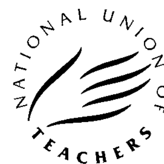
# education review

## Innovation and autonomy




volume 16 • number 1
autumn 2002

*Education Review* is produced by the Education and Equal Opportunities Department of the National Union of Teachers.

**Assistant Secretary, Education and Equal Opportunities**
John Bangs

**Editors**
Janet Theakston and Lucy Carpenter

**Assistant Editor**
Candy Kisseih Akomfrah

**NUT Executive Editorial Board**
Judy Moorhouse (chair)
Bryan Griffiths
Dave Harvey
Max Hyde
Veronica Peppiatt
Dave Rigden

The views expressed in *Education Review* are those of the individual authors. They are not necessarily the views of the National Union of Teachers.

A priced list of back issues of *Education Review* is available from the Education and Equal Opportunities Department of the NUT.
Tel: 020 7380 4717.

The National Union of Teachers
Hamilton House
Mabledon Place
London WC1H 9BD

Tel: 020 7388 6191
Fax: 020 7387 8457

**Web: www.teachers.org.uk**

education review

# contents

volume 16 • number 1

**Preface**
*Doug McAvoy, General Secretary, NUT* 1

**Evaluation of Innovation**
*David Bell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England* 3

**Professional with a heart**
*Delphine Ruston, Staff Development Co-ordinator and English Teacher* 8

**Providing space for innovation and autonomy**
*John Atkins, Independent Education Consultant* 14

**Innovation and the next phase of educational reform**
*David Hopkins, Head of Standards & Effectiveness Unit at the DfES* 20

**An innovation too far?**
*Neil Fletcher, Head of Education Policy at the Local Goverment Association* 27

**Teaching assistants – a national survey**
*Sean Neill, Senior lecturer at the University of Warwick* 33

**Innovation and specialist schools**
*Elizabeth Reid, Chief Executive for the Technology Colleges Trust* 41

**Innovation in schools: giving trust back to teachers**
*James Walters, Researcher at Demos* 47

**Making innovation stick**
*Maureen Burns, Director at the Innovation Unit, DfES* 51

**Teachers: from victims of change to agents of change**
*Martin Johnson, Institute for Public Policy Research* 56

**Thinking through teaching: professional development for innovation and autonomy**
*Vivienne Baumfield, Steve Higgins and Mei Lin, The Thinking Skills Research Centre* 61

**Using ICT for innovation in schools**
*Jerry Glazier, NUT Executive* 68

**The National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth**
*Deborah Eyre, Director of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth* 72

**Mantra rites of passage: teaching and nurturing our boys to be men in the 21st Century**
*Richard Majors and Sara Nance Dewar, Mantra rites of passage project* 80

**A view from the bridge – but is it the Santa Maria or the Titanic? A personal perspective on the Surrey experience of "privatisation"**
*Colin Caswell, Division Secretary of Surrey NUT* 86

**From staff room to innovation strategy room – can it be done?**
*Gemma Blaker, deputy SENCO* 95

**Professional development – it's Union work**
*Amy M Hightower, Assistant Director at the American Federation of Teachers* 100

**Transforming the School Workforce Pathfinder Project – freeing teachers to teach: an individual school's experience**
*Stewart Harris, Headteacher* 107

**SchooLets/Time Banks for SchooLs – An innovative approach to engaging parents and the wider community in the school**
*Joe Hallgarten and Jodie Reed, Institute for Public Policy Research* 112

**Curriculum innovation in Education Action Zone**
*Marny Dickson, Research Officer at the Institute of Education* 119

**Book reviews** 125

# EDUCATION JOURNAL

*The monthly magazine of record*

**Analysis · Research · Reviews · Policy · International reports · Conferences · Parliamentary reports · Document, statistics and research digests · Items of record and reference**

*Education Journal* is Britain's leading monthly education magazine. It is the publication of choice for top policy makers, many of whom are also contributors.The substantial research section includes reports and original articles from Britain's leading researchers. Feature articles cover policy, leadership and management issues.The international section gives particular coverage of the Commonwealth and the USA.

**Subscription Rates**

| | |
|---|---|
| Australia | A$149 |
| Britain, individuals | £38 |
| Britain, university and public libraries | £48 |
| Commonwealth | £58 |
| Rest of the world | £68 |

THE EDUCATION PUBLISHING COMPANY LIMITED

THE EDUCATION PUBLISHING COMPANY OF AUSTRALIA

The Education Publishing Company Ltd.,
Devonia House, 4 Union Terrace,
Crediton, Devon EX17 3DY
Great Britain.

The Education Publishing Company of Australia,
PO Box 390, Sandy Bay,
Tasmania 7006, Australia.

# Preface

If there is one aspect of the 2002 Education Act which should in principle find favour with teachers, it is the clauses aimed at encouraging innovation in our schools. No one should be surprised, however, that teachers are at best unexcited and at worse sceptical about this latest “big idea” from the Government, battered and bruised as they are from more than a decade of government-driven initiatives aimed at controlling and standardising what is taught in our schools.

Many of these initiatives have proved to be ill-thought out and flawed in implementation, and have contributed massively to the bureaucracy and heavy workload endured by teachers. Often, as with key stage testing and league tables, they have been in direct opposition to what teachers believe to be at the heart of the education system, the engagement between teachers and pupils in the learning process.

No amount of legislation or ministerial exhortation on the importance of innovation in education will have any effect unless the circumstances which prevent teachers from being innovative are addressed. Excessive teacher workload from the avalanche of bureaucracy and adminstration has stolen teachers’ time and sapped their creativity.

The unrelenting government focus on testing and targets coupled with a punitive and high-stakes inspection regime have undermined teachers’ confidence. Working in under-resourced schools, often with challenging pupils, for inadequate financial reward have made teachers’ working lives a continual struggle. These are the issues which need to be addressed as essential pre-requisites before innovation can become a reality for all teachers.

The Government, too, needs to take on board the importance of engaging the profession with its innovation agenda. Successful and sustained innovation has to come from the bottom up, not be imposed from the top down. That is why it is so important that classroom teachers and their representatives, as well as headteachers and theirs, need to be important voices in the DfES Innovation Unit along with other education stakeholders.

This edition of *Education Review* looks at innovation in education from a wide perspective and makes an important contribution to the current debate. The article by David Hopkins, head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the DfES, explains the movement by the Government into the phase of “informed professional judgment” and outlines the remit and role of the newly-established Innovation Unit. Neil Fletcher provides a critique of Government policy and its background from the LEA viewpoint. Innovation in terms of the specialist schools initiative and the involvement of the private sector in education are

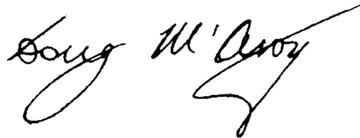
examined by Elizabeth Reid and Colin Caswell respectively.

The articles by John Atkins, Sean Neill, Martin Johnson, Maureen Burns, James Walters, Gemma Blaker and Stewart Harris, from a variety of viewpoints, examine the demands upon teachers and how the profession needs to be freed to move on from the constraints described previously. Encouragingly, the article by David Bell, the Chief Inspector, acknowledges the need for OFSTED to have innovation and creativity as important aspects of the inspection process, and for inspection to be a more responsive, two-way process, while still maintaining a firm accountability function.

As a third focus of this edition, the Review contains a fascinating range of articles illustrating innovations which, despite the odds, are already flourishing in the education system. Jerry Glazier on the role of ICT; Deborah Eyre on provision for gifted and talented pupils; Richard Majors and Sara Nance Dewar on raising boys' self esteem; Joe Hallgarten and Jodie Reed on the SchooLets scheme and Marny Dickson on curriculum innovation in EAZs, all provide welcome examples of innovative developments. There is a strong professional development focus with articles from Delphine Ruston and Vivienne Baumfield, Steve Higgins and Mei Lin on the Union's thinking skills Teacher2Teacher project and from Amy Hightower on the American Federation of Teachers' CPD programme. It is heartening confirmation that teachers remain open to innovative ideas and dedicated to professional development, particularly where they can be seen to benefit pupils directly .

The timing of the publication of this edition of *Education Review* is at the transitional period between two Secretaries of State. The Education Act 2002 was the vision of Estelle Morris; it will remain to be seen which aspects will enthuse her successor, Charles Clarke. It is also a crucial time in the negotiations on the remodelling of the profession which will have significant implications for all teachers.

The National Union of Teachers will continue to work to influence, encourage and negotiate with the Government to provide the conditions and create the climate to enable teachers to be innovative, enthusiastic and autonomous. This edition of *Education Review* reminds all concerned of the issues at stake.



**Doug McAvoy**
**General Secretary, National Union of Teachers**

# Evaluation of innovation

**Abstract:** *Apprehension about inspection can mean that schools prepare what they think inspectors will want to see, rather than taking risks and using the opportunities of the moment. This article sets out the steps that OFSTED is taking to encourage schools to highlight innovative and effective practice.*

**David Bell**

David Bell is Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England

> "There are many reasons why the children do so well. They include their very positive attitudes to learning and enthusiasm for what they do, the high quality of the teaching that encourages children to take risks, and the exceptional leadership. These key features combine to create an exciting and stimulating environment."

THE INVITATION to share thoughts about inspection and innovation in schools arrived in the same post as an inspection report on a nursery school in which the above words leapt from the page. The risks, it became clear, were not so much those that would make an inspector blanche; they were about trying things out in a climate which made fear of failure impossible. There was a belief, within this school, that every child can succeed. The staff were outstanding teachers and for such teachers innovation is a natural part of pedagogy. It is part of the thought, care, planning and – above all – imagination that goes into the sort of teaching that loses no opportunity to foster learning. In discussing a project about a pirate ship, for example:

> "Children talked confidently about the shape they needed to create and why one girl's hammock needed to be longer. 'She's much taller than me so we need more space for her. That piece won't be long enough!' Another group talked confidently about the size and shape of water containers as they played with them. They organised the containers according to size and then worked out how much more water would be needed to fill them. They used tape measures to work out how long their hammocks would be."

Another telling feature of the school is that despite its success and high profile within the local community, there is no sense of complacency. Staff are "constantly reviewing their practice, looking at ways in which they can improve, and are prepared to take advice from a number of sources." This example comes from an inner city school whose children, aged two to four years, live in a local community that suffers high levels of deprivation. One sixth have special educational needs and more than half are in the early stages of learning English, which is not their first language. Innovation in this school is indigenous to its way of working. It is imaginative, not gimmicky. It is focused on making learning ever more effective. Where schools achieve this, we expect every inspector to recognise, report, and applaud it. Inspectors may believe that a school can be like this, but they need to see it in practice. I shall return to this shortly.

## A responsive inspections system

Fortunately, as this report among many shows, we have an inspection system that is sufficiently responsive to illuminate good practice wherever it is seen. Many current inspection reports contain distinctive examples of original and effective approaches. Take, for example, the report on an infant school in Sunderland that works closely with the local member of the European parliament, has taken 30 pupils to France each year for the last seven years, teaches them French and includes European citizenship on the curriculum.

What about the primary school in Hertfordshire, renowned for its school council and the autonomy with which the councillors - drawn from all year groups – can take significant decisions that affect the life of the school and dispose of the sizeable budget allocated to them?

Then there is the high school in Northumberland whose inspection report reveals a remarkable learning organisation. Anything that will benefit the

**Too many schools take their eye off the ball when due for inspection. They prepare what they think inspectors will want to see. They do what they think inspectors will want to see them doing. In short, they play safe.**

progress of the staff and students in this learning community is tried, tested and evaluated. If it works, it sticks; if not, it is discarded. Here, like the previous example, innovation stems from committed and imaginative leadership and the constant search for ways of doing things better. There are no limits to the scope of staff development, for example. If the school is interested in some practice they hear about in the USA, they will send

someone there to find out about it.

All these examples very properly feature in inspection reports. So do the artists in residence, experimental timetables, outreach work of schools, provision for community education, and a host of special projects. If the inspectors see them, they will evaluate and report them.

## Apprehension about inspection

Sadly, not all schools are like this, and some that are hide their light under a bushel at precisely the time they should be holding it high for all to see. Too many schools take their eye off the ball when due for inspection. They prepare what they think inspectors will want to see. They do what they think inspectors will want to see them doing. In short, they play safe. Lessons are secure; they are seldom unsatisfactory in such schools but are never inspiring. Some teachers feel inhibited from taking risks, using the opportunities of the moment, or harnessing children's topical interest into productive learning.

Why does this happen? Why are staff distracted so easily from the momentum of development in the school by apprehension about inspection? Perhaps it is a sign of a less than confident school, or a school that lacks the leadership to instil in staff an unswerving commitment to what they are doing and a resolve to let evaluators see them at their best, not retrenched into completely safe, familiar ground. But can inspections provide any encouragement for schools and teachers to put their best foot forward? Yes they can, in a number of ways.

## Positive changes

First, we have abolished the practice of issuing grades on the quality of lessons associated with individual, identifiable teachers. Inspection is inspection of the school. Its sole intention is to report fairly and accurately on the quality and standards of the school, the strengths of what goes on there and any areas that need to be improved.

Second, the new inspection Framework, that is being piloted this autumn, places greater emphasis on the quality of leadership, teaching that captures pupils' imagination, school climate, and initiatives taken by the school. Inspection reports will be less formulaic, giving inspectors more freedom to report on things that are of worth.

Reports will identify particularly innovative or effective practice, highlighting this in such a way that it can be made available to other schools. Schools have a greater say in what is inspected. We may not quite have reached the stage where, in the words of Henry Ford, "everything we do is driven by you", but certainly the school is in a much better position to help shape the inspection.

Third, we have gone further still in encouraging schools to identify an aspect

of their work on which they would particularly like evaluation. Sometimes they may select a particularly intractable aspect of the school with which they have wrestled and reached an impasse. A report of such a school should give it credit for recognising and tackling a weakness. Equally, a school may point to new, innovative work, or a radical strategy that, even in the early stages, is aimed at moving the school forward.

Schools have considerable scope for taking the initiative in inspection, encouraging inspectors to witness highlights, explaining the school's rationale for what it is doing. This is the professional and positive approach taken by the many schools that take inspection in their stride, using the experience and the feedback they receive as profitably as they can, and refusing to allow inspection to distract or deflect them from pursuit of their aims. Inspectors will recognise the quality of leadership in such schools and take account of that in their reports.

Schools that allow themselves to be diverted, distracted or daunted by inspection are becoming rarer. But there are still some that burden staff with preparing plans, policies or other papers specifically for the inspection, or embark on a defensive strategy of cataloguing the inspectors' every move in preparation for attempting to shoot the messenger if the message turns out to be unwelcome. And if, when the inspection has run its course, there is little to complain about, the material can always be used to lampoon inspection in the educational press!

The new Framework will be piloted in nine school inspections this autumn. All the schools we approached responded enthusiastically to this opportunity. The evaluation schedule is comprehensive and very demanding on inspection teams. So we need to see whether it can be covered rigorously and in a reasonable amount of time.

## Innovation with effectiveness

Despite the exhortations of some, I do not believe that we should be looking to assess innovation as a separate entity within the new Framework. In itself, innovation is not necessarily a good thing if it is about change for change's sake or is simply the pursuit of the latest trend or fad. It is much more important to link innovation with effectiveness and there are many criteria that relate to innovation in the draft schedule. These include:

- pupils' capacity to work independently;
- encouragement for enterprise and responsibility;
- teaching that interests, encourages and engages pupils and which challenges them, expecting the most of them;
- a worthwhile and enriching curriculum; and
- visionary leadership, with the creation of a productive climate for learning,

which maximises pupils' achievement and the professional effectiveness of staff.

