

# FORUM

**for promoting 3–19 comprehensive education**

Summer 1997

Volume 39 Number 2

ISSN 0963-8253

**Narrative, Learning  
and Creativity  
Professional Biographies**



# Contents

## VOLUME 39 NUMBER 2 1997

Editorial. <b>Bearing and Achieving Standards</b>	35
MARGARET MEEK. <b>Reading Transitions</b>	36
MICHAEL ARMSTRONG. <b>The Leap of Imagination: an essay in interpretation</b>	39
DAVE HEWITT. <b>Mixed Ability Mathematics: losing the building block metaphor</b>	46
NEIL DE REYBEKILL. <b>Vouchers, Inclusion and the Limits of Freedom</b>	50
GEORGE VARNAVA. <b>Reflections on a Sabbatical Year</b>	53
JOHN BRENNAN. <b>The Contribution of School Management to the Concept of Spirituality</b>	54
AUDREY OSLER. <b>Black Teachers as Professionals: survival, success and subversion</b>	55
PAM DENICOLO. <b>Teaching, Learning and Research: analogous, symbiotic or independent?</b>	60
DAVID HOPKINS & ALMA HARRIS. <b>Beyond the Classroom Door: exploring the Bermuda Triangle of educational reform</b>	62
IAN DUCKETT. <b>Core Skills: from the heart of the matter to the keyhole</b>	65
Book Reviews	66

**Editorial correspondence**, including typescript articles (1500-2000 words), contributions to discussion (800 words maximum), and **books for review**, should be addressed to Clyde Chitty, 16 Elmfield Avenue, Stoneygate, Leicester LE2 1RD, United Kingdom. Telephone: 0116-2703132. Please send two copies and enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

**Business correspondence**, including orders and remittances relating to subscriptions and back orders, should be addressed to the publishers:  
**Triangle Journals Ltd, PO Box 65,**  
**Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 0YG,**  
**United Kingdom.** Email: journals@triangle.co.uk  
 World Wide Web: <http://www.triangle.co.uk>

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES**  
 (Volume 39, Nos 1-3, 1997), post free  
 Individuals, £17.00 (US\$28.00)  
 Schools, £20.00 (US\$30.00)  
 Libraries, £32.00 (US\$50.00)

This journal is published three times a year, in January, May and September. Those three issues constitute one volume. ISSN 0963-8253

## EDITORS

**CLYDE CHITTY**, School of Education, University of Birmingham (also *Book Reviews Editor*)

**LIZ THOMSON**, Development Consultant, Lincoln

## EDITORIAL BOARD

**MICHAEL ARMSTRONG**, Harwell County Primary School, Oxfordshire (*Chairperson*)

**MYRA BARRS**, Centre for Language in Primary Education, London

**ANNABELLE DIXON**, Holdbrook JMI School, Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire

**MARY JANE DRUMMOND**, School of Education, University of Cambridge

**LEE ENRIGHT**, Westhaven Junior School, Weymouth, Dorset

**DEREK GILLARD**, Marston Middle School, Oxford

**ANDY GREEN**, Post-16 Education Centre, Institute of Education, University of London

**JASON HUNT**, The Sir John Lawes School, Harpenden

**DAVID MARTIN**, Chenderit School, Banbury

**ROGER OSBORN-KING**, Triangle Journals Ltd

## HONORARY EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

**Roger Seckington, Brian Simon, Nanette Whitbread**

# Bearing and Achieving Standards

The overwhelming Labour election victory has left no doubt that the general populace believed it was time for a change. Despite concerns about dressing up Tory policies to match the rhetoric of New Labour, the fact that we now have a government prepared to address some of the wrongs which were perpetrated during the past decade and more, is good news.

Education is the priority and raising standards is the main vehicle by which the new government intends to initiate change. The critical question will be how? At this stage we know the aspirations and some of the people who will be involved. Michael Barber, former professor of new initiatives at the University of London Institute of Education, heads up a new section within the Department for Education and Employment on raising standards in schools. Another academic, David Reynolds from Newcastle, has been brought in to head up a Numeracy Task Force which, like the Literacy Task Force established earlier, under the leadership of Michael Barber, will be concerned with setting clear targets for improving standards.

Setting clear targets is very important, but again we need to know more about how success will be achieved and, perhaps more importantly, on whose terms is it being defined? In setting out the objectives for the new government in the Queen's Speech, we were informed that two Education Bills will be introduced. The first will phase out the Assisted Places Scheme in order to release funding to reduce class sizes to a maximum of thirty in primary schools. The second will be to develop policies to raise standards in schools. We are told that there will be consultation on such policies. Given the self-admitted arrogance of previous Tory governments, it is essential that the process of consultation will be genuine and wide ranging. For too long the observations, insights and experience of those closest to the teaching process, the teachers, have been disregarded and ignored.

Some teacher unions have already expressed concern about the need to address teacher training. It would seem that their concerns are rather narrowly focused on the need to train new teachers and re-train existing teachers in new (old) methods such as class teaching. It is here that I would make a plea not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Within the teaching profession it is absolutely vital that we are receptive to new developments which can improve significantly the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. To suggest that teachers should only be confined to a limited repertoire of strategies, whether whole class

teaching or group work, is both silly and dogmatic. As George Varnava says in this issue, "I do not believe that there is any school trying to get worse. Education ... means improvement that is why schools exist." Similarly there can be few teachers who do not want to do the job better.

The major failure of previous Tory governments was to treat teachers as technicians and not as professionals. The new government now has a unique opportunity to build on the general 'feel-good factor' which has resulted from the Tories' resounding defeat; in particular to be seen to really listen to what teachers have to say about their observations, their experience and their needs and priorities. Above all it is vital that the kind of close observation undertaken by Margaret Meek and Michael Armstrong is seen as illuminative and significant in enlarging our understanding about how learning occurs.

Michael Armstrong's article focuses on the teacher as interpreter of children's narratives. The purpose of such interpretation is not just to acknowledge and celebrate the achievement of a child, but also to know how to stimulate, challenge and extend the learning process, both for the individual and for the whole class. This assumes a high order of skills and expertise on the part of the teacher. Good teachers are able to draw on a wide repertoire of teaching strategies to achieve high standards. Gifted teachers are those with the imagination and the creativity to go beyond what is given; to challenge and to question themselves; to search for answers and in so doing acquire a deeper understanding of how the needs of learners can be met.

The article by David Hopkins & Alma Harris provides some timely reflections on the key challenges facing education reformers today. In it they highlight the essential part that teaching and learning must play in school development and the need for the 'rhetoric of reform' to be reflected in the achievement of students of all ages. Again this requires both the commitment and support of teachers. More recognition of teachers' worth, together with a genuine openness towards finding answers are essential ingredients in moving forward to raise standards.

Moving from rhetoric to reality is never easy. There is no doubt that this new government will be subject to close scrutiny from all quarters over the coming months and years to see whether or not their future achievements will match the fine words now being uttered.

**Liz Thomson**

# Reading Transitions

---

## Margaret Meek

Emeritus Reader in Education at the University of London's Institute of Education, Margaret Meek has acquired an international and national reputation for her outstanding work in the field of literacy. Here she writes about the kind of transitions children make when reading to learn, particularly when interacting with new forms of text on screens and from CD-ROMs.

---

Despite all the bureaucratic and media preoccupations with the teaching of reading in the context of modern literacies and new technologies, there is still surprisingly little formal research evidence of what actually happens when children are learning to read and what progress looks like after the early stages. Persistent divisive arguments about initial teaching methods take the place of rigorous observation and documentation of children's interactions with texts and instruction, except in cases of failure or underachievement. It is obvious that we need some kind of general working agreement, instead of a singular authoritative model, to discover how children 'grow' in reading and what successful teachers do to promote literacy at this time when descriptions of it are changing rapidly.

The need to know how children see, approach and perform the task of learning to read becomes urgent when their aptitudes and abilities are being assessed in relation to the uses of literacy in the world outside school, beyond the terms of the Key Stages of the National Curriculum. Soon, one of the first things 5-year-olds will encounter as they enter 'real' school will be a test of what they already know about reading and writing. The transition of pupils from primary to secondary education is accompanied by records that refer to their past success or failure. These reports also frame the subject teachers' expectations as those they teach face ever-increasing learning activity at the onset of examinations. Thereafter, the demands of new working practices, which include a high standard of computer reading and writing, cast their shadow backwards into classrooms of young teenagers. At times of transition, both social and educational, what counts as being able to read is always beyond the reach of a conventional reading test. My conviction is that much more research attention will have to be directed to what happens at the important periods of change when children are confronted with distinctive shifts in what they are to do when they read, and, more particularly, what kinds of texts they are to confront.

Since Gordon Wells' description of the role of storytelling in the transition period between home and school, [1] picture books have been predominant in pre-school reading and in reception classes. The subtleties of the interaction of print and pictures contribute more than is ever documented to children's tacit understandings of reading as something they are to learn to do for themselves. Books like *Can't You Sleep Little Bear*, *Beware, Beware*, and *Three Star Billy* are not simply exercises in decoding or word recognition. Instead, they invite beginners to learn the insider secrets of reading, fluency that becomes confidence in making the words mean, and the understanding that the pictures extend and enhance the tale, giving it both sense and feeling beyond the words. There is a growing awareness that *what* children read makes a difference to what they

think reading is good for, and to their estimation of their chances of success in doing it.

For decades, comics have played a distinctive role in the reading of some children, although many competent readers of them found their skill unacknowledged as long as these quite complicated texts were banned from classrooms on social and aesthetic grounds. More praise for helping children to read is probably due to Enid Blyton and her successors in series publishing than is ever accorded. The notion that texts teach readers about reading and writing is more obviously acknowledged where authors and illustrators create new representations in traditional formats, books like *The Jolly Postman* for example. In addition, children's literature has a tradition of serious critical reviewing, discriminations which underwrite the choice of books for schools. As a descriptive category, children's literature now includes novels and poetry young people are pleased to read besides books that adults consider necessary to make them well-read. That modern texts can be at the heart of reading lessons is an idea that informs new school collections of 'core' books which are organised as progressive reading experience, not simply in terms of sentence length and vocabulary.[2] The evidence from this latest venture will be particularly interesting. Even so, we should not assume that we already know exactly what contributes to children's views of reading and to the nature of their success. Sports pages of newspapers, Lego instructions, all that television offers as text and many more systems of representation are surely making a difference to the literate competences of individual children.

Details of children's moves from home to school often come from conferences between parents and teachers. Where these are recorded, they show that a number of children have to reconstrue their view of reading in the more formal setting. The evidence also reveals how individual children differ in the ways they link what they understand about the content of a text and what they are told about reading itself. A young reader making sense of a story may be confused when asked to concentrate on the letters that make the words. In the early days of primary school, learners also discover that books are distinguished by their contents: stories or 'facts'. At first the separation is not clear to inexperienced readers; all school books are reading books. The title *Journey to the Moon* is part of a series described as Science, but the text is clearly a story. Children know that stories are sometimes true and at other times 'made up', as when there's magic or make-believe. Stories seem to be about 'what happens next', and the end of the story is linked to the beginning with an adventure in between. Children say that 'fact' books are about 'things around you', the world outside the book. At this point we should remind ourselves that, in contrast to the books distinguished

as 'children's literature', topic and text books are not subject to the same kind of scrutiny in reviewing journals and critical writing.

We know least about how children move from learning to read to reading to learn, the transition that is expected to take place by the third year of school when the range of reading activities widens and there are more school books about actual people and events. The intellectual nature of this transition is usually taken for granted, or only partially explained to those who are about to undertake book learning. As a result, the double didactic of the move, the expectation that the readers will cope with both the content and the constructedness of texts, goes unregarded until readers have 'difficulties'. We still need to know how competent but inexperienced readers adapt to printed text where the *author*, someone whose 'voice' draws them into a meaningful narrative, is replaced by the impersonal, authoritative *writer*, who may address readers as 'you', but presents information in a series of interrogations: 'What is a bird?' or as a succession of propositions: 'Birds are different from all other creatures because they have feathers'. It is not the surface features of the texts that provoke a new kind of uncertainty in the reader. The puzzle is, who is asking these questions and saying these things?

This rhetoric, with its implied answers and assumed correctness, is characteristic of many topic books in primary schools. The assumption is, 'these are facts' and therefore beyond query. Yet, subject matter is always in transition. Bird knowledge becomes ornithology, how things work is physics, a series of events in chronological order is history. Readers who become familiar with the distinctive discourse of a subject become confident readers, regarded as 'good at' it because they see past the words to the content of the text, the subject that holds their interest and makes the reading effort worth while. Their confident familiarity with the topic lets them take on, in their own writing the conventions they learn from reading. Less confident readers, their curiosity unawakened, resist reading, and then claim that the written text remains opaque. At every transitional stage, reading itself can become an activity that either promotes understanding or stands between learners and their learning.[3]

The usual way of dealing with this problem is to say either, that the texts are too difficult and must be simplified, or, that the readers have to acquire strategies for 'tackling' them. Lunzer & Gardner investigated the difficulties of school- children learning to read to learn, difficulties they attributed to the readers' failure to 'comprehend' a factual text. They did not look outside the classroom-confined reader-text interaction for the explanation or the solution of the problem. To their credit, however, they insisted that an act of understanding could not be divided into discrete reading 'skills'. But they were convinced particular reading strategies – SQ3R (Question, Read, Review) – should be "applied to every text when reading is undertaken for learning".[4]

It was all too much. Again, the reading exercises came between the readers and the meaning making. But the notion that readers should acquire and practise 'study skills' on a repetitive basis has persisted, although researchers differ in their approaches to the analysis of reading difficulty. Some concentrate on the text and propose a study of its 'readability', with special attention to the grammatical obstacles presented by the structure of certain sentences.[5] 'Directed Attention to Texts' (DARTS), is a later version

of the Lunzer and Gardner solution. Other studies focus on the pupil in order to describe different kinds of disability or lack of experience and to suggest remedies for their 'recovery'.

Consider this. When a teacher tries to make a text more approachable for an inexperienced reader, very rarely is the writer, editor, illustrator or the design team of a book of information held responsible for the reader's lack of success. The reading difficulties associated with topic texts are as often the result of inadequate writing or bad design as of the readers' inadequacies. At some point, however, teachers are bound to tell pupils that there is more than one way to present the world on paper, and that there are different versions of the same 'facts'. Instead of inadequate tussling with imperfect texts, children need to have some experience of what it is to find something out, to be curious, to wonder (in more than one sense), to write their own versions of experiences, so as to believe they can be judges of the reported experiences of others; critical readers, in fact. My conviction is still that most children's desire to know is linked with their belief that if they can cope with the reading, they will be able to cope with the world the book describes.

I have rehearsed all this because children are now expected to read texts on screens, so this is a distinctive transitional time. Information is seen as being at the heart of the matter, in terms of 'information technology'. The imperative is already enshrined in the National Curriculum and the implications of information technology for school learning are widely discussed and speculated about. My concern so far has been to examine some of the features of the computerised classroom with regard to primary school children's use of information derived from CD-ROM, and to compare this with my observations of children reading information books. The evidence is at the primitive stage, but there is no doubt that the contents of the software leave much to be desired when compared with so-called non-fiction books in current production. But, as with lesson books, what children are to be able read on CD-ROM is assumed to be beyond critical inquiry. Attention is focused on what they are able to do with the machines. The present state of IT in schools varies a great deal, but it is possible to observe the main features of the transition from books to screens in terms of texts and children reading, and to wonder about changes in the getting and using of information more generally, notably in the context of classroom 'projects'. We are still in the early stages of far-reaching transformations, but we should document the features of the starting-points of what is now happening in the domain of school literacy.

Before they can use CD-ROM for information retrieval, children need to be able to read what they see on the screen, so teachers who take seriously the functioning of IT in school tend to let the older primary children have most computer practice. There is no doubt about the learners' eagerness to engage with the keyboards. The children I saw were in their last year of primary school.[6] In the initial encounters with the technology they expected to see words and pictures in a kind of virtual reality of 3D, with movement and music, like the car advertisements on television. They also thought that topic information would be delivered at the touch of a button. So there was a sense of let-down after the first lesson, disappointment that the information was static and were not instantaneously available. In the next session the children explored a range

of effects the machine made possible, different screen modes, and made files for the information they collected.

The strongest and most abiding impression I had of these early moves into CD-ROM researching was of the pupils' confidence in their ability to handle the technology. It comes from computer games. It is different from the early stages of adult learning, notably that of teachers. This confidence rarely deserted the children. They were quite content to go back to the beginning of an inquiry if they seemed to be on the wrong track, in vivid contrast to what happens with books. Inexperienced book readers rarely take time to overcome uncertainties, to make experimental moves, to persuade themselves that the writer wants them to be successful in finding something out. At the keyboard I saw the learners take a task in hand, undismayed by the number of trials they made to correct what the machine told them was 'error'. They also expected great things of the software after they had given up looking for special effects, but were undismayed if they had to restructure their searches. They could read the printed text, but they also manipulated the information they found, stored it, changed it round and saved it for use in later parts of their presentations. Above all, they did not expect to fail. The details of these manoeuvres are new evidence about skilled reading.

These learners had two sources of information: an encyclopaedia (Hutchinsons) and *Children's Micropedia*. In the teacher's view, the encyclopaedia was a "very unattractive and complicated text". The pupils used a highlighter pen to delete anything they could not make sense of. Sometimes there were only a few sentences left, but they were sure that these would be useful to record. There is a new view of 'copying'; in this context it is storing for use. "They go off track easily", said the teacher, and "they are happy with anything familiar". How are we to interpret this before simply saying the children need to understand more of what they are reading or that their efforts were unsuccessful? I ask because, at a keyboard where topic discussion goes on as part of learning to handle the technology, we can see and hear what the pupils are doing. Book learning is less directly observable; silent reading yields little about what is understood, even in answers to questions asked by a teacher or in a test. The teacher of this class was convinced that the term's work in CD-ROM was an important turning-point in the children's learning. While she was also concerned that the amount of time spent with CD-ROM interactions was considerable, she probed deeply into the experiences she shared with her pupils, and sought their views of the respective merits of IT and books. The children were convinced that the CD-ROM material was 'not really so useful as books' and that often it was just the same. Books 'did not let you down or say 'error' or disappear just when you were copying text out. Books had more information. You could see at once all that was in a book, but from the disk it was impossible to gauge how much information detail was available; you knew there was a lot, but not what it consisted of. (They were still in the early days, remember, and hadn't pursued this kind of inquiry very far). Books cost less; you can have a lot of them for the cost of one disk. But CD-ROM was 'more fun'. This last observation came from the least experienced readers who enjoyed the keyboard procedures as computer games. There was no evidence that their CD-ROM exploits had increased their general reading competence.

