A-level and reformulated AS levels would have to cover all these fields of study to a minimum of AS level. GNVQ students would have to cover only two of the four fields outlined above – but this would be through GNVQ provision. Finally, those following the NVQ route would need to demonstrate competence in a foreign language and also to offer units equivalent to 6 GNVQ units in vocational areas outside their main NVQ. These could be in another NVQ, or GNVQ or A-level units.

What is interesting about these proposals is that they seek a restricted ‘breadth’ set around the three curriculum tracks. Key skills provide an element of relative commonality, but the purity of the three curriculum pathways is largely maintained. The academic/vocational divide is set in stone; A-level students are not widely encouraged

to cross over into either ‘applied’ or vocational provision and vice versa.

The unitisation/modularisation picture is even less sharply drawn. Dearing sets great store by creating equivalence between the three tracks in terms of developing a common framework where, at each level, qualifications within the three pathways have similar notional hours of study required of them and make comparable (but different) demands on students. He also points to the increasing modularisation and unitisation of A-level. However, Dearing sees crossover between the three trajectories almost totally in terms of transfer – movement from one track to another – and value for money possibilities for teaching GNVQ and A-level students together where there is overlapping content (Dearing, 1996b, p.17). Having already argued for the ‘distinctiveness’ of the three pathways, and with an eye on maintaining the A-level ‘gold standard’, Dearing stops well short of advocating an open menu approach within a unitised and modularised system.

Dearing had been given the contradictory task of reconciling a flexible ‘mix ‘n match’ approach to qualifications with maintaining A-levels. Furthermore, having developed a framework for qualifications where the ‘distinctiveness’ of the academic, applied and vocational was taken as the starting point, the end result yielded less to ‘flexibility’ than to enhancing and deepening the academic/vocational divide. Despite re-naming GNVQ ‘Applied A-levels’, the primary purpose of these qualifications, “... to develop and apply knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to broad areas of employment.” (Dearing, 1996b, p.16) – ensured that they remained within the vocational sphere.

Reactions to the above aspects of the *Review* reflect the confusion engendered by the inherent contradictions within Dearing’s mission and the particular ways he dealt with these tensions and dilemmas. Taubman (1996) and O’Leary (1996) argued that the proposals perpetuated the academic/vocational divide, whilst the National Diplomas were condemned as ‘elitist’ by the Secondary Heads Association (SHA), the NAHT and the AfC (Pyke, 1996c). Andy Green (1996) argued that the Advanced Diploma was irrational from a student perspective; why should students, who could get into university with two A-levels or a GNVQ, actually bother getting the Advanced Diploma? He went on to discuss the extra time and cost involved if students were to meet all the demands of the Advanced Diploma. Others (Crowe, 1996; Dunford, 1996) also pointed to the increased expenditure the Advanced Diploma would necessitate and questioned whether the Government would be willing to foot the bill. David Hart, General Secretary of the NAHT, gave support to the National Advanced Diploma but rejected Dearing’s model of it on two grounds: firstly, that it would not be compulsory; and secondly, that it was over-prescriptive in terms of its elements and students would find it burdensome (Hart, 1996). However, the response which was particularly interesting came from Melanie Phillips of *The Observer* (Phillips, 1996). According to Phillips, the *Review* blurs the academic/vocational divide and devalues A-level. It was her reading of the role of ‘core skills’ in the *Review* that led Phillips to complain that Dearing had compromised and devalued both A-level and education as knowledge acquisition. The next section examines Dearing’s ideas on core skills.

From Core Skills to Key Skills

There has been a long-standing debate around what should be included in the “core” in framing core skills (see Tribe, 1996). Dearing took a short cut through this discussion by advocating provision for three key skills: communication, application of number and IT. He put forward proposals for a new AS in these Key Skills which could be used for his National Diplomas. A number of preliminary observations can be made on Dearing’s key skills.

Firstly, although there is some reference to students (especially A-level students) requiring such skills for higher education, the main justification given for developing key skills is that they will provide the workers of the future with a basis for coping with the periodic unemployment, re-skilling and upskilling required of a ‘flexible’ labour market. In supporting Dearing’s key skills we are implicitly sanctioning an endemic vocationalism.

Secondly, as a recent report – *Towards Employability* – from Industry in Education (1996) demonstrates, British employers place more emphasis upon candidates’ personal qualities, their attitudes to work and learning, their motivation, pleasantness and initiative than any ‘skills’ or qualifications. The only ‘skill’ that the Industry in Education study threw up as significant was ‘communication skills’. Thus, Dearing’s ‘key skills’ only partly supply what employers say they want.

Thirdly, key skills play a different role within the three curricular pathways. For A-levels, Dearing advocated key skills being built into syllabuses without “distorting the integrity of individual subjects” (1996b, p.52). In addition, students could do the new AS level in Key Skills. For GNVQ students, who currently take NCVQ units in the three skills, there must also be some provision for essay-writing and note-taking so that they are more adequately prepared for higher education. Finally, for NVQ students, Dearing stopped short of advocating key skills – noting that the Beaumont Report had previously argued that the issue should be left up to employers – though individuals could take them on their own volition. Dearing indicated that compulsion would be a disincentive for such young people if they had to study elements they did not view as part of their job. What is interesting here, is that Dearing re-draws the academic/vocational divide along A-level&GNVQ/NVQ rather than A-level/GNVQ&NVQ as with his attitude towards modularisation. The academic/vocational divide seems to shift with the topic under consideration.

Those who see in Dearing’s key skills some kind of movement towards a common 16-19 curriculum have to take three considerations on board. That such skills are based on a vocationalist logic. That, even from a vocationalist perspective, even from a view of what employers say they want, they constitute a narrow and impoverished form of vocationalism. And, finally, Dearing is not offering commonality at all regarding key skills as he stops short of advocating that they become compulsory for NVQ students – who probably need them most if NVQ is also to become a significant route into higher education. What is required is a wide-ranging debate on core skills and a common 16-19 experience. Dearing’s *Review* is not even a sound starting point for such a debate.