The inspection of a school, however, involves reaching a judgement that is greater than the sum of its parts. The overarching question that inspectors must answer is: "How successful is this school?" They must then diagnose what makes it so.

If the school is adopting new, even radical, approaches to aspects of its work, the inspectors will not prejudge the experiment but look for signs of its effectiveness: on learning, pupils' progress and the raising of standards. Where such experiments yield little reward, we expect inspectors to say so. But, where schools that are investing time, energy, thought and commitment in well-planned, intentioned and motivated innovation, reports will give them credit for this. Innovation, it has been said, is 10 per cent imagination and 90 per cent perspiration. It is only when the proportions are the other way round that innovation is doomed to failure. ■

# Professional with a heart

**Delphine Ruston**

Delphine Ruston is Staff Development Co-ordinator and English teacher at Richmond School, North Yorkshire. She is currently taking a year's sabbatical.

**Abstract:** *Using her involvement in the NUT's CPD programme, the writer examines the particular characteristics of why the programme is so appropriate and successful for teachers. She then identifies the generic aspects necessary for successful CPD and the subsequent benefits for students of having teachers who are fellow learners.*

THE 2001 Demos report, "Classroom Assistance – why teachers must transform teaching"[1], made sober reading: "Most teachers argued consistently that they experienced change as a never-ending barrage of externally imposed, randomly timed and badly managed initiatives that they had little constructive role in helping to shape."

## CPD to motivate and empower teachers

Such change over the past 15 years has entailed significant Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as an imperative and a duty. As staff development co-ordinator and an English teacher in a large secondary school, I have been both a facilitator and recipient of change. Frequently, this CPD is in effect "briefing" or "instruction"– new content, structures, requirements are issued which must then be delivered by the conduit teacher.

Often, teachers have received information which in their professional judgement is unworkable, inappropriate and time-consuming; the early recommendations of the Literacy Hour and the introduction of a new A Level structure being contentious examples. Their mental energies are then consumed in modifying it so that it does work for their students' benefit. Subsequently, in the light of national review, change is followed by revised change, for example successive National Curriculum documents.

This prolonged and intensive prescription can be draining and demotivating, to the point where the teacher has little left to give, a situation over which s/he feels no ownership but for which s/he is responsible and accountable. What must be the impact on a student in the classroom of such a teacher?

However, in contrast with this bleak situation, the Demos report also lit a beacon:

> "If both schools and the culture of education practitioners are to be transformed, then the creativity and energy of the professionals need to be drawn on fully."

CPD at its best can achieve precisely this: empowering and motivating teachers to become agents of transformation rather than victims of change.

There are indeed well documented examples of CPD which make a difference, for instance, Best Practice Research Scholarships and the Thinking Skills initiative. And there is at least a statement of intent in the Department for Education and Employment strategy, "Learning and Teaching – a Strategy for Professional Development"[2] and in other professional development initiatives emerging from the DfES. In this article I wish to describe the NUT peer coaching model as a particular example of "best practice" CPD, and from this description to draw prerequisites and generic characteristics of CPD which potentially could contribute to the process of transformation.

## A specific example of best practice CPD

Over the last two years, as a result of collaborative work with Philippa Cordingley, of the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE), the NUT has been developing a professional development programme called "Teacher2Teacher" and the way it works is as follows. Two teachers attend a two-day residential course at the NUT national training centre at Stoke Rochford. Here, they develop their knowledge in a specific area of pedagogy from a leader in the field, for example non-fiction writing, using ICT, or behaviour management. Simultaneously, they receive training in peer coaching from a fellow teacher.

Back at school, the pair take their learning forward through reciprocal observation and feedback. A second residential at Stoke Rochford enables the teachers to consolidate and extend their learning before returning to the classroom to develop further.

In 2000-1, I was a participant on such a course and a year later, as a "graduate" of the pilot was invited to tutor on peer coaching at another "Teacher2Teacher" course. As a participant, I enrolled with a colleague on the course titled, "Making Effective Interventions in Student Behaviour". We each had a Year 10 group where there was disaffection and we were keen to work together to address this issue. Through the excellent input from Rob Long, an educational psychologist, we extended significantly our understanding of adolescent behaviour. We also learned the professional skills of peer coaching.

Over the next three months, we established a purposeful professional

dialogue; observation was set-up carefully according to an agreed agenda with the observed teacher retaining ownership; we refined our skills in observation; and we developed a shared trust and an accurate understanding of issues important to us both in endeavouring to develop and engage our students.

My colleague's feedback illuminated aspects of classroom dynamics that I'd never known before – students' behaviour, my own, the interactions between us. We grew to understand how highly professional are the many subtle

**We grew to understand how highly professional are the many subtle strategies each of us employs when we walk in a classroom.**

strategies each of us employs when we walk in a classroom. And vitally, as coach to each other, we learned how to take this information forward.

The sense of rightness inherent in this CPD model manifested itself in the natural curiosity of other teachers who recognised "a good thing" and the way in which the learning took root elsewhere in the school. Consequently, my peer coaching colleague and I have run training in behaviour management techniques for our department; I have supported other colleagues in behaviour management problem solving; and other teachers from the school have attended "Teacher2Teacher" courses. But perhaps most significantly, a team of internal coaches in behaviour management is being developed to support all staff on an equal footing in refining their skills in this fundamental element of their practice.

As a tutor on peer coaching for another "Teacher2Teacher" programme, I asked teachers to rate their peer coaching skills against a checklist of characteristics, which included:

- setting-up a framework;
- listening skills;
- questioning techniques;
- supportive body language;
- respecting confidentiality and differences; and
- mutual problem solving.

Teachers were pleasantly surprised to realise that they are practising sophisticated, powerful skills and that these are transferable The end-of-course evaluations expressed their satisfaction in feeling valued; there was a strong thread of raised self-esteem; there was renewed motivation to develop teaching and learning.

## The prerequisites of CPD

In order for teachers to benefit from this kind of successful CPD model three prerequisites are essential: support, time and planning. There is a message for leaders in schools. It is difficult to pursue a programme which requires such teacher commitment without senior management support.

It is encouraging to reflect that in their research[3] into leadership, the Hay Group found that "coaching" featured as one of the dominant styles of headteachers:

> "They are genuinely interested in the development and growth of their staff. They create opportunities for people to learn and practise new skills, and they are prepared to let someone make their own mistakes and learn from experience."

Certainly, our headteacher was supportive, keen to know more, and interested to contribute his own experience in facilitating developments in-house.

Time is essential – for course attendance, observation and feedback. This is difficult to achieve and requires stern determination by the teachers. The pressure on time remains a significant impediment to worthwhile CPD. An allowance of professional development time within the school day from the headteacher/staff development co-ordinator helps in sustaining the commitment. Shrewd use of the Standards Fund and of training days can also release time.

Support and time are more likely to be realised where CPD is planned and it is here where a professional development review meeting is needed. In the same way that peer coaching and headteacher as coach are important, so support to the individual teacher is needed – to tune in to his/her individual needs, talents and strengths; and in a flexible way to ensure that the individual's contribution and the broad plans for the school are complementary. In this sense teachers throughout a school are likely to become coaches/mentors to their colleagues.

## Generic characteristics of worthwhile CPD

What generic characteristics can be taken from this example as a benchmark for other CPD initiatives? Firstly, **structure** is a key factor: the two-part structure with intervening application of knowledge allows proper follow-through and an opening whereby the teacher can become a "reflective practitioner". (Compare this with the typical one-day course which usually yields limited impact.) The learning is also active, not passive – which is no more or less than what we aspire to for our students' learning.

Second is the **credibility of the training provider**. Teachers have access to an expert who is at the forefront of developments and to recent research

evidence; they gain knowledge and insight which otherwise they might be unable to acquire because their main work is in a classroom. For the peer coaching element they learn from a fellow practitioner – someone close to their experience who will be returning to the classroom too, who understands intimately the complexities of the environment.

Thirdly, this intimacy is extended as the pairs of **teachers learn from and support each other** in the classroom, as one "Teacher2Teacher" participant commented on her course evaluation, "Two heads are stronger than one". Thus teachers are freed from the traditional classroom isolation. Because of the peer coaching training, the feedback received is not personal, threatening or judgemental but professional and constructive. There is no hidden agenda, no inhibiting link with an assessment of performance or for pay, no external target or requirement to meet.

Finally, the CPD is directly relevant to **the teachers' context**. The teachers focus closely on the core of what matters for their students. In comparison with the "one size fits all" approach, the learning is applied flexibly according to the teachers' professional judgement. In this climate of trust, there is a greater likelihood that risks will be taken and from this real teacher learning can emerge. Far beyond "briefing" and "instruction", "best practice" CPD as described here can change behaviour, the highest form of learning, and release innovation and creativity.

Where the teacher's practice is effective it is illuminated and celebrated: where it could develop, where solutions to problems emerge, these are identified clearly in a climate of mutual trust and respect, with the teacher retaining ownership of how and when to move forward. Thus, the teacher's integrity and professionalism come to the fore.

The natural consequence of all this is that **the teacher is energised and motivated**, as another participant commented, "…the feeling of empowerment – I can make a difference." This energy comes from within, it is the psychological contract and it is the catalyst to any worthwhile CPD. Thus the teacher becomes not only a professional who meets recognised standards and competences but also a professional with a heart who knows that learning is a social and emotional experience. It is especially important for those mature teachers who have shouldered the reforms and may be wearied by the "barrage" of change. Roland Barth comments on this in "Improving Schools from Within"[4]: "The crisis in education for school people is less one of commitment than recommitment". And he illustrates this with a vivid analogy, the instructions given to air passengers:

> "For those of you travelling with small children, in the event of oxygen failure, first place the oxygen mask on your own face and then – and only then – place the mask on your child's face."

If we expect teachers, in the noblest sense, to give so much is it not also necessary that we should replenish that oxygen? From this perspective, CPD is not only a duty but also an entitlement throughout a teacher's career.

What is the impact on a student in the classroom of a teacher, who, through his/her proficiency and energy, conveys that s/he is new, different, better, empowered, alive? The student has more chance of becoming engaged in learning. Isn't this the kind of "raising standards" to which we should aspire? That through the example of their teachers, fellow learners, our students experience profound learning which they draw upon and extend throughout their lives? ■

## References

1. Horne M., *Classroom Assistance: Why Teachers Must Transform Teaching.* London: Demos, 2001.
2. DfEE, *Learning and Teaching: A Strategy for Professional Development.* London: DfEE, 2000. Website: http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/1450/CPD_Strategy.pdf
3. Forde R., Hobby R. and Lees A., *The Lessons of Leadership: A Comparison of Headteachers in UK Schools and Senior Executives in Private Enterprise.* London: Hay McBer, 2000. Website: http://www.haygroup.co.uk/downloads/Lessons%20of%20Leadership.pdf
4. Barth R.S., *Improving School From Within: Teachers, Parents and Principals Can Make the Difference.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

# Providing space for innovation and autonomy

**John Atkins**

John Atkins is an independent education consultant who has worked on education research projects with the NUT for a number of years. He can be contacted at john@atconsult.co.uk

**Abstract:** *The quantity of work that teachers are now expected to do means that they have no time to do anything more than the treadmill of essential tasks. This article argues that if we want to encourage innovation in schools we need to provide recognised guidance on how much work teachers should be doing and create the space that they need to explore new methods of teaching and learning.*

THE twin pressures to be innovative and to take responsibility for one's own as well as one's pupils' learning are not new to teachers. All who teach, or lecture, or train, feel at the end of each session or each term that they have not yet got it quite right: by doing things slightly differently next time, their pupils and students will do that little bit better. And, thereby, the job will be that little bit more fulfilling.

But preparing for teaching takes time, and the higher the standard for which one aims the longer it takes. It can take longer to turn a good lesson plan into a really excellent one than it took to draw up the good lesson plan in the first place. Where is the time going to come from? And will the time invested in the excellent lesson plan really be worthwhile?

## Research projects on teacher workload

Together with colleagues, I have recently completed two research projects for the National Union of Teachers that shed light on these two questions. Both projects were undertaken to inform the NUT's response to the School Teachers' Review Body in 2002, and both focused on the workloads currently experienced by teachers. The projects demonstrate that the potential for innovation and autonomy is seriously under attack from the quantity of work

that teachers are now expected to do. But they also suggest that doing something about this is not as impossible as one might suppose.

Our first impression from our projects was of the sheer pressure that teachers are now under. All of us on the project team were teachers ourselves at one time, and count teachers or ex-teachers among our immediate families. But we were amazed at the hours teachers now put in.

For a start, teachers spend many hours at school. "The hours between 6:30 and 7:30 in the morning", said one, "are the most valuable. After that I am interrupted too often to get much done." But work is not completed during the school day. "I work at school from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.", said another interviewee, "and do two hours every evening. Then there's the weekends – it seems like all weekend every weekend."

And it is not just the workload. If teachers were voluntarily working these hours in order to deliver excellent lessons then it might – might, I stress – be all right. However our interviewees said that they felt driven to these hours, and felt they have no control over them. The sheer volume of paper work ancillary to the job of teaching, particularly when preparing for an OFSTED inspection, say, gave them no choice. Paradoxically, when they just had to make time for a "normal life" – perhaps during a family event or crisis – it was their lesson preparation, not their administration, that suffered.

Of course, teachers' workloads are never going to be as flexible as are those of some other professionals. Like doctors and their clinics, teachers have classes arranged for them at fixed times and cannot just decide to put off until tomorrow things which seem too difficult, or require too much of a dwindling stock of concentration, to do well today. But – as is argued elsewhere in the Review – some autonomy in planning activities outside direct teaching, and

**...the potential for innovation and autonomy is seriously under attack from the quantity of work that teachers are now expected to do.**

some space in which to innovate, will not only make teaching more fulfilling, but also make it more effective for the learners. And there is simply not time in most teachers' working weeks for anything more than the treadmill of essential tasks, all required for tomorrow (or at best Monday).

## Curriculum change

Our second impression from our projects is even more significant. We have been forced to the conclusion that, at least until the launch of the current STRB round, no-one except teachers and their professional associations realised fully

how busy teachers were. For example, we can find no other explanation for the number of different curricula and syllabuses that teachers are expected to prepare, nor for the frequency at which the requirements of these curricula and syllabuses change.

The example is worth pursuing. One subject teacher we interviewed reported having to cope with five major changes to her GCSE syllabus in eight years, while at the same time preparing for new A levels, AS levels, Key Stage 4 vocational strategies, Key Stage 3 literacy materials, and New Opportunities Fund ICT training. And this was in a relatively large secondary school where there were apparently plenty of staff among whom to divide the work.

Now for a start the scale of the preparation work required here is going to inflate this teacher's working week out of all proportion, and dispose of any holidays too. In addition, when curricula are modified this often then that extra effort needed to change a good lesson plan into a really excellent one is unlikely to be forthcoming. There isn't the time anyway, and the syllabus will only change again: you will probably never use the plan a second time. And is all this change necessary? "This [new] chief examiner doesn't seem to like Shakespeare's tragedies", commented one English teacher, "and that means weekend after weekend of work for me and for many others like me. Does it really matter to him that much?"

It is perhaps not surprising that innovation, and autonomy, are far from the minds of teachers who are struggling to keep their heads above water (and their health) under the pressure of 60 and 70 hour weeks. What may be surprising is that it is not, in our view, too difficult to see what should be done about this.

**It is perhaps not surprising that innovation, and autonomy, are far from the minds of teachers who are struggling to keep their heads above water**

Start with recognising an important aspect of the profession. Teaching shares with medicine, the arts and many other professions the property that the more of yourself you invest in it the better the outcomes. This is both an inspiration and a tyranny. The more time you put in to it, the better your pupils do – seemingly without limit. Indeed, one teacher we interviewed said that since he had started a family he had put less time into his teaching and he believed his pupils had done less well as a result.

