

# FORUM

**for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education**

**Volume 42  
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# Intolerance, Ignorance, Bigotry: the story of Section 28

The 1980s was a pretty wretched decade for anyone who really cares about the 'promotion' of decent civilised values at all levels in society. So much of what the Thatcher Government achieved or *tried* to achieve was both intellectually dishonest and morally bankrupt. In the related areas of sexual diversity and personal relationships, the shining example (if that's an appropriate way of describing it) was Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act.

The timing of Section 28 was itself significant in the story of the Thatcher Government's approach to the provision of acceptable sex education in state primary and secondary schools. It can be argued that education reflects the dominant politics of a society's institutions and that sex education reflects the sexual politics of those institutions. In the 1980s (and it is regrettably still true at the start of a new century), sex education was meant to both *construct* and *confirm* the categories of 'normal' and 'deviant' which it could then regulate, monitor and control. Indeed, by the end of the decade, schools were viewed by the Right as key sites for social engineering and social control and for the firm application of a particularly vicious form of moral authoritarianism.

A pamphlet published by the right-wing Hillgate Group towards the end of 1986, *Whose Schools? A Radical Manifesto*, argued that children should be taught unqualified respect for 'traditional' family values. They had to be 'rescued' from 'indoctrination in all the fashionable causes of the Radical Left: 'anti-racism', 'anti-sexism', 'peace education' (which usually means CND propaganda) and even 'anti-heterosexism' (meaning the 'preaching' of homosexuality combined with an attack on the belief that homosexuality is 'normal').

It was also in 1986 that the Government found the pretext it needed for launching a major attack on so-called progressive sex education policies. This came in the form of a whipped-up controversy over the alleged use by teachers of a picture book from Denmark called *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*. This had been published in Copenhagen without any fuss in 1981, and first appeared in this country in an English translation in December 1983. It attempted to present a positive image of a young gay couple bringing up a five-year-old girl, the daughter of Martin.

Writing recently in *The Guardian* (31 January 2000), the book's author Suzanne Bosche says she was devastated to find herself 'embroiled in a British political issue', with one of her children's books becoming 'a weapon in a war over the teaching of sexuality in schools':

*It was absolutely shocking to see the book vilified as homosexual propaganda in the British press back in 1986 and I am shocked to find the same thing happening*

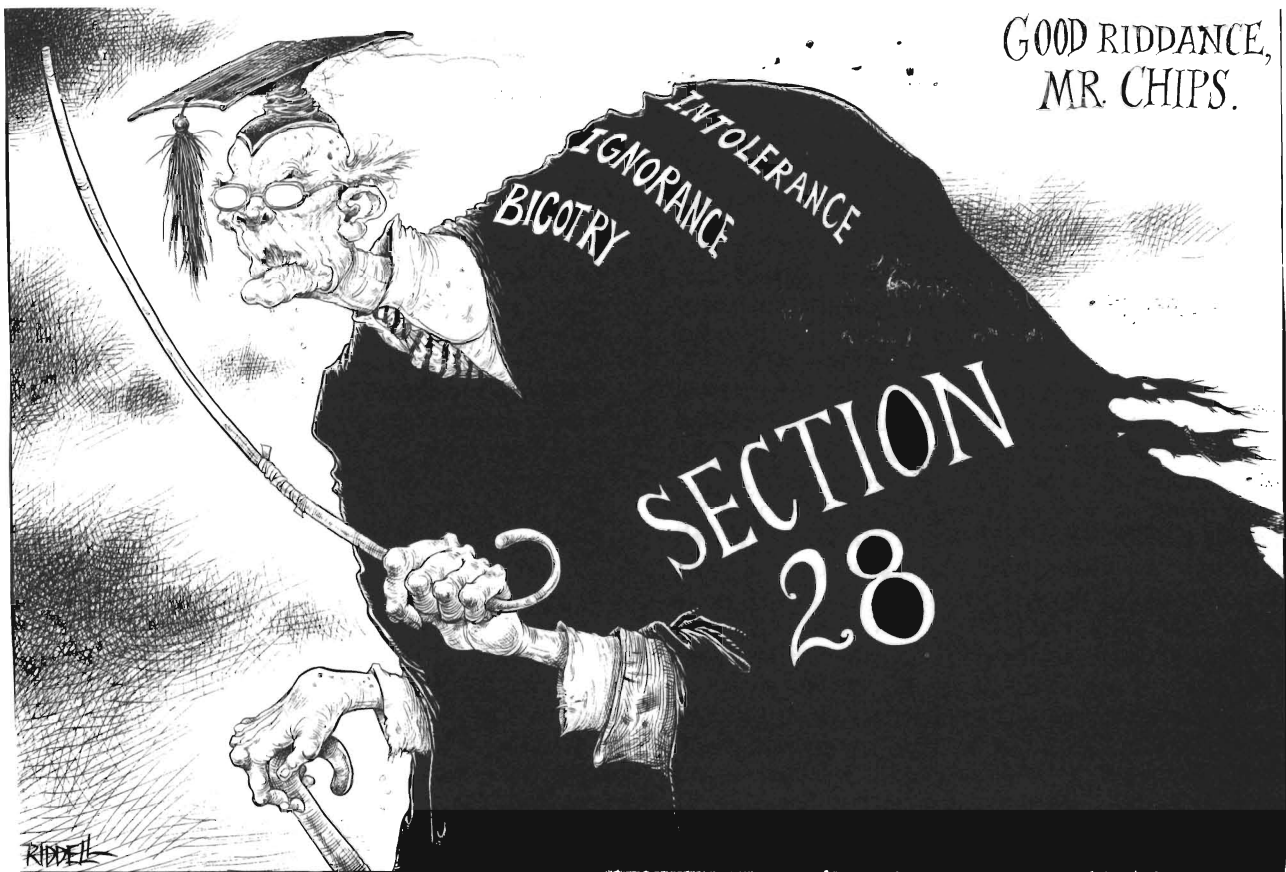
*(to a lesser degree) again now. I feel angry that my intentions in writing this little book – namely to give children a little more knowledge about the world – have been twisted by grown-up people who choose to use it as a weapon in a political battle .... For what it's worth, I don't personally think that homosexuality ... should be aggressively promoted in schools, but I do think it should be talked about in an informative, unsensational way. And one way of doing that is by making books like mine available to children in schools and libraries – as is done in Denmark – and by letting teachers and parents be prepared to answer questions without unnecessary drama.*

The manufactured hysteria caused by the 'discovery' of *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* in a London Teachers' Centre (*not*, as was widely reported, in a London primary school) came at a time when a new Education Bill was making its way through Parliament. In the House of Lords, a number of Conservative peers demanded urgent action on sex education in secondary schools, claiming that the kind of teaching which condoned homosexuality as a 'valid' alternative to heterosexuality was not only undermining *traditional* family life and encouraging divorce, but was also linked with the increase in rapes, attacks on children and sexual crime in general. The panic engendered by the spread of HIV/AIDS was used to justify a 'Christian-heterosexual' approach to morality and an attack on gay 'lifestyles'. In the words of Baroness Cox, a prominent member of the Hillgate Group: 'I cannot imagine how on earth in this age of AIDS, we can be contemplating promoting gay issues in the curriculum. I think that it beggars all description.'

It was the 1986 Education Act which removed responsibility for school sex education from local education authorities and placed it for the first time in the hands of school governors – an obvious attempt to provide sex education with supposedly 'conservative' gatekeepers.

From 1986 onwards, there was an obsession, both at government level and in the popular press, with the traditional family values that sex education was expected to promote. In the run-up to the 1987 General Election, blatant prejudice against homosexuals became a commonplace populist theme; and this prejudice was used to give further emotive force to the criticisms of *all* educational equal opportunities programmes. The popular misrepresentation of local authority policies on homosexuality (though the number of such policies was very small indeed) had the added advantage of smearing *all* equal opportunities policies as 'loony' by connection.

Once the General Election had been won, Margaret



Chris Riddell, *The Observer*, 30 January 2000

Thatcher made use of the 1987 Conservative Party Conference to launch her own personal attack on what she viewed as 'extremist' practices by a number of 'hard-Left' schools and local authorities. Prominent among her list of unacceptable practices was the accusation that children who needed to be taught to respect 'traditional moral values' were being taught that they had 'an inalienable right to be gay'.

The final expression of the Government's authoritarian agenda was Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. This laid down that a local authority shall not:

1. intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
2. promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

It was soon realised (and this is a point many commentators continue to overlook) that these clauses were not, in fact, aimed at the right target. What the sponsors of Section 28 failed to appreciate was that the 1986 Education Act had already removed sex education in schools from the control of local authorities—a fact which the Government itself was forced to concede in a rarely-cited Department of the Environment Circular published in May 1988:

*Responsibility for sex education in schools continues to rest with school governing bodies, by virtue of Section*

*18 of the Education (No. 2) Act of 1986. Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 does not affect the activities of these school governors, nor of teachers. It will not prevent the objective discussion of homosexuality in the classroom, nor the counselling of students concerned about their sexuality.*

Nevertheless, Section 28 was a key cultural and symbolic event in the recent history of sexual politics in this country. By creating a climate of paranoia and fear around the provision of sex education in schools, it played an important role in undermining the confidence and professionalism of teachers. The very ambiguity of the phrase 'the promotion of homosexuality' had the effect of constructing teachers as the potential 'corrupters' of their students and of preventing them from engaging in frank and honest debate out of fear of losing their jobs.

The arrival in May 1997 of a Labour government with a huge Commons majority appeared to signal the early repeal of Section 28. This reform has, after all, been a long-standing Labour commitment with the support of the vast majority of Labour MPs.

Things, however, have not gone according to plan. Since the start of this year, the whole affair has been badly handled, with clear signs of government prevarication in the face of strong opposition from the main religious bodies and large sections of the Conservative Party. It has even been suggested that in the event of repeal, new guidelines will



be issued which could amount to a reintroduction of Section 28 'through the back door'.

By contrast, the supporters of Section 28 have not proved willing to modify their views. On 7 February, the Government suffered a major defeat in the House of Lords when the peers voted by 210 votes to 165, a majority of 45, to keep the measure on the statute book. Most Tory peers, some cross-benchers and a few Labour rebels supported the wrecking amendment by Baroness Young, a former Tory Leader of the Lords, to retain Section 28. Baroness Young's campaign had been backed by a number of prominent church leaders including Dr George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Cardinal Thomas Winning, leader of Scotland's Roman Catholics. Dr Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, and leading Muslims, including Lord Ahmed, the Labour peer, also opposed repeal.

Baroness Young herself made her position perfectly clear in her uncompromising contribution to the House of Lords debate:

*I believe that there is not a moral equivalence between heterosexual and homosexual relationships. I believe that we need to set in front of children an ideal by which they should live.*

In supporting repeal, Lord Alli, the only openly gay peer, was equally forthright:

*This is indeed a debate about morality. For me it is about the morality of hate. I believe that that hate exists because we teach our children to hate. Repeal of Section 28 would be a true test of our moral courage.*

It cannot be stated too often that the debate about Section 28 has never been about 'promoting' any kind of sexuality over another, at least from the reformers' point of view. The idea that gay and lesbian teachers were seriously

concerned to 'promote' homosexuality over and above any other sexual orientation was always a myth perpetuated by Tory ministers and a number of irresponsible right-wing newspapers. What many teachers would like to feel free to 'promote' is the *acceptability* not the *superiority* of the homosexual lifestyle (though the use of this term is itself problematic since it implies something 'chosen', like a fashion accessory).

The issues at stake were neatly summarised in a finely-crafted *Observer* editorial at the end of January:

*Teachers have no wish to be in the business of 'promoting' any kind of sexuality, or family structure, over another. Section 28 was never about 'promotion' in this sense – it was all about stopping teachers from even talking about same-sex relationships as real, and serious, parts of the world for which children were being prepared. The reason for ditching Section 28 is to allow children to be taught about the real world, a world in which moral values such as commitment, fidelity, care and responsibility are more important than ever, but are not attached exclusively to the marriage contract (The Observer, 30 January 2000).*

We are told that teachers will be instructed that they have no role in promoting any sexual orientation, as part of the new guidelines for sex and relationship classes to be published at Easter. But in an apparent contradiction, teachers will be warned not to pass judgement on individual sexuality, while at the same time emphasising marriage and the value of family life. The Government is apparently into the 'promotion' business itself.

**Clyde Chitty**

# The 'Which Blair' Project: Giddens, the Third Way and education

**Glenn Rikowski**

Glenn Rikowski is Senior Research Fellow in Lifelong Education, Faculty of Education, University of Central England, Birmingham. In this article, he argues that the Third Way provides convenient cover for New Labour's real education project: the development of neo-liberal and privatising policies.

In a recent *FORUM* article (Volume 41, Number 2, 1999), David Halpin advanced a case for generating education policy and analysing educational developments through Anthony Giddens's concept of the Third Way. For Halpin, there are several attractions in this. First, the third way is grounded within Giddens's sociological corpus – which apparently gives it social scientific substance. Secondly, third way analyses and policy scenarios move beyond the old 'left/right' divide. This appears to open up possibilities for radical education policies transcending discredited polarities. Thirdly, the third way approach is basically a 'heuristic framework within which alternatives can be generated and their relative merits deliberated'. This offers a promise of coherence for Tony Blair's New Labour project. It seems to provide an answer to the question: which Blair project? Giddens's third way politics offers direction for Blair's New Labour project.

This article takes issue with Halpin's advocacy of a third way outlook for education. It seeks to demonstrate how the vagueness of Giddens's third way is vital for New Labour's education strategy. The third way provides cover for New Labour's real project in education: the continuation, expansion and development of neo-liberalism – as demonstrated by Dave Hill in a recent Hillcole Group booklet (1999), a version of which appears elsewhere in this issue of *FORUM*.

## Introduction

Prior to Labour's election victory in May 1997, there was considerable uncertainty regarding the nature of 'New Labour'. Would it provide a real alternative to Thatcherite Conservatism? Debate continues as to the direction in which the New Labour Government is headed. New Labour's direction and Blair's outlook have continued to generate media attention and academic analysis. Some, such as Iain MacWhirter (1998), have expressed quaint puzzlement regarding Blair and his New Labour project:

*What is Tony Blair? What does he stand for? ... Is he a unique political leader with an infallible sense of the popular mood ... or just another PR construct willing to utter whatever vacuous drivel is written for him by media advisors? It's a serious question. (p. 18)*

MacWhirter's questions appear to be as valid now as when he first expressed them, though others maintain that Blair's

project is becoming less shadowy as the election for a second term approaches.

Intellectually, Blair has been promiscuous. Over the last seven or eight years he has expressed interest in: the learning society (Labour Party, 1994); Etzioni's communitarianism (1993); Hutton's concept of stakeholder capitalism (1995); the writings of the Demos think tank; Giddens's concept of the Third Way (1998a); and, most recently, Leadbeater's Knowledge Economy (1999).[1] It may be that Blair's thinking is moving away from the nebulous 'third way' towards developing something more tangible on the back of the knowledge economy.[2] Nevertheless, in terms of Blair's dalliance with the economic and social theories listed above, David Halpin is correct in giving prominence to Blair's love affair with the third way. Only 18 months ago, Blair was lecturing the French National Assembly on the benefits to be derived from viewing social and economic events and policy formation through a third way lens (Blair, 1998). In this Speech, Blair defined the third way as his conviction that:

*... we have to be absolute in our adherence to our basic values, otherwise we have no compass to guide us through change. But we should be infinitely adaptable and imaginative in the means of applying those values ... What counts is what works. ... But it is modernisation for a purpose. These values are: solidarity, justice, freedom, tolerance and equal opportunity for all, the belief in a strong community and society as the necessary means of individual advancement. These are the values that drive and govern my political life ... In each case, it will mean a changed role for government.*

Blair outlined the consequences of his third way philosophy in terms of economic policy, prudent financial and monetary policy, equipping people for skills through a welfare state which 'promotes work and makes it pay', tackling social exclusion, and a renewed emphasis on entrepreneurship and the creation of small businesses.

So, where does following Blair's New Labour into the woods along the third way path take us? The argument here is that like the three student filmmakers in *The Blair Witch Project*, a light-hearted jaunt can develop into an encounter with the forces of evil. The all-too-real form of neo-liberalism stalks New Labour's educational landscape.

## The Sands of Structuration Theory

Professor Halpin seeks to reassure us that his vision of the third way is safe: it is grounded upon the sociology of Anthony Giddens. As someone who has 'most radically and successfully, revised the language of social science', Giddens appears to be an exemplary third way guide. This is because he has provided structuration theory 'as the basis for reformulating the primary tasks of sociological analysis' argues Halpin. Giddens has provided us with the sociological tools to chart a third way.

Structuration theory almost defies summary (Craib, 1992), and Giddens's exposition of it can be a 'frustrating read' (Willmott, 1999, p. 10). Giddens himself comes nearest to sketching out its elements in the first chapter of *The Constitution of Society*, published in 1984. The theory of 'structuration' attempts to solve the so-called 'structure and agency problem'. Basically, this is the problem of explaining how human action can be said to be 'free' (acting as opposed to merely behaving) when faced with a series of constraints which conventional sociology characterises as 'structure' or structures. Giddens approaches the problem through classical sociology and the bifurcation between macro functional and structural sociologies (with a focus on social constraint) on the one hand, and micro 'interpretative' sociologies and hermeneutical studies (which focus on human subjectivity and meanings) on the other. For Giddens: 'What is at issue is how the concepts of action, meaning and subjectivity should be specified and how they might relate to notions of structure and constraint' (1984, p. 2).

Giddens's complex response to this problem can be cut down to his view that structure and action (what he calls agency) are intimately related. Social practices, undertaken by human agents who could have acted differently, create social structures that solidify into social rules and routines within social spaces. These social rules then come to act as a series of constraints (structure) upon social actors. However, social actors as reflexive knowledgeable agents can also utilise social rules for their own ends such that they become resources for action. This is what Giddens calls 'duality of structure': social rules are constraining and enabling.

Giddens's structuration theory is not as unproblematical or useful as Halpin makes out. Whilst there is insufficient space for a comprehensive critique of structuration theory here, a number of observations are apposite.

First, structuration theory is premised upon a sociology that generates the perception that there is a structure/agency problem. Poststructuralists deny the existence of this 'problem', or dissolve it – along with other debilitating dualisms. Open Marxists utilise 'form analysis', which shatters the closed categories of conventional social theory. There is no 'structure/agency' problem for these theorists, and hence no need for Giddens's structuration theory as its solution.

Secondly, structuration theory conflates agency and structure. Willmott (1999) highlights some consequences of this strategy for social theory. Giddens refuses to see structure as an emergent phenomenon attaining autonomy from human agency. The outcome is that structure is 'granted an epiphenomenal status at best' (p. 8). This delivers a strong form of agency, allowing individuals to have significant control over their lives. Through some well-chosen examples from education and welfare (pp.

8–10) Willmott indicates how the superficiality of Giddens's analysis makes it difficult for him to see the implications of 'structured penalties' (when individuals attempt to 'buck the system' – p. 9). Individuals can always do otherwise, but sometimes at severe cost to themselves, their friends and families.

Thirdly, Giddens's conflation of structure and agency has unpleasant consequences for the latter. It can be argued that Giddens's notion of agency has deeply conservative implications. For Giddens, all structural constraints are simultaneously enabling. Through discussion of individuals selling their labour-powers to owners of capital, for Giddens, even this asymmetrical relationship is enabling, since it does allow the worker to earn his/her living. However, it is a short step from here to the position where all social situations are viewed as enabling, and where most constraints are not experienced as such most of the time. The conservatism and quietism of this view allows justification of any social situation on the basis that it enables as much as it constrains.

Fourthly, in particular instances it is difficult to appraise whether actions of individuals or groups can be viewed as embodying human agency. Critics argue that some people are more constrained than others are, whilst opportunities to pursue actions which incorporate agency are also unequal. This is partly due to the fact that some 'knowledgeable agents' have more 'knowledge' than do others.

Finally, Willmott (1999) argues that although Giddens makes much of the concept of time in his writings, nevertheless he creates problems for himself through temporal suspension. Giddens's focus on individuals creating structure as they engage in everyday practices elides the processes whereby structure attains social reality over long time periods. Agency, on the other hand, is phased over a 'different tract of time' (Archer, 1996, p. 694) – flowing through the life course of individuals. Social structures typically develop over generations. Because of this they attain ontological depth and have histories and genealogies in excess of the life spans of individuals. It is partly this that gives structures relative autonomy. In suspending time and conflating structure and agency, Giddens operates a 'depthless ontology' argues Willmott (1999, p. 15), which leads him to formulate superficial analyses of social phenomena.

Craib (1992) and Willmott (1999) offer substantial critiques of Giddens's work. The criticisms here scratch the surface. Halpin's claim that one of the strengths of Giddens's Third Way is that it rests on his sociological insights via structuration theory starts to backfire when these criticisms are acknowledged. In the event, Halpin does not show how Giddens's third way emerges out of his sociology. His claim that Giddens's sociology is foundational for his third way is hollow. Giddens's musings on the third way can be traced back to *Beyond Left and Right* (1994) where he explores the left/right political distinction.

## No Left/Right

Bobbio's *Left and Right* (1996) appeared just before the Italian General Election of 1994. It was a sensation, selling 200,000 copies within a year. Bobbio held that the demise of the left/right political divide in Italian society (and other advanced capitalist countries) did not invalidate the

distinction as a device for evaluating political programmes. He argued that in contemporary political life the major parties were bunching on centre-right ground. The decline of the socialist Left, following upon the fall of Eastern European regimes post-1989 and the transformation of social democratic parties into centre-right organs, indicated a particular political conjuncture. The left/right divide's significance as a basis for policy formation has shrivelled and fewer people now believe in its existence. Nevertheless, the distinction is still intact and it enables us to judge political programmes on the basis of their effects regarding social inequalities, argues Bobbio.

Giddens published his *Beyond Left and Right* (1994) in the same year as Bobbio's book first appeared in Italy. His analysis was very different. Giddens's *Beyond Left and Right* was the third volume of a critique of historical materialism. Crucially, it introduced a set of reactionary political concepts contributing to an ideological onslaught on working-class politics. Giddens's concepts of 'positive welfare' (welfare becomes less about protecting people against adversity, and more about giving them the skills to cope with it) and 'life politics' (politics as a matter of life style, not life chances or human emancipation) are key examples. Giddens's third way was forged out of this base material.

What is instructive is how Giddens handles Bobbio's thesis. First, Giddens agrees with Bobbio that when one side (the right in the last two decades) become 'the only game in town' then the distinction appears to lose validity (1998a, p. 39). Second, he agrees with Bobbio that the left/right distinction will not disappear and that people will continue to see inequality as its core referent (p. 41). However, Giddens holds that Bobbio's definition needs 'some refining'. For Giddens, when leftists such as Bobbio formulate the left/right divide they have a politics of emancipation as their horizon. However, with the demise of socialism and an absence of serious alternatives to capitalism a politics of emancipation is redundant. The arguments that remain 'concern how far, and in what ways, capitalism should be governed and regulated' (Giddens, 1998a, pp. 40–41). For Giddens, Bobbio's conception of the left-right divide does not allow us to address the key questions of sustainable capitalism: ecological questions and questions to do with 'the changing nature of family, work and personal and cultural identity' (1998a, p. 44). The central questions of our time are not clear left/right issues (p. 44). They are more to do with 'life politics' (a politics of choice, identity and mutuality) than a politics of emancipation, argues Giddens. In this way, Giddens presents Bobbio's left/right distinction as a social relic. Whilst initially appearing to take Bobbio's points on board, Giddens conjures away the left/right divide through assuming the end of all emancipatory projects.

All this manoeuvring can be challenged at many junctures. It is unconvincing. Giddens's 'life politics' sets severe limits to the future of human society. His 'politics of low expectations' coupled with his sensitivity to the generation of new 'risks' for humanity herald a grim grind for the new millennium.

### The Third Way and Education

Halpin's virtual neglect of Giddens's *The Third Way* (1998a) is puzzling. Giddens's attempt to define his third way (through core values) is ignored. Furthermore, Halpin also

eschews what Giddens has to say on education and training. On this second point, Giddens's stress on human capital is embarrassingly close to the position taken within many education reports flowing from previous Conservative administrations. Finally, Halpin's parameters for the third way do not coincide with Giddens's. For Giddens, the parameters are set within old social democracy and new right neo-liberalism. For Halpin, the parameters are state socialism and neo-liberalism – a much broader pitch.