Conclusion

In deepening the academic/vocational divide and failing to

make core skills common skills for all, Dearing’s *Review* does not provide a sound basis for working towards a comprehensive 16-19 curriculum. The *Review* is ridden with contradictions and inconsistencies – not just on the two issues surveyed here – which partly flow from the various contradictory demands that Dearing had been asked to meet in the terms of reference. Dearing compounded the situation by trying to forge ‘coherence’ where none was possible. The *Review* has blurred the discussion lines. On the one hand, the NAHT and SHA have derided the *Review* as ‘elitist’ (on the National Diploma). On the other hand, Phillips (1996) has criticised the vocationalism of the *Review* and its devaluation of education with its emphasis on ‘skills’ and ‘the flight from knowledge’. The *Review* may also add ammunition to those such as Turner (1996) who wish to retain A-levels on the basis that they are the only curricular space left for critical thinking and abstract knowledge.

The challenge would seem to be to theorise a 16-19 curriculum which: provides a common student experience (whilst allowing for some specialisation); is broadly based and does not succumb to the vocationalism of the last twenty years; takes personal and moral development seriously, and does not subordinate these to the demands of employers; has space for critical thinking – especially about inequalities in society and how they might be combated. At most, Dearing’s *Review* can only form a catalyst for thinking about these issues. It certainly does not have the answers.

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Assessing Design and Technology

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Different Structures for Delivering Design and Technology

The introduction of the National curriculum in the late 1980s brought changes to design and technology (D&T) teaching in England and Wales. Described as a new subject for all students and broader than any of its single predecessors, schools had to devise ways of delivering it. Available to them was expertise in traditional curriculum areas like Craft, Design and Technology (CDT), Home Economics (HE), Art and Design, Business Studies and Science. The advice was that they might use these in some integrated organisation where teachers would collaborate closely to work on some overarching theme with their students. Alternatively, it was suggested that there might be some federal structure which allowed both periods of unrelated specialist work and periods of integrated activity.[1] In practice, many schools retained their earlier specialist structures in which pupils attended lessons in each of the distinct subject areas and did unrelated work. Some did adopt integrated structures but most frequent were compromise, federal organisations (Figure 1).[2]

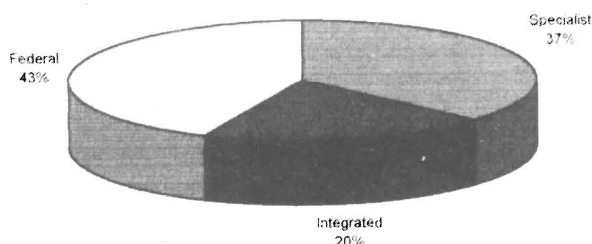


Figure 1. The distribution of organisations for delivering D&T in seventy secondary schools in North-East England (data collected 1994).

An organisation may be chosen because it reflects teachers' conceptions of what constitutes proper D&T. Of course, it may also be imposed but, once in place, it may shape teachers' conceptions of their subject. Organisations can reflect conceptions and also shape and maintain them.[3] Specialist organisations, for instance, allow teachers to preserve earlier subject identities and favour traditional student tasks. Integrated organisations, on the other hand, may support a different conception of D&T which accepts a wider range of student tasks as its domain. Task variation of this kind can legitimately exist in a subject which emphasises process skills rather than specific products. The tasks are the vehicles for acquiring specified process skills.

Assessing Design and Technology

In his report on the National Curriculum, Ron Dearing felt that teacher assessment of the 'non-core' subjects at Key Stage 3 was important for evaluating achievement so he aimed to increase its reliability and hence its status.[4] This may prove quite difficult, at least in D&T. Design and technology is delivered through different organisational structures and each may foster different conceptions of what constitutes the proper domain of D&T. To what extent do teachers in different organisations agree on the merits of students' work? How reliable is their assessment? Can it serve as a national measure of D&T capability?

Testing Teachers in Assessing Design and Technology

In an experiment to test teachers' assessment of D&T, three fourteen-year-old, Year 9 pupils worked on different designing and making tasks.[2] One studied electronic switches and then worked on an application, in this case a table lamp. Another studied simple mechanisms and developed an application in a mechanical display for a shop window. This was a figure which raised its arm using a cam and follower. The third studied the concept of the corporate image and applied it in the design of a logo. These kinds of task are commonly used for students of this age.[5] Their work was photocopied and recorded on videotape and copies given to sixty D&T teachers to assess. The teachers were familiar with gauging levels of attainment in accordance with the requirements of the National Curriculum. We asked them to gauge the attainment levels for aspects of D&T like designing and making. To help them, statements of the National Curriculum's ten levels of attainment were also provided.[6]

Teachers are not machines so we expected a degree of variation in the levels of attainment awarded. Nevertheless, we found the spread of levels to be surprising. In designing, for instance, they ranged from 3 to 7 for the lamp and 4 to 7 for the mechanical display and logo on the usual ten point scale. In making, the range was from 4 to 8 for the lamp, 5 to 8 for the mechanical display, and 3 to 6 for the logo. Differences between the levels awarded for each of these tasks is to be expected; they offered different kinds of opportunities and were attempted by students with different capabilities. But, someone working on one task could be credited with level 3 by one teacher and level 7 by another. This suggests that some scaling of attainment levels is needed to moderate such difference. Is this enough?

One obvious reason why teachers award different levels of attainment is that level descriptors are open to interpretation so teachers have to judge how well a descriptor matches a student's work. At times, this can be a matter

of opinion and some teachers are probably more generous than others. But, another reason may be that teachers in different organisations have different views of what the proper domain of D&T is and this influenced their assessments. The sample of teachers allowed this possibility to be tested.

Twenty of these teachers taught in schools where D&T was delivered through traditional, specialist organisation. Twenty of the teachers taught in a more integrated way, offering broad contexts which could span several areas of expertise. The remaining twenty delivered D&T through federal organisations which included some work in specialist areas and also opportunities for more integrated contexts. Each group were largely an equal mix of CDT and HE teachers.

A Significant Difference

We found that the groups of teachers placed the three pieces of work in a different order of merit. The specialist group tended to give much higher levels to the lamp and mechanical display than to the logo tasks. If that is a true reflection of their relative worth then we might expect the integrated group to rank them similarly. However, they tended to give higher levels to the logo task than to the mechanical display and the lamp. The federal group's responses tended to fall between the others, as might be expected from its compromise mode of delivery (Figure 2). Who was right?