It follows, therefore, that if you give teachers too much to do they will try to do it – indeed, they must do it, or collapse in the effort. Unlike some other public sectors, there is no scope for weeks of "backlog" in the core task of teaching, and very little in the associated paperwork. It all has to be done today, or at best this week, no matter how long it takes.

To stop teachers destroying themselves, therefore, somebody, somewhere

must take an overview of how much work they are "meant" to do. This is not necessarily a contractual issue – though it will have contractual consequences, as we will see. But in the stacks of advice, guidance, instruction and procedure that teachers receive from all sources, no-one, apart from the teacher associations, seems ever to have thought how long all this is meant to take, and how much of a life teachers should have at the end of it. Yet this guidance would be quite easy to give. The approach we developed, which has been subsequently used to inform the submissions to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB), is as follows.

## Teaching and PPMR

The core of the teacher's task is teaching. As the previous Secretary of State for Education and Skills has pointed out, teachers should teach as much as they can so that pupils and students can benefit as much as they can. But teaching requires preparation, marking, and other follow-up: PPMR, in the jargon. Too little preparation and follow-up for every hour's teaching, and the pupils' learning will not be effective. Too much, and the numbers of hours teachers are able to teach will be reduced – or their workloads will become impossible.

Teachers we talked to during our fieldwork believed they spent between half an hour and an hour on preparing for, and following up, each hour's teaching. (Some talked in terms of free periods rather than hours, but the ratio was the same.) Now as between these two limits, one hour is probably too much. Thinking roughly for a moment of 40 or so hours a week (exact figures will come later), one hour's preparation for one hour's teaching means only 20 hours of teaching in a week – and that is with no meetings or other tasks to allow for.

Desirable as this might sound, there are at present simply not enough teachers available to run our schools on this basis – unless we drastically shortened the school week. Moreover, there is a "balance of effort" question here: spending as much time preparing and following-up teaching as actually doing it does not feel right, somehow. However half an hour's preparation/follow up for one hour's teaching does sound much more reasonable, and teachers confirmed that – if only the paperwork was brought under control – this would be a reasonable target to set. It maximises the amount of the teacher's week that is spent teaching, but provides some time to prepare for, and follow-up, each lesson in detail so that the pupils gain the most from it.

Acknowledging that teachers (and their employers, and Government) should reckon on allowing half an hour's preparation/follow-up for each hour's teaching immediately sets some bounds on the working week. However teaching and preparation/follow-up is not all that teachers do. It might be prudent to allow one further hour per day for meetings, discussions with other

teachers, interaction with other professionals, etc. (We are talking about main scale teachers without other specific responsibilities here, of course - holders of promoted posts will require more than this.)

Now the contractual considerations come in. If teachers teach 22 hours, then 22 + 11 hours of PPMR + 5 hours of meetings, etc, make a 38 hour week. Already this looks a great deal better than many teachers' current lifestyles. In fact, however, teachers in England are contracted to 1265 hours per year, which works out at 32½ hours per week (roughly). Teaching, and meetings, are clearly contractual. So putting the two together means that half the 11 hours PPMR can be provided within "directed time", as it is known, while half will fall outside it. Put another way, on top of their contracted 32½ hours teachers would be expected to find *either* one hour or so a day *or* one day of the weekend – not both – to complete their preparation and marking. This seems reasonable.

As we said, this is broadly the position recommended by the teacher associations to STRB. It takes a bit of explaining, and may seem a distraction in an article about innovation and autonomy. But, first of all, it is worthwhile seeing where the "22 hour teaching week" figure came from. Secondly and more importantly, however, this approach establishes for the first time some guidance for teachers on how hard they should reckon on working to do their jobs.

## Establishing parameters

"Reckon" is the key word here. No one is suggesting that teachers will be forbidden to work more than 38 hours. But the point is that - should the Government and the employers accept this position – a teacher who is teaching 22 hours per week, spending an hour in meetings each day, using his or her time productively at school and then spending a further hour or so each evening (or at the weekend) on marking and preparation *is doing all that is expected*. If he or she cannot complete the necessary work in this time, *but would like to*, then something is wrong.

It may be that the teacher him – or herself is being overzealous: a colleague, or an adviser, might be able to demonstrate that preparation or marking is over-elaborate. It may be that the headteacher is expecting too much. It may be that the LEA, or OFSTED, or some other part of Government, is expecting too much of the school. But – perhaps for the first time – all these parties would now have a direct interest in addressing the issue and resolving it.

Thus in our example above awarding bodies would have to take a global view of the workload impact of their changes in syllabuses, and the Government a similar interest in the changes it required awarding bodies to make. Awarding bodies might for example be required to demonstrate – not only to their own satisfaction, but to that of others – that the preparation for these changes can be fitted in within the 11 weekly hours of

preparation/follow up time available, given that some of this time is taken up in meeting assessment requirements which they themselves have set. At the least, rather more notice of syllabus change is likely to be required.

Similarly, OFSTED also might check to ensure that whatever information it requires from main scale teachers can be adequately compiled in a similar time, and even comment adversely when schools have apparently put their teachers to more trouble than this.

Best of all, teachers will have been given some space back in their lives, and some autonomy over them. If they want to use this space to develop new, exciting approaches to their teaching, and to their pupils' learning, they will of course be free to do so, but can rest in the knowledge that it is not *required*. Nevertheless no doubt many will choose to invest their newly free time in this way, and we might reasonably expect to see a large number of new and exciting initiatives, both from individuals and from groups of teachers, bringing both teacher autonomy and revolutionary change to learning and teaching in our schools in the future. ■

*John Atkins would like to acknowledge the support and collaboration of David Carter, Mike Nichol and the NUT Education and Equal Opportunities Department in the research projects on which this article is based. All opinions expressed here are his own.*

# Innovation and the next phase of educational reform

**David Hopkins**

David Hopkins is Head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the Department for Education and Skills.

**Abstract:** *This article outlines the need for Government education policy to move towards "informed professional judgement" and the necessity for innovation to be defined and facilitated. The multi-faceted roles of the newly-established Innovation Unit at the DfES are outlined, which should empower the teaching profession to raise standards of teaching and learning.*

AT last year's "New Heads" conference my predecessor, Michael Barber, presented an elegant overview of the last 40 years of educational reform. His analysis was based on a contrast between "knowledge rich" and "knowledge poor" on the one hand, and prescription and professionalism on the other.

On the basis of this, he characterised the 1970s as a time of *uniformed professionalism*, when by and large innovation and change could appropriately have been described as "random acts of kindness." The 1980s, when government accrued to itself more powers than ever before, was termed *uninformed prescription*. By way of contrast, Barber maintained that in 1997 the Blair Government replaced uninformed prescription with a system of *informed prescription*.

This worked remarkably well for a while. It is an important and necessary first stage in a long term reform effort, but it also has a downside. Teachers often perceived the changes as imposed from outside and worried about the degree to which they could tailor and adapt the Government's materials to their own purposes.

There was also a concern that the changes, because of their external impetus, were not fully embedded or "owned". Moreover, in a fast-moving, large and complex system, confidence, innovation and creativity in classrooms – where the service meets the customer – is of vital importance. Centrally driven policies, however good, cannot by definition deliver these vital characteristics. To achieve these outcomes it was proposed that the next phase of reform should signal a shift from informed prescription to *informed professional judgement.*

Informed prescription does have the virtue of providing good ideas to a system that doesn't have them. Its chief limitation is that it cannot by itself generate ownership and intrinsic motivation and it may not be informed enough without the full creativity of teachers.

Informed professional judgement has the potential to generate intrinsic motivation and good ideas, but it is only a "potential". We are stuck with a classic "catch 22" problem. It takes capacity to build capacity and, if there is insufficient capacity to begin with, then it is doubtful whether informed professional judgement can provide the basis of a new approach. In short, both prescription and professionalism have their limitations.

In the next phase of reform it is necessary to blend informed prescription (and informed external ideas of all types) and informed professional judgement. As Michael Fullan has commented, this must be driven by moral purpose, passion and a commitment to capacity building and the creation of new knowledge.

It must also be recognised that this will require much more intensive and ongoing opportunities for teachers, headteachers and other staff in their schools to learn both individually and collectively drawing on their peers as well as on external experts and ideas. In effect, this means conceiving of the development of collective professional development as a disciplined process in which external ideas and standards interact with those of local educators as they work conjointly – and that the results of these efforts are continuously assessed by reference to student performance data.

All of this argues for the establishing of structures for innovation, "knowledge transfer", networking and capacity building as we manage the transition form one phase of reform to another.

## What is innovation?

There is a need for the creation of some entity to support creativity, innovation and networking. Unfortunately there is a degree of plasticity in the usage of these terms, and it may be helpful at the outset to be clear about what we mean. In terms of innovation, this is not the central production of good ideas that are then implemented – that relates to the phase of "informed prescription"; rather it is the encouraging of innovative practice throughout the system. I define innovation as:

- A process not an event;
- Being about diversity and unpredictability;
- A social not a management process;
- About creating a market for ideas through smart experimentation;
- Recombination rather than invention; and
- About moving from good practice, to best practice, replication and scale up.

When innovation is linked to networking then the power to facilitate transformation is increased exponentially. Networks support educational innovation by:

- Providing a focal point for the dissemination of good practice and the agents of knowledge creation, transfer and utilisation;
- Keeping the focus on the core purposes of schooling; in particular creating and sustaining a discourse on teaching and learning;
- Enhancing the skill of teachers;
- Building capacity for continuous improvement at the local level;
- Ensuring that systems of pressure and support are integrated not segmented; and
- Acting as a link between the centralised and decentralised policy initiatives.

## The Innovation Unit

It is this background and these ideas that provide the rationale for the establishing of a national "Innovation Unit". This was one of the key proposals contained in the Department for Education and Skills White Paper, *Schools: achieving success* (September 2001) which stated:

> "...we want to be able to encourage and respond to innovative approaches to teaching and learning and school management from across the school system. To make sure we can do this, we intend to establish a schools innovation unit with the task of initiating and supporting new ways for schools to do their jobs more effectively."

The Unit is envisaged as a network of education practitioners, including a number of our most innovative serving heads and teachers that would actively seek out, develop and disseminate new ideas. There is no doubt that such a Unit if appropriately conceived could clearly articulate the practices and processes associated with the move to informed professional judgement.

The Innovation Unit was officially launched by Estelle Morris, the then Secretary of State for Education & Skills, at a conference attended by the Prime Minister, on 25 June 2002. At that conference the Secretary of State shared her

thinking so far on how the Unit might operate and sought the views of participating heads on the proposed functions and structure.

The Secretary of State saw the Innovation Unit as having three broad aims:

- Promoting systemic change, through a greater understanding of what innovation is, how it can be encouraged and what stands in its way. Then acting to build capacity for innovation and to remove barriers, including those imposed by Government itself;
- Encouraging and supporting individual schools or groups of schools with innovative projects; ensuring there are mechanisms for schools to access good advice and to learn from one another. Also putting in place means of "spotting" those ideas with the potential for wider application; and
- Developing an overview of innovative activity in relation to strategic priorities and stimulating greater activity (with and through partners) where this is needed.

For these reasons the Innovation Unit was to have a clear focus on a limited range of key issues associated with the diversity and transformation agenda. Given such a tightly focused and challenging agenda, the Innovation Unit should seek to develop strategies that can best deliver on these issues in line with the best of innovative practice in other systems and sectors

It was made clear that the Innovation Unit will operate alongside many other key agencies involved in promoting innovation and change. They include the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the General

**The Innovation Unit needs to embrace, but not duplicate, activity elsewhere, so it can galvanise maximum support for schools and for emerging ideas and so that it brings coherence to seemingly disparate initiatives.**

Teaching Council (GTC), the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), OFSTED, LEAs, professional associations and teacher unions to name just a few.

The Innovation Unit needs to embrace, but not duplicate, activity elsewhere, so it can galvanise maximum support for schools and for emerging ideas and so that it brings coherence to seemingly disparate initiatives.

This means the Unit adopting a quite distinct role that could incorporate some or all of the following activities:

***Providing A Strategic Overview (Think Tank capacity)***

- providing a framework for, and understanding of, innovation;
- developing criteria for determining what is and is not innovation;
- defining information requirements in relation to innovation;
- promotion of evidence based practice;
- understanding knowledge creation, transfer and management;
- seeing education policy and lessons learned in an international perspective; and
- identifying gaps in innovative activity in areas designated to be priorities for leveraging school improvement and transformation.

***Acting as a Clearing House***

- providing a mapping, auditing, searching, categorising, connecting service on innovative activity so that schools wanting to pursue particular paths can be put in touch with others trying similar things.

***And a Referral Centre***

- somewhere that teachers and headteachers can go to with their big ideas, where people will take an interest in what they are doing and pursue those ideas, marshalling expertise and support where this is needed.

***Providing a Resource Centre***

- that brings together information and advice about best-practice and forms the basis of a communication and dissemination strategy;
- including information sheets, best practice guides, tool kits and web-based material;
- having a strong international dimension.

***Brokering a limited number of priority projects***

- to fill strategic gaps identified through the Think Tank;
- involving a range of partners (schools, groups of schools, LEAs, agencies, professional associations, universities, other public sector and private sector groups); and
- providing funding contribution, project management and professional advice with clear deliverables / “product” outcomes.

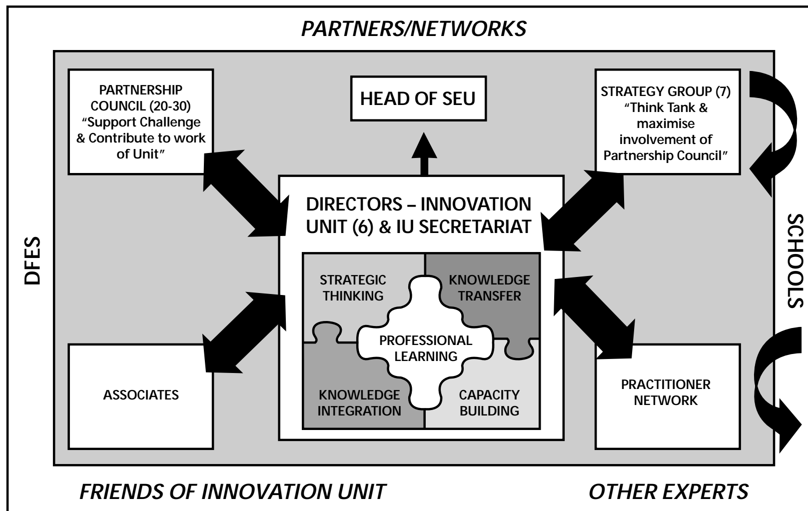
***Evaluating and Disseminating what works***

- designed not to overwhelm schools, but to provide nuggets of information and best practice backed by more detailed information on demand;
- with a particular emphasis on key outcomes of strategic value; and
- promoting further innovation and change.

### *Influencing Policy*

- acting as a voice for schools inside Government;
- challenging established policy and practice; and
- bringing new ideas to Ministers and policy formulators at all levels of Government.

The core of the now established Innovation Unit is a group of Directors with impressive and varied experience of education, led by Mike Gibbons, a "serial head teacher" and distinguished senior educationalist. As seen in the diagram below, they will engage and work with partners throughout the education sector and beyond to explore the nature of knowledge creation, transfer and utilisation.




Good quality innovations and sophisticated knowledge about the knowledge creation and utilisation process, however, are necessary rather than sufficient ingredients for transformation. Another key ingredient relates to the workforce issues and the creation of professional learning communities within schools. Without such a focus on the re-professionalisation of teaching, the deployment of human resources within schools and the necessary leadership transformational change will not be achieved.