Giddens's third way turns out to be a warmed-up social democracy. Halpin's third way is a form of social technicism. For Halpin, the third way offers 'a heuristic framework within which alternatives can be generated and their relative merits deliberated'. This is similar to Blair's third way approach – whatever works, is best – rather than Giddens's more ambitious project of rejuvenating social democracy. This move by Halpin avoids defining the third way, and also ducks awkward questions: who will set the alternatives? who will judge the merits of each?

The practical definition of the 'third way' in the United Kingdom was left to the NEXUS group of intellectuals sponsored by Tony Blair. NEXUS is 'a network for all those interested in contributing to debate on the priorities and policies of the current government'. A central debate concerned the nature of the third way. David Halpern & David Mikosz provided a summary of the NEXUS on-line debate on the third way (Halpern & Mikosz, 1998). The debate exposed the 'third way' as a hopeless concept. The contributors disagreed wildly. Halpern & Mikosz were forced to conclude that the principles of the third way were so unclear as to be useless for policy-makers (p. 26). Halpern eventually withdrew from NEXUS. Blair's hope that UK intellectuals could uncover a third way was dashed. New Labour has now moved towards selective employment of academics and experts on policy-making bodies, rather than looking to them to establish coherent political principles.

The Third Way remains elusive. Grice (1999) has pointed out that Tony Blair 'wasted an opportunity to answer the perennial question – "what is New Labour actually for?" – when the Government displayed its legislative wares for the coming year in the Queen's Speech.' Grice bemoaned the 'lack of intellectual underpinning for [the] government's actions', and Toynbee (1999) reached similar conclusions when surveying 'Labour's ragbag policies': no vision as guide to policy.

At the time of writing, Blair is having another go at defining the third way along with Bill Clinton, Gerhard Schröder, Lionel Jospin, Massimo D'Alema and Brazil's Fernando Cardoso at the G8 meeting in Florence (see Hutton, 1999). Meanwhile, Giddens is apparently thinking of abandoning the third way and concentrating on updating social democracy. Other (conflicting) reports suggest Giddens is preparing a new book on the third way in reply to his critics (see Thomson, 1999).

Perhaps sensing the pitfalls ahead, Halpin ignores chasing after the third way within education policy. Rather, he indicates that education action zones (EAZs) is an example of education policy umbilically linked to the third way – purely on the basis that Margaret Hodge says it is. Yet when he examines EAZs he concludes that they do not appear radical, that it is unclear if they will raise education standards and that they are underfunded. This is hardly swish third way stuff.

## Beyond the 'Which Blair' Project

*The Blair Witch Project* is a film that incorporates a process of recurrent definition. It has generated considerable debate concerning its provenance and significance. On the surface, the story involves three students (Heather Donahue, Michael Williams and Josh Leonard) who go into Maryland's Black Hills Forest to make a documentary film about the Blair witch. The students disappear. A year later their gear, including their cameras and film, are found. The Blair Witch film purports to be the documentary shot by the students. From the start fiction and fact were blurred. Some viewers believed the film to be portraying reality. The Blair Witch web site helped to create and reinforce this perception. Others accused the directors and the film's marketing people of faking their own online fan base. There was disagreement about whether the film was a horror story, an old-fashioned ghost story, a marketing hype and even if it was scary.

In many ways, the film (including its production and its afterlife within the media) can be viewed as a metaphor for Blair's third way project. Both film and political project are still in process and seem to defy classification. However, recent work by Dave Hill (1999) indicates that Blair's third way project, as manifested within education policy, is all too transparent. The Blairite education project is a neo-liberal one. It is a continuation of the neo-liberalism of previous Conservative administrations.

Hill assembles a massive amount of evidence to demonstrate his case. After illustrating disagreement concerning the essence of the Blairite 'project', Hill turns to examine New Labour's 'principles' in education: standards and control; managerialism; competitiveness and selection; privatisation; traditionalism; techno-ideology; social inclusion; and low public expenditure. Hill's next step is to outline five educational ideologies: radical left; social democracy; liberal-progressivism; 'new labour'; and radical right. When Hill comes to categorise New Labour's education policies he finds that they constitute a mixture. This yields the perception that New Labour is doing something for nearly everyone. However, Hill finds that the majority of New Labour education policies are either a continuance/acceptance of Radical Right neo-liberal, neo-conservative or Thatcherite policies, or an extension of those policies. We can therefore legitimately talk of New Labour's neo-liberal stance on education policy; it constitutes the overall policy thrust. Hill acknowledges that his analysis focuses on education. But 'education, education, education' is supposedly at the heart of New Labour.

## Conclusion

In an educational context, Halpin's fascination with the third ways of Blair and Giddens is positively dangerous. The third way can be said to be a smokescreen for neo-liberal policy in education. Answers to the question 'Which Blair Project?' for education become possible only when we leave the third way behind and embark on grounded analysis of education policy. Once out of the woods we witness real horror, but this is preferable to Halpin's reluctance to face our real predicament.

## Notes

- [1] It currently gets top billing in the DfEE's web site. Blair endorsed the analysis of Leadbeater's *Living on Thin Air* on its front cover. In his speech to the 1999 CBI

Annual Conference in Birmingham, Blair extolled the virtues of the Knowledge Economy, noting that 'Business must lead the way towards the Knowledge Economy. But government has a part to play, too, by: creating a stable competitive market framework; giving everyone the chance to get skilled; and using these new approaches to modernise government itself' (Blair, 1999, pp. 3-4).

- [2] On 27 May 1999, David Potter, chairman of Psion, delivered his Third Millennium Lecture at 10 Downing Street (Potter, 1999). This is a further sign that Blair is leaving 'big ideas' behind and attaching his political horizons to nurturing a perceived economic trend.

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# New Labour's Neo-liberal Education Policy

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## Introduction

Is there a 'Third Way' in New Labour policies – in education and elsewhere?[1] Is it centrist, centre-left, updated social democratic, centre-right, neo-conservative, neo-liberal, Thatcherite, or post-Thatcherite? Is Labour's education ideology inchoate and contradictory – a mixture of ideologies? Or does its much vaunted policy priority of 'education, education, education' represent the triumph of Thatcherism, subservient to the interests of 'business, business, business'?

In this article I summarise various interpretations of New Labour's ideology across 'the big picture' of government policy in general. I proceed to identify eight guiding principles behind New Labour's education policy. Here, I denote specific aspects of New Labour's continuity and discontinuity with neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, social democracy and its discontinuity with both liberal-progressivism and the Radical Left. I conclude by categorising New Labour's overall education policy as a mixture of ideologies, but one which is essentially neo-liberal, where social democratic and neo-conservative policies and rhetoric are used only insofar as they do not conflict with a neo-liberal imperative.

## New Labour Principles in Education

Below I set out and analyse what seem to me New Labour's eight guiding principles in education and the 45 education policies that, in practice, exemplify these principles. These policies are the means by which the ends, the principles, are achieved.

1. *Standards and Control* e.g. emphasis on 'standards not structures', with increasing use of compulsory testing, of setting measurable targets; centralised control and monitoring of the school and ITE curriculum; of surveillance and monitoring of pupils, and teachers and those involved in 'initial teacher training'; punishment for 'failing' teachers, schools, Local Education Authorities (LEAs), teacher training departments, and for 16–18 year olds who do not participate in 'the New Deal' (of education, training, voluntary work or work);

2. *Managerialism* e.g. focus of policy on 'Improving Schools' (and LEAs) and on managerialism, for example the focus on School Effectiveness strategies to raise standards; proposals to restructure and stratify the teaching workforce, such as proposals for Performance Related Pay (PRP) and for 'superteachers';

3. *Competitiveness and Selection* e.g. continuation of virtually all of the structural aspects of the 1988 Conservative

Education Reform Act in terms of the macro-structure and organisation of schooling, with its principles of competition between schools, (in effect) selective schooling; local management of schools (budgets and staffing), and its diminution of LEA powers;

4. *Privatisation* e.g. introduction of Privatisation into the management/control of schools and LEAs; and Education Action Zones (EAZs); replacing the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) by a Skills Council, strengthening the role of business; extending the Private Finance Initiative (PFI)-private funding for and ultimate control over new schools and colleges;

5. *Traditionalism* e.g. continuation (pace the 1999 Review of the National Curriculum) of the eurocentric and traditionalist Conservative National Curriculum of 1995; continuation of assault on liberal-progressive education (e.g. attacks on mixed ability teaching, a concentration on 'back to basics' in the curriculum with the Literacy Hour and Numeracy Hour in primary schools); reintroducing the traditional academic/vocational curriculum and schooling;

6. *Techno-ideology* concern with technoculture – an Information Technology driven 'knowledge society' with schools at the forefront; emphasis in IT learning in initial teacher education, where Information and Communications Technology (ICT) are particularly specified for primary teachers (together with English, Maths and Science); schools linked up to a 'National Grid for Learning', IT strategies prominent in many EAZ bids.

7. *Social Inclusion* e.g. some increases in spending targeted at areas of Social Exclusion; focus on increased resourcing for inner city and other areas of social exclusion, in terms of rhetoric/discourse and in terms of finance, through a wide range of initiatives, such as Education Action Zones, and Education Maintenance Allowances for poor 16–18 year olds; Increased funding for schools and LEAs capital and revenue budgets (for example to reduce Primary class sizes and to repair and improve schools buildings).

8. *Low public expenditure* strictly controlled spending on education within a regime of low public expenditure; use of Private Finance Initiative funding to keep down public expenditure, instead of sole use of local or national state finance.

## New Labour, Schooling and Education

Table I identifies New Labour policy, as expressed in legislation and rhetoric, in terms of its agreement with and adoption of what I have elsewhere (Hill, 1997, 1999) analysed as 16 key Radical Right themes. It is instructive,

|   | <b>Radical Right</b> | <b>'New Labour'</b> | <b>Social-democratic</b> | <b>Liberal-progressive</b> | <b>Radical Left</b> |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Pro-individualism   | √√                   | √√                  | X                        | √√                         | XX                  |
| Pro-privatisation and private enterprise, anti-public sector                                    | √√                   | √                   | X                        | O                          | XX                  |
| Pro-market competition and consumer choice  | √√                   | √√                  | X                        | √                          | XX                  |
| Pro-monitoring, measurement and surveillance of public welfare, social and educational services | √√                   | √√                  | ?                        | XX                         | ?                   |
| Pro-cost reduction/ profit/ cheapness/reducing costs of products and public services            | √√                   | √√                  | X                        | X                          | XX                  |
| Anti-professional 'producer power'  | √√                   | √                   | XX                       | XX                         | X                   |
| Pro-tradition and traditional family  | √√                   | √                   | O                        | XX                         | XX                  |
| Pro-back to basics  | √√                   | √√?                 | √                        | XX                         | XX                  |
| Pro-nationalism and 'Britishness'   | √√                   | √?√                 | O                        | O                          | XX                  |
| Anti-anti-racism  | √√                   | O                   | X                        | √?O?                       | XX                  |
| Pro-authority, order and social control   | √√                   | √√?                 | O                        | XX                         | XX                  |
| Pro-elite (social, cultural, economic)  | √√                   | √?                  | X                        | √                          | XX                  |
| Pro-hierarchy and social differentiation  | √√                   | √?                  | X                        | O?                         | XX                  |
| Anti-liberal progressivism  | √√                   | √√                  | XX                       | XX                         | X                   |
| Anti-socialist/Marxism  | √√                   | √√                  | √                        | √√                         | XX                  |
| 'Practical' anti-theoretical bias and emphasis  | √√                   | O                   | XX                       | XX                         | XX                  |

Table 1. Sixteen Radical Right ideological themes showing endorsement by 'New Labour' in its education policy.

too, to compare the degree of New Labour's take-up of these themes with what I consider to be positions held by traditional Labour/ social democrats, and those held by the Radical Left. The relative – though not total – closeness of New Labour to the Radical Right can then be gauged in comparison to its distance from traditional Labour/social democracy, and, in particular, from the Radical Left and from liberal-progressivism.

### **Categorising New Labour's Education Policies Ideologically**

New Labour education policies can be placed in the four categories below. The lists below are not exhaustive. Furthermore, some policies, it might be argued, could fit into more than one category.

#### *Social Democratic Policies*

Some New Labour policies may be seen to be in the social democratic tradition of redistributive policy, extending provision and financing through the agency of the local and national state. Examples of such policies are:

- nursery education on parental demand;
- reduced class sizes for 5–7 year olds;
- a policy focus on reducing social disadvantage in schooling through a variety of funded schemes;
- education maintenance grants for further education students from poor backgrounds;
- proposals to increase the number of students in further and higher education;
- increased expenditure in EAZs;
- increased expenditure in respect of 'Excellence in Cities' targeted at areas of particular social need;
- planning an overarching post-16 agency to control competition between institutions and replace it by co-operation.

### **Continuation of Conservative Government Technicist Policies**

While the market in schooling and privatisation are clearly neo-liberal, it is not clear at all whether some policies pursued by Thatcherism – such as centralised government control over curricula, a regime of assessment and a focus on 'the basics' of literacy and numeracy are essentially Thatcherite. I would contend that these are not necessarily neo-liberal or neo-conservative, even though they were introduced and supported by Conservative governments. Of course, from a functionalist Marxist perspective these developments, widespread across the Western capitalist world, (see Hatcher & Hirt, 1999) are geared towards economic competitiveness in a neo-liberal world economy and can therefore be deemed neo-liberal. Blair & Schroeder (1999) are quite clear that education and training policy – life-long learning, improved standards in literacy and numeracy – are located within the section and macro-policy that 'an active government ... has a key role to play in economic development' (p. 8). However, I am not sure how productive it is to depict as neo-liberal, *en bloc*, all those policies aiming at technical efficiency. Hence, I have included the second category. This does also serve to isolate those policies that have a clear neo-liberal, neo-conservative, and/or Thatcherite ideological provenance from those policies intended to

measure or control the throughput of those policies, for example:

- a regime of testing and assessment;
- tightening the 'standards' to be attained by student teachers and by primary schoolchildren (via the Literacy and Numeracy hours);
- policies which are related to techno-ideology, to an information technology rich schooling system.

### **Continuation/Acceptance of Ideologically Radical Right policies**

Other New Labour policies appear to be a continuation of, an acceptance of Radical Right policies implemented by the Conservative governments of 1979–97. Examples are:

- the competitive market in schooling (albeit with some minor modification), and the accompanying mantra of;
- 'standards not structures';
- increasing the focus on 'the basics' in the school curriculum;
- the neo-conservative, utilitarian national curriculum in schooling and in Initial Teacher Education and in Further Education;
- lack of locally elected democratic accountability across much of the education system (albeit in a modified form with some extra powers given to LEAs and an increased number of parent governors on school governing bodies);
- 'naming and shaming' 'errant' LEAs and schools, and the accompanying closures of 'failing' schools;
- stressing managerialist solutions as opposed to financial/intake/curricula solutions;
- restricted financing of education which, despite publicised 'improvements' and targeting, met Conservative public expenditure limits 1997–1999, and whose planned increase is, overall, notably meagre.

### **New Labour Extension of Ideologically Neo-liberal, Neo-conservative or Thatcherite Policies**

Finally, there are a number of policies, some major areas of policy, where New Labour actually goes beyond Conservative policy. Had a Conservative government been re-elected in May 1997, it would seem likely that it would have pursued its radical right ideology by deepening its neo-liberal policies and neo-conservative policies, for example in the direction of more privatisation and more 'back to basics'. New Labour, instead, is carrying out major extensions to ideologically neo-liberal, neo-conservative or Thatcherite policies

Examples of these New Labour policies are:

- the attack on mixed ability teaching;
- the impending implementation of PRP (Performance Related Pay) for teachers, and the accompanying;
- proposals for superteachers;
- extending para-educational, more lowly paid and poorly trained teaching assistants in the classroom;
- extending, and more highly funding, specialist (i.e. to an extent selective) magnet and specialist schools;
- introducing fees for undergraduate courses, in addition to student loans;

- the introduction of private company control over schools in EAZs;
- the introduction of private company control over 'failing' LEAs;
- the introduction of private contracting out of particular schools;
- the extension of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) – whereby private companies build schools, lease them to LEAs – but thereafter own them outright increasing the focus on 'the basics' in the school curriculum.

These last four policies may be seen as the beginning of the privatisation of the education system, as a semi-privatisation of the state sector (see Ainley, 1999).

### New Labour's Neo-Liberalism

New Labour policy, and discourse on education – and, in particular, schooling and initial teacher education – displays both continuities and differences with Thatcherism. The major continuities are, first, a regime of low public expenditure, secondly, privatisation, and thirdly, the maintenance of a selective and exclusionary education system. Unlike under Thatcherism, this selectiveness is glossed over with a concern to overcome 'social exclusion' by contradictory efforts to 'include' the excluded – in a system that excludes at every level. This market system is becoming ever more selective and exclusionary (Hill & Cole, 1999). New Labour is actually spreading the frontiers of neo-liberalism in education, in its promotion of the business ethic and privatised control over schooling and education. This contrasts with the lack of continuity between 'New Labour' and both traditional Labour/ social democratic, and with Radical Left policy on ITE. While there are numerous examples of traditional social democratic 'big state' interventions, and while there is targeted socially redistributive expenditure, these have to be set within the contexts of maintaining the bulk of Thatcherite neo-liberal and neo-Conservative restructuring of education, and, indeed deepening them.

In the field of ITE, 'New Labour' policy is, essentially, continuing the previous government's neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies. It is, however, modifying some of them slightly in classically social democratic fashion, in a way in which, arguably, spaces for theoretical and equal opportunities work has been re-legitimated. New Labour has also (as suggested with respect to its policies in general, by Driver & Martell, 1998) re-legitimated the role of the state in promoting technical efficiency, and in promoting a greater degree of social inclusion. It has also, thereby, (albeit in the name of equal opportunities and a recognition of cultural diversity), opened some minor space for the development and implantation of egalitarian and critical teaching. Critical pedagogy and critical reflection have, for example, been facilitated via citizenship in the National Curriculum (see Hill & Cole, 1999), and via modified requirements for student teachers (see Cole, 1999). These spaces were virtually closed down by the 1992/93 DfE criteria, and would have been even more so in the putative Conservative Party National Curriculum for 'Teacher Training'. However, to reiterate the analysis of this article, 'New Labour' has, to an overwhelming extent, accepted the Radical Right revolution in schooling and initial teacher education, as it has in schooling, scarcely amending

the Conservative legacy in terms of routes into teaching or in terms of the curriculum.

In an overall determination of the New Labour government's education ideology, some policies are more overarching, more influential than are others. Of the seven most important, overarching, policies, two might be deemed social democratic (targeted funding at the poorest areas; use of the state in addition to the market to raise standards); and one neo-conservative (the neo-conservative curriculum in schools and teacher education/training). However, in its four policies of privatisation, of Performance Related Pay (PRP), of relying on the grossly socially divisive selective market in schooling, and in the overall low level of public expenditure on education, New Labour education policy is dominated by neo-liberalism.

To depict New Labour as social democratic, updated, revised, modernised, or as centrist, whether radical or not, when the wholesale adoption and furtherance of neo-liberal policies are submerging and setting strict limits on traditional social democratic principles and policies, is clearly unwarranted.

The rhetoric and exhortations of Blair's reforms appear to be attempts to make capitalism more humane, and more meritocratic. As such, some of the policies, in education as elsewhere, will make a difference, albeit in many cases modest, to millions of lives. They are, in many cases, improvements on Conservative government policies. Such improvements as there are, however, are located within a grossly unequal and neo-liberal- and increasingly unequal and neo-liberal- economic, social and political system. Furthermore, New Labour policy is constrained by highly restrictive public spending plans. And so, despite the social democratic gloss of isolated examples of targeted spending, and of the mechanism of the state replacing that of the market, New Labour's education policy remains that of a determined Thatcherism, in its neo-conservative and, in particular, its dominant neo-liberal form.

### Note

- [1] This article is based on the author's booklet, *New Labour and Education: policy, ideology and the Third Way*.

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# Pupils and Policy: what is the target?

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## Introduction

The current rationale for a national curriculum is made explicit in *Developing the School Curriculum*, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) report and recommendations published in August 1999 following consultation. This article considers target setting, one of the statutory requirements, with reference to the National Curriculum aims of promotion of standards and providing coherence and continuity to pupils.

Following some years of publication of school and LEA performance tables, based on SATs and GCSE results, the Government has begun to set national and local achievement targets. LEAs, in turn, consult with head teachers and school governors about the targets they should set for schools.[1] The performance tables and targets are in terms of the percentages of pupils reaching predefined National Curriculum levels in English, mathematics and science. There are other targets, such as those based on truancy rates, but it is the target-setting process for academic achievement that is the most prominent.

Anticipating the considerable impact that target setting could have on schools' internal procedures we carried out interviews in a sample of three London schools during the Spring term of 1999, in order to discern the nature of the initial changes, focussing on mathematics.[2] Governors and LEA advisers or inspectors are expected to become involved in setting targets at whole-school level and, as our pilot study indicates, senior managers and governors are beginning to play a part in setting subject specific targets. In some mathematics departments these are simply redefined as targets for seated classes but there is evidence of new and imaginative methods for using targets in a formative way with individual pupils.

A key issue is how the aims of 'establishing standards' and 'promoting public understanding' (QCA, 1999) may conflict with the aim of establishing educational entitlements for individual children. Institutional and individual needs are not necessarily concurrent: the key issue is whether the setting of whole-school targets is supportive of the learning of each child.

## Implications of Targeting Knowledge

In their public form, targets are about the knowledge which pupils should acquire by certain stages in their educational careers. In mathematics it is assumed that mathematical concepts can be formed into a hierarchy of knowledge which is the same for each child, which is a questionable assumption.[3] But even if this were true it is not obvious how such a hierarchy would or should map onto a pedagogical sequence, as few would argue that the structures

of knowledge in any discipline correspond straightforwardly with the ways that individuals set about mastering that subject.

In order to measure pupils' achievement we must measure or test a selection of specific skills or knowledge. In a 'high stakes' environment, where pupil achievements are used for 'accountability,' there are well known issues concerned with an undue concentration on preparation for the test and neglect of important aspects of learning. In the next two sections we explore this in some detail and relate these concerns to our case studies.

## Contextualisation of Results

Teachers, schools and LEAs are to be held accountable for how closely they reach the set targets which will thus be functioning in the same way as test score and examination 'league tables'. The advice to teachers and governors from the DfEE is that targets should be set by studying the achievements of 'similar' schools and attempting to move towards the most 'successful' of these. Currently, 'similarity' is judged in terms of the percentages of children eligible for free school meals and on some incomplete sets of data about the pupils' prior attainment. A full 'value-added' analysis, based around individual pupil data, is recognised as a necessary condition for satisfactory comparisons between schools. Alternatives which utilise *average* intake scores for chosen cohorts of children are inadequate, both because such aggregate level data lack specificity and because of pupil mobility between entry to the school and the time of the test scores. Research by Goldstein & Spiegelhalter, reported in 1996, demonstrates that pupils' prior achievements are the single most powerful indicator of later academic achievement, so that it is necessary to relate the test scores of the *same* pupils at intake and outcome times. Moreover, Goldstein & Sammons (1997) showed that adjusting for intake scores at just one previous point in time may be inadequate and, for example, for the purpose of assessing the performance of secondary schools it is important to take into account performance at the age of 8 and the primary school attended.

There are, therefore, clear difficulties in reporting schools' academic performance using value added adjustment procedures, especially where pupil turnover is high. In one of the pilot schools, for example, between 30–40% of the pupils on roll have changed between years 7 and 11. Another factor is the statistical effect of small sample sizes, especially true in small schools. After the best possible value-added analysis most schools cannot be distinguished from the average (Goldstein & Spiegelhalter, 1996).

The manner in which test scores are reported can also



conceal the fact that many schools are 'differentially effective' (O'Donoghue et al, 1997). For example, some schools have high value-added scores for initially high-achieving pupils but low value-added scores for initially low-achieving pupils etc.

### Moving Targets

The Government White Paper (DfEE, 1997) sets the target for year 6 in 2002 that 75% of pupils will reach the standard expected for their age (level 4) in mathematics. This target is highlighted whenever results are reported, usually referring to mathematics as 'numeracy'. We must assume that the White Paper regards level 4 as a standard that, in a well-functioning system, virtually all pupils should reach. How was this standard conceived and can it be maintained consistently over time? A national system of testing was originally recommended in the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) Report (DES, 1988, para 108) where it was stated that 'the *average* for an age 11 pupil will be level 4 or more'. It was never made clear whether this was intended to be maintained over time. It is meaningless, as the DfEE 1997 White Paper claims, to contrast, in 1996, the 82% of 7-year-olds who achieved the target of level 2 or above with the 52% of 11-year-olds who achieved level 4 or above. Such differences are as much a function of test design as any 'real' differences. For example it is possible that the introduction of the mental mathematics test in 1998 was a large contributory factor behind the lower SATs scores among 11-year-olds that year. In 1999, after an emphasis by teachers on mental mathematics, the percentage of year 6 pupils achieving level 4 increased considerably.