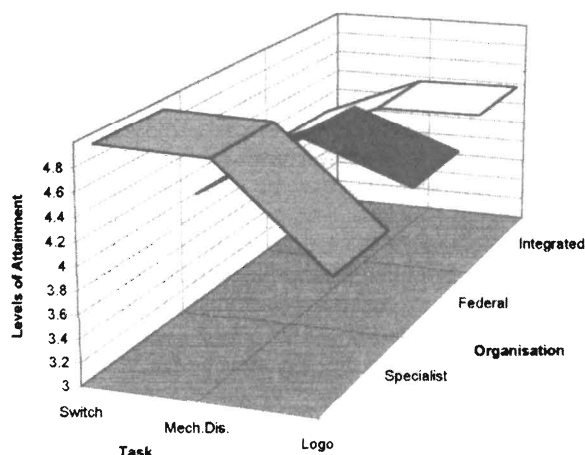


Figure 2. The average overall levels of attainment awarded by the three groups of teachers. Higher 'wings' show more generous levels tended to be awarded by that group. The change in the tilt of the wings shows a change in the ordering of the tasks in the assessment. The differences between the three groups of teachers were statistically significant.

It depends on your view of what constitutes worthy D&T. From what has been said about a relationship between organisation and conceptions of a subject, this seems a likely outcome. Those from specialist organisations may prefer more traditional tasks and unconsciously favour them in assessment. Those in integrated organisations may have

a different conception of what is proper and tend to favour tasks which lie outside traditional bounds. With a foot in both camps, those in federal organisations were generally intermediate in their assessments.

Some Implications

A simple, linear scaling of the levels of attainment to bring different schools' averages into line may not achieve comparability. This would leave order reversals unchanged. Some equally capable students in different schools would still receive very unequal grades. Dearing assumed schools would form groups to moderate their assessments. If such groups are of schools with a similar organisation for delivering D&T then a problem of this kind is unlikely to be noticed. Only if mixed groups are formed is there any chance that it will become apparent. But, in that event, what are they to do? Which order of merit is correct?

The activity is a vehicle which gives students the opportunity to demonstrate D&T capability. The nature of this vehicle can influence teachers' assessment of that capability. Simple moderation procedures may fail to correct for this and it is questionable if there could be – or should be – a sufficient national consensus of what constitutes proper and worthy D&T amongst teachers to be able to say that the risk of bias is negligible. Teachers might be made aware of the potential problem and guard against bias in their own assessment and in moderating other teachers' assessment of D&T capability but could this ever be enough?

Teachers should assess their students' work. This is what lets them see if their teaching is effective and if the student is making progress and what might come next. The National Curriculum statements and levels of attainment might be a useful framework for that. However, great caution is needed when faced with a belief in their potential as a reliable measure of D&T capability.

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Local Learning Partnerships: the Birmingham experience

Bob Turner

A research associate at the University of Birmingham, Bob Turner carried out this special investigation for *FORUM*.

For many practitioners at the sharp end of the educational process, market forces have created an unwelcome competitive edge between schools. League tables, the National Curriculum, funding issues and of course the 'dreaded' inspection, have all played their part in creating an institutional culture of 'schools in competition', as have the ideals behind consumer choice, performance indicators and 'value for money'. In the light of this, I was particularly delighted to have discovered a group of schools in Birmingham City Centre who were joining forces to create an environment which would raise the academic profile in a small geographical area of immense deprivation. It is well-documented that areas on the immediate edge of many city centres are regions of deprivation with transient populations. The Ladywood and Lee Bank area of Birmingham is no exception with unemployment running at over 40%, a large percentage of single parent families, a wide cultural mix and poor housing with high rise living.

The Headteachers of the schools in the area, together with the City Council, have formed the Ladywood Consortium after recognising that what was needed was a five-year plan of regeneration through 'A Local Learning Partnership'. The aims of the consortium are: 1. To improve the educational image – through celebrating good practice, both individually and as a group of schools; 2. To share ideas – for school improvement and effectiveness by developing inter-school support, and; 3. To build partnerships – with parents, families and neighbouring companies, colleges and institutions. The vital element in achieving this is a 'spirit of co-operation' by developing a close working relationship with each other and by generating high expectation and morale.

The Consortium consists of some 22 schools, which Martin Straker-Welds – the Schools Advisor for the area – sees as "...a family of schools, which should be a natural way for people to work". These schools are divided by geographical location into 3 cluster groups and it is one of these clusters – Lee Bank – I will be looking at in more detail later. Martin Straker-Welds told me – and this was echoed by the four Head Teachers I spoke to – that in addition to the regional and community deprivation, the biggest single difficulty was a 30% per year mobile population. Martin went on to say that:

... the consortium had to take a wider liberal view and address the issue of the role of the schools in the community as a whole ... This would mean not working as individual educational islands ... To achieve this, the schools were willing to make themselves the focus of a regeneration programme by "rising above" the deprivation and by working with the concept of "people

generating their own futures" ... By doing this, they would help to change the image of the locality, change the climate of learning, and raise the standards of achievement, all of which could/should slow down the outward movement of the population and establish a stable culture.

The Consortium meet every half term with cluster group meetings the week before. However, as Maggie Scott – Head of St Luke's CE J&I – told me "... that is only the formal meetings; this week alone I have been on the phone to four other heads in the Cluster to discuss matters which affect us all and share ideas on individual issues."

Through developing this strong network of communication, the Consortium intend to strengthen forward planning and to ensure accountability for the use of funds contributed by schools throughout the Consortium. The main areas for investment are:

- Whole-school INSET involving all teachers in the Ladywood Consortium.
- Developing a consortium-based Children and Family Service to provide support for children with Special Educational Needs as well as their teachers.
- Improve channels of communication between schools, their governing bodies and Education Services, other consortia and the Primary and Secondary forums.
- Exploring opportunities for exploiting Lottery and European funding.
- Strengthening relationships to support initiatives for training and economic development.
- Celebrating children's learning and achievement through local and city-wide festivals, open weeks and thematic initiatives.
- Launching a Governors Forum, with the intention of promoting training and exchange of ideas on local and national issues.
- Promoting cross-phase partnerships from the earliest years to secure accelerated learning and a shared sense of progression.

