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Schools and Communities: Responding to New Challenges and Opportunities

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Preface by Christine Blower, General Secretary, National Union of Teachers

We have a new Government, and with it comes uncertainty about what lies ahead for the education service in the coming months and years. This edition of *Education Review* provides a timely opportunity to reflect on some of the key challenges facing those of us in education in the context of the challenges and opportunities of a new government.

Schools have long recognised the role and importance of building strong community links as a means of providing additional opportunities for their students. It is understood that these external relationships can help to raise students' aspirations and achievements. But developing the outward facing role of schools is not easy.

The Sinnott Fellowship was established by the Department for Children Schools and Families in 2009 to honour former Union General Secretary Steve Sinnott's contribution to education. The Fellowship allows outstanding practitioners who hold a key outward facing role in their schools to pursue their own programme of work to deepen and strengthen the network of external links for their schools, and share that with their communities and local partners. The collective experience of the Fellows is building up a valuable resource of best practice to act as a catalyst for other schools that wish to adopt similar approaches.

In this edition of *Education Review*, Sara Bubb, director of the Sinnott Fellowship, describes how participants on the scheme are leading the way in enabling their schools to look outwards and form external relationships. Her article draws on evidence gathered for the evaluation of the impact of the work of the first 15 Fellows. It shows that the Fellows have been highly creative in their development of a wide range of projects.

The Fellows' work has had significant local impacts, and this is demonstrated through articles by two of the Fellows, Jackie Barnes, chief executive officer of Globetown Learning Community, a charity based in Morpeth School in Tower Hamlets, east London; and Marcia Clack, of Phoenix High School in Hammersmith.

Jackie, and her co-author Peter Horsfall, of the Faculty of Education Community and Leisure at Liverpool John Moores University, consider how the links between social deprivation and educational achievement can be challenged. Their article describes an approach developed over ten years which has achieved sustained success in raising aspirations, engagement and attainment for some of the most disadvantaged and disaffected youngsters. Globetown's *It's Your Life* programme aims to surround young people with a connected programme of support to build educational and social 'capital' to enable them to improve their life chances and that of their families.

They suggest that there are lessons here for policy makers to consider in

shaping schooling for the 21st century.

At Phoenix High School Marcia Clack and Garry McMillan are colleagues in the school's Family and Community Engagement (FACE) department. In their article Marcia and Garry explain how they and their colleagues have been working with parents and the community for five years, during which time they have seen an increase in student attendance and attainment. They describe the ways in which the school began to explore opportunities for building relations with the local community and helping its students find common ground with pupils from other schools and different backgrounds.

Tackling underachievement is a challenge for all educators and it is now the case that white-British pupils on free school meals, and especially boys, are the least likely of all young people to do well in education in Britain.

The NUT has been developing its policy response to this problem and in January the Union held an event at the House of Commons to launch its policy paper entitled *Opening Locked Doors: Educational Achievement and White Working Class Young People*. One of the speakers at that event was Dr Gillian Evans from the University of Manchester. Gillian has written an article in this edition of *Education Review* in which she looks at the challenge for educators of tackling underachievement by white working class girls and boys. Gillian argues against the adoption of an ethnic frame in policies aimed at challenging underachievement by this group. She argues that white working class and black Caribbean working class boys in Britain have more in common than a multicultural system of classification has allowed anyone to realise. She believes that we need to recognise that the working class in Britain is multi-racial and that if we treat the white working class like a new ethnic group we will fail to educate young people about the real difference that social class makes to their lives. This would not only be a lost opportunity but would play into the hands of the British National Party.

The theme of underachievement by white working class boys is followed up in an article by Dr Gabrielle Ivinson, a feminist writer in education and a lecturer in social and developmental psychology in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Cardiff. Gabrielle's recent work in the south Wales ex-mining valleys has brought her into contact with boys who are disaffected from school and who fit the profile of potential NEETs (not in education, employment or training). In her article, she explores changes in the social perceptions of working class youth, changes in the school curricula aimed at re-engaging working class boys and recent work in gender studies. She argues that for schools to achieve change, they need to recognise the link between working class history and pride associated with the skilled body. She believes that teachers have an appetite for active roles in social transformation if given enough support, autonomy and trust and one of the openings available to teachers, lies in a curricula defined in terms of skills. The challenge, she believes is to use skilled practices as the opening to genuine and transformative education.

Angie Kotler started the Schools Linking Project in Bradford in 2001 and

in her article Angie describes the project's role in promoting and developing community cohesion in the city. The project was started when two major issues collided. These were the growing disparity of achievement between different groups in different schools and the fear and mistrust that grew between different communities following the riots in 2001, followed directly by the events of 9/11. Colleagues in Bradford felt it was not only appropriate to share good practice between confident professionals but that there would also be reciprocal gains from direct contact between children of diverse backgrounds. These might be the development of better communication skills and allowing the children's natural curiosity about each other to blossom within a safe and structured environment.

Anne Swift, a member of the NUT Executive is headteacher at a large Infant School in Scarborough, North Yorkshire. Her school building was originally built in 1887 to deliver a radically different concept of education from that of today. In her article Anne describes the ways in which education has changed dramatically since the Victorian expansion of educational provision when it was enough to teach the 3Rs. Now schools face a plethora of roles and responsibilities under an increasingly centralised and micro managed system where teachers' professionalism and creativity is constantly challenged. Despite this, Anne argues, teaching remains the best job in the world and while the challenges are many, so too are the opportunities to make a difference.

Professor Gus John is an Honorary Fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London and Associate Professor in the London Centre for Leadership in Learning. In his article, Gus argues that the process of school reform both before and since 1988 has largely ignored the one group of people who are meant to be the beneficiaries of those reforms, namely learners themselves. Gus believes that it is time for school students to organise themselves and, with the support of their parents and teachers, reclaim education and rescue schooling. He argues that school students need a learners' charter that would place schooling in the driving seat of education for democratic citizenship.

The importance of pupils' view of their schooling is a theme also pursued by Dr Philip Cross, headteacher of Hurlingham & Chelsea School and an NUT member for 20 years. In his article Phil argues that the methodology used to gather and analyse stakeholder views through the OFSTED Inspection framework and its associated school self-evaluation processes are inadequate. Instead he argues for a methodology that is more objective and systematic and based on a rigorous research-based approach. This is essential to achieving secure judgements that stand up to external scrutiny and act as a sound basis for devising and measuring the effectiveness of school improvement strategies.

As a headteacher in a school serving a disadvantaged community and a post-doctoral researcher, Phil has been able to establish a unique methodological approach to measure school effectiveness. In his article he

describes this approach and its contribution to a highly successful rapid school improvement strategy.

NUT member Pauline Trudell writes and campaigns about issues affecting nursery education. She has been involved with different aspects of early childhood education for over 30 years as a headteacher and teacher in inner London nursery schools and classes, LEA advisory teacher, university lecturer and teacher trainer. She examines the decline of state nursery schools and the blurring of roles that has occurred between education and childcare and away from public accountability for education. She believes that current changes in funding arrangements further threaten the distinctive form of early child-centred education that has developed through decades of practice within maintained nursery schools.

Pauline ends her article with a quote from an article she wrote for *Education Review* in 1994 whose message is even more important today:

> *"The early years curriculum challenges the view of education as isolated instruction. It highlights the transforming power of imaginative play and honours children's own intentions for learning. It is holistic and cross-curricular and acknowledges children's capacity for active learning and their independence and self discipline. Because it promotes an alliance with parents and breaks down divisions between teaching and learning and because it stresses that all learning is social and collaborative and that knowledge and experience can be shared it is genuinely subversive. We need to hang on to this."*

Breaking down the divisions between teaching and learning is a theme developed by NUT National Executive member Nick Grant who rounds off this edition of *Education Review* with a rallying cry for an alternative model of education. He argues that another form of schooling is both necessary and possible. One that provides a service to learners rooted in child development and human potential that is implemented with collective and co-operative methods in pursuit of a just, equitable, peaceful and sustainable future.

Nick believes it will require all the public sector unions to take on a greater role in the political life of the country and that we should commit ourselves to forging a new school for our learners, as part of a wider new democracy.

The book review section of this edition of *Education Review* continues its tradition of providing valuable resources and reference material on challenging issues for busy teachers.

I hope you will enjoy reading this edition of *Education Review* which provides a timely opportunity to reflect on what the future holds for education as we move forward into a new era of government ready to face the challenges and opportunities that it may bring.

The Sinnott Fellowship: embedding an outward-facing philosophy in schools

Sara Bubb

Sara Bubb, a senior lecturer at the Institute of Education, University of London, is directing the DCSF research project into outward facing schools through the Sinnott Fellowships. Sara also leads England's Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) network, has featured on many Teachers' TV programmes and sits on the editorial board for the journal of the Training and Development Agency for Schools' (TDA). For correspondence please email s.bubb@ioe.ac.uk

Abstract: *Government policies such as diplomas, community cohesion, family engagement and international school links require schools to look 'outwards' and form external relationships. This can be a great challenge but in this article the author demonstrates how participants on the Sinnott Fellowship Scheme are leading the way.*

In 2009 the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) introduced the Sinnott Fellowship in memory of former NUT General Secretary Steve Sinnott's contribution to education. To date, the Sinnott Fellowship has funded 30 successful applicants to spend two days a week for two terms developing innovative external links and relationships to improve pupil aspiration and attainment. This article draws on evidence gathered for the evaluation of the impact of the first 15 Fellows commissioned by the DCSF and carried out by the Institute of Education.

The Fellows have been highly creative in their development of a wide range of projects broadly falling in to seven categories, as shown in Figure 1. These were:

- positive activities for young people;

- community and voluntary groups;
- world of work and business;
- parental engagement;
- further and higher education;
- international understanding; and
- access to statutory support and services.

The Fellows' work has had a significant impact. For instance, Marcia Clack, of Phoenix High School in West London, who also writes in this edition of *Education Review*, organised a Summer Fayre which 2,200 people attended. It brought a lot of organisations into partnership with the school and led to a four week free sports' programme. But Marcia felt strongly: "We wanted to offer unique opportunities in sporting activities that many of the participants would not have experienced". So the activities for young people ranged from cooking, arts and crafts, rowing, golf, futsal, football, climbing wall, BMX biking, Gaelic football and cheerleading to rollerblading. People from the London Metropolitan Police, Queen's Park Rangers Football Club, rugby clubs, the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Hammersmith and Fulham Borough Youth Service gave their time for free, so that local children didn't have to pay. An amazing 602 children attended and now have avenues to continue their involvement in new sports. (See figure overleaf.)

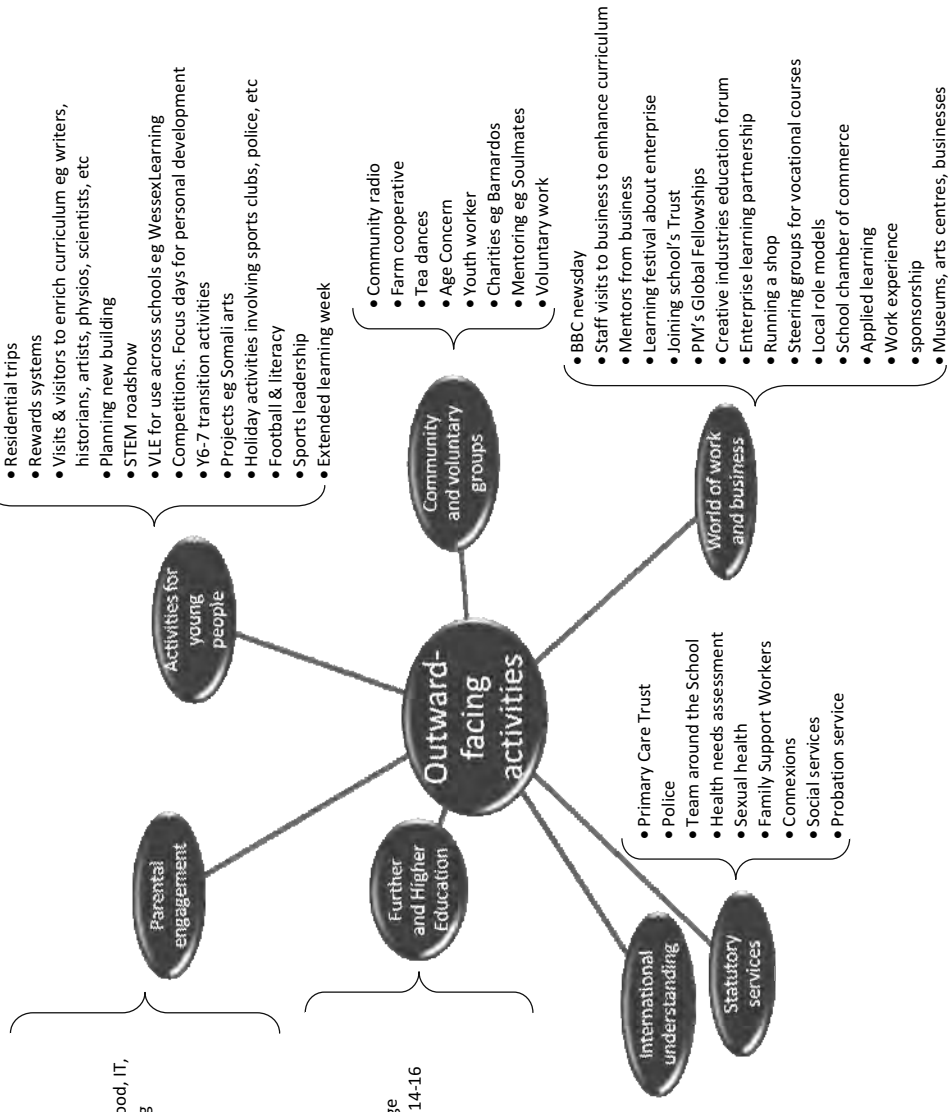
While the Sinnott Fellowship celebrates and learns from the work of outstanding individuals, the premise is that – for the work to be sustainable – the outward-facing ethos must be embedded in the school. So, what models are there for others to learn from? At one extreme there is a sole person in a school ploughing a lonely furrow to the outside world; at the other, there are models involving many staff where outward-facingness is at the very heart of everything that the school does – and this is seen in the staffing structure and responsibilities.

As Figure 1 shows, there are so many facets of outward-facingness that schools need to ensure that it is well-organised in order to make a difference to young people. From my evaluation of the Sinnott Fellowships to date, four principles emerge:

1. A belief in outward-facingness.
2. Strategic leadership of outward-facingness is required so that there is a clear vision focused on improving pupils' learning, aspirations and wellbeing.
3. Staff have sufficient time and expertise to do their roles so that tasks are carried out by the most appropriate people.
4. Communication needs to be clear so that people outside the school know who to contact, and how.

Each of these is now looked at in turn.

Figure 1: Outward-facing activities led by Sinnott Fellows



1. A belief in outward-facingness

The Fellows were strongly passionate about the importance of their work. But why? Tim Smith of Prudhoe High in Northumberland captured the need to connect through the image of a safety net:

> *"I have this vision of the school as a massive safety net. We need to encourage students to get on the high wire and achieve but to have safety nets for them. If you're not connecting things then there are going to be holes and kids are going to fall through. Bringing the outside world into the classroom and connecting the school to the wider community in every way possible is just as important as formal learning. If we imagine that these connections form nets then the more there are, the smaller the gaps there will be and the harder it will be for anyone to slip through."*

The Sinnott Fellowship seeks to develop external relationships further and to pull them together by an outward-facing philosophy that adds value to the school as a whole. What is the ethos that is required? The North Liverpool Academy encourages its pupils in the 'Enterprise Gems' of problem-solving, creativity, risk-taking, determination, teamwork and reflection. These underpin the rationale for outward-facing work. Sinnott Fellow, Shaun McInerney, says:

> *"It is not what we teach students that is important so much as how they learn from the experiences they have and how this new learning benefits them and their community."*

He believes that an outward-facing ethos allows pupils:

> *"To build capacity for what the community needs: a new generation of community leaders who can make a difference by succeeding in their own lives through taking responsibility for themselves and others."*

Many of the Fellows' passion was driven by an appreciation of how deprived their pupils were. Marcia Clack of Phoenix High School in West London said:

> *"Our knowledge of the home circumstances of many of our students makes it clear to us that we have to mobilise and engage parents, carers and the local community as fully as we can, in our efforts to raise their achievement and improve their life chances."*

Jackie Barnes' *It's Your Life* project at Morpeth School in East London in many ways tried to replicate the kinds of activities that middle class

families provide for their children: after school clubs, meals out, visits, trips and holidays. The *It's Your Life* project is also discussed later in this edition of *Education Review*.

Raising pupils' aspirations is a key rationale for facing outwards and the achievements made through the Fellowship made people yet more convinced of its value. Chris Cullingford from Stoke Newington School in North London said:

> *"We have to raise awareness amongst colleagues and drive forward an agenda to raise the aspirations of every child in the school. It will be crucial to their life chances as the world changes, and make them happier and more able to make a positive contribution to their community. Creativity and collaborative outward-facing work is not an add-on."*

The achievement of individual young people is a powerful way to open the door for others to follow. One of Tim Smith's ex-students, Andrew Hart, uploaded a Christmas song and video that he had made in his loft onto YouTube and within three weeks it had been played 300,000 times by people across the world. It was featured on an American TV show and others made cover versions of it. All this was brought back into the school and Andrew became a hero for his achievement.

Many Fellows saw their school as a vital resource for the community and articulated the tension that this had with the responsibility for safeguarding young people. Ben Johnson from Bishop Barrington in County Durham felt strongly about his school's facilities not being used in the evenings and holidays:

> *"I want the local community to view the school as more than just a school. I want them to see it as a place where they can take part in a range of activities and partnerships."*

Community groups need schools. The local school is often the most unifying and stable organisation in a community.

2. Strategic leadership

Outward-facingness needs to be led strategically if it is to have a significant impact. It is an area in which people can spend a lot of time and effort but there is a danger of taking the eye off the ball because individuals can get so engaged in different activities that they find that they have lost their focus on children's learning and wellbeing. Is the time and effort expended on outward-facing activities worth the effort? The vision and rationale for all the elements of outward-facingness should be clear. What difference will it make to the pupils?

Sometimes there are hard judgements to be made:

- Is the residential trip going to be beneficial or is it going to eat up valuable revision time?
- Will time spent on after-school activities mean that pupils fall behind in their homework or are too tired to learn the next day?
- Is there somebody better placed to be doing this work? and
- Should teachers put more effort into their teaching rather than the 'extras'?

Certainly outward-facingness needs to enhance pupil learning and wellbeing – and not distract from them.

Strategic leadership should pull all the elements together. It is possible to understand all the individual components of outward-facingness but the size, shape and sheer complexity of the whole needs to be clear. Being strategic involves having the big picture of the whole and that takes time. Schools need to identify their baseline (where they are at) and what they want to improve and why. The North Liverpool Academy did this well by defining and identifying needs and then building the team to help meet that need. In June 2008 the school held a two-day Future Search community stakeholder planning event from which emerged five Task Groups:

- supporting safer communities – police officer;
- supporting students' health – nurse, health survey, community health, PE department;
- supporting students' personal development – soulmates, youthworker;
- supporting parents' learning – ICT, parenting support, families and students together; and
- supporting students' economic wellbeing – enterprise team.

They formed the Student Wellbeing, Enterprise and Enjoyment Team led by Sinnott Fellow, Shaun McInerney. This model has freed him up to spend more time teaching because the student needs coordinator, Debbie Crew, works with him to maximise the impact of the five areas together. She uses the skills developed through her background in the third sector, where she won the Sheila McKinney award for taking a local issue to a national campaign. The people involved in the various teams come from within and outside the school but work together to develop the Academy's extended services strategy by matching community needs to provision. This model has helped build an ethos of community involvement within the Academy.

It is important to be strategic in choosing pupils to take part in different activities. Some Fellows who tracked what was going on in their schools found that some pupils and year groups had many more

opportunities than others – indeed, some had too many and others none at all. Who are the most appropriate young people to take part in activities? For instance, is taking the whole of Year 7 on a trip to a university a good idea? Will it raise their aspirations or might it scare them off? Would another year group benefit more?

3. Staffing

One Fellow spoke of how in her large school, nobody really knew what others were doing and who was responsible for what. Individuals would be doing things within their subjects but there was no clear way for others to find out about these things. Office staff who opened the mail and electronic communication did not know who to pass information or queries on to. Opportunities were missed because the right people didn't get to hear about them in time. Equally there was no way for someone from an outside organisation to find the right person to talk to within the school. One significant outcome of her Sinnott Fellowship is that she has been given a new role: that of coordinating all outward-facing work.

There were numerous examples of individual staff doing too much and spending a great deal of time on tasks for which others were better qualified. One of the significant benefits of the Fellowship was that more administrators were employed, enabling Fellows to use their time more efficiently.

The Sinnott Fellowship resulted in a new staffing structure within Carl Ward's school, Sutherland Business & Enterprise College, with many extra people being involved as can be seen in the difference between Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Figure 2: Sutherland College's outward-facing roles before the Sinnott Fellowship

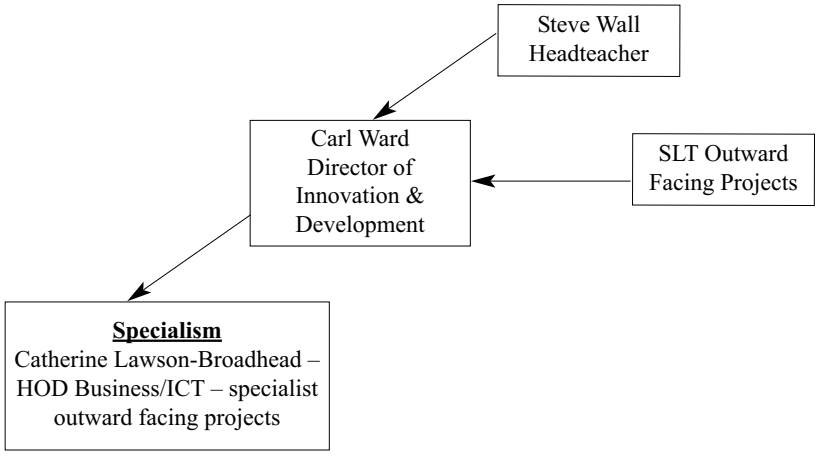
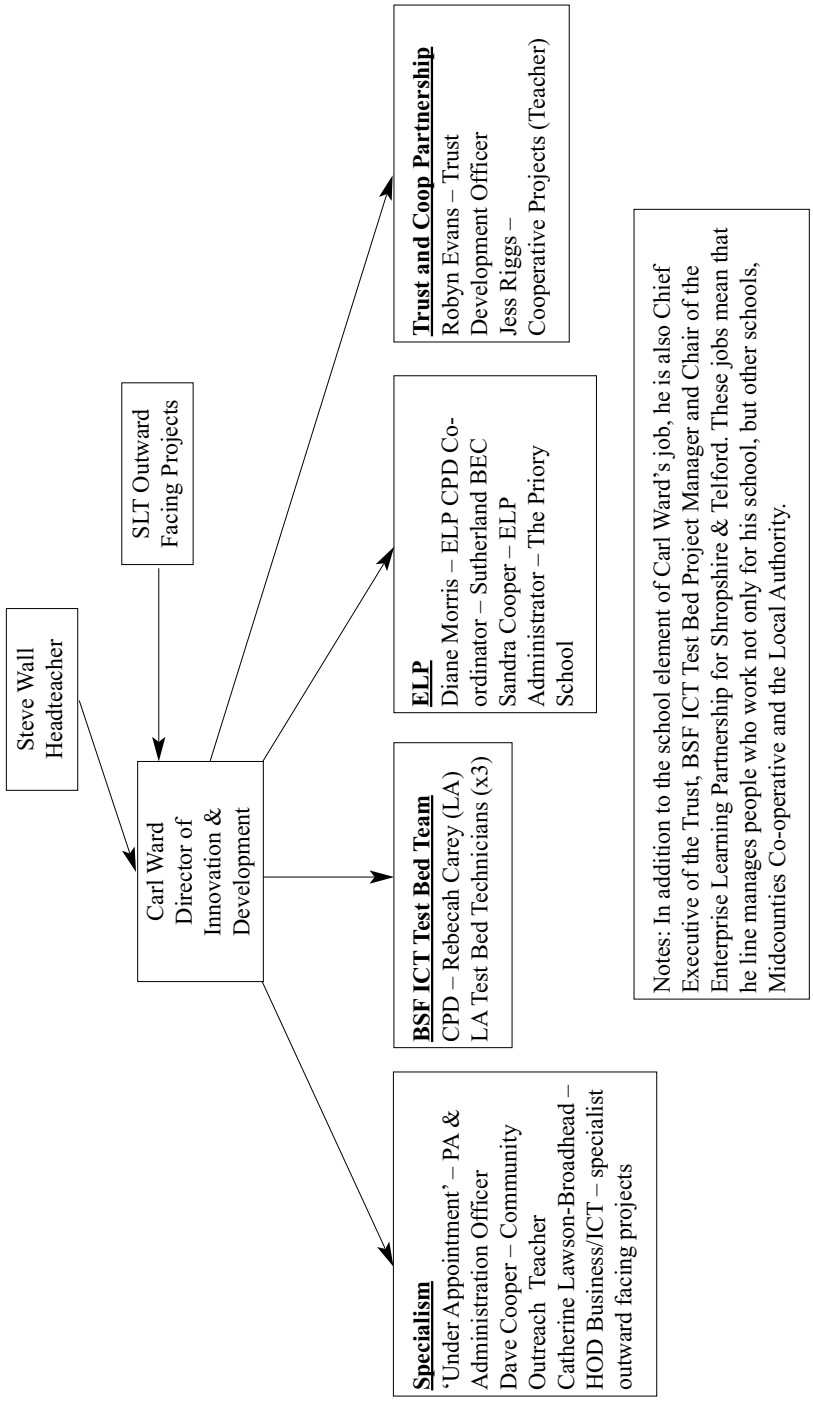


Figure 3: Sutherland College's outward-facing roles after the Sinnott Fellowship



Carl's job title is Director of Innovation and Development. Other Fellows' job titles in this field include:

- family learning coordinator;
- enterprise coordinator;
- extended schools coordinator;
- director of college improvement;
- head of personal development faculty;
- director of business and enterprise;
- extended services strategic lead;
- progression and enrichment leader;
- coordinator of vocational education;
- complementary curriculum and outreach coordinator; and
- student needs coordinator.