This latter observation highlights an important point which, although not a focus of this article, is worth bearing in mind. The reification of targets as a central goal of education, tends to obscure and even stifle debate on whether the targets themselves are consistent with acceptable educational objectives. It may be that it is right to sacrifice children's broader mathematical achievement in order to enhance scores on targets which narrowly construe mathematics as numerical facility. We do not happen to agree. But we can, surely, agree that it is important to be aware of the sacrifice, and to discuss its broader educational implications.

A final point on targets themselves: Targets will move in response to curriculum change. The revised mathematics programmes of study for secondary schools from September 2000, following on from the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy in primary schools from September 1999, are likely to affect expected levels of achievement and their interpretation.[4]

### Targets for the Whole School and for Individuals

In the DfEE document, *Excellence in Cities* (DfEE, 1999), there is a recognition that target setting must not stop at whole-school level but should accompany the close monitoring of every pupil:

*Getting the system right can only be a first step. We must take an individual as well as an institutional perspective ... Individual planning, target-setting and monitoring of pupil progress need to apply to every pupil and not just those with special educational needs.*

Several important developments have taken place in each of the pilot schools in response to the need to raise achievement and, as part of that process, to set and review regularly the targets set in a range of subjects for individual

pupils. There is a current focus on year 11 pupils for whom targets were set in 1998 for their GCSE results in 2000, but schools have also projected ahead on the basis of assessments of younger pupils. Difficulties in making predictions, for which teachers will be held accountable, were expressed during all the interviews. Guidance about subject-specific targets was not, at the time of the study, available from LEAs. Targets for GCSE results are often expressed across all subjects, such as in the schools where pupils are allotted a 'target minimum grade'. There is sometimes pressure from head teachers and governors to set targets at a higher level than previous assessments have indicated since theirs is the responsibility to balance the demands of public accountability with the support for teaching and learning within the school.

Support for individual pupils to understand and achieve their targets includes once or twice-yearly academic mentoring, in the presence of a parent whenever possible. The interviews are with the form tutor who has information about attainment in most subjects, including mathematics. The degree of detail from class teachers to form tutors is increasing with more of a subject-specific focus rather than background factors. Teachers whom we interviewed expressed an awareness of how targets for the whole school are achieved through the efforts of individual pupils. The need for more frequent mentoring which would be provided by the class teacher is seen as the way forward by heads of mathematics and by senior managers within the sample interviewed. For example:

*Targets are as useful as the review and evaluation which follows. One aspect which I hope will start to become departmental practice is a micro target-setting process actually within the teaching. (Deputy Head, March 1999)*

In another school there are developments towards recording targets in pupils' weekly planners which are seen by form tutors and parents. They are intended to be closely related to the mathematical learning objectives within the schemes of work. They are part of the larger picture of targets for the class, the year group and the school, but they are individual for each child.

### Conclusions

It is apparent from our, albeit limited, study that some teachers are seeking ways of reconciling the external pressures for specific targets with their responsibilities to enhance the overall learning of all students. This results in explicit attempts to record achievements and to try to involve parents in this process as well as the pupils. Because it is centred around the need to satisfy particular targets it tends to function in a different manner to traditional 'record of achievement' schemes which are generally more wide ranging in what they record.

To some extent, the increased documentation which this produces can be viewed as a means by which individual teachers, departments, or schools can demonstrate their adherence to the target setting protocols. They could be used conceivably as 'defence' documents if things are seen to be 'going wrong', for example targets not achieved. Clearly, such a bureaucratisation of learning carries dangers of resource wastage, unwillingness to take risks and possibly disincentives for students. We have already suggested the possibility that undesirable curricular distortions have occurred in relation to the SAT scores. These dangers are also present of course in an overly explicitly defined National Curriculum, as these are aimed at pupils *in general*. On

the other hand, we accept that a move towards defining targets for *individual* pupils can be helpful in allowing for the careful monitoring of performance and learning and providing a means to enhance it.

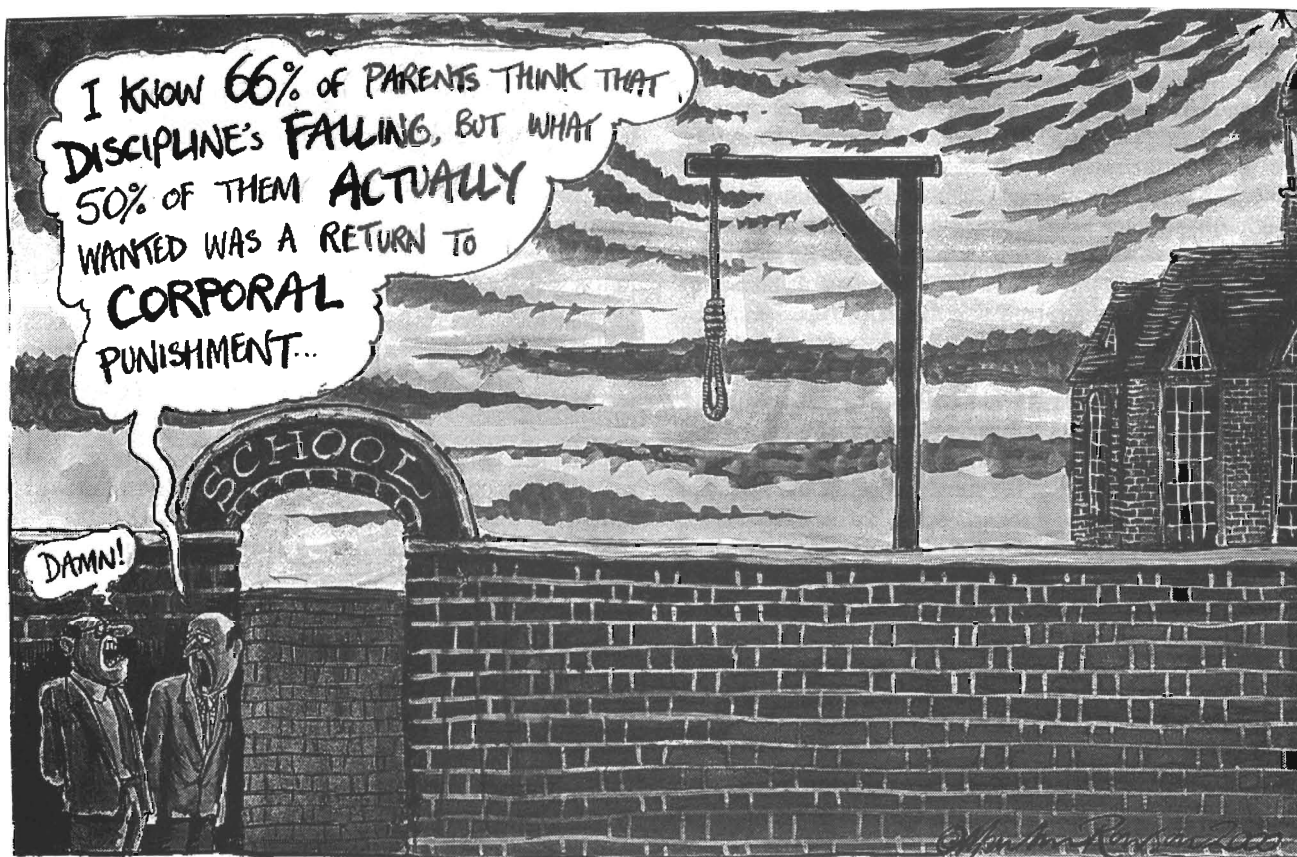
Obtaining a suitable balance between these negative and positive aspects of target setting may not be easy and it is a problem which government in particular should be concerned with. It is something that teachers and parents will increasingly have to face up to and for which they will need appropriate external support.

## Notes

- [1] Details of this target setting process, together with the Government's justifications, can be found on the DfEE Standards and Effectiveness Unit web site, <http://www.standards.dfee.gov.uk>. A useful summary can be found in the guidance for governors ([www.standards.dfee.gov.uk/library/publication/achievement](http://www.standards.dfee.gov.uk/library/publication/achievement)).
- [2] Details of this pilot study can be found in Tikly (1999).
- [3] See Noss et al, 1989.
- [4] The responses to consultation about Curriculum 2000 include a significant comment from the National Association of Mathematics Advisers, 'At key stage 3 the programme of study is exceptionally detailed and specific, reflecting most of the level 7 requirements. Level 5 is the current expectation for the majority of pupils. We all know the perils of cramming too much too soon' (QCA, 1999).

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Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 7 January 2000

# Travelling Together: teachers meeting the challenge of collaboration

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The title of this article reflects the metaphor of a journey, which is often used to describe education itself and, indeed, school improvement. However, it is not always clear what we are really moving towards and sometimes the importance of the journey itself is forgotten in the race to measure standards and appear in the 'winning' position in league tables. I believe that we need to re-evaluate some of the rhetoric around teachers' work in education and recognise that there are many different routes (and modes of travel) to suit the many individuals and communities that our education system must serve. It is the manner of undertaking the journey that I have been able to explore through the one-year research fellowship

## What is Collaboration?

The word derives from the Latin, *colaborare* to work together. Interestingly, the term immediately offers the possibilities of a polarity, from the positive connotation of working jointly on an activity to co-operating traitorously with the enemy. The teachers in my study, described collaboration in terms of working together for a common purpose or goal, in a manner characterised by sharing of values, goals, knowledge and ideas as well as materials and facilities.

However, on investigating the concept more closely, these teachers presented collaboration in a wide variety of ways. Answers were given as varied as 'borrowing paint from the art department' to 'sharing ideas of what goes down well to 'collectively planning, individual delivery and collectively evaluating and refining'. While joint work was felt to be positive and desirable, the conceptions of what it was ranged from staffroom social interchange or 'storytelling' to peer coaching and collaborative action research. It was this 'terra incognita' that I set out to explore, believing that these interactions represented something quite different in form and content.

## Context of the Study

The concepts of collegiality and collaboration are widely employed in education literature, but commonly conflated, some writers merely meaning 'teachers working together'. Inspired by Michael Fieldings's work [1], I wanted to tease out the differences in the context of teachers' workplace culture.

Despite this lack of conceptual clarity, for 10 years in the United Kingdom and North America, collaboration and collegiality have been lauded as, to quote Andy Hargreaves

'pivotal to orthodoxies of change' (Hargreaves, 1984). It has been suggested [2] that in the early 1990s, collegiality was a preferred and official way for staff to manage the development of the (National) Curriculum in schools. Also, that collaborative cultures (variously defined) were best able to support school improvement. However, a lack of empirical work and weak definitions means that the concepts and practices have rarely been exposed to more sceptical treatment, with some important exceptions.[3] Unless one understands why and how collaboration functions to make a difference to teacher and school development and thence to student experience it is of little use recommending it!

The specific aims of this project were therefore to explore aspects of teachers' workplace culture and to look at multiple forms of teacher interaction, distinguishing between different forms of joint work. I aimed to begin developing a typology of the ways that teachers might work together and to investigate conditions that encourage or inhibit collaboration as productive joint work. Through this, I hoped to begin exploring differences between collaboration and collegiality, and the possible influences of gender.

Further study of collaboration is particularly relevant in relation to the wider context of how teachers' work is constructed by current discourses. In a list of 11 'Factors for Effective Schools' drawn up for OFSTED [4] collegiality and collaboration were identified as a component of 'shared vision and goals'. Work on 'effective departments' has also stressed the importance of collaboration and teamwork.[5] However, what can be contested and decontextualised lists, offer little to teachers in way of a route map. Even if there is agreement on what constitutes effectiveness in a given situation, such studies tend to show end results rather than the process of change, for example they fail to identify what 'effective schools' avoid. We need to ask what does collaboration look like? How do we get there?

The school improvement literature employs a greater focus on values, attitudes and the web of relationships in school contexts. Culture is seen as holding the key to school improvement-and as the location into which the doors open.[6] Collaboration and collegiality are identified as important in developing the capacity for learning and change, with collaborative cultures suggested as an essential building block for staff and school development.

The work of teachers is also in the spotlight, possibly as never before, with the Government focusing on classroom teachers and heads as the major agents responsible for driving up standards. With the emphasis on teaching and learning,

teachers are seen as pivotal in turning the handle of reform. Michael Fullan [7] shows that in integrating school and classroom improvement it is the *teacher as learner* that is the driving cog in the wheel – it moves they all move. However, as many writers point out, it is one of many paradoxes that teachers are charged with improving society through education, but often work in poor conditions with increasing dictats as to exactly what and how they should teach, while being scapegoated for low standards which are more accurately attributable to poverty.

A further significant national issue is the recruitment, education and retention of high quality teachers and it is striking that 25% headships have recently had to be readvertised.[8] Research has consistently shown that motivation and job satisfaction of teachers can be enhanced by extending their professional repertoires through collaborative joint work and the atmosphere it engenders and this in turn affects recruitment and retention.[9] Large scale studies have shown the importance of teachers' feelings of efficacy in affecting student outcomes.

The Government Green Paper *Teachers Meeting the Challenge of Change* (DfEE, 1998) proposes fundamental changes in the conditions of teachers work with different professional structures, extrinsic rewards through performance related pay and the creation of 'fast-tracked' and 'superteachers'. But performance related pay has been shown in business to demotivate the majority. At a time when industry (even the military) are moving towards flattened hierarchies and collective team work, it is ironic that structures are being suggested that could mitigate against these. Studies by Linda Evans at the Teacher Development Research Centre at the University of Warwick suggest that:

*The context of teachers working lives represents the realities of the job and as such has a much greater impact on job-related attitudes than do factors such as centrally initiated policies or teacher conditions of service including pay. (Evans, 1997)*

In parallel with the Government's proposals we also have the socio-political project of professionalization by Unions and Associations. The National Association of Schoolmaster/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) campaign in 1998 was even titled 'The Case for Collegiality'.

### Existing Research

As children always suspect, teachers have only recently emerged. From the back of the filing cabinet, in this case of educational research. There is now search for an understanding of connections between the social organisation of teaching and teachers' learning. While in North America large scale projects have explored teachers' quality of worklife [10] in Britain, finer grained qualitative studies have documented collaborative cultures in primary schools [11] but there has been relatively little work on secondary schools except within ethnographies of comprehensives.[12] More recent work, both on subject departments and micropolitics suggests a complex picture of both teacher groupings and gender/power influences on school reform efforts.[13]

### Research Assumptions

In common with Sandra Acker, I believe that with the emphasis on the classroom and interaction between teacher and student it can easily be forgotten that schools are workplaces for teachers.[14] Indeed, this project was based on the premise that what goes on outside classroom may

be as important for teaching and learning as what goes on inside the classroom.[15] What happens within classrooms will be influenced by policy decisions but also more subtle and complex influences, such as the implicit cultural understandings or a constellation of power relationships within the schools as an entity.

The 1997 report by the School Teachers' Review body found that teachers generally worked 25% longer hours than the average professional. In 1994, a study of secondary school teachers' work by Campbell & St John Neill at the University of Warwick found that of an average 54-hour working week. In reality, only about 40% of teachers' working time is spent in direct contact with students with a further 27% spent working at home.[16] The researchers found that over two-thirds of secondary teachers had no time with another teacher in their class. I was interested in trying to 'map' the contact (or lack of it) between the adults in the workplace. Where they meet, how they interact? What works, why, and for whom?

The study adopted a broadly sociological approach, with a feminist perspective. Because schools are complex organisations, composed of multiple and embedded contexts and relationships, a variety of lenses were used to focus on the processes under scrutiny. Gender is an important organising principle in the workplace and schools are actively involved in constructing gender but are often studied in ways that ignore this (particularly with relation to the intersection with class and ethnicity).

It is now generally recognised that there is not one static, monolithic school culture; but a variety of changing ones; local context and community, student cultures and teacher cultures. I was focussing on the latter.

### Forms of Teacher Culture

In many of studies of teacher cultures, a pervasive view, amounting to a stereotype [17] is that of the individual teacher working alone in classroom with children. Lortie's influential study of school teachers [18] found individualism to be pervasive with teachers rarely observing one another or collectively analysing their work. Bruce Joyce in a new book (Joyce et al, 1999) comments that the descriptions of the modernistic structure of schools by other sociologists also depict an environment 'almost surrealistic if it were not so sinister' with teachers assigned to classes with almost no provision for collective work.

Nias et al identified collaborative cultures in an important 1989 study of primary schools. Help, support, trust and openness appeared to foster an atmosphere where failure and uncertainty were not defended or hidden, but were discussed and shared and so experimentation was supported. Teachers developed the collective confidence to respond to change critically, selecting and adapting ideas and materials appropriate for their own school contexts.

It is possible, of course, that collaboration can create a self-referencing, supportive group that might actually mitigate against improvement/change, a 'cosy collaboration', operating only within the probably unchallenging 'comfort zone'. Likewise it is possible to collaborate around issues that are redundant or projects that are unhelpful to the students. I would suggest that what was being described in these primary schools were actually collegial cultures. Here the whole staff participate in negotiating the curriculum, contributing jointly to planning and evaluation. The collegial unit is the whole school. Collegiality is in working to the same ends, not

necessarily on the same tasks. Collaboration on different tasks is then a subset of this collegial culture.

In balkanised cultures there may be collaboration, but it is fragmented within the school. Teachers work with, and attach their loyalties to, particular groups in the school, often departments which exist within a hierarchy of status and resourcing. Andy Hargreaves in his conceptualisation of school culture (1984), used here, also differentiates between cultures of collaboration and what he terms contrived collegiality where collaboration is required by managers to facilitate pre-determined change (for example where 'off the peg' appraisal schemes are imposed). This collaboration then, is regulated, limited in time and space and designed to have predictable outcomes.

In a comparison with contrived collegiality, Hargreaves describes collaborative cultures as having, 'deeply feminine characteristics ... spontaneous, evolutionary and unpredictable' thereby reflecting the typical western dualism of women as 'natural' and men as 'rational' (although in this case it is the feminine attributes that are suggested as desirable). Without taking an essentialist position it is interesting to question whether women are more likely to show the collaborative behaviours of such 'feminine' cultures?

In going into schools I hoped to explore how patterns of association between different teachers contributed to the prevailing workplace cultures and to look at the content as well as the form of these.

### **Description of the Research and the Schools in the Study**

The three schools were chosen as they were all comprehensives with sixth forms, in a variety of locations and local cultures. The names are invented.

*Earlescombe* is an 11–18 school located on the edge of a city in the West Country with a fairly homogenous white working class population. Like *Brythnoth*, *Earlescombe* has a small sixth form and students achieve around the national average for GCSE passes A\*–C. This represents a significant value added to their lower than average key stage 3 scores.

*Brythnoth* is an 11–18 Community College serving a basically rural catchment with islands of socio-economic advantage but also deprivation. The college was established in 1986 from the amalgamation of two existing schools, with the students and staff of the smaller village college moving to the present site. Like *Earlescombe*, there is a significantly low percentage of adults in the catchment with higher education experience while the number of students with some statement of Special Educational Needs is above the average. Teachers in both schools commented on the relatively low aspirations and self-esteem of their intake. OFSTED inspections have noted that all the schools studied serve their individual communities well.

*Kingbourn* is a large 14–19 Upper School and Community College, drawing students from generally prosperous villages in a Shire county. The sixth form has over 500 students. The proportion of students taking free school meals is low in comparison with the other schools and the range of ability, while broad, has a greater proportion above average than below it. In 1993 the school became grant maintained and now has foundation status. It is therefore relatively well resourced. In contrast to *Brythnoth* and *Earlescombe* whose contracting budgets have meant staff losses, the school is expanding. It has twice been awarded the School Curriculum Award and in 1998 was designated

a 'Beacon School', with 68% of the year group achieving grades A\*–C at GCSE.

The study involved staff volunteers completing a grid to indicate where, when and with whom they most commonly associated or worked with (so this was self-reporting). There were 20 possible forms of interaction, from Social talk to Designing Inset, with an opportunity to add others. The interactions that people were asked to consider on the grid were derived from the research of Judith Warren Little (1990) at Stanford on teachers' work relationships. This provided the conceptual framework for the project. She suggested that what she termed 'more successful' schools (my inverted commas) were characterised by 'patterned norms of interaction':

*In successful schools, teachers valued and participated in norms of collegiality and continuous improvement (experimentation); they pursued a greater range of professional interactions with fellow teachers ..., including talk about instruction, structured observation, and shared planning or preparation. (Little, 1982 p. 5)*

Out of a range of over 170 common interactions in the teachers' workplace generated by socio-linguistic analysis, she identifies a number of 'critical practices of success and adaptability' which are most likely to lead to 'learning on the job' and the development of productive joint working relationships.

The critical practices of adaptability used on the grids in this study were:

- design and prepare materials together;
- prepare lesson plans together;
- observe other teachers (with feedback);
- persuade others to try an idea or approach;
- make collective agreements to test an idea;
- talk 'in public' about what one is learning;
- design INSET.

The results were graphed for departments and schools and compared by means of percentages. Semi-structured interviews were then held with a range of teachers who had completed the grids, also the Headteacher and members of the Senior Management team. Areas explored included 'what it is like to work in this school', roles and responsibilities, beliefs and values, perceptions of the quality of workplace experience. Observation and document analysis were also used as part of a micro-ethnographic approach.

As can be seen in Table I, at the beacon school there were significantly more interactions (of all types) reported and indeed observed. The graphs showing the overall patterns of reported interaction for each school are broadly similar, with *Earlescombe* and *Brythnoth* being most alike. The radial chart is used to emphasise similarities and differences (see Figure 1). It should be noted that as they were completed at different stages in the research process, so the grids differed slightly, for example, *Kingbourn* had 'Design INSET' on their grid rather than 'Mark and moderate together' which distorts the pattern a little, but allowed schools to choose their own focus.

All three schools reported a large number of interactions relating to talk – about students, whether praising or complaining, and dialogue on teaching and learning. The cluster of interactions ranked next according to reported frequency are focused on again on talk about teaching, arguing over theory, defending or explaining classroom practices, exchanging project ideas and lending and



borrowing materials. These are strongly associated with individuals within departments.

The 'critical practices of adaptability', the incidences of powerful joint work which Little suggests are most likely to build capacity for improvement of practice are reported least frequently, e.g. designing and preparing lessons and materials together, observation of other teachers, researching/evaluating and testing ideas collectively. However, they did differ measurably in reported frequency between the schools. Kingbourn 31% interactions, Earlescombe 22% and Brythnoth, almost half that of Kingbourn, at 16%.

The figures for Kingbourn show less variability between the interactions. This presents a pattern where there is more joint work being reported, notably in preparing lesson plans, observation and collectively testing ideas. However, I was interested in looking more closely at variability between departments and was able to work closely with a teacher from Kingbourn who was completing a masters thesis using the grid and so plotted a variety of graphs for the departments (including gender breakdowns). The results were then discussed both in interviews and in department meetings.

Returning to the suggestion that the various forms of what are termed collaboration, are quite different; both in conception and possible impact, Little made the distinction between strong and weak forms of joint work:

*Patterns of interaction that support mutual assistance or routine sharing may account well for maintaining a certain level of workforce stability, teacher satisfaction and a performance 'floor', they seem less likely, however, to account for high rates of innovation or high levels of collective commitment to specific curricular or instructional policies...(or to) force teachers collective confrontation with the schools' fundamental purposes ... (Little, 1982)*

Overall Kingbourn reported higher proportions of the 'strong' forms of joint work and Brythnoth the least.

So, what has the study suggested so far about the 'Black Box' of collaboration as Fullan et al (1990) term it? Perhaps that collaboration and collegiality may be distinguished by the types of interaction and task and the relationship between the actors. On a notional continuum from what could be termed independence to interdependence (see Figure 2) collaboration is a more instrumental form of joint work, which does not necessarily require agreement on overarching school aims', or indeed shared values. On the other hand, collegiality results from and is nurtured by, collective agreement of the group on basic purposes, and shared decision-making for the benefit of all. The format

is necessarily simplistic and should not suggest that there is a straightforward progression from individualism to collegiality, although they are often framed as opposites. Reality is much more messy and a 'nested hierarchy' of different relationships may be a more useful frame to develop. It should also be noted here that the influences shaping a wide variety of student outcomes are multidimensional and cumulative and in this small study I could not claim to make direct links with outcome.