No-one I spoke to was under any illusion that this would happen quickly, but unless someone somewhere makes a start, the past will continue into the future, a situation with which all in the Consortium would not be happy.

I'm sure by now, as I was, you are saying to yourself, this all sounds very idealistic! How is it all going to work? What is the way forward with such a challenge? To get the answers, I spoke to four Head Teachers to find out how it worked for them, what their school contributed and what they got back.

Speaking about the Consortium, Head Teacher Brian Hickey – Cardinal Newman RC Secondary School – told me that for him: “... the open lines of communication were enabling schools to have an openness about their problems and difficulties, with schools learning from each other”. One example of something Brian has shared and is now not ashamed of, is that of attendance of pupils. He told me:

When I took over 4 years ago, this school was being considered for closure. You name the problem and we had it here. One of the biggest issues was attendance. Now we have the attendance records of all the pupils on the wall in a public place within the school and things have improved. If a pupil attains a 95% attendance record over a four week period, they are rewarded with a half day off school and if they maintain this throughout the year they are given a free day out with some of the teachers.

He went on to say that,

Because of our willingness to share information, primary schools are now passing on information they are no longer ashamed of, and this is particularly valuable to us in the secondary sector in an area like this. Primary schools seem to have greater success at liaising with Parents. Many Parents have had a bad educational experience themselves, and communication with parents is difficult at secondary level because they feel an even greater academic threat. We have a lot to learn from our primary schools ... In addition, we have 41 feeder schools and the consortium has not only already provided a vehicle for talk between teachers, but I have also been able to allow my teachers to work for a period in another school ... Teachers are not social workers or probation officers, but they have to be willing to work with a variety of agencies – they are no longer lone teachers teaching behind closed doors. In the short term, we are sharing resources, we are setting modest targets and we are building for the future which will create the long term goal of learning for work and learning for life. In this area, because of its proximity to the city, we have to develop access and skills in IT. For me, the biggest support is that we are supporting each other’.

The Lee Bank Cluster is somewhat unique within the Consortium, and the problems and difficulties are worsened by its geographical location – it is an Island surrounded by three major roads. It presents, as Maggie Scott told me: “... far more severe difficulties than other areas in the consortium”. She went on to say:

In my school the percentage of pupils on the Child Protection Register is 1 in 18 (compared to 1 in 4000 nationally), 50% of my pupils have Special Educational Needs (compared to 2% nationally), I have a 37% mobility per year, unemployment in Lee Bank, is 80% of the population, the highest in the City, and it is an area of drug abuse and prostitution.

Another Head Teacher Robin Brabban – St Thomas CE Community High School – added to this, as a measure of the deprivation, the statistic that in his School 67% of pupils got free school meals. For these reasons, the Lee Bank Cluster – which is made up of 2 Nursery Schools, 4 Primary Schools, 1 Secondary School and 1 Further Education College – has to work even harder to change the educational agenda.

All the Heads I spoke to within the Cluster stressed the importance of communication. For Robin Brabban in the

Secondary School, this has meant more background information of children coming to his School, which makes pastoral care easier as they have a greater awareness of the history of the child.

Within a mobile population like ours, ‘tracking’ a child is very important. We are able to offer a more settled approach for children, and this goes some way to compensating for poor backgrounds by providing opportunities which middle class children take for granted.

Equally for the Head of St. Catherine’s RC J&I School – Barry Desmond:

... the cluster has developed a common understanding amongst the schools, which is creating schools which give children choice and standards which offer choice.

He goes on to remind me that:

It is not that we have children who can’t achieve.

Sharing has become second nature to all the Heads and Teachers in the Cluster. Maggie Scott told me that:

Not only do we share key staff who are perhaps particularly skilled in a certain area of teaching, but we share facilities. One of the schools has a brand new computer suite which I have time-tabled for use on a weekly basis, so I can take a group of pupils there for teaching sessions ... Another school has a swimming pool which we use; we always invite the other schools to any INSET days and our SENCO’s have good links in the group. Do you know, we have even shared paper if one school has run out of budget ... However, the biggest benefit is moral support, I know I can talk things over with other Heads, I know they are there for me’.

It is not uncommon within schools to adopt an annual or termly theme. One thing that has already happened in the Lee Bank Cluster has been cross-school themes. Last academic year 95/96, schools worked with the Birmingham Royal Ballet. Barry Desmond told me that:

Schools were able to work with the Ballet Company in an individual way, as well as pupils from different schools working together. Together we wrote and performed the music, and a dance was designed, we shared Hall facilities and eventually performed the work. It was all very successful.

Already, schools in the Lee Bank Cluster have been making enough noise to get their difficulties listened too. Back in early July they held a very successful Learning Futures Conference, the purpose of which was to bring together interested groups whose work has an impact on the area and to identify the challenges, create partnerships and seek a common agenda to meet the challenges. The Conference was endorsed by the presence of Professor Tim Brighouse – Chief Education Officer, of the City of Birmingham, Councillor Marion Arnott-Job – The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Dr Carl Chinn – Community Historian at The University of Birmingham and representatives from the city’s Economic Development Department, who all addressed the gathered audience. Along with colleagues from the School of Education, I attended and first heard of the Lee Bank Cluster. Through this Conference the practitioners working in the area have certainly put themselves on the map.

With immense enthusiasm Maggie Scott told me:

We thought we were doing well before the Conference, but now things have really taken off and we are moving forward; already there is a change in attitude. We have been chosen for a family support scheme, there is a

pilot to look at the health and education of the community, Tim Brighouse is going to instigate something which will look at 'cross phase tracking of pupils' and Carl Chinn is going to start an archive of Lee Bank involving the pupils in their own local history ... This is all in addition to our ongoing plans. We had already planned for the summer of '97 to hold a 'Festival of Learning' – an opportunity to celebrate our achievements – and we will certainly be having another Learning Futures Conference'.

All the Head Teachers I spoke to realise that this is only the beginning and that change will be slow, but I got a real sense of excitement and determination from the Heads, which is certainly something that is very important if this is going to work and the Cluster is going to address and change the difficulties in the community. I feel Barry Desmond summed it up for me when he said:

We are all very busy people ... We are all different people from different schools, with different ideas, but there are many ways up a mountain and I'm sure we are all climbing it in different ways, but I'm also sure that if

we keep talking on the way up we will all get there together.