My own observations suggested that the paired work at

the keyboard had distinct advantages. The learners were in constant discussion about both the working of the IT and their adaptations of the material to their inquiries. They planned strategies. If these failed, as they often did, they found ways to redirect their inquiry without asking for help more than occasionally. They tolerated each other's uncertainties. At times I was sure I could *hear* them thinking in their running monologues as they explained things to their partner. I was particularly struck by the fact that, when they looked at the text on the screen, they not only pointed to the salient points and details of the illustrations, they also read the printed text *aloud* to each other, fluently, with the same confidence, something they probably hadn't done in class since their early reading lessons.

In their interactions with CD-ROM, children's assurance about what they are doing derives in part at least from their understanding that their teacher will not criticise their handling of the technology if they are engaged with it in ways related to their learning. They discover exploring screen texts as an important activity. Also, the failure of a particular line of inquiry doesn't reflect adversely on the seeker's ability to understand the text. It simply means that another kind of search has to begin, a kind of hypothesis revision, modified by the earlier failure. In contrast to book learning, computer sources are also less threatening because many children have had more experience in using the tool than their teachers. The more important worry is, of course, that the least confident screen readers are also those who have least access to IT.

In the domain of new literacies this is a time of transition for all readers and writers. There are more paradoxes and puzzles than this outline portrays. Some of the children I observed using CD-ROM were sharp critics of the contents of the encyclopaedia in the discussions they engaged in with their peers. You can hear the same kind of argument when they watch their favourite programmes on television. Here it was in the context of school learning. Then I thought of the groups of readers I see finding their way through new books of information, turning the pages to seek out what they already know rather than reading the text in a linear sequence. I wondered if I had simply not taken good enough note of what children actually do when they read information books together. Helpful evidence about some unresolved problems about children's reading might come from their interactions with book texts composed of pictures, photographs, diagrams; signs devised in the world outside school. In the special case of CD-ROM, and screen reading we have a chance to investigate how children read new texts and to modify our beliefs and assumptions about the nature of modern reading more generally.

## Notes

- [1] Wells, G. (1988) *The Meaning Makers*. London: Hodder
- [2] Barrs, M. & Ellis, S. (1997) *Core Books*. London: Centre for Language in Primary Education.
- [3] Hull, Robert (1985) *The Language Gap: how classroom dialogue fails*. London: Methuen
- [4] Lunzer, E. & Gardner, K. (Eds) (1979) *The Effective Use of Reading*. London: Heinemann
- [5] Harrison, Colin (1980) *Readability in the Classroom*. Cambridge University Press; Perera, K. (1986) *Classroom Language and Reading*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [6] The activities described here were with the London Borough of Redbridge CD-ROM Group. The results of their initial inquiry are published as *Exploring Issues in Reading for Information with CD-ROM* by the Redbridge Teachers' Centre.

# The Leap of Imagination: an essay in interpretation

---

**Michael Armstrong**

In this closely-argued article, Michael Armstrong, Headteacher of Harwell Primary School and chairman of *FORUM*'s Editorial Board, writes about the power and force of narrative in the writing of young children and the crucial role of the teacher as interpreter of such narratives.

---

---

"As all men are alike in outward form, So [and with the same infinite variety] are all alike in the Poetic Genius." William Blake, *All Religions are One*, 1788.

---

This essay is dedicated to Brian Simon who taught me that in the power of their imagination, as in their capacity to reason, all children are equal.

---

## ONE

In his monumental treatise *Time & Narrative* the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur argues that "to make up a plot is ... to make the intelligible spring from the accidental, the universal from the singular, the necessary or the probable from the episodic." He calls this achievement "the leap of imagination" and illustrates it, as might be expected, from the masterpieces of European literature in the twentieth century: *The Magic Mountain*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*. But what might the leap of imagination look like at the age of five or six, in a child's earliest attempts at written narrative? Does it even make sense to define children's work in this way? In any event, does it matter?

Questions such as these are no longer fashionable. We have stopped thinking about children's thinking. Trapped within the impoverished language of the national curriculum, with its targets, levels and tests, we no longer seem to possess the terms in which to describe the specific energy of children's thought. Increasingly our judgements lack subtlety, let alone generosity. We are growing fond of the labels, as if we had invented them ourselves: a level three story, a level one writer, a level two child.

Description abhors labels. To describe a child's achievement is not to impose an external, measurable judgement but to identify oneself as delicately as possible with the world of the child's work. There is no other way of grasping the work's significance. I am tempted to say that the suspension of judgement is almost a precondition of description. In due course judgements may become appropriate but they will always remain relative to the work, open to review, and to that extent provisional. Of course a great deal of what children do at school does not call for description. There are routines to acquire, techniques to master, drills to practise. But routines, techniques and drills have little value independently of the purposes which they serve and if it is children's purposes which we wish to understand, or to promote, description has to be our method.

## TWO

One Friday afternoon, towards the end of winter, two children, barely six years old, stood up in assembly to read

their stories. Their teacher had given her class small, hand-made booklets in which to write stories of their own invention. They could illustrate their story if they wished but they did not have to. Jessica Orr and Melissa Warwick had worked side by side, looking over each other's stories as they went along, although they wrote in different modes. They were pleased with the results and wanted to share them with the rest of the school. The girls read boldly, with only an occasional hesitation. You could sense a certain pride in their achievement. The audience caught the spell, even as we smiled at each story's eccentricities. It was a magical moment, as if the leap of imagination had taken place right there before our eyes. Here is Jessica's story. She called it *The Poorly Mouse*.

I want to examine Jessica's story page by page. I shall offer a descriptive commentary which attempts to interpret the story in its own right and at the same time to read it as a particular instance of the early life of narrative. At the end of the commentary, I try to draw out some of its educational implications.

## THREE

Title Page: *The Poorly Mouse*

In adult speech 'poorly' is almost always used predicatively. "Jessica is poorly and won't be at school today." Jessica's usage is original, a first sign of her inventiveness. The drawing at the foot of the page is the visual equivalent of her title. The tiny mouse is lying on a large bed, its head propped on a pillow. This bed plays no part in the story that follows. In a sense, it does not belong to the story at all. Its significance lies outside the manifold of events that make up the plot. It pictures the thought of Jessica's title, though not of the story as a whole, which is no more than set in motion by the mouse's injury.

**Page One: Once there was a mouse who lived near where the wolves lived. One day a wolf came out of its home and hurt the mouse.**

The opening page introduces a fairy tale: a mouse in a land of wolves. Wolves are unknown in Britain except in the fairy tale, where they are ubiquitous. *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Three Little Pigs* are still among the most popular



of all the stories that children at our school are likely to have heard, long before they come to school. With her very first sentence, then, Jessica places her story firmly within tradition. The elements of that tradition include magic, often employed by those who come to the aid of the hero or heroine, complicity between humans and animals, family conflict and happy endings that tend to be more ambiguous than they might seem. Each of these elements finds a place in Jessica's story, as we shall see, although her narrative is anything but conventional. Like most children, even at this early age, she plays with tradition rather than reproducing it.

"... who lived near where the wolves lived." The language is chaste but full of menace in the context of the fairy tale. The written text goes on to provide the brute facts: "one day a wolf came out of its home and hurt the mouse." It is the pictured text which on this particular page colours and elaborates the narrative. A bold sun between tall trees outlines the wood in the middle of which the tiny mouse is at play. Meanwhile, from the edge of the page, a wolf's head, emerging from its lair, surveys the scene: eye, nose and jagged teeth in a head already larger than the mouse itself – threat made visible on the page. The animation that is so marked a feature of Jessica's drawing throughout her tale is as much a product of her pencil line as of her choice of subject or pose. Two of the three trees are drawn with a single pencilled flourish. The sun is a thick circle with hard pencil strokes radiating from it randomly in all directions. The mouse is delicately drawn, segment by segment, head, body, legs, eye, ear and flourishing tail. You can almost feel the physical effort taken to draw it minutely. As for the wolf's head, its teeth are a double row of sharply drawn chevrons, superimposed on the much softer line of the wolf's jaw.

This first page of Jessica's story demands to be read as a written and drawn narrative whole. The drawing is not an illustration but part of the text itself, providing a context and establishing a mood. In one way and another this is true of every other page in the narrative. Each presents its own unity. Turning the page becomes a form of punctuation, encouraged no doubt by the fact that Jessica was handed the booklet to write in before she composed her tale. She does not yet make use of sentence punctuation, with the possible exception of a single full stop at the end of this first page. This is a routine which she has still to acquire. But the punctuation of discourse is already part of her repertoire, guided by her developing sense of narrative propriety.

**Page Two: One day a little girl was walking in the wood when she saw the mouse. Then she saw it was injured.**

This "one day" is the same day on which the wolf came out of its home and hurt the mouse, but we have turned the page and begun the story again from a human perspective. With this turn we enter the world, not so much of the fairy tale as of a family saga: the story of a girl, her mum, the vet and the awesome dad. Fairy tale and family saga are interrelated in many of the stories which children tell or are told, as they are within the folk tale tradition as a whole, for example in *Little Red Riding Hood* itself. As Angela Carter once remarked, "a fairy tale is a story where one king goes to another king to borrow a cup of sugar." Jessica's double opening draws attention to the juxtaposition of folk tale and family life in the story she has to tell. In an adult

writer this might be seen as a self-conscious conceit. Jessica is less knowing but I doubt whether her new beginning is less deliberate. It is interesting to compare the opening of her friend Melissa's story, *The Little Girl Who Got Lost*: "One day a little girl came outside and she decided to go out for a walk." Melissa's story is a family tale with no folk tale element. She begins it straightforwardly enough on the equivalent of Jessica's second page. She doesn't require the first of Jessica's two beginnings.

It might seem inappropriate for Jessica to speak of a little girl "walking in the wood" when she has not yet mentioned any wood. But of course she *has* mentioned the wood, in her drawing on Page One. I read this as a sure sign of the unity of word and picture in her story. As so often throughout the narrative her words are carefully chosen. First the girl sees the mouse, then she notices its injury. The separation of the two kinds of recognition indicates how precisely the narrator has imagined the scene. It is only after the girl has caught sight of the mouse, delightedly perhaps, that she realises with horror that it has been injured.

The drawing below the written text catches the moment of recognition, without on this occasion adding a setting as the first picture did. The mouse lies centre stage while the girl peers in from the margin, her mouth open, perhaps in a gasp. This is one of only two places in the story where a figure is drawn with an open mouth. The second is on Page Six where the mother's mouth is open as she confronts the dad returning from his holiday. The similarities and differences between the drawings on these first and second pages, the mouse in the middle of the page each time, the wolf and girl each entering open mouths from the right, dramatise the evolving plot and incidentally reinforce the sense of a double beginning. The mouths have become mute signifiers.

**Page Three: So she took it home and showed her mum. Then they both took it to the vet but the vet was busy.**

Page Three complicates the plot, reinforces the interdependence of written word and drawn image and confirms the unity of the individual page in Jessica's story. Jessica is careful to insist that it is "both" the little girl and her mum who take the mouse to the vet. This apparently simple emphasis establishes the rapport of mother and daughter, a complicity which binds mother, daughter and animal in a magical embrace from which, as we are to discover, the father, like the vet, is excluded. Mother, child and mouse live in the world of fairy tale, a liberated world, out of time and beyond care. Vet and, more especially, father are bound to the appropriate and the orderly, the world of everyday, the world of toil.

"... but the vet was busy." Jessica might have chosen to place these words on their own separate page. Her decision not to is surely significant. The vet's business is the complication, or trouble, which drives the story forward, threatening to frustrate the good intentions of mother and daughter and opening the way for a much more dramatic display of their resourcefulness. Page Three presents the failure of common sense: the vet is too busy to attend to the mouse. Page Four substitutes magic. Each page expresses its own thought, the ineffectiveness of reasonableness, the triumph of play. To have placed the vet's business elsewhere than on Page Three would have disrupted the symmetry of the plot.



“... busy.” For children it is such a dismissive word, the sign of a world of adult concerns that can find no time or place for children. It’s the grace of the mother in Jessica’s story that she is not too busy to share her daughter’s care. It’s the misfortune of the father that he can neither recognise nor share the pleasures of complicity.

The drawing pictures the disappointment of the mother’s and child’s expectations. As on Page One, it extends the narrative. Mother, child and mouse form a single hopeful group. In front of them a cat waits on top of its basket while its owner approaches the vet, yet another figure who looks in from the margin of the page, surveying the scene. Mother and child are smiling expectantly while the vet looks glum. The words above have already forewarned us that these smiles are about to be disappointed.

**Page Four: So the little girl and her mum pretended to be the vet and soon got the mouse better.**

In children’s earliest stories the most insignificant words often carry the heaviest weight of meaning. So it is with this ‘so’. We have reached the moment of transformation. The business of the vet, representing the unavailability of medicine or the reasonable world, opens the way for magic. The word ‘so’ is an expression of purest consequence.

The audience of older children and adults, listening to Jessica’s story, chuckled at the word ‘pretended’ but our smiles were as much in recognition of Jessica’s daring as her naivety. So much of early childhood is bound up in play and in the pretence that makes of play an imaginative world as rich as the real and vital to any satisfying engagement with the real. In the fairy tale it may take the godmother or the witch to weave a spell to heal the injured but for Jessica all that is required is confidence in the power of pretence itself, a triumph of the narrative imagination in which the wish has become for the moment equivalent to the deed. But note that it is the child and mother who together succeed, as if it is the very fact of complicity between them that accomplishes the trick. It seems that it is not enough for the child alone to believe in the power of pretence. Confirmation is sought, not from the creatures of fantasy – witches, godmothers, fairies, genies – but from those who are nearest and dearest.

The drawing below the text signals the moment of magic. The mouse lies prostrate between mother and child, as if on an operating table. But there are no instruments to be seen. While the child looks straight ahead, her arms half raised as if in hope, the mother faces the mouse, stretching out an arm in a nurturing gesture. Next moment, as we know from the text above, the mouse will be on its feet again. Our eyes are already straying onto the facing page.

**Page Five: Even now the mouse was better the little girl and her mum still kept it and played with [it]. They had lots of fun.**

The drawings on Pages Four and Five form a pair. This particular drawing does not accompany the text under which it is placed. Both in time and in narrative sequence it anticipates the text by picturing the fulfilment of the magic of the previous page. The mouse stands upright, flourishing its tail and gazing out at the reader as if in triumph while mother and daughter turn towards it, each of them now standing and smiling, admiring both the mouse and their own success. Meanwhile the words above the drawing have moved the story on, demonstrating again the variety of

ways in which Jessica relates written to drawn text as her story unfolds.

When Jessica read her story on tape, some time after reading it in assembly, she read the second word as “though” rather than “now”. Whichever reading is adopted, a trace of ambiguity enters the story at this point, as if, in keeping the mouse despite its recovery, mother and child are infringing the boundary of the permissible. If we have already read the story, we know that the magical achievement celebrated in the drawing on this page is about to unravel. Jessica, after all, is not content with the triumph of pretence. Her narrative vision is more complex. There is another side to the story which must now be given its due.

For all that, the overwhelming feeling on this page is one of mutual delight. We have entered that time out of time which I have already mentioned. The magic of pretence has released the three protagonists into a world in which, for a while, nothing obstructs their common pleasure in play. Momentarily they are free of the constraints of reality. “They had lots of fun”.

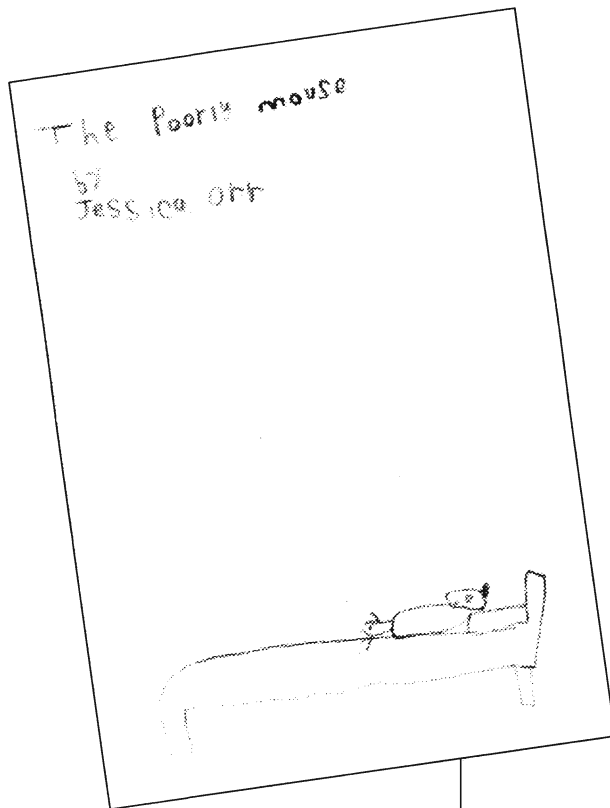
**Page Six: Then after a while, the dad came back from his holiday.**

Enter the father, not so much a villain as a kind of *deus ex machina*.

“Then after a while ...” As anxious teachers we might be tempted to question the need for the word ‘then’ but we would be wrong. Two times are inscribed here: the time of event, of the next stage in the unfolding plot, and the time of duration – “after a while”. Mother and child have been liberated into a magical world of play as if all time were theirs. But it cannot last. Now the father returns to bring play to an end. By calling him “the dad” Jessica seems to emphasise the archetypal character of this father but the significance of her definite article lies more in the need to preserve the bond that exists throughout the story between mother and child. If she had written “the little girl’s dad” she would have too readily separated mother and daughter. She might have avoided the problem by naming the father but this is a story without names. To that extent *all* the characters in the story are archetypes.