The distinctive role for the Innovation Unit is to enable practitioners to understand innovation; and then identify strategies for making it powerful. Work is continuing to develop ideas about intended outcomes and priority themes and the Innovation Unit will be holding workshops for practitioners later this term to gather their ideas about how the Innovation

Unit should work.

In conclusion, the passage of the new Education Act and the Investment for Reform commitments opens up even more possibilities for the transformation of our educational system. This challenge also has great moral depth to it because it addresses directly the learning needs of our students, the professional growth of our teachers and enhances the role of the school as an agent of social change.

The emphasis on transformation is key - reform strategies can no longer take only an incremental approach to change. The raising of standards of learning and attainment for all of our students now needs to be seen within a whole school or systems context and to impact both on classroom practice and the work culture of the school. It is this that will characterise the next phase of educational reform, and it is within this context that the Innovation Unit has a vital role to play. ■

# An innovation too far?

**Abstract:** *This article questions the Government's real motives in encouraging innovation in the education system. It suggests that the urge to control from the centre operates against the natural tendency to innovate that exists naturally among large numbers of educators, and inhibits the best prospects of innovating imaginatively. Government only encourages the development of modest and severely constrained innovation on the part of other individuals and organisations and misses the challenge posed by the factor of "social class" and underachievement.*

**Neil Fletcher**

Neil Fletcher is Head of Education Policy at the Local Government Association (LGA). He was previously Head of Education at NALGO/UNISON and for 11 years was an elected member of the Inner London Education Authority, including 3 years as Leader (1987 – 1990). He writes in a personal capacity.

THE Government's recent enthusiasm for educational innovation as expressed in the 2002 Education Act, and elsewhere, may be sincere, but is severely constrained by the deep-rooted, centralising control-freakery to which the present administration, no less it must be said than most of its predecessors, seems to be prone. However, by encouraging innovation like a mantra ("Innovation, innovation, innovation…") it becomes vulnerable to the charge that it preaches one thing, but practises another. More significantly, it risks missing the chance provided by the prospect of massive government investment in education through the Comprehensive Spending Review to address the most significant remaining variable in attainment levels and pupil performance – social class.

If ever an historic settlement between government and the educational stakeholders was needed to deliver the improvements demanded by social justice, it is now. I shall come back to the "social class" factor later. First, let me say something about the areas where innovation is to be encouraged.

Consider for a start the different meanings given to the term "innovation". It covers a range of initiatives involving different degrees of novelty affecting various requirements of the education system. There is, however, an unstated thrust to the Government's clarion cry for innovation that implies elementary or "modest" change as appropriate to individuals and partners, while the more radical and transforming change which is needed to address the society-wide

educational needs of the UK population is still off the radar screen for any other group beyond government itself to endorse - for example the local authorities who still employ the overwhelming majority of teachers in this country.

To illustrate this, consider the way the announcements of Education Action Zones, City Academies, literacy hours, specialist schools, the imminent dawning of the "post-comprehensive" era, or the sudden expansion of church schools (to take but a few of the headlines since 1997) were made. These ideas were never discussed with partner organisations before the newspapers were

**Hands off the big agenda – top-down planning works – and sadly your job is moving the deck-chairs.**

given their privileged briefings. The omission indicates either a lack of trust – or a failure of confidence. However, this amounts to the Government saying to everyone outside of Whitehall – "Hands off the big agenda – top-down planning works – and sadly your job is moving the deck-chairs."

So when the Government in the 2002 Education Act urges innovation on those currently working in the education field, what is it they are hoping to generate? Is it a modest change in the way services are delivered, or something rather more exciting? Are ministers inviting "partners" and "stakeholders" (as the modern terminology has it) to engage in a concerted and challenging revolution that will affect the way a universal education service can be organised? There is precious little evidence of it to date. The Government announces initiatives as if they were rabbits plucked from a hat: sadly little partnership there!

## Intrinsic innovators

Inevitably there are questions to be asked about the capacity of individuals, schools, councils, and others working in the system to deliver innovation to order. Real innovation cannot be turned on or off at the whim of a minister. However the history of education suggests that those working in education are frequently driven by a commitment to their profession (in the same way as are for example scientists, lawyers, evangelists, and philosophers) to challenge the status quo and current practice and to discover better ways of making a difference.

The process of education is fundamentally a challenge to the status quo of the time. Scratch a teacher, an LEA elected member or a council education officer, and the chances are that you will find beneath the sweat and chalk dust someone genetically programmed to innovate. Often all that is needed is encouragement.

One could go further and argue that the need for innovation is permanent, or indeed a “given” within the formula of the delivery of an open and accountable education service. Educating people in a very simple sense empowers them. It is as true for individuals as for society as a whole that acquisition of knowledge and skill can liberate. Indeed as the great South American educator Paulo Freire pointed out in the 1960’s, education is always fundamentally subversive. It has the capacity to transform lives. Ensuring that people have equal access to education and to the transforming power that it can provide has to be an essential (one is tempted to write “the essential”) component within a democratic society.

Government, just as much as those working in the education service, should constantly be looking at ways of innovating. However, history shows that the real drivers of desirable and radical change (the top of the pile reforms, so to speak) are not governments but partners and stakeholders.

The heroes of educational innovation in England and Wales are not ministers of education, but local interests and organisations with hands on the real levers of institutional power. I do not restrict to this category just the school boards of old, and currently the local authorities, but the immense range of influential organisations, such as the churches and charities, not forgetting the pantheon of individual benefactors, trusts, guilds and trade unions. Hard though it may be for governments to stomach, the real “step-changes” in educational attainment much beloved of ministerial speech-writers derive as much from the progressive roles of intermediate agencies such as these as from the efforts of individual teachers and inspirational heads.

## Role of government

Of course government has a key role. It should set the goals and define the objectives for the nation’s educators. It must motivate the innovators, and programme the planners. Crucially it provides the resources, but can it trust its partners? And the professionals? The Government’s (indeed all governments’!) record of failed or incomplete innovations is lengthy. For example, GM schools, assisted places, student loans, City Technology Colleges, performance-related pay, have all delivered less than promised.

Even the successes – like the literacy & numeracy hours, and Key Stage targets for national testing - have actually delivered less than ministers promised. The much-lamented departure of Estelle Morris from the Cabinet is testament – were it needed – to this truth.

It is naive to imagine the educators are not even at the moment already innovating. Pressures in the early 21st Century to spread mass literacy into the entirety of the UK population provides a highly relevant test case for this synopsis. Pressures to create a mass literacy entitlement and therefore empower 20 per cent of adults currently reckoned to be illiterate (a disgraceful

figure in an advanced society such as ours) indicates a real challenge since to survive in a digital, service-oriented, economy requires at the very least literacy and numeracy in the capacity to contribute wholeheartedly to society.

Changing the way we educate ourselves has been the task of educators since time immemorial. Pretending that they actually make a difference to what happens to the multitudinous number of individual acts of learning that take place across our society every day is one of the grosser conceits politicians are prone to.

In reality, national politicians can will the resources, and can vary the way they are distributed (for example, more to the north, or to head teachers, or on rebuilding outdoor toilets rather than science labs). Local politicians can build or close more schools, or determine holiday dates, and get involved in schools which go wrong, or try to resolve rows between governors and parents and each ones' responsibilities.

Do not misunderstand my drift. These issues are not unimportant. Good can be done by politicians, but with very few exceptions, genuine and radical innovation is not an accomplishment which political parties or powerful centralised bureaucracies frequently achieve. Or even should seek to.

Of course there is some social administration that seems to have a sense of novelty about it. "Joining up" areas of responsibility (for example between education departments and social services departments to ensure that vulnerable young people are identified at an early age and given help and support) has been a social imperative for some time. Indeed for some commentators it has been a yardstick of the "third way", beloved of Mr Blair.

The Local Government Association has been pressing, with some success, to develop models of collaboration that illustrate what can be done by "joining up": restoring schools to their communities so that councils have got into the frame of mind enthusiastically, and have developed alternative schemes for delivering services in ways that were unheard of hitherto.

Obstacles, where they exist, usually turn out to be bureaucratic ones, and frequently arise from the unjoined up workings of Whitehall (or "unthinking joinery" as I heard it once described). Government is always likely to get it wrong when it endorses innovation as good thing in itself and then sets out define that which is new. Real innovation in pedagogic practice is a fact of everyday teaching life. It goes on in schools and classrooms across the country.

## Addressing social deprivation

There are new community schools that are delivering collaboration and partnership. Yes, there are councils that are working with private sector organisations to run cost effective new Pupil Referral Units or partnerships between independent and state schools. The reforms do not have to follow politically correct ideology, or indeed any ideology at all. But these are more

items of home improvement than a serious re-design of the basic concept – and this is what the nation now needs. The case for it lies grounded in the statistics which demonstrate how deeply the class system in the UK in linked to educational attainment – much more so than is the case in the major advanced western economies without exception.

Estelle Morris herself spoke of social class as the remaining barrier to raising standards, and to the delivery of equality of outcomes at all ages. The indictment of our school system is expressed most forcefully in the recognition that postcodes, not A levels, are actually the best predictors of university entry – and therefore of life chances, life expectancy, lifetime income, unemployment, chances of prison, homelessness and so on. Yet it is hard to find evidence of specific government innovation – as opposed to good intentions - that might radically improve the prospects of the kids that come from the wrong side of the tracks.

Estelle Morris, like David Blunkett before her, succeeded in winning substantial additional resources for education, but new investment is still likely to go into interesting if peripheral innovation, rather than tackling social deprivation and its educational consequences head-on.

**...postcodes, not A levels, are actually the best predictors of university entry – and therefore of life chances, life expectancy, lifetime income, unemployment, chances of prison, homelessness and so on.**

Where is the innovation, and the extra resource to back it up going? The present system of education funding to schools is certainly a mystery wrapped up in an enigma: but why cannot social deprivation be unambiguously linked to resource allocation? Additional money to compensate for the educational disadvantage of poor housing, poverty, lack of access at home to books, computers and musical instruments, travel, sport and cultural activities – would directly assist schools to raise standards. Present funding systems reflect historical patterns of expenditure but do little to redress historical educational under-performance.

A shared vision between government and all the education partners is needed. This would involve the production of a national recovery plan which would detail how a massive investment in meeting the needs of what used to be called the “working classes” would begin by looking at the unacceptable gap between the high-attaining middle-class families and the others – and directly targeting compensating assistance at it.

I recognise that these may be unfashionable concepts (after all planning remains a dirty word!) but innovation that started from the grass roots and then worked upwards could have the effect of unifying teachers, churches,

LEAs and government around an agenda for real individual and social regeneration.

Perhaps I'm a dreamer, but there are thousands of teachers and educators who share my ambition, to create a climate in our schools and colleges where teachers can dare to experiment, innovate and challenge the status quo in the hope of producing the changes that can transform young lives.

There are planners, technicians, builders, architects and IT wizards busy inventing the future. John Marks, in an earlier edition of this journal[1], incorrectly quoted me in 1987 as being a defender of grammar schools and a critic of comprehensivisation. He could not have been more wrong. My complaint at the time was that the comprehensive experiment, begun in the 1950's and 1960's had been prematurely halted midway through.

The innovation of educating all young people together, in schools of substantial size, with facilities commensurate with the multiplicity of need expressed by cohorts of the entire age and ability range, was then a radical, even a preposterous vision - a conceit even. By comparison, the narrow vision of the Prime Minister in October 2002, speaking of the "post comprehensive era", seems limiting and imprecise, in that it seems to lack any real vision, or at least any vision that contains the essential social restructuring that valid educational innovation would aspire to.

Estelle Morris before she resigned, I suspect, knew and feared that Achilles' heel that is called the "third way". Her experience as a classroom teacher cannot fail to have exposed her to the real potential for improvement in every one of our young people – and the wealth of lost opportunities that social inequality condemns many of them to.

It is not the possibility of managerial improvements, and new forms of collaboration working that will (despite the benefits that may flow from them) deliver the "big" revolution; but rather the empowerment of the 25 per cent of our population that the education service still lets down. That remains a challenge and an innovation that still seems a bridge too far. ■

## References

1. Marks J., A System of Comprehensive Schools or Education for All? *Education Review*, 15(1), NUT, Autumn 2001.

# Teaching Assistants – a national survey

**Abstract:** *The Government plans to increase the number of teacher assistants in schools, partly to address problems of teacher workload. This article outlines the results of a survey commissioned by the NUT from the University of Warwick which provides information from teachers on what teaching assistants do, what they might do and whether there is a correlation between more teaching assistants and less teacher workload.*

**Dr Sean Neill**

Dr Neill is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Warwick, and has conducted extensive research on classroom non-verbal signals, particularly those which were used to maintain or subvert discipline and order.
In recent years he has been involved in the statistical analysis of a range of projects, including diary studies of teacher workloads and questionnaire studies on the effects of government policy changes.

WITH the increasing difficulty in maintaining the supply of teachers[1,2] the Government aims to increase the workforce in education by recruiting twice as many classroom assistants as new teachers. The previous Secretary of State, Estelle Morris, suggested that teaching should move away from the historic situation, where the direct education of children was delivered entirely by teachers, to a situation analagous to medicine, where medical roles previously carried out by doctors have been devolved to nurses. She considers that this has allowed doctors "to concentrate their energies on more difficult matters, to the benefit of those in their care". The validity of this apparently persuasive analogy is considered in the discussion at the end of this report.

Marr *et al*[3] found that in their three study areas, recruitment of Teaching Assistants (TAs) was buoyant even where it was proving difficult to recruit teachers. Recruitment patterns were highly variable, depending on local, especially financial conditions. Assistants tended to be involved particularly with literacy and numeracy, and in supporting children with special needs of various types. Relationships were generally good and assistants were often doing work which would previously have been the professional responsibility of teachers, though this did not generally include formal appraisal of children.

One in five assistants sometimes worked with a class on their own. Marr *et al* felt that teaching involves "complex skills which often require on-the-spot adaptation in the face of the unfamiliar" and that this made it difficult for teachers

to plan lessons for assistants to "deliver". More training, for both assistants and teachers, was needed, though problems occurred with both finance and clashes with other commitments (mainly family commitments) for assistants.

Marr *et al* concluded that a debate was urgently needed on the roles and salaries of assistants in conjunction with a discussion about teacher workloads and pay. The survey of members of the National Union of Teachers which forms the basis for this article is a contribution to that debate, covering a larger number of teachers and LEAs than had been possible in Marr *et al's* study, with its use of labour – intensive interview and case study methods.

## Methods

The questionnaire covered biographical information, the support teachers currently received in the classroom, the basis on which assistants were deployed and whether respondents had had training to work with TAs. The questionnaire asked opinions on what was the most significant benefit of TA support, whether there were drawbacks and if so, which was most significant, and the ways in which TAs increased or decreased teacher workload.

There were also questions on whether TAs should be allowed to undertake five types of independent responsibility. The questionnaire also covered administrative support, including how effective the current level of administrative support was and the usual practice for providing, and amount of, administrative support. Of 15,358 questionnaires sent out, 3,822 were returned in time to be analysed (24.9%).

The respondents were a representative sample of Union membership and teachers in general, with a majority of highly experienced teachers, and more female than male and primary than secondary respondents. Fuller details of the questionnaire and analysis are given in Neill.[4]

## Assistance from Teaching Assistants – numbers and focus

Most commonly, assistance was given by one (32.9%) or two (26.0%) TAs, though over a tenth of teachers (13.2%) received no assistance from TAs. Two-thirds of secondary teachers received support for a day or less, while primary teachers were significantly more likely to receive support for 2-3 days or more. Respondents commonly reported several reasons for TA deployment, but a factor analysis suggested that individual teachers tended to use TAs in rather distinct ways.