## Location of Different Forms of Collaboration

For each school the location of interaction was graphed. By far the most association reported was between individuals, particularly those in the department and the importance of the department as a site for joint work was emphasised via the department meetings. In contrast, few interactions of any kind occurred in staff meetings. This was slightly different at Kingbourn where a new regime of staff meetings incorporating development time in small groups was being introduced.

Given the importance of coherence and continuity in the curriculum and the experience of students, it is thought-provoking to note how little contact there was with Heads of Year, cross-phase liaison and cross-curricular groups (although these are percentage figures). The low figures for appraisal reflect the virtual abandonment of the formally required process in the face of budget cuts and demands on time. It was also interesting that both Kingbourn and Brythnoth show a similar proportion of interactions occurring in the staffroom, less than Earlescombe. In both cases departmental offices are important meeting places, but often to different effect.

The grids were followed up the with over 38 interviews. In them, teachers expressed enthusiasm for joint work. More experienced staff sometimes referred back to a 'golden age', a formative period when they experienced particularly close professional relationships:

*He and I worked together 6-7 yrs very closely, building the dept together. We created a standard and practice. Got the timetable arranged to allow team teaching. Developed some fabulous programmes. Had a thoroughly enjoyable time.. It was wonderful. We used to talk the subject all the time. We would go to ///s home and carry on talking about the lesson we had been teaching. It was very exciting - we felt we were engaged in something important ... We went on courses together. We RAN courses together. It was all go. It was really good. (CP, Brythnoth)*

The interviews also confirmed the importance of the

|            | Total | Males | Females | Departments                           | Average number of interactions per person |
|------------|-------|-------|---------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Earlscombe | 12    | 5     | 7       | Various                               | 59  |
| Kingbourn  | 44    | 22    | 22      | English/Science/Expressive Arts/Maths | 91  |
| Brythnoth  | 26    | 15    | 11      | Science and various                   | 49  |
| Somerton   | 16    | 4     | 12      | English/science/humanities            | 49  |

Table I. Study sample (Somerton was the pilot study).

department as an arena for collaboration, both formally and informally. Overall, informal rather than formal situations were cited more frequently as locations of collaboration, both within the school day (e.g. break duties and snatched moments) and outside school, particularly in peoples houses or sharing lifts. It was at times such as these that teachers found themselves talking about beliefs and basic principles which could be translated into practice through working together. Unsurprisingly, this particularly involved friends or colleagues of 'like-mind', illustrated by a quote from a young teacher at Earlescombe:

*With Pete (I have done) observations. Four of us shared a lift – we were permanently talking about issues, that is where that came from. (BJ, Earlescombe)*

This, then was really 'travelling together'!

Although the allocations of non-contact time were broadly similar in all the study schools (with Kingbourn undoubtedly being the highest) time was seen as a particular issue at Brythnoth where the budget for supply staff was very tight. In contrast, at Kingbourn timetabled slots enabled pairs or groups of staff to meet. In formal meetings, productive joint work was most likely when they were explicitly structured (e.g. with pairs of colleagues, working to 50% development time). Time before school was also mentioned as useful, particularly when groups then went on to met more formally (e.g. sixth form morning briefing).

INSET days (the orthodoxy of professional development) were rarely mentioned, except in providing opportunities

to meet colleagues from other departments. The young woman earlier went on to say:

*None of the development work I have done, has been in the time given. That is probably common. (BJ, Earlescombe)*

Throughout the study, gender was employed as one focus and overall gender differences were found in the interactions reported by teachers. Men and women make up similar proportions of the teaching force in secondary schools but in 1997 men held over 75% of headships.[19] The staffing at Kingbourn and Brythnoth reflected this pattern with women making up around 33% of senior staff and posts of responsibility but by far the majority of support staff.

There seemed to be differences between women and men in the type of interactions most commonly reported, although there was a similar proportion of Little's critical practices of adaptability. Women described a wider range of interactions and also locations of interaction, while the men in the study reported a larger number of interactions per person. There were also differences overall in the most frequent type of interaction, although I was not able to test this out through observation. Women reported 'Collectively test an idea' and 'Design and prepare materials together' significantly more frequently than men. While men scored particularly high on 'Persuade others to try an idea' and 'Talk in public about what you are learning'.

Returning to the question; are collaborative cultures 'feminine'? Gender is obviously an important factor in

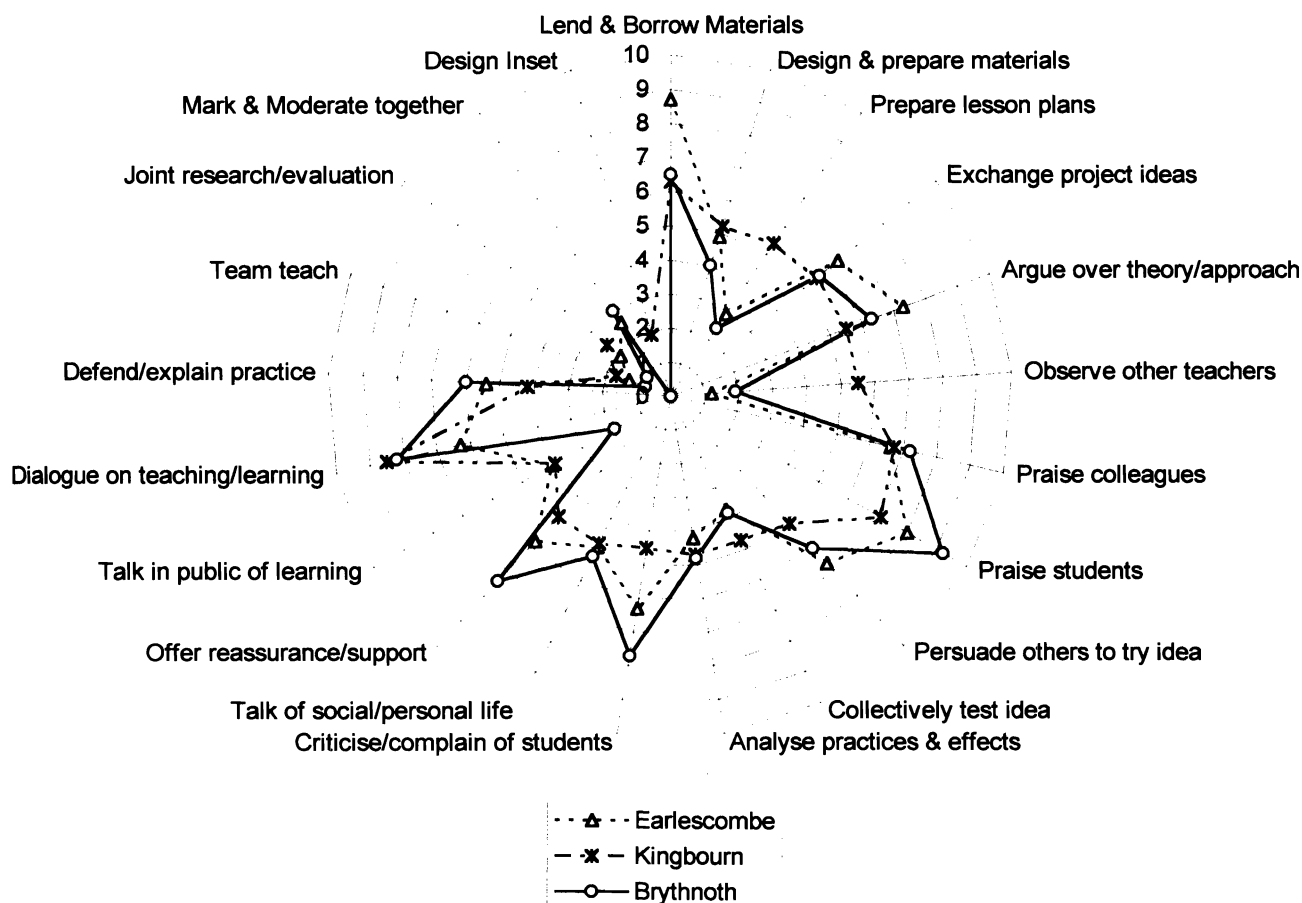


Figure 1. Percentage interaction in three schools.

affecting how people relate, however there may also be wide difference in values, attitudes and behaviour *between* women. This may be more to do with preferred *styles*, e.g. the different conversational styles where women seem socialised to engage in talk, particularly in small groups, which makes others feel comfortable, while men may adopt a more hierarchical approach, having learnt to state their opinions strongly.

### Barriers to Collaboration as Perceived by the Teachers Interviewed

Unsurprisingly, there was an emphasis on a lack of resources, particularly in terms of *time* to meet during the day. The use of time, where meetings were mainly information giving was a source of frustration, especially to middle managers. A Head of Year at Brythnoth noted:

*The problem is always lack of time. Dept meetings are 6/7 weeks apart and we lose the impetus. With staff days they are over and that's it. (R, Brythnoth)*

The associated burden of heavy workloads was illustrated by one teacher (of RE) who taught over 500 students in a normal week, including GCSE in the lunchhour. Teachers of some years experience all agreed that their work had intensified considerably due to the huge changes in education since the ERA in 1988. This was against a background of budget constraints and staff cuts.

*I am damage limiting. I lost £70,000 and this year we are £160,000 out – because I am not prepared to make class sizes of 40. We are already at the very very bottom of the country (for funding) and the county is at the very bottom of the country. (Head, Brythnoth)*

Externally imposed initiatives were felt to be continually adding pressure and in some cases the National Curriculum was felt to have reduced collaboration as joint work through emphasis on individual subject areas. A lack of collaboration between schools was ascribed variously to geographical isolation, lack of time and a reduction in LEA support, but

also to increasing competition for pupils in an artificially created 'market'. The beacon school is now actively engaged in developing such links and at Earlescombe the sixth form must do this to survive.

The spatial arrangement of the schools was cited as problematic at Brythnoth and Earlescombe, with departments meeting in their own offices rather than using the staffroom, linked by those interviewed with lack of time to move, e.g. at break.

An NQT at Brythnoth said:

*We rely on memos, there's no interaction except on paper. If everybody used the staffroom and talk to each other they wouldn't have to ask, 'am I the only person struggling?' (RL, Brythnoth)*

A Senior member of staff concurred:

*One thing undermines anything we do is we have so many department offices. The staffroom is the most underused room in the school. That has its consequences. (M, Brythnoth)*

At Brythnoth, some of the departments in their use of departmental space were also likened to dysfunctional families, meeting daily over the dinner table (or sandwiches) but disliking each other heartily.

Poor interpersonal relationships were perceived as a significant barrier to productive joint work. A number of comments involved negative feelings, notably insecurity and lack of confidence resulting partly from a perceived judgmental air of criticism:

*There is an air of criticism. ... Teachers are very sensitive to criticism. They worry they are going to be judged, given a mark out of 10. For my generation it was, what marks can you take off? We are critical. (L, Brythnoth)*

A lack of appropriate leadership at different levels in a school was also identified as a further barrier to joint work:

*In my subject area I work on my own. In a way it was thrust upon me by the style of leadership, there is a difference in personalities. A good leader would make*

|  | Co-existence/<br>Co-operation  | Colleagueship   | Collaboration  | Collegiality   |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Ways of working                                      | Autonomous individuals isolated in privacy of own classroom. Sporadic opportunistic contacts                             | Help-giving and advice when sought. Expertise acknowledged and shared                                 | Mutual assistance. Routine sharing. Open exchange of insights, methods, materials  | Collective, critical confrontation with purpose. Contribute jointly to agreed curriculum. Development of professional community. Participation in whole school decision making |
| Examples of interaction between teachers (from grid) | TALK<br><br>Storytelling, 'trick-trading'<br>Praising/criticising students & colleagues.<br>Talk of social/personal life | OBSERVATION<br><br>Mentoring for ITT/SCITT.<br>Lending/borrowing materials<br>Defend/explain practice | TEACH EACH OTHER ABOUT TEACHING<br><br>Exchange project ideas<br>Dialogue on teaching & learning.<br>Analyse practice.   | PLANNING, DESIGNING, PUTTING INTO PRACTICE<br>EVALUATING<br>Development considers work of whole school. Collectively test ideas. Research work together                        |
| Relationship to whole school outcomes                | Relatively little impact except through effects contingent on individuals  | May consolidate rather than encourage evaluation and necessary change                                 | Increases coherence of curriculum through improved planning and wider range teaching and learning styles. Increased focus on learning of individuals within the school | Synergy. Collective and ongoing learning for school, staff & students.<br>Values and aims articulated and acted upon.<br>Improved morale and sense of efficacy of staff        |

Figure 2. From independence to interdependence. Suggested typology of ways of working in teachers' workplace.

*use of differences, harmonise, bring people together. Having differences should be a strength but for us it is a weakness. (L, Brythnoth)*

At Brythnoth there was noted a concern for hierarchy, with a focus on roles and status. The sometimes ascribed to the effects of the amalgamation of schools 15 years ago. The same senior member of staff observed:

*In 1986 there was a MOVE – people had to reapply for their jobs. They threw money at the school. People lost status, but not money. It was the cause of a lot of dissension. Some made a move by staying still and some moved 3–4 miles down the road which wasn't really a move. It helped shape unhelpful attitudes. (M, Brythnoth)*

Teachers often find that their knowledge of 'what works' is less transferable than their long experience might suggest and in one school the lack of a focused induction process was seen as problematic both for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and also new and supply staff. Issues relating to the structure of teacher education were also mentioned. Student teachers certainly had very different experiences in the three schools.

### **What Does the Research Tell Us about Supporting Collaboration as Joint Work?**

1. Teachers in the interviews were clear about the importance of providing protected and dedicated time. At Kingbourn, the use of timetabled protected meetings within the school day were seen as extremely important. The Head commented:

*I am stunned by the (effect of) the entrepreneurial use of time. The timetabler is given pairs which are made by choosing from those who are free It provides a facilitative mechanism to engender collaboration.*

2. Department offices of all sizes, where relationships were positive, were felt by teachers to be a significant factor in encouraging joint work. The importance of visibility was discussed (at Kingbourn, one glassed internal department area was nicknamed the 'goldfish bowl'), also proximity and joint responsibility for activities such as work clinics were seen to be important as well as the day to day interchange and social interaction around the 'departmental kettle'.

3. Leadership from the Head and Senior Management team was centrally important in structuring opportunities for involvement in decision-making (rather than necessarily *taking*), also in restating aims and values and endorsing policies favouring joint work. This was seen to operate most effectively when leadership was broadly distributed throughout the staff who treat each other as equals. It was noticeable that the Kingbourn staff had a greater consensus of what the term meant and apparently a clearer understanding of the nature and possibilities of leadership than did the Brythnoth staff.

4. In the context of leadership, collective agreement of staff on aims, policies and practices was also seen to be essential. Increasingly, in education as well as business, it is suggested that 'transformational' or 'invitational' leadership is more likely to 'empower' staff at all levels. This is sometimes identified with 'feminine styles' of leadership (rather than simply management) which are not, of course, only or even necessarily employed by women. A report on Kingbourn's Investors in People stated: 'the headteacher is almost evangelical in his pursuit of continuous improvement and the development of every individual'.

5. Relationships based on trust and mutual respect were seen as fundamental. The confidence to share experiences,

positive and negative, and to debate this constructively seemed dependent on trusting colleagues not to criticise or judge unhelpfully. This relates to wider research which suggests that defining the work of teaching as inherently difficult means that teachers see success as less a matter of personal style that cannot be changed and more as a practice that can be developed and refined. They are therefore more likely to talk about the management of teaching and learning instead of only the 'troubles talk' of workplace complaints which serves as a protection for their self-esteem. Trust is crucial to the development of the mutuality and respect which is necessary for powerful joint work and the development of collegial cultures.

Teachers' workplace cultures may thus encourage or provide barriers to joint work, although what can be an enabling condition in one school context, such as the perception of the dept office, can be perceived as a barrier in another. The study has shown that there are patterns of situated interactions among teachers that can be 'mapped' to provide an insight into such teacher cultures that practitioners can recognise.

### **What is the Challenge of Collaboration? What May We Take from the Results of the Study?**

In recognising that there is a reciprocal relationship between the structure and culture of schools, it is important not to see the issue as one of managing culture to ensure compliance. This runs the risk of pseudo-participatory bodies and collaborative pretence, but there are elements that can be changed. Providing teachers with working conditions that other professionals take for granted means more than replacing the staffroom kettle or exhorting staff to work together in teams. It means time to develop work together in a variety of ways within an ethical discourse built around teaching and learning in their broadest sense.

We need to encourage a synergy of collective vision and purpose through actively interrogating, debating and expressing the aims of our schools. Thus to move towards the development of a collegiality that is not a contrived and imposed managerialist strategy expressed in the sterile language of performativity. We need to take time to debate and restate the meaningful aims which encompass the moral purpose of education. This will require more emphasis on relationship, including the emotional context of teaching and schools as workplaces, an awareness of the importance of scale and communication, and the possibilities of members of the community entering into challenging dialogue. This would be real 'joined-up thinking', the development of social capital to liberate the intellectual capital of staff and students!

In this way, over time, a new dynamic equilibrium may be established, using information and enquiry to develop and sustain improvement. Research shows that context is of greater significance than any other factor in what and how teachers learn on the job, transforming information to knowledge through classroom practice. If teaching is to become a 'research-based profession' as the Government desires, then a major challenge for a 'knowledge-creating school' is to determine how teachers learn best from each other. The current use of INSET days and staff meetings could be usefully scrutinised here.

Within the recent, and not unproblematic, focus on leadership in education (e.g. in school effectiveness literature, the creation of a new leadership college for heads, NPQH, etc.) we must explore wider possibilities,

questioning the discourse of strong leadership from the front (man-on-the-white-horse style). It is necessary to investigate the range of possibilities, including facilitating, invitational, notionally 'feminine' styles of leadership. These may well influence different types of joint work and certainly micropolitical processes in the workplace. The study highlighted the importance of leadership *throughout* the school, at a time when arguably the roles of heads and senior management teams are becoming more polarised in relation to the rest of the staff. It is here that the development of collegiality may float or founder on the relationship between involvement in decision-making and delegation.

The real challenge for policy makers and the present Government is one of trust. The prevailing discourse of failure and the deficit model of teachers reproduces a destructive judgmental atmosphere of surveillance. What we have touched on here is *not* the collegiality of inferiority or excuses that David Blunkett has talked of, nor a refusal to use outstanding expertise. Rather it means recognising the school as a unique context – made up of human beings living and working together in a particular time and place.

Although welcoming much in the recent Green Paper, like the majority of teachers I have grave doubts about the performance management structures proposed. I fear that linking 'performance' directly to pay and status could force *real* conservatism, with teachers retreating to the privacy of their classroom, rather than being engaged in a genuine ongoing dialogue on teaching and learning. If these new structures destroy trust between teachers this may be the biggest casualty of all. If my research has taught me something it is that collegiality as collective purpose and joint work is worthwhile, but difficult to establish and potentially easy to destroy.

## Notes

- [1] Fielding, 1998.
- [2] Campbell & Southworth, 1992.
- [3] Including Little (1982), Hargreaves (1984), and Fielding (1998), as cited.
- [4] Sammons et al, 1996.
- [5] Harris, 1995
- [6] Hopkins et al, 1994.
- [7] Fullan et al, 1990.
- [8] *The Times Educational Supplement*, October 1999.
- [9] Recent research on PGCE students showed they entered the profession because they wanted to work with children, improving their life chances. These graduates saw teaching as a means of sharing and using their knowledge and they perceived the job as offering high satisfaction (see Reid & Caldwell, 1997).
- [10] Rosenholz, 1989; Louis & Kruse, 1995.
- [11] Nias et al, 1989; Acker, 1999.
- [12] Ball, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994.
- [13] Paechter, 1995.
- [14] Acker, 1999.

- [15] McLaughlin, 1993.
- [16] Campbell & Neill, 1994.
- [17] Acker, 1999.
- [18] See Hargreaves, 1984.
- [19] DfEE, 1998.

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# The Use of Creole Alongside Standard English to Stimulate Students' Learning

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**William Henry**

The author teaches at West Herts College, but this article is based on his experiences as a Saturday School teacher in London. He believes that, with some notable exceptions, teachers, schools and examination boards are not yet successful in utilising the huge diversity in language and culture represented in inner-city schools today.

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To take on a language is to take on a culture, and if we reject a child's language, we could be said to be rejecting his or her cultural community and even his or her individual identity and sense of self-worth. This applies to all early languages and dialects, in London and elsewhere. As Rosen & Burgess (1980, p. 78) made clear, 'school pupils bring an enormous language variety to school'. However, in this article my special concern is with the value of Creole and with its potential role in enhancing children's school experience.

I am not suggesting that Creole should replace Standard English but that the recognition of the child's language and culture is likely to have a favourable effect on a child's attitude to school life and on his or her progress in learning. This point will be elaborated upon as the article develops.

Furthermore, an EEC directive obliges all governments 'to promote in co-ordination with normal education the teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin' I think that in the case of Creole-speaking children it would be beneficial to encourage the use of Creole in drama and poetry initially, because it is important that the culture of all children should be recognised and accepted by the school.

Due to the controversy surrounding the status of Creole, I shall use the term 'Creole' instead of 'language' or 'dialect', where appropriate, except, of course, when crossreferencing with other work. My intention is that this will reinforce and clarify specific points while highlighting their relevance. As previously mentioned, the identity and self-image of all pupils, and in this case Creole-speaking pupils, is intimately tied to their culture and their control over their language; in my view, the desire in the case of Creole speakers to identify with a Creole speech community is particularly important during the period of adolescence when they are at the crossroads between childhood and adulthood, seeking to establish strong individual and group identity.

## Background

I have been teaching in a Caribbean Saturday Supplementary School in Hackney for one year. The school is attended largely by students of African and Caribbean origins with a few European attendees. The students' ages range from 5 to 16 years old. There are more male attendees than female

due to the high rate of African-Caribbean male exclusion from state schools.

The Saturday School was established to address the issue of exclusion and to accommodate parents who were determined not to allow their children to follow the NVQs/GNVQs qualification pathways.

I am responsible for teaching English and History to the older students (13–15-year-olds) who are preparing for GCSE exams. From teaching this group of students, I have developed an interest in finding out if the use of Creole alongside Standard English would enhance and stimulate learning. The students are of mixed ability and of Caribbean descent.

In this article, I shall explore the question 'what is involved in valuing Creole in the school?' The answer to this question is quite complex, but I wish, at this point, to establish that I fully accept one of the main aims of the National Curriculum which states that 'all pupils should be helped to gain control over Standard English'.

For geographical, historical, political, educational, commercial and other reasons, this standard dialect has a special status. Its communicative power is great because it is widely spoken and written and, while it is not linguistically superior to other dialects, it is nevertheless within the interest of young and/or mature learners to achieve control over it, not least because 'Standard English' is the key to success in a society like ours, leading to greater educational success, wider occupational choices and increased chances of promotion. It is also believed that helping all students to achieve competence over Standard English can actually be compatible with giving their home language or 'dialect' a value in school.

Why, then, is there a need to give Creole a high profile in schools where there are black pupils whose roots are in the Caribbean where Creole is spoken and written?

First, to make the powerful link between linguistic, cultural roots and cognitive growth more explicable, the tree analogy is useful. Consider two trees growing side by side: one is allowed to continue to grow naturally, but the other is uprooted, displaced and replanted in different soil. Clearly, the tree which has been disturbed will take longer to reach maturity than the tree which has been left unmolested. This analogy can be paralleled with language in education since language, which is intrinsically linked

with culture and cognitive growth, is the tool by which learners acquire knowledge. Therefore teachers ought not to expect speakers of Creole to cast off their language and culture as soon as they cross the school threshold.

The casting off of the home language could possibly have detrimental effects on the pupils' intellectual development and their academic progress, particularly if the children's weaker language is the language of the school. Ideally, such children need to use the stronger language in school as well in order to make academic progress. Saunders (1988, p. 57) makes clear 'that from a neurological point of view, the brain can handle two languages as easily as one'.

If, and when, speakers of a first language discard that language, they are, in effect, disregarding part of their culture and devaluing what seems worthwhile and valuable. The far-reaching consequences in the case of some cultures involve causing a total breakdown of communication between parents and children, with the children refusing to speak their mother tongue, either because they feel ashamed of it, because of the stigma attached to it, or simply because they fear losing a grip on the new language.

Whilst making these points, however, I am aware that teachers alone cannot totally influence change. Society in general, Examination Boards, the Department for Education and Employment, Local Education Authorities and other professional institutions need to create the ethos and opportunities conducive to motivating users of more than one language to operate confidently in both languages. Once the opportunities have been created, then they ought to make policies, and develop strategies to implement those policies and form criteria to evaluate the working of those policies.