How strange that it should be the father who returns from holiday. [I asked Jessica why the father had been on holiday on his own. All she would say was that usually the family would have gone on holiday together but this time the dad had chosen to go by himself.] The real holiday has been the magical holiday of mother, child and mouse, that imaginative complicity from which the father is excluded. Perhaps that is Jessica’s point. Though the dad comes home from his own holiday, it is those who have stayed at home who have experienced, in his absence, the more significant freedom. Neither holiday, it seems, can last. Reality intrudes upon magic, separating once more the worlds of the animal and the human. The fairy tale world will now close back on itself, as it does at the end of Angela Carter’s marvellous farewell to the fairy tale, *Peter and the Wolf*, although in neither case can we believe this farewell to be final.

The drawing is stark. Father and mother confront each other across an empty space. The father’s head is spiky and hard, like the harsh sun on the opening page. The mother’s mouth is open in what might be a shout of welcome or a cry of alarm. Child and mouse alike have disappeared. The adults confront each other alone.

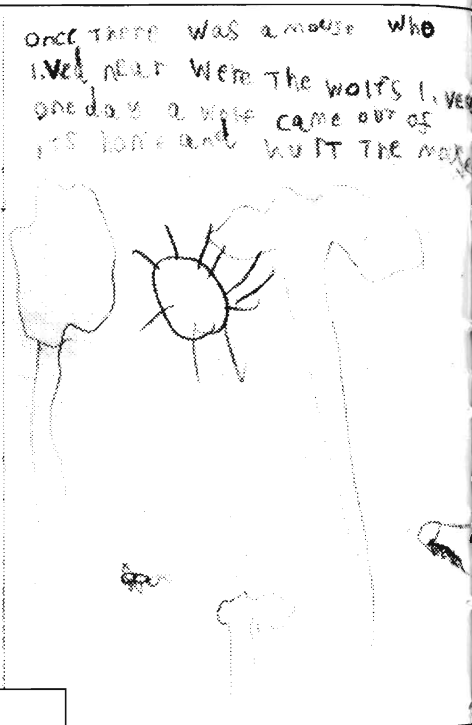
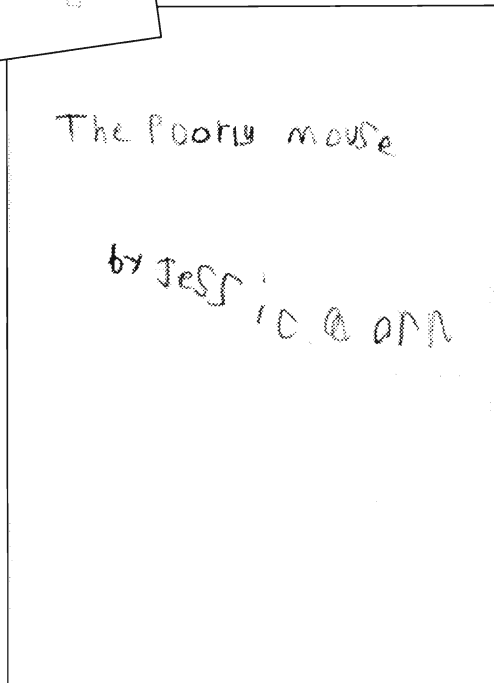


▲ Front cover

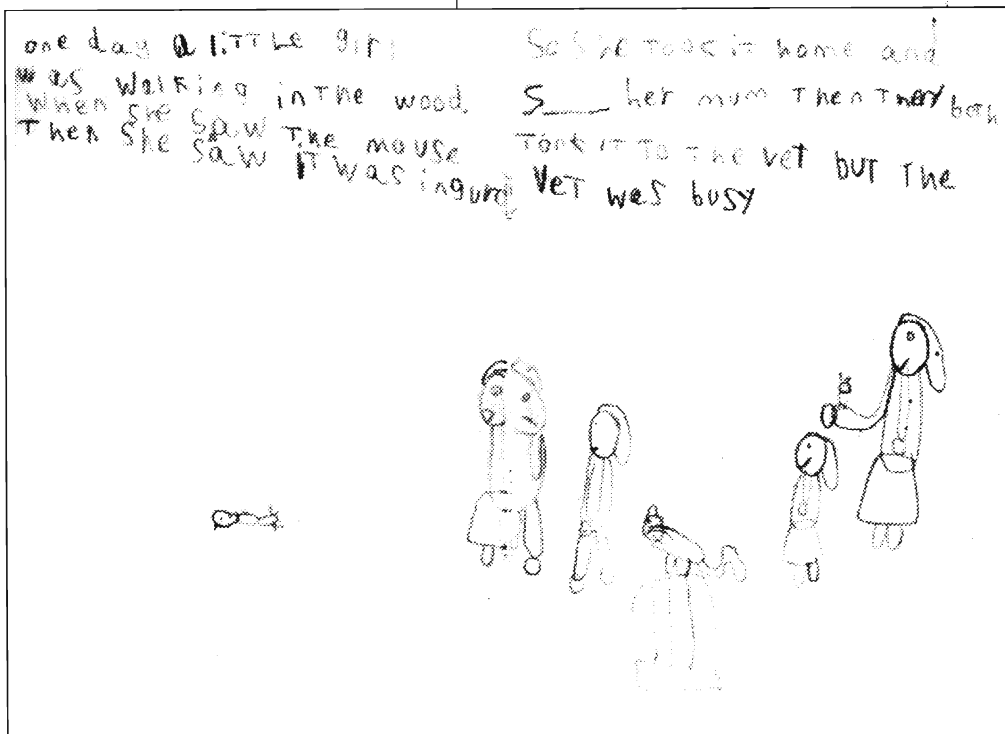
# The Poorly Mouse

by Jessica Orr

Inside front cover ►



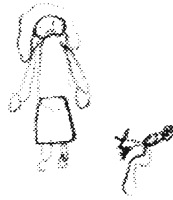
▲ Page 1



◀ Pages 2 and 3

So the little girl and her  
mum pretended to be  
the vet and soon got the  
mouse better

Even so the mouse was better  
the little girl and her  
mum still kept it and played  
with it they had lots of fun



Then after a while the  
dad came home from  
his holiday

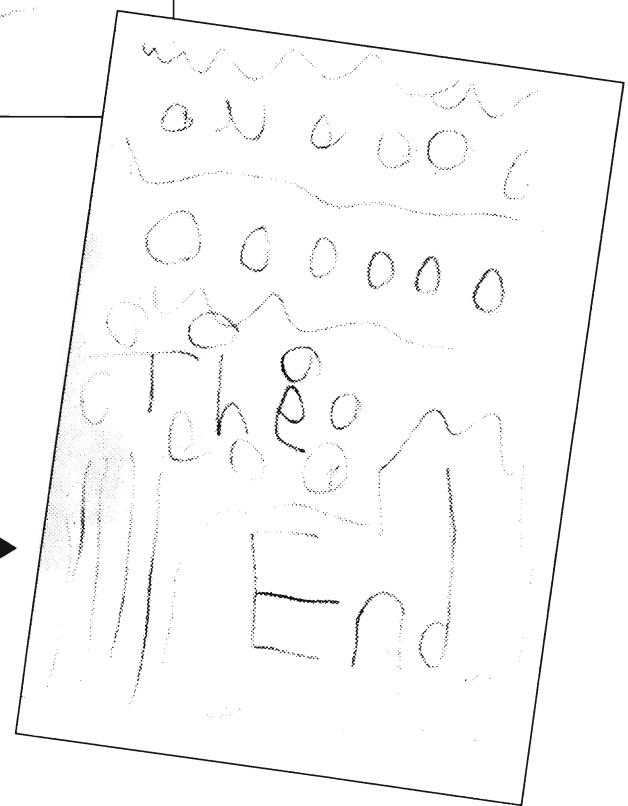
He didn't like animals  
so the mouse went back  
to his old home



▲ Pages 4 and 5

▲ Pages 6 and 7

Outside back cover ►



**Page Seven: He didn't like animals so the mouse went back to his old home.**

The story's ending is uncertain. We don't know what awaits the mouse in his old home, "near where the wolves lived", although in conversation both Jessica and her friend Melissa expressed confidence that the mouse would survive. The father's motivation is given as his dislike of animals yet he can speak to the mouse in apology. Perhaps the words "sorry, you have to leave" express something of the inevitability of an end to magic.

This is the only picture which incorporates written text. The words are placed in the picture in part simply because they are spoken. Like most children, Jessica appropriates without difficulty the conventions of the comic strip. But these words are also necessary if we are to understand the complexity of the father's attitude. We can see from their gestures the different responses of mother, child and father to the mouse's departure, but without words we could not be sure of the father's apologetic tone. The words add a subtlety which is as yet beyond Jessica's visual scope.

This final drawing is a curtain call, a farewell to the reader as much as to the mouse. All three characters face the reader, announcing variously their sentiments. The father's hands remain by his side; only his words evoke apology. The girl waves her hand which has now grown almost as large as her face. The mother waves too, but more sedately, her hand still, as everywhere else, a button. In front the mouse sets off on the bumpy path back home. Its departure is double edged. There is danger in the woods but the mouse will no longer be 'kept'. Its own world beckons. "Then he determinedly set his face towards the town and tramped onwards, into a different story." The words are Angela Carter's but they capture the sense of this ending. Not so much "and they all lived happily ever after"; more a case of "and now what next?"

#### FOUR

What, then, does this story tell us about a young child's narrative imagination? I want to emphasise two aspects of Jessica's storytelling: her relationship to tradition and the largeness of her narrative concerns. The two aspects are closely linked.

Jessica's achievement is inconceivable outside of the narrative traditions to which she already has access by way of the books which have been read to her or which she has now begun to read for herself, the stories which she has heard and told and retold, the culture of narrative which infuses her environment. These traditions include the folk tale and the fairy tale, the family story, the picture book, the early reader, the comic strip, the cartoon, the playground fantasy and much else besides. *The Poorly Mouse*, like Jessica's other stories and those of her companions, is in no way independent of such traditions. It is bound to them at every turn. How could it be otherwise.

But to work from inside a tradition is never simply to reproduce the given. "Let us understand by this term," Ricoeur recommends, "not the inert transmission of some already dead deposit of material but the living transmission of an innovation always capable of being reactivated by a return to the most creative moments of poetic activity." Imitation and innovation are the twin faces of tradition. What *The Poorly Mouse* shows us is that the innovative face, no less than the imitative, reaches back as far as the genetic history of narrative itself.

Jessica reactivates tradition in a variety of ways. I think of how she juxtaposes and integrates picture and text, or interweaves folk tale with family saga, or uses the turn of the page to punctuate her narrative. Innovation comes naturally to her but it is goaded by necessity. Where words fail her, in imagining the beauty and terror of the wood where the mouse lives close by the wolf, or in detailing the preoccupation of the vet in his surgery, drawn images come to her aid. Conversely, when the significance of a pencilled gesture is insufficient to convey her meaning, a speech bubble makes good the deficiency. By such means constraints can be redefined as opportunities.

This bond between constraint and opportunity is nowhere more apparent than in Jessica's distinctive use of language. Her vocabulary is limited, more particularly so in the context of the written as compared with the spoken word. She is compelled to achieve large effects by slender means. Words like "pretended", "poorly", "busy", evoke a special resonance, while the simplest connectives – "so", "then", "after a while", "both" – are almost overwhelmed with meaning. An inattentive reading can easily overlook the subtlety of a six-year-old's prose. We have to work hard to appreciate the richness of the economy which young children like Jessica learn to exploit in their early written narratives.

In the end, what strikes me most about Jessica's storytelling is the sincerity of her commitment to narrative. Her story touches upon so many of the fundamental puzzles of childhood, as of narrative itself. How does magic fare in relation to reality? Who controls access and who gains access to the magical world? What are the limits of companionship between the human and animal kingdoms? Where does care end and play begin? What sense can be made of conflict and complicity within the family? Where lies the source of authority and whose authority counts? How fine is the borderline between being free and being kept? How close can we come to understanding one another? *The Poorly Mouse* does not aim to resolve these questions nor even to raise them. It's rather that the narrative winds its way through them, turning the questions over, exploring implications, establishing relationships, suggesting new puzzles, complicating issues, alternately offering and cancelling possibilities.

Perhaps this is no less than we should expect. I have presented Jessica and her classmates as children for whom the writing of stories has become a way of appropriating a literary inheritance. If this is true, then by the same measure writing stories will necessarily be for Jessica a way of exploring the central questions of her culture, whether in ethics, citizenship, science, art of religion. For children at least, narrative may well be a privileged means of speculation on culture, if only because, as we have seen, it offers both immediate and disciplined access to the heart of a culture's concerns. Privileged or not, telling a story and reflecting on experience are activities which, in the writing of a narrative such as *The Poorly Mouse*, have become inseparable. Their inseparability is both source and substance of Jessica's achievement.

#### FIVE

To make up a plot is to engage in a critical practice. *The Poorly Mouse* shows us something of what that practice looks like in the early years. How is it to be recognised, promoted and sustained? To answer this question would be to provide a pedagogy, though of a kind which the

authors and managers of the national curriculum might be hard put to recognise. It is a heady enterprise and beyond the scope of this essay. But one feature of such a pedagogy is already present in everything that I have had to say about his story, and that is the central role of interpretation.

I set out to demonstrate a way of reading a six-year-old's text. From a teacher's perspective, however, interpretation is always more than a way of reading a text, more even than a way of describing an author's intention and achievement. It is completed not in the act of reading itself but in the representation to a child of the teacher's understanding of her work. That representation may take an almost limitless variety of forms. We may ask Jessica about the meaning of particular words and images in her narrative, about what she has left out of her story and why, about the sequence of events, circumstances, devices and impediments that make up the plot, about the ending. We may draw connections between this story and others which she has written or between this story and stories which she may have read or listened to. We may describe our own feelings about the characters in the tale – mouse, wolf, girl, mum, dad and vet – and wonder about their past histories or future prospects. We may propose new stories for Jessica to read, new picture books, for example, in which to explore the interweaving of drawn and printed text. We may invite her to act the story out with her friends, or to give a reading

to another class or in assembly. We may ask her to compare her own story with her friend Melissa's story, written at the same time, wondering about similarities and taking note of differences. We may take up in a different mode of thought or medium of expression some of the speculations implicit within the story. In ways like these we make available to Jessica our understanding of her story in the expectation that it will help her to move on into the next story, and, beyond each individual tale, into a continuing engagement both with narrative itself and with the broader culture which narrative helps to define.

Seen, in this way, interpretation deserves to be considered foremost among the teacher's many functions. To tell a story is to redefine the world. At the age of six Jessica has already begun to learn how. A teacher's responsibility to Jessica and her companions is to conspire with them to keep the plot alive.

#### Acknowledgement

This essay was first presented to a seminar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in October 1996 and later revised for a conference at the Centre for Language in Primary Education in November 1996. I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to the discussions that took place on each of these occasions.



## In Search of a Grandfather Henry Simon of Manchester 1835-1899

BRIAN SIMON

Foreword by Asa Briggs

Henry Simon, of German origin, arrived in Manchester in 1860 aged 24, penniless (as he put it later) but endowed with a first-class scientific and technological education. In Manchester he carried through an astonishingly successful revolution in the flour milling industry, and also pioneered the use of bye-product coke ovens in an attempt to modernise the iron and steel industry, establishing what is now the Simon Engineering Group. He assisted in the rescue of the Hallé Society and orchestra at a moment of crisis, took the leading part in establishing the Manchester Crematorium, and gave financial support to Owens College (now the University of Manchester) both in endowing a new Physics Laboratory and the Henry Simon Professorship of German Literature. With his friend C. P. Scott he founded Withington Girls' School and engaged in a confrontation with the classical teachers at the school where three of his sons were educated (including his second, the late Lord Simon of Wythenshawe).

#### ORDER FORM

To Brian Simon, Pendene Press, 11 Pendene Road, Leicester LE2 3DQ, United Kingdom.

Please send me ..... copies of *In Search of a Grandfather* at £11.00 per copy (£10.00 plus £1.00 postage and packing).

I enclose cheque/postal order for £.....

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

# Mixed Ability Mathematics: losing the building block metaphor

**Dave Hewitt**

Dave Hewitt is a lecturer in mathematics education at the School of Education, University of Birmingham. In this article he challenges the assumption that all learning in mathematics is linear and sequential and considers the implications for mixed ability teaching.

Many primary schools operate mixed ability classes, but an increasing number are considering creating sets for mathematics. In secondary schools, mathematics is often the first subject to organise students into sets, when other subjects stay mixed ability or do not begin to set until later on. Why is it that mathematics is sometimes seen as an exception to the ways in which successful mixed ability practices have developed within comprehensive education for other subject areas? I will explore this question and offer ways in which mathematics can be approached so that working with a mixed ability class makes just as much sense for mathematics as it does for any other subject. In fact, it is important that mathematics be viewed in a way suitable for mixed ability teaching, since *every* class is mixed ability (the grouping of students into sets does not change the fact that there are mixed abilities within the class, and these mixed abilities need to be catered for). First, I will look at how the viewing of mathematics in terms of building blocks presents arguments (or excuses) for why students need to be placed in sets for mathematics. Then, I highlight attempts departments have traditionally made to avoid what is often seen as the 'problem' of mixed ability. And last, I will consider an alternative way of viewing mathematics which enables direct access to high level mathematics content without the need for students to have memorised layers of previous mathematics content. This collapsing of the building block metaphor takes away the traditional reasons why mathematics can only be taught in setted groupings.

## **The Building Block Metaphor: providing excuses for setting students**

Mathematics is often seen as a hierarchical subject – a student needs to know one thing before they can know something else. The metaphor of building blocks is used where the foundations are laid and knowledge is built from the foundations in a step-by-step approach (Figure 1).

Sfard & Linchevski echoed the views of many teachers when they wrote that "mathematics is a hierarchical structure in which some strata cannot be built before another has been completed" (1994, p. 195). This image of mathematics learning is endorsed by text books where later chapters rely on students remembering work from previous chapters. Many teachers also prepare their lessons based on what students have already 'done'. This may all seem quite sensible, but it has many features which are problematic.