This range of titles is interesting and points to a remodelled workforce, which draws upon people with suitable skills and experience but not necessarily teaching qualifications. Choosing the most appropriate people for tasks is vital. For instance, Ryan Gibson realised that the process of placing 150 staff from St Joseph's School in South Tyneside within industry and the community for an applied learning INSET day would require a significant amount of planning. The local Education Business Partnership had the most substantial contacts and so the school paid them to broker all placements. This gave just one point of contact both for school staff and employers so that communication was efficient and effective.

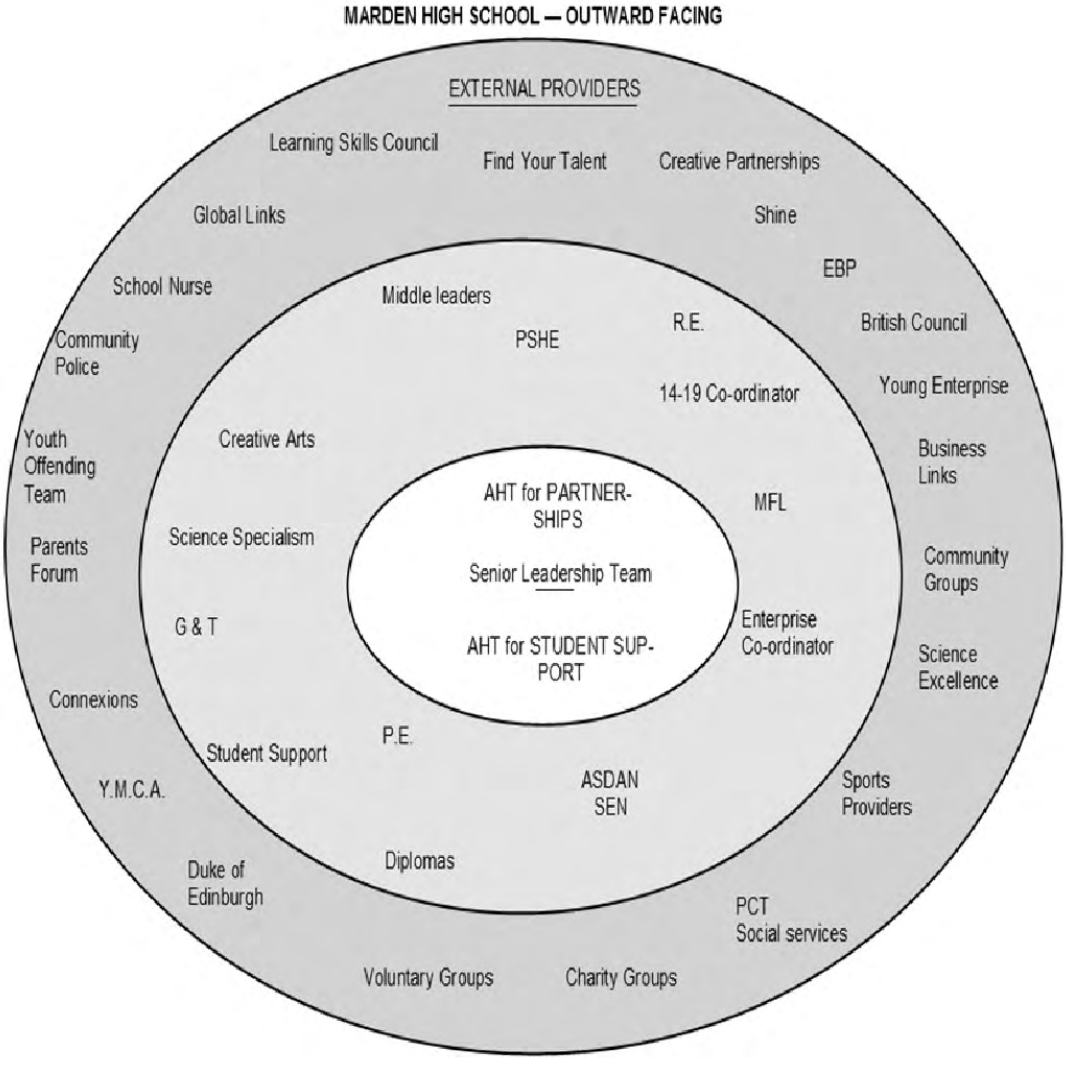
It is useful to maintain a database of contacts to ensure efficient communication. Figure 4 illustrates the number of parties involved in Joan Bloomfield's school, Marden High in North Tyneside.

Chris Cullingford mapped the outward-facing roles of staff at Stoke Newington as seen in Figure 5. What is interesting is that the workforce has been remodelled so that tasks are carried out by people with suitable skills – meaning that teachers can focus on teaching. Chris is a teacher and he is quite clear about what he can bring to outward-facingness:

> *"Whilst others help make things happen, I believe I am probably the one who has ideas, and certainly the one with the experience to help others make things work."*

He works closely with the Director of Specialism (who is not a teacher) and people in her team, who have specialist skills. For instance, the special projects assistant will take photos or videos of any interesting work and the communications director will publicise it through the website or newsletter.

Figure 4: Marden High School's outward-facing roles



4. Communication

In general, the only way to make contact with the schools is through the office phone number and email. The gatekeepers of these vary in effectiveness and some can seem actively anti-outward-facing. Known popularly as 'the headteacher's rottweiler', their role can seem to be to stop outsiders disturbing staff so that they can focus on teaching and learning. School websites are the outward face of the school but these are often under developed and not helpful. One positive example is Manchester Academy's website (www.manchester-academy.org). A key tab is entitled

'Our Community', which leads to pages with useful information, such as:

- an impressive list of 23 partners;
- facilities for letting, with tariffs and booking form;
- a getting involved section where outsiders are invited to help in a variety of ways;
- getting to know Manchester with a map of free places to visit; and
- the 'Partners in Learning Association', made up of parents, teachers and other supporters of the Academy.

Under 'Wider Community Effort' there is information about mentors from businesses who come in to help students regularly with literacy and numeracy. Sinnott Fellow, Jane Delfino considers:

> *"These are invaluable opportunities because they not only allow students to mix with the wider community, but the relationships which grow between our students and their older mentors raise self-esteem."*

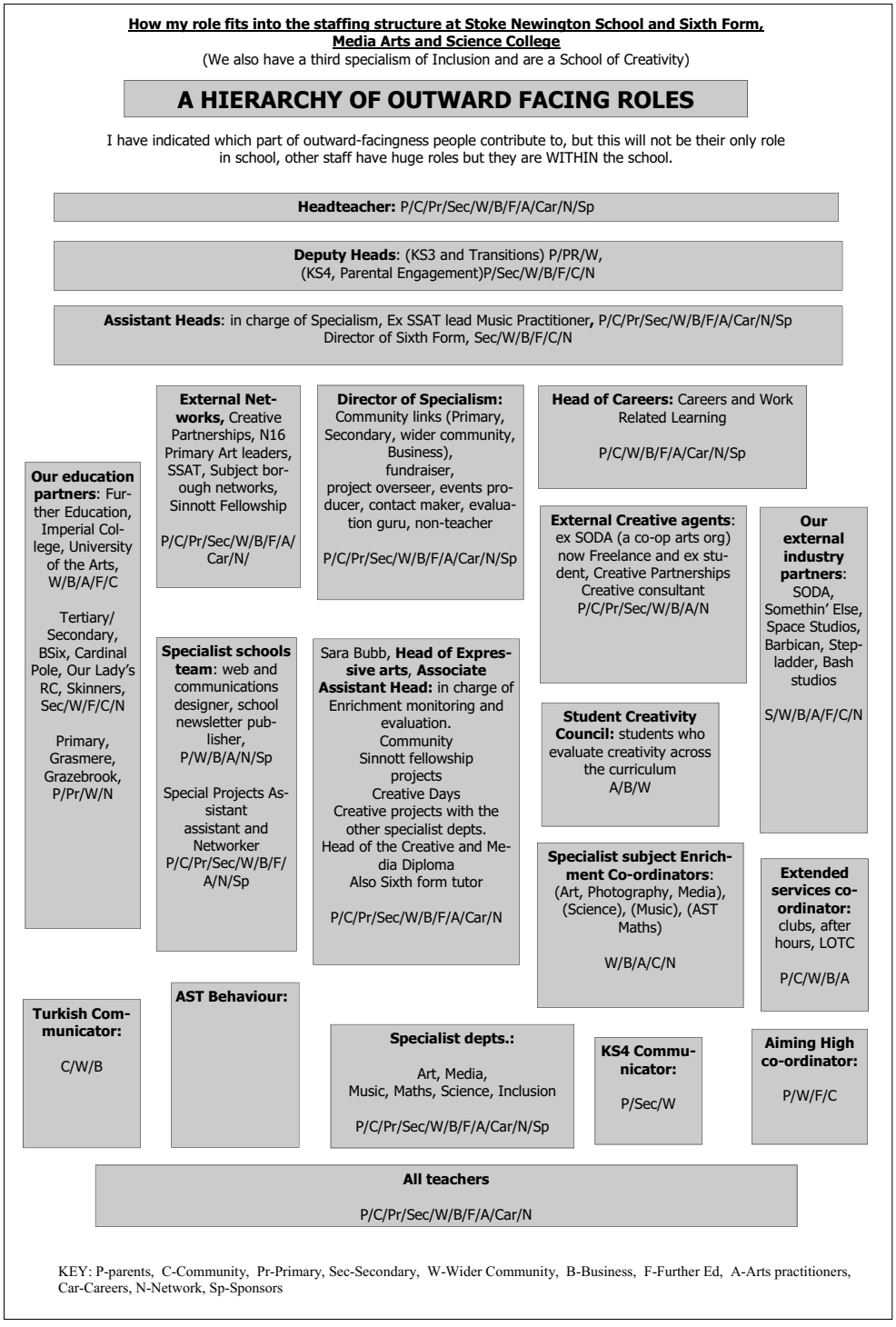
The Enterprise for Employability section is large and there is also information about foreign exchanges, Debate Mates and the BBC news desk. To help the sharing of resources for vocational courses, Rob Palmer of Twynham School has developed WessexLearning (www.wessexlearning.org.uk), a learning gateway with access for all partners – six schools and many businesses. Lessons and resources for each learning line are made available to students, parents and home institutions. For courses that take place at Twynham, attendance and assessment data is made available to the home school of the students, and a personalised logon gives access to parents so they can see their child's data direct from the school's Management Information System (MIS). Photographs from visits and trips as well as successful pieces of work are up-loaded to the site, allowing students, schools and parents to share experiences. The site also supports the administration of the partnership by providing a central point for minutes of meetings, specifications from the examination boards, schemes of work and a calendar for all activities planned for the year.

Conclusion

In many schools, there are elements of outward facing activity but what is needed is for all of them to be pulled together so that they make a difference to young people. As Tim Smith put it:

> *"Schools need to have paths leading in many directions to the outside world. As teachers, we've often trodden a circular path: we enjoyed and succeeded at school as pupils, then came back as teachers. But there are other paths and we need to open them up."*

Figure 5: Stoke Newington School's outward-facing roles



It's Your Life: developing a community of learners to combat social deprivation

Abstract: *In this article the authors consider how the links between social deprivation and educational achievement can be challenged. They describe the successful approaches developed over ten years by a partnership which has sought to raise the aspirations and achievements of some of the most disaffected learners in one of the most socially deprived areas in London. They suggest that there are lessons here for policy makers to consider in shaping schooling for the 21st century.*

Our understanding of the links between where you live, where you are raised and how well you will achieve within education and in life has increased greatly in the last 12 years. The simplistic measures of socioeconomic status by, for example, the take up of free school meals or family income and social deprivation and disadvantage have been applied for some time to measure and account for differences in achievement and are still influential in framing policy. For example, Bradbrook's Research Report: *Meeting their Potential* (2007) proposes reforms to address social disadvantage which highlight:

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- young people from prosperous areas are 47% more likely to get five or more GCSE A–C grades compared to young people from deprived areas; and
- 30% of those from social class DE say they are not doing as well as they had hoped in life, compared with 12% of those from social class AB.

We recognise the value of such descriptive statistics in defining a problem. However there is a complexity in the relationship between these measures and a young person's achievements in school and in later life which need to be considered when defining appropriate remedial actions. By themselves these factors are insufficient to account for the differences in educational achievement between individual young people growing up in different communities.

A recent report by Hirsch (2007) reminds us "...the relationship between poverty and low achievement at school is part of a wider cycle in which family disadvantage is passed on from one generation to the next". We recognise the significance of three factors in determining the aspirations and educational achievement of learners:

- the quality of parenting;
- the quality of schooling; and
- the community culture within which a young person grows up.

Many children growing up in areas of social deprivation achieve well in school. They may have strong family networks and beliefs which recognise the value of education and provide encourage and support them to do well and instil self efficacy, a belief that they can enact change in their lives. Many schools which serve such areas have excellent records of attainment and are places where most pupils do well and achieve their potential. They have strong leadership, enthusiastic and skilled teachers and excellent support systems (Office for Standards in Education, 2009). A response to the issues of underachievement needs to reach deeper if policy and practice are to impact on *all* learners as proposed in the 2009 Education white paper as the goal for 21st century schooling (Department for Children Schools and Families 2009).

Closing the *opportunity* gap in education is only one part of combating long-term causes of disadvantage and needs to be considered alongside other features of disadvantage. A detailed review of evidence by the Social Exclusion Task Force (2008) identifies the importance not only of economic status and parental characteristics but of the community within which a young person grows up as determining their future opportunities and the life choices they make.

Many initiatives now exist to help schools and others to explore ways of addressing low aspirations and underachievement in disadvantaged

students. For example, *Aimhigher* and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) *Extra Mile* project (2009) offer a wealth of creative strategies exploring new approaches to curriculum development and delivery. They promote positive attitudes to, and encourage engagement in, school activities. Such initiatives have provided opportunities for schools to begin to explore the needs of their disadvantaged students. However they are prone to two weaknesses: they may fail to target or impact on those most in need through the use of simplistic measure of social disadvantage, such as free school meals, to define target groups, whilst the really disadvantaged learners are those who stopped attending school six

The approach is based on a belief that whilst poverty and social deprivation may be root causes of low achievement, young people's life chances may be changed through education and that the solutions lie ultimately with the young people themselves coming to take charge of their life decisions.

months previously; and they may fail to engage learners by presenting 'adult driven' goals and strategies which require the young person to buy into the cultural expectations of those deemed to have already achieved success (Slack, 2003).

This article describes an approach developed over ten years which has achieved sustained success in raising aspirations, engagement and attainment in life for some of the most disadvantaged and disaffected youngsters in one of the most deprived communities in London.

Morpeth School in Tower Hamlets, east London, has a distinguished track record of success in serving its community and achieving high standards for most of its students. It has been recognised by Ofsted (2009) as one of "12 outstanding secondary schools" for its performance under the inspirational leadership of its headteacher, Sir Alasdair Macdonald.

Globetown Learning Community (formerly Globetown Action Zone) is a charity operating in partnership with Morpeth School which has for ten years provided additional support for students identified as likely to fail to achieve their potential, even with the outstanding systems offered by the school. The charity has explored the individual and diverse needs of these children and devised responses tailored to develop in them self efficacy and the educational and social capital necessary to build successful lives, through the *It's Your Life* project.

The approach is based on a belief that whilst poverty and social deprivation may be root causes of low achievement, young people's life chances may be changed through education and that the solutions lie

ultimately with the young people themselves coming to take charge of their life decisions.

The target group is made up of students whose disaffection with schooling and whose life problems are so severe that they would be unlikely to respond to the strategies developed to improve engagement within the secondary school. Most come from families on low income with a history of high unemployment and little experience of their children staying on in secondary or further education. Many have additional multiple barriers to success in education which might include:

- involvement in anti-social behaviour or crime;
- persistent absentees or likely to be excluded;
- poor family support and support networks;
- friends and family involved in gangs or with criminal convictions;
- poor aspirations and poor emotional, coping and social skills;
- living in a deprived neighbourhood and on free school meals;
- the first in family to continue in Post 16 education;
- teenage pregnancy; and
- addiction to drugs and alcohol.

Globetown has helped over 50 such young people get into higher education since it started its *Raising Aspirations* program in 2001 and has built on its success through continuous review and reflection on what works best. This has resulted in the evolution of the *It's Your Life* project.

The impact has been impressive and sustained. Many past participants remain connected to the community of learners developed through the project and give up their time to act as mentors for incoming students. Participants like Leon Williams, who at age 15 was thinking of leaving school when he got involved in the first cohort to enter Globetown's *Raising Aspirations* project in 2001:

> *"It would have been so easy to get trapped in a different way of life and if I hadn't become part of their Raising Aspirations project I think I would have ended my education then. My mum wanted me to get a job at 16 but I know if I had, I wouldn't have had the experiences and made the choices I have. It's easy to get involved with antisocial behaviour and drugs but University kept me focused and determined to have a better life. I now have a degree in Criminology and play American Football for Great Britain."*

The programme is underpinned by core values which include:

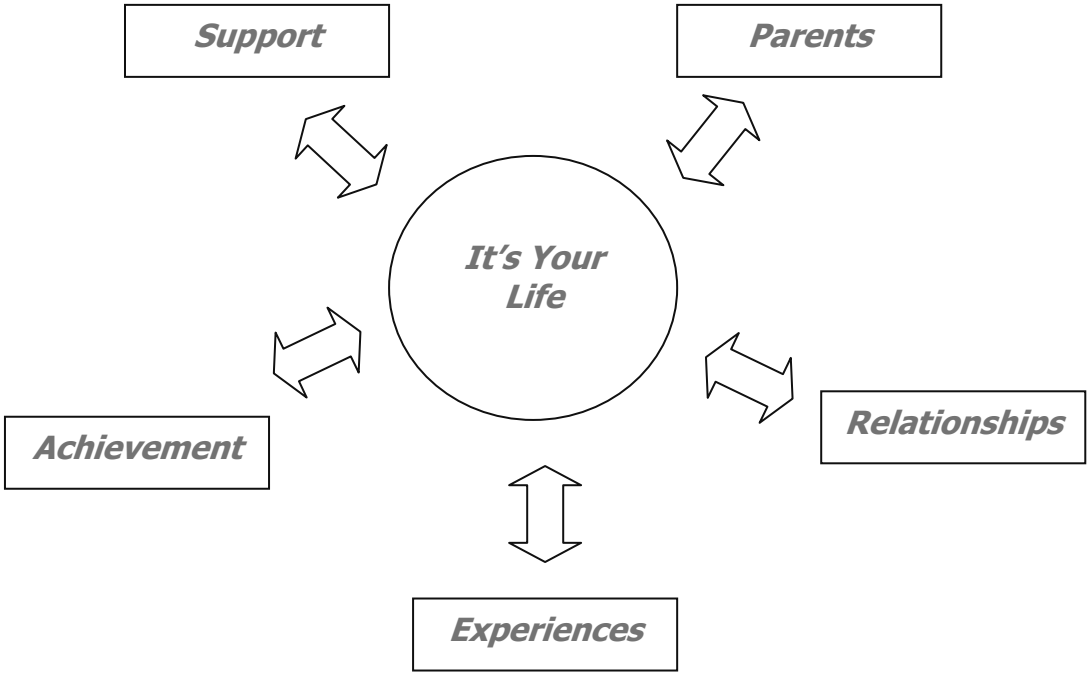
- a belief that education is a way to overcome disadvantage and a way out of poverty;
- a commitment to address what is seen as the most persistent failure in our education system, that where and to whom a child is born plays far

too big a part in their achievement;
- an understanding of the need to work with the whole family to support the young person in their studies; and
- a belief that the learners themselves must take responsibility for the life choices which they make and that they should be empowered to do so from a position of understanding of the consequences of their choices and experience of what is on offer beyond their immediate community.

Framed by these values the programme aims to *surround young people with a connected programme of support to build educational and social "capital" to enable them to improve their life chances and that of their families.*

It's Your Life recognises the influence of five interconnected needs on an individual's achievement and is designed to maximise the impact of these for the good of the learner (fig.1). The provision of these needs helps promote self efficacy which combats the effects of social deprivation and culture experienced in the community within which the young person is growing up.

Figure 1: The five needs which determine success



Morpeth School retains prime responsibility for the educational achievement of its learners that are involved in *It's Your Life* and they are supported by the variety of school based pastoral, teaching and learning strategies to do well in their studies. However by working in partnership with Globetown Learning Community a shared and collective responsibility ensures that the most disadvantaged young people do not fall through the systemic gaps by failing to engage, for whatever reason.

It's Your Life focuses on enhancing attainment by providing additional academic support through activities such as weekly study support sessions, revision classes, academic tracking and liaison with the year head. It also tackles those issues that indirectly affect attainment such as attendance and motivation through the provision of enrichment activities, celebration events with parents and a two week residential in Strathclyde University.

> *"Going to University in Scotland for two weeks was the best thing I've ever done in my life. My attendance at school was terrible, my Mum had drug problems and I spent most of my time trying to get my sisters out of care. Globetown helped me and my family in so many different ways. This year I hope to pass all of my GCSEs with grades A to C."* (Pupil, aged 15)

Of those students who attended the residential at Strathclyde University in 2008, 75% achieved 5+ A-C grades in their GCSE exams in 2009, 67% of these including Maths and English.

Support

The programme provides support systems which offer a personalised and tailored response to the needs of individual young people and their families. These include:

- mentors who provide support through individual and group mentoring in areas of identified need;
- careers' workshops and guidance from a careers' consultant; and
- life coaching workshops.

Support is offered through a case worker (mentor), providing a single point of contact for the young person *and the family*. For more disadvantaged families having one person working with the family, bringing together the education, health and social work agendas is a key factor for success. The case workers work with partner agencies when needed, addressing issues such as anger management, conflict resolution, drug and alcohol addiction and gang membership. The mentoring sessions address personal and emotional issues and enable young people to make appropriate choices on issues that impact on their future life chance.

The benefits to young people of on the spot support, more timely interventions and a 'professional friend' who is able to look at and support the young person holistically are significant and can lead to an increase in educational attainment. For example, of the 20 pupils who had a life coach during 2008-2009, 85% achieved 5 A-C grades in their GCSE's.

> *"Globetown Learning Community got me a mentor to support me. He was permanently excluded from school himself when he was 15. He has been the best person to get me back on the right track. He talks to me straight. I am now getting help for my drug and alcohol problems."* (Pupil, aged 15)

Parents

Parental influence in supporting their child's education and moulding their aspirations in life is a key factor in determining choices made by learners. Their involvement however is often associated with social class, the level of the parents' education, material deprivation and single parent status, and their own lack of self efficacy. This effect is linked to the parents own experiences and achievement in education and life opportunities. A parent may want to fully support their child educationally but may lack the awareness and know how to do this effectively.

Considine (2002) suggests that "while financial assistance to schools and families in need is important, policies and programmes that assist low-income parents in providing appropriate psychological and educational support for their children should also be promoted". *It's Your Life* offers such a programme, providing parents with encouragement and personal development to help them become more involved with their child's education and guidance on actions they can take to support their children to achieve academically. Activities include:

- one to one interviews with parents to identify need;
- university visits for parents;
- provision of a family case worker offering weekly individual advice sessions and monthly workshops covering, for example, barriers to achievement; and
- personal action planning for parents with a careers' consultant.

Parents are also encouraged to get involved in learning themselves and this has a positive effect on the young people's achievement. They engage in a variety of classes some of which lead to qualifications ranging from Entry Level ESOL (English for speakers of another language) to GCSE Maths. If needed, parents are also supported in taking their own first steps to work.

Relationships

Whilst parents are an important factor in determining a young person's

future the individual's peer group may have a more important impact on their life choices. "During adolescence years greater significance is given to peers as companions, as providers of advice, support and feedback, as models for behaviour and as sources of comparative information concerning personal qualities and skills. Relationships with parents alter in the direction of greater equality and reciprocity." (Coleman and Hendry, 1999)

The existing programme owes much of its success to the strength of the peer group networks that have been developed both within each cohort and between cohorts. Our experience strongly suggests that as with mentor support, at challenging times the fact that there is a group of young people who are sharing similar experiences has proved critical.

It's Your Life develops strong peer group networks for its participants, through activities including mentor training, and also vocational networks. Networking can be a highly effective tool when applied to other aspects of our lives including employment and it is a skill we work to develop. A range of topics covered includes understanding the help that contacts can offer, developing contacts from scratch, making an effective use of contacts and how to approach contacts. Such activities have helped develop each cohort into a community of learners who have continued to provide support for each other outside the confines of the project and into adult life.

What young people do after school hours does influence their future outcomes. Participating in organised evening activities, as well as offering enjoyable and exciting experiences also supports the development of resilience by improving social and emotional skills.

Experiences

The Rowntree Foundation (2007) found that just 14% of variation in individuals' performance is accounted for by schools quality. Most variation is explained by other factors, underlining the need to look at the range of young peoples' experiences, inside and outside school, when seeking to raise achievement.

What young people do after school hours does influence their future outcomes. Participating in organised evening activities, as well as offering enjoyable and exciting experiences also supports the development of resilience by improving social and emotional skills. These opportunities help young people plan for the future, develop maturity and bridge the gaps between individuals from different classes and cultures.

It's Your Life involves its young participants in a variety of out of school

experiences aimed at developing their social capital. These include team building residentials; an action research weekend exploring barriers to learning; and numerous other social experiences designed to extend the range of social skills learners develop, such as those required for an evening meal at a restaurant.

Expansion and Replication

Globetown Learning Community has developed innovative approaches to working with the most disadvantaged young people. These aim to develop educational and social capital through quality experiences with academic and personal mentoring, social and vocational networking and family support. These approaches have been effective in raising attainment and aspiration for cohorts of young people from 2001 to the present day. For these learners *It's Your Life* is providing an effective approach to lifting participants out of the cycle of dissocial deprivation, disengagement and underachievement which has curtailed the life choices and opportunities of others in their community.

It's Your Life is based around activities and practices which are currently being explored in many schools across the country and which are in line with the proposals for a 21st Century Schooling from the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA). What may be unique to this project however is the extent to which it has:

- brought together a wide range of alternative approaches to developing learners, in a holistic model involving many partners;
- sustained these over a long period;
- tracked their impact on participants, following these from entry into year ten into their (by now) early twenties; and
- engaged families and developed and sustained a community of learners.