That mountain is high and there is a long road ahead but this group of schools is clearly not willing to sit around at the bottom just looking up; the schools are climbing and will take with them the pupils and the community.

Robin Brabban suggested that the effect of open enrolment has meant a mass exodus from schools like his, which is something he is working on changing. Membership of this new 'family' of schools will help by offering pupils and the community as a whole, high quality education, which is available to the whole population. It is clear then, that the area is on the move and I for one, look forward to coming back (for *FORUM*) in perhaps three or four years' time, when I'm sure I will be visiting a very different Ladywood Consortium.

I would like to thank the four Head Teachers I interviewed, Maggie Scott, Barry Desmond, Brian Hickey and Robin Brabban, Schools Advisor, Martin Straker-Welds and Chris MacGregor from Birmingham City Council for their valuable time and comments on this finished article.

Bridging the Gap: physics and the primary scientist

Mike Watts & Arnaldo Vaz

Dr Mike Watts is Reader in Education at Roehampton Institute, London, and Dr Arnaldo Vaz is Lecturer in Science Education at University of Campinas, Brasil. This article is based on a presentation, on the conjunction of Paulo Freire's and George Kelly's work, made to the European Conference of Personal Construct Psychology at the University of Reading.

Since before the 1960s there has been strong pressure to haul science down from the rarefied atmosphere of university courses and A-level studies into primary classrooms and below. While in the past there has always been some science (or more likely 'nature studies') in primary schools, it has increasingly become a substantive and statutory core of the mainstream school curriculum. With the publication of 'desirable learning outcomes' by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (1995) this 'down-drift' has now reached nursery and pre-school classes. Science is to be a required component of under-fives' provision – three-to-five year olds, too, it seems are to be introduced to aspects of biology, chemistry and physics.

Such an emphatic trend raises many questions, for example: Why should this downward pressure be the case? and Is science necessarily a good thing? The general answer (for example in Driver et al, 1996) is that science is not only good, but is a vital means of enabling people – adults and children – to act successfully both within and upon the world. To limit access to science is to render them helpless within an increasingly scientific and technological lifestyle, to disenfranchise them from full democratic decision-making, to hamper their participation in debates on science's ethical and moral developments, to hinder students' broad career and employment prospects, and to

disadvantage all people in the face of a powerful and pervasive intellectual force within our culture. During the early 1980s, the movement in many parts of the world has been towards 'science for all', a movement which paved the way in the UK for compulsory science in the 5-16 curriculum. Since then there has been increasing pressure for science to be spread into the general public, for greater 'public understanding of science', for general 'scientific literacy' – and even for a fully articulated specified science curriculum for the general public.

In our research we have been interested in two particular groups: the world of the physical scientist and that of the primary school teacher – worlds apart and yet yoked together by the demands of the National Curriculum. The primary teacher is required to teach aspects of physics within the classroom; the physicist, in the shape of the physics educator, is required to teach the teacher. At first sight it is tempting to see it as a simple 'cascade' model – the primary teacher learns good clear physics at the feet of the physicist in order that children, in turn, learn good clear physics in the classroom. This is not, however, a model which bears much scrutiny – it fails to take into account that 'science', 'teaching', 'learning' and 'primary classrooms' are all both personal and cultural notions which are invested with a wealth of meanings. For example, we see the physicist

(and that specific brand who become teachers and teachers educators) to have a particular perspective on teaching and learning (Vaz & Watts, 1996).

It is a perspective which differs quite markedly from that of primary classroom teachers, so much so such that there is a gap of mutual incomprehension between the two. On the one side, the physicist is an experienced and qualified advocate of physics who has a particular world view driven by particular language systems, beliefs and value systems within physics. On the other, the primary specialist has expertise and professional practice of the teaching and learning of young children, with very separate and distinctive frameworks and perspectives.

These differences relate to 'membership' of distinct cultural groups, well illustrated by Snow's *The Two Cultures*:

The intellectual [and practical] life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups. At one pole we have the literary intellectuals, at the other scientists, and as the most representative, the physical scientists. Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension – sometimes hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding. They have a curious distorted image of each other. Their attitudes are so different that, even on the level of emotion, they can't find much common ground (Snow, 1959, p. 3-4).

We have here, then, a 'clash of cultures'. This gap has appeared because, within this pressure for 'science for all', it is quite clear that not 'all' are 'for' science. Many have developed, from their own school days, a huge and strong distaste for and rejection of the substance and ethos of science. Many reasons have been offered for learners' disillusionment with this, for instance: the fragmentary nature of topics, or 'bittiness'; the patchwork nature of the science curriculum – its 'invisible structure'; a lack of obvious purpose and the 'pointlessness' of many activities; the contrived and falsified form of typical classroom experiments; the illogical and counter-intuitive nature of common scientific assertions and statements; the restrictive and stern emphasis on safety and attention to detail; the reputation of science as a highbrow and 'difficult' subject, and its perception as dry, remote and impersonal. No doubt there are many other, broader, factors at play and curriculum designers and classroom practitioners in science might mount a spirited defence that such criticisms are without foundation. It remains, though, that those who take up science as a career are quite distinctive in their interests and perspectives. It is, as one teacher illustrates below, worlds apart from that of the usual primary specialist:

L: I wasn't taught science at school very well. I was 'turned off' science and I couldn't do an O-Level or anything. It was presented to me as a thoroughly boring subject, which I now know it's not ... I'm now fascinated by lots of aspects. Nor do I want to turn children off. I would rather give them the experience of finding things out, at this level, and just open up their horizons: "Ooh, I wonder what happened there?" "I wonder why ..." When I was a child I was always asking such things as "I wonder how a camera works?" but ... we didn't do that in school! It was all rotten old Bunsen burners and boiling up a few chemicals, or something that the teacher did at the front – when you're at the back of the class and you don't know what the heck's going on! I don't want that to happen to the children in my class. I'd rather have them having hands-on experience and know

that they're capable of finding things out for themselves. It's a balance, isn't it? Between imparting knowledge and giving them the idea that they can find those things out for themselves.