First, there is an assumption that just because students have 'done' a topic earlier, then later on those students will still feel confident and competent with that content. As any mathematics teacher will know, students forget. And if students have forgotten the mathematics that the current lesson is built upon, then that means the students will have difficulties understanding the current topic as well. In fact the building metaphor suitably demonstrates its own weakness. If one or two of the foundation blocks have become loose, or fallen down completely, then there is nothing which will hold up the building of any higher blocks (Figure 2).

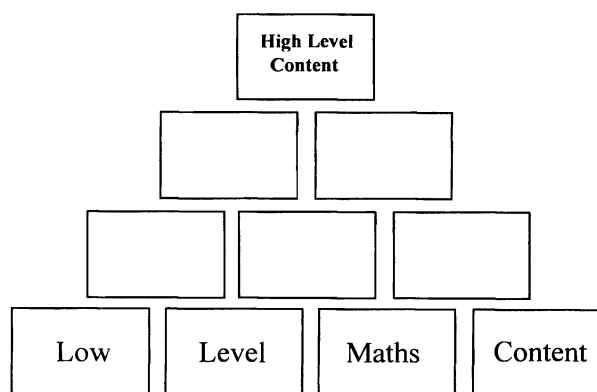


Figure 1. The building block metaphor of mathematics learning.

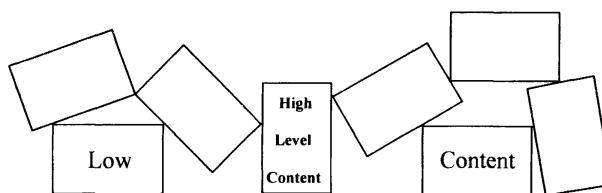


Figure 2. The collapse of the building metaphor – there is no longer a basis from which to build.

Suddenly there is no basis from which the higher content can be built. In such a situation, what is a teacher to do if their view of mathematics is based on the building block metaphor? If they try to persist with the new topic, this can lead to students saying that they don't understand the mathematics. Alternatively, if the teacher decides to abandon the new topic and go back to re-teach the old topic it was

based upon, then the students will not be progressing and it can lead to a situation where some students spend most of their mathematics education trying to learn and re-learn the same mathematics content during the whole of their 10 years of formal schooling. “Why is it”, the child psychiatrist Winnicott asked, “that maths is the best example of a subject that can only be taught in continuity? If a stage has been left out, the rest is nonsense” (1984, p. 33). This again gives an image of there being a hierarchical route towards the learning of a particular piece of mathematics content, with a student inevitably having a difficulty if one stage has been forgotten or not understood in the first place.

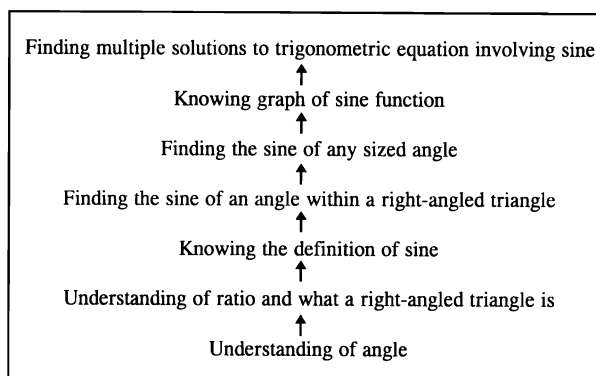


Figure 3. A possible hierarchy of stages towards finding multiple solutions to trigonometric equations.

Consider a teacher, who views mathematics in terms of building blocks, trying to teach students how to find multiple solutions to a trigonometric equation such as  $\sin\theta=0.5$ . Figure 3 gives a possible hierarchical structure of the stages through which this teacher might believe students have already had to develop to be in a position to solve such equations. This is not a particularly thorough list, but I have written enough to give a flavour of how much previous mathematical knowledge such a teacher may call upon when attempting to teach how to solve such equations. Finding multiple solutions to these equations is built on knowing the graphs of the sine function; and knowing this is built on being able to find the sine of any sized angle; and this is built on being able to find the sine of an angle within a right-angled triangle; this, in turn is built on a definition of sine; which is built on an understanding of ratio and what a right-angled triangle is; which is built on an understanding of angle; etc. The list is a long one, and the learning of each stage requires a student to remember and use the previous knowledge at the last stage. It is for this reason that such work in trigonometry either does not appear in the GCSE books at all or, at best, appears in one of the final chapters of a series of books. There is so much for students to learn before they can even start to learn how to solve these equations. This is what happens when mathematics is viewed as hierarchical in an absolutist way: trigonometry *cannot* be learned without having learned a whole set of other things first' it is *necessary* to learn these foundation 'basic' ideas before other, *more advanced*, ideas are built on top of these. It is the building block metaphor which make the arguments for setting students appear so logical. And it is the building block metaphor which is at the root of why so many students do not succeed in mathematics. It is the building block metaphor which helps students leave school to become adults who say “I can't

do maths, I never understood it”. One reason why a student does not understand some mathematics is because a teacher is attempting to teach them something by basing it on previous mathematics knowledge (previous building blocks) which that student has since forgotten or is unconfident with at the time.

### Attempts to Avoid the Mixed Ability 'Problem'

How can a teacher teach a mixed ability class when the students are inevitably at different stages? How can a teacher attempt to teach trigonometry when some students have already learned about ratio and algebraic manipulation, whilst others are not sure what a right-angled triangle is? The government at present is pressing for more whole-class teaching. How can whole class teaching make sense when faced with teaching mathematics to a mixed ability class? Whilst the vast majority of the teaching profession view mathematics in terms of building blocks, it is perhaps not surprising that most departments have decided mathematics is best taught within setted groups. At least, the department argues, there is an increased likelihood that a greater percentage of students in the class are *at a similar level*. This is the conclusion that the influential CSMS (Concepts in Secondary Mathematics and Science) (Hart, 1981) study made. One of the conclusions was that:

*It is impossible to present abstract mathematics to all types of children and expect them to get something out of it. It is much more likely that half the class will ignore what is being said because the base upon which the abstraction can be built does not exist. The mathematics must be matched to each individual and teaching a mixed ability class as an entity is therefore unprofitable [her emphasis]. p. 210.*

One way round the problem of how to teach mathematics to a mixed ability class was adopted by schemes such as SMP, KMP and SMILE. These were individualised schemes which presented a hierarchical step-by-step structure within booklets designed for individuals to work through on their own at their own rate. Thus, the idea of learning as part of a group was largely ignored, and teachers using such schemes found that students, sitting alongside each other, were literally working at different stages, and often at different topics. Some teachers thought this was a good solution, and such schemes sold widely during the 1980s. However, these are becoming less favoured as teachers find that their own personal role within the classroom is administrative rather than educational, and that their students are trying to race through the booklets rather than understand what is in them. SMP are currently preparing a new set of books which moves away from the individualised idea.

There is a new technological version of these individualised schemes, where a student sits on their own in front of a computer and works through electronic worksheets which are supposedly *at that individual student's level*. Whilst a student is working, the computer registers how many correct responses the student gives and produces an assessment of each student or the teacher whenever it is required. This all sounds wonderful, except that these computer packages are very expensive and have similar weaknesses to the other non-electronic individualised schemes. I am sure they will also be found wanting, although it is too early to analyse results at present.



### Losing the Building Block Metaphor: opening possibilities for teaching mixed ability

So, I return to my question of how mathematics can be taught to a mixed ability class. Up to now I have identified several factors which appear to mitigate against successful mixed ability teaching of mathematics, and identified two apparently logical alternatives: (a) don't teach mixed ability – put the students in sets; or (b) don't teach mixed ability – give the students an individualised scheme.

There are other ways in which the learning of mathematics can be viewed, ways in which stem from the understanding students already possess. Students of any age, and any ability, are not empty vessels which have to be filled with the mathematics curriculum. All students have already demonstrated that they are capable of impressive learning before they ever enter a classroom. All children have learned a language, learned to walk and learned to feed themselves. For those children who, by some accident, illness or condition, have not been able to achieve one or more of these, alternative learnings can be substituted in this list. All children are already impressive learners. And within their everyday learning, they have developed ways of thinking which, if formalised, can be recognised as mathematical. For example, learning to speak brings with it a time field (Vygotsky, 1978), since words are said in time. As a consequence of this, children know that in order to say accepted words within a language, certain noises have to be said before other noises. Likewise, for sentences, certain words have to be said before other words. There is an *order*. All children have a sense of order, which is learned through their everyday learning. Order is also a root notion within many areas of mathematics. Likewise, there are other aspects of everyday learning which also have significant roots within mathematics, such as inverse and sameness/difference. These root notions of mathematics – *order*, *inverse*, *sameness/difference* – which are also experienced by everybody within their everyday learning as a young child, we (Brown, Hewitt and Mason, 1994) call *mathematical essences*. All children are already mathematicians, in that there are ways in which they have already gone about their everyday learning which relates to notions behind the mathematics syllabus in the National Curriculum. I will give an example for each of these three mathematical essences:

**Order:** there is a difference between the function  $f(x) = 2x + 3$  and  $f(x) = 2(x + 3)$ : with the first a number is multiplied by two and then has three added; with the second, a number has three added first and then is multiplied by two. Order matters. Likewise, the order of words matters when saying a sentence: *this is good* and *is this good*?

**Inverse:** the solution of an equation such as  $x + 2 = 6$  involves knowing that the inverse of *add two* is *take two*. There are equivalent of this within early learning where a child learns that if they have moved something a certain distance to the right, then to return it back to its original position involves moving it the same distance but to the left.

**Sameness/difference:** the classification of different triangles into right-angles, isosceles, scalene, equilateral, etc, is fundamentally concerned with what is the same and what is different. All children have already employed this sameness/difference within their early learning (there is no other way in which they could have learned to make sounds

within language similar to the sounds they hear adults say, other than attend to sameness/difference).

These are some examples of how students of all ages know about root notions of mathematics. I do not mean by this that students can articulate such things, but that students can employ these notions when engaged with a mathematical situation. Imagine the following mathematical situation: a circle with a dot on the circumference. The dot moves round the circle in an anti-clockwise direction.

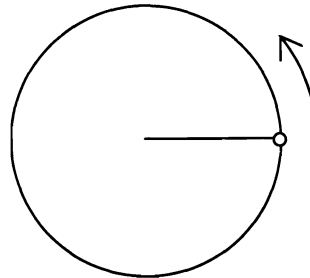


Figure 4 – A dot moves round the circumference of a circle. An image for trigonometry.

As the dot moves round, I can expect students to tell me what they notice about the height of the dot. I inform them that when the dot is at its highest, I will call that height *one*. When the dot is lowest, I call that height *negative one*. Now I draw in the radius of the circle which goes from the centre to the dot (Figure 4), and say that the starting position for the dot will always be this far right position, and the dot will always turn anti-clockwise.

We can now talk about how far the dot moves in terms of the angle the radius has turned from its starting position. "What angle has the dot turned to get to a position where its height is 1? What angle, always from the starting position, has the dot turned to get to a height of -1? What about a height of 0?" These are questions I expect students of a variety of abilities and ages to be able to answer successfully. The only mathematics knowledge of substance I am assuming is a certain understanding of angle, otherwise I expect them to use their powers to imagine and to notice. So, I am not basing the work on several layers of previously taught mathematics content which I hope that students will remember. There are no 'blocks' which this new content is built upon. Instead, there is direct access to trigonometry through students only needing to employ their powers of noticing order, sameness/difference, etc, within the drawing.

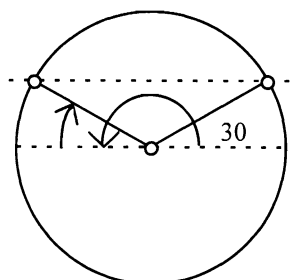


Figure 5. Considering other angles where the height is the same as 30 degrees.

Now I turn to a particular line of questioning: "Suppose the dot has turned through an angle of 30 degrees from the starting position. When will it next be at the same height,

in terms of angle from the starting position?" This question may result in someone saying 150 degrees, in which case I will ask them to tell me how they worked that out. Usually, there is the observation that the symmetry of the situation means that this 150 has been obtained from coming back 30 degrees after having turned 180 degrees (Figure 5). So, I say, the height at 30 degrees is the same as the height at  $(180 - 30)$  degrees.

Having said this I write,  $\sin 30 = \sin(180 - 30)$ , saying that I call the height of this dot *sine*, written *sin*. "When does it next get to the same height?" Some students may say that it doesn't get to be the same height again, but I say that it will. Eventually, someone says that the dot will have to go a second time round the circle, and offers  $360 + 30$  degrees. "The time after that?" And so on, until a chain of expressions is written on the board.

$$\sin 30 = \sin(180 - 30) = \sin(360 + 30) = \sin(360 + 180 - 30) = \sin(2 \times 360 + 30) = \sin(2 \times 360 + 180 - 30)$$

Someone says that the dot can go as many times round the circle as it wants, as long as it then goes another 30 degrees, or another  $(180 - 30)$  degrees. I write this as:

$$\sin 30 = \sin(360n + 30) = \sin(360n + 180 - 30)$$

We have now got into multiple solutions of trigonometric equations, only this time there has been little previous mathematical knowledge which the students have been required to remember. Instead of thinking of mathematics in terms of building blocks, with a long chain of blocks leading up to this level of mathematics content, students can engage with trigonometric equations through using their powers to imagine, notice, look for what is the same and what is different, and consider order and inverse. This means

that such high level content (level 10 and beyond, in the old National Curriculum; 'exceptional performance', in the new National Curriculum) can be engaged upon by students of a wide range of age and ability. Suddenly, it does not matter which 'level' a student is at, since little previous knowledge has been called upon in order to engage with trigonometry. High level mathematics content can be taught in mixed ability classrooms, within a whole class activity.

Bruner (1960, p. 33) said that "... any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development." This can be done with mathematics as much as any other subject, and the way in which it can be done is to let go of the building block metaphor, and recognise that all children are already mathematicians and can use the powers of their early learning.

## References

- Brown, L., Hewitt, D. & Mason, J. (1994) Ways of seeing, in M. Selinger, M. (Ed.) *Teaching Mathematics*. London: Routledge.
- Bruner, J. S. (1960) *The Process of Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hart, K. (Ed.) (1981) *Children's Understanding of Mathematics: 11-16*. London: John Murray.
- Sfard, A. & Linchevski, L. (1994) The gains and pitfalls of reification: the case of algebra, *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 26, p. 191-228.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in Society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1984) Sum: I am, *Mathematics Teaching*, 106, p. 30-33.



# Vouchers, Inclusion and the Limits of Freedom

---

## Neil de Reybekill

Neil de Reybekill is the former Head of Handsworth Alternative School in Birmingham. He is currently visiting Lecturer in Special Educational Needs at the University of Wolverhampton.

---

*... if there is a segment of the public who want this type of education, don't they have a right, as taxpayers, to have it? ... Excellent argument, I thought. Why doesn't it work in England? (Moorsom, 1979, p. 25)*

### Vouchers

In front of me, as I write, lie two pamphlets. One is from the Centre for Policy Studies and the other from my union: the National Union of Teachers. What they have in common, indeed probably their only connection, is their subject: educational vouchers.

It is a sad fact that this subject has been damned, in this country, by the company it has kept. In 1955, the economist Milton Friedman argued for a scheme which gave universal parental purchasing power in place of providing nil-priced schooling (Friedman, 1955) but, as Seldon points out, this was no more than a re-working of a scheme for educational vouchers proposed in 1926 by Cardinal Bourne (1986, p. 12).

The introduction of vouchers was Tory party policy from 1976 onwards but, after the 1979 election, it was allowed to atrophy as an initiative until October 1983, when the Secretary of State declared that the 'Voucher Scheme' was dead. For these reasons, amongst others, the notion of funding transfer has long been seen as a neo-liberal, market-oriented idea. And, yet, since the 1960s, academics on the Left (Meighan & Toogood, 1992; de la Cour, 1988; Waddell, 1988) as well as those on the Right (Beales et al, 1967; Seldon, 1986; Tooley, 1996) have continued to write in favour of an entitlement to transfer of educational funding to follow the child: no matter where the child goes to school.

In the end, legislation has recently been passed, informed by Lawlor's 1994 booklet, allowing nursery voucher schemes to be run. This appears to be a hurried and underfunded attempt to impose vouchers without sufficient consultation, agreement or resources.

In this article, I propose that we look anew at this issue: not from the position of historical or ideological dogma, but with a view to considering what it may have to offer our society and our schools.

### What if ...?

*Les periodes de crise sont des periodes de grande liberte. Le monde se disloque, les societees se decomposent, les valeurs et les espoirs sur lesquels nous avons vecu s'effondrent. L'avenir cesse d'etre la prolongation des tendances passees. Le sens de l'evolution en cours est brouille, le sens de l'histoire en suspens. (Andre Gorz, Les Chemins du Paradis)*

If, as Gorz says, times of crisis are also periods of great

freedom, then it behoves us to use this freedom to think broadly and courageously about the future role of education in our society. For, as we approach the end of a political era, one thing is particularly noticeable: that our schools are failing a very large number of children thus substantially contributing to exclusion, division and alienation in our society.

After all, are we not all entitled to look for a better future for our children: prefaced by the magic words "What if...?"

What if our education service were to be funded properly? Might there not be a point to introducing Funding Transfer Entitlement (FTE) as part of a package of measures designed to empower the individual whilst enhancing social cohesion? I suggest that not only is this possible but it is also achievable.

It has become a commonplace to claim that our schools are in crisis: politicians do so all the time:

*According to successive Secretaries of State for Education, truancy is now so widespread as to confirm a crisis of schooling, reflecting a breakdown in family, education and work discipline. Such a view was recently endorsed by the Prime Minister who, signalling his anxieties, maintained that one in four pupils now plays truant. (Gleeson, 1994)*

And yet, the education system that I work for is not what it ought to be, a force for emancipation, inclusion and social cohesion. Although it beats the socks off the old tripartite system and selection at 11, comprehensive state education – as an egalitarian programme – has failed.

As Wright (1996) noted, the decision in 1965 not to include public and grammar schools in the laws to reform state education, followed by the failure of successive governments to invest successfully in education has entrenched divisions in society (Hutton, 1996): leaving us with an education system which excludes large parts of the population.