Morpeth School and Globetown Learning Community are keen to share their experiences with other organisations wishing to explore alternative approaches to education. Dissemination of good practice is planned through local networks of schools and through the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Thanks

Globetown Learning community would like to acknowledge the support of its partners in supporting the *It's Your Life* project. The Mayor's Fund for London, The Sinnott Fellowship, Pilotlight, Clifford Chance Law Firm, Barbican Education, Into University, Strathclyde University Innovative Routes to Learning and Tower Hamlets 14-19 Education Improvement Partnership, LAP 1 and 2 Extended Schools, Tower Hamlets Education Business Partners, Parental Engagement Team, Early Years Partnership,

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White Working Class Under-Achievement: the pitfalls of targeted attainment strategies

Gillian Evans

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Abstract: *Young white-British people on free school meals, and especially boys, are the least likely of all young people to do well in education in Britain[1]. Recent policy recommendations aimed at addressing this situation have suggested a need for targeted attainment strategies. In this article, however, the author argues that it is not the targeting itself that she is alarmed by, but the ethnic frame through which the proposals for targeting view the white working class. She argues that the unforeseen effects of this ethnic strategising will be damaging for all kinds of reasons, not least of which is that it plays into the hands of the British National Party whose growing influence poses a serious challenge to schools and their neighbourhoods, especially in post-industrial areas of the country.*

> *"Support schools and Local Authorities to develop a multicultural curriculum that treats White British identity in the same way as ethnic minorities. This curriculum should give confidence to White British pupils so that they can proudly assert their identity as an ethnic group."* Demie F. & Lewis K. (2010)

> *"In some schools there is a conscious effort to include White British culture in the life of the school. This included a Year five evacuation visit to the World War Two heritage site Lincolnsfields Centre, Bushy for a World War Two 1940s war time*

experience of life as a child evacuee. The same school also celebrated the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002 with a street party in the playground with decorations and food outside." Demie F. & Lewis K. (2010)

Occasionally I find that my work, which explores the complex set of reasons for white working class educational failure, is misinterpreted. For those tasked with lending the book's insights to practical policy responses there is a risk of proposing that the research suggests either a backlash against multiculturalism or the need to make social class fit inside a multicultural framework. I wish to use the opportunity that this article presents to sound a note of caution. Such responses necessarily turn the white working class into a new and neglected ethnic group with a distinctive culture in need of recognition; this is not only politically naïve in the contemporary cultural landscape of Britain, but it is potentially damaging because the more important issues at stake are then obscured. The logic of my concern is as follows: a multicultural system of classification is used, for statistical purposes, to organise children and young people in Britain into racial and ethnic groups. The categories are confused and inconsistent and I have recently drawn attention to this fact elsewhere (Evans 2010a), but suffice it to note here that the system draws on a version of the following classificatory set: white British; black Caribbean; black African; Chinese; Bangladeshi; Pakistani; Indian; white and black Caribbean; white and black African (Demie F & Lewis K. 2010).

A multicultural system of classification in education is necessary because, since the 1970s multiculturalism has been the political means through which the struggle for racial equality in Britain has been fought. In many respects this has been a fantastic resistance movement, which rightly deserves to be celebrated and supported and there must be no sense in which it is undermined by new concerns about the position of the white working class in Britain. Things have become rather complicated, however, and there is a need for careful thinking, continuous debate and extremely cautious action.

The introduction of racial and ethnic categories in education meant that the attainment of different racial and ethnic groups could be compared and contrasted to see how black and Asian children and young people were faring in the British education system. It was important to be able to assess and to monitor whether a racial and ethnic bias against black and Asian children and young people existed, to what degree and how it might be changing, or not, over time and in response to policy interventions.[2] Using this system of multicultural classification it was easy to see that those who were doing consistently badly in the British education system were black-Caribbean boys. In 2002 Diane Abbott, MP for

Hackney North and Stoke Newington, lamented:

> *"There is a silent catastrophe happening in Britain's schools in the way they continue to fail black British school-children. When African and Afro-Caribbean children enter the school system at five they do as well as white and Asian children in tests. By 11 their achievement levels begin to drop off. By 16 there has been a collapse. And this is particularly true of black boys – 48% of all 16-year-old boys [nationally] gain five GCSEs, grades A to E. Only 13% of black boys in London achieve this standard. In some boroughs the figure is even worse. This is not a new issue."*[3]

In an effort to make black and Asian children feel more supported and welcome in British schools and with a determination to take seriously the controversial accusation that schools in Britain are institutionally racist, targeted attainment strategies were developed, including the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant.[4]

A spanner was thrown in the works of this multicultural system of classification, however, when more attention was focused on analyses which included variables measuring the relative poverty of children's backgrounds, such as parents' occupations and parents' claims for free school meals for their children (Cassen R. & Kingdon G. 2007). It suddenly became clear that the children least likely to do well in the British education system were no longer black Caribbean boys, but relatively poor, white working class boys.[5] This caused something of a seismic shock in the nation: it was picked up and sensationalised by the national press and education specialists began the process of trying to chart a course through the dangerous waters of this new finding at a time when concern about the alienation of the white working classes in Britain was growing.[6]

Two things became apparent: firstly, the homogenous racial and ethnic grouping of white British children had concealed important differences between white families in Britain. This was not news to me. My book is not just about the differences between social classes in Britain but also about the differences between kinds of white working class people in Britain. The diversity of kinds of white working class families and neighbourhoods means that we should be speaking of the white working classes not the white working class. Anyway, the point is that the spanner in the works of the multicultural system of classification is social class.[7] Clearly it wasn't useful to think about all white people in Britain as being the same: white British people are divided by social class in ways that seriously affect children and young people's life chances and orientation to the world, including the world of work. Differences of social class are, therefore, intrinsic to an understanding of British-ness. It is not all about race and ethnicity.

It became clear that in the multicultural system of classification the relatively high attainment of white middle class children and young people had obscured the often chronically low achievement of the children of the poorest white working class families. Whilst the struggle for racial equality in Britain had been fought through multiculturalism, it was becoming obvious at the beginning of the 21st Century that, that struggle had become disconnected from another equally important political struggle: the struggle for greater equality between the social classes. This disconnection between race and class had been made easier by 30 years of British political history in which the ongoing relevance, to British life, of social class distinctions was disavowed. The meritocracy was to be celebrated no matter what and talk of the ongoing existence of the working classes had ironically become, under New Labour, a taboo subject.

Secondly, it became apparent that black-working class Caribbean boys were succeeding only marginally better than their white working class peers (Strand 2007, 2008). This undermined the hypothesis that black-Caribbean boys were failing simply because of institutional racism and suggested that the black-Caribbean boys who were failing were also likely to be those from the poorest of working class families. This allowed a radical hypothesis to emerge, a hypothesis that most people don't want to hear: white working class and black Caribbean working class boys in Britain have more in common than a multicultural system of classification has allowed anyone to realise. Indeed, it could conceivably be the case that white working class boys in Britain have more in common with black Caribbean working class boys, in the same kinds of neighbourhoods they are growing up in, than they do with white middle class boys who live different kinds of lives.

The term 'white working class' is not a perfect phrase to use. It needs to be understood in the context of the definition of social class and that what it means to be 'working class' is a multiracial phenomenon.

This suggestion of commonality between white and black people in Britain upsets the multicultural system of classification, which organises people into distinct racial and ethnic groups defined by unchanging and bounded cultures. It also derails the educational bandwagon, that is just getting geared up, whose momentum is being created by proposals to treat the white working class as if it were simply a new ethnic group, a group that needs ethnically focused, racially segregated, targeted attainment strategies to do with teaching white working class pupils and families about their distinctive cultural identity[8] (Demie F. & Lewis K. 2010).

The problem with this is that if it is clear that black and Asian people can be working class too, it is absolutely vital that educationalists come to terms with the fact that the working class in Britain is a multi-racial

phenomenon:

> *"The term 'white working class' is not a perfect phrase to use. It needs to be understood in the context of the definition of social class and that what it means to be 'working class' is a multiracial phenomenon. Without this it is impossible to recognise that the working class in Britain is multi-racial. There are many working class communities which are not challenged by social and economic deprivation, although working class communities in general are likely to experience the impact of economic crises deeply. The use of the phrase is not intended to imply deficit. The use of the term 'working class' is intended to indicate that there continues to be a group of people in society whose children are extremely likely to reproduce the social and economic conditions of their parents' lives, if not see a deterioration in life conditions relative to their parents. As soon as that is no longer true in Britain, there will be no need to talk of the working class because social mobility will be available to all. The NUT believes, however, that division by social class in our society is real and cannot be ignored."* NUT (2010: 3)

What this means, necessarily, is that black, white and Asian people share history in common in the ways that they have come to be distinctively British. The way this works in each neighbourhood and region of Britain is different, but there is a rich localised and national history[9] to discover about how immigrants of all kinds – both white and non-white – have, over hundreds of years, come to be present in working class neighbourhoods and communities. The story to be told is how the struggle for greater class equality, realised largely through the self-organising collective action of the Labour and trades union movements, intersects messily with the struggle for racial equality.[10] There is nothing straightforward about this. It is complicated. The point is that now more than ever, we need to teach young people – black, white and Asian – in British schools how to think about the complications of the history their ancestors have lived through and what that means for their appreciation of the present moment and what kind of future they imagine for themselves. It is this sharing of history that an exclusively multicultural system of classification cannot account for.

This is the moment, then, in British politics, to state loudly and clearly, that black, white and Asian people in Britain are bound together by the history they share in common. This shared history is to do with the rise and fall of the British Empire,[11] which extended the boundaries of Britain and British citizenship across the four corners of the globe. It is also to do with a social structure, which, whether we like it or not, despite the achievements of the meritocracy, is still defined by the distinctions associated with social class. Just as white people in Britain cannot ignore the history of Empire, which links them inextricably to black and Asian

people, black and Asian people cannot avoid the fact that British-ness is about having to come to terms with the possibilities and limitations associated with how social class works in Britain. It is exactly this sharing of history that the British National Party wants us all to forget.

If it is true that white working class boys, who are the most likely to fail at school in Britain, face similar problems to black Caribbean working class boys, then it means that we need to focus a lot more on what makes being a working class boy in the education system so difficult. These difficulties are considerable and I have written about them elsewhere (Evans 2006b, Evans forthcoming), but I summarise them here. They are to do with:

a) Being more likely to live in neighbourhoods where masculinity is defined violently on the street, which leads to the necessity for boys to have to develop a tough fighting stance, what I call an oppositional stance, that make certain kinds of boys want to resist the humiliation associated with what it means to be a good boy and do well at school.
b) Having to make sense of the effects in school of this oppositional stance that makes it more likely for a small minority of boys to continuously disrupt the learning of other working class children – the majority – who are ready and willing to learn and want to do well.
c) Being more likely to attend failing schools where the economic and social realities of working class life are more likely to be misunderstood and where there is less likely to be the strong leadership[12] required to make sure that adult authority is secure and school discipline conducive to effective learning for all.
d) Being more likely to have to cope with the continuous disruption of a minority of dominant boys whose conflicts may be reflective of on-going conflicts in the wider community where particular local families exist in a state of continuous conflict.
e) Being more likely to come from families where the ability of one or both parents to care for their children is disrupted by the demands of working class life, which leads boys in particular to look more and more to the solidarity of their male friendships on the street.
f) Being more likely to live in neighbourhoods where there is a history of labour that didn't depend on educational success, where a boy could leave school at the age of 14 or 15 and walk into a working class job and feel a sense of working class pride.
g) Being more likely to live in neighbourhoods where good economic prospects for working class families and the chance of social mobility through employment – not education – are in decline.
h) Being more likely to grow up in areas of the country where the demise of the industrial and manufacturing economies over the last 30 years has led to a prolonged and often traumatic state of transition to long-

term unemployment or insecure working class jobs in the service economy, which is now in recession.

i) Being more likely to live in neighbourhoods where once strong social networks of support have diminished and where strong, but not necessarily conventional family structures, are likely to be the exception rather than the rule.

j) Being more likely to be influenced by media stereotypes of wealth without education where young men dream of getting rich quick and of buying prestige at any price.

In summary, only when we begin to take account of and have found a way to communicate effectively about the similar kinds of social, political and economic issues facing black Caribbean working class boys and white working class boys, can we come to properly appreciate the significance of the ethnic differences between them.[13] The way ahead, in the current political climate, is uncertain, but one thing I am sure of: if we treat the white working class like a new ethnic group and offer, as a targeted attainment strategy, nostalgic celebrations of the Queen's Jubilee and reminiscences about the heritage of the Second World War, as if there was ever a time when a racially segregated vision of white working class culture was justified, we will utterly fail to educate the young people of Britain about the real difference that social class makes to their lives. What a lost opportunity that would be and what a gift to the British National Party.

Footnotes

1 It is important to note that although the statistics now allow us to clearly appreciate that white working class children and young people are the least likely to do well in education in Britain, this is not a new phenomenon. Practitioners and academics have been aware for decades of the impact of social class on educational attainment. For a classic interpretation of the issue see Paul Willis' book, *Learning to Labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*.

2 To get a sense of this area of research see David Gillborn's books *Race, Ethnicity and Education: teaching and learning in multi-ethnic schools* (Key Issues in Education).

3 Abbott, 2002, (accessed April 16th 2010). http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2002/jan/06/publicservices.race

4 The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) is a fund devised in 1999, administered by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF); it is devolved to local authorities and designed to support the achievement of minority ethnic pupils.

5 Media attention had already been drawn to the chronically low educational achievement of white working class boys (Ahmed, K. and

Townsend, M. (2003) but the assumption was still that black Caribbean boys still fared worse. 'Among poorer white boys only 18 per cent achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A to C compared with an average among white boys of 50 per cent. Among poorer girls, 25 per cent get five or more GCSEs at A to C compared with a national average of 61 per cent.' (accessed 16th April 2010 http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2003/aug/17/uk.schools1).

6 Sparking controversy, in 2008, the BBC attempted to explore this issue in a series of specially commissioned works entitled White Season.

7 Social class in Britain is a category of relative and ranked distinction. It situates people in relation to economic and political history; in relation to educational and socio-cultural history; in relation to a history of housing and health spanning across three generations of family life, which makes grandparents particularly important figures in oral testimonies and which suggests that it takes three generations to completely change the class position of a family up or down the social hierarchy. In other words social class is a relative and ranked category of distinction that indexes, in a complex way, any person's historical placement in a society defined by a particular kind of moral and political economy. In a nation defined by class relations we are constantly engaged in reading each other's history, trying to work out what the body and its language can tell us about social class and all of its subtle degrees of distinction. As such class is a peculiarly British obsession, one that intersects clumsily and continuously with a more historically recent and discursively more prominent preoccupation with notions of equality (Evans 2010a).

8 What would a strategy for encouraging the white working class to understand itself as a new ethnic group, in a multicultural system of classification, mean for the growing numbers of mixed race children in Britain? These children and young people signify what strategies of racial and ethnic distinctiveness are trying to avoid: black, white and Asian people in Britain share a long history and relations in common. Racial, ethnic and cultural boundaries are permeable and change over time.

9 One of the practical recommendations arising out of the new targeted attainment strategies is that local history could be a relatively easy way to encourage a positive attitude to white working class 'identity'. I agree that a localised history curriculum is a good idea to encourage learning about the significance to British children of social class, but this must be a history that can tell the story of how the working class in Britain came, over time, to be a multi-racial phenomenon. Trying to invent a tradition of white working class culture segregated from black and Asian people in Britain is a dangerous form of mythologizing that is

completely in line with the thinking of the British National Party.

10 How many of us appreciate, for example, that Asian women were at the forefront of industrial struggles in Britain in the 1970s? (accessed April 16th 2010 www.connectinghistories.org.uk).

11 The campaign for inclusion of a more 'diverse' history of Britain in the Citizenship curriculum is justified but in so far as it fails to account for social class it leads to a simplistic understanding of British history that cannot account for the working class as a multi-racial phenomenon. It leads, as a consequence to a 'diversity' perspective in which black and Asian people are defined only by their race, ethnicity and culture and white working class children are seen, therefore, to have a worrying lack of awareness about their 'cultural identity' (Department for Education and Skills, 2007).

12 A number of publications have focused on how essential strong leadership is to successful schools and positive outcomes for working class children. See, for example, (Mongon and Chapman 2008).

13 My argument is not to suggest that ethnic difference is not significant among working class children. There is a pressing need for research to explain why the majority of white working class and black Caribbean working class boys fail to do well at school whilst Chinese and Indian working class children appear to thrive in education.

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Redefining Masculinity: new lines of thought

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Abstract: *A recent study of the educational attainment of British children found that boys who live in poverty are more educationally disadvantaged even than girls in similar circumstances (Mensah and Kiernan, 2010). The author's recent work in the south Wales ex-mining valleys has brought her into contact with boys who are disaffected from school and who fit the profile of potential NEETs (not in education, employment or training). In this article the author explores changes in the social perceptions of working class youth, changes in the school curricula aimed at re-engaging working class boys and recent work in gender studies.*

Changing perceptions of working class youth

My aim in writing this paper is to support teachers working in schools that recognise that harsh discipline will not solve the problem of white, working class boys' educational underachievement (e.g. Mongon and Chapman, 2009). The U.K. is aligning itself with a global movement to invest in human capital through transforming its school curricula. This has arisen as a response to general anxieties about Britain as a declining nation, ill-prepared to compete in a global market where other countries are said to have developed skills in ICT literacy. In the past, working class boys who did not do well in secondary school were contained, often in special units, until they reached the legal school leaving age. If they left school with few qualifications, there was little public concern because it was assumed that they would learn skills on the job in apprenticeships. The collapse of the industrial base in the U.K. has greatly reduced apprenticeships in manual and technical sectors fuelling public concern that working class boys will remain unemployed and turn to crime and hooliganism.

Neary (2002) argued that youth emerged as a social category with a

distinctive form of human sociability in the second half of the 20th century. Following the Second World War youth was viewed as a useful resource for post war reconstruction of the economy. However, this did not last long and the term 'youth' became associated with delinquency, viewed as a threat to social order. The emergence of cultural studies in the 1970s defined the resistances of the youth in the material experiences of the working-class, rather than middle-class culture, which lent itself well to the new radical sociologies influenced by Marxism. Aligned against the middle-class norms and values, youth emerged as a political threat.

Since the 1970s the study of working class boys in the UK has been framed within a Marxian concern with the worker (Blackman *et al.*, 2008). A landmark study in the Marxist tradition was Willis' (1977) Learning to Labour which used functionalist analysis to demonstrate that schools create the workers of the future and that working class groups were churned out as factory fodder. In the U.S., Braverman's (1974) Labor and Monopoly Capital called on what became known as economic Marxism to make a similar point. Class ideology was used to explain processes of social oppression. This kind of analysis removed any incentive to talk about pedagogy because it tended to view the inner workings of the school as a 'black box' in which class hierarchies were reproduced.

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Althusser (1971) argued that what happened inside schools, along with other social institutions such as the army and the church, produced social identities. Therefore the rituals, routines and interactional minutia of what happens in schools on a day-to-day basis became worthy of critical attention. Such approaches focused on how young people became labelled as an 'A', 'E' or special needs student and how this provided them with identities within schools that they had to manage (Blackman *et al.*, 2008).

Cultural Studies drew attention to the active construction of alternative identities through youth sub cultures such as punk in Hebdige's (1979) Subculture: the meaning of style and Hall and Jefferson's (1989) Resistance through Rituals. Such theorists argued that working class resistance to the academic culture of schools signalled the existence of radical and transformative acts. Idealistic views of working class potential to disrupt the status quo have disappeared from current discourses to be replaced with a pathological image of working class youth as violent druggies who set light to cars and throw missiles at middle class

houses. Instead of viewing working boys/men as heroic, the engine of industrial production and the seedbed of social transformation, they are now viewed as surplus to requirement. The solution is to refashion them more in the line of the educated middle classes.

Working class youth, especially in the old coal and steel producing areas of the country, live at a pivotal point betwixt the industrial past and emergent economies of global capitalism. We do not know if the crumbling structures of the old economy are going to support new economic growth. Whilst youth bear the brunt of social rupture, the image of working class boys has become a symbolic dumping ground for ubiquitous fears and anxieties that go hand-in-hand with social change. White working class boys have become a pathologized group (Skeggs, 2004). Yet, brought up with working class traditions, community ethos, housing and family structures they live in very different social and economic conditions to middle class young people.

The question that we face is do we wish to draw on working class traditions as potential sources of social renewal or do we wish to eliminate working class perspectives from future social imaginaries? The remarkable complexity of post 14 education provision appears to encompass every possible route forward. It seems that educational policy is undecided on this point.

Changes in school curricula

Recently economists have argued that schools should teach skills required for economic competitiveness. In the face of globalised markets and possible economic decline, this argument has acquired renewed vigour (Leitch, 2006). Increasingly in curricular documents, the term 'skill' is used as a common descriptor to describe both vocational and academic courses. Educational policy is being driven by the perceived need to build a 'knowledge economy' based on generic skills within a flexible and tailor-made curriculum that addresses individual needs and potentiality.

Yet, teaching skills in school creates tensions because it removes skilled practices such as engineering and health and beauty from their fields of production. Apprenticeship in these applied fields derived their value and usefulness from being learned outside schools. Also, academic or text-based courses have traditionally enjoyed higher status than practical learning in schools in the U.K. By making 'skills' the common descriptor for both academic and vocational courses, policy makers aim to blur the boundary between academic and vocational education. By spreading provision after age 14 across sites other than schools, such as work places, Further Education Colleges and other public sector "providers", the boundaries between school and work also become blurred. Part of the motivation to describe all courses in terms of skills is to remove the stigma

of low status attached to vocational courses and thus by blurring the boundaries between academic and vocational subjects make schooling more attractive to disaffected groups.

There is a deep confusion about what is meant by 'skill' evidenced by the array of terms (e.g. hard, soft, basic, generic, specific and key) found in curricular documents. Even so, such terms signal a need for knowledge to be applicable, generalisable as in life-skills and outward looking as in work-ready. We can detect a shift from knowledge viewed as text-based, cognitive and elitist to knowledge viewed as applied, embodied and egalitarian. Shifting school knowledge in this way appears to broaden knowledge and make it applicable to all, not only to educational elites. However, early research suggests that many vocational courses are not re-engaging young people and are not providing the skills that employers want (Hayward, Oancea & Wilde, 2008 a & b; Stanton & Bailey, 2005). In order to consider some of the challenges that schools face in re-engaging young people, I next turn to a brief review of new thinking about gender.

New ways to think about gender

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s we witnessed a moral panic about the potential threat surrounding youth that grew incrementally. Studies of gender suggested that white working class boys draw on culturally available discourses in order to be recognised as 'masculine' (e.g. Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002). Connell (1987) identified the body reflexive practices of "fighting, football and fucking" as acts used to perform and signal hegemonic masculinity. Actions such as rejecting academic work, boasting about effortless achievement and disruptive behaviour were said to be ways to demonstrate masculinity. Boys' underachievement in school came to be seen as a consequence of their performed masculinity that teachers recognised as anti-school behaviour.

Walkerdine (2009) suggested that subject positions such as masculinity have to be continuously re-won as if a perfect version of the imagined masculinity is always just out of reach or in danger of escaping. '(T)he production of a heroic masculinity' and 'autonomous masculinity' (Walkerdine, 2009, p. 33), for example, require emotional work that takes effort to perform and which is formative in producing boys as men (ibid). The hyper masculinity that appears as 'laddism' in schools has elements of heroic masculinity and requires defence against the feminism of academic 'head' rather than masculine 'body' work associated with working class 'craft and graft' (Nayak, 2006), even though the jobs in manual labour no longer exist for these boys.

The conundrum for working class boys is how to perform masculinity while trying to imagine futures that are devoid of the socio-cultural resources that have traditionally upheld the 'hypermasculinity' of working

class white boys/men. However, a further requirement is to pay close attention to the material as well as symbolic resources available to young people living in specific locales, with specific geographies, specific historical legacies and particularly in communities that are experiencing traumatic transitions into post-industrial economies. There is a growing recognition that social structure is as much a product of place, history and duration as it is social class. Socio-cultural approaches have come to recognise the importance of place and history in the formation of social identities (e.g. Holland, D & Lave, J, 2001).

Neary (2002) argues that from 1948 onwards a particular form of youth labour and the culture that was associated with it have been destroyed. Opportunities to work, or to imagine entering into work, with distinct sector identities and identifiable communities of practice, have disappeared. Instead youth has become the source of cheap labour. In many

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of the available service industry jobs there are no prospects of becoming central participants because there is no skill progression to mark out mastery (Sennet, 2009). The very impossibility of becoming genuinely engaged and therefore of acquiring a sense of belonging is negated with flexible, impermanent, low skill jobs.

There is a growing body of work on peer group cultures that investigates forms of performed masculinity that have hierarchical, social status among boys. Such work has led Nayak (2006), for example, to suggest that instead of being pitted against the oppressive state, as in a Marxist analysis, working class boys are using reflexive-body practices to pit themselves against other factions within the working class (e.g. Charvers against 'Real Geordies'). The enactment of muscular-body capital inherited from an industrial past when 'graft and grime' were valued are redeployed to assert identities such as the 'heroic' involvement in crime or drinking that working class factions use to achieve distinct group identities. We can see these kinds of dynamics at play in peer group cultures within schools, where boffins are pitted against goth's, emos, nerds etc. Youth is not so much struggling against alienating forms of capital and labour so much as struggling against itself.

I wish to close by presenting two vignettes from interviews with boys in south Wales valley communities to demonstrate how they were living alternative lives and acquiring skills to the ones recognised and sanctioned by schools. Some schools are trying to work with working class community values, thus contributing to a slow process of social regeneration. We need more schools to join in.