Secondly, as I have already made clear, there is official sanction for the valuing of the language and dialects in general embodied in very recent reports connected with the National Curriculum guidelines. Indeed, teachers and schools are now obliged to think of imaginative and constructive ways of using children's first language and dialects or Creoles.

All dialects or Creoles are close to the speakers' identity and feelings of self worth. Black people in particular living in Britain have special problems of prejudice in connection with education, jobs, housing and many other factors. These prejudices have damaging and far-reaching consequences.

The scope of this article is not broad enough to take into account and examine all the various factors. However, it is important to mention that part of that prejudice is perpetuated predominantly through children's literature where the authors disseminate stereotypical myths about the sloppiness of black people's speech, the notion that they have very little intelligence, and the myth that they are lazy and disorganised.

It must be noted that the term 'prejudice' or 'racism' as is used in this article is not used lightly; nor is there any assumption that all white people are 'prejudiced'. However, the point needs to be made that there is considerable evidence to suggest that black people are discriminated against and that they are misrepresented in both children's and adults' literature as already indicated. They are also overwhelmingly stereotyped in the media, particularly in television and in the press. Their history and culture are not sufficiently regarded in society in general, and in many schools in particular. While the study is not broad enough in scope to examine the whole area of multicultural education, it can be argued that by allowing



Steve Bell, *The Guardian*, 9 January 2000

black children the freedom to use some Creole in their written work, we are exposing them to their roots and introducing white children to the richness of another culture. This should, in the right hands, lead to greater mutual respect and, indeed, I hope to show this as one result of my work in this area. This kind of initiative could help black children to value their first language, and white children to respect other cultures and languages.

We must also remember that having control over one's language also has psychological effects. Research makes it clear that black children often devalue the culture of their own ethnic minority groups. It is hard to resist the view that this rejection is partly based on the attitudes of their new culture towards all that they hold dear. It is in everyone's interest that young black people should feel that they have a respected part to play in society.

Not only is British society encouraging the black child to deny his or her colour, which is part of their identity; society is also denying them the right to use and thereby maintain their mother tongue. I am aware that some children of Caribbean origin may not consider or use Creole as a mother tongue. Nevertheless, research shows that many children do regard it as their first language and do use features of Creole in their everyday speech and in some of the writing, intentionally or unintentionally, which they undertake in school.

As language is so important to the personal and social development of the individual as well as the other factors already mentioned, it is worth maintaining, or at least acknowledging, its existence and its functions.

For too long the academic underachievement of Creole speaking children has been blamed on the inadequacies in the learners themselves, whereas the underachievement of students of African Caribbean descent could more profitably be attributed to the denial of the use of their language and culture by a monolingual, monocultural education system.

Allowing Creole in the classroom is of potential benefit to the children. It will be particularly beneficial to the speakers of that language because they have probably never thought of the language in a positive light, nor ever thought that it could be used in the classroom for serious work. By seeing it used in this way, a new sense of pride in their language could be developed and hence they could become more motivated to learn. It may even help them to develop a positive image of themselves, and give them the courage to identify with the language more positively.

I believe that valuing a child's language (in this case, Creole) will also help lead to respect for black culture. It may also be a key to finding the answer to the problem of the underachievement of black children in British schools, and explain why too many black adolescents display a lack of interest in school work.

Other reasons for valuing Creole are to do with aesthetic enjoyment both black and white people find in the work of the great Creole writers and poets such as Samuel Sevelon, Andrew Salkey, Louise Bennett, V.S. Naipaul, Linton Kwesi Johnson, James Berry and many others.

In using and valuing Creole, the pupils whose first language is Creole would not be missing out on the opportunities to make vital links between the expressive, transactional and poetic functions of language. It is in that context that James Britton emphasises the vitality of the

expressive function as the matrix from which the more advanced forms of writing develop.

In this study, I will be relying on the work of pupils who are engaged in English language and literature. My role will be to create contexts where different varieties of language are appropriate.

Use of Creole in spoken language has tended to centre on situational role play, while in its written form, it is found in dialogues and stories, and above all in the poems that the pupils write. Transcripts of pupils talking about language and variety as well as about their own work have been used, so have those of parents. There is, of course, space to use only a very small proportion of the transcripts that I have made over the year.

### The Importance of Creole in the Classroom

The central purpose of this article is to justify the benefits of the use of Creole in the class to all pupils, but particularly to those pupils whose first language is Creole – those pupils who have been made to think that their language has no value, function, or role in a place of learning.

My central argument, therefore, is also to justify the use of Creole in the classroom as an aid to enhance the cognitive processes of those pupils who have learnt that language. The language learnt first in infancy has a crucial effect on the learning capacity of the learner because as Britton has argued (1975), the language we learn first lays the foundation for future cognitive and linguistic developments.

I also believe that it is beneficial to the whole class to share the Caribbean culture with children whose mother tongue is Standard English. It is useful to get a feel of different styles of writing and to understand that there are different ways of saying the same things. Certainly through my work with both sets of children, with those whose mother tongue is Standard English and with those whose mother tongue is both Creole as well as Standard English, I have found that they all welcome the introduction of Creole in the classroom.

One of the reasons why I believe pupils enjoy learning about other cultures and languages is because they get the opportunity to all contribute positively, rather than negatively. It seems to markedly boost the morale of the Caribbean children who are invariably on the receiving end in the sense that they have to acquire knowledge continuously through a language and culture that are imposed upon them. Earol, a third-generation pupil of Caribbean parentage, remarked during the discussion lesson on the usefulness and purpose of using Creole in a lesson:

*It makes a change to be able to contribute a part of me instead of having to take on the whole culture of somebody else. We have always had to learn in "correct English" about English stories, the English language, History and Geography. Geography should teach us something about the whole world, but we only learn about Europe and America. If we ever do anything about Africa or other black people's countries, it is always about poverty and diseases. We are never given any information about the good things we have done for the betterment of mankind. It is good to use our language for a change to discuss and learn in school.*

Later on in the day after the whole class had participated in the shared reading of a book entitled *The Horned Helmet* they were asked, as one of their activities, to take on the

role of the Baresark and write interestingly and imaginatively about their thoughts and feelings.

Earol actually gave a new slant to his interpretation and recreation of the story using Creole to interpret the character of the Baresark. When he had completed writing his story, he shared it with the whole class by reading it aloud.

They all enjoyed it tremendously. One indigenous pupil whose mother tongue is Standard English remarked after recalling the effect the experience had on him:

*When Earol wrote a little bit of his story in Creole we enjoyed that story more than the original Baresark story . . . I like Earol's ideas and that . . . and the things he comes out with. He gives the impression of some of the expressions his mum would come out with.*

It is pertinent, I think, to point out here that Earol initiated using Creole as long as a year and a half before I envisaged attempting this research.

The realisation of their enjoyment in fact prompted me to consider this work, particularly because I wouldn't have to feel guilty about imposing my wishes on them. I had up until then used stories written only in Standard English, written by English authors, to stimulate reading, writing and oral response. It had never occurred to me to use Creole in the classroom. The implication is that all the children see the value of using a dialect other than Standard English to stimulate learning and I think they felt on that occasion that the incorporation of Creole in the curriculum had enriched their enjoyment of learning during that lesson.

As a teacher, I, too, benefited from their enjoyment and feedback on that lesson; I understood their enthusiasm and could see the value of using other forms of dialect in the classroom, at least occasionally, in order to broaden their outlook and acceptance of other languages and cultures as part of their learning experiences.

### Parental Views on the Use of Creole in the Classroom

What are the views of some of the parents regarding the introduction of Creole in the classroom? Before attempting to reproduce some of these views, it is pertinent to point out that some parents who have themselves been brought up under the influence of the dominant cultural ideology may inevitably allow their thinking to be coloured by stereotypical views about the Creole language and culture.

By implication each individual is formed by the culture of the society into which he or she is born. It is almost impossible to avoid the preconceptions about language and culture that exist and which are reflected in the way Caribbeans think and speak and sometimes write about their language and culture.

When I asked one parent, interviewed for this article, whether she approved of the introduction of Creole in the classroom, and whether she thought it had any potential, she remarked:

*It is one of those tricky situations. Let's see now. How can I put it? Now where was I? I was over in Wellington and I happened to mention to another parent whose son attends the school where you teach, that you were coming to visit me to talk about the possibility of introducing some form of Creole in the classroom, and it started one big argument. This is because to a lot of people as far as they are concerned, Creole has no place in the classroom. The woman actually said that she don't send her child to school to learn Creole. She just sends him*

*there to learn Standard English, because that is what is going to get him a job, so it is really one of those contentious issues.*

A visiting teacher from Canada, who is herself a parent of Jamaican descent and is researching for her PhD, showed mixed feelings about the credibility of Creole when she commented:

*It doesn't happen in Canada. Nobody advocates for anybody to read, speak or write in Creole nor to produce anything in Creole. Parents are sceptical about it. If I am sending my kid to school and my kid is writing 10 pieces of work in Creole and putting them in his or her coursework folder, I would be upset. It is not a class issue, it is not just working class parents who wouldn't want it. It is particularly middle class parents who do not want their kids to grow up on patois, I reckon, and I know that it is not an easy issue to resolve.*

She envisaged that the children would encounter enormous problems in trying to write in Creole. She was also worried that children might not want to write in Creole. She said that if she herself had the choice in an examination between Creole and Standard English, she would opt for Standard English and would not touch Creole with a bargepole.

Her reasons for not wanting to associate with the Creole language were echoed in the first parent's hypothesis relating to the argument she had had:

*The social world and the world that they are hopefully going to work in is dictated by Standard English, and as far as this other parent is concerned, she wants her son to be competent in Standard English to the point where he can function more than adequately in that world which I agree with, but I said that teaching the children Creole shouldn't detract from teaching them Standard English.*

Fortunately, there were some positive views in favour of including Creole in some of the children's writing. Earol's mother, herself a primary school teacher, linked language with feeling and thinking when she remarked on the issue:

*It is just a way of expressing yourself. I mean I find that if I am angry, or if I get something really bothering me, I will not express myself in Standard English. It just does not come to mind. I can find the words more in Creole to say exactly what I feel. One thinks faster and more profoundly in Creole.*

She also thinks that the language or literature written in Creole has literary value when she says:

*I personally think that it is a good thing for it to be used in the classroom, because they need something they can grasp as their own to analyse in the same way as you would analyse Shakespeare, or Milton or whoever else. I mean I think they need something that is pertaining to them to show that they have got something that is valued, and looked upon as being as good as anybody else's.*

The other PhD parent/teacher was of the opinion that we should not leave out Creole entirely, but that we should make up our minds as to whether we wanted Creole to have equal status with Standard English or whether we just wanted it to be accepted without too much fuss. She articulated her mixed feelings in this way:

*I am not suggesting that we leave it, but what we will have to do is to take a good look at what we are talking about, whether we want Creole to be used on the same level as Standard English or not, and sometimes I get*

the feeling when I talk to different people that they want Creole to have the same status in the classroom which it cannot, and may never have. If we are satisfied bearing in mind what you say about it being an oral language, if we are satisfied for our students or teachers, including white teachers, to accommodate Creole language without fuss; that's fine, or should the language be perfected to get it equal status? Now these are two different things we are talking about. Which do we want? Our students can either use it and identify with it, or are we on a campaign to equalise Standard English with Creole?

My answer to that was that I only wanted Creole to have a place in the curriculum, particularly because there are some things that one can say better in Creole than in Standard English, and vice versa. To this she replied:

*In this literate society, whatever is in print seems to have more status than what is said orally, so until the oral language begins to get a certain amount of respectability in print, a certain means of consistency, there will be no respect for the language. Standard English is "standardised", codified and that was in the old days when the language was developing. They spell the words differently nowadays from the way they spelt the words then, and the language never had that much status then.*

The interviewee herself recognised that poetry is one genre in which Creole is workable when she said:

*You accept a lot in poetry that you do not in other mediums, because poetry has an art form, and the more different the language and form, the more notice is taken of it. Poets have a poetic licence for using language in a different way.*

## Conclusion

The use of Creole languages in the mainstream classroom needs careful thought and skilful organisation. If the inclusion of Creole in the curriculum is made arbitrarily without the kind of context which makes its linguistic significance clear, then the result may be that pupils could become confused and disenchanted, which, in turn, could lead to, or confirm their rejection of the language. Pupils need to be made explicitly aware of the relationship between language, individual speakers and society in order to make meaning from texts.

In the final analysis, it can be beneficial to all pupils, giving them the opportunity to learn about, and respect other language users. Learning about other cultures and traditions in this way will arguably do more good than harm. Appropriate use of minority languages in the classroom is wholly consistent with a child-centred approach in education. It ensures that the use of Creole in writing promotes self-esteem, emotional growth and a sense of well-being within the learner, affording increased linguistic opportunities for the expression of thought and feeling in both written and spoken texts.

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Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 18 February

# Why the GCSE Should be Abolished

**Clyde Chitty**

The author has been Reviews Editor of *FORUM* since 1982 and Co-Editor since 1989. In this article, he argues that the GCSE, introduced a decade ago with the intention of catering for all students, has proved to be a failure and should now be scrapped.

## Background

By the middle of the nineteenth century, assessment by written competitive examination was increasingly common at what we would now term the post-school level, providing 'gateways' to the universities, the professions and to the civil and military services. Naturally, this development affected the secondary schools attended by potential applicants. Responding to pressure from parents, many of the grammar schools of the day began to prepare students specifically for these entrance examinations; some even ran a special 'Civil Service Class'. Grammar schools were flourishing at this time, for there was no shortage of young people aspiring to fill the growing number of clerical and administrative posts associated with an industrial, exporting nation possessing a far-flung empire.

Over a period of about a hundred years, a system of public, external examinations for 'academically-inclined' students developed, and this system became a form of 'quality-control'. Its main aims were to increase competition and to select and reward merit. The long association between the examination system and the universities underpinned the academic emphasis of most school examinations and ensured their applicability for the more 'academically able' students.

Shortly after the end of the Second World War, in 1947, a report emanating from the SSEC (Secondary Schools Examinations Council) outlined proposals for a single-subject system of examinations, the General

Certificate of Education (GCE), with examination papers at three separate levels: Ordinary ('O'), Advanced ('A') and Scholarship ('S'). These new examinations would replace the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate which had held sway in the inter-war period. They were to be administered by the existing university examination boards, although there were initial expectations that the new system would become internal and teacher-controlled.

The first 'O' and 'A' level examinations were held in 1951 and were clearly intended for a privileged minority of the school population. In the 1950s, grammar schools provided education for roughly one in five of all secondary-age students; and the new 'O' Level was similarly intended for the 'top' 20% of the ability range. Yet from the first, many of those attending the non-selective secondary modern schools (together with their parents and teachers) were campaigning to be allowed to sit the new examination which soon acquired extraordinary prestige with large numbers of employers. Students could not normally take 'O' levels until they were 16, but growing numbers stayed on at school past the statutory leaving age (which had been fixed at 15 in 1947) in order to do so. In 1955, Circular 289 relaxed the age restriction for entrance to the 'O' level examination, but at the same time warned that secondary modern schools should beware of developing new GCE courses simply for the sake of prestige.

There were still many who argued that too many students were being entered for an examination for which, in theory at least, they were not suited; and in 1958 the Beloe

| O-level | GCSE | CSE |
|---------|------|-----|
| A       | A )  |     |
| B       | B )  | 1   |
| C       | C )  |     |
| D       | D    | 2   |
| E       | E    | 3   |
|         | F    | 4   |
|         | G    | 5   |

Table I. Grading scale for the new GCSE.



Committee was established to consider secondary school examinations other than the GCE. The acceptance of Beloe's main recommendations resulted in the establishment of the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) in 1963, and the first CSE examinations were held in 1965. Officially at least, the new examination was to have no pass/fail distinction: the certificate would simply show one of five grades for each subject taken. But on the recommendation of the SSEC, a degree of credibility was to be gained by making the standard of a CSE grade 1 equivalent to an 'O' level pass. Whereas the 'O' level was intended for the 'top' 20% of the whole ability range, the new CSE was aimed at the next 40% – with no external examination considered suitable for the 'bottom' 40%. By the beginning of the 1980s around 90% of students were being entered for at least one subject at GCE 'O' or CSE level.

Almost as soon as the CSE was established, there were many who advocated the merging of GCE 'O' level and the CSE into a single 16-plus examination. In 1971, the Schools Council drew up plans for a single system of examining at 16-plus, with a target date of 1977. It was forcibly argued that 'a common system of examining should be based on the view that the curriculum comes first ... the examination system must always serve the schools, not dominate them'. The steady abandonment of the post-war divided system in favour of comprehensive schools and the raising of the school leaving-age to 16 in 1972/3 appeared to strengthen the case for the abolition of a two-tier examination system.

### The Introduction of the GCSE

After many years of controversy and debate over the desirability or otherwise of introducing a single system, the announcement of the Government's decision to bring in a new examination, to be known as the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), was finally made by Sir Keith Joseph in the House of Commons on 20 June 1984. Students would begin studying for the new examination in the autumn of 1986 and the first papers would be taken in the summer of 1988.

A DES pamphlet, published in 1985, announced that, broadly speaking, the new examination system would have five main features:

- It would be administered by five groups of GCE and CSE boards, four in England and one in Wales, and be monitored by the Secondary Examinations Council.
- All syllabuses and assessment and grading procedures would follow nationally agreed guidelines, known as the 'national criteria'.
- These 'national criteria' would be extended as soon as practicable to embrace a new and more 'objective' system of 'criteria-related' grading in which the grades awarded to candidates would depend on the extent to which they had demonstrated particular levels of attainment defined in 'grade criteria'.
- The 'national criteria' would make provision for differentiated assessment, by means of differentiated papers or differentiated questions within common papers, in each subject, and for relating coursework tasks to candidates' individual abilities.
- GCSE grades would be awarded on a single, 7-point scale (as shown in Table I) with the GCE boards

bearing special responsibility within the groups for maintaining the standards of grades A to C, and the CSE boards bearing a similar responsibility for grades D to E.

It could not be claimed that the introduction of the GCSE met with universal approval. Even before the new examination was officially announced, the late Professor Desmond Nuttall had voiced his concerns in a 1982 article in FORUM, where his view was that many of the original positive proposals for a common system of examining had been watered down to such an extent that 'they began to look more like a common grading scheme for two examinations, rather than a genuine common system of examining'. He further argued that:

*the promise of a comprehensive and liberating system to match a comprehensive education system has been lost, and ... the system we are now likely to get, after years of stultifying bureaucratic and political manoeuvring within the DES, is divisive, retrogressive, incapable of developing, obsolescent in that it is not likely to meet today's curricular needs, let alone tomorrow's, and anti-educational, in that it will not be sensitive to the needs of pupils, teachers, classrooms, schools and even society itself. (p. 61)*

It was also pointed out, in an article published in The Guardian in May 1986, that the new system did not even solve the problem of having more than one examination to choose from:

*Many months before the examination, pupils will be segregated into those who will answer the hard papers and questions and those who will answer the easy ones. To reinforce this, the GCE boards will be responsible for the standard of the top grades, and the CSE boards for the bottom grades. That is little different from the GCE/CSE dual system, except that the segregation will be hidden, all certificates being headed GCSE. (The Guardian, 6 May 1986)*

### Criticisms of the GCSE Today

Secondary schools are now judged by the percentage of their year 11 students who achieve five or more GSCE passes at Grades A to C. And it needs to be emphasised that there has been a spectacular increase in the proportion of entries receiving these 'top' grades (or their equivalent) since the early 1960s. In 1962/63, the proportion was just 16%; and this had risen to 41 % by 1993. Since the inception of GCSE performance tables, there has, in fact, been a year-on-year improvement in the proportion of students attaining five or more of the higher grades: 42% in 1994, 43.5% in 1995, 44.5% in 1996, 45.1% in 1997, 46.3% in 1998 and 47.9% in 1999.

Yet a closer examination of these statistics reveals a worrying trend of equal significance. Because the performance tables concentrate to an alarming degree on the percentage of students achieving the 'top' grades, schools appear to be concentrating all their efforts on their 'average' students and, at the same time, neglecting those youngsters thought unable to contribute to the five A-to-C grades benchmark. As a result, the percentage of candidates awarded a grade C has risen more sharply than the proportion awarded As and Bs; while the gap between high-scoring and low-scoring students is steadily rising.

Commenting on the growth of a new 'examination underclass' at the time of the publication of the 1999 GCSE



results, John Dunford, General Secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, said:

*The league tables... encourage our schools to concentrate on a very small part of the cohort at the C-D borderline. Any sensible measure of school performance should reflect performance across the full ability range. (quoted in The Independent, 26 August 1999)*

And David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, commented:

*The fact that there is a smaller increase in the success rate lower down the scale demonstrates that there is a clear polarisation between the educational 'haves' and the educational 'have-nots'. (quoted in The Independent, 26 August 1999)*

The truth is that the story of the GCSE has hardly been one of real success. It has become, like the 'O' level it replaced, an examination for the 'brightest' students. Very few employers or parents take much notice of the grades below C. Yet fewer than half of year 11 students achieve five A to C grades; and about 40,000 young people leave school each year without any qualifications.

A Government source last Summer said that the talk of a growing gap between 'educational haves and have-nots' was 'utter rubbish'; despite all the 'scare-stories', 'there is simply no evidence that secondary schools are abandoning the slowest pupils to meet national targets for top grades.'

And Education Secretary David Blunkett said:

*We have now begun to offer 14 to 16-year-olds a more vocational route at Key Stage Four, with greater work-related learning... I believe this will help us to build on the welcome reduction we are seeing in the number of young people leaving school without any qualifications (quoted in The Independent, 26 August 1999).*

Yet despite the Government's complacency on the issue, a recent research project administered by David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell, who work in policy studies at the Institute of Education in London, yielded results which appear to confirm that since the publication of the GCSE performance tables, schools have been 'rationing' the education they offer and thereby widening the attainment gap. The project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, involved two years studying the day-to-day life of two secondary schools as they sought to improve their league-table position. Reporting on their findings in *The Times Educational Supplement* (26 November 1999), the researchers argued that the publication of GCSE results had actually fostered inequalities of attainment between certain social class and ethnic groups.

In the course of the two-year period, teachers and students at the two schools felt under incredible pressure; and they shared the feeling that the A-to-C benchmark had become the all-important issue. Typical of the teachers' comments were:

*A school now lives or dies on its results  
The hard fact is that Cs are worth very much  
more than anything below a C.*

The importance of league table success had led the schools to develop new ways of identifying and encouraging those students who might, with additional support, manage a C grade in a number of subjects. Increasingly, the schools found it necessary to 'ration' their attention in order to concentrate on the students at the 'borderline' between grades C and D. These students might benefit from a range of strategies including one-to-one mentoring and extra teacher support.

The two main groups of students who 'suffered' as a result of the schools' policies were those who were thought to be 'safe bets' for the higher grades and those who were thought to stand no chance of ever reaching a C. This latter group filled the 'bottom' streams and sets, to be taught by the less experienced teachers. Moreover, this group included a disproportionately high number of children from working-class homes, students with special educational needs, and African Caribbean young people.

The students interviewed were well aware of the strategies that the schools were adopting. Typical of their observations were:

*They say they believe in equal opportunities, but they don't.*

*You have to get a C; otherwise it's a fail.*

Gillborn & Youdell argue that the time has come to question the value of league tables that reward the 'rationing' of education. They suggest suspending publication for a year or two while a better method is found.

A more radical solution would be simply to abolish the GCSE altogether. It is pointless for that growing proportion of students who move on to A level and then some form of higher education; and it serves little purpose for those who leave school at 16. It is surely time to move towards a situation where 18 is the effective school leaving age. In the words of an *Independent* editorial dating from Summer 1999:

*An academic exam at the end of compulsory schooling which fails to give half its pupils a proper qualification is worthless. And an exam at 16 is the last thing we need at a time when we are trying to encourage everyone to stay longer in education and training to help both themselves and the economy. For pupils in America and in most of Europe, there is no important pupil exam at 16: the first big hurdle comes at 18. In this country, the idea of a school-leaving certificate at 16 persists among parents, employers and the general public. The end of the GCSE would bolster the belief that, for the vast majority, secondary education ends at the age of 18. The Independent, 26 August 1999)*

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# Bridging the Gap: Britain's divided youth

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The very excellent Report recently produced by the United Kingdom's Social Exclusion Unit (1999) at the behest of the Government has at long last taken seriously the need to explore ways of influencing the chances of achievement and success for *all* young people at 16–18. The Report shows that at any time 9% of the 16–19 age group are outside any form of education, training or work for long periods and they have to deal with major obstacles to any form of success, however limited.