Many of our Key Stage 4 (14-16 year old) population are persistent long-term truants from school. If you believe John Major, this figure is as high as 25%. Others go further: O'Keefe & Stoll (1994), amongst others, found that as many as 47% of this age group were at least occasional truants. This "voluntary exclusion" (Reid, 1995) is, according to Ouston & Maughan (1985), the "crystallisation of disaffection from school" rather than an activity caused solely by home or family needs. It is the tip of the iceberg of disaffection and alienation felt by a large number of our adolescent pupil population.

Consequently, truancy, disaffection, exclusions and crime have become the most prominent issues associated with the adolescent experience in Britain today. Not an

honest picture of the quiet successes of the majority, but any system which fails such a large number of those it is meant to serve cannot be said to be thriving.

Absences often tell us more than present 'facts', though in this case, we need to consider those who are no longer part of the state system of education: home-schoolers and those in private education. Why have they been alienated? It is equally essential that we address the needs of these excluded parts of society if we are to build a cohesive education system and a fairer future society.

With the 7% of the school age population going on to get the pick of the best university places and, subsequently, of the top jobs, Hutton (1996) notes:

*The dominance of the public school system is a long-standing offence to any notion of democracy or meritocracy in our society ... The wider processes of exclusion and their dependence on privatisation are laid bare by these schools. The value system that justifies such inequality is compelled to reject ideas of citizenship, inclusion and universalism. (p. 214)*

Yet, such is the negative image of state schooling and the actual, as well as mythic, success of the private sector, that 46% of parents (Hutton, 1996, p. 350), nationally, say that they would send their children to a private school if they could. This picture of parental dissatisfaction matches the picture of pupil disaffection described above. So, what is the solution?

### Vouchers and Inclusion

Perhaps the first thing to acknowledge, in approaching this problem, is that we can't put the genie back into the bottle. It is unlikely that the diverse range of public, private, charitable, church and other schools that now exist could all be nationalised and run successfully even if there was the political will so to do. That chance was lost in 1965.

And yet the UK desperately needs a proven way of empowering the parent, motivating the child and healing society – some umbrella arrangement uniting and covering the areas of quality that exist in all sectors of our educational system.

It is my suggestion that the UK looks to Denmark – a country that it has more in common with than most others – where FTE has been in use as a central plank of national education policy for many decades.

The Danes, as noted by de la Cour (1988) and Waddell (1988) amongst others, have an exemplary system of public education working hand-in-hand with a thriving alternative, private and free school sector.

What is special about this set-up is that all these component parts provide the glue in a highly cohesive society. Children's experience of school, though clearly never perfect, is one of choice. Along with their parents, they have chosen the school they want to go to from a variety of options – public and private – and they can do so without concern for cost because the money follows the child.

The Government, which means the taxpayer, pays 85% of the schools' costs: which as such are laid-down by law. In the *folkeskole* (state 6-16 comprehensive) the remainder comes from a support grant which is locally administered. In private, free and other alternative schools, the remaining 15% is paid by parents.

Detlefsen (1993) notes that:

*Even though all children can learn to read and write freely and easily in folkeskole, many parents choose to*

*pay for their children's schooling. They put little Ida in private school and between £30 and £80 in the school's giro account each month. (p. 1)*

Danish society is characterised by a solidarity borne of social democratic institutions, a sense of social conscience and trust which comes from small town roots and a commitment to progress through education.

It is also a society which understands the necessity of inclusion and the limits of freedom.

Funding Transfer Entitlement works in Denmark because, like so many other Danish institutions, it gives freedom to the individual, trusts the citizen to make an informed choice and then regulates to prevent abuse of the system by the unscrupulous.

In any system of education, there will be more and less successful schools. Parents, naturally, try to do the best for their children – including getting them into the most appropriate school. This – as Tony Wright points out – is not just their right, it is a duty of parenthood (1996).

Those who criticise FTE often do so on the grounds that it invites selection and social manipulation leading to segregation. Whilst our own bedevilled state system is hardly free of such behaviour – with middle-class parents 'buying addresses' near to sought-after schools – implications such as these must be considered.

Jensen (1996) suggests two factors that have prevented the Danish *frie skoler* from becoming the sort of élite private schools with which we are familiar in Britain. On the one hand, he argues, there has continued to be a sufficiently high level of investment in state schooling to ensure that:

*... for the vast majority of parents, there are no real reasons of attitude – political or otherwise – to choose anything else. (p. 38)*

On the other, Jensen continues, over a hundred years of legislation has ensured that private and free schools can operate almost on equal terms with the state sector. The only difference – that 15-20% of running costs not covered by public subsidy – is paid for by the parents.

Fees are usually set on a sliding scale: so that those with lower incomes pay less. Legal restrictions limit the sums raised from parents, so that schools risk having their funding withdrawn totally if they try to charge too much or allow their costs to rise above set levels.

The inspection of private and free schools is community based to ensure local satisfaction with the quality of core teaching and pass rates for the national school-leaving exams. The government gets involved only where the community or its inspectors are unhappy, or – as recently at the Tvind schools – in the case of financial and pedagogic mismanagement (UVM, 1996).

Occasionally, where there are serious problems with a child 'failing' and a parent continually changing their school, the local authorities can step in to offer alternative class provision. But this is still used mainly to support children with emotional and behaviour problems.

There is an elastic dimension to this. All *folkeskole* (local state schools) must make provision for all the children resident in their *skoledistrikt*, whether they attend the school or not. Should the parents choose not to avail themselves of a place at that school, the funding follows the child to whichever school he or she eventually attends.

Where a school is much in demand, places are allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis, with waiting lists much in evidence for successful *friskoler*. One beauty of this system is that if you are unable to get a place in the private

or free school of your choice, and you don't like the look of the local state school, then, as long as you can find 10-12 other parents who are in a similar position, you can start your own school. The government will help you find premises, employ staff and run it. Which is only natural: are they not, after all, charged with spending your taxes wisely, providing the education of your choice for your children?

Where a school is failing, local people know and won't use it: rolls fall and the school adapts or closes. Class sizes in all schools are low (19 per class), so it takes only a few parents who are dissatisfied to make a rapid and drastic difference to teachers' jobs.

Ultimately, though, from the teachers' point of view, the number of jobs in an area doesn't fall with the establishment of a new free school. As the money follows the child, and free school classes tend to be smaller, there is always the need for new teachers whilst private and free schools are in balance with the state *folkeskole* sector.

Because this funding arrangement covers *all* schools, it works as a unifying element – a common thread linking state schools to Islamic free schools and those of the socialist seventies to those of the Christian Right established in recent years. Students can and do move freely in and out of the state sector and so do teachers.

The findings of my research into Danish alternatives to mainstream education are backed-up by Peter Jyrk, head of a Free School in Frederiksberg. He emphasised:

*It is important to keep the breadth of range of schools on offer – both solid, good, big folkeskoler and also private schools for those with special wishes or special needs. (Detlefsen, 1993)*

### The Limits of Freedom

Denmark is by no means a perfect society. It has, for example, seriously mismanaged its policy with regard to race, ethnicity and the settlement of migrants and refugees. However, it remains an example to many outsiders:

*Denmark is a clean, well regulated country populated by prosperous, literate people who all vote in elections, live in handsome and modest surroundings and have no hang-ups about sex. (Keillor, 1993, p. 11)*

It also has a great deal to teach us about high attendance rates in schools, low levels of crime and long-term economic prosperity.

Coincidentally, Denmark also spends the highest amount, per capita, on education in Europe and this investment in education which is seen in government is mirrored in the family. This has historic roots but is continued today with wide parental involvement in schools – seeing how their high taxes are spent – and a clear understanding that no western society can hope to pay civilised wages to its workforce unless they are educated to very high levels indeed.

This commitment to the education of our fellow citizens

is possible in this country too. But the key to this is a fairer system of educational funding, giving an equal chance to all in society – at least at the level of school provision. FTE can offer us that inclusive chance – so that those who need academic education the most are not alienated from it ... and those who need socialising get it.

Fully funded vouchers, as part of a raft of desperately needed educational reforms, including increased spending on education, can offer us the beginnings of healing for our divided society. This idea, once stripped of its ideological baggage, can offer emancipation and inclusion in a more participatory society, given active parental involvement, government investment and regulation.

As Keillor noted:

*This sense of order is what makes freedom possible. There are 11 political parties in Denmark because there is only one way to eat lunch ... There are, after all some limits. If there weren't limits to freedom, how would we know how free we are? (Keillor, 1993, p. 11)*

### References

- Beales, A.C.F. et al (1967) *Education: a framework for choice*. London: IEA.
- de la Cour, P (1988) Diversity in one country: the Danish example, *Education Now*, May/June, pp. 28 & ff.
- Detlefsen, L. (1993) Folkets Skoleer for Stor, *Politiken*, 10 October.
- Friedman, M (1955) The Role of Government in Education, in R. Solo (Ed.) *Economics and the Public Interest*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Gleeson, D. (1992) School attendance and truancy: a socio-historical account, *Sociological Review*, 40, pp. 437-490.
- Gorz, A. (1983) *Les Chemins du Paradis*. Paris: Editions Galilée.
- Hutton, W. (1996) *The State We're In*. London: Vintage.
- Jensen, J.C. (1996) Den danske friskole - elitaer eller blot for de privilegerede?, *Uddannelse*, 29(10), pp. 37-41.
- Keillor, G. (1993) The Tidy Secret of Danish Freedom, *The New York Times*, 5 September, p. 11.
- Lawlor, S. (1994) *Nursery Choices: the right way to pre-school education*. London: CPS Policy Study.
- Meighan, R. & Toogood, P. (1992) *Anatomy of Choice in Education*. Nottingham: Education Now.
- Moorsom, S. (1979) Statefunded alternatives, *Where*, 144, January, p. 25.
- O'Keefe, D. & Stoll, P. (Eds) (1994) *Issues in School Attendance and Truancy*. London:
- Ouston, J. & Maughan, B. (1985) Issues in the Assessment of School Outcomes, in D. Reynolds (Ed.) *Studying School Effectiveness*. Lewes: Falmer.
- Reid, K. (1986) Truancy and school absenteeism: the state of the art, *Maladjustment and Therapeutic Education*, 4(3).
- Seldon, A. (1986) *The Riddle of the Voucher*. London: IEA.
- Tooley, J. (1996) *Education Without the State*. London: IEA.
- UVM (1996) *Ny Lov vil Stoppe Tvind*. Danish Ministry of Education (UVM) press release, 7 May.
- Waddell, A. (1988) Alternative education in Denmark, *Education in the North*, 24, pp. 67-74.
- Wright, T. (1996) Good Grammar, *The Guardian* 1 February.

# Reflections on a Sabbatical Year

---

**George Varnava**

George Varnava is headteacher of Ashburton High School in Croydon. In this article he shares his observations on the state of education in the United Kingdom following his recent sabbatical year as president of NAHT.

---

My presidency of NAHT (National Association of Headteachers) provided the exciting opportunity to represent a professional body, travel extensively in all parts of the UK and several other European countries, confer with other organisations, lead delegations to government departments and visit schools.

Every NAHT president aims to put a personal stamp on the year and I set out with two particular objectives: firstly, to shift educational debate from the commercial to the philosophical and, secondly, to promote an international dimension in schools. The presidential theme for 1995/96 was 'Reform, Revolution, Renaissance'.

The past ten years have seen unprecedented change in education. The promise of a five-year moratorium on innovation was unconvincing and unfulfilled. Even the recent 16-19 Review by Dearing was hailed by the press as "the biggest shake-up in 40 years". It does seem, nevertheless, that the former Secretary of State listened to the teacher organisations. Our representations on exclusions, detentions, school security, the sharing of responsibility for children between home and school and, most recently, early retirement have been effective. OFSTED is learning and adapting; even the Chief Inspector admits that the organisation and its process have their weaknesses. We are, too, getting closer to a clearer, agreed definition of the related roles of Headteachers and governors and there is a renewed political commitment to a General Teaching Council.

In a heated debate on the environment, a roads protester asked "what will Britain be like when it's finished?" We might well ask the same question of education to remind ourselves that perfection is illusory and that we are engaged in an evolutionary process in which progress is more important than achievement. What is certain is that the future is unlikely to turn out the way we planned it. Predicting the future is tempting but only worth attempting if we understand the present circumstances on which that future will be based. In education, the effect of waves of reform has been to deprive the professionals of control; teachers have been brainwashed by a national preoccupation with failure; they suffer from a sense of injustice; but, mostly, they have accepted the impossible: total responsibility for children. For teaching and learning, health and safety, physical and moral well-being, general conduct and motivation, teachers are held accountable and blame-worthy.

It is time to question seriously the role of schools and society's expectations of teachers. It is self-evident that schools are struggling to compensate for the decline of social structures. The family, Church, Youth Service,

National Service and apprenticeships no longer meet the complex needs of children and young adults. The school is fighting a losing battle against more powerful pressures: consumerism, television and the belief that the world owes everyone a living. Schools have become the last reliable providers of continuity and security and, in spite of the impression commonly given, children want to be there. Continuity and security are not easily compatible with a rapidly evolving society. Attitudes change, expectations increase, the extraordinary becomes the norm. Note, for example, that what was once known in sex-education programmes as 'family planning' is now presented as 'safe sex'.

At the end of the presidential year I wrote to the former Secretary of State with some observations on an experience not enjoyed by many. I indicated that the concerns most commonly expressed across the UK were: Headteacher/governor relationships; the effect on schools of a market mentality, and the widespread low standard of working conditions. These are all matters that continue to be central to the educational debate.

Teacher morale may be low; but teachers are succeeding against tremendous odds. There are many examples of good practice and excellence. All schools, whatever opinion or judgement is made of them, have examples of success to show. What has hit schools hardest is accelerating change. Each new demand comes sooner than the last like the 'transverse yellow bar markings' at the end of a fast carriageway: even though they are meant to slow you down! Deteriorating working conditions add to the demoralisation of both children and adults. By comparison with France where 66 new *lycées* were built between 1987 and 1993, Britain has failed dramatically to invest in education. Serious problems resulting from disagreements between Headteachers and governors are certainly increasing. There is a fundamental question still to be answered: 'Who runs schools?' The directive that 'Headteachers are responsible for day-to-day management' is inadequate. Management decisions invariably have consequences beyond the immediate.

The teaching profession has been conned by the 'school-improvement movement'. I do not believe that there is any school trying to get worse. Education, after all, means improvement; that is why schools exist. This 'movement' has joined the ranks of parasitic industries which leech precious resources from where they are most needed: the classroom. OFSTED's own report on school improvement programmes in America reveals the ineffectiveness of such policies (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 21 February 1997).

Perhaps the most pernicious influence on schools has been the drive towards 'competitiveness': a commercial principle misguidedly applied to education. RSA's Sir Christopher Ball's slogan: 'learning pays' ignores the intrinsic value of education; we learn for all sorts of reasons, not only to increase our earning power. Ironically, in the case of teachers – the very people responsible for the encouragement of learning – the slogan is wildly untrue. Paradoxically, the Secretary of State has condemned 'anti-intellectualism' yet promotes the notion of learning for profit.

In recent years, some professional associations have become a strong political force. At party political conferences, at meetings with government departments, with prompt submissions to consultation processes and through a high media profile, they have kept up the pressure on government, particularly in respect of the management of

schools, school governance, discipline, school security, professional qualifications and training. They have succeeded in keeping education at the top of the political agenda and used the media to keep issues in the public eye. One of their most difficult but most necessary objectives must be to attract a more generous investment in education and ensure that resources are properly targeted: at schools. The slogan must be: 'cash not condemnation'. If there is one persistent barrier to the advancement of British education, it is surely an unwillingness to set reform within the context of an inter-dependent world. There is no international dimension in the curriculum; we are one of the very few mono-lingual countries among developed and developing nations and we are so preoccupied with competition that we under-value collaboration not only as members of a European 'union' but, more destructively, among ourselves.

# The Contribution of School Management to Spirituality

---

**John Brennan**

Clyde Chitty's editorial in the last issue of *FORUM* challenged the imposition of moral absolutism in schools. This article by John Brennan, until recently a Senior Lecturer in Education at De Montfort University, considers the contribution that school management can make to spirituality.

---

On Monday 21st October 1996, the widow of the murdered London headteacher, Philip Lawrence, launched a campaign which was designed to highlight issues relating to the moral and spiritual development of young people. Her campaign was endorsed specifically by each of the leaders of the three major political parties, each of whom attested his personal commitment to Christian values. On the same day, the Roman Catholic bishops published a summary of the Catholic Church's teaching on social issues. Two months earlier SCAA had published its Discussion Paper No 6 *Education for Adult Life: the spiritual and moral development of young people*. There has been an almost unprecedented level of interest and comment throughout a summer tragically remembered for the incidents in North London, Dunblayne and Wolverhampton. Schools are seen, perhaps unrealistically, as major stakeholders in present and future strategies aimed at filling a vacuum in the community. Much of the comment is couched in terms of 'schools do; schools could; schools ought'. These exhortations may simply not last, indeed, they may all be in some sort of educational and political backwater by the time this article is read. Crucially, the SCAA document and much of the public media response is relatively generalised, and will only lead to specific outcomes if those involved in the management of schools are convinced, intellectually and then organisationally, that schools can be powerful agents for some of the suggested changes. Nowhere is this more important than in examining the potential of school management itself for fostering and nurturing the concept of spirituality. There is little mention of spirituality in management literature, although there is

a growing body of work considering business ethics: this does not mean that we should ignore this topic, but we have to be sensitive to working in quite uncharted territory. For the purpose of this short article, therefore, I want to reflect on some of the aspects of spirituality set out in the SCAA document, and try to interpret these alongside the role of senior managers in school.