Along with the 'down-drift' of science has also come a 'hardening of methods' in primary education – a shift away from 'soft', child-centred, integrated-topic approaches of the 'Plowden Era' towards 'tougher', more whole-class, subject-specific strategies prompted by the National Curriculum. The use of topic work, projects, activities, play areas, reading corners etc are all still part of the traditions of the nursery and primary classroom in the UK. However, while many teachers like 'L' above maintain a consistently integrated approach to their work, this is now a curriculum disposition which is constantly being eased out, eroded and dismissed. This policy of eradication serves only to foster critique.

The aim of physics education is that physicists develop the ability to live easily within the current scientific consensus; they must think 'physically'. They must internalise the shape of their subject and be at one with the 'normal science' of the day. While physicists usually engage in healthy critical scrutiny and skepticism there is, too, a deep immersion in their subject. There exists a good deal of faith in the capacity of physics (and physicists) to display a unity of principle and purpose. In this sense, physicists are united by a series of beliefs. They fully believe that the physical principles they know and use on a daily basis have been the subject of intense research and have stood the test of many efforts at refutation. Broadly speaking, while there are some periods of scepticism and resistance to ideas, they are largely taken on trust and internalised by every physicist for whom they seem relevant.

The substance of our research has been in the generation of a number of 'themes for discussion' which are designed to bridge this kind of cultural gap. We see our themes as 'lenses' which focus on the very heart of the divide and which form the basis for meaningful dialogue between participants on both sides. The themes are developed from conversations between physics educators and primary teachers within the design of teacher professional development courses. Research like this lies within the broad field of 'teacher thinking research' and we have collaborated with teachers to co-generate themes from within their experiences, and to create a series of 'problem conversations' between themselves as 'primary specialist' and the 'science specialists'. These encounters have attempted to 'problematise' the links which teachers establish between their implicit teaching theories and principles, on the one hand, and their own professional acts and decisions on the other.

Over a year or so we asked teachers to talk about episodes where they felt particularly moved by the problems and challenges posed by their work in class and the requirements of the National Curriculum. The emotions involved are important in providing 'trigger incidents' as a means of setting out the structure of the problems, and the constraints under which the problem occurs. By focusing on moments of particular emotive significance within classroom work, we can explore teachers' attitudes and feelings. In this way, the conversations bring to the surface the implicit assumptions, beliefs, values etc. which underlie their observable decisions, attitudes, procedures.

Our research draws together the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and philosopher, and George Kelly,

the American psychologist and theorist. Others have used this same combination before us, taking Freire's work as a frame of reference to examine with teachers aspects of their pedagogic knowledge, and using a Kellyan approach to describe and analyse their reflections. In our research we have used Kelly's Personal Constructs Theory to explore Freire's epistemology: what we describe as a 'limit situation' in Freire's terms is that very moment when a person is challenged to reconstruct his or her conceptual system because they are failing to properly anticipate events and deal successfully with their world. In the context of this study, the problems facing primary teachers are the legal requirement to teach aspects of science, particularly physics, in the face of both their own 'sub-literacy' in the subject, the counter-cultural perceptions of science within their own practice and reductionist models of classroom teaching strategies.

In discussion our sample of primary teachers has described various teaching activities concerning, for example, the physics of forces ('pushes and pulls'), gravity and free-fall, the reflection of light and electric circuits. From these descriptions we have generated themes, one for instance which can be seen in 'L's' exert above. We call this theme 'Hands-off teaching for hands-on learning'. Broadly, it is a theme which relates to teachers' dilemma of encouraging pupils to find out about science for themselves while at the same time trying to desist from telling the children what to do and what to know. It is, in part, a debate as to how children learn best. It became apparent during such conversations that learning is seen to be most fulfilling when primary teachers remove themselves from direct subject teaching, from 'full-blown transmission', when they 'Hold back the teacher' and push children into building their own knowledge, for 'Hands-on learning'. A second teacher gives flavour to this:

J: I think it's better if the activity comes from them because they feel they achieve it on their own. When it comes from them, they can see the value because they own that work. They have a sense of ownership. If it comes from me, I own it. They still can gain a degree of success, but I don't think it's the same. The challenge is for me to hold back. There is obviously frustration when they go off on a very different tangent and I want to get them back over here. Then again I might step in, and say too much perhaps.

The implicit belief here is that learning comes from doing, that the value of the activities to the learners come from ownership of the process of learning. Primary teachers in this study argue strongly against any direct transmission of knowledge, recipe of activities or mechanical reinforcement. Indeed, they associate it with 'being a

teacher', a role they avoid in favour of being an enabler, a facilitator or a manager of learning.

Overall, such comments as these highlight major deficiencies in the forms of communication which allow both parties to share values, principles, attitudes, practices. These two groups – the specialist primary practitioner and the specialist physics educator – have different backgrounds, interests, relations with their audiences and with the subject matter: they belong to different 'cultures'. That these are considerably different to each other and – to the extent that they are in opposition – means that our research is, first, one of exploring a clash of such cultures.

Second, it is concerned with bridging the gap. This aspect of our research is still evolving. It has, however, influenced the design of a two-week in-service course, congruent with reflective teacher education research. The course opened with energetic discussion and debate on a broad range of pedagogic principles, forms of thinking, the nature of scientific knowledge and the 'broad church' of educational writings. Sessions were taken up with epistemological and pedagogic issues, particularly as these concerned the teaching and learning of school science. Some sessions encompassed a range of approaches to educational research – with action research and case-study work in particular. During seminar and tutorial time the participants were required to shape themes which were then developed much more thoroughly in further sessions. They also designed individual action research projects to be tackled in the following weeks. The implementation of these projects took three or four months and at the end of this period the participants were asked to report their work and progress at a collective feedback seminar.

We see this type of teacher professional development as the early precursor to a more ambitious and challenging approach where both sides of this culture gap can take equal places around the conference table: where the generative themes more thoroughly form the dialogic bridges which span the cultural divide.

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CAN YOU HELP?

In future issues of *FORUM* we would like to carry details of local initiatives designed to defend or promote comprehensive systems of schooling. Do please let us know (via our address on the inside front cover) about any local campaigns with which you are currently involved.