Working class boys: invisible skills

Rhys lived with his dad, mum and three sisters from two relationships. He came to school with his arms covered in mud. During a session in the special needs class, which consisted of seven boys aged 14 years, Rhys recounted how he had seen a dog run over by a car at the weekend. The other boys laughed and talked of the blood and gore. Rhys reprimanded them telling them, *'How would you like it if your dog had been run over?'* He had given his pup to the lady whose dog had been run over. He had hand-reared the pup when it had been abandoned by its mother. This involved feeding it every four hours for the first few weeks, getting up in the middle of the night, racing home from school and getting his mum to take over when he could not make a feed. Rhys had reared dozens of ferrets and was able to tell me in great detail how to hunt with them. He also knew the precise legal position on hunting rabbits and deer and using a shot gun. He had learned these skills from his dad and uncles who were long-term unemployed due to the lack of suitable jobs in the valley. He had a knowledgeable, caring and respectful relationship with animals and had bought and sold at least six dogs using his entrepreneurial skills. He had learned to build kennels with his dad and explained to me why some dogs must sleep outside. I came to realise that the mud on his arms was worn as a badge of honour, a mark of his relationship with the land. Rhys was excluded from school before the study came to an end.

Youth has become the source of cheap labour.

Gareth, aged 14, owned three trail bikes. He pointed from the classroom window out towards the mountains surrounding the valley and described the stunts he performed on his Scorpa 125cc dirt bike. Doing wheelies was a basic trick that could be done on his bike but with far greater success if he rode his father's more powerful bike. Areas dedicated to stunts had been forged in the mountains as numerous bikes had ridden up and down creating hollows and ruts. Gareth rode his bike off banks with steep descents sometimes with sudden drops of up to three metres. He had been taught to ride by his father and described when to accelerate, how to move his body and when to ease off the clutch to achieve a sequence of manoeuvres. He described these skills in a matter-of-fact kind of way without boasting.

Learning to become bikers taught boys about male adult life. Gareth

had sophisticated ways to avoid police detection en route to the mountains. In the mountains fathers had to watch out for their sons in case they were ambushed by the police. When asked directly if their activities were illegal all the boys we interviewed told us that once they were in the mountains they were not breaking the law. The social divide between the police and the biker men/boys heightened the sub cultural quality of the sport. Furthermore, Gareth differentiated sport bikers, who he said 'draw the police', from trail bikers. He wanted to get on with biking peacefully, out of the public and police gaze. Characteristics of this male social world were independence, freedom, developing skill and avoiding police contact.

Rethinking skills: teachers as social transformers

Rhys and Gareth were constructing masculine identities within communities that grew up to service heavy industry. Such communities arose, reached peaks of extraordinary productivity and receded into decline in relatively short periods of time. The harsh realities of working down coal mines required boys/men to develop strength, resilience and endurance; qualities that were opposite to those required for office and professional jobs available in middle class communities. In order to survive, the communities had to find ways to value hard physical labour. Body practices became sources of pride and anchored male working class identities. It is not surprising then, that in the wake of the massive pit closures in the 1970s and 1980s, boys continue to recognise and value the skilled body. The two vignettes above demonstrate transformations in working class masculinity. Fathers inducted their sons into skilled bodily practices such as hunting and biking using resources available within rural landscapes. These practices retain residues from the relatively recent past when fitness, physical prowess and survival skills were essential. Outside school such skills were sources of pride for the boys we interviewed. However, within school these skills were taboo. They neither spoke to peers about these skills in class nor boasted about them to us. They were wary of institutional authority. Our research found that local police practice was changing to become relatively tolerant of local trail biking and hunting practices. Can schools also change?

Firstly, for schools to achieve change, they need to recognise the link between working class history and pride associated with the skilled body. Some have suggested that schools should find ways to celebrate and reward a wider range of practice than just those associated within the academic curricula (e.g. Brighouse, 2009). I suspect that this will simply perpetuate the divide between academic and non academic practices and which groups become aligned with them. Secondly, schools have an opportunity to develop courses that explicitly recognise the links between

body and mind. Even in science the body has to be trained, for example to look down a microscope and identify specific shapes. The shift to describe all post 14 provision in terms of skills provides a real possibility for schools to do something radical. Thirdly, schools can resist the neo-liberal rhetoric of generic skills that creates an illusion that skills are transferable, disembodied and flexible.

Teachers can become what Peter McLaren (1998) called 'critical transformative intellectuals' and I believe that teachers have an appetite for active roles in social transformation if given enough support, autonomy and trust. One of the openings available to teachers, lies in a curricula defined in terms of skills if we remember what skilled practices involve. All learning requires effort, repetition and labour; skills are embodied as much as they are conceptual. Learning requires personal commitment and starting with what already motivates young people is a good first step. The challenge is to use skilled practices as the opening to genuine and transformative education.

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Education's important role in social cohesion

Angie Kotler

Angie Kotler has worked in education since 1980 and has been a teacher, trainer, LA curriculum adviser and project manager. She is now the Strategic Director of the Schools Linking Network. She has worked in London, Brighton, France, Zimbabwe and since 1991 in Bradford, where she started the Schools Linking Project in 2001.

Abstract: *There has been a duty on schools to contribute to community cohesion since 2007. Some have said that such a duty is unreasonable; that schools have more than enough to do and cannot take on all the problems in society. The author however, argues that there is an urgent and moral imperative for education to grasp this particular nettle. Failure in education is linked to almost every other social problem, and rather than it being a straightforward case of cause and effect, the article suggests that the challenge is rather more complex and that the education world absolutely needs to embrace and engage with this complexity. It is both a challenge and the most amazing opportunity to consider the role of schools as agents of change and evolution, she concludes.*

In September 2007, a new duty was introduced, requiring all schools to contribute to community cohesion. Although guidance was issued by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) (DfES at the time of publication) (2007), and the DCSF has worked hard to support the dissemination of this, it has been clear that this duty has posed unprecedented challenges to schools. The first of these lies in definitions – what does community cohesion actually mean? This leads to the question of why is it needed? And whether it is realistic to expect schools to be able to realistically contribute and how that contribution is measured and evaluated. Overall, many schools have been unclear how it connects to their main business of teaching and learning. If they are schools with many challenges in that area they have often felt that this duty is an additional burden they could well do without. Others however, have embraced the duty because it builds on what they instinctively knew was fundamental to the work they do; developing well rounded, confident, articulate young people, with excellent skills of communication, enquiry

and empathy, ready to go out into a diverse and complex 21st century world. It is the contention of this article that these skills are the most important ones for schools to teach and that they can only be taught successfully in the context of the real life environment within which children and young people live.

A bit of history

The Schools Linking Project was started in Bradford in 2001-02 when two major issues collided; one was the growing disparity of achievement between different (ethnic/socioeconomic/religious) groups in different schools. The other was the fear and mistrust that grew between different communities after the riots in the summer of 2001, followed directly by the events of 9/11. It seemed an obvious first step to share good practice between confident professionals in an attempt to find new solutions to stubborn problems, but it was felt that there would also be reciprocal gains in the possibility of direct contact between children of diverse backgrounds – not only for developing better communication skills with a real purpose, but also for allowing their natural curiosity about each other to blossom within a safe and structured environment. At this time the term community cohesion was quite new and it was felt that it referred only to northern towns and cities with particular problems. Since then the notion has expanded to include ideas of how we all live together, whoever and wherever we are, in the quest for a society which can live peacefully and productively.

An emerging model

The disparity between many of the schools in Bradford was exemplified by the first two schools that were approached to see if they would like to link. The first was a highly successful school in a leafy suburb with almost 100% white middle class children. The other was an inner city school with almost 100% Pakistani Muslim heritage children. This school was also relatively successful especially in early years, engagement with parents and the local community, but was struggling to get children to leave with good results at age 11. What these schools shared was unusual; post 9/11 they both demonstrated a courage and willingness to bring the concerns of the children and the community into school, where most schools found this too hard and preferred to try to keep school as a safe haven from the unspeakable horrors of the world outside.

The 'white' school had chosen to use its strength – drama – to allow children to explore their feelings about 9/11 and what was so striking was the power and quality of their writing as a result of that process, expressing their fears and hopes for a better future. They started to share their thoughts and feelings with the children in the other school. It

immediately became clear that we absolutely have a moral duty to provide children and young people with the space to express themselves in this way and furthermore to support them to develop the skills to do so. These ten year old children from both schools understood so quickly that they shared the same fears and hopes, albeit from a different perspective and they also understood that in order to grow up with confidence they would need the skills to understand more about these differences.

The teachers appreciated the schools' link for several reasons: firstly they were able to see their pupils in a new context and how they responded to this highlighted new learning for them. They saw them not just as their pupils, but as young people grappling with real issues in a genuine social context well beyond their normal experience and where they needed the skills to communicate and engage. They saw that the children rose willingly and successfully to that challenge when supported by the adults they trusted and this in turn inspired them, the adults, to grow bolder. They started to explore their own teaching methods and realised that they all had a lot to learn from each other. The staff from the school where all the children had English as their first language, saw that there was much they took for granted and assumed about the children that they now felt better equipped to investigate further. The staff from the school where most children had English as an additional language started to use more creative techniques to allow the children to express what really mattered to them. They all started to understand more deeply the concerns of the communities they served and to realise that they could support not only the children but also their families to overcome their fears and prejudices by engaging in dialogue and going beyond the news headlines to make real human contact and discover that everyone wanted the same things – to live in peace and work well together. (Ackroyd, C., Grant, P., Kershaw, J., Kotler, A., 2003).

They started to share their thoughts and feelings with the children in the other school and it was immediately clear that we absolutely have a moral duty to provide children and young people with the space to express themselves in this way and furthermore to support them to develop the skills to do so.

The work in Bradford grew, became established as a district wide strategy, and currently involves up to a hundred schools every year in a range of partnership projects. A large scale evaluation was carried out (Raw A, 2006) which provided the evidence needed to understand what it was that impacted on the teaching and learning and the ethos of the schools that participated. And in 2007, after two reports highlighting this good practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) and when the duty

to contribute to community cohesion was introduced, the DfES (now DCSF), asked the Bradford team to develop a national programme to support schools and local authorities to fulfil it.

The Schools Linking Network (SLN): what school linking is all about and how it supports community cohesion

School linking (either local, national or international), has been going on in many places for some time. Nevertheless, it felt very important to us at the Schools Linking Network (SLN) when embarking on a national programme to be clear that this work had started with twin aims of raising achievement and developing community cohesion and these would remain at the core of how it developed. The aims were set out as follows:

- to develop and deepen children and young people's knowledge and understanding of identity/ies, diversity, equality and community;
- to develop skills of enquiry, critical thinking, reflection and communication;
- to develop trust, empathy, awareness and respect;
- to provide opportunities for children and young people to meet, build new relationships, work together and contribute to the wider community; and
- to provide opportunities for adults, who work with children and young people, to share good practice, increase understanding of the issues of identity and community in their districts and to broaden perspectives.

This work is not merely a mechanism for bringing people together but when done well, engages both teachers and pupils in an ongoing cycle of high quality experiential learning and deeply reflective practice. Our task has been and remains that of supporting education professionals across England to understand and engage with the issues which in principle are the same for us all and yet are played out very differently in different contexts. Local ownership and understanding are crucial for successful cohesion work.

The most basic idea of school linking is based on contact theory (Allport G, 1954), which claims that having real human contact enables people to get past the myths and received wisdom about groups of people, which we all absorb from media and other influences. Most people have at some point had the embarrassing experience where they find themselves generalising about a group of people (e.g. 'the French', 'black people', 'women', 'Jews'…etc) and then realise that a member of the group they are speaking about is present…and they say: "Oh I don't mean you!" While those examples may seem trivial and are sometimes even amusing, what they reveal is that we all unconsciously accumulate information about people who we perceive as 'others' and are rarely challenged about them

while we stay within a community which is relatively homogenous or unchanging. It could be argued that this may not matter for much of the time, but, for example after the London bombings of July 2007 or in the lead up to a general election, the media continue to play on the fear and schisms in society and the overall effect of this is that we have a society gripped with a combination of ignorance and fear, set against a background of international conflict. Our children are growing up in a world where there is a state of heightened anxiety; schools cannot ignore the impact that this has on the way children think. The challenge and the opportunity are to engage with that thinking and enable them to think past the headlines, question, challenge and feel empowered to make a difference.

Local ownership and understanding are crucial for successful cohesion work.

For many, school linking is seen as a benign activity, a nice thing to do, to make friends and learn something about other communities. At SLN we are quite clear that it has to be a lot more than that. Contact theory needed to be adapted to our context and our time, so the principles we adhere to are as follows:

- equitable benefits for all partners;
- safe but challenging processes;
- meaningful encounters including enjoyment and thought-provoking work;
- creative approaches to learning;
- time and space for reflection between encounters;
- recognition and respect for diversity;
- continuing Professional Development for staff; and
- institutional support and sustainable programmes.

Our most recent evaluation of linking across England (Raw A, 2009) shows that where it is done well and these principles are understood and applied, the results can be impressive as shown in the extracts below from the evaluation report.

While this mainly refers to children's learning the comments from teachers throughout the report echo the learning of the children. Where there is evidence of strong learning in the children, it is most often the case that teachers also show growth and development.

Trends in the ***strongest areas of learning*** *amongst children were seen in –*

- *children's openness to mixing;*
- *children's confidence to explore and express their own identity;*
- *children's awareness of a broader, mixed community to which they belong; and*
- *children's curiosity about different cultures and ways of life.*

"I was scared but now I'm keen to find out more about people" (Child)

"My confidence has really risen…I wasn't sure at first. It's about exploring, anticipating, but not censoring." (Teacher)

However when it is not done with preparation and care or embedded in the long-term practice of the school, the results can at best be superficial:

Trends in ***weakest levels of learning*** *amongst children were seen in:*

- *children's motivation to challenge prejudice based on curiosity to explore the concepts of identity; and*
- *children's keenness to explore and give effort to new diverse friendships.*

"I didn't stay with them, I played with my own friends." (Child)

"I have no capacity for this." (Teacher)

And at worst, when the linking is handled too 'lightly', it may harden negative attitudes:

Negative change – children becoming less open *– registered occasionally by teachers, or found in the focus group data for individual children.*

"I didn't like them, they were rude." (Child)

"I've done this before, not new, I felt no growth this year." (Teacher)

Lyn Davies, in her book: *Educating Against Extremism* (Davies L, 2008) echoes our concern to give due attention to work on identity, diversity and the issues they raise. She argues that treating serious issues lightly is never a good idea and that we need young people not only to have high ideals but also to have opportunities to experience different points of view and to develop highly developed critical thinking skills –something she calls 'critical idealism'.

Davies quotes Catron (Catron P, 2008) who, says that there are five key attitudes which foster real growth. While Davies and Catron are talking about de-radicalisation of young people, it could be argued that these attitudes are essential for all young people to cultivate, to build resilience to more negative forces. The attitudes include:

- the raising of students' life experiences, as new knowledge will be related to prior knowledge for deep learning to occur: and discussion of religion should occur in the classroom;
- a willingness to reveal our own struggles with faith and intellectual

development;
- an acceptance of students' views, wherever they are on the development scale;
- patience; and
- a willingness to engage in dialogue with views that may be fundamentally opposed to your own.

If we do not do these things in classrooms where else do young people have the opportunity to build these skills? And if they do not, do we feel we have done our job as educators? All of the work we undertake at SLN strives to support young people in developing these skills and to support their teachers to help them to do so.

Model United Nations

One of the projects SLN has developed has been to work with a group of secondary school students from ten different schools over a period of 18 months to develop their skills and knowledge in political processes, research, debating and learning to work together as a team. The students have been involved in the Model United Nations (MUN). This replicates on a smaller scale the actual United Nations and involves students from different schools coming together to debate, caucus and develop resolutions on important world issues such as child labour or women's development. We have worked closely with these young people and have learned as much from them as we hope they have from us and each other. One of the most impressive and moving outcomes of this work is the way they frequently express how much this opportunity has meant to them, that it has opened doors to the wider world, it has given them confidence to go anywhere to find what they want, to work with other people who they never would have imagined being able to get along with and how they feel impelled to work with their schools to ensure that more young people have these same opportunities.[1]

A new era in education?

In 2010 there are indeed many challenges and opportunities for education. The exploration of the past nine years of how school linking can provide a vehicle for bringing rich experience and reflective practice into the curriculum has been both exciting and frustrating. It is exciting when teachers tell us that it reminds them what they went into teaching for; that it has allowed them to think outside the box, that it has given them a new perspective by working with colleagues in different contexts and by giving them opportunities to view their own lives and those of their pupils with new eyes. It is inspiring when a courageous headteacher tells us that she is going to change the way her school works, that she will no longer

'paper over the cracks', but fully embrace the issues both within and surrounding her school. It is encouraging when another says that a day with SLN has been the best professional development of his career.

And it is frustrating when so many teachers tell us that they do not have enough time to do this work justice, that they cannot find time to have reflection sessions after a linking day because there is no space in an overcrowded timetable, and giving children time to think, write and talk about what they are learning about themselves and others is not seen as

Where there is evidence of strong learning in the children, it is most often the case that teachers also show growth and development.

valuable. It is a concern that we are still burdened by a system that is not fully supportive of teachers in allowing them to use their professional judgement about what their children really need to learn and that does not equip them to do so.

Overall it is an exciting time, with a new curriculum and who knows what changes are on the horizon with a new government. There is cause for optimism and an imperative to act. It may seem like an overwhelming task for schools to engage with difficult issues but we know that it can be done. In those schools where it is happening, staff and students alike feel a sense of belonging and connection which roots them and allows them to be fully themselves, a place where they can grow, learn and thrive. At the same time this gives them confidence to look outwards to meet the world with curiosity and kindness.

Footnote

1 See www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk

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The F.A.C.E. of Tomorrow's Schools

Abstract: *Family and Community engagement has for too long been an under realised tool in secondary schools but new guidelines have made this a new territory for schools to excel in. Research (Sacker, Schoon & Bartley 2002, Hango 2005, Ipsos Mori poll) has shown that engaging parents can increase the ability of students to perform; increasing learning potential by 27% at age 11 and 14% at age 16, irrespective of the parents prior learning. 62% of schoolchildren say they learn the most from their mother. At Phoenix High School the authors and their colleagues have been working with parents and the community for five years and have seen an increase in student attendance and attainment. In this article, the authors describe this story and the steps that the school experience has made along the way.*

Marcia Clack

Marcia Clack has worked at Phoenix High School for four years, taking over the Family Learning department in its infancy. She is currently the Manager of the Family and Community Engagement Department (FACE).

Garry McMillan

Garry McMillan has worked at Phoenix High School for 11 years and is currently the Director of Facilities and Development, he oversees the FACE Department and all the outward facing elements of the school.

Introduction: The School and Local Area

Phoenix High School is located adjacent to the White City Estate, west London, in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The school serves a culturally diverse community. It has a number of partners working together with a proactive Family Learning Centre run by the school with strong ties within the local community. It has a ¾ acre farm on site which is used by six local primary/preschools along with community groups and local residents.

15 years ago Phoenix High School was in a very dire situation with only four per cent of students getting five or more A*-C GCSEs. Sir William Atkinson, the current headteacher, was brought in to turn the school around and this year the school was named number one in the Contextual Value Added table.

However, many of the local community still remember Phoenix as it was in 1995, and this has been the focus behind improving the community cohesion aspect of the school.

The Context

The main family unit in the local area lives within modest means, with approximately 40% of families being poorer minority families and deprived families in social housing (Experian 2005-06). 29% of individuals are young people up to 20 years of age (Office for National Statistics 2003). Eight percent of residents are categorised as not being of good health (Office for National Statistics 2003). Childhood obesity in the borough is one of the highest in London and is both an NHS and Local Authority target for 2009-10. The National Child Measurement Programme results for 2006-07 (NHS, Eastern Region Public Health Observatory, Information Centre 2008) indicated that 11% of Reception children in the borough were obese; rising to 23% of children by Year Six.

The Local Authority and Primary Care Trust have set a target to minimise the rate of obesity prevalence (to 24.6% in 2010-11), but they recognise that this will not be achieved without community based intervention and collaborative working.

All the indicators show that this is a deprived area:

- the Wormholt and White City ward, in which the school is located is in the top five per cent of the most deprived super output areas in the country, with crime sixth highest out of 32,482 (Office for National Statistics 2005);
- students start in Year Seven with levels of prior learning that are significantly below those typically found nationally. Many also arrive after the traditional start of the school year; about a tenth are refugees or asylum seekers;
- around half of the students speak English as an additional language, about a tenth at the early stages;
- almost two-thirds of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the largest number being those with behavioural, emotional or social difficulties; 56% are on free school meals;
- White City is a deprived low income area, and 29 different languages are spoken with Arabic, Somali and Polish being the three main languages;
- there is a higher rate of deprivation in the north of the Borough. This is consistent with the Index of Multiple Deprivation Report (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007) finding increased deprivation near London's main road networks (A40);
- the Well London report of Summer 2008 (University of East London. Well London Community Engagement and Mapping Teams 2009) noted that "White City residents had a perception that there is not enough places for young people to go after school hours in the school holidays"; and
- Hammersmith & Fulham has the highest youth unemployment in

London.

The History of Family and Community Engagement at Phoenix High School

The Family Learning Centre at Phoenix has been in operation since 2005. Before the appointment of the Family Learning Coordinator in June 2006, family/community involvement was negligible. The family outreach worker started hosting literacy classes for Romany travellers. These classes were very poorly attended with only two to three parents attending. We began to explore ways of building relations with the local community and helping our students find common ground with pupils from other schools. We also wanted to provide reasonable means for children, young people, their families and members of the local community to interact with people from different backgrounds and build positive relations with the wider community, take part in activities and receive services which build positive interaction and achievement for all groups.

Our experience has shown us that the biggest obstacle that we face in engaging parents and the local community is that many have negative memories of school and hence learning. In order to counter this we began by using a soft approach to learning, inviting parents for cultural coffee mornings and arts/crafts events, thus increasing their confidence. At this point, we suggested that they undertake accredited courses e.g. ICT, European Computer Driving Licence and Food Hygiene Certificates. Adult GCSEs are now being delivered which have proved highly popular.

In September 2007 we developed a community farm and learning zone. Phoenix High School Farm and Learning Zone was conceptualised in 2007 with the primary aim of educating students, their parents and the local community in growing and producing healthy food, along with a programme of learning and awareness about healthy eating and nutrition. The farm has proved invaluable, especially as the area has one of the highest obesity levels in London.

What is Family Engagement?

Family learning/engagement is aimed at parents/carers or the family (including friends) and is delivered as a shared experience between adults and children.

Examples of family learning and engagement at Phoenix High School include:

- arts and crafts;
- flower arranging;
- ICT courses;
- sports activities;
- cooking clubs;

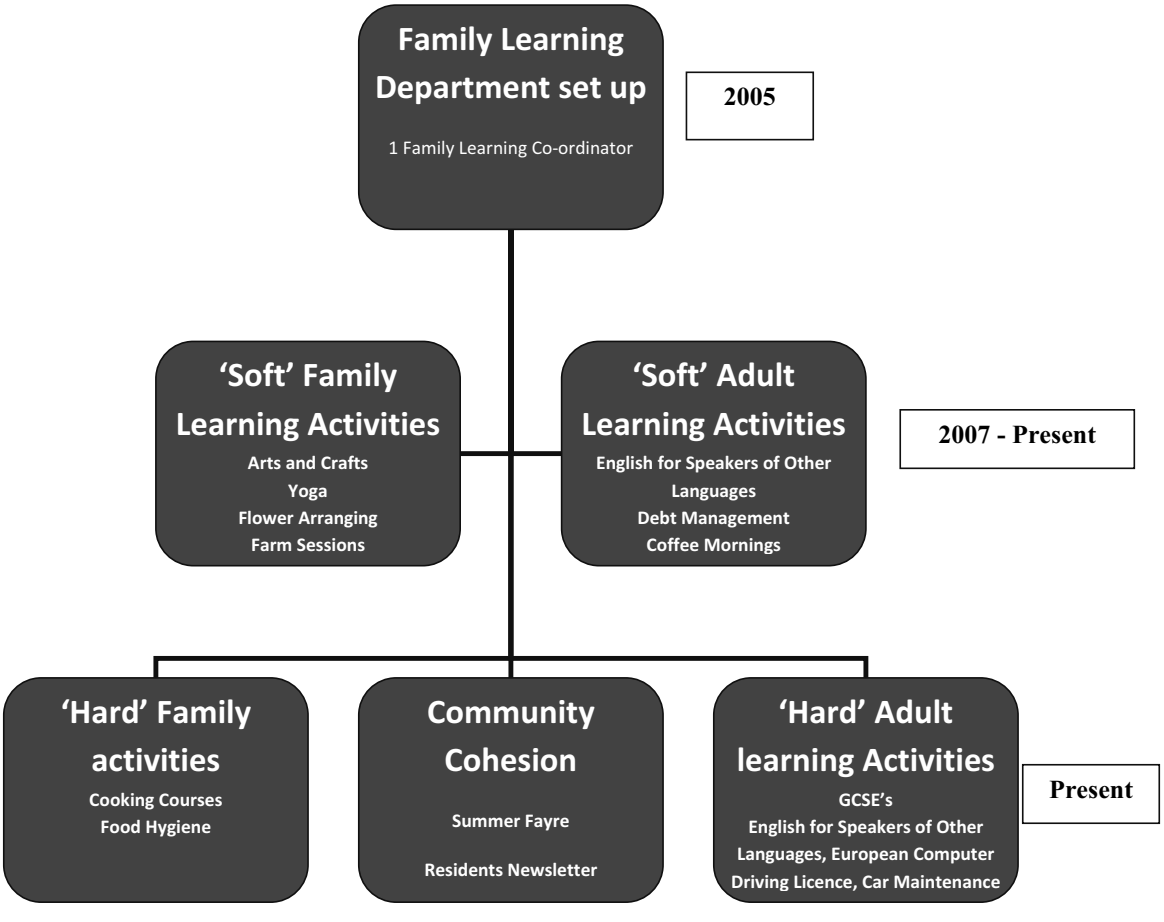
- basic car maintenance; and
- events – summer fayre, harvest festival, healthy living week, community dinners.

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is the building of long term relationships for the purpose of developing a collective vision for the benefit of the local community.

Examples of community engagement at Phoenix High School include:

- events;
- residents committee/newsletters;
- food co-op; and
- farm volunteers/family learning volunteers.