The document suggests that spirituality includes "the essence of being human, involving the ability to surpass the boundaries of the physical and material". When we review the work of our colleagues and pupils in school, we are hoping surely that the formation inherent in good teaching and learning will transcend the immediate and the obvious. In recent years, however, the fundamental objectives set for schools by central government have been weighted heavily towards the immediate and the obvious: national curriculum; pupil testing; teacher appraisal; school inspection; value for money; all contributing to the new education market-place. Inevitably, school managers have responded, usually vigorously and successfully, to these tasks, but in the process have possibly neglected 'the essence of being human' in favour of academic scoring and financial prudence. To return to a more fundamental perception of the true purposes of education is not easy in such a context. Neither is it easy to give emphasis, resources and enthusiasm to the 'development of the inner life, insight and vision': these are concepts that require time for reflection and analysis, and many of the mechanisms needed to sustain the 'efficient' school have not been conducive to such reflection: they are instruments for the achievement of external goals rather than openings for the innerself to



emerge. Similarly, the new accountabilities have limited our inclination to “believe in ideals and possibilities that transcend our experience of the world”. Even the curriculum proposals have been limited to a national perspective, conveying perhaps an underlying notion of selfishness and superiority. The very pace at which we work through the curriculum is in danger of creating blinkers designed to keep us on course and on task. It requires a very brave and determined headteacher to encourage sparkle and adventure in a genuinely outward-looking curriculum. School management may have become the custodian of systems rather than the creator of challenge, assurance and affirmation.

The SCAA definition suggests that spirituality is concerned with ‘an inner world of creativity and imagination’. How do children gain access in school to this inner world if value for money, performance indicators and action plans are increasingly the *raison d’être* of the school? How do they engage in ‘the quest for meaning in life, for truth and ultimate values’ when the major preoccupation of school management is with the secular (i.e. the worldly, temporal, material and mundane: *Oxford Thesaurus*, 1991). Professor Stephen Ball writes of teachers “over-determined and over-regulated” working in “a tight bundle of planning and surveillance”. Surely, school management needs to realise that teachers deprived of autonomy and trust, are in no position to create autonomy for children. School management itself needs to become more creative and imaginative and to free itself from the tyranny of unnecessary restraints and procedures. Only when

school management itself rediscovers its ‘sense of identity and self-worth’ can it express its own value for the teachers and children who work in our schools. Rediscovering that identity means challenging the values that have restricted us. Who is restricting us anyway? Is it the children? Is it parents? Is it league tables? Is it governors? Or is it ourselves? I begin to suspect, and fear, that it may be the latter; perhaps that is why so many of my former colleague heads retire at 52 years. Can we not challenge this culture: Philip Lawrence had the courage to challenge a culture.

I have only taken a few elements from the SCAA document in order to highlight the need for school managers to begin themselves to think of what they do in a spiritual sense. If we can view a school in terms of some sort of grid, then we can see how the vertical lines of curriculum, performance indicators, planning, value for money, have imposed themselves. No school can function educationally with only vertical values, we need horizontal values to create a balanced and creative school. The values of acceptance, tolerance, respect, friendship, love, have been accompanied in the past by emphases on insight, imagination, creativity, identity and vision. Some schools and colleagues will find their roots for these values in a “response to God, the other, or the ultimate”. Others will find them in notions of a kinder, warmer, more accepting community. Many of the transactions we have daily in schools are contributing significantly to the spiritual development of pupils. Perhaps we all need to reflect on the potential of school management for nurturing this development even more.

# Black Teachers as Professionals: survival, success and subversion

---

**Audrey Osler**

This article by Audrey Osler, a Senior Lecturer of the University of Birmingham’s School of Education, is based on a lecture to the National Union of Teachers at Hamilton House in June 1996.

---

This article draws on life history research which I conducted with black student teachers, experienced teachers and senior managers in education from 1991 to 1995. The student teachers’ narratives have been discussed elsewhere (Osler, 1994a, b, c). Here I draw particularly on the narratives of the experienced teachers and those who reached senior management positions.

First, I would like to focus briefly on each of the three Ss in the title: survival, success, and subversion. You may recall a recent television advertisement for Christian Aid which shows an old woman talking directly to the camera. She begins by describing how she has survived war, suffering and many hardships. Her courage and determination come through very strongly. The camera then moves slowly downwards to reveal a small baby she is carrying in her arms. She introduces the child: “This is my grand-daughter.

I don’t want her to survive”. The old woman goes on to explain that she wants much more for the child: she wants her to live life to the full and to enjoy it. The first S in my title is survival. I discuss black teachers’ professional survival, which like that of the old woman, may require considerable courage and determination.

The second S of the title is success. I want to describe some stories of black teachers’ successes, stories which I believe deserve to be celebrated. When we as teachers concentrate all our energy into survival it is easy to neglect such celebrations. I examine not only how black teachers have been successful but also consider some of the factors which motivated them. Success is not usually achieved lightly. In the second part of the article I therefore also count some of the costs of success.

The third S is subversion, and in a way I have cheated

a little to produce this third S. In this section I highlight ways in which black teachers have sought to change schools, and about a shared vision to transform education. Here I am really talking about transformation rather than subversion, although we sometimes need to adopt subversive tactics to achieve change and transformation! This section is also about the ability of individuals and groups to challenge racism, and seek to make schools the kind of places where the rights of *all* children, and particularly those of black children, are realised.

This brings me to a fourth S not mentioned in the title: strategies. Throughout I seek to highlight some of the strategies which black teachers have used to effectively achieve this goal of transformation.

### Survival

Recent years have seen a considerable growth of interest in the lives and work of teachers and headteachers (for example, Sikes et al, 1985; Acker, 1989; Nias, 1989; Ribbins & Marland, 1994). Many of these studies have tried to understand how teachers perceive their work and how they develop what I would call a particular professional identity. As educators we recognise the importance of a child's identity in the processes of teaching and learning, but we often neglect the impact of teachers' identities and self-awareness in these same processes. Very few of the published studies of teachers' lives and work have included black teachers' stories or examined black teachers' careers. One of my objectives was to explore the development of black teachers' professional identities, how these teachers saw their role as educators. Running through these teachers' accounts was another political or community identity, their identity as black people. I want to consider how these teachers' various identities influence each other: how does an individual's identity as a black person influence their professional identity as a teacher? Are there any tensions or contradictions which may be experienced between professional and socio-political identities?

I held in-depth interviews with a total of 26 experienced teachers, 10 of whom were in senior positions: headteachers and advisers. There were 18 women and eight men in this sample. All were based in the West Midlands and in London and were working in LEAs and schools where there are substantial black communities, although many had also worked or studied in predominantly white communities. The teachers in this study were invited to participate as black teachers, and none of them questioned or challenged this at the outset. Nevertheless, the term black has been strongly questioned in recent years by writers such as Modood (1992) who has suggested that, when applied to people of South Asian descent it ignores an important principle, that of self-definition. The teachers in this study generally accepted the term, despite their varied histories, languages, religions and cultures, as one which might be applied to them as people of African, Asian or Caribbean descent. In doing so they were using, if you like, a form of short-hand to acknowledge some shared experiences of living in Britain today. Nevertheless, as they recounted their stories it became clear that individuals' understandings of the term, and the degree to which they accepted the term as a way of identifying or describing themselves, varied considerably.

You may be wondering, why this emphasis on identity? Surely the key question is how can black teachers survive racism within the education system? I would like to suggest,

from the evidence of these stories, that one of the ways in which black teachers learn to survive, and even manage racism, is through a process of negotiating and re-defining their personal identities. The stories speak for themselves to confirm that within black teachers' professional lives racism is a powerful force, and one which can operate in extremely subtle as well as overt ways to undermine individual teachers. Black headteachers and senior managers are not immune from its damaging effects. Here I do not wish to focus on racism, but simply to acknowledge it. To acknowledge something is not however to accept it, and while I recognise the existence and damaging effects of structural racism in these teachers' lives I want also to emphasise that this is not the end of the story. There is much more to black people's lives than racism.

Many of the teachers in this study entered teaching without necessarily having given much thought to their personal, political or community identities. It is the experience of teaching and their interaction with other teachers and pupils, which cause them to reflect on how they see themselves. Many feel an additional pressure on them as black people, from the predominantly white education community. One young African Caribbean woman in her second year as a primary teacher expressed it like this:

*Nothing has been asked or expressed of me, but I feel because I am black that I have to prove myself, I don't know why, I just feel it. And I have got an added sort of burning, because I am new as well ... I have got to be seen doing all the right things.*

Another young teacher was very anxious to be accepted as a good teacher, rather than as a good *Asian* teacher. He was aware of the dangers of racist stereotyping being applied, even when he was succeeding:

*If I do my job as well as I think I can do it, then I think I will be serving other Asians or other non-white people as much as I think I would like to, in a sense that people could see that an Asian person or a non-white person could do the job comfortably. ... There is no sort of language problem, or stereotypical situation: why can't a black teacher just be like any other teacher?*

A more experienced teacher in a middle management post referred explicitly to her growing awareness of her political identity, after she moved from her first job in a secondary school in Scotland to work as a Section 11 teacher, first in one West Midlands authority and then in another:

*I began to work with people who had also fought discrimination and had their own stories to tell. In [the new LEA] the black teachers were more aware of racism and their experience of it, and in education generally. That was quite good in terms of my own development as a black person. I felt I was able to develop in that way, as well as to develop professionally through that (My emphasis).*

One identity does not rule out others and this teacher sometimes talks of her experiences and identity as a Muslim, particularly as a Muslim woman. At other points in her narrative she emphasises the experience of growing up bilingual in Britain. At different times she stresses her role as a mother and at others what it means to her to have a management role in the education service. One point that comes over in her story is the encouragement and strength which she receives from the black parents and children in her school.

Although working in a predominantly black school or

community can bring advantages for many teachers it can also act as an external constraint on identity. Identity should be a question of choice. Yet a number of teachers offer examples of ways in which some black children and adults expect them to behave as black people, conforming to a particular stereotype or model. There can be an element of imposition in the expectations of others. For example, a number of women teachers in the study encountered parents or children who had fixed ideas about the way they should dress.

One African Caribbean man recounted how some of his African Caribbean pupils found it difficult to accept him as black. Although he clearly took an anti-racist approach, which was apparent in his pastoral work in the school, he did not conform to their particular expectations of blackness, because of his middle-class British accent and personal interests. In the criticism or taunt that a black teacher is 'acting white' there is often the implication that the individual is denying the existence of racism, and rejecting their own culture and identity. In the case of black teachers who are working in the interests of all their students, but particularly conscious of the racism which many black students are encountering, such criticism can not only be hurtful but frustrating. In addition to the barriers of structural and inter-personal racism some black teachers may find themselves facing such external impositions of identity.

These examples illustrate that potential challenges to black teachers' professional and political identities may come from within the black communities as well as from white colleagues and children. Black teachers' survival means responding to these challenges and managing tensions between their identities as teachers and their identities as black people without denying aspects of themselves and their experience.

I have many more stories of survival which I could write about but shortage of space means that I have to move on to the second S: success. I hope that from these snippets from other people's stories it is possible to appreciate some of the tensions which, I would argue, exist for black educators at all phases of our education system.

### Success

One of the factors which led me to carry out this research was reflection on my own career. At the start of my career I was unable to achieve internal promotion in school. In my first school I watched as other less experienced and less well qualified colleagues were promoted over me. I eventually gained promotion by moving into a section 11 post in another LEA. In this post I benefited from the wider perspectives and opportunities which were available and re-gained my confidence in my abilities. I had the opportunity to lead in-service courses, to be involved in whole-school planning and curriculum development. I learnt a great deal from collaborative teaching with colleagues. My confidence was restored, I was a good teacher after all! Nevertheless, my qualifications and experience as a history teacher were overlooked and I had to develop a new area of expertise: multicultural and anti-racist teaching. Although I enjoyed this work, I also found it emotionally demanding always to have an anti-racist label in my work. My next job was as the head of a large teachers' centre in a different part of the country, where I was responsible for in-service courses in everything from primary science to secondary art and from induction courses to headteachers' conferences. Naively, I thought I had lost the multicultural

and anti-racist tag, but I quickly found out that it travelled with me. I was working in the town where I myself had gone to school. When I spoke up in favour of equality, it was sometimes suggested that "We don't do things like that round here" or "You are a newcomer, but you'll soon get used to local thinking". There was no real retort when I eventually explained that I understood quite well, that I was a local person and a product of local schools!

My own career has not really been planned, and I cannot be described as having followed a traditional path, yet a number of its features are also to be found in the stories of those whom I interviewed. My study of black teachers' lives and careers suggests that those who have made it to the top have often had to choose non-traditional routes. Of the ten headteachers and senior managers only three had followed the traditional path through from classroom teacher to secondary school head of department or primary school curriculum area and then to deputy head and headteacher. At one point or another the others each had a Section 11 or equivalent 'race equality' job.

These 10 people reflect quite a broad range of experience: at the time of the interviews they were working in four urban LEAs in the West Midlands or London. Although seven of the ten had migrated to Britain from India or the Caribbean, six had had all or a significant part of their schooling here, arriving as school-aged or pre-school aged children. All but one of the ten gained their teaching qualifications here in Britain and all had gained their highest qualification here.

As black educators in Britain, a number of these senior managers have been 'high profile'; for example, many have attracted considerable media attention, both local and national. I want to guard against sweeping generalisations, since they have both common and varying experiences. These are likely to have been influenced by such factors as self-identity, gender, family and social class background, age, religion, nationality, culture, and perceived ethnicity. Their experiences do need to be recognised as *individual* experiences but there are some common threads which, I believe, we can learn from.

There is not time to explore each of these threads so I will do little more than list the factors which a number of the senior managers put forward to explain their success:

- an education abroad, often with encouragement from a particular teacher:  
*I remember my teachers in the Caribbean, I remember one of them in particular who was very concerned about the progress I was making, that I was working hard, because my parents were very ambitious that I should be successful. And from very early on I wanted to teach, I liked the thought of teaching.*
- family encouragement: 'nobody said you couldn't do it'
- (among those schooled in Britain) learning to manage racism, rather than letting it get the better of you when young
- very strong parental support during schooling (this was emphasised most by those educated in Britain):  
*I was brought up on a big white council estate in Manchester. ...We were brought up to believe that you just got good results, full stop. That's how it was in*

*those days, in our family anyway. And I think that because we were so 'special' the teachers wanted us to do well. We were a curiosity to them and certainly to some of the children. I don't remember anything terrible happening in the early infant school days except for some of the books; I remember not liking the Black Sambo books. I didn't like playtimes because of name calling and stupid things like that, finding friends at that early stage was quite difficult. ... I was so glad when I was made a prefect in junior school, where you didn't have to go outside.*

- overcoming the initial traumas of migration: *one of the first things they did was to reject my educational qualifications when I came here. Even though the papers were set in England and sent out to Jamaica for me to sit and sent back here to be marked and so forth. ... So I had to go back [to college] because I was determined that I was going to be a teacher and not only a teacher but a headteacher.*
- obtaining good qualifications: (five of the ten held higher degrees and a sixth was studying for a PhD)
- high levels of personal determination: for example, one head describes a teaching practice she did while at teacher training college: *I was the only African Caribbean student in my year ... As I was the only one, the only black person, and going [on teaching practice] to places like a coal mining district... I set out to succeed. I had good teaching practices but I think it was because I was a fierce young person. Going into the classroom I was determined that you were going to listen to what I wanted you to do. ... It wasn't that difficult, but that doesn't mean I wasn't aware that the kids were saying Blackie and that sort of stuff. But I got on with it, because it really was a sort of do or die. ... And I think as a student I worked myself silly because it was very important that I didn't fail. I couldn't fail, do you know what I mean? That didn't come into the question at all.*

What then motivated these people to enter teaching and to strive for the top? Eight of the senior managers chose teaching as their first choice of career. Two of the women would have preferred to have become doctors, but both of them were thwarted by the processes of migration: one married and lacked support from her husband, the other was sent on her arrival in Britain to a girls' secondary modern school where there were no opportunities to study sciences. A number wanted to work for racial equality and justice. This is something which the senior managers held in common with many of the younger and less experienced teachers in the study: they wanted to provide children with a high quality education and they wanted to ensure that black children, in particular, had a better education than many of the teachers themselves had experienced. Notably, the senior managers managed to maintain this idealism, despite the difficulties and stresses which their senior positions often carried. Two of the ten were able to name a senior colleague who gave them encouragement at an early stage in their careers, although a number emphasised the benefits of networking with other black teachers, either through their Section 11 work or through joining organisations like NAME (National Anti-Racist Movement in Education). Interestingly enough, none of them mentioned networking through their union, although a number were critical of the lack of support they had received from this source.

I would not wish to underestimate the costs of success for these senior managers. Many argued that the opportunities offered to them in the mid-1980s in Section 11 posts gave them experience which stood them in good stead for the future. Many also saw this period as 'an affirmation of their blackness'. They recognised however, that there is a danger in getting labelled in these posts and that the route which they followed is not open to black teachers today.

The senior educators in this study were generally very aware of the political dimension to their work. Most sought posts where they would have the greatest impact on pupils' lives, and for one this meant giving up a senior inspectorial post to become a headteacher. Holding a senior post was no protection from racism, and two teachers, both primary heads, spoke of horrific experiences of harassment on taking up a new post as headteacher. This was explained in terms of the difficulties which some white people experience in accepting a black person in a position of authority.

Many, particularly the women, feel that the personal costs of success have been high, in terms of family and personal relationships. This may also be true for many white headteachers, but be particularly acute among black senior educators who feel the need to work harder than their white colleagues in order to be accepted, and under continued pressure to prove themselves at all stages in their careers but particularly in senior positions. If the costs of success are so high then individuals need to believe that career progression brings more than its intrinsic rewards. To understand why these senior managers retained their determination and ideals we need to consider the third S: subversion.

### Subversion

As I wrote earlier, what I really mean here is not subversion but a vision of the transforming nature of education. I have identified six broad strategies which are adopted by black educators in response to racism and injustice in schools: rejecting, conforming, reforming, affirming, challenging and transforming. I present these as a model rather than as an exact reflection of reality. I believe it is possible to move freely from one strategy to another. Individuals will do so according to the contexts in which they find themselves.

Those who reject will probably leave teaching quite quickly, while those who conform will deny the existence of racism and seek to compete on equal terms with their white colleagues. Reforming may involve adopting home school liaison and other specialist roles while at the same time avoiding confrontation. Those who seek to reform often believe that racism is little more than personal prejudice which can be overcome by personal contact. An affirming orientation means being ready to act as an advocate of black students. A challenging orientation involves questioning the narrow designations of black people and using positions of influence to encourage the school community to be self-critical. Unless we place ourselves in positions of authority this may be as far as we can go, and it may be difficult to transform our schools.