The Report sets out the need, long awaited, for 'an integrated approach to provision for young people' which aims to ensure that 'young people stay in education, training or work with a strong education/training component until they are at least 18'. This is to be achieved through four main strategies:

(1) a clear outcome to aim for by 19 (called 'graduation' in the Report);

(2) a variety of pathways to 'graduation' which suit the needs of all young people;

(3) financial support for individuals where necessary;

(4) a new multi-skill support service. (1999, p. 9)

These proposed provisions are to be welcomed; they build on the recognition that there is a need for coherence and flexibility in the structures provided for our young people as they cross the threshold to adult life. They also establish the need for the UK to give full recognition to the 'non-standard' pathways through post-16 provision which are taken by those young people who typically struggle to succeed at that stage. It is to be hoped that there is also to be a system of registration for all young people at this stage, so that no one may fall by the wayside simply because they have not been registered on someone's data base and have missed opportunities as a result. As parents of 16-year-olds are aware, it is clear that they could well fall between the cracks of a multifarious system and structure which is difficult to see clearly and to understand, just at a stage of development when one does not want to be dependent nor yet cast adrift. We do not treat our 11-year-old school transfer students this way; why, just because of age, do we treat our 16-year-olds like this?

The fundamental characteristic of post-14 education in the UK is the division which exists between the academic and the vocational. And this division results in a separation between the young people who follow one or the other. A divided youth.

There has been a demand for education in general and vocationalism in particular to provide the knowledge, skills and resources necessary for democratic participation (Donald, 1992; Avis, 1996), and for an educated citizenry (Hickox & Moore, 1990). Yet as Hoggart asserted in 1995, education has not only failed to redress historic injustices,

but it has, in fact, reinforced them (Hoggart, 1995, p. 23). Many academics have discussed the historical context and argue that education has reflected, perpetuated and created the divisions in society through the very divisions in its structures and provision (Banks, 1955; Ainley, 1993; Benn & Chitty, 1996).

By the 1980s many academics were focussing on education and the effect it was having on the development of young people. 'The education system itself is highly undemocratic. Tinkering is not enough. What is required is a fundamental educational reform as the foundation of a new democracy' (Simon, 1985, p. 159). By the late 1980s, there was clear evidence both for government and educators that economic, technical and social changes both in this country and abroad meant it was no longer sensible to educate 'elite thinking classes and offer only basic education and early vocational training to the rest. There were choices to be made between preparing young people for a low-skilled, undereducated society or a highly skilled, informed, learning society which educated everyone' (Tomlinson, 1997, p. 1).

It has long been realised that the process of separation between school and work in the UK was complex. This was the result of two main influences: the nature of industrialisation in the UK, where the Industrial Revolution had created such appalling conditions for the workers that educators were reluctant to be associated with the industrial world and defended a purely classical education, divorced from the reality of the industrial and scientific world (Wiener, 1981, pp. 11–24). At the same time, the nature of the class structure was such that people with power over the education system were often drawn from those strata in British society where there was little connection with the world of industry. They were 'old money' rather than the 'nouveaux riches' of the industrial world. Typically a very strong culture of class, all-pervading as the last century drew to a close, was created in British society through mechanisms of social absorption. The children of businessmen were admitted to what Wiener calls 'full membership' of the upper-class of British society, and thereby separated from their origins. As a result, the culture of understanding and access to production which had been developed through the previous century of industrial advancement and isolation was removed from the upper classes. In effect, they were protected from the 'world of production', which was reduced to inferior status and left for the lower classes.

Where someone had aspired to and reached the upper echelons of society through their success in business or industry, this was ignored and their origins were obscured. The truly educated and successful person was one who had received a fully liberal and classical education and if this had, instead, been through the world of work, this was of

less significance. The result of this was that schools were successfully insulated from direct association with the new industrial order. There was a very strong sense of isolationism and intellectual arrogance in British upper-class society where an 'anti-industrial' attitude was deeply rooted. The 'laissez faire' ideas of Adam Smith and his successors helped justify the belief that education was a matter solely for individual initiative or private charity. This carried the British aristocracy through the Industrial Revolution rather insulated from the ideas and beliefs prevalent in Europe, where, by contrast, governments were expected to provide adequate education and good training institutions in order to encourage and support the industrial developments in their countries (Barnett, 1986, pp. 228–233). Fundamental to the prevailing schooling system was one built on education for the few. Lowndes noted that in 1934, the system of schooling was structured in such a way that, out of every thousand elementary pupils in England, only 119 had the opportunity to move on into secondary school at 11, while in Wales the figure was 223. In other words, the overall proportion for England and Wales was under 12%, a figure which disguised regional variations and variations between authorities (see Simon, 1974, p. 256). This particularly affected the working-class pupils who had even less chance of attending secondary schools, where fees could still be charged even in the state sector until they were abolished in 1944.

The elementary school system catered for the mass of working-class children throughout the pre-war period. At the same stage of this century in Germany, by contrast, proportionately twice as many secondary school pupils as in Britain stayed on until the age of 18, and proportionately two and a half times as many obtained the senior leaving certificate as did British young people (Barnett, 1986, p. 203). The pattern of provision and subsequent change in England and Wales over the late nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century up to the First World War has been well documented, showing how schooling was aimed at the few: the upper and middle classes who would be groomed for professional and managerial roles in society.

Such divisiveness has not changed; while there is still, in the very fabric of the education system itself in England and Wales, a divisive and discriminating structure for our young people's progression between 16 and 19, there will continue to be a divisive and discriminating outcome for those young people who follow any route other than those which are clearly laid out. They will run the risk of falling short of achieving their potential. The weaknesses which we find in the system are not to be found solely in the inadequacies of the separate routes, but 'in the divided system itself' (Young, 1999, p. 65). Our education is not unlike other divided education systems; Young quotes both the Netherlands and Japan as having similarly divided systems, yet since they are not as deeply embedded in divisive social class structures, the levels of participation are unlikely to be as fundamentally affected as they are in the UK. Even though the education system in both of these countries is based on a division between the academic and the vocational, young people continue to participate in education in both cases; in the Netherlands because schooling is compulsory after 18, and in Japan because the division into the academic and/or the vocational does not happen until 18 (Young, 1999, p. 64). And in neither country is the division based

on the class divisions which are endemic to and permeate the whole of society in the UK. It will not matter what the Social Exclusion Unit does to alleviate and to rationalise inclusivity of provision for 16- to 19-year-olds; it will not matter whether the later stages of education and/or training are called 'graduation' and recognise voluntary activity. It will not even matter whether or not there is an allowance paid for those young people who continue at school. While education continues to be based on a structure which is archaic and elitist, infused with class divisions and expectations, young people will continue to be held within a school system which sticks to the 'gold standard' of A-levels and allows a dalliance with GNVQs.

The Government would do well to read again the Institute for Public Policy Research Report, *A British Baccalaureate* (Finegold et al, 1990), and revisit the recommendations therein. The first, for a single Qualifications Authority, has been realised; the second, for a single integrated diploma, seems still to be light years away (Young, 1999). Until we achieve this, there can be no real structure which can support young people at this very crucial stage of their educational careers; a stage where they can so easily feel unsupported, confused, misled and even blindfolded. If we 'want all our young people to be able to reach their full potential and go on to lead successful and fulfilling lives, making the maximum contribution to our economic prosperity and playing an active and positive role in society', as David Blunkett has argued, then there is a need to ensure that no one is denied the chance to learn because they lack funding and back up due to family and personal circumstances. But this cannot be achieved without the most radical reform of the very structure which allows that division and discrimination to happen.

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# Learning to Comply: the impact of national curricula for primary pupils and primary trainee teachers on the ownership of learning

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## Introduction

This article seeks to identify similarities between the effects of the pupils' National Curriculum on patterns of ownership of learning and the new Initial Teacher Training (ITT) National Curriculum on student teachers' teaching. The first section of the article reviews elements of the Primary Assessment Curriculum, and Experience (PACE) project which has investigated the impact of the pupils' National Curriculum over the last 10 years. It claims that the notion of a delivered curriculum may make it less likely that pupils will have 'ownership' over their own learning processes. This is seen as problematic as it is arguably detrimental to pupil autonomy and proactivity. The second part of the article uses the earlier analysis to speculate on the likely impact of ITT reform in England. It argues that whilst the emphasis on the definition of standards has the potential to lead to rigorous and consistent technical competence, there are dangers in student teachers being unable to engage critically with key educational issues. As with pupils, opportunities to see educational alternatives may be marginalised. The two sections of the article, taken at their extreme, paint a bleak educational picture where proactivity, creativity and vision are unduly restricted in the face of compliance with directives and central policy.

If one effect of the Education Reform Act (ERA) (1988) has been to compromise the extent to which ownership of learning rests with pupils, then this links with the notion of enhanced teacher direction within classrooms to ensure that curriculum requirements are fulfilled. The PACE project describes this concept in terms of a tightening of the pedagogic frame defined as a movement towards greater teacher control of activity in classrooms.


Two studies can be used to illustrate this notion of pedagogic frame. Parker-Rees (1997) uses a case study to illustrate the general principle that 'when teaching purposes are determined more by the requirements of a tidy, generalised curriculum than by the complex needs of particular children, purposeful teaching may fail to promote purposeful learning' (p. 46). The case study involves Robert and Sarah designing and producing a model of a slide in a children's park. In the making of the model the issue

arises as to who is in control. Does the model of the slide belong to the children or is it the teacher's? The case presents a picture where the teacher, Mrs Dillon, controls the context of the task, the learning processes which were occurring and the detail of the interaction. In subsequent conversations with children this clearly results in them being unclear as to why they were doing the task and also in them not being in control of the learning processes which were occurring. The practice which emerges is one where the children have very little control over the task with which they are engaged in the classroom.

This kind of scenario contrasts sharply with Rowland's (1987) interpretative model whereby children are actively involved in 'interpreting the stimulus which motivates the activity' (p. 131). Rowland outlines the case study of Dean, who is developing his understanding of the classification and taxonomy of caterpillars, through devising his own framework for representing the knowledge he is gaining. Unlike Sarah and Roger, Dean has control over this learning and the teacher's role is to intervene skilfully in the role of reflective agent, taking Dean's understanding forward. With Dean, there is only a limited sense in which the learning process itself is controlled by the teacher. It emerges from the context and the circumstances. It is literally 'child-centred'. His teacher is facilitating key processes of pupil learning.

The contrast between Parker-Rees (1997) and Rowland (1987) is used merely to illustrate two key features of pedagogic frames. The Parker-Rees study exhibits a tight frame with extensive teacher control, whilst the Rowland's study asserts a looser frame with stronger instances of pupil control and less direct control by the teacher. Whilst there is no implication in this article that all, or even much, teaching was like Rowland's example 10 years ago or like Parker-Rees's, example now, the PACE findings do contain data to suggest a change in emphasis such that teachers are exercising more control over pupils' work. This can be seen in data relating to both the pupils and teachers.

This notion of control over pupils' work is central to this article and needs careful defining. Does pupil autonomy refer to the 'what' of learning or the 'how' of learning; the



|                        | 1990       | 1992       |
|------------------------|------------|------------|
| Child-centred/informal | 22.7       | 16.1       |
| Mixed                  | 70.5       | 72.0       |
| Traditional/formal     | 5.7        | 10.8       |
| Other                  | 1.1        | 1.1        |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

Table I. Teacher perspectives on their approaches to classroom teaching (%). Source: PACE 1 teacher interviews.

'what' being content, the 'how' being learning processes? This article touches on both, but with a particular emphasis on the 'how'. It grounds a definition in Galton's work (1989) on defining a 'new progressivism' in primary classrooms. Hence, pupil autonomy is related to the extent to which pupils have ownership over the source of activity, the time frame for their work and the resources in the classroom. It also links to the characteristics of child-teacher negotiation and teacher intervention in learning, the former relating to the extent to which there is willingness to negotiate on processes relating to work in progress, the latter being concerned with the extent and characteristics of teacher intervention (Simco, 1997).

### The PACE Project

Before considering PACE findings on the issue of pupils' learning processes, it is important to contextualise this analysis with a statement about the strengths and limitations of PACE. The project is concerned about the effect which the ERA has had on aspects of primary school life, including the work of headteachers, teachers and children. It involves a sample of schools in eight English LEAs with six schools in each area. One school in each LEA was chosen for more detailed analysis specifically involving the tracking of six children from their Year 1 class through to Year 6. Various methods of data gathering were used including observation and interviews with pupils, teachers and headteachers and the collection of documentation. The study has resulted in various publications, particularly Pollard et al (1994) which reports on the PACE 1 findings related to pupil years 1 and 2, and Cross (1996) which is concerned with PACE 2 focusing on pupil years 3 and 4. PACE 3 is currently being prepared but initial findings were presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference in 1997 (Pollard et al, 1997). One limitation of the PACE data is the small size of the sample, and as such care has to be taken when making any generalisations to other children, teachers and schools; tentative generalisation to theory may be more valid. Another relates to the notorious difficulties surrounding the drawing of valid inferences over time. It is extremely difficult to separate the influence of the National Curriculum from other changes, for example as a result of children growing older and being exposed to different teachers. Given the intricate complexity of classroom processes (Doyle, 1986), we can never fully understand the impact of any one particular factor on classroom life. What PACE does do is to give insight into the experiences of the sample and the validity comes through the comparison of different key players, children, headteachers and teachers. The strength is also in its attempt to identify key patterns of continuity and change over a period of 10 years and generalise these to speculative interpretation of the impact of the ERA.

The central organising framework of PACE is provided by an adaption of Bernstein's (1975) ideas that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are essentially message systems to convey the *status quo* about education in any particular society. The PACE team use this classification to develop a cuboid model which illustrates changing dimensions of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment over the period of the study. In assessment, the PACE data illustrates a movement towards forms of assessment which are strongly defined, represented by the enhanced place given to national testing in primary schools. The curriculum has also moved to a strong frame with strong patterns of prescription most

recently illustrated by the national literacy strategy (DfEE, 1998). Arguably it is the former two areas which have led to the PACE finding that the pedagogic frame is tighter, illustrated by a pattern of more teacher control over processes of pupil learning in classrooms.

In the first phase of the project (Pollard et al, 1994), there was evidence to suggest that Key Stage 1 teachers' response to the introduction of the National Curriculum was to assert more control of pupil learning processes in classrooms. This is seen in Table I in which teachers' perspectives on their approaches to classroom teaching are charted. Here there is a decrease, albeit from a relatively low level, in those who felt themselves to be child-centred and a parallel increase in those who adopted more formal/traditional approaches where pupil autonomy was compromised. This perception was borne out by other elements of the research which saw increases in the amount of whole class teaching (however this is defined) at Key Stage 1 and a rapid decrease in the prevalence of the integrated day. Additionally, teachers saw that the advent of the National Curriculum had had a negative effect on the relationships between teachers and children because of the increased pressure on teacher time, 'Overall teacher control tightened and teacher direction of pupil activities increased' (p. 230).

Similar findings emerged from the second phase of the PACE project which reported on the effect of the introduction of the National Curriculum in the lower part of Key Stage 2. Pollard (1996) reports that from year 1 to year 4 there was an increase in the proportion of children who believed that the teacher 'chooses what you do at school' from 59% to 98%. Pollard acknowledges that whilst this may be related to teacher perception about appropriate pedagogical approaches for older children, there was a general tightening of teacher control over the activities of pupils during the period of the research as the National Curriculum became embedded within primary school cultures.

PACE 3 findings, concerned with years 5 and 6, demonstrates continuity with earlier trends. Children were asked the question 'Do you like it best when you choose what to do or when your teacher chooses?' – a question which links with the first element of the Galton analysis cited above. There was a clear trend away from children wanting to control their own learning such that by year 6 48% had given up any desire to choose for themselves. Linked to this the question 'Do you choose what you do at school, or does your teacher choose?' led to a response which indicated a very high level of perceived teacher control over choice, approaching 100% in years 4 to 6. These findings were validated by responses from teachers in PACE 3 who indicated an increase in the degree of direction they gave to the 'how' of pupils' learning. The PACE 3 findings indicate that 'Teachers in our study felt that pupils should have some classroom autonomy within a clear organisational structure. However, pressure from the demands of an overloaded National Curriculum was creating a situation where they found it increasingly necessary to direct pupil activities' (p. 26). In other words the pressures of a systematised curriculum had led to teachers placing less emphasis on them being able to teach according to their belief in the importance of giving pupils some ownership over processes of learning. There was also some evidence that the effect of preparation for national testing has been

such that teacher control of pupil time has increased still further.

The broad finding of PACE about restricted pupil autonomy in the face of the advent of the National Curriculum needs to be reconciled with the idea that it demonstrably contains opportunities for pupils to take a measure of ownership of their learning through, for example, instigating their own enquiry in a variety of subject areas. Enquiry involves or can involve the establishing of questions for investigation, a systematic search for evidence, the seeking of alternatives and the setting of new questions; it involves pupils who have a degree of ownership and can be seen in various strands of the National Curriculum. Key Stage 1 Programme of Study in geography, for example, states that pupils should 'undertake studies that focus on questions e.g. 'What/where is it?' 'What is it like?' 'How did it get like this?' (DfEE, 1995, p. 8). The key elements of the Key Stage 1 and 2 history curriculum include interpretations of history, and historical enquiry; 'to ask and answer questions' (p. 77). Moreover, enquiry and therefore enhanced ownership of learning are also a fundamental part of the Core National Curriculum. Attainment Target One in science involves experimental and investigative science and that in mathematics is about using and applying mathematics. In his analysis of the relationship between the structure of the mathematics curriculum and the processes of mathematical thinking, Ernest (1998) confirms that the recognition of problems and problem-solving as central to the nature of mathematics underpins the National Curriculum in the subject. In all these subject areas, the structure of the National Curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to have some autonomy in the 'how' of learning. Hence, the notion of enquiry has the potential to intrinsically involve some ownership over the time frame for activity, over direction of the enquiry and in terms of pupils learning the work.

There is then an apparent discrepancy between aspects of the National Curriculum content and the PACE findings about the tightening of the pedagogic frame, and it is hence necessary to develop other arguments to support the contention that curriculum reform has led to enhanced teacher control of learning. One argument relates to the issue of curriculum overload: the sheer amount of curriculum to be covered had implications, particularly in the early 1990s, for patterns of teacher control, even though elements of the content encouraged pupil autonomy. In this way, one effect of curriculum prescription has been to influence the structure and pace of teaching and learning. By prescribing what is to be taught this arguably creates an external structure to teaching and learning and dictates the speed of curriculum coverage. It seems reasonable to suggest that increasing pace of learning was the only real way to achieve coverage of all the curriculum elements. The view that the National Curriculum was undeliverable was widespread and endorsed both by research and Government agencies (Campbell, 1994).

This is arguably at odds with enquiry-based learning which implies a slower pace of work; to deliver knowledge is quicker than the painstaking setting of hypothesis, collecting evidence and interpreting fieldwork. So, although enquiry-based learning was embedded within the National Curriculum the need for compliance with statutory curriculum coverage may well have been dominant over realising pupil autonomy in enquiry.

If the twin issues of amount of content in the National

Curriculum and associated pace of coverage were among those dominating the early years of the National Curriculum, then compliance with national policy have, arguably, dominated the post-Dearing period. The current narrowly defined focus on a particular approach to teaching literacy and numeracy as the panacea for the raising of national standards has led to the dominance of a particular view of pedagogy of these areas of the primary curriculum. The Government White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) suggests that 'Literacy and numeracy must be our prime focus because they are fundamental to all future learning: a child who does not learn to read well early on is at risk of falling behind in all subjects' (p. 19). The implication of this has been the development of the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies, both of which differ from the National Curriculum Statutory Orders in the enhanced degree of specificity of content and pedagogy. Further, compliance to the national priorities is encouraged by public dissemination of output defined in terms of pupil performance data on national tests and a new framework for inspecting subjects which creates a model of accountability for those priorities (OFSTED, 1998). This document is particularly interesting as the inspection process in literacy and numeracy specifically requires inspectors to use output measures in terms of performance data and pupils' work to judge standards of attainment and progress.

It seems reasonable to suggest that this culture of compliance is associated with increases in teacher control of learning processes. Teachers are accountable for the learning outcomes of their pupils and these learning outcomes are broadly defined not in terms of ability to enquire or challenge, but to perform in relation to the national targets in literacy and numeracy.

### Education for Citizenship

All this is not to deny the existence of other influences which may encourage a degree of pupil ownership over learning. In this respect one important influence has been the debate about education for citizenship which has occurred during the 1990s. On one analysis, citizenship is about encouraging children to engage in democratic society with implications about developing own ideas and conveying these to others. To be able to do this implies a degree of pupil autonomy and links with the notion of political literacy embedded in the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 1998) proposals for citizenship. However, the substantive point remains. In the post-Dearing world, teachers work in the National Curriculum has increasingly been dominated by performance in literacy and numeracy. The national priorities of achievement in these areas are reflected in the detailed arrangements for curriculum reform and inspection.

This is important because excessive emphasis on performance indicators and a consequent reduction on pupil ownership of the 'how' of learning may lead to democratic skills, central to the QCA (1998) proposals on citizenship being under-developed. In brief, an unrelenting focus on narrowly defined targets may lead to a decreased emphasis on critical thinking skills – 'learning how to question, when to question, and what questions to ask; learning how to reason, when to use reasoning and what reasoning methods to use' (Fisher, 1998, p. 66) – being marginalised. Pupils need both a context and a degree of autonomy to acquire these skills. Over-emphasis on meeting targets in literacy and numeracy may not provide this context.



It is against this background that Pollard et al (1997) argue that 'the call for resilient and flexible learners, whose intrinsic motivation and mastery orientation will provide the foundation of future national and social development is in some tension with the systematic performance-orientated changes which are being introduced' (p. 47). Implicit here is an argument that future society will be best served by pupils who know the value of learning for themselves, who are able to see alternatives, and who are empowered to some degree to manage their own learning. To emphasise teacher control may mitigate against this scenario happening.

### Initial Teacher Training

If there is a danger of pupils not being encouraged to take ownership over elements of their learning where does that leave the learning of would-be teachers? The contention here is that in the long term Circular 4/98 (DfEE, 1998) has the potential to create a new generation of teachers who would be technically competent but who would be unable to critically engage with educational issues including the consequences of increased or reduced pupil autonomy. The new National Curriculum for ITT has the potential to impact on trainee teachers in a similar way that the pupil National Curriculum may have impacted on children. In the same way that there is a shift towards a tightly controlled curriculum for children so there is for trainees. In a critique of the early elements of the ITT National Curriculum, Richards et al (1997) ask 'Does Britain need a cadre of skilled technicians able to deliver the school National Curriculum programmes of study to pupils in an efficient and effective way? ... or does Britain need a profession of imaginative, creative teachers whose informed professional judgement leads to intelligent action? ... [the proposed training curriculum] lacks imagination and vision; it embodies rather than opens up to scrutiny, a straight-forward, value-free common sense view of education, teaching and English and mathematics' (p. 26). The argument is that the ITT National curriculum has the potential to produce highly efficient curriculum delivery agents but is unlikely to lead to teachers who are able to rationally debate the benefits of different teaching and learning processes or education policy issues generally. It is very difficult to see how the ITT National Curriculum as currently presented is compatible with encouraging pre-service teachers to challenge their own and others' assumptions about classroom processes and to be aware of benefits and drawbacks of alternatives. In the same way that the pupils' curriculum has led to pupil ownership of learning processes (the 'how' of learning), being restricted, so the ITT National Curriculum may result in student teachers having little ownership over processes of professional learning.

One example of this relates to the subject knowledge section of the English ITT National Curriculum. Whilst some welcome the importance of specifying subject knowledge in English for student teachers, others are concerned about the imposition of a particular view of grammar and standard English as if there were not alternatives about which a student teacher needs to know. As it stands, the ITT National curriculum holds a set of assumptions which appear not to be up for debate by student teachers who are developing their underpinning professional views and values.