Deployment of TAs across subjects differed markedly between primary respondents and secondary respondents. In primary schools, they were mainly deployed in the core subjects (literacy, numeracy, ICT and to a lesser extent science), and to support groups or individuals in class, and less commonly groups or individuals withdrawn from the class.

At secondary level, specialist teaching was accompanied by the deployment

of specialist TAs; there was relatively more work with the whole class in modern foreign languages. Pastoral or special-needs assistance was significantly greater in special schools.

The overwhelming majority of teachers (85.5%) did not allow their TAs to work on their own. Primary teachers were significantly more likely to allow TAs to work on their own than secondary teachers. Where TAs were allowed to work on their own, this was normally for periods of an hour or less, most commonly when the teacher was called away from the class, either on a planned or unplanned basis.

## Training to work with Teaching Assistants

Only a small minority of respondents (14.7%) had received training to help them work with TAs. Primary teachers were significantly more likely to have received training than their secondary colleagues; training was usually from the LEA or school. A smaller number of, mostly younger, teachers had received it from an ITT provider, usually as part of their ITT course. A majority of those who had received training thought it had been very or quite useful:

> "Training on the roles of TAs and teacher would probably benefit both types of staff and help them work together more effectively. TAs have an important – and separate – role to play in education."
> *(Primary supply teacher)*

> "I have worked in a school where the TAs were encouraged to take the City & Guilds course and acquire the LSA qualification; this led to a better quality of support with greater understanding for teachers and then in how and why we teach."
> *(Primary science co-ordinator)*

## The benefits and drawbacks of Teaching Assistants

An overwhelming majority (76.7%) considered the most significant benefit of TA support was "additional support for groups/individual pupils". "Working in partnership with other adults in the classroom" (8.0%) and "reduction of teacher workload in the classroom" (9.0%) were mentioned by much smaller numbers, and "closer parental / community involvement with schools" (0.8%) and "other benefits" only by very few respondents.

Two-thirds of respondents (63.9%) thought there were drawbacks to working with TAs; there was no significant difference between phases. The commonest reason was "variations in TAs' skills/qualifications /experience" (39.0%), followed by "insufficient/underdeveloped skills in the management/supervision of TAs" (25.1%) and "lack of time available to plan with TAs" (22.3%). None of these drawbacks can be seen as hostility to

working with TAs in general.

Lack of time was a problem mentioned mainly by primary teachers, whereas variation in TAs' skills was stressed much more by secondary teachers. Primary teachers usually do not have the free periods which would allow them to plan together with their TAs, and the higher academic level in secondary schools makes the level of subject skill which TAs display more critical.

The variation between teaching assistants was a major issue:

> "Vast differences between abilities of individual TAs – some are v. incompetent, others – I don't know why they aren't teachers!"
> *(Secondary head of English)*

Even where assistants were good, teachers could not make best use of them if there was no time for planning:

> "Clear guidelines are needed. Set by negotiation between SENCO, TA & staff. Time is needed for this and I only see one TA once a fortnight!"
> *(Secondary art co-ordinator)*

Opinion was divided on whether TAs increased (58.1%) or reduced (41.6%) workload; some wrote in comments to indicate that TAs did not increase or decrease workload but changed the nature of work. Primary teachers were more likely to feel that TAs reduced workload.

The most common reasons given for TAs reducing workload were that they allowed more time to be spent on teaching (37.8%) or that they allowed tasks to be delegated (22.9%). Respondents who reported TAs increased workload reported this was due to extra management – work planning (22.7%), management responsibilities (34.6%) and supervision (7.3%).

## Should Teaching Assistants take over duties?

Respondents were asked their opinions on whether TAs should take over five types of duty. Attitudes were most positive about "pastoral support to pupils"; 52% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly, A quarter to a third of respondents agreed that TAs should undertake supervision of "work set by teachers, without teachers being present"; "invigilate tests / examinations" and "supervise lunchtime activities".

The strongest disagreement was with the suggestion that TAs "should be used to cover for teacher absence": 87% of all respondents were opposed. The views expressed are consistent with the low proportion of TAs who were actually allowed to work on their own with classes.

[Supervising pupils who undertake work set by teachers] [This implies]

"the teacher does nothing but hand out work and does not recognise the ongoing assessment occurring all the time."
*(Primary Year 6 class teacher)*

[Pastoral support] "Some pupils seem to prefer initially talking to TA. TA must be aware of issues such as confidentiality /child protection."
*(Primary part-time class teacher)*

[Cover for teacher absence] "Most TAs do not appear to want to be in charge of a class and they are certainly not paid enough to do so!
*(Primary Key Stage 1 co-ordinator)*

"Teaching assistants are worth their weight in gold. I value my TA enormously. But – I would not put her under pressure to take the class in my absence. She is quite capable of disciplining the class – reading a story to them and we may split the class for activities but not whole days."
*(Year 2 teacher – senior management)*

## Discussion

The results of this survey confirm Marr *et al's* report, across a wider range of local authorities; the issues of division of responsibility between teachers and assistants and the inequalities in the availability and expertise of assistants which concerned Marr *et al* still apply.

Perhaps the most striking quantitative difference between the two studies is the smaller proportion of teachers who allowed assistants to take responsibility for classes on their own (12.7% in this survey as opposed to 20% in Marr *et al's* survey).

**The strongest disagreement was with the suggestion that TAs "should be used to cover for teacher absence": 87% of all respondents were opposed.**

A possible explanation may lie in the different methodologies of the two surveys. In this survey questionnaires were sent out to individual NUT members, whereas Marr *et al's* method was a co-ordinated questionnaire study of the perceptions of five members of staff (headteacher, two randomly selected assistants and two teachers selected by the assistants) in each school.

This procedure has obvious merits in ensuring that the differing perceptions of heads, assistants and classroom teachers are matched: but it is likely to have selected schools, or individual teachers within schools, who had a more favourable attitude to working with TAs than the average – as is apparent from some comments in this survey, some teachers felt that TAs had been imposed on them. Marr *et al's* figure therefore probably over-represents the willingness

of the average teacher to allow TAs to take over responsibility for the class. However respondents generally approved of TAs and felt their pay should be increased, and their other conditions improved:

> "The role of TAs could be developed greatly to the benefit of all if their hours were guaranteed, pay enhanced, and opportunities were built in for liaison with teachers."
> *(Primary SENCO/ICT co-ordinator/EAL co-ordinator)*

It is notable that respondents most welcomed the idea of TAs working on their own if they were providing extra pastoral support for pupils; this parallels the situation in France, where separate assistants undertake these duties, leaving the teacher free to undertake the more academic aspects.[5]

> "I am very worried that teaching assistants are going to be used as 'teachers on the cheap'. They need a clearly defined role as in France – 'surveillants'. There teachers do far less work than us."
> *(Secondary teacher: second in language department)*

By demonstrating to pupils, and their parents, that other adults in the system support and respect teachers, this development could go some way to countering the lack of support from parents which many teachers report feeling.[6]

Morris's analogy, between education and healthcare, mentioned in the introduction, does not take into account two major differences between medicine and education which have major implications for delegation. Firstly,

**...high-quality teaching involves constant interaction between teacher and taught. A teacher cannot devise an inspired lesson-plan and hand it over to others with the certainty of an inspired delivery.**

education relies largely on interpersonal skills, especially those involved in dealing with class groups of, sometimes disaffected, students: the success of medical treatment depends to a much greater extent on accurate diagnosis and correct use of the accumulated scientific knowledge about appropriate treatment, which can be done by nursing staff, leading up to, or following, the appropriate use of the doctor's expertise.

As pointed out by Marr *et al*, and many of the respondents in the current survey, high-quality teaching involves constant interaction between teacher

and taught. A teacher cannot devise an inspired lesson-plan and hand it over to others with the certainty of an inspired delivery. The difference between teacher and assistant is made particularly clearly by respondents who have experienced both roles:

> There is a vast difference between a TA (who is usually a parent) and a teacher. I should know – I was a Nursery Nurse first!!
> *(Key Stage 1 early years manager)*

A second critical difference between medicine and teaching relates to the different timetabling demands in the two professions. Medicine is, inevitably, a reactive profession; the doctor reacts to the needs of patients for treatment according to their urgency, and the timing of medical treatment, including that given by nurses and other ancillaries to the doctor, is adjusted according to current priorities. In addition, ancillary staff are available, in a hospital setting, round the clock. Teaching is, however, rigidly timetabled, and administrative or ancillary support has to be available to fit in with the demands of the timetable – it is, for example, useless if lesson materials are produced after the lesson for which they are needed. In addition, at present, ancillary staff are often employed only for the period of the school day.

Solving this problem may require the employment of administrative staff for relatively unsocial hours so they can, for example, discuss teachers' support work requirements for the following day - potentially a particular problem in relation to work planned over the weekend.

The more general problem of how work in the classroom should be divided between teachers and assistants requires sensitivity to teachers' concerns and a willingness by policy-makers to take them seriously. There is clearly great goodwill by teachers to their assistants, which should be capitalised on to allow developments which are seen as productive by both parties.

However, the Government has expressed its determination to maintain accountability for teachers while the recruitment of assistants is currently relatively unregulated[3] – which largely explains the concern of many teachers in this survey about the variable quality of assistants.

In addition, many teachers join the profession largely because they enjoy working with children[2]; they tolerate the bureaucracy and regulation in return for this satisfying aspect of the job.

If teaching becomes a job where more time is spent on planning work, which classroom assistants get the satisfaction of delivering to children, some potential applicants to teaching may consider becoming assistants instead, especially if the improvements in pay and conditions, which many respondents in this survey have called for, are actually delivered. The Government's drive to compensate for the teacher shortage by increasing the

recruitment of classroom assistants could, if not handled carefully, itself increase the teacher shortage. ■

## References

1. Morris E., *Professionalism and Trust – The Future of Teachers and Teaching: A Speech by the Rt Hon Estelle Morris …to the Social Market Foundation*, Nov. 2001. London: DfES, 2001. Website: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/speeches/12_11_01/DfES-SpeechDocCOVER.pdf
2. Smithers A. and Robinson P., *Teachers Leaving*. London: NUT, 2001.
3. Marr A., Hancock R. and SwannW., *Classroom Assistants in Primary Schools: Employment and Deployment*. Report to the Economic and Social Research Council, 2001. Website: http://www.regard.ac.uk/research_findings/R000237803/report.pdf
4. Neill S.R. St.J., *Teaching Assistants: A Survey Analysed for the National Union of Teachers by the University of Warwick Institute of Education*, Teacher Research and Development Unit. London: NUT, 2002.
5. Osborn M., Broadfoot P., McNess E., Ravn B., Planel C. and Triggs P., *Comparing Learners Across Europe: A World of Difference?* Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003.
6. Neill S.R. St.J., *Unacceptable Pupil Behaviour: A Survey Analsyed for the National Union of Teachers by the University of Warwick Institute of Education*, Teacher Research and Development Unit. London: NUT, 2001.

## Further reading

Neill S.R. St.J., *Teachers Responding to the Challenge of Change: A Survey Analysed for the National Union of Teachers*. London: NUT, 1999.

Neill S.R. St.J., *Performance Management and Threshold Assessment: A Survey Analysed for the National Union of Teachers by the University of Warwick, Institute of Education*, Teacher Development, Research and Dissemination Unit. London: NUT, 2001.

# Innovation and specialist schools

**Abstract:** *Specialist schools are an important part of the Government's "diversity" agenda for secondary education. This article charts their development and the role of the Technology Colleges Trust in providing advice and information and also networking opportunities for specialist schools to share innovative practices which work with other schools.*

**Elizabeth Reid**

Elizabeth Reid is Chief Executive for the Technology Colleges Trust.

SPECIALIST schools are an important strand in the Government's policy for transforming secondary education. The principles behind transformation were set out by David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education, in his speech[1] to the Social Market Foundation in March 2000 as follows.

- high expectations of every individual pupil;
- increase the diversity of provision in secondary schools, both within schools and between them;
- schools working together can achieve more;
- intervention by government must be in inverse proportion to success;
- no excuses for underperformance.

On the last point the Secretary of State could not have been clearer: "No child is pre-ordained to fail by their home life, by their ethnic background, their economic circumstances or by their gender."

That sentence encapsulates the challenge and moral purpose of the transforming secondary education agenda. Both the Prime Minister and Estelle Morris, the former Secretary of State for Education and Skills, have emphasised in their speeches and public statements the role of diversity in that agenda. In her introduction to *Investment for Reform*[2], the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) prospectus published following the Spending Review announcements, Estelle Morris said:

"The secondary schools of the future will be specialist, not simply in the

technical sense, but with a character and ethos that is distinctive to each school and which focuses on the individual talent and potential of each child. The keys are diversity not uniformity, and every school with an incentive to improve … This new 'specialist' system will mean higher standards, better behaviour and more choice. Through bold reforms, the achievement of young people in all our schools can rise dramatically. Only in this way can we fulfil the original comprehensive ideal – every child being of equal worth."

## Specialist schools policy

DfES policy on specialist schools has evolved rapidly. Specialist schools have been encouraged through Education Action Zones and through the Excellence in Cities programme with the aim of increasing the number of specialist schools in areas of deprivation and the inner cities. In 1997 sports and arts were added to the existing specialisms of technology and modern foreign languages and an important community dimension was added to the programme, signalling the importance in policy of collaboration as well as diversity.

By 1999, after five years, there were 376 specialist schools. Now in October 2002, there are 992 specialist schools including, for the first time, the new specialisms of science, engineering, maths and computing and business and enterprise. A million young people or over 34 per cent of pupils in maintained secondary schools are taught in specialist schools.

As recently as a year ago the target was for 1000 specialist schools in 2004, now the target is 2000 specialist schools by 2006. The White Paper *Schools Achieving Success*[3] published in 2001 cited the research undertaken by Professor David Jesson showing that on average specialist schools' attainment at GCSE was ahead of other comprehensive schools. It also cited as exemplars the innovative work of individual specialist schools such as St Thomas More School in Gateshead where CAD/CAM facilities are used to extend the curriculum of neighbouring schools.

Innovation, perhaps particularly in ICT, but also in the specialist subject, as well as in community learning is an important feature of specialist schools and the organisation I lead, the Technology Colleges Trust, works with specialist schools and other schools in its network to support the spread of innovative practice.

## The Technology Colleges Trust

The Technology Colleges Trust is part-funded by the DfES to support schools' applications for specialist status, including by raising sponsorship to help schools having difficulty in raising the £50,000 required. The Trust is also funded to support specialist schools to retain their status. However as part of its core business the Trust runs a major subscription network for schools. This network is self-financing and self-determining. The network is led by a

national headteachers steering group and by regional steering groups in each of 10 regions.

## The affiliation network

The focus of this schools-led network is the exchange and dissemination of good practice. Innovation is a major feature of its programmes. The network is developing annual conferences for each specialism, in addition to the well established and significant annual conference which this year will be the largest ever for 1250 delegates at the ICC in Birmingham.

An essential feature of all the network conferences (which are attended by specialist and non-specialist schools alike) is the showcasing of innovative work by individual schools. So, this year at the annual conference, Archbishop Michael Ramsay School in Lambeth will present their “Communiversity” project. Archbishop Michael Ramsey School is a technology college with a radical approach to school improvement and neighbourhood renewal and a new way of using the community element of the specialist schools programme. Goffs School, a language college in Hertfordshire will present their work on on-line citizenship and Key Stage 2/3 transition, both exciting projects showing innovative use of ICT.

These are only two examples to make the point that schools showcasing innovation to schools is a popular and powerful way to promote new methods and developments in secondary education. Schools can see “what works” demonstrated by their own professional peers and are motivated to follow through their interest to adapting the idea for their own use.