A primary headteacher describes his strategy of transformation:

*I accepted that the system was not created for me, I just happened to be here. If the system is going to do anything for me I have got to make it do it. I have got to go in there and change it from within. ... I have argued with the more radical of my friends because they don't want*

any part of the system, they want to drop out of the system in many ways, but they want to attack it from outside. To me that is confusion, if you are going to attack it, it means you must bother about it enough to want to change it. So it would make more sense to use those energies positively and constructively, and by that I mean getting into the system and getting into some positions of power wherever possible, and then changing it from there. That is my tack.

Another headteacher expresses her transforming vision:

*Teaching I consider to be a real mission, education does matter. And it matters for young black and white kids in inner-city Manchester, inner-city Birmingham, inner-city London. And I can remember in my first school there were kids who were absolutely spaced out because they had never seen a black teacher before and they certainly didn't have a black teacher who, as one kid said: Talked with a Parker Pen voice, but who could also go into Creole and level with kids. When I went into the classroom, the first thing I said was: I am not here to play, I am here to work and you are here to learn, so if you are going to play you can stand outside. Your parents are working hard in shit houses for you to be here, they are working anti-social hours and you are not going to mess about. Now that sort of understanding I think has stayed with me and I think that is the most important thing. I understand what parents want, I understand that education is potentially liberating and useful.*

Black educators who adopt senior positions of influence are, I believe, in a position to transform our schools. More importantly they will need such a vision to sustain them in their struggle for justice. Such educators seek to empower all students and communities through participation in school decision-making. They explore the potential of education for liberation with their students. This involves working alongside parents and acting on community priorities. It requires continual self-critical development. I recognise that we will select our strategies according to the situations in which we find ourselves, but for black teachers as professionals who are striving to genuinely make a difference to our students' lives, then this transforming vision is one which we need to share with each other, with parents, and with our students.

## Conclusion

Throughout this article I have sought to highlight a number of strategies which have enabled these black teachers to survive, to succeed and to subvert or transform education. They include the development of professional and personal identities as black teachers which promote inclusivity. Survival and success requires us to recognise that hybridity is the norm and that we all have multiple identities: as professionals, as members of families, as members of communities. Professional success for black teachers is likely to bring additional responsibilities, but also additional opportunities. Above all, professional success provides us with the opportunity to work together to transform education and make it a tool for liberation.

## Note

Audrey Osler's book, *The Education and Careers of Black Teachers: changing identities, changing lives*, is due to be published by the Open University Press in June 1997.

## References

- Acker, S. (Ed.) (1989) *Teachers, Gender and Careers*. Lewes: Falmer.
- Modood, T. (1992) *Not Easy Being British: colour, culture and citizenship*. Stoke-on-Trent: Rnymymede Trust/Trentham Books.
- Nias, J. (1989) *Primary Teachers Talking*. London: Routledge.
- Osler, A. (1994a) An equal start: black students and assessment practices in initial teacher education, In S. Butterfield (Ed.) *Qualifying Teachers: assessing professional work*. Birmingham: Education Review Publications.
- Osler, A. (1994b) Education for democracy and equality: the experiences, values and attitudes of ethnic minority student teachers, *European Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 5(1), pp. 23-37.
- Osler, A. (1994c) The Flavour of the Moment? Bilingual teachers' experiences of teaching and learning, in A. Blackledge (Ed.) *Teaching Bilingual Children*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Osler, A. (1995) The education, lives and careers of black teachers in Britain. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham.
- Ribbins, P. & Marland, M. (1994) *Headship Matters: conversations with seven secondary school headteachers*. Harlow: Longman.
- Sikes, P., Measor, L. & Woods, P. (1995) *Teacher Careers: crises and continuities*. Lewes: Falmer.



# Beyond the Classroom Door: exploring the Bermuda Triangle of educational reform

**David Hopkins & Alma Harris**

In this article David Hopkins and Alma Harris of the University of Nottingham's Centre for Teacher and School Development reflect on the key challenge facing education reformers today – that of linking whole school development to innovations in classroom practice that impact positively on the achievement of students.

Pressure for educational reform and the raising of standards of student achievement – despite the recent examination successes at GCSE and A-level – still crowd the political agenda. That so much has been achieved, yet so much remains to be done, is an irony that suggests that the challenge of educational reform is met by complex rather than simplistic solutions. Yet many of the panaceas for educational change are of the 'quick fix/deficit model' variety. A notable exception to this is the DfEE's 'Improving Schools' initiative that celebrated its first birthday in June, and that recently staged its first national conference. The programme starts from the assumption that all schools, even the best, are capable of continuous improvement. It provides a coherent framework within which that improvement can be achieved, that is based on the following six principles:

- improved achievement of pupils is the common aim for all educational partners;
- all schools have the potential for continuous improvement;
- schools themselves are the main agents for improvement, with support and pressure from national and local partners;
- raising pupil performance requires each school to re-examine the processes of teaching and learning;
- comparing and using performance information is a cornerstone of school improvement; and
- school development planning, including the setting of targets related to pupil achievements, supports continuing improvement.

These six principles resonate with common sense, with best practice and have solid foundations in the research literature. Building on the work that is already in hand, the second year of the 'Improving Schools' programme includes four additional areas for action in the 1996/97 academic year:

- development planning, including the capacity for the school to manage change;
- encouraging use of comparative information by governors, head-teachers and teachers for school based target setting;
- spreading existing knowledge of 'what works' to inform teacher development and practice; and
- building the involvement and expectation of pupils and parents for high achievement.

The former Secretary of State, Gillian Shephard, has recently suggested that schools follow a five-phase cycle in order to implant the substance of these four themes.

It seems to us that these four themes address the most profound conundrum facing educational reformers today – be they politicians or practitioners. It is this – how can

the whole school initiatives, with which we are becoming increasingly familiar, link directly to those changes in classroom practice that impact positively on the achievement of students? Our experience is that however well intentioned, whole school developments often fail to get beyond the classroom door. It is as if there is a 'Bermuda Triangle' lurking just outside the classroom ready to swallow up any initiative designed to positively affect classroom practice.

In many schools a 'top down' model of implementing change and development still pervades. This approach is characterised by a belief that change within the organisation is a function of singular, purposeful leadership, rather than collaborative planning. Moreover, it implicitly assumes that implementation is an event rather than a process, and that change proceeds on auto-pilot once the development, or the plan, has been decided. The net result of this type of whole school development can be improved efficiency in relation to the overall management and organisation of the school. However, this mode of operation has notoriously little impact, or effect, upon teachers and pupils.

Yet beginning at the classroom level and working from the 'bottom up' is similarly unsatisfactory. Experience of the classroom action research movement of the seventies and eighties suggests that innovative work in individual classrooms rarely has a whole school impact. Yet as the school effectiveness research so explicitly demonstrates, it is only consistency through the whole school that has an impact on the child's long term achievement.

So if neither 'top down' nor 'bottom up' approaches work, what does? If the end product of whole school development is to be improved teaching and learning in the classroom, there is only one possible position to adopt – that is to ensure that whole school development is centrally concerned with improving teaching and learning in the classroom. This is the implicit message running through the four themes of the 'Improving Schools' initiative for the 1996/97 academic year. Yet at present they are presented as being discrete rather than dynamic. It is, however, the linkages between the themes, between planning, target setting, best practice and high expectations that ensure high standards for increasing the numbers of students. This linkage is best achieved in our experience by:

- accepting the moral imperative of taking a central focus on teaching and learning and developing a language of ownership and success;
- realising that even a classroom practice focus will be quickly marginalised unless a similar emphasis is placed on the conditions within the school and classroom that support such changes;
- understanding that there is a symmetry and overlap

between what has to be achieved at school and classroom level to ensure success;

- systematically reflecting upon the cause and effect relationship between classroom practice and student achievement, rather than just focusing upon classroom practice.

These ideas illustrate simply but powerfully the interface between whole school development and classroom improvement. The more research that takes place, the stronger the message becomes that whole school development and improvement depends upon improvements in classroom practice. Yet many of the school improvement initiatives perpetually overlook the importance of focusing on teaching and learning. Far too many of these programmes have spent too much time on policy and management issues and have neglected fundamental issues of teaching and learning. Our explanation for this concentration of effort at policy and management level is the dominance of a model of educational change which is by definition 'top down'.

As the new Secretary of State for Education and his advisers ponder the conundrum of educational reform we introduced earlier, they would be well advised to reflect on the complexity rather than on the simplicity of educational change. Take, for example, whole school development planning which over the past eight years or so has been

shown to be a key strategy in the school improvement process. A recent study conducted by colleagues at the University of London Institute of Education concluded that it is only when whole school planning has a central focus upon teaching and learning that it is likely to impact across the school as a whole – for teachers in classrooms and for pupils' learning. Whole school development planning as a process in itself is insufficient to engender meaningful teacher commitment. This is because teachers generally derive personal and professional meaning from their work in the 'classroom' rather than the 'school'. Since educational change depends upon teachers' commitment, teacher involvement in this process is essential to the success of the change effort.

Without careful consideration whole school development planning, like many other strategies, can easily become a bureaucratic management strategy that does not affect the lives of teachers and pupils. Consequently, by employing planning processes that have a resonance with effective classroom practice, and through creating meaningful links between whole school development and classroom improvement, there is a greater chance of getting beyond the classroom door – of negotiating the 'Bermuda Triangle' – and of ensuring that the rhetoric of reform is reflected in the achievement of our students.





# Teaching, Learning and Research: analogous, symbiotic or independent?

---

## Pam Denicolo

Pam Denicolo is a Reader in Education and Community Studies at the University of Reading, where her focus is on developing research in professional education from a constructivist perspective. This article is based on a paper given at the European Personal Construct Association conference at Reading in April 1996, and is concerned with her reflections on the change in role emphasis which has occurred for her professionally.

---

In recent years rapid developments in knowledge, technology and modes of delivery of the professional service of teaching have produced consequent pressures on United Kingdom teachers in whichever sector they practise. Confronted by advice and criticism, constructive and destructive, from the public and the media, from expert and laypeople alike, it is little wonder that teachers and teacher educators feel beleaguered in the face of a plethora of paradox and dilemma (Denicolo, 1996).

Evaluating a parallel situation in North America in the process of exploring the multidimensional, multilayered and dynamic nature of teacher identity, Cooper & Olson (1996) warned that such tensions created between systems and individuals can lead to fragmentation of self. Similarly, in a comparative study of primary teachers in the UK and in Hong Kong, Day & Hadfield (1996) noted that learning about teaching draws on many diverse sources, not always to the embryonic teachers' advantage: "This has resulted in the content of their professional theories and the 'architecture of their professional selves'" (Pinar 1988) becoming discontinuous and fragmented" (p. 149).

However, they go on to posit that professional development can also be enhanced by confrontation and that professional growth can be promoted by new insights derived from the identification of contradictions. It is often at points of transition in professional life, when decisions are forced about which recurrent themes are to be preserved, which should be discarded and which can be expanded, that such identification occurs. Such a watershed occurred recently for me and it is my cogitations on the relationship between the themes of teaching, learning and research, and on how each should be preserved in my future career, which form the substance of this paper.

Others involved in teacher education in the higher education sector will be familiar with the dilemmas I faced. While teaching, along with its consequent administration, threatens to consume the working day, there is still so much to learn in the face of constant change; yet, survival in the system, as well as the lack of available information on pertinent issues, demands that time is devoted to research. Interminable forms demand that we discriminate between the processes in order to list the time and effort spent on each. Superficially this seems an easy task but, as Hesse (1966) suggested, an individual's construction of events is dependent on how language is used: "observation

descriptions' are not written on the face of events to be transferred directly into language but are already 'interpretations' of events, and the kind of interpretation depends on the framework of assumptions of the language community."

Mair (1977) had similarly linked the Personal Construct Theory (PCT) of Kelly (1955) with writers on metaphor, in that they all proposed that our approaches to reality were through 'screens', 'goggles' or 'masks' which we construct. Throughout my professional life, experience with students and my exploration of various theoretical approaches to teaching and learning, combined to develop my own personal models of the concepts of teaching, learning and research. And these were not so readily differentiated as others in the 'language community', at least as exemplified on those forms, would suggest. A digest of my professional biography charts significant contributions to those models.

## Biographical Reflections

In the young adulthood of my professional life, using a PCT approach, I worked with learner teachers to find ways to help them explore and facilitate their own learning and that of their students. 'Active learning', as opposed to container-filling models of learning, became a focus for all of us as I also became involved in academic staff development, working alongside colleagues to improve teaching and learning in higher education. This kind of learning has little in common with simple reception of knowledge models nor does it fit the technical rational model which deems that professional activity is the application, in the untidy and often dirty world of real life, of principles derived in the organised and sterile world of the research laboratory. Instead, it demands that the individual engages with their own learning in contexts which make necessary some experimentation with different ideas, or, indeed, make urgent the revision of meaning in the face of challenge.

Ausubel et al (1978) used the term 'active learning' while Revans (1982) spoke of 'action learning' to communicate activities which involve examining ideas afresh, self-consciously assessing personal relevance, re-interpreting knowledge – instead of taking for granted that which is traditionally presented. This seems to be congruent with a constructivist view of what occurs in the workplace as professionals deal with dilemmas as they arise in context, constructing responses from previous experience

of actions that proved appropriate in the past, reformulating ideas as they are found to fit less well in current circumstances, experimenting with notions developed through reflection on and in practice, as advocated by Schön (1987).

Intrigued by these theories, the *middle years* were epitomised by testing them out through working with research students interested in studying professional development in many guises. Supervision of their work was and is more like action research than teaching, for me at least, as we work together to refine a question, devise methods to address it, reflect on the results of action, refine or redesign procedures and explore ways to communicate meanings both precisely and elegantly. In these activities I learn not only about other professional worlds, their similarities and differences to mine, but about different ways of using familiar tools and designing new ones; about the ramifications of implementing in a new context strategies designed for another; and about alternative ways of interpreting data, through analysis and synthesis, construction and deconstruction.

Learning, teaching and research seem to pervade all of these professional years and, though one may seem to dominate during any one period, they appear inseparable and continuous in my own professional development. So much so that in maturity, and in the changing context of my work, I began to wonder if they were not just one and the same thing.

### Synonyms, Supplements or Complements?

Learning, as psychology textbooks tell us, is a relatively permanent change in behaviour as a result of prior experience. Although formal taught courses are deemed to be a source of learning, they hold no monopoly on that activity and many would suggest that much learning actually takes place less formally.

A constellation of related ideas emerges from the literature about theories of adult learning. Knowles (1984) described adult learning as being qualitatively different to that engaged with in early years, in his andragogical model proposing six factors which, in dynamic conjunction with each other, produce this difference. These were: "the need to know; a self concept of being responsible for decisions; having experience; readiness to learn; a life, task or problem orientation and internally driven motivation."

Other educational theorists, Schön (1983,1987) and Mezirow (1981, 1990) for example, emphasised reflection on and in action as critical processes, with the latter citing Habermas' emancipatory cognitive interest as distinctive in adult domains of learning. (He had described this as involving self-knowledge from self-reflection, including reflection on the way biography has influenced how the self, the role one occupies and social expectations are perceived.)

These ideas are firmly focused on the learner as main actor in the process, so where does teaching fit in? Teaching is generally understood to be a process that involves finding ways to help others to engage with learning. In the case of professional learning in and from the workplace, much is self taught, the practitioner simultaneously fulfilling both teacher and student roles. Tutors take supporting or complementary roles, *inter alia* facilitating access to resources, raising awareness of alternative perspectives, encouraging exploration of ideas, providing stability at times of insecurity, and a sounding board in times of conflict.

The very engagement in these activities by the tutor, with different students in ever changing circumstances, inevitably means that s/he must too be continuously engaged in learning – for instance about what resources might be available, what might be viewed differently, when to act and when to leave well alone, to name but a few possibilities. Certainly such teachers with such learners cannot afford to be passive teachers, resisting relatively permanent change in behaviour in spite of experience. Perhaps in this situation the protagonists could be termed co-learners/co-teachers, with the balance shifting see-saw like through each transaction.

It seems that in these circumstances we use the titles 'teacher' and 'learner' for administrative convenience to denote, perhaps, length and range of experience and to ensure that support is supplied more in one direction than the other, rather than to represent the kinds of processes engaged in, for these are similar. In entertaining this preposterous notion, it is acknowledged that power relationships can and do exist but it is also posited that these may be inappropriate in a truly andragogical framework. Though not synonymous but perhaps symbiotic, the activities of teaching and learning are best intimately combined, each gaining from the other. In situations in which each is independent of the other, the teacher not learning and the learner being a passive recipient of information and experience, each is the poorer.

So, having briefly explored teaching and learning, let us now turn to research. A combination of dictionary definitions of traditional scientific research could produce the following general description: a methodical study or investigation involving analysis and synthesis to discover new facts or furnish new ideas about something or someone (usually someone else in traditional research!).

On the other hand those of us who are intimately involved in research with unpredictable fellow human beings in messy social contexts, rather than with inert objects in neat laboratory conditions, are acutely aware that "methodical" is a description of intent rather than practical reality. In Action Research in particular, though different trends have developed within its traditions (McNiff, 1993), a common tenet is not to treat human beings as passive subjects, rather to share with them decision-making and other research activity so to seek change and development in self as well as in others.

Such research involves co-operative finding and accumulating of information, exploration of it, checking of it against what is already known, and the making of adjustments in either or both as the fit is found to be inadequate. As previously noted (Pope & Denicolo, 1991), this is familiar ground for those who espouse a personal constructivist perspective in which, as personal scientists, we learn, as well as research, by testing hypotheses, reviewing the new in terms of similarities with and differences to the familiar. The finding of refutation of dearly held hypotheses is a discomfiting and challenging experience whether one labels oneself a learner or a researcher. In each manifestation it is tempting to deny the mismatch, excuse it on some ground or hide the evidence of it in some dark corner – of the mind, laboratory or fieldwork venue! However, that makes for neither good learning nor good research, both of which appear to demand a search for explanation even though it can be unexpected and unpleasant.

Some commonality between the processes of Action Research and of learning seems to be evident and equally

some congruence between teaching and research can be traced. Dyson (1995) focused on the relationship between good teaching and good research, finding that both evolved from a strong sense of curiosity, both involved scholarship and a critical approach and both engaged in dissemination of ideas as well as in seeking new ones. His empirical work and literature review provided convincing evidence for a range of common elements in the processes, suggesting that what constitutes pure research and what constitutes preparation for future teaching overlap on a continuum.