Nanette Whitbread

With the current number of *FORUM*, Nanette Whitbread steps down as a co-editor of this journal and leaves the Editorial Board to become an Honorary Editorial Board member. We print below a celebration of her thirty years on the Board by her former co-editor **Brian Simon**.

Nanette Whitbread has been one of the longest serving editors of *FORUM* over its nearly 40 years of successful existence. Based at the Scraptoft College of Education at Leicester from the early 1960s she contributed articles and reviews to early numbers and worked closely with me on local affairs. Francis Cammaerts, Principal of her College, and a close friend, was then a member of the Editorial Board. Nanette joined the Board in 1966, being then immediately appointed Assistant Editor.

She remained Assistant Editor (together for three years with David Grugeon) until, in 1972, she joined me as joint editor of the journal. We remained joint editors until early 1989, when I retired (after 31 years as Editor) to be replaced by Clyde Chitty. Nanette now continued as joint editor (with Clyde and later Liz Thomson) until 1996. Her involvement as assistant and then joint editor of *FORUM* extends from what might be called the heroic days in the mid-late 1960s through the defensive battles of the 1980s and early 1990s, to today – a total of precisely 30 years.

Throughout most of this period Nanette has taken full responsibility for (roughly) alternate numbers of the journal, commissioning authors, jointly planning future numbers,

attending Board meetings and seeing each number for which she was responsible effectively through the press – also writing editorials for the numbers she was editing, always with clarity, punch, and close attention to the key issues of the time. All this has entailed an immense amount of continuous work undertaken when Nanette had many other responsibilities. True to the journal's original brief, she has retained her faith in comprehensive education and its potentialities, bringing a sharp analytic mind to bear on the elucidation of its problems through thirty stormy years.

FORUM readers and its Editorial Board owe an immense debt of gratitude to Nanette for all she has done for the journal over the years, and wish her a fruitful retirement from the immediate responsibilities of producing yet one more number of *FORUM*.

For myself, I can only say that I could have wished for no more devoted colleague than Nanette. She was efficient, crisp and clear in all she did – ensuring the years of collaboration were a pleasure, as well as being highly productive.

Edward Blishen (1920-1996)

Edward Blishen was a mainstay of *FORUM* in its early crusading days. His *Roaring Boys*, published in 1955, was an extraordinary evocation of teaching and learning in a typical inner-city secondary modern school – informed throughout not only by Edward's very idiosyncratic wit and humour but also with a profound humanism entirely lacking in pomposity.

On its publication I immediately invited Edward to lecture to our PGCE students at Leicester. He arrived with a lengthy MS meticulously written in his characteristic handwriting but also evidently nervous. He had never lectured before. Taking him into the hall I introduced him briefly. Edward stood up, put his papers on the table, and started talking without so much as a glance at them. The hour passed with unbelievable rapidity as Edward poured out his experiences with unimaginable gusto.

Edward joined the Editorial Board as one of its original members, while still teaching in London. He remained a

member for fifteen years, consistently attending our always serious, but sometimes uproarious, tri-annual meetings. He also contributed many articles and reviews. He returned in 1987 at our special request to contribute a full report of our all day 'Demonstrative Conference' critical of the 'Great Education Reform Bill', later the 1988 Act. All his life he remained true to his early ideals.

Edward was a close friend and colleague who never lost his vitality and thrust. His writings on education, especially *Roaring Boys*, its sequel *This Right Soft Lot* (1969) and *A Nest of Teachers* (1980) will surely remain crucial documents for a true understanding of the state of the schools at that period. We are proud to have had him as a colleague and send our warmest sympathy and love to his wife Nancy, who supported him so effectively in all his many initiatives.

Brian Simon

Book Reviews

A Community Approach to Bullying

PETER RANDALL, 1996

Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books. 120pp, £14.95
paperback, ISBN 1-85856-060-8

Bullying has been a big issue for the last ten years. Research projects have investigated the causes of bullying behaviour, the variety of its manifestations and its effects on the victims. Conferences have been held and many books have been published on the subject. The focus of much of this work has been the school. This is hardly surprising, since most people associate bullying with children and, therefore, with schools. A number of well-publicised cases of extreme bullying – some even ending in the death of the victim – have supported the view that the school is the natural centre of bullying activities.

Experts in the field have long acknowledged, however, that, whilst manifestations of bullying among the young inevitably often occur at school – after all, it is in school that young people come into close proximity with one another – the causes of bullying and the examples of bullying behaviour from which young people learn are often outside the school. And bullying is not the prerogative of the young – adults bully and are bullied, too.

Peter Randall's book therefore takes a wider look at bullying and suggests ways in which communities can tackle it. In his Preface he states "There is a dangerous myth circulating amongst confident adults that bullying is a kids' game played in school and if ever adults do complain of being bullied or victimised or harassed, then they are just weak people who can't take pressure." The first chapter of his book 'Schools are not to blame' explores this in more detail, discussing what bullying is, the characteristics of bullies and victims and the consequences of bullying. The second chapter investigates the development of early aggression. This is a useful chapter, dealing with how children learn aggressive behaviour and how they learn to cope with it from birth onwards. A particularly interesting section looks at the beliefs held by parents of aggressive children and their attitudes to school and education. The chapter also discusses inappropriate and inadequate parenting, an important cause of much aggressive behaviour in children.

The remainder of the book is a detailed description of the sort of project which could be set up in and by local communities and is based on projects with which Peter Randall himself has been involved. Some of the work relates directly to schools, some of it concerns the wider community. There is an enormous amount of material here, much of it very helpful. Some of it is rather technical: there is much talk of Steering Committees, Implementation Groups and Monitoring and Evaluation Groups. But there is also helpful advice on conducting bully audits in the school and the community, using the local media and setting up counselling and telecounselling services.

One of the most useful aspects of the book is the reference section. Peter Randall includes a list of helpful resources, a sample anti-bullying policy, guidelines for writing a pamphlet for parents, a checklist for a whole school approach to bullying, the implications of bullying for the curriculum, some strategies which school staff could initiate and finally

a very exhaustive list of useful books. Glancing through the book again, I am amazed at the amount of valuable material which Peter Randall has managed to include, from theories of the causes of bullying behaviour to the practicalities of organising a community project. £14.95 may seem fairly expensive for a paperback but you certainly get your money's-worth.