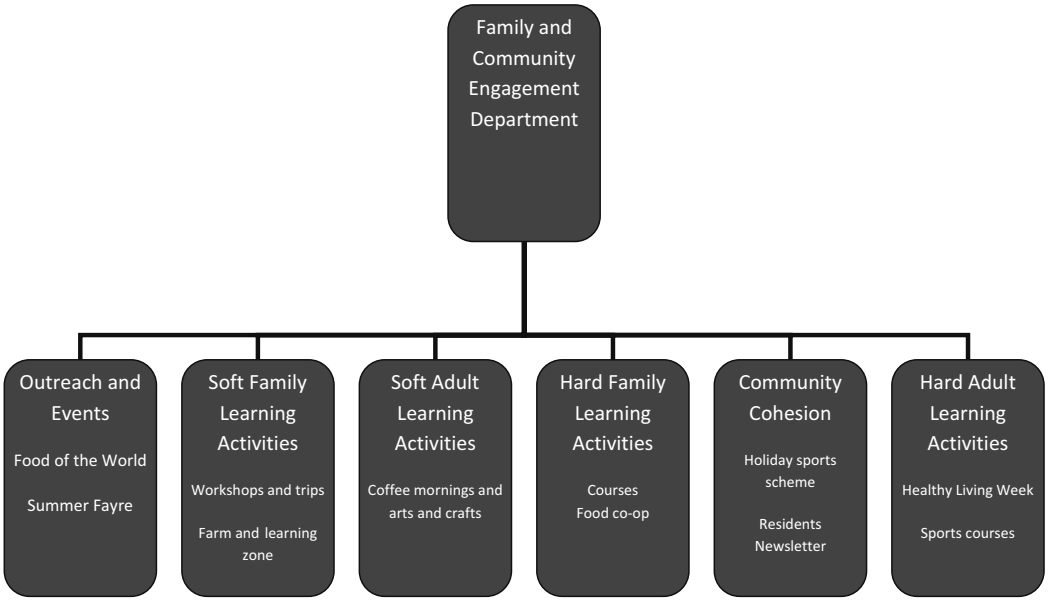
What is Adult Learning?

Adult learning is the practice of teaching and educating adults. This includes workplace learning, vocational training, as well as skills and personal development learning.

Examples of adult learning at Phoenix High School include:

- food hygiene certificate;
- cooking classes;
- farm sessions;
- ECDL;
- ESOL;
- money matters;
- debt/housing advice;
- level 1 coaching (for football, rugby or Gaelic football);
- one to one life coaching; and
- parenting classes.

Our Current Approach (an overview):



Our Current Approach (two examples in detail):

Outreach and Events

Food of the World

We have found that food activities are a positive way to engage the community and celebrate cultural differences. A recent Food of the World

event celebrating the diverse geography of Phoenix students held at the school, showcasing food cooked by parents from 15 countries around the world, was attended by 480 community members. Food and information sheets were prepared and distributed by Phoenix parents and their children.

Phoenix Summer Fayre

July 2009 was Phoenix High School's inaugural summer fayre. This free event was attended by 2,225 people. Local community groups and our cluster of schools and parents were invited to run stalls, with fairground rides and a BBQ.

Students from our young enterprise team sold cakes, drinks, sweets and organised a raffle.

We also showcased arts and crafts and farm produce used and produced during courses, to inspire further courses and community participation. This has encouraged volunteers and allowed course participants to develop their own projects.

Soft Family Learning Activities

Once we had initially attracted the parents with short taster courses we progressed to wider family learning courses.

Workshops and Trips

For example, we targeted all pupils and their parents in years Seven and Eight who had low attendance. We invited the parent and their child to attend a workshop. We have strong ties with the local police and the borough's welfare department. We showed a short presentation on attendance and offered practical advice (e.g. what to do if your child refuses to go to school).

Our projects are delivered in a way that breaks down traditional barriers and are fun, informative, practical and educational.

We offered family cook and eat sessions after school. The families are given a short, simple lesson on a different aspect of healthy eating before cooking a healthy dish. The course has proved extremely popular with 100% of children and parents rating the cooking club excellent overall and 85% of parents reporting an increase in household cooking.

We have also found that educational trips are a beneficial way to engage families. We have hosted trips to pick your own farms, Longleat, Arts & Crafts exhibition at Olympia and the Victoria & Albert museum.

Farm and Learning Zone

In September 2007 we developed a community farm and learning zone. The primary aim of this was to educate students, their parents and the local

community in growing and producing healthy food, along with a programme of learning and awareness about healthy eating and nutrition. This farm has proved invaluable especially as our ward has one of the highest obesity levels in London.

Soft Adult Learning Activities

Our parents generally have poor academic achievement and very low levels of learning themselves (as previously outlined).

Coffee Mornings and Arts and Crafts

In order to counter this, we began by using a soft approach to learning, such as inviting parents to cultural coffee mornings (e.g. Somali women's group) where translators were on hand to assist. The curriculum was explained along with school rules and attendance.

Our experience has shown us that the biggest obstacle that we face in engaging parents and the local community is that many have negative memories of school and hence learning.

Arts & crafts classes were also offered: parents were shown how to make handmade cards, clothes, bags and mosaics. We encouraged all participants to speak in English (most of the parents have English as an additional language) this helps them to improve their conversational skills. A 15 minute numeracy or literacy lesson was incorporated into the middle of sessions as a taster into education.

These soft activities increased confidence and self esteem, and were also key in enabling good social networking and friendships. All of these parents now have a more positive attitude to their children's schooling. These classes also helped with cultural integration of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Our arts/crafts sessions are run by a volunteer who is also a parent which makes participants feel more comfortable.

Hard Adult Learning Activities

Once our soft approach had attracted numerous parents and after monitoring and evaluating the courses we found that there was a large demand for accredited courses.

Courses

We offered food hygiene certificates, European Computer Driving License (ECDL), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

We have now launched English and maths GCSE's for adults. These

classes are free not just for Phoenix parents but also for members of the local community. The classes are full but due to phenomenal demand, we are currently applying for funding to host more classes.

The borough Adult Education department and the family learning programme leader at the adult and skills' service have collaborated with us and they currently provide free ESOL and ICT classes and will also provide basic car maintenance in May 2010.

Food Co-op

In March 2009 we launched a Food Co-op on the Farm. This enables local residents to buy fresh fruit and vegetables at a very low cost. Feedback from local residents has been largely positive. Volunteers are given a Food Hygiene accredited course and money handling training. To date 17 local residents have been involved in the design and running of the project, including eight volunteers who support the running of the weekly stall. Three of these volunteers have now gone on to employment with references from the school.

Community Cohesion

Phoenix High School is a focal point for local residents, which fosters better relationships between diverse communities. Recent consultations around White City stated the lack of provision for young people and their families during school holidays as a major concern. Our aim was to:

- engage young people and their families in projects where they can learn and participate together; and
- engage with the local community.

Studies have proven that well being traits, such as healthy eating and physical activity are proven to be key interventions in lowering the probability of disease and other health related risks. Unfortunately, it has also been well documented that those living in areas of deprivation are least likely to meet the recommended levels of physical activity. There is also an existing concern that groups deemed 'hard to reach' or minority groups suffer further inequalities relating to physical activity and healthy eating accessibility. Thus we aimed to organise activities around being active and healthy eating.

S.A.F.E (Shepherds Bush Activities and Family Engagement) Holiday Scheme

Summer 2009 found us hosting our first holiday programme in collaboration with the Metropolitan police and a local charity Active Planet. This was a four week free sports programme with activities for young people and also intergenerational learning (young people and their families) with activities ranging from cooking, arts and crafts, Futsal,

football, climbing wall, BMX biking, Gaelic football, cheerleading and rollerblading. There were 4,100 visits, accounting for 602 different individuals attending the Camp. The gender make up was 60/40 male/female. We wanted to offer unique opportunities in sporting activities that many of the participants would not have experienced.

The project also had a bank of volunteers who received training in sports delivery (e.g. level 1 coaching) who as a result of their free training, will have to pay back eight to ten hours to the running of future schemes. These volunteers are a key factor in the sustainability of future events. They also give an applied learning aspect, and will promote community cohesion, as it is local people that are involved in the project.

The main group that we targeted were vulnerable young people who currently have few avenues for engagement outside of the normal schools' sports activities, these were referred from social services or were poor attendees at the school.

In further partnership with Queens Park Rangers Football Club, Rugby Union Football association, Gaelic Athletic Association and the borough Youth Service, these local groups were encouraged to give their time entirely free, and use the opportunity so that young people have a platform to continue their involvement in sport after the scheme is completed.

The intention is to build partnerships and not service providers (local sports clubs, football clubs, schools, not for profit organisations) so that the schemes run with the minimum funding and are therefore more sustainable. Due to the huge success of this scheme we have now secured funding to host holiday schemes throughout this year.

The Phoenix F.A.C.E (Family and Community Engagement Newsletter)

As part of our ongoing commitment to the community and as a direct result of our residents committee meetings, we have launched our Family and Community Engagement Newsletter. This newsletter is released quarterly, initially as a source of information to the local area to advertise the positive things that are being developed here at Phoenix. We are adding new courses for the community expanding the use of the Farm and Learning Zone. At Phoenix we are keen to work with the community so that we can deliver a tailored package of local community courses in our goal to make Phoenix a hub in the local area.

Hard Family Learning Activities

Healthy Living Week and Sports courses

As part of the schools ongoing commitment to the health of the Phoenix community, we decided to incorporate the visit of our Food for Life Cooking Bus with a Healthy Living Activities Week.

Phoenix was awarded flagship Food for Life Status in April 2009. The

Cooking Bus is at the heart of the drive to bring practical cooking skills to children, schools and the local community. The Cooking Bus is a specialist-built articulated lorry which opens out into a spectacular purpose built kitchen/classroom.

During our Healthy Living Week, students, primary school pupils and members of the local community were able to learn first-hand how to cook and enjoy food. The work is linked to other subjects offering many opportunities for cross curricular work. Our teachers were made more aware of food knowledge across the curriculum.

Phoenix was awarded flagship Food for Life Status in April 2009. The Cooking Bus is at the heart of the drive to bring practical cooking skills to children, schools and the local community.

The Cooking Bus activities taught a number of key skills, such as communication, teamwork, enterprise and problem solving. The visit built self confidence and critical awareness of food choices. The Family and Community Engagement team also set about organising a series of trial sessions in different sporting activities. The goal was to enable as many students as possible to experience new and different sports. Over the course of the week we had 16 different sports running at lunchtime and after school, where students, parents and the local community could just drop in. These ranged from Gaelic Football, Futsal, circus skills, cheerleading and a climbing wall. There were over 1,500 students participating in the different activities. The Cooking Bus ran on three days of the week and on the Wednesday we hosted a 'Food of the World' event.

Summary and Conclusion

Our aim is for Phoenix High School to be the school of choice and learning hub for the local community. Our knowledge of the home circumstances of many of our students makes it clear to us that we have to mobilise and engage parents, carers and the local community as fully as we can, in our efforts to raise their achievement and improve their life chances. The impact of our work on students, parents and the local community has been invaluable in raising the achievement of our students and their parents. Our school's proactive community programme and our enthusiasm for embracing cultural and religious differences has helped transform Phoenix's relationship with the local area.

Many of our activities revolve around healthy eating and sports, this is due partly to the need to combat the poor health in the area but primarily because we have found that celebrating food from different countries crosses cultural barriers enabling people to see the positives in other societies.

We have found that parents/carers when engaged positively by the school are more likely to be involved in their child's learning and more likely to become involved with school events.

We aim for every visitor to Phoenix to leave with a positive legacy about the school and what we are achieving here. Our five year FACE journey has shown us that engaging parents and the local community can have an effect on the perceptions of the school in general and also go some way to raising levels of students' attainment. However, we are at the start of another long road and must continue to develop our outward facing profile. Now that we have some ideas about the best way to do this, we are confident that this will be a step and not a leap that we need to take.

Five Year Plan

- *Develop more partnerships including businesses and local community groups.*
- *Create links with international schools.* This will benefit the school and the wider community creating a better understanding of diversity and also helping to raise the profile of the school.
- *Co-ordinate a S.A.F.E. Holiday scheme in the south of the borough.* We have applied with our partners for third sector funding to enable this provision.
- *To showcase best practice to secondary schools throughout the borough.*
- *Increase funding to further develop Family Learning.* Currently the FACE team spends around 20% of their time applying for funding to ensure the courses that we run can continue to be FREE of charge, many of our courses are now run through partners or by volunteers to ensure sustainability.
- *Further increase the usage of Phoenix High school.* Helping to reduce social isolation, continue to build community cohesion and celebrate different cultural and ethnic traditions through courses.

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The View from Here

Abstract: *Education has changed dramatically since the Victorian expansion of educational provision. In those days it was enough to teach the 3Rs, now schools face a whole plethora of roles of responsibilities under an increasingly centralised and micro managed system where teachers' professionalism and creativity is constantly challenged. Despite this, the author argues, teaching remains the best job in the world and while the challenges are many, so too are the opportunities to make a difference.*

Anne Swift

Anne Swift has been teaching for 28 years and is currently the headteacher at a large Infant School in Scarborough, North Yorkshire. She began her teaching career as a nursery teacher at a social priority nursery and infant school and has worked in two other primary schools. Prior to her current post she was a teaching head at a village school. She has taught all nursery and primary age groups. Anne has recently been re-elected to the Executive of the National Union of Teachers.

The Elementary Education Act of 1870 enabled many more children from poor families to benefit from education. I teach in an infant school which was opened a few years later in 1887 to educate the pupils of a growing Victorian seaside town. It is typical of many schools built during this period; solid red brick with high windows and lofty ceilings. Its architecture displays the confidence of the times. The building is robust – there was no asbestos and with the addition of double glazed windows' is generally energy efficient. This of course has benefits in that less money spent on the premises releases funds for other activities. However the building does not lend itself to the curriculum requirements for the early years and modifications need to be made with the provision of extra doors and a canopy to provide shelter in inclement weather.

For the past 123 years education has taken place on the site with the school doubling in size within the past 30 years. This is a relatively short historical period and yet what momentous changes have taken place, not least the advances in technology. Would the first headteacher, have pondered the opportunities open to educators in that period? She would surely have thought about the challenges; large classes – the rooms were originally intended to accommodate 45-75 children; little outdoor space and no green areas; reluctant learners and unqualified staff, these were the days when pupil teachers taught the younger children.

Extracts from the school archives paint a picture of a school concerned with not only educational achievement but also the health and welfare of the pupils. Entries in the school log book note the deaths of pupils from diphtheria and scarlet fever. Despite better nutrition and the National Health Service we still fear for the health of our children. The latest results

from the Department of Health survey of weight and height for children in Reception Year and Year Six show that eight per cent of reception children in my school are obese and 14% are overweight. This matches the regional results and therefore makes 22% at risk of developing medical conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. The letter which accompanied these results exhorted me to do something about this. How we promote healthy lifestyles and encourage children to be healthy is inspected and given a grade in the Ofsted framework. We have obtained healthy school status and have been invited to complete the enhanced model with its audit tools and formation of a healthy school team. The challenge to do this can seem insurmountable at times when processed food and sweet, sugary snacks are easily available. It seems that the more cookery programmes there are on television the more we, as a society, reach for the pre-packaged microwaveable meal. We do all we can to encourage the take up of school meals. Recently as more families have become eligible for free meals, because of the recession, more children are having a school lunch. If the government could take this opportunity to provide more free or subsidised meals then I am sure the benefits for health would be considerable and cost effective in the long term.

There is growing evidence that our relationship with food, more sedentary life styles and exposure to advertising is fuelling an obsession with fad diets and leading our children, particularly girls to have a distorted view of themselves even at a very young age.

I was given a games console recently for my birthday and I went through the set up process which culminated in a calculation to show my fitness age. It was a shock but not really surprising to find it was in excess of my real age. I was offered advice and a range of activities to complete to improve my fitness. I wondered if this virtual fitness world could provide opportunities in school to tackle the issues around health and body image. It may seem fanciful to consider this but technology can have advantages. I am sure a real coach would not have told me I was a "couch potato" but it did goad me to greater efforts.

Hula hooping, rhythm boxing and running through a virtual field were fun and certainly provided a workout but they are no real substitute for being outdoors and experiencing reality. Looking again at the school archives, the curriculum of the time detailed needlework and cookery for girls, craft for boys, along with basic literacy and numeracy with some history, geography and Religious Instruction. Not a huge amount of change in our curriculum today. Even the reworked curriculum recommended by Sir Jim Rose is still based largely on the 19th century model. But the focus on skills is very welcome and gives us the opportunity to consider just what children need to learn. Creating safe(ish) outdoor spaces for children to run about and use all their muscle groups as well as stimulating their

imaginations has to be a better alternative to the games machine to improve health.

Curriculum development over the years has responded to our knowledge of the world, the needs of business, commerce and industry. A number of projects such as Nuffield Science and Maths, and more recently the National Strategies have been developed to give greater consistency to what has been taught and how. Since the inception of the National Curriculum the content and pedagogy has been centrally dictated, controlled and inspected. But when I was training in the late 70s the Plowden report had been published and schools were exhorted to place children at the heart of the learning process rather than a body of knowledge to be transmitted. The profession was largely left to decide what was to be taught and how it should be done. This "hands off" approach by the government has been replaced by a more centralised diktat. Perhaps we are now at a time when the pendulum is swinging back towards the centre and we could be at the point of having a national core curriculum with more flexibility to develop local bespoke elements. I certainly hope so.

Hula hooping, rhythm boxing and running through a virtual field were fun and certainly provided a workout but they are no real substitute for being outdoors and experiencing reality.

Many teachers have been taught themselves via the National Curriculum and various strategies; they have been trained to deliver the curriculum and given a framework in which to do it. Inevitably this one size fits all model of three or four part lessons fits no one and in many cases has left teachers unable to assess progress within lessons and adjust their teaching accordingly. Teachers feel that if their lesson has been planned according to the formula i.e. lesson objectives, starter, some differentiated activities and a plenary then it must be successful. One of our main challenges in supporting teachers is to enable a creative response and sensitivity to learners; to give teachers the confidence to deviate from the plan and be educators rather than deliverers of a body of knowledge.

Professor Robin Alexander spoke at a fringe meeting at the 2010 NUT Annual Conference about the Independent Cambridge Review of Primary Education (Alexander R, 2010) and he said he was struck time and time again in his discussions with teachers of their fears of trying anything new. They were frightened to innovate and he found this disturbing. It is disturbing. I believe if teachers can develop their own elements of the curriculum, and have continuing professional development which truly

develops their own education and hones their pedagogical skills, then this is a real opportunity to capture what it is to be a professional. The ability to make decisions based on expert knowledge and understanding.

The current government appear to have ignored the Cambridge Primary Review and in my opinion this is a lost opportunity. All the changes wrought by advances in technology and science, our growing understanding of how we learn and questions about what is education for and what is valuable to pass on to the next generation are always worth asking. This is the kind of debate that should go beyond academics, and those involved directly in education, to have a wider public platform.

One aspect of recent government policy which I think is developing well is the Early Years Foundation Stage. It is based on sound principles even though some elements need adjustment. Teachers are actively encouraged to assess the needs of the child and plan provision to meet those needs, constantly adjusting the plans in the light of the child's progress. This is challenging and demands a high level of skill on the part of the staff. Knowledge of how children learn and a wide repertoire of teaching skills are necessary to help children be successful learners.

To have any hope for a better future I think it is imperative that we teach our children about the world around them, how to get along with others and to share the planet's resources.

Our challenge is how to translate this practice in to the key stage one curriculum when we know a great many children need this kind of approach well in to year one and beyond. The Cambridge Review recommendation that a reformed Early Years Curriculum should continue until age six is very welcome and deserves greater consideration.

"Too much too soon" is where we are at present in the English system. In Wales play based approaches and child centred experiential learning continues through to age seven. In addition evidence from other European countries indicates that this is a successful system. Our insistence on more formal approaches at an earlier age and the consequential array of catch up programmes to meet the needs of the children who are failed by this approach, seems perverse in the extreme. But whilst we have a system of assessment which feeds the data machine and very little trust in the judgement or ability of teachers then I fear the situation will not change.

However maybe I am being too pessimistic. The Education Secretary, Ed Balls, said in November 2009:

> *"I have always said that the assessment and testing system is not set in stone and that what is important is what works best for pupils and schools and provides parents with the information that they need."* (Balls E, 2009)

Perhaps Mr Balls will take note of the Cambridge Review recommendation that assessment for accountability must be uncoupled from assessment for learning. We cannot really review and revise the curriculum without considering how we assess learning. There are many examples of how we can give parents and pupils information about their progress and satisfy the legitimate right of the public to information about the success of the system as a whole without the current expensive and damaging regime. Our challenge is to create a vibrant and dynamic curriculum which captures the interests of children and turns them on to lifelong learning across a whole range of subjects and not to drill them in those aspects which are easily tested. This is our moral purpose.

We can think creatively and meet the needs of our pupils using the expertise, skills and interests of staff and children. In my school we have been involved in a four term project in association with The Voices Foundation. High quality training for all the teachers has enabled all children to benefit from first class music teaching. The result has been the achievement of a Platinum "Sing Up" Award (Sing Up – *Help kids find their voice*) and children who understand musical terms and concepts and have the confidence to sing solo. This may inspire them to continue with the study of music as they get older and certainly brings a great deal of pleasure. Pursuit of the arts more broadly is vital if we are to educate the whole child and I am pleased that organisations like the Arts Council support schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. However, I believe we cannot think about what children will need for the future without considering the Global dimension in education. To have any hope for a better future I think it is imperative that we teach our children about the world around them, how to get along with others and to share the planet's resources. In the Early and Primary Years our curriculum should "plant seeds" which will flourish as the children get older. With access to a broad curriculum the children can find for themselves what they are good at, what interests them and what they might want to study further.

When one looks at the rate of change and advances in our knowledge and the range of new skills needed it would seem that any curriculum design must take this unknown element into account. Anyone who wants a demonstration of this should look at "Shift Happens" (Furness J, 2008). It is clear that we cannot know for certain just what children will need to know or be able to do when they leave school. The most telling phrase in "Shift Happens" is:

> *"We are currently preparing our students for jobs that don't yet exist… using technologies that haven't been invented… to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet."*

These are the issues our policy makers need to be thinking about. We as educators should consider how we as experts in teaching and how children learn can best prepare our youngsters for a rapidly changing world. When I started teaching I could not have imagined writing this on a home computer and sending it through the ether to appear hundreds of miles away. A computer was an enormous machine housed in a room in a university department. Now we can access and send information in all sorts of forms from a mobile phone.

Coupled with how and what should be taught we need to think about how our school system is organised. Whilst class sizes have fallen since the classes of 45 – 75, which prevailed when my school was first opened, we still have a system which herds children together in one place for up to six hours a day. With extended schools and the pressure to provide wrap around child care for up to ten hours a day this is an even longer time for very young children to be away from home. For some this may be desirable, but the pressure for parents to work long hours and with more value placed on the workplace than family life this is an added challenge for schools, both to provide the childcare and after school activities and cope with the aftermath of tired children who may also exhibit anxiety and separation difficulties. Perhaps in the future the idea that children will leave home to be educated will be redundant and education will take place via new technology. What is important is to maintain human contact. The idea that a machine, a virtual teacher, could take the place of a flesh and blood teacher is not pleasant to contemplate. But that is exactly what my games machine coach is. She cannot respond to the nuances of my performance and the comments are repetitious. It's a good try but not the real thing.

As central government has become more involved in micro managing education in the public sector then a collective historical memory has disappeared. Successive secretaries of state have a relatively short time to make their mark and this leads to initiative overload as each tries to have the next "big idea".

Schools are now charged with a great many more tasks deemed good by the state than they were in the 19th century. For example the duty to promote community cohesion, create good citizens, teach children to be safe, keep healthy and understand economics in order to be solvent as adults - the "Every Child Matters" agenda. Through the new Ofsted framework schools are judged on the extent to which they succeed in meeting those duties and bringing about the desired outcomes. My predecessor was expected to drill children in facts. They learned by rote

with little differentiation or account taken of their needs. They learned to answer questions and were punished if they didn't.

I do not want a return to those days and meeting the educational needs of each and every pupil is the right thing to do but we cannot fix everything. Children need to be well nourished, have sufficient sleep and feel safe and secure to thrive. Poor housing and poverty are not excuses for underachievement but they are unacceptable in the richest nations of the world.

Is it any wonder that with all these responsibilities and challenges we have now reached a crisis in the recruitment of headteachers and senior leaders. The answer has been that all governing bodies who are seeking to recruit a new headteacher must consider a federation. This doesn't really tackle the issues. Local Authorities and the National College for the Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (NCLSCS) are considering how the wider education workforce can be used to support leaders, including developing the roles of business managers and finance staff. Defining roles and responsibilities are useful strategies to ensure the smooth running of any institution and harnessing the collective expertise of staff is a powerful way to bring about developments. This is not the same as blurring the roles staff carry out but a way of ensuring that the distinctive skills and expertise that staff bring to the school are complementary and productive.

Another method to help school leaders meet the challenges facing them and develop opportunities to improve their schools may be to provide sabbaticals. This could be planned for by allowing all experienced staff to put away a small amount of their salary matched by their employer for a period of seven to ten years to pay for a term out of the school environment. Sabbaticals for school leaders may then provide opportunities for teachers who are currently not contemplating promoted posts, because they are put off by the workload and responsibilities (including Ofsted inspection), to have a taste of leadership. When asked if they are likely to seek a headship many deputies say "no", citing the long hours and onerous responsibilities, but when they are given the opportunity to "act up" they find they enjoy the experience and are then more likely to apply for a promoted post.

I started this article by looking back to the beginning of public education in my own school as it seems that without that collective memory we do not learn the lessons of history. As central government has become more involved in micro managing education in the public sector then a collective historical memory has disappeared. Successive secretaries of state have a relatively short time to make their mark and this leads to initiative overload as each tries to have the next "big idea". Constant reform of the system is both costly and counterproductive. It leads to ever more data collection as the state tries to prove why an initiative is needed,

why current arrangements are not working or how successful their policy has been.

By the time this article is published the next government will be in office. Whoever wins power it is clear that the many challenges facing schools and the expectation that schools can solve society's ills will remain. Ofsted in its current form epitomises the low trust and high accountability situation in which we find ourselves. But can Ofsted be viewed as an opportunity to showcase what the school does well? Can the inspectorate advise and support schools to improve by sharing good practice? I live in hope.

Having the opportunity to work in a school with young children and dedicated, talented staff makes teaching the best job in the world and with a little imagination and lots of good humour it is most satisfying and worthwhile. The challenges are many but the opportunities to make a difference are great. We need to unleash our children's potential to be creative, solve problems and perhaps most of all, question the answers rather than answer the questions.