### Some Further Speculations

From the foregoing it seems to me that learning, teaching and research are tightly clustered concepts (or elements in our universe of professional activities), each with many constructs in common with the others, at least in terms of process, principles and values. A new model emerges which brings cohesion by linking the three activities without assuming that they are necessarily facets of the same entity. It envisions learning and teaching as two parallel strands, each working well when entwined with each other and even better if linked occasionally by bonds of research in its broadest sense – a double helix with a reproductive and developmental function like DNA.

Such a model would serve to alert us not to take our professional role titles too literally – to be teachers who don't learn; researchers who don't teach; learners who don't research; would result in very limiting experiences for ourselves and those who work and learn alongside us as well as contributing to the fragmentation of self noted at the beginning of this article.

### References

Ausubel, D. P., Novak, J.S. & Hanesian, H. (1978) *Educational Psychology: a cognitive view*, 2nd Edn. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

- Cooper, K. & Olson, M.R. (1996) The Multiple 'T's' of Teacher Identity, in M. Kompf et al (Ed.) *Changing Research and Practice: teachers' professionalism, identities and knowledge*. London: Falmer Press.
- Day, C. & Hadfield, M. (1996) Metaphors for Movement: accounts of professional development, in M. Kompf, et al (Eds) *Op cit*.
- Denicolo, P. M. (1996) Productively Confronting Dilemmas in Educational Practice and Research, in M. Kompf, et al (Eds) *Op cit*.
- Dyson, J. (1995) The Relationship between Accounting Teaching and Undergraduate Teaching. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Surrey.
- Hesse, M. B. (1966) *Models and Analogies in Science*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Kelly, G. A. (1955) *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, Vols 1 & 2. New York: W W Norton.
- Knowles, M. S. (1984) *The Adult Learner: a neglected species*. Houston: Gulf.
- Mair, J. M. M. (1977) The Community of Self, in D. Bannister (Ed.) *New Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*. London: Academic Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1981) A critical theory of adult learning and education, *Adult Learning*, 31(1).
- Mezirow, J. (1990) *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: a guide to transformative and emancipatory learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- McNiff, J. (1993) *Teaching as Learning: an action research approach*. London: Routledge.
- Pope M. L. & Denicolo P. M. (1991) Developing Constructive Action: PCP, action research and professional development, in O. Zuber-Skerrit (Ed.) *Action Research for Change and Development*, pp. 93-112. Aldershot: Gower Publishing.
- Revans R. W. (1982) *The Origins and Growth of Action Learning*. Bromley: Chartwell.
- Schön D. A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. London: Temple Smith.
- Schön D. A. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



THE OFSTED INSPECTION WAS TURNING NASTY

# Core Skills: from the heart of the matter to the keyhole

---

**Ian Duckett**

This short article by Ian Duckett, a lecturer at Barnet College, follows up some of the issues he raised in the article he wrote for *FORUM* last year on the introduction of core skills at A-level.

---

One of the debates centred on and arguably fostered by, the Dearing Review of 16-19 qualifications, is the lax and inconsistent assessment procedures of NCVQ qualifications. Nowhere is this debate more heated than in the well-furrowed field of core skills accreditation.

Ever since I can remember there have been problems about the assessment of generic skills and general education aspects of vocational education, be it liberal education; general studies; communication skills; general and communication studies; social and life skills; people and communication and, more recently, common skills or core skills.

If then, there is nothing new about the problematic nature of assessing these transferable skills, supposedly a pre-requisite for a competitive UK industrial and service workforce, why the commotion on the pages of the education press and beyond? Perhaps it is because now, these 'core'; 'key'; 'transferable' or 'generic' skills are, for the first time, making an impact on traditional academia as well as vocational further education.

At the series of conferences in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, held as part of the consultation process for the Dearing Review, the issue most extensively discussed was core skills. The concerns and interests of the participants reflected the importance of core skills for both employment and life-long learning.

General support for the development of written and oral communication skills, number, information technology, personal and interpersonal skills including working with others and taking responsibility for one's own learning, expressed by participants in the Review, reflects both the perceived needs of the employers and the aspirations of the students.

A CBI/TEC survey of 1995 ranked core skills in order of value to employers as: (1) communications; (2) working with others; (3) application of number; (4) improving own learning and performance; (5) problem solving, and (6) information technology. Ninety per cent of the employers surveyed, rated communication as either first or second in importance and 85 per cent placed working with others in the top two skills.

Vocational and academic students alike seem to be in agreement about the value of core skills, once they understand the nature of them.

Students on the GNVQ Advanced Health and Social Care Programme at Barnet College commented positively on the opportunity to reflect on their own learning processes and felt that time spent on developing the non-mandatory core skills of working with others and improving own

learning and performance, has enhanced their chances of getting in to university. UCAS now emphasises the value of core skills through the Youth Award Scheme, FE Award Scheme and Universities Award (accredited through ASDAN – Award Scheme Development & Accreditation Network) in its notes for applicants.

A pilot scheme involving A-level students, included in a FEFC national survey, focused on communication, improving own learning and performance, working with others and problem solving, as part of a student enrichment and entitlement programme and led to some positive outcomes.

Julie, a student on the full-time A-level programme, welcomed the opportunity to gain control for aspects of the student learning experience not usually assessed in A-level courses. She said: "I can now see the value of thinking about the way I learn and working with other people. When I was introduced to the scheme, I felt quite negative, but now I have a qualification that lists four important skills." Ellen, an A-level student at a neighbouring college which does not offer a core skills programme to its students said: "I would have loved the opportunity to have spent time working on my study skills and developing teamwork skills."

In the lengthy appendices of the Dearing Review in a section entitled 'Breadth and Core Skills', Dearing seems to be in agreement: "The most commonly expressed viewpoints referred to the need for core skills to be the same for all 16+ students, or affirmed that they should be mandatory."

On the surface at least, according to Dearing, employers and students alike, core skills are a good thing because employers and HE providers are concerned at 'deficiencies' (Dearing's term) in numerical and communication skills and that GCSE qualifications do not guarantee that students have been successful in developing these essential transferable skills.

The proposed change of name to key skills, may at first glance seem to be merely cosmetic, but to me, downgrades the skills from the foreground they should occupy at the heart of the learning experience and at the centre of qualifications envisaged in the Dearing Review, to a simply mechanistic role aimed at opening the door for a glimpse of what is inside the big house of education. It seems a shame to have gone so far down the road of integration only to balk at the final hurdle and offer a learning support or basic skills model of 'core' or 'key' skills.

# Book Reviews

## **School Development Planning: a practical guide to the strategic management process**

CORRIE GILES, 1997

Plymouth: Northcote House. 120pp, £12.99 paperback.  
ISBN 0 7463 0626 1

This book sets out "to provide a clear and straightforward guide to school development planning in the light of experience gained during the difficult transitional years immediately following the 1988 Education Reform Act ... (and) is designed to improve the strategic management of the various stages of the planning process as well as (providing) clear guidance on how to produce effective working documents."

The book succeeds in achieving the above objectives. It is written in a clear and easily understandable style and the guidance offered is both thought-provoking and practically helpful. The emphasis on practical support is linked to suggestions and recommendations based on direct evidence drawn from case studies. These take the form of management tips and management issues which provide useful reference points for action, discussion and follow-up. The author does not claim to provide an academic foundation for development planning but does offer a useful reading list for those who wish to pursue the more theoretical aspects of this subject.

The target audience for the book is wide and includes LEA officers, headteachers, governors and teachers. It is also suggested that the book may provide useful reading when reviewing development plans before an OFSTED inspection. If this latter suggestion is taken up it should, in my view, be at least a year before the due date, so that some of the suggestions for action and implementation can be incorporated into the overall approach to management within the school.

Corrie Giles provides a clear and useful distinction between the different types of plans: strategic, operational and action, which are part of the school development planning process. He stresses the importance of seeing such planning as contributing towards a holistic and visionary approach to school development. He refers to the difficulties schools face when confronted with the 'tyranny of the urgent' and 'planning as incremental ad hocery'; two phrases which I believe provide a very apt description of some of the planning which has occurred in the wake of ERA and the constant adjustments to the National Curriculum and the OFSTED framework.

The examples in the book are taken from secondary schools, where the organisations and structures are more complex. And, whilst the author has aimed the book at all phases of schooling, I suspect it is less useful for those involved with primary schools than was intended. Nevertheless it is a very useful book which tackles not just the planning process but the implications for action and implementation for everyone involved in school development.

LIZ THOMSON

## **Celebrating Identity: a resource manual**

compiled by CHRISTINE CHAMBERS, SUE FUNGE,  
GAIL HARRIS & CYNTHIA WILLIAMS, 1996

Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books. 76 pp. £8.95. ISBN 1 85856 068 3.

*Celebrating Identity*, as its title suggests, is a comprehensive resource manual for all practitioners working with Black children and young people, including Black children of mixed parentage. This is a tool and "much needed body of knowledge" for those to use when addressing the issue of racism in Britain today; its ultimate aim being to promote positive self-identity and a situation

where all young people not only feel valued in society but also value one another.

I came to this book when given the rather daunting task of teaching about the family in a series of PSE lessons in my first teaching practice as a PGCE student in an inner city comprehensive school in Birmingham. As a young (-ish) student and generally conscious person, I was well aware of the delicacies of tackling a topic like 'the family' in any area of multi-cultural Britain, and that it was an especially sensitive issue in a deprived area that encompasses several differing ethnicities.

Although *Celebrating Identity* did not help me in my crusade for 'politically correct' resources on families, it did give many examples of how to promote self and mutual respect for all pupils in my school. The book begins by reflecting on the long history of racism in the UK, and then gives an accurate description of the ethnic make-up of Britain today. This sheds light on some of the crucial facts here, and puts the area of my school into a social context.

*Celebrating Identity* explores the impact that racism has on children's self identity, concluding that racism, "damages the emotional, intellectual, and social development of all children ..." which eventually leads to feelings of isolation, anger and rejection. Having established this crucial fact, the book moves on to how we can combat this, through strategies that support these young people. This is done through a series of exercises (for example, discussion starters and a powerful case study that confronts how you would deal with a racist occurrence) that hope to sensitise practitioners to the particular needs of these young people.

The most useful chapter in *Celebrating Identity* to me in my quest for PSE resources was that which suggested activities for young people that promote positive self awareness and identity. This is done, for example, through a game that helps young people empathise with occupying *dominated* or *dominating* roles in society, and a drama that allows young people to explore racial abuse. Finally it provides details of a supportive network for those working with these children and young people.

The book makes a positive contribution to resources available to teachers of PSE, as well as all those who work with the youth of Britain today.

KATIE ALISON

PGCE History Student 1996/7

## **Handbook of Organisation Studies**

S. CLEGG, C. HARDY & W. NORD

London: Sage. ISBN 07619 51326

This handbook presents a major retrospective and prospective overview of the field of organisation studies. Drawing on the talents of a team of international contributors, the editors have assembled, assessed and synthesised the key strands in past and current theory.

The text moves from the general to the specific, from the past to the present and from the present to the future. Addressing the established traditions, as well as newer foci of inquiry, it examines the questions that the *fin de siècle* poses for organisations, and for ourselves as organisation members and researchers. Central to the enterprise has been a concern to reflect and honour the manifest diversity of the field – including recognition of the extent to which the very notion of a single field of organisation studies is itself debated – while also directing attention to the points of intersection and potential dialogue across the numerous 'conversations' that make up this area of study.

Part One analyses the historical development of the study of organisation before examining some of the most significant theo-

retical paradigms in the field, including organisational ecology, organisation economics, institutional theory, and feminism and postmodernism.

Part Two addresses a number of the most significant research topics emerging from these broad perspectives, including leadership, decision-making and innovation in organisations, alongside such these as diversity, globalisation and ecology.

Part Three reflects on the relationships between theory, research and practice in organisation studies.

The book concludes with a discussion of the implications of 'representation' in organisational analysis – representation of individual and organisational subjects – and what this means for the researcher as a subject.

Comprehensive and wide-ranging, this important resource will be an excellent benchmark for researchers, teachers and advanced students alike.

STEWART RANSON

*School of Education, University of Birmingham*

### **Beat the Bullying with Buzz**

Video and Support Pack, A19 Film and Video, 1996  
£25.00. 21 Foyle Street, Sunderland SR1 1LE, United Kingdom.

Bullying continues to be a major problem in a large number of our primary and secondary schools and it is often difficult to detect because victims are reluctant to speak out for fear of retaliation. It can have a damaging and long-lasting effects – causing children to be withdrawn and depressed and to perform well below their ability in class.

*Beat Bullying with Buzz*, comprising a 23-minute VHS video and 24-page support pack, is aimed for use in primary schools, though it could also be used in middle schools and with children in the early years of the secondary school. Employing a skilful combination of drama and animation, the tape depicts two pupils' experiences of bullying and how they cope with it.

The video has been developed and performed by a group of 9-to-11 year old pupils from Hylton Castle Junior School in Sunderland with the support of professional actors and a professional film producer/director. An animated character called 'Buzz' appears periodically during the video to make observations and draw pupils' attention to significant points.

The story involves two pupils – Vicky and her friend Mark – both of whom are treated as 'outsiders' by other members of their class. Vicky's parents are separated and she lives with her dad. Vicky is a keen swimmer and falls victim to two girl bullies when she is picked to take part in a national swimming competition. Several specific instances of bullying are highlighted – beginning with teasing and name-calling and culminating in physical contact. When opportunities arise for her to tell a teacher, Vicky makes up excuses, getting herself in trouble and, in effect, protecting the bullies. She becomes so unhappy that she develops various

ailments and doesn't want to go to school. Her dad is concerned that she is unwell, but fails to ask probing questions and too readily accepts her assurances that nothing is wrong at school.

Mark is also experiencing a form of bullying at school: he is left out of playground football matches and pushed away when he tries to join in. He feels lonely and isolated. He sees what is happening to his friend Vicky and tries to help her, advising her to tell someone but disregarding his own good advice.

The video ends somewhat abruptly when Vicky overcomes her twin fears – of disbelief by adults and retribution from the bullies – and knocks on the staffroom door.

I watched this video with a group of my PGCE PSE students at the University of Birmingham and afterwards we compared notes.

We all thought the story was suitable for children of primary school age 7-to-11 and could also be used with Years 7 and 8 at Key Stage Three. There was general admiration for the quality of the accompanying photocopiable activity sheets. These contain suggestions for drawing, writing and role-play exercises that explore the story and the characters' actions. There is also an excellent design for a 'pupil contract' consisting of three main points.

*I will treat all my fellow pupils with respect.*

*I will not humiliate or hurt any other pupil physically or verbally.*

*I will do the best I can to help any other pupil who is obviously being upset or hurt by one or more of the other pupils.*

It was felt by many that the story of Mark was not explored in any depth and appeared to have been 'tacked on' for no apparent reason. It was also queried whether *not* being picked for a game of football in the playground was really an example of being 'bullied'.

There was some feeling that the interventions of the cartoon character 'Buzz' could be somewhat infuriating, though it was accepted that these could be opportunities for the video to be stopped to allow for small-group or whole-class discussions. There was also some concern that the programme did not show what happened once the bullying had been reported.

On the whole we felt that the video is a most welcome addition to the resources available to schools and teachers. The story of Vicky is well-acted and handled with great sensitivity and perception. The point is made that many bullies are careful not to give themselves away to adults – and particularly teachers. They can 'pick on' children from single-parent families or children who cannot afford smart clothes or children who appear to have won favour with certain teachers. The message is that children being bullied must have the courage to tell a teacher. As Vicky says at the end of the video: "bullies get away with it only if you let them; and it's just as bad if you see somebody being bullied and say nothing."

CLYDE CHITTY

*School of Education, University of Birmingham*

**The following back numbers  
of *FORUM* are still available**

Vol 30 No 1	<b>Primary School Special</b>
Vol 30 No 2	<b>Comprehensive Counter Attack on the Bill</b>
Vol 30 No 3	<b>Education Bill and Primary Teaching</b>
Vol 31 No 1	<b>The Education Reform Act</b>
Vol 31 No 2	<b>Opting Out, CTCs, National Curriculum</b>
Vol 31 No 3	<b>LMS and National Curriculum</b>
Vol 32 No 1	<b>AIDS Education, National Curriculum</b>
Vol 32 No 2	<b>RE and Collective Worship Symposium</b>
Vol 32 No 3	<b>Conservative Education Policy: the hidden agenda</b>
Vol 33 No 1	<b>Assessment</b>
Vol 33 No 2	<b>Into the 1990s: the state system under attack</b>
Vol 33 No 3	<b>Reflective Teaching</b>
Vol 34 No 1	<b>The Past, the Present and the Future</b>
Vol 34 No 2	<b>Curriculum U-turns, Bullying, Europe</b>
Vol 34 No 3	<b>Three Wise Men, Why Assess?</b>
Vol 34 No 4	<b>The School Curriculum: need for vision</b>
Vol 35 No 1	<b>Mixed Ability Applauded</b>
Vol 35 No 3	<b>Training Primary Teachers</b>
Vol 36 No 1	<b>National Curriculum and Assessment</b>
Vol 36 No 2	<b>Dearing's Legacy</b>
Vol 36 No 3	<b>Back to Basics</b>
Vol 37 No 1	<b>Comprehensive Achievement</b>
Vol 37 No 2	<b>Evaluating Schools, School Self-improvement</b>
Vol 37 No 3	<b>Education Post-16</b>
Vol 38 No 1	<b>The Return of Selection</b>
Vol 38 No 2	<b>Assessment Models</b>
Vol 38 No 3	<b>Comprehensive Achievements, Disruptive Pupils</b>
Vol 39 No 1	<b>Whose Morality? The New Education Bill</b>



Copies can be ordered from  
**Triangle Journals Ltd, PO Box 65**  
**Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 0YG**  
**United Kingdom**  
 Email: [journals@triangle.co.uk](mailto:journals@triangle.co.uk)  
 World Wide Web: <http://www.triangle.co.uk>  
 Single copies: £6.00 (individuals),  
 £7.00 (schools), £12.00 (libraries)



0963-8253(199705)39:2;-F