This perspective on the ITT National Curriculum is

further emphasised by the research on processes of teacher development within initial teacher education. There is much research (for example, Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997) which suggests that learning to teach is a profoundly complex and painstakingly slow process. One reason why it is so is because of the characteristics of classroom environments in which much of initial teacher education occurs. Doyle (1986) uses the terms multidimensionality and simultaneity as key words to describe these characteristics. Multi-dimensionality refers to the sheer quantity of events occurring in classrooms and simultaneity is concerned with two or more of these events occurring at any one given moment. Using the Doyle (1986) framework, Simco (1995) proposes a way of analysing the characteristics of classroom activity. It is proposed that classroom activity is essentially ambiguous in two dimensions. Firstly, the 'clear-vague' dimension refers to the extent to which activity is clearly communicated. It is concerned with such elements as the structure and pace of teacher explanation. Secondly the 'open-closed' dimension is concerned with the extent to which activity is owned by the teacher or the child. It relates to ownership of task content, pupil time, resources for tasks and so forth.

Findings of small-scale empirical research consisting of a survey of students' beliefs and a series of case studies (Simco, 1997) have suggested that on a final block placement there is evidence of a shift in student teachers' teaching from vague to clear. In other words students get better at the communicative/technical aspects of teaching. There is thus evidence of professional development in terms of classroom performance. However, there is little change on the open-closed dimension of activity ambiguity, i.e. there is little evidence of students giving pupils more ownership over elements of their learning. Students choose to teach in ways in which they direct and have firm control over children's learning. Opportunities for children to be aware of their own learning processes are at best infrequent. Clearly the results of any small-scale research need to be interpreted with caution, but they can be used to illustrate possible trends and developments. Why is it that students do not give more of the ownership of learning to children? There are at least four possible blocks to prevent student teachers giving such ownership. The first has already been discussed. Student teachers are under the same pressure as qualified teachers to deliver the National Curriculum. Through mentors in school they will be also under the same pressure relating to the national system of assessment. Pupil achievement in relation to the delivered curriculum is paramount.

Secondly, there is the argument that student teachers are not well placed to give ownership of learning to children because to do so demands sophisticated knowledge about effective intervention to enhance pupils' learning. Teaching in open ways is more complex than teaching where the centre of control remains with the teacher. In terms of progression in learning to teach it seems likely that the student will first need to develop the technical skills associated with teaching such as structuring and pacing activity, effective use of non-verbal communication and so forth. To be clear within closed activity is more straightforward because in closed activity the teacher retains the ownership of that activity. To be clear within open activity where the pupil has greater ownership is far more demanding; to pace and structure that activity without taking ownership of learning away from the pupil is problematic.

Given the research which suggests the slow rate of learning to teach, it is reasonable to argue that few student teachers will be able to foster clear, open activity.

The third argument contends that not only do students have limited ability to teach in open ways, but also that there is no incentive for them so to do. In order to teach in ways that give increased ownership of learning to children there are two pre-requisites. The first is that the student needs to have the ability to do this in complex classroom environments: the second is that s/he needs to accept the importance of giving a measure of ownership of learning to children. Circular 4/98 sets the agenda for initial teacher education. The assessment of students' professional achievements in relation to this agenda, specifically the standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status, will arguably drive the training process. Whilst the document itself recognises that 'it is necessary to consider the standards as a whole to appreciate the creativity, commitment, energy and enthusiasm which teaching demands and the intellectual and managerial skills required of the effective professional' (p. 6), it does not mention any notion of the validity of developing a vision or a personal philosophy of teaching and learning. Indeed the word vision is not contained within the standards as it was within a previous Government document Circular 14/93 (DfE, 1993). The implication of this is that there is no real reason *why* students should engage with ideas about autonomy in pupils' learning. It is not necessary for them to be able to develop pupils' abilities to engage with their own learning through giving them enhanced ownership of learning. It is quite possible to meet the standards through adopting a closed and clear approach to teaching.

Fourthly, the new arrangements for teacher training make it harder for students to develop their own thinking processes as part of their professional preparation. The problem in essence, is that the new ITT National Curriculum is seen in terms of compliance with the standards rather than with intellectual engagement about elements of teaching, learning, education and the standards themselves. In the same way that opportunities provided to pupils to think critically may be compromised by the delivered curriculum so too are students' opportunities to challenge assumptions curtailed by the necessity to meet the standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status. In March 1992, the British Psychological Society made a representation to the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education at the time when the competence/standards model of professional development first gained currency. This document suggested that would-be teachers 'need to be able to ground their professional knowledge rigorously in evidence and analysis otherwise they will be prey to mere fashion and assumption ... Therefore beginning teachers also need to be in a position to examine critically the relative strengths and limitations of particular findings, theories and policies ... Effective practical applications of particular strategies and tactics require intelligent monitoring' (British Psychological Society, 1992, pp. 2, 8). Acceptance of this view implies that as developing professionals student teachers need to be able to acquire views about different approaches to teaching and learning and to be able to express these views through practice. On this view, the ability to engage in critical thinking is a necessary condition of professionalism.

Some five years later the Sutherland Report (1997) in a different way suggested that an essential part of the process

of learning to teach is concerned with the ability to engage with research and use research to inform practice. Sutherland suggests that 'a further desirable objective of teacher education and training should be the development of teachers who are "reflective practitioners" and are able to engage with educational research' (p. 5). Whilst the complexity of professional development in initial teacher education has already been cited and the problematic notion of reflection is acknowledged, the Sutherland objective supports a view of teacher education which is about encouraging critical engagement.

Within this, however, there is a clear place for the standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status and the National Curriculum for ITT. It is important that students are able to meet demanding performance indicators. They need to be professionally competent in subject knowledge, classroom organisation and management, and assessment and recording. The laying down of standards helps ensure consistency and adequate coverage of all areas of the role of teachers. It helps ensure that initial teacher education has at least some goals and aspirations that are clear and assessable.

It is, then, a question of emphasis and balance. The standards should be there and they should be specific but so too should the need for students to critically engage with a range of alternative pedagogies and understand their relative merits. To do this in any real way is intellectually demanding. Moreover, the point is that without this and given the complexity of teaching, it is unlikely that students will be able to develop pupils' abilities to become autonomous in their own learning because this implies a teaching approach which is open and therefore complex. To understand the nature and importance of more open approaches to teaching and to know how to teach in open ways are both problematic and complex. To be able to teach in this way demands the development of personal understanding of effective classroom practice based on a considered and intellectualised view of teaching and learning. This in turn means critical engagement with the research and literature on teaching and learning.

## Conclusion

The long term implications of the arguments of this article are at first sight worrying. There is some evidence from the PACE project that teachers have more control over the 'how' of pupils learning, and that the concept of a delivered curriculum hence takes the emphasis away from pupils having autonomy in their learning. In a parallel way the reform of teacher education fails to encourage student teachers to engage in open-minded thinking about teaching and learning. There is hence an implication that neither pupils nor teachers need to challenge current orthodoxy and seek alternatives. At its extreme the capacity of the teaching profession to think and be proactive would be curtailed as new entrants to the profession have limited powers to see alternatives and to critically engage with issues of the day. There is a danger that the new standards framework will lead to a profession of efficient, yet 'dumbed down' technicians. Broadfoot (1996) suggests that 'There is little evidence as yet of any shift from a child centred ideology of teaching. Rather a confirmation of the findings of PACE 1 that teachers will add new practices to their repertoire as required by law, but *in the short term* [my italics] at least will seek to mediate the goals of those new practices to support their existing understanding of what

primary teaching is and indeed their values concerning what should be' (p. 85). It may well be the case that short term radical change is unlikely in both primary and primary teacher education. However in the longer term the effect of the National Curriculum for ITT and a standards-driven definition of professionalism has the potential to radically alter and control the cultures of teaching in English primary schools such that relatively little emphasis is given to helping pupils or teachers to be autonomous and creative in their thinking. To go too far down the performance indicator/output model could have consequences for the very nature of professionalism in education.

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# Control Again Or: the impact of control mechanisms on the culture of the school

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I'll tell you what my problem is – it is that politicians keep acting like politicians. The main seduction of political life appears to be the need to keep trying to re-engineer solutions to problems, no matter what the nature of the problem. Surely if we have learnt anything in the context of improving education it is that schools are living systems. Trying to engineer control of a living system so that it changes in particular ways ignores the challenging complexities of the system and in the context of education the realities of school life. These political acts of 'ignorance' can only kill those aspects of our education system which are its very life-blood.

Politicians have got into the habit of using simplistic exhortation as the rationale for their lack of knowledge about schools. The Santa Fe Institute has provided evidence, however, to show that exhortation actually stops an organisation from moving to higher levels of success. The problem with the continual urging of schools to improve is that the slogans simply replace the hard work of strategic thinking about themselves as complex living systems.

The thinking, logic and language used to try and control schools is based on an assumption that the world works like a machine, that everything can be engineered to be predictable and understandable. Don't get me wrong about engineering; engineering is fine when you need precision, predictability, correctness. But when I know that schools are above all else a human world, I also know that this means accidents, unforeseen circumstances, the shifting environments that depend for their survival on flexibility, adaptability and durability.

If we are really interested in transforming our education system and making it more intelligent then what is needed is a theory for organising educational practice which bridges the current gap between thinking, language and effective teaching. We should question the way that the big controllers think about schools and the way that we organise our co-operative endeavours for teaching, learning and relationships in schools.

## Control or Improvement?

It could be interesting if a Secretary of State for Education considered the dual meaning behind the question 'is a school out of control?' Is not a school that is 'out of control' but responsive a better school than one which is dedicated to 'correct programs' and hasn't really got a clue what is going on? Does the exercise of specific controls (i.e. targets) at a too detailed level kill the patterns of endeavour and creativity that would otherwise emerge? Who will trade a clean corpse for a messy life?

Using the justifications of 'accountability', politicians are trying to teach us to think in terms of goals (even though no value to this approach has been demonstrated). The

mechanistic thinking that lies behind the target-setting agenda assumes that humans have to have goals in order to function effectively. Teachers don't need goals to make sense of learning.

Is a school *beyond* control? The recent work on complex systems shows that if you want to change such a system from the outside (a bit like 'trying to herd cats'), you have to enable the 'independent agents' (teachers) in the system to communicate about the various 'interactions'.

In other words you won't get what you want simply by telling teachers what to do. You have to allow people to make sense of the task for themselves by giving them information and stimulus and enabling them to talk about it. The real nitty-gritty of change involves knowing how to look into the mirror.

Rather than trying to pump in bits of change to schools, there needs to be an appreciation of the need to stimulate the heart of change in schools as an adaptive spirit. The current school improvement process appears to be based on a hierarchical downflow of information with communication downward from DfEE, OFSTED, QCA etc. and another kind of communication going upward in the form of data/'results' from schools. But these two channels are independent of one another – there is no place for engagement. In order to increase engagement the minimum requirement is dialogue; this means recognising the intelligence of all the professionals involved. It is not incantations about higher standards that are needed but a better dialogue so that teachers can make meaning of education as it happens.

Those who are more interested in surveillance than transformation appear to be looking for order without recognising that order isn't order, it's predictability. Prediction is not the source of success or school improvement. The source of improvement at any given moment is action that is appropriate to the particular school landscape or culture. For a teacher this means:

- being able to adapt oneself;
- influencing the circumstances one finds oneself in;
- increasing one's intelligence to do the above two more effectively and in a wider variety of circumstances.

Improving the space in which you work is dependent on being able to create your own possibilities. When you start to discuss new approaches with a teacher, you can open up access to new possibilities or you can block them. Teacher trainers need to decide whether they are trying to design a set of processes for emerging practice or constructing a linear strategy for controlling outcomes. There are too few facilitators around who are able to open-up possibilities

with teachers; to be the 'safari guides on an exploration' rather than 'the pilots on a mission'.

### Innovators

The current educational orthodoxy appears to be promulgating a dogma concerned with 'choice'. In particular it is either innovation (suspicious, loose, liberal) or reliability (measurable, certain, rigorous) that is being made the choice for managers.

Planning is being mistaken for strategy. Strategic thinking is about trying to understand the nature of things. The Thatcher legacy is also the inheritance of the Social Darwinists, seeing life exclusively in terms of competition/choice, struggle and destruction of the 'weak'. It is a view that has legitimised exploitation and the disastrous impact of much technology on our environment. But it is also a view founded on a more familiar ignorance in that it ignores the integrative and co-operative principles that are essential aspects of the ways in which living systems organise themselves. The necessity for a school (or education system) that exists to meet the needs and aspirations of all its children is that improvement for one teacher or department (or school) means adapting to meet the needs of another. The 'survival of the fittest' regime applied to schools is an evolutionary anachronism; more often than not a 'successful' school depends on a less successful school in order to enable it to be selective and remain 'efficient'.

The problem is that the lack of understanding of systems, together with the obsession for control, has created a monster that swallows attempts at debate and expression. Teachers are becoming resigned to conformity as the surest way to survive.

It is the innovators that take existing circumstances and redefine and utilise them in novel ways, thereby altering the capability of the system. To realise the benefits of innovative thinking a school must provide opportunities for experimentation and some minimum 'protection' for the innovators to prove themselves. High stakes accountability is the real barrier to such potential. For maximum effectiveness the investment in innovation must be allocated without a requirement of *individual* justification through results. It is policy and practice that must ensure that the overall investment in innovation produces results.

### Transformation

A living system is not a comfortable place, it is, in fact, trying to avoid 'order' whenever possible. An 'orderly' school is often one that is not adapting, not responding, it is going through the motions, repeating patterns of response, complacent and unresponsive. A 'growing' school is able to be spontaneous and adaptive, it is alive in the sense of being on the edge of its own possibilities for transformation; it is this 'edge' which fosters learning creativity and improvement.

When a school is transforming it is likely to:

- start by listening;
- realise that communication isn't just sending a message, it's a process that is established through resonance over a series of interactions;
- ensure that there is a 'difference' that makes a real difference to students and teachers;
- establish an agreed way of describing what alternative models for teaching and learning might look like; rather than continually pump in bits of

change, implant the heart of change – an adaptive spirit – into its structure.

A school has to 'survive' (conform) at the same time as it is transforming. This means making full use of the intelligence of the school and everyone in it. Maintaining this balancing act means introducing new conversations into the existing ecology of conversations in the school. Conversations that are characterised in turn by:

- Awareness that something is needed and possible.
- Dialogue that moves from proposition to compelling possibilities.
- Testing new theories of teaching against the realities of circumstance and environment.
- Ways of integrating the new with the old and the implications for organising structures of support.
- Building structures for challenging the new within the main organisation.

Those of us who are interested in improved pupil performance need to understand how and when these processes can open up for teachers in a living school system. This means looking at a system, such as a particular school, in terms of how it behaves instead of how we assume it is made.

### Structure

The denigration of structure also appears to be part of the current political scene. To alter the course of what is occurring and begin something new in a school requires structure. Structure encompasses theory, process, practice and organisation. If we ignore structure then the most that we can hope for is remedial action rather than productive transformation.

We have inherited school structures that evolved during an era organised around the economic conditions necessary for material production and we are trying to use those same structures in a time that is increasingly focused on information. We need to consider school structures that are appropriate to the shift that is taking place all around us.

Structure is the very source of intelligence and production for a system. When politicians say that structures are not important, they are tacitly accepting that our schools can continue to be structured as if people were production machinery. The transformation of our schools will remain out of reach until those in charge of structure become able to understand structure.

The major element for structuring an environment conducive to learning is 'relationship'. By relationship I mean an environment of respect, trust, lack of fear, openness and generosity. The barrier to the emergence of these qualities in schools is often embedded in structures of hierarchy and bureaucracy. Not only have we inherited anachronistic structures which are embellished by current policies of control but these barriers work against the values that are at the heart of being human and destroy the relationships necessary for learning.

To be effective, strategic thinking about structures must be shared with relevant individuals in such a way that action can be co-ordinated. The only organisational structure capable of such co-ordinated growth and learning is a network. (Only a network can nurture the small failures so that large failures don't happen as often.)

### Language and Resonance

It is the past that limits the future possibilities of a school and it is not just any past; it is not a general past; it is a

past that has become part of the school's organisational memory. It brings with it an interpretation that is unique to the school (and not necessarily based on what actually occurred). It determines the context for any current action and language is its keeper.

Language provides the tools with which we think, interpret and generate meaning. If a transformation in our schools is to take place then our thinking must change and any new way of thinking will be reflected in our conversations. This is an interactive and self-reflexive process; different speaking will in turn influence thinking and different thinking will change the speaking in a spiral of accelerating impact.

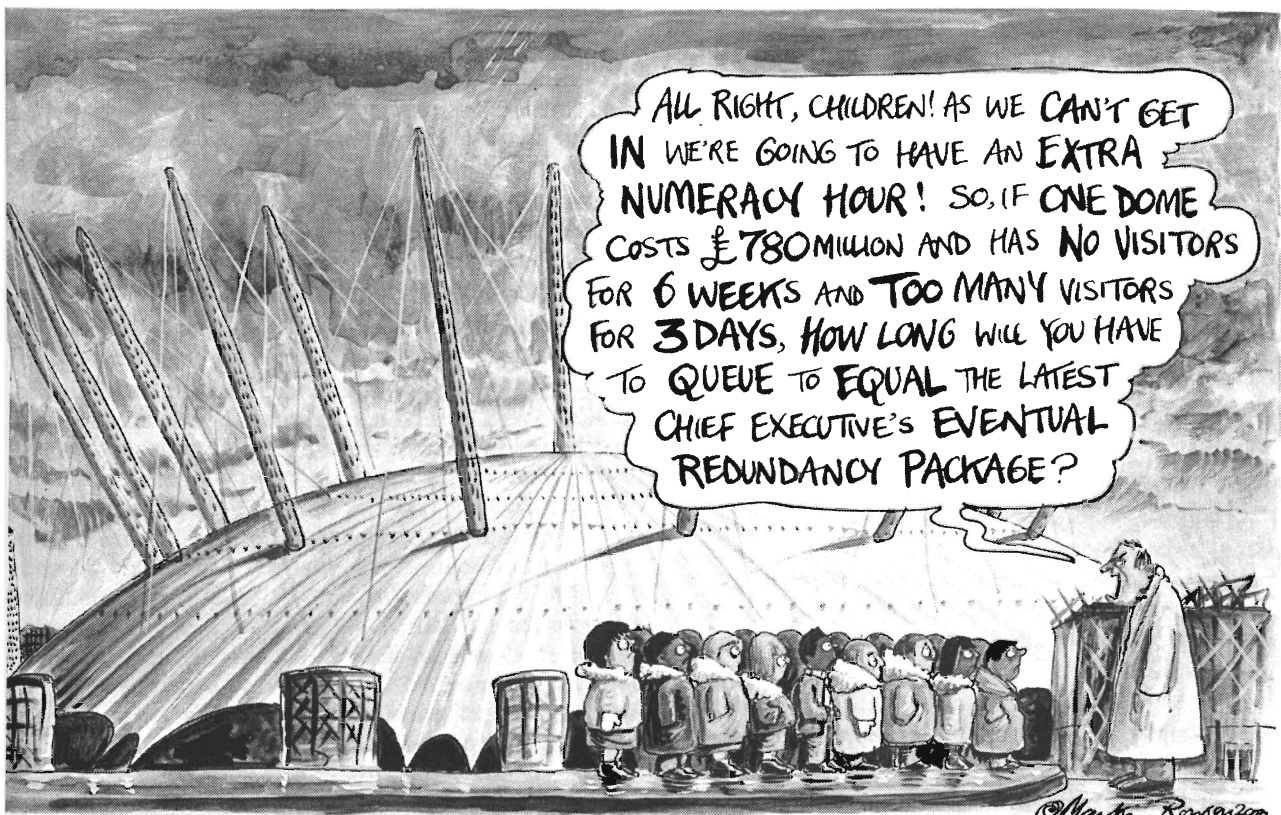
For teachers to be engaged in transforming schools, accessible, malleable and effective language tools need to support their efforts. It is language that will allow teachers to break free of inherited ways of thinking and develop a real climate for transformation in our education system.

Sometimes a discourse of 'explanation' is necessary but in the context of education it is more a matter for resonance. Above all else, I want to say that teaching is defined by teachers, when outsiders try to understand what motivates teachers they fail. Without the relevant experience of a

social practice we are incompetent to judge it. Breaking free of the past requires more than effort; it requires changes in structure and most of all it is dependent on who talks to whom about what. Teachers will learn only what they want to learn and fit it into their existing view of the world.

In a complex system, like a school, the participants in the system need to be as much influences as the influenced. The future emerges from the complex interactions of teachers and is unpredictable in detail because of that. The challenge for a school as part of an intelligent system is to continually develop both the ability to adapt to the environment and the ability to influence that environment.

It is unlikely that a school culture can be transformed by control mechanisms, whether exercised by politicians, inspectors or headteachers. And so back to my problem; we know that our politicians are going to go on interpreting power as control – and we can't afford to ignore them – but we can design our professional relationships, especially ones that bring teachers into working more closely together, and affect how teachers talk to one another. It is through evolving professional relationships and the content and style of professional dialogue that schools will improve.



Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 25 February 2000

# The Development of Key Skills and the Learning Curriculum

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**Ian Duckett**

The author is based at Barnet College.

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First, I would like to state that I welcome John Quicke's comments (and criticism) in his article (*FORUM*, 41(1), p. 35) in response to my earlier piece (*FORUM*, 40(2), pp. 56–57) which, in my view, progresses the debate around key skills. A later article of mine (*FORUM*, 40(3), pp. 98–102) promotes the 'integration of key skills' through 'settings which contextualise the key skills in ways meaningful to students' and moves much closer to Professor Quicke's 'learning curriculum' in that it argues for the teaching of 'understanding argument, improving learning and developing critical skills'. I am fully committed to the view that learning how to learn is dependent on the genuine learning of something; this, in the current discourse, means an academic subject or discipline, or, in vocational terms, a unit.

Professor Quicke argues in favour of 'a properly debated learning curriculum ... grounded ... in the development of the critical and reflexive awareness of individual learners'. He also states that 'it is one thing to state the need for integrating a knowledge and skills approach and quite another to construct courses which actually achieve this'. I could not agree more. In the context of the post-Dearing

and Curriculum 2000 debate concerns about inclusivity and widening participation are beginning to face further education colleges in the direction of the more individualised learning programmes which will, I believe, ultimately drive life-long learning in the direction of the kind of curriculum both John Quicke and I support. It will, however, be a battle, not least because those who promote a narrower version of key skills have stolen the language of the progressive educationalists.

While the dangers highlighted by Quicke are real ones and a behavioural and cognitive narrowly-defined key skills model continues to dominate, a curriculum – a progressive and radical curriculum – which takes account of the forces in education and society which facilitate or impede learning is needed. It must, however, also be a curriculum which embeds the so called 'soft' skills that help students learn how to learn, namely, improving own learning and performance, working with others and problem solving.

The relationship between learning skills and academic achievement is, it seems to me, a crucial one for both a valid and meaningful key skills and a learning curriculum.



# Exposing the Truly Conservative Force in Education

Chris Searle

## State Schools: New Labour and the Conservative legacy

CLYDE CHITTY & JOHN DUNFORD (Eds), 1999  
London: Woburn Press. 168 pp., £16.99,  
ISBN 0 7130 4034 3

A fine phrase designed to disguise an underlying continuity between new Labour and Thatcherism. This is how Clyde Chitty – co-editor of the provocative book *State Schools: New Labour and the Conservative legacy* – describes Tony Blair's 'third way', in particular as it applies to education.

Professor Chitty's co-editor is Secondary Heads Association General Secretary John Dunford and many of the book's indignant and insightful contributors are head teachers. They may seem to be unlikely allies to the progressive cause.

After all, it could be argued that head teachers are now more powerful than ever. Stewards over vast school budgets frequently in excess of £1 million, charged by the 1988 Education 'Reform' Act to be in local control of all aspects of school life at the cost of local education authorities and now to be responsible for appraising teachers for performance-related pay and promotion – the new managerialism offers them unprecedented power, authority and influence.

This, however, is only the surface. Many heads are both angered and depressed by the changes which have been caused by the step-by-step marketisation of state education since 1988 – begun by Thatcher, Baker and company and zealously continued by Blunkett, Byers and Morris.

This book outlines the extent of the damage which has been inflicted by such continuity.

The competitive mentality of league tables, school budgets driven by pupil numbers, 'open enrolment' and the virtual demise of the catchment area system which fostered local and inclusive comprehensives, the strengthening of the grant-maintained sector and 'specialist' schools, 'fast-track' learning and wholesale streaming, relentless testing and the 'results' obsession, OFSTED surveillance, the unaccountable partial privatisation of Education Action Zones, the centralised, state-licensed and highly prescriptive regime of the National Curriculum, which narrows knowledge and suffocates teacher initiative and creativity – all these have been suffered by head teachers, many of whom would like to offer students and teachers a satisfying and motivating school life.