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Time to Reclaim Education and Rescue Schooling

"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education" – Mark Twain

Abstract: *In this article, the author argues that it is time for school students to organise themselves and, with the support of their parents and teachers, reclaim education and rescue schooling. He argues that school students need a learners' charter that would place schooling in the driving seat of education for democratic citizenship. Furthermore, it would enshrine the principle that empowering individuals to develop their capacity to act in a self-directing way and to take collective action with others in pursuit of change is at the very heart of the process of managing and expanding a democratic culture.*

Gus John

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On 31st October 2007, Gordon Brown made a speech at the University of Greenwich in which he shared his intention to create a "world-class" education system in Britain, settling no more for "second best":

> *"Our ambition must be nothing less than to be world class in education and to move to the top of the global education league, and it is time to say not just that we will aim high but that we can no longer tolerate failure, that it will no longer be acceptable for any child to fall behind, no longer acceptable for any school to fail its pupils, no longer acceptable for young people to drop out of education without good qualifications without us acting.... So no more toleration of second best in Britain, no more toleration of second best for Britain."*

Mr Brown's speech was full of catchy sound bites, full of statements that sounded entirely reasonable if not radical. He talked about, among other things, social justice for all, delivering services that are personal to each but

shaped by people themselves (merit of each in the service of all), a decent school and a decent education as an entitlement, education as the key to social progress, the need to raise boys' aspirations, personalised learning and testing and the Government's intention to establish 400 new academies, 150 of them by 2010. He shared parents' concerns about 'discipline, about bullying, about schools where children's lessons are disrupted, and where there is not enough of a school ethos for learning to flourish and all children to succeed'. He argued that:

> *"If we ask parents to get more involved in the education of their children, in the lives of their schools, we have to respond to these concerns, just as parents for their part need to reinforce the expectations for good discipline and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour set by headteachers for their schools. So, let us do more now to involve and engage parents at every stage of the journey of their children's education..."*

What was significant about that speech was that despite Brown's claim that children had an 'entitlement' to a decent school and a decent education, he made no reference whatsoever to involving them in any form of consultation on his proposals or to engaging with them in devising strategies to bring about that 'world class' education.

There have been numerous government initiatives aimed at reforming and restructuring schooling in England and Wales in the last two decades, beginning with the Education Reform Act 1988. These have ushered in, among other things, local management of schools, academies, non-denominational foundation schools and a range of school improvement programmes including: raising achievement, aiming higher, gifted and talented and much more besides. In addition, schools are mandated to deliver the citizenship curriculum and to engage with the community cohesion agenda. The principal focus of these initiatives has been upon:

- extending parental power;
- curtailing the power of local authorities to intervene in the management of schools and in schools' admission arrangements. This has displaced the crucial role of elected government in guaranteeing the defence of the children and their parents against invidious forces that do not necessarily respect the rights and entitlements of those who cannot fend for themselves, or who constitute the excluded in society;
- giving schools wider powers to exclude students; and
- testing, examinations and 'naming and shaming' schools for poor test and examination results. This process has had untold impact upon, and induces hopelessness in, the children who had no choice but to attend those schools, as well as those teachers - to be found in every such

school – who worked hard to overcome the in-built barriers to quality teaching and learning.

Significantly, however, the process of schooling reform both before and since 1988 has largely ignored the one group of people who are meant to be the beneficiaries of those reforms, namely learners themselves. They remain the passive subjects, or victims, of one education lobby after another, one new initiative after another, one change in practice after another, one pedagogical shift after another even when the overt intention may be otherwise. Yet, they are systematically excluded from the debate about school improvement, school governance, the quality of schooling outcomes and what to do about education provision for the 135,000 children of compulsory school age who are out of school, typically because they have been excluded or have voted with their feet and for whom learning provision otherwise than at school remains of variable quality.

Teaching and non-teaching staff in schools are typically organised in trade unions, professional associations and various networks. There are parent teacher associations, parent lobbies, organised parents' groups and voluntary education projects. But apart from students' councils in schools, which are not independently organised student forums, there are no

The process of schooling reform both before and since 1988 has largely ignored the one group of people who are meant to be the beneficiaries of those reforms, namely learners themselves.

independent student organisations acting to promote students' education entitlements and safeguard their interests. The one exception is the National Association of School Students which is still in its infancy and has yet to see the development of a significant number of local associations of school students, especially in urban education.

The schooling debate tends to be about improvement or otherwise in school examination results on the one hand and disruptive, undisciplined and underperforming students on the other. It is a debate that often fails to compare like with like, dismisses considerations of class, culture, geographical environment and parents' ability to exercise, if not buy, choice of school. The preoccupation with disruptive, undisciplined and underperforming students is part of a wider construction of 'youth' in society, with a focus on anti-social behaviour and anti-social behaviour orders, under-age drinking, teenage pregnancies, youth crime, street violence, inadequate parenting, inadequate parents and government and

schooling interventions that are principally about league tables and about exclusion and punishment.

I have 12 basic propositions:

1. The primary and ultimate purpose, the Alpha & Omega, of schooling and education is to humanise society.
2. Schools are being overloaded with initiatives which are incoherent add-ons and which do not add up to a societal consensus on what we want schooling and education to be about.
3. The education of children is too important for it to become a ready-made canvass on which government applies whatever fancy ideas it might have, while requiring teachers to bend their professionalism and square it with those ideas and the ideology that gives rise to them.
4. Schooling is still characterised by the structured omission of issues to do with ideology, exploitation, power, discrimination, inequality and social injustice.
5. Whether we teach Religious Studies or Quantum Physics, we do not occupy neutral, non-ideological space, nor are we simply engaging in neutral 'knowledge transfer' activity.
6. It is the duty of schools to ensure that, irrespective of the disposition or beliefs of parents, children and young people are provided with the knowledge, understanding and skills to be at ease with and respect themselves so that they could respect others, especially people who are different from themselves, and to develop commensurate attitudes and behaviours.
7. The context of schooling in today's Britain is:

- a multi-ethnic, multi-faith and multi-class society in which *inequality* is as much part of the diversity of the society as is 'race', disability, gender, age and so on; and
- a society impacted by globalisation and the many challenges it poses, not least for countries and regions that have a poor record of international activity, multilingualism and intercultural education. In such contexts, globalisation is seen as a challenge to social cohesion and regional if not national identity and causes moral panic about the very concept of multiculturalism.

8. Schooling is increasingly hitched to a neo-liberal agenda that defines its purpose mainly in relation to labour market needs and the nation's economic competitiveness in a global, free-market economy. It is an ideology that:

- provides the justification for government's obsession with league tables and for school admissions procedures and practices that are potentially discriminatory;
- promotes the cult of the individual, selfishness, greed and the 'survival of the fittest', while at the same time espousing 'commonly shared

values', as if such values are a given and we could make the assumption that everyone would subscribe to them;

- encourages families to buy quality education in the marketplace, rather than acting collectively to ensure that there is 'a good school for every child in every community'; and
- encourages a situation where seeking private – and privatised – solutions to public ills becomes its own justification.

9. Children need a charter for schooling that will enshrine their entitlements and their responsibilities as learners and provide a framework for those who facilitate their learning and self development.
10. Such a charter would mirror the purpose and intent of the equity and diversity agenda and make combating discrimination and social inclusion, promoting equity, diversity and community cohesion organic to what schools do, rather than being yet another set of challenges overburdened teachers are expected to meet.
11. Such a charter would be a holistic package and implementation tool for placing the equality duty and the community cohesion requirements at the very core of what schools do and how children and families relate to the globalised world about them.
12. It would place schooling in the driving seat of education for democratic citizenship. Furthermore, it would enshrine the principle that empowering the individual to develop his/her capacity to act in a self-directing way and to take collective action with others in pursuit of change is at the very heart of the process of managing and expanding a democratic culture.

The case for a learners' charter is also based upon the premise that while no child should have the right to obstruct the learning of others, or teachers' attempts to facilitate that learning, children should not forfeit their educational entitlement on account of their poor self management and discipline. Moreover, it is as much the purpose of schooling to support them in unlearning inappropriate behaviours and acquiring the values, insight and social skills that make them able to live in civil society and act as socially adjusted members of the learning community, as it is to help them gain 5 + A*-C grades at GCSE.

Initiatives such as *Sure Start*, parenting education classes, extended schools and mentoring for young people are all meant to impact upon the way children are guided and supported in their personal and academic development. Such initiatives and those who evaluate them, however, have a tendency to problematise families in certain communities as having an inadequate 'home learning environment' and poor parenting skills. Moreover, they fail to take account of the fact that parents from higher socio-economic groups pay hundreds of pounds per week for early years'

provision, employ nannies to look after children and pay £50 to £65 per hour for private tuition for primary and secondary age children.

Despite the plethora of policies, reforms and initiatives since 1988, the last decade has seen the unprecedented rise in the number of young people being murdered by other young people, the number of young people in young offender institutions and in the care of the Youth Offending Service and the number of school age children who are out of school.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families rolled out its '*Back on Track*' programme with the aim of 'modernising alternative provision' for the 135,000 young people of compulsory school age in alternative provision, including pupil referral units, in England. The central plank of this programme was the commissioning of such provision from private and voluntary sector organisations and the vetting, registration and accreditation of such providers.

At the same time, the government spent billions on an unprecedented and long overdue '*Building Schools for the Future*' programme. Government was therefore institutionalising a twin track schooling system, with expensive and well appointed schooling facilities for some and considerably less resource intensive provision for the 135,000 young people (the equivalent of the roll of 132 schools) whom schools had rejected or who had turned their backs on mainstream schooling. All of this took place five years after the government replaced the 1989 Children Act with the 2004 Children Act and the 2004 'Every Child Matters - Change for Children'. Unfortunately, consonant with the approach adopted since the Education Reform Bill in the middle to late 1980s, the Children Act was about children, not for them or belonging to them, and therefore there was little opportunity for them to influence the way it applied to them, especially in the context of schooling provision.

The last decade has seen the unprecedented rise in the number of young people being murdered by other young people.

Side by side with that, the last decade has seen the steady expansion of police presence in schools. Previously, schools maintained a close liaison with the police and encouraged them to be involved in supporting the curriculum in areas such as the role of the police in the community, road safety, personal safety, avoiding the risk of offending and the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse. But now, many schools, secondary in particular, have a mini police station. According to a newspaper report (Fenn 2008), referring to the police presence in Shoeburyness High School:

> *"Headteachers decide on suspensions and expulsions but the officers can look to make arrests should an incident warrant their intervention. Headteacher Sue Murphy said she would recommend every school have an officer based on site to*

deal with issues, help educate pupils and make everyone feel safer."

It is not unusual these days to walk into some schools and before you see an office marked 'Home/School Liaison', 'Parent and Pupil Support' or 'Parent Partnership', you come face to face with the police office (or mini police station) staffed by uniformed police officers. Sometimes, you are met at the inner entrance to the school by such officers.

This fails to take account of the historical relationship between the police and black and white working class communities in Britain. It fails to acknowledge that many parents of today's school and college students were themselves victims of, and had their life chances compromised by the operation of, the 'Sus' laws in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. It fails to acknowledge that while today's police officers might be befriending them and supposedly acting in a learning support capacity in school, other police officers could well be repeatedly making them targets of 'Stop and Search'.

Police are now routinely intervening in incidents in schools that are properly the responsibility of school managers to deal with. Students are carted off to police stations in police vehicles to be dealt with either by way of a ticking off, a caution or charges for a range of indictable offences, often before parents are informed of their involvement in any given incident. Children are therefore finding themselves put on the national DNA database even when the police have no cause to proceed against them.

'DNA samples can be taken by the police from anyone arrested and detained in custody in connection with a recordable offence' (House of Commons, Home Affairs Committee, 2007, p. 15), Baroness Scotland (now Attorney General) confirmed in her evidence to that committee that 'three quarters of the young black male population will soon be on the DNA database'.

For many children and parents in urban areas these days, schooling is conducted as if against a backcloth of youth offending. It presupposes a youth offending culture that the school must at all costs keep far from its gates. When young people display behaviours that the school sees as manifestations of that culture, it employs a 'zero tolerance' approach which inexorably leads to fixed period if not permanent exclusions, typically of black and ethnic minority and dual heritage students.

Schools compartmentalise support for children's moral, social, emotional, spiritual and academic development into subjects that are taught: Personal, Social, Health Education and Citizenship, Religious Education, Community Cohesion and the National Curriculum. Support for children in unlearning the behaviours that characterise how they are in their peer groups, in their community or sometimes in their homes, too often takes the form of dealing with the way they conform or not to a set of

rules: You do this... You don't do that. And too often we are told that teachers are far too busy 'to do all that other stuff'.

But, doing 'all that other stuff' is something for which, increasingly, parents are finding ways of acting collectively to devise methods and to give support to one another, acting on the age old principle that 'it takes a village to raise a child'.

Whether in relation to managing discipline in schools or dealing with youth offending, Britain adopts a more punitive approach to young people of school age than most other European countries. It certainly excludes more children from school than any other European country. Such punitive measures, however, have the effect of compounding young people's social exclusion and sense of being rejected by society rather than 'teaching them a lesson' that might deter them and others from similar conduct.

The reality for most school students and parents is that successive waves of school reform have failed to reflect the United Nations provisions on the rights of the child:

- The best interests of the child must be paramount (Article 3)
- Children have a right to be heard (A.12)
- Children have a right not to be discriminated against on the basis of, for example, class, race, ethnicity, religion/faith or gender (A.2)(Or because of the failings of their parent(s) or families)
- Children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence. They must be kept safe from harm. They must be given proper care by those looking after them. (Article 19)

Mr Brown's agenda for schooling and education was silent on the vexing issues of admissions, school exclusions, legal compliance in relation to the rights of pupils with special educational needs and the canon of equality and human rights legislation. It ignored what the national picture told us about the operation of the above rights. This showed:

- 9,000 permanent exclusions per year in English schools;
- 350,000+ fixed term exclusions averaging 3.5 days each;
- 14 million days lost through truancy;
- staff sickness absence averages five days per year or seven times the rate of pupil absence through truancy; and
- stress remains a major factor in staff sickness rates.

Where does all of this feature on the agenda of the Flagship Academies that receive, on average, £1,600 more per pupil from the DCSF than neighbouring comprehensives? Why are the 135,000 school age children who are the focus of the government's 'Back on Track' programme not considered to be similarly worth £1,600 more per pupil?

School students themselves need to rescue schooling and reclaim

education. This is a task too important to be left to politicians and parents beguiled by the neo-liberal agenda. Students have a responsibility to work together to determine the kind of schooling system that would help them make the future they want for themselves and their children in an increasingly globalised world and atomised society where social exclusion continues to mirror social injustice.

We need a learners' charter to provide a framework for them to do just that, unimpeded by the systems, structures and practices that constitute schooling today. When one looks at the pronouncements of the major political parties with respect to education, school students clearly cannot look to them to deliver empowerment and democratic participation any time soon.

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The 'missed' potential: the importance of students' perceptions for school effectiveness

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Abstract: *The current Ofsted questionnaire to ascertain the views of students about their school provides a model of how not to do it argues the author. Instead he presents a more vigorous methodology that challenges Ofsted's current 'one size fits all' approach to taking account of students' views about their school.*

The Ofsted Inspection framework and its associated school self-evaluation processes require inspectors and school leaders to consider the views of stakeholders. However, neither inspection nor school review and self-evaluation are considered methodologically rigorous or scientific. One of the objections to using a scientific approach to gather and analyse stakeholder perceptions is that there are inherent difficulties in identifying, let alone controlling for, all of the possible factors that might be instrumental in explaining and measuring outcomes for children and differences between schools. This position is further compounded by the fact that the current methods of seeking stakeholder views are notoriously poor.

This paper argues two fundamental points:

First, that the methodology used to gather and analyse stakeholder views must be more objective and systematic and based on a rigorous research-based approach. This is essential if such an approach is to lead to secure judgements that stand up to external scrutiny and act as a sound basis for devising and measuring the effectiveness of school improvement strategies.

In addition, the analysis of student perceptions of school effectiveness has been undervalued but is critical for three distinct reasons:

- The approach provides a broader, more reliable and more holistic direct measure of the impact of the school's work as seen from the students' perspective;
- The perceptions of students are context specific in that they primarily have experience only of the school they currently attend; and
- It is a compelling way to challenge the assumptions made about young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As a headteacher in a school serving a disadvantaged community and a post-doctoral researcher, I have been able to establish a unique methodological approach to measure school effectiveness and to assist in the formulation of what has subsequently turned out to be a highly successful rapid school improvement strategy.

The Importance of Context

One of the strongest findings from both leadership (Crawford, 2002) and school improvement research (Chapman and Harris, 2004; West, Ainscow & Stanford, 2005) is that context matters and much more than hitherto has been recognised or openly acknowledged. Moreover, schools in especially challenging circumstances often take insufficient account of the socio-economic contexts in which they operate (Slee, Tomlinson & Weiner, 1998) and few school improvement studies have given serious thought to how schools engage with the local communities (Wrigley, 2006):

> *"Family background, social class, any notion of context are typically regarded as noise, as "outside background" factors which must be controlled for and then stripped away so that the researcher can concentrate on the important domain of school factors*". (Angus, 1993:361)

Implicit in this approach is the need to apportion blame to schools when they are deemed to be underachieving, rather than highlighting social circumstances or flawed government policy. Consequently league tables, based solely on statistics that are seemingly easy to measure, are presented as the answer. Alternatively, contextual value added (CVA) measures, whilst desirable, are flawed and uncertain. Such measures can do serious damage when ranked in league tables: teachers become focused on teaching to the tests; they can be used to blame teachers for lack of achievement of students and have been shown to lead to increased selection. This has the impact of making the job of schools operating in especially challenging contexts even more difficult.

Definitions of Effectiveness

One of the weaknesses of the school effectiveness movement is its narrow

definitions of achievement and its attempts to measure the school effect based on the cumulative achievement of students rather than the effectiveness of provision. Regardless of this fact, Ofsted has largely confined its definitions of effectiveness to narrowly defined measures (such as attendance, exclusions and test and examination results) which it has become very adept at measuring. Furthermore, through its links with the school effectiveness movement, Ofsted has also defined a range of criteria against which all schools are judged regardless of their context. The use of such criteria and measures have been used to drive approaches to Ofsted monitoring of schools in difficulty and crucially those serving disadvantaged communities.

One particular concern in relation to attainment measures is that of "grading". Students achieving the same grade or level on a test or examination may have scored very differently in terms of the raw score mark they achieved due to the placement of grade boundaries. This is compounded by the fact that the examinations system is so error-ridden that it is "inevitable" some pupils will be awarded inaccurate grades (Newton, 2005). In particular, "marking was not completely reliable" with "as many as 30% of 11 year olds gain(ing) the wrong marks" (ibid., 2005).

Many consider that value-added measures have improved things but again grading has a disproportionate impact on how schools are judged. There is no better example of how the "system" is biased towards more high attaining schools that serve more advantaged communities than the issue of truncated level boundaries at Key Stage 2. Here high achieving students, who are statistically more likely to be advantaged, at age 11 cannot achieve more than a level five – even where they are achieving well above that level. Consequently, schools with a high proportion of such students will be significantly advantaged at secondary school level because higher levels are already "in the children" – they have just not been measured. This has significant implications for CVA measures that were introduced to enable schools with disadvantaged cohorts to be measured on a more level playing field. The current CVA formula further disadvantages schools with significant numbers of multiply disadvantaged and vulnerable students. The formula for example, does not distinguish between English as an Additional Language (EAL) stages, with a first stage learner gaining the same points in the formula as a child speaking near perfect English.

Given this interpretation, it seems unfair and unsound to measure the effectiveness of schools solely on the basis of the aggregated performance of its students in tests and examinations – but this is precisely what happens in practice. Consequently, a more holistic measure of improvement is required rather than the reliance on narrow, easy-to-measure, achievement or attainment scores. One potentially interesting

way forward in developing more holistic measures of effectiveness and improvement is a more methodologically rigorous analysis of student views.

The Importance of Student Perceptions

The issue of how schools engage with their context is further compounded by the relative neglect of children's views in educational research (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 1999), particularly in England where the "market driven" education system regards parents rather than students as the consumers (ibid). Furthermore, current examples of seeking stakeholder views are notoriously poor – witness the Ofsted parent questionnaire. Poorly constructed questions (e.g. my child receives the correct amount of homework) are supplemented by a flawed ideology – how can parents make a judgement, however basic, about the teaching or leadership when they aren't present in the school all day and are not direct recipients of the service provided? All of these issues point to the value and role of students in making authentic and informed judgements based on their direct experience.

It is acknowledged that researching student perspectives is a potent way of challenging assumptions made about marginalised groups (e.g. children from disadvantaged backgrounds) in education, in the way that feminist and anti-racist research has revealed levels of discrimination and subtle social processes embedded in educational policies and practices (Troyna and Hatcher, 1992; Woods and Hamersley, 1993; Dawtry *et al.*, 1995). This is particularly the case in an especially challenging school comprising large numbers of children representing multiple marginalised groups.

Additionally, Alderson (2003:2) argues that: "Adults powerfully influence schools and yet the overwhelming majority of people within schools are the students". Consequently, "Just as women's views are largely missing from history, children's views are almost wholly absent" (ibid, 8) from school improvement and school effectiveness texts.

The implication here is that improvement strategies that focus on teachers' and other adults' perceptions of schooling and on the assumptions they make about their students' experiences will be flawed. Consequently, not listening to students' perceptions may lead to school improvers and inspectors getting it wrong (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2002).

Davie and Galloway (1996) highlight another practical benefit of giving students a say in their education. They argue that the process:

> *"provides a desirable model of cooperative working that helps to give a sense of ownership over what goes on in school, adding also that it is effective because children who have been involved in decision making will find it harder to complain*

later about what goes on". (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2002: 61).

Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2002) propose that from a sociological perspective, the principle justification for listening to students' views is epistemological. They contend that the reality experienced by students in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption, since:

> *"The meanings they attach to their experiences are not necessarily the meanings that teachers or parents would ascribe; the subcultures that children inhabit in classrooms and schools are not always visible or accessible to adults*". (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2002: 61).

However, researching students' views is not without difficulty. Historically, a lack of confidence in methodological tools may have acted as a deterrent to research focusing on children perceptions and interpretations of the world. Despite the "persuasive rhetoric" about the need to listen to students, there are powerful social and cultural tendencies to keep them in their place. Studies by Keys and Fernandes (1993) and Wade and Moore (1993) indicate reluctance among teachers to consult their students. Consequently, researching students' perspectives is a significantly underdeveloped area (Lewis and Lindsay, 1999) and often neglected in methodology texts (Breakwell, 1990; Robson, 2002), with treatment of questionnaires being particularly scant. The challenges to obtaining students' views are therefore considerable (Lewis and Linsey, 2000) but must be addressed and developed as an aspect of innovative research practice (Burgess, 1995).

Effectiveness is currently measured via Ofsted criteria and examination results but student perceptions of the impact of the educational offer are no less valuable – just significantly less well researched and used. It is compelling to reflect that in order to understand fully the school context researchers and practitioners have got to see it through the eyes of different people, most notably of those for whom the system is designed. The methodological approach suggested in this paper involves the extensive gathering and analysis of students' perceptions as a central aspect of gaining a richer and more authentic understanding of the individual school context and the effectiveness of its provision. In this way student perceptions can be seen as a more holistic measure of school effectiveness.

A Critique of the Current Ofsted Pupil Questionnaire

For some years now Ofsted has included a parent questionnaire as part of their evidence base for inspections. More recently questionnaires have been introduced to seek the views of students and staff. It is left to the school to

administer these questionnaires and then present them to the lead inspector. Three issues emerge that require greater comment:

- The content of the questionnaire and the quality of questions;
- The response format and subsequent lack of valid statistical analysis; and
- The "one-size-fits-all" approach.

The questions in the current Ofsted questionnaire provide a model of how "not to do it". The following questions typify the problems:

Question 5:

"Pupils in this school behave well" is problematic for three reasons. Firstly, the statement is heavily context laden – the important aspect is not whether pupils inherently arrive at school being well behaved or not, the key issue related to the effectiveness of the school is that "pupil behaviour is well managed by the school". Secondly, the pupil is left to determine what constitutes good behaviour. Thirdly, it makes the assumption that all pupils must behave well all of the time for a strongly agree box to be ticked.

The absolute nature of questions and the limited response format combine to act against schools operating in very challenging contexts.

Question 11:

"There is no bullying or racial abuse in my school". It should be remembered that schools don't teach children how to bully – it is a feature of their socialisation process that largely emanates from outside the school. Confusingly, the question combines two very important issues, bullying *and* racism with an *absolute* measure. The inclusion of the word *no* means that if there has been one minor instance of bullying or racism – the pupil must tick strongly disagree! Again what is *most* important in terms of school effectiveness and school improvement is that the school takes the combined issues of bullying and racism seriously and tackles such incidents rigorously whenever and wherever they occur.

Question 1:

The notion of context is also apparent in the statement "This is a good school to be at". Since the advent of league tables and competition amongst schools there is a danger that defining a "good" school is a relative term. Simply changing the question to "I think this is a good school to be at" avoids confusion with valued judgements in comparison with other "perceived" better local schools.

Question 12:

Another issue with the questionnaire relates to vagueness. The statement:

"The school is well run" is a prime example of this. What does "well run" mean? It would appear this is a vague attempt to quantify leadership of the school, and most importantly the headteacher. If this is the case, why patronise students – just ask them if the headteacher provides strong and effective leadership of the school!

Once schools have collected this data there is very little evidence that inspection teams do little more than produce a cumulative table of responses and use simple descriptive statistics to make basic valued judgements.

This brings into question the response format used in the questionnaire. The type of response format has significant implications for any subsequent statistical analyses. It is essential to provide a wider range of responses to the questions as possible. Rather that asking students to agree or disagree as in the current Ofsted questionnaires, it is possible to use a continuous Likert-type scale as shown below:

Behaviour is managed well by teachers								
strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly agree

This type of response scale gives a wider range of possible scores and increases the statistical analyses available, particularly those of a useful inferential nature that go beyond simple descriptive or subjective judgements. This continuous scale enables a correlation analysis to be undertaken, enabling a more complex set of hypotheses to be explored, such as whether there is a relationship between management of behaviour and teaching.