The power of the specialist subject conferences, as well as the regional conferences, to promote innovation amongst schools is real and I would argue that this is because everything about these conferences from programme to venue is decided by headteachers. One headteacher recently told me that, following his session at a regional conference his school had hosted 30 separate visits from schools seeking more information.

Showcasing at conferences is not the only way in which innovation is encouraged. Annual awards, publications and international study tours are also important. The network’s Vision 2020 group is running its second on-line conference this autumn. Last year over 800 contributors from 50 countries took part. This year will feature cyber tours of schools and an international on-line debate. The Vision 2020 group aims to define, disseminate and support innovation in the network and beyond and is a vital “ginger group” within the network.

A new development is the setting up of local networks of specialist schools to work together and with other schools to promote good practice and innovation. The first such network is in Birmingham, in partnership with the LEA, which is seconding a member of staff to the TCT to support the initiative.

## Specialist status

I am finishing this article with a series of short interviews with the headteachers of specialist schools. They all acknowledge the boost that specialist status has provided through the provision of additional resources and a new sense of energy and commitment. In each case there is innovation, sometimes just for that individual school; in some cases the innovation is of wider significance. These are the authentic voices of schools improving through change and innovation, as well as facing outwards to other schools and the wider community.

### *Bishop Rawstone CofE Language College, Preston*

Bishop Rawstone Language College in Preston, Lancashire, has reached "a new academic plateau", according to head George Lloyd:

> "Acquiring specialist status has enabled us to invest in new equipment which is helping to drive up academic standards. Standards are higher than they have ever been in the school's 41-year history, which is a fantastic achievement. We have also been able to create new lifelong learning opportunities for everyone in the local community by providing a range of language courses. Links with other schools in the area are being reinforced enabling more people to benefit from the skills and opportunities we offer."

The college has also successfully developed a range of industry links, working closely with an electronic whiteboard supplier to provide training using this particular technology.

> "The new digital technology we have been able to acquire means we have some first rate teaching aids. Obviously this is equipment which the whole community is benefiting from, I can say confidently that becoming a specialist college has made an enormous difference, not just to the school but to the wider community."

### *Holly Hall School, Dudley*

Pupils at Holly Hall School, in Dudley, are still getting over a "wow" factor, just one month after the school was awarded specialist status in maths and computing. Headteacher, Graham Lloyd, explained that since term started last month there has been a renewed sense of energy and excitement around the school.

> "The students were amazed when they saw all the new equipment. Our new status has enabled us to invest in technology which can be used not just for maths and computing, it's being used in almost every other subject.

> For instance the PE department will be using state-of-the-art computing equipment to gather data and results during lessons for downloading to the student intranet.

Graham Lloyd is confident that the new mathematics software will push up standards:

> "Obviously it's early days yet – we've only had our specialist status for a short time. We are incorporating this new technology into our teaching programmes to help with our Key Stage 3 strategy. These new teaching methods are being used to help the wider community and with this in mind we've launched several adult computing courses. Staff are benefiting because they are learning new skills and there are new opportunities for them."

### *Thomas Tallis School, Greenwich*

Specialist status has enabled Thomas Tallis School in Greenwich, South London, to forge closer links a former rival. The school shares its visual arts college status with Kidbrooke School, explained deputy head, Rosemary Leeke:

> "There always used to be a bit of rivalry between the two schools but now both sets of pupils freely wander in and out of both schools to use each others' facilities. The two schools were applying for specialist status at the same time and because we were so near we decided it would strengthen our bid if we submitted a joint application. We've never looked back. Specialist status has given us access to new resources which has enabled us to expand the range of A-level subjects we're able to teach. We now offer art-based studies in photography and history of art, subjects we would not have been able to teach in the past. We have enriched our curriculum."

The new resources have enabled Thomas Tallis to entice professional artists and designers to the school.

> "We have had a range of professionals in to give talks and demonstrations from photographers to architects. This can be extremely encouraging for students thinking of pursuing similar career paths."

### *Greensward Technology College, Essex*

For David Triggs, principal of Greensward Technology College, specialist status has become more than just a way of raising standards in his own institution. "It has benefited us hugely by boosting results and raising standards generally in the college," he said.

"Standards were always high but the number of A* to C grades achieved at GCSE level has increased to around 70 per cent. Being part of the Technology Colleges Trust network has given us access to new resources and a professional support network. This has been extremely beneficial in raising professional standards. When we acquired specialist status we decided our resources could also be used to benefit struggling schools – we've done this rather that just forging links with local schools which are already doing well. We are helping one primary school with the cost of buying computer equipment. We are sharing our technology with other schools and they also have access to our resources."

The results speak for themselves – standards at Greensward have improved and things are on the up for the college's link schools:

"One of the schools was in special measures when we first formed the link. It is now out of special measures and standards are improving."

## Conclusion

It will be obvious from the text of this article that I view successful innovation as being school based, not just because it changes the school where it occurs but because it comes from professional practice and therefore has a credibility and an immediacy that makes it transferable.

Of course specialist schools do not have a monopoly of innovation and they do have some extra resource to support development. However, they and many other schools choose to belong to a network that prioritises and encourages innovation. That is significant for the changing culture of secondary schools in England. ■

## References

1. Blunkett D., *Transforming Secondary Education: A Speech by the Rt. Hon. David Blunkett to the Social Market Foundation*, 15 March 2000. London: Social Market Foundation, 2000. Website: http://www.dfee.gov.uk/dfee_speeches/15_03_00/index.shtml
2. DfES, *Education and Skills: Investment for Reform.* Sudbury: DfES, 2002. Website: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/2002spendingreview/pdf/investmentforreform.pdf
3. DfES, *Schools Achieving Success*, Cm 5230. London: TSO, 2001. Website: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/achievingsuccess/

# Innovation in schools: giving trust back to teachers

**James Walters**

James Walters is a researcher at Demos, the independent think-tank.

**Abstract:** *The concept of innovation in education is regarded with suspicion by teachers following years of "top down" reform which has also placed a huge burden on pupils. Teachers' time and energies must be freed to enable them to be innovative, often working collaboratively with colleagues in their own and neighbouring schools.*

AS THE pressures on the public education system become ever more great, the "top-down solutions" imposed by the Whitehall policy makers to raise standards will become increasingly ineffective. Most dangerously, they have started to undermine the integrity and appeal of the teaching profession. The way forward is to rejuvenate the processes of education through new forms of innovation, coming from teachers themselves.

Many people are suspicious of the concept of innovation in education for two very good reasons. The first is the legacy of years of seemingly relentless innovation by education policy makers. A political culture driven by the need for "new initiatives" that catch the public attention has left teachers with little appetite for fresh ideas. This kind of innovation has been dictated from Whitehall and when the initiatives are a success, as SureStart has been, Ministers claim the credit. When they fail, as Individual Learning Accounts have done, the Government looks the other way and education providers lose out.

The second suspicion of educational innovation, related to the first, arises from a legitimate sympathy for students themselves. The radical transformation of the education system since the introduction of the National

Curriculum 15 years ago has led to the labelling of today's students as the "guinea pig generation". In this kind of climate where both teachers and pupils feel like they are running to keep up with the pace of change, teachers are wary of introducing any new schemes or ideas that would further destabilise the educational experience. Much policy innovation is high-risk in a way that is inappropriate when you are dealing with young people's futures.

## Fresh ideas

Both suspicions ignore the urgent need for fresh, practical ideas in teaching. Rather than introduce more policy-led innovation or further-complicating change, we need to encourage the kind of fresh thinking and innovation that teachers themselves want. Research carried out by Demos and the National Union of Teachers during 2000 and 2001[1] revealed a deep frustration among teachers at the limited opportunities they had to reflect on and develop their own practice. In conversation with a group of colleagues, one teacher commented, "When you were talking about spending your Sundays marking, I just felt that there were so many better things that someone of your intelligence could be doing . . . I mean, not leisure – heaven forbid [laughter] – but to do with the job . . ."

Anyone who has worked with, or in, a variety of schools knows that what differentiates a creative, stimulating school from a mediocre school is not the vigour with which it pushes towards its ever-stretching targets. Rather it is the opportunities that teachers have to enhance the educational experience with fresh ideas.

The input of creative, dedicated teachers can make all the difference. The head of religious studies at a comprehensive school in Hertfordshire has managed to renew interest in his subject by setting up an online discussion forum where current students can debate theological and philosophical issues with each other, with alumni and with the wider community outside of the classroom. Similarly, teachers at a Church of England primary school in

**Innovation is not about doing the old things better – a task that becomes increasingly unsustainable. Rather, it is about doing new, and hopefully fewer, better things.**

Camden have re-engaged the families of students in the life of the school by making their IT resources available for after-school computer classes for Bengali mothers who, in turn, have helped their children to learn through IT. These innovative ideas are responsive to local need. They go beyond the basics of teaching the curriculum, and are dependent on the energy, goodwill and

imagination of teachers themselves.

Stimulating this kind of innovation throughout the education system will require three paradigm shifts: firstly, the freeing-up of teachers' time through new understandings of school organisation and personnel; secondly, a freedom from the ideological constraints of the existing educational process; and, thirdly, a new appreciation of teaching as an intellectual, learning profession.

## Time constraints

Being innovative requires the time to think, but time has become a rare commodity in the teaching profession. The Demos/NUT research highlighted excessive workload as the primary source of disillusionment and frustration. Nearly all teachers interviewed described how they did not have enough time during the normal working week to do sufficient work to meet the pressure to improve their productivity.

The average working week is now 54 hours for a primary school teacher and 51 for a secondary school teacher. While these are not untypical of the hours worked by many of today's professionals, the real frustration is that much of this time is spent on mundane administrative functions which, most teachers believe, do little to benefit students directly.

Demos has argued that teaching assistants can work with teachers as part of a "team approach" education that reduces some of the burdens placed on teachers' time. Their role should not be that of a cheap, non-graduate teaching workforce, but rather a supportive presence within the classroom that adds greater status to the teaching profession, not less. Better use of information technology and knowledge management in schools could also do much more to alleviate the pressures of paperwork. Even a short visit by a management consultant to a school can reap rewards in streamlining systems and minimising bureaucracy.

The second obstacle to innovation is the received wisdom in contemporary education – that standards will be raised by meeting higher targets simply through everybody working harder. The "standards agenda", reinforced by the Labour Government since 1997, has been successful in raising levels of attainment across the education system and in creating minimum standards below which no school will fall.

However, relatively little in the basic structures of schooling has changed and even the generous increases in resources has done little to reduce the day-to-day pressures that teachers face. Teachers have had little opportunity to reflect on how their methods and practices can adapt and evolve to meet the needs of the pupils they teach.

Innovation is not about doing the old things better – a task that becomes increasingly unsustainable. Rather, it is about doing new, and hopefully fewer, better things. Allowing teachers to develop innovative teaching practice will

require a move away from maniacal performance monitoring. The system needs to incorporate greater levels of trust. Increased trust and practitioner autonomy would take the pressure off teachers, allowing them to raise standards in diverse and more locally effective ways.

## Facilitating exchange of good practice

Finally, being innovative requires the ability to learn as well as teach. Innovation is not necessarily originality! One of the paradoxes of the teaching profession is that, while intellectual challenge is one of the biggest attractions in graduate recruitment, teaching currently offers few opportunities to experience such a challenge and to learn from other practitioners and schools.

The publication of league tables and increased parental choice has created a competitive culture between schools which is destroying opportunities for cooperative improvement. The British education system is one of the largest professional networks in the country, with a wealth of knowledge held by headteachers and teachers that could be tapped. Despite this, communication between individual schools is still highly limited.

The Government has introduced some initiatives based on these principles. Many schools, particularly in urban areas, have benefited from the introduction of Education Action Zones, the Beacon Schools initiative and Excellence in Cities partnerships. However, these schools are still in the minority and the day-to-day pressures of teaching, discussed above, have restricted the impact that such knowledge sharing can have on educational innovation.

Even within their own schools, teachers need greater opportunities to discuss their professional development, to learn from their colleagues and to reflect on new ways of communicating ideas. At present, a teacher rarely gets the opportunity to learn first hand from the teacher in the neighbouring classroom, let alone from a teacher in a neighbouring school.

Good innovation is taking place in schools. But at present it is struggling to emerge from a system so weighed down by targets, initiatives and managerialism that many high-calibre teachers simply throw in the towel. It is time for the Government to put the creativity and trust back in the hands of teachers themselves. It is teachers who are best placed to innovate in education, but teachers need to be given the time to think. They need to be freed from the current received wisdom and, most of all, teachers need to be allowed to learn. ■

## References

1. Horne M., *Classroom Assistance: Why Teachers Must Transform Teaching.* Demos/NUT, 2001.

# Making innovation stick

**Abstract:** *Years of Government reform have left many teachers feeling alienated and undervalued. This article argues that it is now time for the teaching profession to move forward and to concentrate on the future. It outlines a number of proposals that could contribute to the development of teaching as a modern profession and looks at how the profession can gain autonomy.*

**Maureen Burns**

Maureen Burns taught history in two inner city comprehensive schools in Inner London and then became an adviser. She was Head of Policy and Communications with the General Teaching Council from its foundation and has recently been appointed Director in the Innovation Unit in the DfES.

FOR THE next phase of government reform to stand a real chance of success, there is no alternative but to invest in developing the capacity and status of the teaching profession. No one would question the fact that the profession has brought about higher standards of achievement over the last decade, and the story of the last five years in our schools is a story of substantial success. Yet teachers seem to remain ill at ease with the story. So many still talk about the high price they have paid for the achievements (for example in workload) or the things they feel they have lost (for example in that which they no longer can control). Or they talk about the values they have wrestled with and found difficult to live with (for example, when others prattle on, not about the children, but about economic imperatives for change).

## Teachers' voices

During my recent work with the General Teaching Council, we embarked upon promoting a professional conversation within and across groups of teachers. Their testimony was clear and focussed around the issues that confront them on a daily basis:

- They had made a moral investment in deciding to become a teacher;
- That moral investment is rooted in a powerful desire to improve pupils' life chances through "learning to learn";
- A significant aspect of the rewards that teachers seek is to do with seeing pupils make progress across a wide range of their potential achievements.

In fact, some teachers suggested that the highest form of professionalism is to make the greatest difference; and
- Structural demands, largely interpreted as externally required, actively get in the way of teachers' capacity to focus on teaching and learning.

This is an interesting voice. It speaks in part of deep-rooted expectations linked to professional commitment but, even more loudly, it speaks of a reaction to more than 10 years of change driven from above. Not only have those changes made demands of teachers but they have also actively undermined the very basis on which some entered the profession.

It is the same voice used by those teachers who comment that what they need, in order to feel more confident and fulfilled about doing the job, is to feel that their status as professionals is being valued. They say this even when the Secretary of State barely misses an opportunity to express positive sentiments. The issue remains that many teachers experience some sense of alienation.

I believe that it is time for us to separate out the legacy of the past from our ambitions for the future, and to concentrate on the future. I know that this is difficult and that, in planning to move on, we have to deal with the past. But – as a profession – we most need to get the new theory right. If we don't, then the teacher's professional voice will be cautious and conservative, just when we need it to be strong, assertive and reforming.

Let me give an example. I have heard a number of colleagues recently call for teachers to be given more autonomy. This is an understandable reaction to the pressure that teachers have felt building up on them to conform – whether to particular curricula, assessment arrangements, or even pedagogy. Yet, I think the concept of autonomy is a questionable basis on which to build a profession. It suggests an individuated response to our work, and it may actively contribute to the current experience of overload and loss of ownership.