I feel I must say, however, that you also get a large number of errors in the text. I counted sixty-one, including typing and/or spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. The most annoying are where a word has been omitted, necessitating the re-reading of the sentence to try to ascertain its meaning (for example, "it is also difficult to how to conceptualise the people these professionals are empowering", p. 106), or where the wrong word has been used – 'in' instead of 'is', for example. Practice and practise are confused. I do hope that these errors are corrected in any future editions of the book – they are extremely irritating and distract the reader from what is, otherwise, an excellent book.

DEREK GILLARD

Marston Middle School, Oxford

Inspecting Schools: holding schools to account and helping schools to improve

BRIAN WILCOX & JOHN GRAY, 1996

Buckingham: Open University Press

In this excellent book, Brian Wilcox and John Gray reveal much about the tensions and anxieties of the current state of school education. They set out to research the impact of inspection *per se* but were overtaken by the 1992 Education Act which established Ofsted. At the heart of their work is an evaluation of the principle that inspection is a means of bringing about improvement in schools but inherent in this is a debate about the seemingly irreconcilable interests of those seeking to impose a structure of accountability on schools and those who wish to 'empower' teachers to improve what they do.

The authors provide enlightening insight and first-hand accounts of the effects of inspection and reflect the opinion, commonly held amongst teachers, that the Ofsted system is an expensive blunt instrument – flawed in its epistemology, overstretched in its scale, confused in its focus on *quality control* as opposed to *quality assurance*. Most of all, the Ofsted system often appears to release nervous energy – sometimes a good thing at a time of change – but also both enervating and downright stressful.

In the wealth of detail in the book, Wilcox & Gray muse on many notions concerning inspection: the use of 'insider inspectors' (i.e. members of staff as part of the team); how the Ofsted Framework has meant an improvement in the focus of LEA inspectors; and how observation is, or at least should be, the real value of an inspection. But they also confront the crucial issue:

The crunch question, of course, is whether inspection really does bring about improvement. Regrettably this is a question which is easier to pose than to answer ... Ofsted's assertion that it does represents a departure from the previous practice of HMI ... HMI Frost ... [who believed it did] ... stated:

...I am confident that inspection is encouraging schools to focus on their core functions in a systematic way and

that through action and development planning schools are gradually improving.

We are inclined to share Frost's optimistic assessment ... (pp. 8-9).

Despite their optimism, the authors recognise the limitations of inspection – the fact that inspection does not appear as a central part of *school improvement*, and that teachers are generally discomfited by the Ofsted approach and largely sceptical about the claim that inspection works in bringing about improvement. They also accept that, in some quarters, inspections carried out by LEAs have appeared too teacher sensitive, possibly anodyne. They go on to consider changes to the Ofsted structure which are in the offing. Of these changes, they welcome the slimming down of the Handbook which should make the process more manageable for both inspectors and teachers and they welcome the more explicit recognition of the context of a school and the context of change and improvement within that school. This, they believed, was a significant flaw before:

In our view there has been a missing section in inspection manuals over the years. At the same time as asking questions about what a school needs to do in order to improve inspectors should have been asking equally searching questions about what a school has already done (p. 138).

This is a view with which the Chief HMI, Chris Woodhead, would have much sympathy. However, for teachers in schools, the aims of the Ofsted process have become inextricably inter-woven with the approach adopted, or apparently adopted, by Woodhead. He has been seen, within schools, to have politicised both Ofsted and the generally still lauded HMI. He is seen as a figure of the accountability agenda, one that has championed an aggressive, power-coercive march on the teaching profession, an agent of a directive state. Woodhead, it is feared, will make inspections have more 'bite' :

Of course judgements are involved in an inspection. How could it be otherwise? But to associate judgement with punishment is to confuse the need to identify the failing school and incompetent teacher with the wish to make that school or teacher suffer for their failures (Woodhead, in an article in The Times Educational Supplement entitled 'How to Judge the Pick of the Crop', 4 October 1996).

Wilcox & Gray provide ample evidence that this 'confusion' is indeed alive and well in the minds of teachers in schools. Although they do not set out to support or justify the feelings of fear and exasperation amongst many teachers concerning Ofsted inspections, Wilcox & Gray have put together a comprehensive and illuminating picture which identifies the pros and cons of inspection and the benefits and drawbacks – actual, perceived and potential.

The lingering doubts about the efficacy of inspections as vehicles for improvement are well rehearsed in the book. The fact that there exists a well established literature regarding school effectiveness and school improvement provides a context in which inspection needs to be judged – many schools, their teachers, heads, senior managers and governors, are determined to bring about improvement in what they do. Improvement strategies stress the importance of 'ownership' of change if they are to be successful and the authors quote research on this key problem with an inspection system along the Ofsted lines:

As the OECD researchers put it in their report:

... simply making schools 'accountable' is unlikely on its own to lead to improvements in performance ... Care should be taken to build on the expertise and professionalism of teachers and to provide well-focused programmes of staff development which enable them to change, learn to work in teams and to exercise new forms of autonomy fruitfully.

The key to effective improvement is seen as development planning and the authors show some scepticism about the claim that inspections generate useful, dynamic plans:

Many schools have considerable difficulty in constructing plans which combine both the practicalities of organising change efforts with the visions necessary to galvanise fresh energies. And even when they have constructed what looks, on paper, like a 'good plan', few plans have the power to withstand the battering daily exposure to school life can bring... Ofsted's own study of schools' action plans has demonstrated something rather similar. Hardly any schools had developed lines of thinking through to the bitter end of the improvement process. (p. 137)

This is a book which takes the debate further and is a significant addition to the literature of the field. As they say at the last:

... there is a paradox at the centre of the reform process. Inspection has undoubtedly changed more in the last five years than for most of its previous lengthy tradition ... The core methodology, however, remains stubbornly familiar. History tells us that institutions which have been built to secure greater accountability do not usually succeed in embracing other purposes as well. Fortunately for those who would 'improve through inspection', history is not an exact science and benefits considerably from the wisdom of hindsight. (p. 140)

I hope, as an historian and teacher, that Chris Woodhead has put this book on his Christmas list.

BARRY WRATTEN
The Grange School, Stourbridge, Dudley

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