And things have been made worse under New Labour, which introduced the 'naming and shaming' of so-called

'failing' schools, plans for performance-related pay and fees for many would-be university students, along with the contemptible abolition of maintenance grants – all this from a government led by a man who claimed that his passion was 'education, education, education'.

Clyde Chitty's chapter on The Comprehensive Ideal shows a formidable grasp of history and aspiration, exposing how deftly the new Labour Government has hidden behind its intention to focus on what their 1997 White Paper called 'standards not structures' – thus doing little to challenge selection, division and elitism.

*Only when the Labour Government understands the importance of creating a single unified system of fully comprehensive secondary schools under local democratic control and without selected enclaves [he writes] will the country have an education system of which we can be truly proud.* (p. 3)

A practical implementation of educational structures fired by that vision is described by Roger Seckington's inspiring chapter about the community colleges which were established in Leicestershire from the 1950s onwards.

He was a head, successively, of three of them and, therefore, is particularly well-qualified to describe their histories and how they worked.

As community-oriented schools offering resources to all who lived nearby throughout the day and evening and seeking to make education a genuine 'whole-life activity', their story makes fascinating reading.

Martin Lawn's chapter on Teachers and New Labour is both astute and frightening in some of its implications. As teachers are expected to act as classroom 'operatives' or 'deliverers' rather than creative professionals, a new being is working in our classrooms.

As Lawn emphasises, 'it is not just that the work has changed structurally. Teaching is now redefined as a form of flexible and reskilled, competence-based labour; teachers operate a regulated curriculum and internal assessment system in a decentralised, external school market' (p. 104).

So, it is not merely a matter of denying teachers the right to organise curriculum content and pedagogy. Lawn identifies an essential change of purpose and transformation of identity. It is a forbidding new school landscape that he maps out.

Other chapters describe the pervasive power of OFSTED, the rise of 'parent power' – middle-class parents, that is – and the dwindling links between LEAs and schools, with private business forces and unaccountable, government-appointed quangos like the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) or the Qualifications and Curriculum

Authority (QCA) becoming increasingly powerful and dictatorial.

John Dunford's finely composed chapter on the 14–19 curriculum includes one of the most poignantly true arguments for coursework as a replacement for the examination system that I have ever read.

'After 100 years of virtual drought with an examination system, we enjoyed six wonderful fertile years with coursework', wrote an English teacher to the chair of an examinations quango after Prime Minister John Major arbitrarily ended coursework in 1991. 'The children, able and weak, feeling that their work was more valued because they were given time and opportunity to develop it, were highly motivated and felt liberated to experiment, research and redraft' (p. 51).

New Labour has shown no inclination to move away from the tyranny of an assessment system based almost wholly on testing and examinations.

It is also important to remember what exactly caused the imposition of the National Curriculum which new Labour embraced so readily.

At the Tory Conference in 1987, Thatcher insisted that the new curriculum was to be an antidote to 'hard-left education authorities and extremist teachers'.

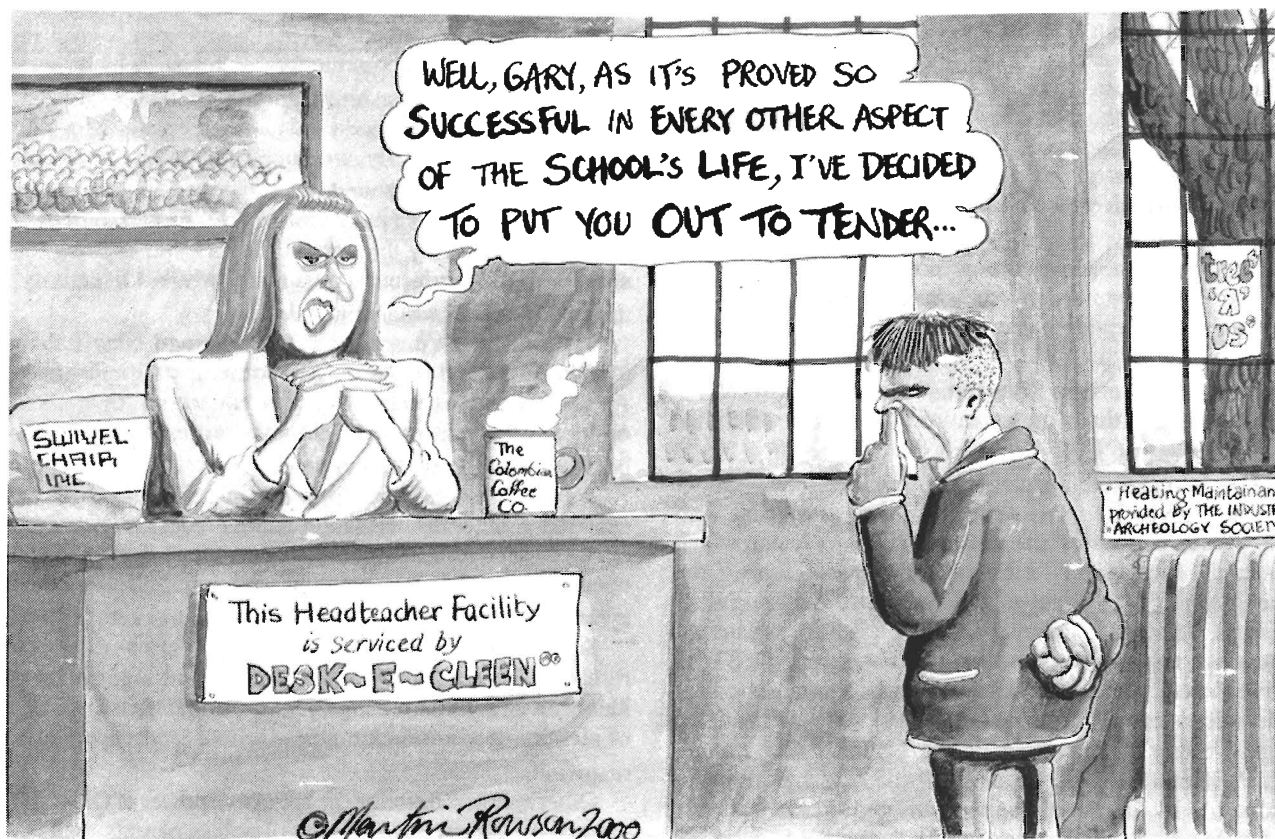
She went on: 'Children who need to be able to count

and multiply are learning anti-racist mathematics – whatever that may be. Children who need to be able to express themselves in clear English are being taught political slogans. Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an unalienable right to be gay ...'

State Schools offers evidence of the continuum of education policy from 1988 onward, despite new Labour's 1997 election victory. It also sets out alternative visions for educational structures and practices which Blair's Government has spurned.

It shows that the true 'force of conservatism' that 'infects' our schools is not Blair's scapegoat, the teachers, but his own backward and conservative government, which is attacking and seeking to undermine the change and progress for which teachers struggled over several generations in their efforts to achieve truly comprehensive education and to bring justice within a divided and money-tiered system – a system of which Blair himself, in choosing a selective, grant-maintained school for his own offspring, has taken full advantage.

This book is an often wise and always stimulating work which all teachers, parents and students of education need to read and think hard about.



Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 28 January 2000

# Literacy Hour: some thoughts on gender and literacy learning in a Year 2 classroom

**Emma Gray**

Having completed her BA(Ed) course at Goldsmiths College, London, Emma Gray now teaches a reception class at Turnham Primary School in Bromley.

Many language experts have studied the issue of gender in language. I wanted to look at what they found out and compare it with my own observations as an art specialist. Issues like gender are often being overlooked as teachers try to get to grips with the National Literacy Hour, so I decided to base my work around the structure of the Literacy Hour. Whilst I do hope that my observations will be useful to language specialists, I really undertook this study for the benefit of non-specialists such as myself and tried to present my findings in a way that I would find helpful in the future.

Recent research has shown that girls do better than boys in the Literacy Hour.[1] Boys' underachievement in language in relation to that of girls' was an issue since well before OFSTED identified boys' underachievement in English GCSE in 1993. 1997 National Curriculum Key Stages 1 and 2 tests revealed that:

- at Key Stage 1, 21% of girls achieved level 3 in the English tests compared with 14% of boys;
- at Key Stage 2, 69% of girls achieved level 4 and above, compared with 57% of boys.[2]

Mathematics was made 'girl friendly' as a result of concerns about girls' underachievement. More recently, feminist researchers have uncovered a great deal of inequality in areas like language and gender, the overt and hidden curriculum, the teacher's role, classroom resources and children's literature. Already there are many implications to consider when getting to grips with the Literacy Hour. I decided to investigate ways to make it more 'friendly' to both genders, studying the suitability for boys and girls of the strategies and resources used.

The bulk of my investigation was done in a year two class at a school in South London, but I have also used observations from past experience to inform my thinking. The school is situated in an area of rich cultural diversity, where minority ethnic families have above-average representation amongst the school's population. Nearly 60% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals; 40% have English as a second language; 22% of pupils are on the school's Special Educational Needs (SEN) register (5% at 3-5). Baseline assessments indicate levels that are well below average for the majority of pupils in language and literacy.

## The Structure and Groupings of the Whole Class Sessions in Literacy Hour

Research shows that 'boys in whole-class situations tend to talk more, interrupt more and be more aggressive while girls defer to others' ideas and are more tentative'.[3] I compared boys' and girls' responses to questions during the whole-class part of the Literacy Hour. I looked at who put their hand up and to whom the teacher responded and

why. I found that many more girls than boys put their hands up; but often, when asked, didn't have anything to say. Perhaps they were intimidated (girls often are) by speaking to the whole class, or they simply put their hand up to please the teacher. Of the children whom the teacher asked, a higher proportion were boys than of those who had originally put their hand up. Those with hands up who were not asked were mainly girls. Those who called out or interrupted were mostly boys. Those whom the teacher asked without having their hand up were also mostly boys, often asked to test levels of attention.

I decided that although research shows boys dominate class discussion and girls often find it intimidating, this teacher's handling of the session appeared not to be helping the children overcome these disadvantages. Teachers should look for ways to keep boys interested, rather than to inculcate fear of being caught out. Boys need an incentive to put their hands up and share ideas without interrupting or calling out; possibly rewards for polite behaviour (putting hand up) and contributions to discussion. Could boys also be more involved by a text that they find interesting? I will further investigate choice of text in the section on resources. The girls needed to be encouraged to say something when asked. If teachers asked girls more often would this happen naturally as girls gained experience?

As well as making observations, I asked some of the children what they thought. I interviewed four boys and four girls. All the boys thought both sexes benefited equally from the whole-class session, but three girls felt girls learnt more in this session. Reasons given were 'Because the girls can sit on the carpet and be sensible', 'The boys are always chatting' and 'The girls are always concentrating and the boys are busy chatting'. This suggests boys have more difficulty than girls in concentrating in these circumstances. There is evidence that girls concentrate for longer than do boys [4], so perhaps this session is putting boys at a disadvantage by being too long. A *Times Educational Supplement* article (30 October 1998) advocated teaching the Literacy Hour in shorter sessions for the benefit of all. My findings suggest this would be particularly advantageous to boys. Another *Times Educational Supplement* article (9 January 1998) suggested boys should sit next to girls. 'Girls ... are better listeners and better organised. If boys sat next to girls they would be free from distraction from their peers and would benefit from their example.' [5] Although it would be impractical to have boys sitting next to girls all the time, perhaps it would help the boys if the seating were more integrated. I found that girls sit at the front and boys at the back; with encouragement this could change. This may be difficult for girls at first, but if seated this way constantly I think boys would become less distracted and girls would find themselves better at tolerating them.

## **Activities that Take Place during the Whole Class Sessions in the Literacy Hour**

### *Shared Reading (Whole Class)*

Shared reading is a class activity using a common text, e.g. a 'big book', poetry poster or text extract. Because this activity is so closely linked with the text being studied, the success, and degree of interest of each sex is determined by choice of text. This is an issue I shall explore further in the section on resources.

### *Shared Writing (Whole Class)*

Here teachers should use texts to provide ideas and structures for the writing and, in collaboration with the class, compose texts, teaching how they are planned and how ideas are sequenced and clarified and structured. Again, this section depends upon the choice of text to determine the suitability for each of the sexes.

### *Word Level Work (Whole Class)*

This should be taught as a 15-minute section of whole class work, but in the school investigated this section was integrated with the 'shared reading' and 'shared writing' sections, teaching the phonological awareness, phonics and spelling within the context of the text. Although this was unusual it meant this section was also dependent on choice of text.

## **The Structure and Groupings of the Group and Independent Sessions in Literacy Hour (Second Half of the Hour)**

The National Literacy Strategy suggests grouping children according to ability. Research shows girls thrive in single sex groups, and boys in mixed sex groups. Ability groups do not account for this, and if they did either boys or girls would be put at a disadvantage. I asked my interviewees about grouping. The boys said they worked harder in a mixed sex group. Reasons included, 'The girls force us to do work' and 'Just boys would be fighting'. Again we see the 'boys should sit next to girls' principle in action. The girls said they would work harder in a single sex group. Reasons included, 'Because girls don't chat and you get to finish your work quicker, and the boys just waste my time', 'The boys always say nasty things about us' with the boys fighting and distracting the girls. It seems the only way to get the best of both worlds is to alternate the groupings between single and mixed sex, but this would mean the grouping would not strictly be by ability. However, although the government support ability groupings, (Tony Blair says ability grouping makes children 'progress as far and as fast as they are able'), there has been much debate as to whether this is the most effective grouping method, and much evidence suggests that ability grouping can depress low ability groups' performance even lower.

## **Activities that Take Place during the Group and Independent Sessions in Literacy Hour**

### *Guided Reading (Independent Work in Ability Groups)*

According to the DfEE, in ability groups of four to six, pupils should have individual copies of the same text. This means that although the children should read independently, they do not have an independent choice of text. Again this section depends on the teacher's choice of text. This problem could be overcome if for each session the teacher provided

a selection of texts that still met the criteria specified by the National Literacy Strategy. The group could take it in turns to select a text for the whole group to study, meaning that although the teacher maintained control of the choice, the pupils' individual and gender related reading preferences could come through.

### *Guided Writing (Independent*

### *Work in Ability Groups)*

In these activities, the work will normally be linked to reading, so in the cases when it is, the work is again usually dependent on the teacher's choice of text. Steedman (1982) pointed out the differences in boys' and girls' choice of writing genres in *The Tidy House*, 'Little boys prepare lists and guide books and write their own encyclopaedias; whilst girls write soft cosy poems about domestic subjects'. [6] Minns [7] identified that girls prefer poetry and letter writing; boys prefer factual writing and see fewer purposes for writing. Poynton also acknowledges differences in boys' and girls' choices when writing stories. [8] Girls' subjects of interest were: home activities, dress, appearance, romance, the fantasy worlds of witches and fairies, characters from stories, toys and talking animals and objects. The subjects that Poynton lists as interesting boys were: sport, fantasy worlds of aliens and monsters, violence, burglars, kidnappers and murderers. Poynton also noticed (as did Steedman) that 'Boys also write about topics that do not lend themselves to "story-writing", e.g. the solar system, dinosaurs, radios, etc.' Teachers account for these differences of interest when choosing subjects for writing, and try and provide a balance between the interests of boys and girls. Poynton also points out that 'girls write about topics that their teacher can approve of, while boys' topics can, and do, upset teachers'. Teachers could overcome this problem by providing opportunities to write for peers, hence limiting the desire for teacher approval.

Another important issue, in terms of the Literacy Hour, is writing. Because children do so much work based on a text (adapting, re-writing stories, etc.) they find it difficult to think of their own ideas when writing without the influence of a set text. Millard has pointed out that 'Children's writing shows influence of "books chosen by the teacher for that age range"'. [9] Because in the Literacy Hour teachers base work on the text more regularly than usual, this has become even more true. I was told by several class teachers at the School that children more often than not would re-write an old favourite, such as *Not Now Bernard*, instead of working from their own ideas, often replacing characters' names with the names of their classmates. This was a strategy I have often seen in the Literacy Hour. I think so much emphasis has been given to children writing in this way, because it is more frustrating to leave a piece of writing from your own idea unfinished, than somebody else's. This issue of unfinished work is important. The timings given for each activity don't always give time for finishing off work. Although the framework suggests finishing work during other parts of the week, many teachers feel that the Literacy Hour already takes up so much time that they don't want it eating into the remainder. Teachers may overcome this problem by setting work to be written from children's own ideas that show strong cross-curricular links, including writing non-fiction texts. They could include links with Geography and History through children writing stories about different times or places. With strong cross-curricular

links, teachers would not feel so reluctant for pupils to finish the work in non-Literacy Hour time. If more of this writing were done from children's own ideas, then they would become more familiar with the processes of thinking involved, and then become better writers.

#### *Independent Work (in Ability Groups)*

This section of the Literacy Hour also contains independent reading and writing. When planning for these activities teachers must take into account all factors discussed in the previous two sections. Another issue to consider is children's ability to work 'independently'. Measor & Sikes discussed the fact that 'boys are able to gain much more of the teacher's attention and help, and that this affects their achievement levels'[10]; this must surely be an influencing factor on boys' ability to work 'independently'. As I have said, boys find it harder to concentrate than do girls. This 'independent' work may be another situation when it would benefit boys to sit next to girls.

#### *The Whole Class Plenary Session (last 10 Minutes of the Hour)*

Being another session when children sit on the carpet, the plenary faces many of the problems of the initial whole-class session. From my interviews with the same eight children, I found that this seemed to be the only issue that everyone agreed on: all enjoyed the plenary session and enjoyed being chosen to show their work. However, the different reasons the children gave for wanting to show their work were interesting. All boys saw showing their work as recognition of being 'the best' or 'excellent' which shows boys enjoy the plenary because they use it as a competitive forum. The girls seemed to enjoy the teacher recognition and general praise, reasons included: 'You get to hear some nice things about your work if it is good' and 'I like it when [the teacher] thinks my work is good'. This showed that although boys and girls were getting different things from the plenary, both found it beneficial.

#### *The Resources Used in Literacy Hour (including Human Resources): teachers (and other adults)*

Although teachers are a resource for planning, I focus here on their interactions with the children during the Literacy Hour. Fichtelius et al [11] looked at the form of teachers' questions addressed to 3–7-year-olds. They found that more open-ended questions were directed towards boys and more yes/no questions to girls. This gave the boys the opportunity to develop verbal abilities, etc. During all sections of the Literacy Hour, teachers need to consider carefully the types and forms of questions they use.

Teachers not only have to carefully consider the questions, problems, etc. they pose to both sexes; they also need to consider the kind of role model they themselves are providing for the children. Millard (1997) pointed out that most language teachers (even in secondary education) are women. If children are shown mainly female role models as the people who enjoy language, reading, writing, etc., what message is it sending them? In my experience it is not only teachers that set a predominantly female language role model for children. Most of the primary helpers who assist children with work during the Literacy Hour are also female, as are midday supervisors who may read to children or play a language game while they are waiting to go into lunch. Some thought needs to be given to developing strategies to combat this problem. Elaine Carlton [12]

supports a 'mentoring' project in North London to provide boys from today's non-'nuclear' families with positive male role models. Others have reported on schools' schemes inviting fathers and men from the community to work with children and to provide positive male role models in many areas. All these schemes proved effective and I think could be beneficial to all schools where males are underrepresented. All staff should be aware of being role models. According to Minns, 'Teachers can help here by being good reading role models themselves; if it's possible, boys and girls should see male teachers in their school reading and enjoying fiction, perhaps at quiet reading time, at storytime, and reading and telling stories in assemblies'. Library visits would broaden children's range of role models in terms of gender, race, class, age and ability.

#### **Books**

Many writers have given advice on choosing books for the primary school, many with a specific focus on gender. It is indisputable that boys and girls usually have different tastes in book choice. Children's libraries even used to be separated into sections for 'books for boys' and 'books for girls'. Girls seem to prefer fiction, while boys prefer non-fiction. The subjects Millard identified as appealing specifically to boys or girls in terms of book choice were very similar to those for choice of writing subject (see previous section on children writing). In terms of fiction, 'girls prefer stories about girls and boys about boys'; even if a book was chosen as a 'girl's book' because it was fiction, it may be more of a 'boy's book' if it has a male protagonist. Millard said 'the kinds of fiction chosen for study by and large, found more favour with girls than boys, even where the main character of the story was male'. Even when working from the same text, boys and girls could have different interpretations. According to Millard: 'Boys read with an eye to finding out new information, even from their fiction; girls enjoyed the dissection of relationships'. Many of these findings were confirmed in my interviews. No boys chose fiction books, although the class had studied only two non-fiction books that year. Although two of the girls chose fiction, one chose non-fiction and the other chose an anthology of poems, the reason given for the choice of the non-fiction book was one we might expect from girls. Denise chose a pizza recipe book, but she described it as 'The one about the boys who like pizza'. One of the boys chose the same book but described it as 'The one that tells you how to make pizza'. The children agreed that boys and girls liked different kinds of books. Boys thought girls liked stories about 'mums and dads' and 'animals'. Girls thought boys liked fighting and 'scary stories' and one girl said 'Boys don't really like stories that much'.

Before the introduction of the Literacy Hour, schools were doing their best to provide books to suit both sexes' tastes, and books that portrayed both genders fairly in non-stereotypical roles. In 1989 Poynton wrote, 'Boys' interests must be taken into account in choosing reading materials, themes or topics with subject areas, and even the content of text books, because boys will not tolerate "girls' topics" but girls will not actively protest at "boys' topics"'. Millard even links this misrepresentation to boys' underachievement in language. Females have been at a disadvantage in terms of being portrayed in stereotypical ways and in a lack of protagonist roles in children's literature.

What does the National Literacy Strategy suggest when

choosing books? The guidelines for Early Years show a fair balance between fiction and non-fiction and show a range within each. There are some guidelines as far as subject is concerned, e.g. 'stories about fantasy worlds', but choice of subject is mostly left up to the school. I analysed the school's books for the Literacy Hour. I was surprised that there were no books that I would classify as a 'boy's book'. All fiction was about subjects researchers have identified as appealing to girls (families, fairy tales, anthology of playground songs, etc.). Even non-fiction books were about 'girls' subjects (bookmaking and cooking). It seemed that boys' tastes were drastically underrepresented. Perhaps the introduction of the Literacy Hour gave the schools so much to do that they overlooked the issue of boys' and girls' differences in book taste. I realised the only time I had seen boys really enthusiastic about a text was when the Literacy Hour text was a non-fiction book about dinosaurs. If boys show interest in work when they are interested in the text, Millard could be right in linking boys' underachievement in language to book choice.

Schools should provide a balance of books that appeal to boys and girls if they want to achieve a balance of language attainment. The boys in my class are very keen on computer games; teachers could use extracts from magazines about computer games as a literacy focus. Boys also enjoy comics; teachers could help boys to realise any reading is legitimate by including comics in the choice of texts for the Literacy Hour. Also schools should look at 'big books' subject matter in relation to boys' and girls' taste.

### Other Resources

Schools must consider gender for all Literacy Hour resources including games, literacy toys, etc. I feel that this is another area in which boys' tastes are underrepresented.

In such a small study I cannot do more than raise some interesting issues for further investigation. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority have recently published *Can Do Better: raising boys' achievement in English* (QCA, 1998). This confirmed many of my observations and suggestions as well as providing more detailed information, and tackling the subject in greater depth from nursery to GCSE. Although the Literacy Strategy does not seem to have been specifically designed to give each sex an equal opportunity in terms of language attainment, the framework can be adapted. With careful consideration of every aspect of the Literacy Hour, teachers and schools can develop a programme that is equally enjoyable and beneficial to both sexes. Many of the genres I discussed are limited in terms of texts; perhaps a change

in demand for different types of texts in 'big book' format will cause publishers to publish more suitable texts for the Literacy Hour in this format. If there are more 'quality' books to be chosen from, children will benefit by having a better and more interesting range of materials available.

Differences in the performance of boys and girls in the Literacy Hour are part of the wider issue of Equal Opportunities within the school. This is an issue that needs to be considered carefully, especially in terms of sexual stereotyping. As teachers we need to think beyond these feminine and masculine stereotypes toward ways of promoting equality in our schools which take into account the social, political and cultural implications of what it means to become 'gendered' in our society. Although we may make a conscious effort to avoid some kinds of sexual stereotyping, there are many kinds that are so unconscious we hardly notice them. Also we would be succumbing to sexual stereotyping if we assumed all children fit within the above generalisations. Nobody is denying individual difference within the obvious differences between the sexes; I am only asking that we make every effort to ensure that gender will have a minimal bearing on children's attainment in the Literacy Hour as in any other aspect of their learning.

### Notes

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