For years, the teaching profession was characterised by a workplace – the school – rigidly subdivided into individual classrooms where teachers acted "autonomously" for the best part of every day. There is a growing acceptance that the job of teaching needs more space and more time – to build greater capacity to become more interactive, to be more attentive to team problem-solving and better connected within and beyond individual schools. I would be very concerned therefore to see steps taken that caused teachers to feel, or behave, purely as autonomous individuals again. If we are going to speak of professional autonomy we need to create a better shared language and better connecting ideas.

## Developing a modern profession

I would like to set out some proposals which could contribute to the development of teaching as a modern profession. Without apology, I am

looking forward rather than back and I am looking to characteristics that make teaching distinctively professional.

Central to any profession must be a mission to serve the public, rather than itself. As professionals, this is our reason for being. It is what provides us with our moral purpose, whether we articulate it as serving society, serving parents, serving children, or aspects of all of these. It is why as teachers we always strive to do our best, why we always conduct ourselves well, and why we seek to establish, evaluate and renew our knowledge and skills.

It is because we serve the public that we must be accountable to the public. This is unavoidable in the modern age, even though accountability brings burden and even though accountability means answering to people beyond the classroom, the school and the profession. In the modern age, it is not enough to ask people to trust us purely because we work for the public good.

Our argument should be about the form for that accountability, and its extent. We should resist perverse and unproductive accountability but not seek to replace it with no accountability. Our default should be to complete transparency in all we say and do, save where we have an opposing duty to protect the individual.

We cannot hope to serve the public unless we take the principled stand that every child is important and we are committed to realising the potential of all. This is in many ways our duty of care. This formulation is rooted in equality of opportunity – or equity – because it says that we should use equal effort while tailoring education to the needs of each individual.

## Professional renewal

It is because we serve the public that the entitlement to professional development and professional renewal should be fundamental to every teacher. Professional renewal, over the course of a single career, will take many forms. It should begin in the support and investment we promise teachers from their first point of entry into the profession. It should continue, and take new shape, throughout each person's career. It must be the right of every individual regardless of their particular school or local context. And we should appreciate that seeking our rights as individuals to professional development and renewal has to be offset by acknowledging our duty as individuals to contribute towards it.

Every teacher recognises that it is an aspect of their professional responsibility to take part in educating, training and developing those new to the profession. And no teacher would deny their responsibility to share in educating, training and developing those around them.

Because the profession serves the needs of young people and because those needs are continually growing more challenging and complex teachers maintain a strong commitment to continuous improvement, innovation and

reform. The experience of the last ten years must not be allowed to make us appear to be reactionary or even worse to turn us away from reform.

If teachers are to feel more in control, I would argue, it will not be by calling for a moratorium on change, but by calling for more locally-driven change.

On a personal note, this is why I have recently joined the new Innovation Unit at the Department for Education and Skills. The Unit will have an important role to play in encouraging and promoting innovation led by teachers. Our task will be more than to find financial and moral support for a limited number of exciting and innovative ideas; the task will be to engender and validate much more widespread innovation in all schools, as teachers, and others, continue to confront the challenges and opportunities that make up their everyday experience.

Serving the public means that we focus on the skills and knowledge that lie at the very heart of work in schools – we need to maintain a clear focus on teaching and learning, and develop a much more robust body of experience and understanding about what works.

Teaching has been less able in recent years to build a widely shared body of professional knowledge based on practice. We have codified less and exemplified less than the professions of law and medicine. And when we have described practice in schools the focus has too often shifted from the classroom and the key interaction that takes place between teacher and pupils. Until we redress this, we cannot create an informed profession.

A cornerstone of any profession is identification and association. The goals of professional renewal, of realising the potential of all and of maintaining a clear focus on teaching and learning can only be achieved if teachers can commit to working and meeting together, to pursue their shared objectives.

The profession needs to be built on a much stronger network of professional associations, subject associations, network learning communities and simple, school-based problem-solving teams. Just as much as it needs at its head, a strong, independent, professional body in the form of the General Teaching Council, which can embody all of the principles I am espousing here. The great opportunity in the modern age is, of course, to use the Internet as a further way to increase professional association.

And self-evidently the profession must be well managed and led. In the 21st century, association is not enough. Schooling is a complex of people, activities, structures and meanings. All of our goals for education need to be pursued through purposeful activity, well-focused and well aligned. That needs modern leadership and management, with its array of modern tools – including determining direction, using data, planning, measurement, performance development and communication.

As I have said before, we may choose to argue with leadership and management approaches that we find perverse but none of us calls for creating

a vacuum in their place. The task is to argue for systems which better secure the service that we are trying to provide.

## Conclusions

No single organisation, agency or association has the capacity to deliver on such an agenda, nor even the knowledge in its entirety about what is needed next. Even more importantly, no single group, let alone individual, knows how to bring about the right set of relationships, the right environmental factors, and the right actions to succeed.

Turning to the questions of entitlement and responsibility, for the teaching profession to become what it needs to be, will require:

- Serious investment in continuing professional development at the level of each individual teacher. Not as a piece of serendipity but as a guarantee;
- If there is an entitlement for each teacher then there is a responsibility too. Headteachers have to take the responsibility for creating schools peopled by communities of professionals that focus relentlessly on teaching and pupils' learning. And teachers have to take their responsibility for taking up their entitlement, for using it wisely and for sharing their own learning and insights with their colleagues;
- LEAs and other groups or agencies or private companies at the local level must take on the challenge of supporting heads and teachers in focusing their endeavours. But also, they must motivate and lead schools, recognising where schools are successfully establishing a professional base and nurturing those who still have a way to go. They must facilitate purposeful links and productive associations between groups of teachers and groups of schools.

When will we know we have succeeded? My test will be when we see again widespread evidence of the passion that teachers used to express for their profession. You cannot legislate for passion – by its very nature it is deeply personal, individually generated, owned and ferociously defended. A kind of passion has kept many of us working away during turbulent years, and now just might be the moment when that shared passion re-emerges, stronger, better channelled, and more constructive than ever. It is that same sense of passion and energy that results in innovation which is sustainable and renewable over time. ■

*Please note this article reflects personal views and not necessarily those of the Department for Education and Skills or General Teaching Council.*

# Teachers: from victims of change to agents of change

**Martin Johnson**

Martin Johnson was a teacher, mainly in inner London, for over thirty years. He was also a trade unionist, and National President of NASUWT in 2000. He joined the Institute for Public Policy Research in 2001 to work on the project on the future of the teaching profession, and is currently preparing proposals for schooling in London.

**Abstract:** *Teachers face unprecedented and unnecessary levels of accountability, which are destroying their professionalism and autonomy. This article argues for a significant reduction in these layers of accountability which would rejuvenate schools and make teaching an attractive profession.*

THE Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) is Britain's leading centre-left think-tank. It is a charity; donations from companies, trade unions, and trusts enable independent policy proposals to be developed by researchers who occupy a position between academia, journalism, and government. It recently carried out a year long study of the future of the teaching profession[1]. Here, I shall outline the dilemma faced by government in responding to its findings on the question of professional autonomy.

## The cycle of judgement and prescription

In 1999 primary teachers in England were virtually instructed to use a national lesson plan. Minute by minute, they were told what to teach, and how to teach it. Yet less than half a century previously, a Minister of Education famously reported that the only control he had over schools was over the removal of air-raid shelters from their premises. In between, we had the rise and fall of the catchphrase, "a national service locally administered". Why do we now have one of the most centralised school systems in the world, and where do we go from here?

The National Literacy Strategy can be seen as the end of a straight line which

started with Prime Minister Jim Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1976 and passed through the Education Reform Act of 1988. Until 1997, the line was labelled "Education is too important to be left to the teachers". The National Curriculum was introduced because schools could not be relied upon to offer a broad and balanced curriculum; OFSTED because teachers' employers could not be relied upon to force up standards. Within these terms, the two measures were successful, but their effect was also a high degree of standardisation.

Labour came to power in 1997 with higher ambitions: standards of pupil performance were too important to be left to the teachers. Embracing the publication of raw score results and imposing top-down targets, it was a natural extension of centralisation to standardise also on effective teaching methods.

The debate on autonomy has to proceed from the fact that within these (simple) terms, this measure was also stunningly successful. Globally, the two national primary strategies are regarded as almost fantastic achievements, for the very rapid universal dissemination and application of a single pedagogic model, and for the resultant outcomes. The performance of 11 year olds on a day in May in tested elements of English and maths far exceeds what was recently thought possible by many primary teachers.

Former Secretary of State, Estelle Morris, referred to this sequence as a journey from uninformed professional judgement through uninformed prescription to informed prescription, with the difficult next step towards informed professional judgement. We might call the sequence the Plowden years, the Woodhead years, the Barber years, and the wonder years.[2]

Estelle Morris had absorbed analyses of the weaknesses of central imposition from sources as varied as the official evaluation of the literacy and numeracy strategies and the Downing Street Performance and Innovation Unit: "While focusing on targets may represent a useful starting point for large-scale reform, it may not be the best approach for continued success." "The next stage of the literacy/numeracy reform may well be to strengthen efforts already underway and encouraged by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Strategies to build professional community both within and across schools."[3] "Excessive directive methods of government that appear to treat front-line deliverers as unable to think for themselves, untrustworthy or incompetent, undermine the very motivations and adaptability on which real-world success depends … Driving through policies with an implicit assumption that the main players are the problem, rather than part of the solution, is usually a recipe for failure."[4]

With a candour other political leaders would do well to copy, Estelle Morris posed the dilemma: how to restore autonomy to the profession, and encourage bottom-up innovation, without reducing teacher accountability or putting a brake on the current rate of improvement in teaching and learning? To put it another way, we must all accept that an outcome of a decade of relentless

pressure is a remarkable improvement in the average quality of lessons in English schools and a much higher focus on pupil achievement. Could these changes be retained and consolidated without the pressure?

## The teacher supply challenge

The IPPR project concluded that solving this dilemma is both essential and urgent. Underlying all the other dissatisfiers which frustrate teachers is a perceived lack of autonomy. Professionals expect their jobs to involve judgements, the independent application of skills and experience, and the opportunity to reflect and develop. As the Audit Commission has recently reported[5], like other public sector workers teachers' complaints about workload have at their heart the unproductive nature of the hours of work in keeping detailed records of activity for an untrusting machine. This feature, which reduces professionals to highly supervised technicians, makes teaching unattractive.

While teacher organisations are right to point to workload in the sense of the total number of hours worked each week, to pupil behaviour, to apparent government criticism, as dissatisfiers, we concluded that the underlying sense of lack of opportunity for creativity and independent judgement is a key long-term factor.

Teaching has to become more attractive because of the now well-known short-term and long-term issues of the supply of teachers. Demand for teachers is increasing rapidly because improved funding for schools is creating additional jobs, particularly in secondary schools where pupil numbers will not peak for two years. Partly because of financial incentives, partly because of a reduction in demand for graduates generally, the recruitment of trainees looks better than for many years, and we are approaching record numbers of teachers in post.

The numbers leaving the profession in their early years looks excessive, but is partly due to more mobile twenties lifestyles. We are fast approaching the beginning of a 10 year bulge in retirement, which will require more than ever new graduate and mature entrants, and the return of those who have left for career break or other reasons.

Financial incentives will attract people into the profession. Only greater job satisfaction will keep them there in a buoyant graduate employment market. This is why transforming the profession is not only a trade union's demand, but also a governmental necessity, giving urgency to its decentralising dilemma. Part of the transformation must be the implementation of the Government's laudable intention to make continuing professional development an entitlement, but with the teacher's own assessment of training needs being decisive. However, this is only one facet of a professional autonomy.

## Accountability? here, there, everywhere

One way to approach autonomy is to reassess accountability. Currently,

teachers are accountable by way of an overlapping network of mechanisms. Firstly, the ever-higher expectations of both pupils and parents may be expressed in a variety of ways, some more positive than others, but are very real pressures on teacher performance. Then, teachers are increasingly managed, that is monitored, by a variety of informal internal processes, and subject to formal target setting, performance management, and threshold. On top of that, they are liable to external inspection, perhaps by agency of the local authority, and certainly by OFSTED.

At school level, there are targets, generated not only by the PANDA data, but also by national targets decided in horse-trading between the DfES and the Treasury during each government spending review. On top of all that, we have the discipline of the league tables. This non-exhaustive list may explain why teachers feel unduly constrained.

This all amounts to an inefficient duplication. There is a strong argument that, if government requires schools to be judged by their (necessarily contextualised) pupil outcomes, it should not need to intervene further where the outcomes are satisfactory. "Intervention in inverse proportion to success" has long been a slogan. It does not appear to be a reality.

## Relax...

The IPPR believes that the time is right for the Government to relax. Schools are highly popular institutions. In an increasingly affluent society, where purchase of private schooling is within the financial range of a large proportion of parents, some 93 per cent choose the public service option.

Parents have very high satisfaction levels with the school attended by their own children, even when they are uneasy about the system as a whole. This satisfaction is not unjustified, with real improvements in standards at all levels. Even more encouraging, the most recent international study conducted by the OECD[6] showed the performance of English 15 year olds in a very favourable light. Over concentration on the very real weaknesses should not detract from the fact that schools are a very effective and popular public service.

All this should provide the confidence for a radical relaxation of the network of central controls developed over the last 15 years. The Government now collects an unprecedented amount of data on schools and pupil performance. It could use it to monitor, and intervene only when things are going seriously wrong. Here are some examples.

The Government claims that it is introducing new flexibility into the National Curriculum for secondary schools. It amounts only to a limited availability of a vocational education element for Key Stage 4. We do not believe that vocationalism is the way forward for secondary schools, but we do believe that schools, within the "broad and balanced" criterion, should be free to develop their own curricula.

The Government may remain committed to the Public Service Agreement as a target driven link between the Treasury and the spending departments. We propose that in future, PSA targets are derived bottom up, by building on teachers' assessments of what they should be aiming for.

However, this return to professional judgement, even though informed, cannot be unfettered. No-one is suggesting that, and we must be careful that a call for "autonomy" is not misinterpreted as a wish to return to the days of anything goes, however poor the practice. We need new forms of accountability to replace the mess described above.

If central accountabilities are replaced by central frameworks unobtrusively monitored, issues of curriculum, standards, and school ethos could be the object of negotiation between the staff of the school and the community it serves. It must be admitted that currently neither the local authority nor the governing body performs this function in any meaningful way, although that may be partly because the community has no real say. Hence new mechanisms of relationship between school and community will be required.

Such relationships would be problematic at times, and would require new ways of working by staff, once the workload issue has been resolved and the roles of the various kinds of school staff have been clarified in the Government's workforce remodelling exercise. But such a system would lead to a true diversity, rather than the diversity by branding which is taking place currently. It would mean a new and challenging professionalism for teachers, a new community role, and a role as agents of change after a decade of being victims of change. Teaching would become again a high status and attractive job, and schools would become again the focus not only of individual academic achievement, but also of social and cultural development. ■

## References


1. Johnson M. and Hallgarten J. (Eds.), *From Victims of Change to Agents of Change: The Future of the Teaching Profession*. London: ippr, 2002.
2. I am indebted to my colleague Joe Hallgarten for this formulation.
3. Earl L. *et al*, *Watching & Learning 2: OISE/UT Evaluation of the Implementation of the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies*. Toronto: University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education; Sudbury: DfES (Distributor), 2001.
4. Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit, *Better Policy Delivery and Design: Discussion Paper*. London, The Cabinet Office, 2001.
   Website: http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/papers/betterpolicy.pdf
5. Audit Commission, *Recruitment and Retention: A Public Service Workforce for the Twenty-first Century*. London: Audit Commission, 2002.
   Website:http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/AC-REPORT/8C72A180-D241-11d6-B1BB-0060085F8572/nrrecruitment_retention.pdf
6. OECD, *Knowledge and Skills for Life: First Results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) 2000. Paris: OECD, 2000.