Since equality of opportunity and social cohesion are central to the 2009 Ofsted accountability framework it is important to measure the effectiveness across key groups based on ethnicity, gender, free school meals (FSM), etc. On this basis it is vital to collect individual data about students along with their response to the questions.

In addition to falling short of credibility in terms of question structure and subsequent analysis, the current Ofsted survey approach to seeking the views of students can be criticised as a result of its "one-size-fits-all" approach. It assumes that the definition of an effective school serving a challenging community is the same as those serving more advantaged communities. Consequently, the same questionnaire is administered to all schools regardless of context. Of course, there are on-line alternatives that many schools use but they are all open to the same criticisms as the existing Ofsted questionnaire. This point again demands a more context-driven approach involving a wider range of effectiveness criteria. Given the time and rigour expended on the analysis of flawed CVA data, Ofsted

should certainly seek to establish a more rigorous approach to gathering and analysing student perceptions. Schools should be encouraged to design their own rigorous questionnaires that are context specific.

A More Rigorous Approach

At Hurlingham & Chelsea we have adopted a more rigorous approach to seeking and analysing the perceptions of students.

The questionnaire shown in Figure 1 has been derived over a five year period of rapid school improvement in a very challenging urban school. The 21 questions were derived statistically from the observations of students during this period. In 2008 the questionnaire was robustly tested to ensure that it covered all aspects of what students deemed to be indicators of school effectiveness.

The collection of data from children, all of whom were under 18 years of age, gives rise to two important ethical issues not mentioned in Ofsted guidance:

Confidentiality and Privacy

It is vitally important that all respondents are able to express their views freely and in confidence, whilst ensuring that students, in particular, did not confer with each other over their responses.

Reliability and Coercion

There is a potential conflict between the professional role of teachers and the right of students to choose whether to take part. The possibility arises of bias in students' responses due to coercion and the power relationship that undoubtedly exists between students and their teachers.

In order to address these potential concerns, an external consultant, skilled in seeking the views of students and other stakeholders, was engaged to conduct the questionnaires and subsequent focus interviews. The completion of the questionnaires (n=302) were conducted in groups of approximately 30 in the school lecture theatre; providing ample space for participants to be well spaced and hence guarantee privacy and anonymity of responses. Since the questionnaire was carefully explained and conducted by an external consultant, anonymity was guaranteed and issues of coercion by teachers were negated. No names were specified on the questionnaires.

A positive decision was taken not to use postal questionnaires or to conduct on-line questionnaires where students could converse about their responses. Previous experience of working with children shows that reliability is more likely to be assured if the questionnaire is carefully explained to groups in an environment where the independence and privacy of responses can be guaranteed. Experience in the school shows

that response rates from students, parents and teachers to written requests is very poor. Furthermore large sample sizes are required to enable the data to be analysed effectively. This demands that the school cannot risk a low response rate.

Focus group interviews (n=18) were conducted, with groups of six participants at a time, by the same external consultant in order to triangulate responses and seek a greater understanding of the issues.

How Effective is your School?

In order to determine how effective your school is at providing for your education, you are invited to complete this questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality, please do not put your name on the questionnaire. Of course, you can choose not to complete this questionnaire.

Section 1

How good would you rate your school on a scale of 1 to 10?
(1 being the lowest rating and 10 being the highest) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Section 2

For each of the statements below can you please indicate by circling the position [1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree] the extent to which that statement is true for your school.

strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

Figure 1: Student perceptions questionnaire

1	The headteacher provides strong personal leadership of the school.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2	The school provides a safe and clean environment with good resources for learning.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3	The curriculum is relevant and strongly structured, with opportunities to study vocational and academic courses and to get help with basic skills.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4	Senior staff focus on learning and achievement.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5	Issues of bullying, racism and anti-social behaviour are taken seriously.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6	The school employs good teachers.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7	Staff are committed to the school and its improvement.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8	There are good relationships between staff and students.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9	There is good extra-curricular support in preparation for examinations.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10	Students have a positive attitude to school and want to do well.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11	Students are treated fairly and with respect.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12	Students are usually taught well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13	The work of the school is regularly monitored (such as teachers observing each other's lessons) and improvements are made as a result.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14	Our lessons are well structured and organised by teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15	Student behaviour is managed well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16	Teachers model the behaviour expected of students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17	Attendance and punctuality are taken seriously by the school and my parents are contacted if I am absent from school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18	Classes are generally small (compared to the average of 30 in all schools).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19	Students are expected to work hard and do their best.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20	There is good feedback on students' progress so that they know how to improve.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21	Parents are kept informed of students' progress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section 3: What do you like most about your school?

Section 4: What would make your school even better?

Section 5: About You

What year group are you in?	(please state year)	☐
Are you?	Male	☐
	Female	☐
Which of these best describes you?	White	☐
	Mixed Race	☐
	Asian or Asian British	☐
	Black or Black British	☐
	Chinese or other	☐
	Don't Know	☐
Do you receive Free School Meals?	Yes	☐
	No	☐
	Don't Know	☐
Do you receive extra help at school with your learning or behaviour from someone other than your subject teachers?	Yes	☐
	No	☐
	Don't Know	☐

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

The interviews took place in the school conference room which provides ample room to allow privacy for the small sample sizes used in this study. "Zing" facilitation software was used to structure the interviews, with a pre-prepared question template. Participants were able to respond anonymously by using a keyboard but group agreement on common themes was recorded at the end of each question. This system allowed more detailed and searching questions to be asked as the interviews progressed. Once the interviews were complete, the responses were simply exported to a Microsoft Word document and stored securely for further processing. This enabled an accurate confidential electronic transcript to be obtained immediately.

Given the complexity of the analysis used to manipulate test and attainment data, including CVA formulas, it is somewhat surprising that such little effort is expended on the analysis of student views. However, this does not stop schools themselves from adopting more statistically relevant analyses. By using the SPSS statistical computer analysis package it is possible to conduct a really detailed and meaningful analysis.

The presence of a dependent variable in section one of the questionnaire (how good would you rate your school?) and 21 independent variables in Section two enables both correlation and multiple regression analysis to be conducted. So rather than "X% of pupils thought that they are well taught" it is possible to statistically determine the significant strengths and

weakness in the school. For example it is possible to test if the quality of teaching is influenced significantly by approaches to behaviour management. The data analysis at Hurlingham & Chelsea has demonstrated unequivocally that the quality of teaching and learning, commitment of teachers and whole school leadership are the significant predictors of improvement – suggesting that further work in these areas is most likely to bring about even further improvement.

The inclusion of personal data on each student participant allows a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test whether students from specific groups (e.g. based on gender) responded statistically significantly differently. This is an essential approach when seeking to demonstrate equality of opportunity and social cohesion. If an analysis demonstrated that students from a particular ethnic group responded significantly differently to the rating of the effectiveness of the school then this identified a very important issue that needed further investigation. At Hurlingham & Chelsea a detailed analysis using MANOVA demonstrated statistically that the responses to the effectiveness of the school were not significantly different on the basis of gender, ethnicity or free school meals. This is a key judgement to present to an Ofsted team but if there had been a significant difference then it provides the school with a key issue to address through their school improvement efforts.

Although a much more difficult statistical procedure, I used Factor Analysis to reduce a possible 90 school improvement factors to the 21 that formed the basis of a rapid school improvement programme. A further Factor Analysis applied to the 21 variables included in the questionnaire suggested in figure 1 showed that a combination of these school improvement factors were considered by students to provide a coherent school improvement strategy. Hence, the school concentrates all its efforts in these areas – often at the exclusion of other, less high impact, strategies.

Conclusions

There is a danger that the fundamentally different pursuits of inspection, school review and self-evaluation and academic research on their own lack the rigor required effectively to inform school improvement and school effectiveness practice. This is most particularly the case, with regard to gathering and analysing students' perceptions of the impact of the education provided for them and to which they are exposed and experience on a daily basis. Currently the field is dominated by inadequate questionnaires and small-scale and largely unfocussed interviews, with the resulting analyses lacking statistical rigor and external credibility.

There is much talk of school-based research in modern postgraduate courses in education but the potential for rigorous scientific analysis of stakeholder views is an area largely untouched by professionals and

academic researchers.

I believe that Ofsted and school leaders should give significantly higher status to stakeholder, and most importantly, to student views within schools. Simultaneously researchers should concentrate on developing more rigorous methodologies that ensure that judgements based on stakeholder perceptions can stand up to external scrutiny.

No doubt there will still be objections to this approach by those who consider that student views lack credibility or that judgements arising from them will be flawed, biased or should be treated with great caution. However, I believe that these potential criticisms are not as compelling as those emanating from the current Ofsted-driven analyses of student attainment data as the primary measure of school effectiveness. There is a strong argument that a deeper and more meaningful insight into school improvement and school effectiveness can only be achieved through a detailed analysis of student perceptions.

The same arguments presented in this paper could equally be advanced in respect of staff perceptions. Indeed treating staff views in the same way would go some way to negating the defensiveness with which many staff treat student voice.

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A challenge too far: the end of the local authority maintained nursery school?

Pauline Trudell

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Abstract: *This article considers nursery schools' past history as centres of resistance to an outcome dominated early education, and as democratic learning communities. The author examines the decline of state nursery schools as a broad shift has taken place from education to childcare and away from public accountability for education. The author argues that current changes in funding arrangements further threaten the distinctive form of early child-centred education that has developed through decades of practice within maintained nursery schools.*

Whatever the result of the General Election, and however optimistic our resolve, it is hard to believe that state nursery schools will survive for very much longer. Always singular, in a brave new world that denies the difference between childcare and education they present an awkward anomaly.

The Childcare Act 2006 has already formally ended the distinction between nursery education and childcare. The responsibility of the local authority to provide nursery places has changed to that of 'facilitating the childcare market'. This move away from local authority provision of education has been a feature of education policy generally, but one more radical and easily achieved within the nursery sector. There are many and various services for children under five most of which would claim to offer 'nursery education', a confusion which successive governments have found useful.

The situation in which we now find ourselves is not wholly unexpected. Indeed, another way of writing this would have been via the campaigns we conducted over the years against the measures which were

inching us towards this point. Some were introduced over the course of the last 13 years as part of the government's national childcare strategy, while others have grown up over longer time. They include, the closure of nursery schools; changes in initial teacher training that eroded the specialism of nursery teaching; a narrowing of the early years curriculum with consequent change of emphasis from process to measurable outcomes; and, most recently and decisively, the introduction of a single funding formula for both maintained and private and voluntary (PVI) nursery provision. All taking place within a culture in which collective responsibility and control of education is being dismantled.

To begin with the most recent: The Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF) illustrates both an immediate threat to the viability of state nursery schools and a broad shift from public to private: from education to childcare. Intended to be in place from April 2010, full implementation has been postponed for a year, in part because of the perceived effect on maintained nursery schools.

Nursery schools, like other schools, are free, accountable to their governing bodies, the local authority, and their local community. They are public bodies open to public scrutiny. To date nursery schools and classes have been funded, like other schools, through the Dedicated School's Grant, while private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings have received the Nursery Education Grant.

The government has passed primary legislation (The Apprenticeships, Schools, Children and Learners' Act) that allows for amendments to the School Standards & Framework Act, 1998, so that both maintained and PVI settings can be funded from the Individual Schools' Budget. In addition, relevant parts of the School Finance Regulations will apply to PVI funding. This quite astonishing move has gone largely unchallenged.

Local authorities are now required to use a single local formula to fund all 'early years' provision'. They must ensure that the funding mechanism is 'transparent' and based on the same principles. Both government and opposition are committed to the spurious ideal of a 'level playing field' between public and private provision. Defining the 'same principles' have involved local authorities wrestling with the problem of what constitutes 'quality' in early years.

Quality in education is a slippery concept, but taken at face value there is no doubt that maintained nursery schools provide the highest quality and most effective learning environment for young children. They employ qualified teachers and other qualified nursery practitioners and are centres of specialist knowledge and experience of child development, curriculum, pedagogy, and formative assessment. They have buildings and outdoor space geared to the learning and developmental needs of early childhood.

The government's own longitudinal research into the comparative

effectiveness of early years' 'settings' (Sylva, *et al* 2004) found that nursery schools had the greatest impact on young children's social and intellectual development and their subsequent progress in school. This is confirmed annually by reports of the Office for Standards in Education. In 2007-08 the Chief Inspector of Schools noted that "nursery schools are particularly effective, 96% of those inspected are good or outstanding". In fact 47% were judged outstanding. PVI nurseries have different constraints but it is impossible to ignore the evidence: lower qualifications and salaries, higher staff turnover and the pressure for profitability inevitably affect quality.

The aim of the EYSFF, besides the achievement of that mythical level playing field, is to fund an extension of the free entitlement to nursery education from 12.5 to 15 hours a week, to be 'delivered flexibly'. Nursery schools presently offer some free full time places, i.e. 30 hours a week, but in order to fund the 15 hours some local authorities will no longer fund full time places.

Ignoring a substantial body of research (Sykes, 2009) that demonstrates the damaging effects of early entry to school, the government has accepted a proposal of the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum (Rose, 2009) that all children should enter primary school in the September immediately after they are four years old.

It follows from these two measures that young children will have only three terms on a part time basis in the places most suited to their age and stage of development and most of them will only have part time places. Nursery schools will lose the balance of four and three year olds which has been such a strong feature of their practice. The loss of four year olds will reduce numbers and further compromise sustainability.

Nursery schools have the highest cost base, and on going costs associated with quality - leadership of a headteacher, staff with teachers' pay and conditions or local authority scales, upkeep of buildings and gardens - and, when setting the formula, local authorities were advised by central government to take this into account.

In spite of this, the evidence from pilot authorities is that the greatest impact has been on maintained nursery school budgets while much of the PVI sector consider they are receiving very little more. Some local authorities are clear that the new funding formula should not damage their nursery schools. In many others such commitment is not evident and nursery schools stand to lose substantial elements of their budget. They will lose teachers, lose experienced teams, and lose the capacity to train and support early years staff from all sectors. The best model of early education will become extinct.

Constructivist learning theory helped shape a distinctive form of early education in this country, arguably most highly developed through decades of practice within maintained nursery schools. The principles that

underpin that practice affirm that:

- all aspects of development are important and affect each other;
- children are active learners from infancy, eager to make sense of their world and to communicate;
- learning is social and collaborative;
- that children will represent their thoughts and feelings in many different ways if they are given the chance and that play is a key form of representation;
- children learn in individual families and specific social, economic and cultural contexts;
- social and emotional development and sense of identity affect learning; and
- each child will be different in their rate of development, their knowledge, experience and persistent interests and that this difference must be acknowledged.

16 years ago I wrote an article for *Education Review* (Vol.8 No.2, 1994). The topic then was the development of the early years' curriculum.

> *"…in the growth of a distinctive and progressive early childhood curriculum, the most fruitful collaboration has been that between teacher and researcher, and the curriculum has been, and continues to be, most fully developed within the school system, in particular within nursery schools.*
>
> *Within nursery schools there has been a conscious examination and struggle to define and implement a fully integrated curriculum, pedagogy and method of assessment within the early childhood tradition that rejects a "non interventionist developmentalism" (Donald) and takes account of issues of feminism, anti-racism and cultural and linguistic difference. The curriculum that has emerged is vulnerable to internal and external pressures and implemented within structures that are increasingly irrelevant to the needs of children and families and will need to change. But change in ways that build on that achieved curriculum."* (p.12)

Written from a high point in the development of nursery schools within the old Inner London Education Authority it marks the moment when teachers' creative freedom was about to slip from their hands. At that time the early years' curriculum was based on nine broad areas of learning and experience. Teachers both contributed to that framework and made the professional judgement about what would be taught and, crucially, how it would be taught to the children in their care.

But, National Curriculum programmes of study and attainment targets were already beginning to press down on children who were not yet five, especially in nursery classes within primary schools. Since then external pressure has increased while teachers' confidence in applying the

principles of nursery education has diminished. For example, nursery schools have sophisticated systems of formative assessment, based on each child's unique pattern of development, used to track progress and plan for future learning, but compliance with data driven assessment of groups of children has grown to meet Ofsted demands.

The study of child development and the processes of early learning disappeared from early years Initial Teacher Training (ITT) long ago. The EYFS applies to children from birth to five and presented an opportunity to restore those elements. Instead a new category of Early Years' Professional was devised with an ill defined relationship to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

The current curriculum, EYFS 2008, is both prescriptive and incoherent. Its focus is on a measurable end product – the achievement of early learning goals at age five. It is closely linked to the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies for primary schools. It oversimplifies complex development through age related 'developmental matters' grids. By end stopping 'early years' at age five it separates the Foundation Stage from KS1; this, together with the invention of the Early Years' Professional to work with children up to five, makes teachers expendable for that age group.

How has all this come about?

In 1997, when the Labour government came to office, services for children under five were various, limited and fragmented; a mix of public, private and voluntary. Many of them had grown up in ad hoc fashion in the absence of any coherent and comprehensive policy and funding for state nursery education. Within the public domain there was a damaging split between social services day care and education. Each had its own government department, and professional practice had developed in sharply different ways. The exception to divided public services were the few combined centres that had been established. Most of these were maintained nursery schools and most subsequently became Early Excellence Centres.

The previous year the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained School Bill had been passed, funding nursery education for all four year olds via nursery vouchers to be redeemed at any of the patchwork of nurseries they attended. The Major government's action had been prompted by public demand for more and better services at a time of changing family and employment patterns, while evidence of the social and educational value of high quality nursery education was exemplified in a series of influential reports which called for a national policy. (Ball,1994; National Commission on Education,1994; Pugh,1996).

The voucher system blurred the distinction between different forms of nursery provision by regarding all as nursery education as long as it could

be shown that children were working towards a set of learning outcomes produced by the (then) Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority. It also channelled public funds from local authority budgets into the hands of parents of four year olds who could use it to pay for private nursery fees. In these two key ways it set a precedent for the incoming government.

In order to achieve state funded 'nursery education' for all three and four year olds fast the government endorsed all existing nursery provision of which the private sector formed the greater part. There was no time to improve the qualifications of a generally undertrained workforce over the decades it would realistically take. Instead, over the past 13 years targeted capital and revenue has gone into the private sector to improve premises and fund the recruitment of graduates. The EYFS was put in place to 'guarantee quality' across a wide range of settings, though it is clear that no curriculum document could compensate for training.

The significantly uneven quality of the services being built on mean that, for example, there is no statutory requirement in the EYFS for nurseries to have any outside space or natural light since not all could comply. We should note that these are places where children from birth to five may spend up to ten hours a day. In the early part of the last century Margaret MacMillan wrote:

> *"To move, to run, to find things out by new movement. That is the life of early childhood."* (MacMillan,1919)

It has remained a principle of nursery school education that the learning environment for young children, crucially, includes space inside and outside, with simultaneous access to both.

Since 1997 the growth in services and government spending has been enormous. Measures were also put in place to draw together the divided public sector at national and local level with new departmental and local authority structures. There were initiatives to integrate education, daycare, health, social welfare, and family support services within single centres with 3,500 to be in place by 2010. The first of these Early Excellence Centres (later Children's Centres) were predominately nursery schools.

Nursery schools were initially a central element of such growth because almost all had extensive experience of working with families while the high quality of education they provided was seen as of particular importance in overcoming disadvantage and social exclusion.

The government's expressed aim was to end child poverty by 2020. Following historical precedent they displaced the problem of poverty on to the regulation of families and the rapid expansion of childcare places was driven hard by a social welfare agenda. One-fifth of all children in Britain in the late 1990s were living in poverty (Unicef Innocenti Research Centre,

2000). Key determinants of poverty such as unemployment, low income, reliance on benefits and single parent households, were to be addressed by government initiatives that concentrated on helping families into work with targeted resources going to support families and children from birth to age four in areas of high social deprivation and disadvantage. (Neighbourhood Nurseries, Working Families Tax Credit and Sure Start).

More nursery places also increased the opportunities for early intervention in the learning and development of children seen to be most at risk:

> *"If we were to make evidence based policy for preventing educational and behaviour problems in children from disadvantaged communities we would recommend universal early childhood education."* (Sylva 2000)

Authoritative research indicated that not only could class based differences in educational achievement be narrowed by early education but the state would gain lasting social and economic benefits from the increasing numbers of socially adjusted and law abiding citizens. (Milbank, 1987; Athey, 1990; Bertram & Pascall 2000; Berreuta-Clement *et al.*1984; Schweinhart *et al.*1993). The importance of securing the involvement of parents was a consistent factor in contemporary research, which also showed that not all forms of early education are equally effective.

> *"Programmes that deliver measurable benefits require high levels of staff and training. There will be little or no benefit from early childhood services that fall below a certain threshold of cost and quality."* (Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2008)

In other words, only the highest quality integrated care and education could improve the educational and life chances of those children and families that live in poverty. Nursery schools offered the best hope. They are universal provision. The majority are situated in the 30% most disadvantaged areas of England. They have always admitted children from a variety of backgrounds. Their admissions policies, determined by their local authorities, give priority to children in social and medical need. However, nursery schools had been vulnerable to closure before 1997 and only around 500 remained. The children's centres that were produced in great numbers were not those that grew from nursery schools. More new nursery school based centres could have been opened if government commitment had been to universal funding of universal provision. As it was, the drawing together of services in targeted areas of disadvantage provided a context within which some local authorities felt licensed to

make cuts, and as the new centres rolled out more nursery schools were closed or amalgamated with primary schools. The government insisted that the loss of nursery schools was an unintended consequence of their policy and introduced a presumption against the closure of nursery schools (June 2003).

> *"This Government is committed to the maintained nursery school sector. We are clear about the particular and vital role they can play in taking forward the ambitious agenda we are setting. We recognise the consistent evidence about the quality of early learning in nursery schools . . .We recognise the distinctive contribution the sector can make to help raise the quality of services, inform practice and disseminate information."* (Cathy Ashton, Ministerial speech, 2002)

> *"…the change to a single formula is not intended to threaten the viability of maintained nursery schools."* (interim DCSF guidance, July 2008)

What persists is the gap between government rhetoric and the actions of local authorities. The presumption against the closure of nursery schools is widely ignored and many more will face closure as their budgets decline.

The article I wrote in 1994 for this journal ended on what now seems a prescient note:

> *"The early years curriculum challenges the view of education as isolated instruction. It highlights the transforming power of imaginative play and honours children's own intentions for learning. It is holistic and cross-curricular and acknowledges children's capacity for active learning and their independence and self discipline. Because it promotes an alliance with parents and breaks down divisions between teaching and learning and because it stresses that all learning is social and collaborative and that knowledge and experience can be shared it is genuinely subversive. We need to hang on to this."* (p.15)

We still do.

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The article also draws on unpublished work written with my colleague, Barbara Riddell.

Another School is Possible

Abstract: *Following the outcome of the 2010 general election, teacher trade unionists must renew their efforts to forge a different kind of school to the one foisted on staff and learners by recent governments, argues the author. He goes on to offer a schematic plan to focus both the unacceptable current orthodoxies and the shape of another more appropriate vision.*

Nick Grant

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Another form of schooling is both necessary and possible. By that, I mean a service to learners rooted in child development and human potential that is implemented with collective and co-operative methods in pursuit of a just, equitable, peaceful and sustainable future.

So the general election outcome has to be significant for us teacher trade unionists in a couple of crucial inter-related respects.

To start with I have some sympathy with what a Jamaican-born voter told me when I canvassed as a Parliamentary candidate in 2001. "Politics is poli-tricks". I see far too much consensus on social, economic and ideological questions within the Westminster village. What divides the major parties is insignificant compared to their joint adherence to self-perpetuating core values. 'Duck houses'. Say no more.

However, lunching recently in the Country Girl pub next to Selly Oak hospital, amongst three separate severely disabled, very young men attempting a sunny afternoon's return to normality with relatives, I realised that politics is far too important and life-changing to be left to the politicians. Their bodies, minds and futures are irreversible marked by their time in Afghanistan.

Firstly, we are mostly employed in a state-funded public service, even though, perversely, the NUT seems more vigorously ready to defend the principles of democratic management and accountability than Parliament itself. The increasing spectrum of deviant systems introduced in the last 20 years could soon expand beyond Academies and Trusts to the Conservative's 'Free' schools, or the 'Accredited Schools' in Labour's manifesto.

Secondly, we are afloat in the uncharted waters of adversity due to the severest capitalist crisis since the 1930s, with the sharks of private profit smelling blood. The good ship Comprehensive Education is already listing from torpedoes fired by HMS Choice and Diversity.

The public sector as a whole is being touted as the object of serious retrenchment rather than expansion. Neither Harold Wilson in the 1970s nor Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s geared up to dismantle the post-1945 Welfare State in quite the manner expected of whichever Prime Minister sees in 2011.

Our strategies into the coming governmental era have to be informed by our own unique vision of change and how work and learning can be truly liberating.

One small detail tells everything about the Conservative's deceitful public relations. Their flagship schools policy is being imported from Sweden, but deliberately mis-translated as being about 'Free' schools when the more accurate term is 'Independent' schools. That word has too much Conservative baggage, implying private schools, and contradicts the laughable 'power to the people' hype.

Education is big business globally, especially where governments are prepared to de-regulate and open up existing public provision to profit-taking.

Ghana, for example, has been ravaged by privateers whose key profit source is derived from the charges for access to testing and examination systems.

In vast areas of the world such as India or Africa, the poor pre-existing level of tax-funded education makes the amount of charity and religious-based funding of schooling more prevalent than in Europe. However, some local co-ops exist to fill the gap in state funding. I visited two, fee-paying village schools in the Punjab in 2008, operating with no profit, poor wages and basic equipment. The schools were open when children were not needed for harvesting duties.

So, whilst the extremes of multiple redundancies, debilitating pension reform and school closures may not impact on us straight away, the size of teaching groups and workload generally, the demise of generous support staffing and a shrinkage of teacher supply due to lost places in Higher Education, will hit us hard and quick.

Most school workers already function to the limits of their physical and mental health due largely to the excessive and ever-changing external performance pressures, and the relegation of all sorts of equality issues in the workplace. The very fabric of our own organisational structures will face terrific strain as school reps face greater victimisation and local officers less and less facility time.

Yet I want to assert here that now is not the time for us to match such conservative thinking. The very defence of our union and its comprehensive ideals requires us to see the coming severe challenges dialectically – as a great opportunity.

But that in turn is contingent upon an acceptance of the thoroughly ideological function that schools perform, most eloquently summarised by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), in reproducing human capital, preparing young citizens for their slot in the social status quo.

Practically speaking I am referring to the smiley faces reward systems and ability-based table-setting of Early Years, the internalisation by primary learners of SATs levels and national curriculum sub-level progress as a measure of their total self-esteem, the spoon-feeding that masquerades as learning, the very existence of government invective about creativity in classrooms, managerial careerism trumping pedagogic skills, the scramble for admissions to 'popular' secondary places, and the dips in performance and interest that accompanies the realisation by so many secondary students that learning is never going to be fun.

The predominant approach shaping the jungle of current systems is instrumentalist, designed to affect both social control and some level of job-skilling, but not about true universal child development or human liberation. Indeed, it is not the best of times to be young (Vernell, 2010).

So another kind of school is possible, as a vibrant negation of the increasingly regimented hothouses where everyone marches to the Ofsted drum. We must and can delineate what we want, not merely what we oppose.

Barack Obama and David Cameron may have now finally emptied the rhetoric of change of any meaningful purchase on reality. Certainly for decades now the dominant mode of change-management in our schools has been an authoritarian, top-down, relentlessly self-justifying nightmare known only too intimately by the nation's general practitioners who assess its steady flow of casualties in their daily surgeries.

From numerous casework scenarios involving bullying managers that I have dealt with as an NUT Division Secretary it is common for our members to be left exasperated by the conflicting directives being given to them. The managers involved either don't recognise their own professional inconsistency and subjectivity or, more typically as time goes by, don't care, or even deliberately confuse targeted staff as a tactic of harassment.

Thus willing and conscientious colleagues are tipped into a vortex of mental torture, self-doubt and illness. I have never understood how this culture of fear is productive, other than being a short cut to rapid advancement for ambitious managers. Yet it is of course a feature of so many modern workplaces, personified in the vicious antics of British Airways boss Willie Walsh.

I have lost count of the number of times I have asked school leaders who think that bullying is legitimate, why on earth they think that strategies to get the best out of their staff seem to run directly counter to the strategies teachers typically use to get the best out of their students. Which learner thrives on being shouted at, isolated, overloaded with contradictory tasks and sent home miserable at the end of every day?

Our strategies into the coming governmental era have to be informed by our own unique vision of change and how work and learning can be truly liberating.

No policy stone about funding, governance, curriculum, admissions, accountability, pedagogy and student voice should remain unturned. Our vision for change, not theirs, needs revealing in high-definition sound and colour.

In developing a schematic approach to this contrast between the suffocating jungle of present provision and the paradise of potential systems it is worth acknowledging some very basic notions about how change happens.

Conscious involvement in the *why*, *what*, *how* and *who* of change is crucial.

Within any size of social group from a nursery class, to a school departmental staffing team to a whole social class of citizens, conscious involvement in the *why*, *what*, *how* and *who* of change is crucial.

All participants need to understand *why* change is necessary, and the exact features that are untenable or stale about the current situation.

The group has to then identify *what* they aspire to achieve at the completion of change.

The bridge between here and there has to be agreed as the *how* of getting from old to new arrangements.

Lastly the agency of change, *who* will accomplish it, needs to be fully understood.

None of the links in this process can work without all others. Failure to convince participants about *why* change is necessary will undermine the effectiveness of all other stages. Not agreeing precise transitional steps about *how* to change will undo any teleological consensus.

The following table tries to map the rift between jungle and paradise according to the competing ideological forces.

'They' represents the government and business institutions as well as the social partner unions, whose change agenda is regressive, utilitarian and claustrophobic in terms of closing down creative spaces.

'We' represents the NUT and progressive campaigning groups for whom the motivation and purpose of schooling is quite contrary.

CHANGE	*THEY* say JUNGLE	*WE* say PARADISE
WHY	Individual is paramount in learning and competition is the core ethos Students need to be delivered fit for the class relations and skills required by job market Schools are a panacea for a range of social ills (obesity, violence, pregnancy, community cohesion) Schools must adopt new status as remaining locus of otherwise obliterated local public services (health, social care, careers, nursery/adult/community ed)	Learning is essentially a social process and co-operation the core ethos Students need full emotional and intellectual potential released by appropriate curricula, and institutional freedoms Learning for social justice on a collective model can replace atomised individualism of testing and examinations paradigm School can be a pro-active social resource for whole community with equal partners beyond its gates
WHAT	Increased instrumentalism Greater commodification of learning for purposes of measurement Entrenched polarity between academic and vocational study Citizenship for conformity - if not social authoritarianism Schools extended to replace full range of social/community services	Greater academic liberation Global citizenship and empowerment Greater freedom to design and enact learning by learners and teachers Topic teaching at all levels Increased school democracy in context of local public democracy Full range of public services
HOW	A fixed-ability paradigm from outset (setting, selection, gifted & talented) Standardisation, not 'standards' High of producer surveillance (Ofsted, PRP, League Tables) A cult of managerialism Greater role for private sector (Academies, Trusts, BSF) Emasculated public sector and trade unions Consumer sovereignty	Finnish Model (Kindergarten until age 7, smaller 7-16 schools, no selection or testing, fresh food, highly-qualified staff, higher spending on frontline) Global, social justice learning projects produced collectively Mixed ability, high-opportunity paradigms formatively rather than summatively assessed Holistic approach to human potential (practical and academic) Limitless standards of expectation and outcome
WHO	Private companies and corporations Top down from Whitehall quangos and private consultants, LA SIPs Senior managers, especially heads Compliant social partners - in abusive, one-sided relationship with government!	Bottom up from learners Starting with teachers and learners supported by their caring and academic communities Public forms of management and truly reciprocal social partnerships Publicly funded and managed, with union participation at all levels

There are of course a minority of counter-initiatives within the current schools system and related academia where exemplary practices are being eked out against the tide of orthodoxy and stultification represented by Ofsted, SATs, reduced funding, privatisation and endless governmental diktat (Yandell, 2010).

The refreshing approach to the Early Years curriculum in Wales is perhaps the most progressive widespread development of note. A few dozen schools have taken the issues of climate change to heart by designing curricular themes around its scientific and social aspects, as well as organising alternative energy and waste systems within their control. The Alternative Futures project led by colleagues at Filton High School, south Gloucestershire, has repeated a successful and inspiring strategy of deconstructing present curricula in favour of themes based on issues of global social justice.

Yet these are most often the product of dissident staff or administrators whose selfless bravery risks the eventual wrath of inspectors, if not parents or Local Authorities, and the indignation of ignorant journalists. The pressures to achieve mediocre outcomes, despite all the false, shrill rhetoric of excellence, are huge.

It is not at all easy to remain focussed on the true values of education when all around are being trained and rewarded for their adherence to a tick-box, marketised, competitive ethos of drive-by lesson observations and the arbitrary promotions of unworthy leadership candidates.

So another kind of school is possible, as a vibrant negation of the increasingly regimented hothouses where everyone marches to the Ofsted drum.

The real crisis in quality management recruitment, especially in the primary sector, has lead not to a re-evaluation by the government of why so few now want to take on such an impossible job, but the barmy opposite conclusion that 'good' managers should be given more and more schools to manage!

Our greatest solace has to be that the importation of production-line methods and mechanical, private-sector originated management models will never fit the organic and meandering processes of education, and are failing to do so. For a start no individual's learning trajectory is ever production-linear except to a number-crunching Whitehall or Town Hall apparatchik!

For example, the Academies programme in England is modelled on US Charter Schools. Barack Obama's first Washington appointee was his chum Arne Duncan who had spearheaded this trend in his Chicago base.

But Charter Schools have made no real impact on the learning of the very kids they claim to enhance, when compared with traditional public sector schools there. The most forensic comparative monitoring of their

progress in 16 US states carried out by Stanford University, California last summer, does not make good reading for Charter advocates.

> *"If charter schools are to flourish and deliver on promises made by proponents, a deliberate and sustained effort to increase the proportion of high quality schools is essential. The replication of successful school models is one important element of this effort. On the other side of the equation, however, authorizers must be willing and able to fulfill their end of the original charter school bargain: accountability in exchange for flexibility. When schools consistently fail, they should be closed.*
>
> *Though simple in formulation, this task has proven to be extremely difficult in practice. Simply put, neither market mechanisms nor regulatory oversight (have) been a sufficient force to deal with underperforming schools."* (Stanford University, Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009)

The other more recent US model for change has been the Knowledge Is Power Programme (KIPP), which purports to have had dramatic impacts in high ethnic-minority enclaves. Bearing in mind that funding for public services has always been so much lower in the US than the UK, the degree of anxiety about their quality is understandably more pervasive there.

But KIPP schools are highly exploitative of staff, commonly open six days a week and 12 hours a day with staff on call 24/7 via mobile phones, and aggressively test-focused. 'Drill and kill' fits this regime as much as any military boot camp. Anyone wanting a vivid exposure of the impact of testing on urban US schools can look no further than series four of the wonderful HBO series 'The Wire'.

Evidence from Sweden shows clearly that the model of Independent schools there, much-favoured by the Tories here, again show no real improvement of academic outcome but do show greater social stratification along religious, ethnic and class lines. The private sector pressures have brought reductions in qualified teacher posts and a sharp increase in cheaper ancillary staffing. Most perniciously, this is all done in the name of parental free choice, not, as is patently obvious once we engage with its protagonists, corporate profit grab.

Readers needing any further inspiration to keep their heads high should always turn to a much better US source – the Rethinking Schools team. Their website and journal should be a common calling place for all our thoughts of resistance to the rising tide of reaction in the coming years (Rethinking Schools, 2010). Their ideas are always classroom tested, equality-minded and child-centred. Every learner really does matter to them.

From the scheme that I have outlined above perhaps the most difficult but necessary aspect of the change we want to see concerns agency.

It will be no mean feat to invert the status quo, turning the top-down

autocracy of current systems into a bottom-up process using public funds for the benefit of all communities. The democratic deficit whereby politics remains alien to the masses will not be rectified by sham Tory populism. Their free-market decimation of public services with schools handed over to privateers will take us in completely the wrong direction.

But it will mean all the public sector unions taking on a greater role in the political life of the country to the point that new political forces will become more and more necessary to represent their real interests. The NUT's current anti-fascist commitments enshrined in its Political Fund will have to be extended to articulate our role in shaping and supporting pro-democracy political organisation in the coming years.

So let's commit ourselves to forging a new school for our learners, as part of a wider new democracy.

We, and they, have nothing to lose but *our* change.

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Book reviews

THE COACHING TOOLKIT

Shaun Allison and Matthew Harbour

Sage Publications Ltd 2009 ISBN 9781412945370

Coaching is "like a virus in that it needs to adapt and evolve depending on the conditions and circumstances of the school". An interesting view expressed by one of the participants from a case study and absolutely right too. Coaching, as the book identifies, is not in itself a panacea for improving schools; however, the enthusiasm with which this book has been written might lead you to think it could be.

The authors Shaun Allison and Matthew Harbour point out that they are not experts in the field of coaching but their combined experiences and dedication to the use of coaching as a tool for improvement picks them out as professional experts with an eye for a successful process.

The book is easy to read in that it can be dipped into or read cover to cover – I tried it both ways and found the whole process informative and thought provoking! Anyone considering using coaching methods in a school could do little better than take up this guide and consider the range of options provided.

The layout of the information is very clear and the content of the chapters usefully identified in the "How to use this book" section right at the beginning.

Some experienced coaches may want to skip around the order of the chapters but that sits comfortably with the design of the book. New practitioners will want to study the guidance on effective questioning and listening as this is crucial to effective coaching.

The range of coaching models will irritate those who are not over keen on the use of acronyms and may deter cynics to the coaching process. However, in terms of describing different approaches to coaching, and the background to each, the book is useful. And after all, as pointed out on a number of occasions within the text, coaching can adapt to the needs of the school – so choices can be made.

The core theme throughout is reflection for improvement. The case studies demonstrate how leaders and teachers have benefited; as have, ultimately, the students receiving the improved practice. Developing coaching is a great professional responsibility for aspiring leaders to get their teeth into and have a positive impact across the school. Allison and Harbour suggest several methods that can be used to track impact in

Nigel Ash

Nigel Ash has been a headteacher at a number of schools in three different local authorities and has worked as an adviser, a senior inspector and an independent consultant. Currently he is Senior Inspector in Southampton. Nigel has tutored a number of NUT CPD opportunities and will provide guidance on peer coaching as part of the new Internationalising Learning CPD project. (email: internationalcpd@nut.org.uk)

different ways and from different perspectives.

I believe the authors missed a trick by not spending a bit more time providing a handful of primary case studies which would have fully rounded off the whole book and encouraged a wide audience. To be fair, all the principles, advice and guidance regarding coaching remain the same across primary and secondary; it's just that there are still those who get hung up about the differences between phases rather than see the benefits of the similarities.

I, for one, will be making constant reference to the book and will happily and heartily recommend it to those I work with, especially those who have the challenge of improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to improve outcomes – in the widest sense – for pupils. Onwards and upwards – perhaps the second edition could have case studies from primary, early years and special schools!

REFLECTIVE PLAYWORK - FOR ALL WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN

Jacky Kilvington and Ali Wood

Continuum 2010 ISBN 9780826497642

"All children and young people need to play"; this is the first principle of play and play work. This book is aimed primarily at play workers and weaves together a theoretical, practical and reflective approach which makes it both useful and accessible. Teachers wishing to explore the concept of play further will find it a useful reference guide to many elements of play practice. With useful chapter outlines listed at the beginning of each section, the book can easily be dipped into or read from chapter to chapter.

The authors' experience and passion for 'play' shines through the book, particularly in the reflection boxes peppered across each chapter. These provide a contrast to the theoretical detail which comprises the majority of the book. In addition, 'reflection opportunity' boxes are included within each chapter which did make me stop and consider my own experiences and views. The opportunity for reflection makes a strong link between play theory and its practical application for play workers.

I think that elements of the book could usefully be incorporated into training for both lunchtime staff and teachers considering play issues. The first chapter explores the important principles of play describing for example, why it is important for young people to play and the capacity for positive development. The list of principles may provide useful material for teachers wishing to win arguments within their schools about the importance of play for all children and young people.

The book places the child firmly at the centre of the play process and

Judy Ellerby

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reminds practitioners that play should be child-initiated and directed, not adult led. There is also recognition of the importance of adult play and the way in which this influences play workers perceptions of children's play.

There are useful theoretical examples of the ways in which play aids children's psychological, social and physical development which teachers may find useful if they are seeking evidence justifying increased elements of play as a learning tool within schools. Holding on to play in schools, even within the early years' sector, may become increasingly difficult for teachers in the future.

A contentious issue, often raised in schools with regard to play, is risk-taking. This is addressed clearly and with concrete research examples by the authors who emphasise the importance of risk-taking opportunities for children's development.

The section on play resources in Chapter Five serves as an important reminder that play resources do not have to be expensive catalogue bought toys and gadgets and that scrap items can be as good if not better in firing the imagination of children and young people and providing them with play opportunities. The items on the list include cartons, boxes, buttons, seaweed, twigs, crates and large cable reels. This list reminded me of my days working in a nursery class when all my 'recycling' went in to school each Monday morning for the children's workshop area and where old milk crates were one of the most popular outdoor play items.

The book also includes some useful material on regulatory matters. It is geared essentially towards play workers despite claiming to be aimed at all those working with children. I did enjoy the book, however, and will use it as a reference point for play theory, to provide practical suggestions for play in a wider context and, of course, the essential resources list.

A STORY TO TELL

George Murphy and Maggie Power
Trentham Books ISBN 9781858564432

"The book will inspire teachers and help them to develop their own storytelling skills" says the blurb. "Inspire" is not a word I would use. I think this book validates experience and supports reflective thinking about where teachers can go with storytelling in their own classroom or school.

Telling a story was, and is, an essential ingredient in every classroom. More importantly, it is not my story that needs to be heard it is the story of every child that needs to be heard – every child matters.

I approached this book with a storytelling open mind and was rewarded with experiences from other professionals who have used and value the use of storytelling in the curriculum. I found the contributors

Julie Hawkins

Julie Hawkins first realised the value of storytelling when listening to statements during her career as a police officer. Julie then trained and taught as a primary teacher and currently works as an Advisory Teacher with the Social and Emotional Behaviour Support Service in Somerset. An NUT member of the Somerset Division, she has found NUT CPD opportunities invaluable.

engaging and their contributions validated my own personal ethos. They describe their success in using the outside classroom, historical artefacts, and specialist projects to support the development of storytelling expertise within schools.

The book would be particularly useful to newly qualified teachers who may be hesitant to engage in some established ways of working such a "hot seating" or exploration of cultural story and how to confront stereotypes in fairy tales. Of particular interest was "*Working in Schools*" by Maggie Power which described the practical approach for research and active support to schools.

Storytelling has been a fundamental element in my career. My current work takes me into many classrooms where storytelling is often marginalised. Children of concern often have very complex stories to tell about the relationships that are important to them. Stories to tell about incidents and accidents of life that have impacted upon them. I often support therapeutic storytelling (Margot Sunderland) and find parents and children have enormously intricate stories to tell. The story needs to be told and heard. School is one of the safe places to do this.

For the classroom teacher what this book lacks are planning and curriculum notes alongside the listing of resources. I had to highlight things I needed, and make separate notes of good ideas. Nothing wrong in this, but I felt like I was back in school and that is the point of my earlier comment "inspire" is not a word I associate with the book. I would describe it as a theoretical book that contributes to reflective thinking and planning around storytelling.

The inspiration comes from storytelling in the classroom, within relationships, when we slow down and listen to a story to tell.

Helen Hill

Helen Hill is Principal Officer in the NUT's EEPD department with responsibility for policy work in the secondary school area. Before working at NUT she was a secondary school teacher in the London boroughs of Islington, Lambeth, Wandsworth and Enfield. She has been a Head of Department, an Equal Opportunities Officer and is currently an examination moderator.

LOST GENERATION – NEW STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH AND EDUCATION

Patrick Ainley and Martin Allen

Continuum Education 2010 ISBN 9781441134707

This book usefully charts the rise of overqualified but underemployed young people who know where they are but are still lost: "young people anxious to enter employment, repay student debt and move on with their lives. They are, however, a generation all dressed up but with nowhere to go". Ainley and Allen have once again prodded the conscience of everyone who should be interested in equality and justice for young people.

It comprehensively describes how education over time has become a mechanical and instrumental affair: students navigating their way through a recession, learning what they have to do, when they have to do it and, in many cases, doing so by whatever means available.

The authors highlight the distinction between being "unemployed" and being "underemployed". For many young people, even those with qualifications, casualised, low wage and unskilled jobs have increasingly become the only ones available. The authors argue for a "really useful" education system that breaks down divisions between "academic and vocational learning that empowers people to take control of the economy and society". The book describes the dilemma of young people which has arisen from a mismatch between qualifications held by the current generation and the opportunities available to them in the labour market: as the authors put it, "a graduate education without a graduate job". The learning society has become a "credential society" where for many young people education and training is increasingly becoming like: "running up a down escalator; a situation where you have to gain more and more qualifications simply to stand still".

The authors maintain that while governments have promoted the idea of the "knowledge worker" this has not materialised due to a significant over-estimation of the need for highly skilled jobs relative to those classified as "unskilled". Politicians face a real dilemma because as graduates take over non-graduate jobs, the wages of those with lower qualifications are depressed and they are then forced to take up low-paid work: "If graduates are underemployed young people without qualifications are more likely to be unemployed". The book maintains that an underclass of "worthlessly certified" young people is becoming socially excluded on the margins of society. Hence the title of the book points to a new generation of young people "lost in transition".

What answers does the book provide? Teachers and educationalists have to work to promote change from below, the status of vocational education has to improve, there needs to be a multi-level general diploma for everyone, with the promotion of socially critical learning and a call for a self-sustaining campaign on youth employment.

A book not to be ignored.

Rachel Galea-Baker

Rachel Galea-Baker is a former primary school teacher and holds a Masters in Education and Social Justice from the Institute of Education. Rachel joined the NUT in 2007 and works as the Union's Professional Assistant for Gender Equality.

UNDOING HOMOPHOBIA IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The No Outsiders Project Team, compiled by Elizabeth Atkinson and Renee DePalma

Stoke on Trent: Trentham 2010 ISBN 9781858564401

> *"Gay and Lesbian and bisexual people shouldn't be very afraid to say it". (Year 5 pupil, London)*

Discrimination against teachers and pupils who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered, continues to plague our schools and

communities. Teachers, who want to, often feel unable to 'come out' at school, and pupils are denied opportunities to challenge deeply embedded norms around sexual orientation and gender expression. *Undoing Homophobia in Primary Schools* is an account by teachers involved in the ground-breaking and innovative 'No Outsiders Project', which aimed to undo that discrimination from the ground up.

The project has helped shape the views of many primary school pupils, their teachers, parents, carers, and indeed whole communities. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and supported by the NUT, it was an action research based project which lasted from September 2006 to December 2008. It used a practitioner-researcher model, in which academics and teachers worked together to explore a variety of different ways of teaching about gender and sexual orientation in primary schools. With a common aim to address sexualities equality in primary schools, teachers set out to interrogate the processes of homophobia, gender normalisation and heteronormativity inherent in their own practice and to explore possibilities for new kinds of practice. The schools participating in the No Outsiders Project used a collection of children's books featuring non-heterosexual characters which were carefully selected for their ability to examine identity and difference in a non-threatening context.

Undoing Homophobia in Primary Schools is organised into eight chapters. The succinct overview of UK Government legislation contextualises the political landscape in which the relevant equality issues are situated. The chapters are made up of various vignettes from project team members. Issues covered include: the pedagogical approaches adopted throughout the project, reflective essays, accounts of challenges, communication strategies, policies and support, planning and information, and resources. In chapters two to six, project team members present their own experiences of No Outsiders work, drawing on presentations, emails, conversations and web postings during the project.

The strength of this book, however, lies in the moving accounts of the pupils and project leaders cleverly woven throughout each chapter. Every practitioner member of the research teams is represented somewhere. This provides the reader with an authentic insight into the grassroots experiences of the teachers and pupils engaged in this groundbreaking project.

This book gives hope to all those teachers who have worked tirelessly to combat homophobia in their schools:

> *"Well, it doesn't matter if you've got two mams, or just a mam with no dad, if you've got two dads or just one dad – it doesn't matter – you're just still a family"*. (Year Three pupil, North East).

…and to those teachers who have felt unable to express their identity at their workplace:

> *"I never thought I'd be doing assemblies on my civil partnership. But I sort of made that pledge to some of the other same sex parents that I would talk about my civil partnership when it came round. When it did, I thought well either I just forget about it or do it. Everywhere I walk in school now a child wishes me well for my wedding".*

Finally, it will inspire those who believe in empowering people by equipping them with the values of respect, tolerance and understanding of diversity;

> *"Issues to do with minorities aren't about minorities; they're about all of us". (Parent, North East).*

Undoing Homophobia in Primary Schools offers readers with sound and effective pedagogical approaches to promoting equality along with honest and open accounts of challenges faced within the classroom and at a wider school level. This book is an indispensable teaching resource, a thorough and useful guide for teachers and school leaders and an essential read for anyone who is striving for equality and fairness.

CREATING TOMORROW'S SCHOOLS TODAY – EDUCATION – OUR CHILDREN – THEIR FUTURES

Richard Gerver

Continuum 2010 ISBN 9781855393943

Richard Gerver begins his book with the story of a sausage sandwich – or as they call it in his neck of the woods a "sausage cob". This breakfast delight becomes a metaphor in his opening chapter for what has gone wrong with education. Unable to buy a sausage cob in the airport café because it is "not on the menu", the young man behind the counter comes up with the ingenious solution of selling him a plate of sausages and a bread roll instead. He is, according to Gerver, "the perfect example of a young person educated in the current school system. He was technically efficient yet lacked the essential skills he would need to truly flourish in the world he now inhabits and the one he will continue to mature into".

In the first part of the book, the author dissects what has gone wrong with our education system in recent years and why we cannot continue to pursue a model of education that primarily aims to create people to fit jobs instead of one that produces young people who can make the jobs fit them. He argues that: "Schooling should be a journey which helps our young

Celia Dignan

Celia Dignan is a former London primary school teacher. She now works for the NUT in the Union's Education, Equality and Professional Development Department and is the Editor of *Education Review*.

people develop their interests and cultures responsibly, to see applications and development opportunities that take them beyond what they know, to inspire them to want to know more, and most importantly, to use their experiences to make positive contributions to the global communities they are part of." To do that, he argues, we must stop believing that education is something that can be "done to children" and that one size fits all, we must do more to value children, their cultures and their backgrounds.

In the second part of the book, Gerver sets out an alternative model for education. This is based on his experiences as Headteacher of Grange Primary School from 2001 to 2007 during which time the school became an 'outstanding' school. He describes the root and branch transformation of the learning process that he engaged in alongside the staff, students and parents. This involved first creating a vision of the model for education that Grange Primary wanted to develop. This began by asking a series of abstract questions to engage the whole team of staff such as: "How do we turn our school into Disneyland? What would I want to learn if I was eight years old? Ideas then developed into strategies to redesign practice and evolve into systems.

The school developed a "Learning Profiles Policy" based on a model of a successful learner at the end of his or her primary school career at Grange which identified, "how they behaved in different situations, how they handled challenges, problems, interactions with other people, information and technology". It then set about transforming its curriculum to create a model that had, at its core, the development of Grange's pupils as people and which, to that end, had four key elements: learning to learn and live; developing aspiration and values; developing skills and competences; and applying learning in contexts.

The remainder of the book follows the school as it develops its philosophy in practise, culminating in the Grangetown Project in which the children were able to develop their learning in real contexts. This was for me the most riveting part of the book and one which I will not spoil for potential readers.

This is an inspiring book in its ability to challenge the conventional wisdom about what education is for. It reminds us that children need to be at the heart of any successful system of education and that it is possible to swim against the tide and create a community of successful teachers and learners despite the pressures to give in to the data machine model of schooling.

Children's Services Weekly

Children's Services Weekly is a new electronic publication that will give you short news reports on what is happening in the world of children's services across the range of service providers, from schools to local authorities, the NHS and the police. It is edited by Chris Waterman, children's services editor of the monthly magazine, ***Education Journal***.

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