# Thinking through teaching:

## professional development for innovation and autonomy

**Vivienne Baumfield, Steve Higgins and Mei Lin**

Vivienne Baumfield, Steve Higgins and Mei Lin are members of the Thinking Skills Research Centre at the University of Newcastle. They have worked in collaborative partnerships with teacher researchers investigating the impact of thinking skills in their classrooms for the past nine years.

**Abstract:** *Participants in the NUT Teacher Research Scholarship programme report a positive impact on their pupils and on their own professional development. The authors argue that the programme is an effective way to work in partnership with teachers to engage with aspects of pedagogy as part of a constructive professional dialogue. In making these claims, they draw on several sources of information including feedback from the seminars and workshops during the programme and discussions and reflections with Union and University staff.*

> "Doing this has made us see that really we do have the power to change things within our classroom if we want to, and that has been really good."

IN COLLABORATION with the Thinking Skills Research Centre at the University of Newcastle, the NUT Professional Development Programme has for the last three years supported a scholarship programme for pairs of teachers to investigate the use of thinking skills strategies and approaches within their classroom. The aim is to encourage teachers to engage with research whilst at the same time promoting effective approaches to teaching and learning over the course of an academic year.

The focus for all the teacher research scholarships is investigating thinking skills approaches to teaching and learning. This focus developed out of the work of the Thinking Skills Research Centre at Newcastle University which had been involved in a number of local and national projects and in the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers in primary and secondary schools. We had found that teaching thinking or a focus on thinking skills was both motivating to teachers and had a powerful catalytic

effect on professional development. Investigating the implementation of thinking skills in the classroom has the characteristics identified by Stenhouse[1] as the key to promoting teacher research through curriculum innovation.

Thinking skills as a field of enquiry also has the advantage of being an area that does not have a history of teachers being blamed for any inadequacy in education and so does not harbour a deficit model of existing pedagogy. Such a focus enabled teachers to investigate aspects of their professional practice in classrooms and to explore the implications of research findings by critically evaluating their claims through their teaching.[2,3]

Building on this experience, we have developed a model of professional development consisting of:

- an introductory seminar that provides an overview of thinking skills approaches and action research methods and enables participants to refine their research focus;
- an interim seminar to look at data and methods of analysis; and
- a final seminar to share findings and elicit colleagues as critical friends in evaluating the impact of the intervention

Advice and support was provided by phone, e-mail and fax by the University and local Union staff during the research phases between the seminars. This year mentor support is also being provided by teachers who have successfully completed scholarships in accordance with the Union's aim to create a cohort of skilled teacher researchers to support colleagues.[4]

## Thinking classrooms/learning schools

Interest in the teaching of thinking skills as part of the school curriculum has been growing in the last 10 years. The redraft of the National Curriculum 2000 includes specific aspects of thinking skills and was supported by the DfEE research review.[5]

Part of the Key Stage 3 Strategy, *Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Subjects* draws extensively on this research base. For us, thinking skills, or teaching thinking, draws on broadly constructivist approaches to teaching and learning and involves tasks where pupils are actively involved in discussion and making sense of curriculum requirements as well as discussing how the approaches and techniques have helped them to learn (metacognition). In the process teachers have access to information about pupils' understandings and misunderstandings, which they can then address (formative assessment).

The use of particular teaching thinking techniques has been of growing interest; these "powerful pedagogical strategies" seem to be both catalytic and supportive of changes in classroom practice.[6,7] As such, they exemplify a

shift in the relationship between research and practice as identified in the school improvement literature.[8]

Across the different projects each year the level of prior knowledge of thinking skills approaches and their claims varies. Whilst some teachers have several years' experience of working with techniques or materials developed to support the teaching of thinking, others are not familiar with the strategies. What they share is a commitment to investigate their own practice and to encourage pupils to develop an awareness of their own learning and to be motivated to engage fully with the curriculum.

We conceptualise this approach as "enaction research" in that teachers investigate claims about the impact of thinking skills that often have broad implications for pedagogy and link with other areas of research. The teachers

**Thinking skills as a field of enquiry also has the advantage of being an area that does not have a history of teachers being blamed for any inadequacy in education and so does not harbour a deficit model of existing pedagogy.**

then evaluate these claims by trying the strategies out for themselves or "enacting" aspects of the research in their own professional contexts. Teachers, as professionals, then become engaged in collecting data about their own pupils and analysing the impact of such change through classroom-based research.

## Innovation, autonomy and professional development

The emphasis in the support from the NUT and the team from the University was on enabling teachers as professionals to develop their pedagogical expertise in the classroom and engage in and with research by using and evaluating the impact of thinking skills approaches and techniques. Accordingly it was important that the teachers themselves identified the precise focus for investigation, both in terms of curriculum goals, but also in terms of research methods and appropriate evidence that they collected.

The teachers involved reported that the projects were of significant personal benefit. They shared the pupils' enjoyment of teaching thinking activities and approaches and felt strongly that their own confidence had increased, and that the project contributed to their professional improvement and development.

The reports that the teachers wrote summarising their projects indicate a striking sense of commitment to improving the quality of their teaching

through thinking skills techniques, with many pairs having attempted to widen their application beyond the focus subject, and others expressing the intention to do so. Overall there are few negative comments from participants about the impact of involvement and these tend to relate to problems of time, workload and access to existing research reports and articles.

Interviews with teachers involved in the first round of scholarships revealed the following themes.

### *Developing and extending teaching skills*

"But it was the fact that we were covering, trying to cover every angle, that we found more and more out about teaching skills, so the research really helped us understand a lot more, really, about what it was we were interested in."

"I mean, in the current climate of the profession, you don't get enough time to really think about your lessons and think about your teaching, because there are so many other pressures on your time, and I think it's given me the opportunity to sort of sit back and genuinely think about how I am teaching things and think about my lessons… so that impact has been quite a big impact, not just on me personally but also on the department."

This included aspects of subject knowledge and pedagogy:

"It's improved my subject knowledge. I have actually put it down as one of my performance management targets now, to continue the thinking skills work in the classroom, so I mean, that's how much I've enjoyed it and that's how much of an impact it's had. I've seen how successful it's been in the classroom so I'm keeping that as one of my main areas to focus on."

"It's improved my subject knowledge in terms of how children learn… so that's made us far more aware, for me, of how different children learn in different situations. …it's improved my knowledge in that respect."

### *Overcoming burnout and improving retention*

"Becoming motivated myself as a teacher again."

"I was thinking of giving up, giving up teaching altogether. And I've gone back into the classroom with renewed motivation, and that's been good, because I was, I was thinking of just resigning."

"… it has given me more enthusiasm, and the fact that it's made me keener to want to find out how the students are learning and why they like learning in a particular way."

### *Undertaking INSET and involving other teachers*

"I think a benefit of having somebody engaged in some small-scale classroom research can trigger interest in other colleagues to actually want to embrace a new idea or change their established way of working."

Most of the teachers who received NUT scholarships were involved in disseminating the work either in their own schools or other local schools. This has encouraged other teachers to try out the approaches and techniques:

"Our school has seen that as a bonus, because it's not just my professional development, it can help move our curriculum on and hopefully I can use some of the strategies I've developed this year in INSET with the rest of the staff, so that's been a big plus"

Heads of department and headteachers has valued the effect of this and some teachers have made presentations at regional or national conferences with the full support of their schools.

### *Promotion*

"I actually used a thinking skills lesson in an interview and got the job, about two months ago. That was based on thinking skills ideas."

A number of teachers involved in the scholarship programme have since received promotion. Whilst it is clearly not possible to attribute involvement in the project as a cause of this promotion several of the teachers mentioned that they valued the skills or insights that they had gained through their involvement.

The tenor of most of the statements of the teachers acknowledges the impact of the programme on themselves as professionals:

"We feel the greatest gain has been our own. As an instrument of professional development, this project has been an enormous success."

## Partnerships

The teachers involved chose to apply for the Thinking Skills Research Scholarships and, with a colleague, selected the particular focus of their research, either in terms of areas of the curriculum or the precise subject focus; they also chose and refined the particular methods of investigation.

These aspects of choice and control appear to be pivotal to their engagement and motivation. The relationship between motivation and autonomy in teaching and learning is well theorised and is important for teachers as professional learners as well as for students (for an overview see Ecclestone).[9] A recent study

of teacher burn-out in the Netherlands[10] suggests that motivation and autonomy are crucial aspects of teachers' personal beliefs and that the impact of prescriptive national initiatives has been to jeopardise professional identity.

The scholarship scheme also embodies the values of collaborative partnerships and takes forward the principles developed through the Teacher Training Agency funded School Based Research Consortia and the new focus on Networked Learning Communities promoted by the National College for School Leadership. The emphasis on autonomy and choice was underwritten by a policy of structured support from the Union and from the university partners.

The involvement of the NUT gave the projects status in their schools, which the teachers perceived helped them in justifying what they were doing. One teacher referred to the "kudos" that the involvement of the NUT provided. The financial support was invaluable; the teachers were able to pay for cover to meet, plan, observe and work with each other, as well as to buy resources and materials to support their investigation.

Working with a colleague was cited by most of the teachers as important in keeping them focused on the research, despite all the competing priorities of daily school life. Coming together with other teachers at the seminars was rated in the evaluations as one of the most valuable aspects of the scheme. The benefits of the seminars were enhanced when they were residentials with the opportunity to mix socially and share experiences of teaching across subjects, phases and schools.

The support given by the University colleagues was valued as it helped to gain access into what can sometimes appear to be a remote and arcane world of academic research. The fact that teachers and researchers work together to interpret the findings and draw conclusions ensured that the relationship was one of parity with the teachers as the experts about their own classrooms.

Lieberman and Miller[11] have been involved in building collaborative networks to support school improvement through teachers' professional development in the USA for many years. They offer the following summary of what matters and works in professional development:

- Explicitly connecting teacher and student learning;
- Supporting professional collaboration and collegial accountability;
- Creating and sustaining communities of practice where there is time and space for conversation, joint action, and critique;
- Coupling teaching and assessment practices;
- Encouraging the development of a common language through oral and written communication;
- Developing and using structured tools and protocols to guide discussion; and
- Using real-life events of teaching as the source of professional development.

From an HEI perspective, we have found that our role in supporting teacher researchers has evolved over the years of the project. Balancing the often contradictory demands of promoting autonomy whilst also providing structure has been the subject of much discussion between all the participants and we have identified at least two key aspects of the role of the University partners.

The first is to scaffold the processes of teacher enquiry and research without dictating the outcomes; this can also mean conveying confidence that the outcomes will meet everyone's expectations.

Secondly, acting as a mediator between the particularities of the classroom and aspects of the wider research field that may have relevance when interpreting findings. Perhaps, not surprisingly, this mirrors the role of the teacher in the thinking skills classroom and is another indication of the power of the focus of these projects in supporting innovation and autonomy. ■

## References

1. Stenhouse L., *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development.* London: Heinemann Educational, 1975.
2. Baumfield V., Inquiry Made Public: Thinking Skills and Professional Development. *Education Review*, 14(1), p. 76-79, 2000.
3. Baumfield V. (Ed.), (Final Report of the North East School Based Research Consortium.) London: TTA, in press.
4. Stainton R. and Bangs J., Putting Teachers First. *Professional Development Today,* 4(3), p. 65-70, 2001.
5. McGuinness C., *From Thinking Skills to Thinking Classrooms: A Review and Evaluation of Approaches for Developing Pupils' Thinking.* Nottingham: DfEE. (Research Report; RR115), 1999.
6. Leat D. and Higgins S., The Role of Powerful Pedagogical Strategies in Curriculum Development. *The Curriculum Journal*, 13(1), p.71-85, 2002.
7. Higgins S. and Leat D., *Horses for courses or courses for horses: what is effective teacher development?* In: Soler J., Craft A. and Burgess H. (Eds.), *Teacher Development: Exploring our Own Practice.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing in association with the Open University, p. 57-68, 2001.
8. Hill P., Shaking the Foundations: Research Driven School Reform. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9(4), p. 491-436, 1998.
9. Ecclestone K., *Learning Autonomy in Post-16 Education.* London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002.
10. Evers W.J.G., Brouwers A. and Tomic W., Burnout and Self-efficacy: A Study on Teachers' Beliefs when Implementing an Innovative Educational System in the Netherlands. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72(2), p. 227-243, 2002.
11. Lieberman A and Miller L. (Eds.), *Teachers Caught in the Action: Professional Development that Matters.* New York: Teachers College Press, 2001.

# Using ICT for innovation in schools

**Jerry Glazier**

Jerry Glazier is a member of the NUT Executive and chair of the Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunities – Race. He also represents the Union on the Forum of the South- East Virtual Education Action Zone.

**Abstract:** *if computer technology is to be effective in schools teachers must see it as being a useful, accessible and enabling tool. This article outlines the experience of schools taking part in the South East of England Virtual Education Action Zone and explores how ICT can be used to foster new and innovative ways of working.*

IT IS now 20 years since IBM invented the personal computer. No one, two decades ago could have imagined the impact computer technology would have on our lives in the early years of the 21st century. For schools the introduction of the computer was slow with the BBC B (pre PC) machine hanging on in many schools for years. The greatest single factor inhibiting PC use was money – Government funding was initially non-existent. In the early days limitations in performance rendered PCs good for word processing, simple game programmes and little else. There was a dearth of educational programmes, no sound cards or video capability. All programmes were downloaded from discs until the CD Rom made access much easier. The digital camera only started to appear on the school scene in the mid 1990's and was perceived by many as a rather expensive toy.

Now developments in ICT offer the real possibility of supporting teachers and enhancing the educational experience of pupils. By the age of four many children show remarkable confidence in navigating around a computer screen and are able to use PCs to access home learning packages. Sadly many children never have the opportunity to benefit from home learning packages because of economic circumstances.

For computer technology to be effective in schools, the staff must see it as being a useful, accessible and enabling tool. It must contribute to the reduction of workload, enhance teaching and learning and provide greater

access to the curriculum.

The NUT's success in winning training money from government for teachers underlines the digital divide that still exists in the profession. Many teachers still need to be shown how computers and associated technology can help them to be more effective, better informed, more organised, reduce repetition and drudgery in areas of planning, reporting and reviewing pupil progress.

Given that the Government appears committed to the effective use of ICT by teachers and that they recognise that it is an important component of workload reduction, it would seem logical that all teachers be provided with a laptop. Whilst there have been increases in laptop provision, the vast majority of teachers are not provided with one by the Government, LEAs or schools.

National investment in teachers is huge and it should be feasible to provide all teachers with a laptop, since the costs are relatively small. This should be with a three year rolling programme of replacement and would be manageable using a lease arrangement. Giving all teachers a laptop and enabling them to realise the potential the tool has through application and training in work time, would have significant benefits in relation to workload reduction. Where this has happened in a coherent and integrated way teachers have valued the opportunities the laptop has provided.

## ICT in SEEVEAZ

So what is happening currently at the cutting edge of ICT innovation in schools? One example of good practice can be found in developments in the South East of England Virtual Education Action Zone (SEEVEAZ). The establishment of SEEVEAZ in April 2000 produced an interesting hybrid of the Government's EAZ experiment. It involves some schools in Essex and Bromley in a mixture of affluent and deprived areas.

**Giving all teachers a laptop and enabling them to realise the potential the tool has through application and training in work time, would have significant benefits in relation to workload reduction.**

The additional EAZ funding has enabled schools to be equipped with state of the art computer technology. The emphasis of the Zone has been to get the hardware into schools as quickly as possible, give teachers the training and confidence to use the equipment and then concentrate on using the tools to improve teaching and learning. Now all teachers have laptops, access to projectors, interactive whiteboards, wireless communication and the broadband. There still remain some problems with access to the broadband

resulting from infrastructure delays.

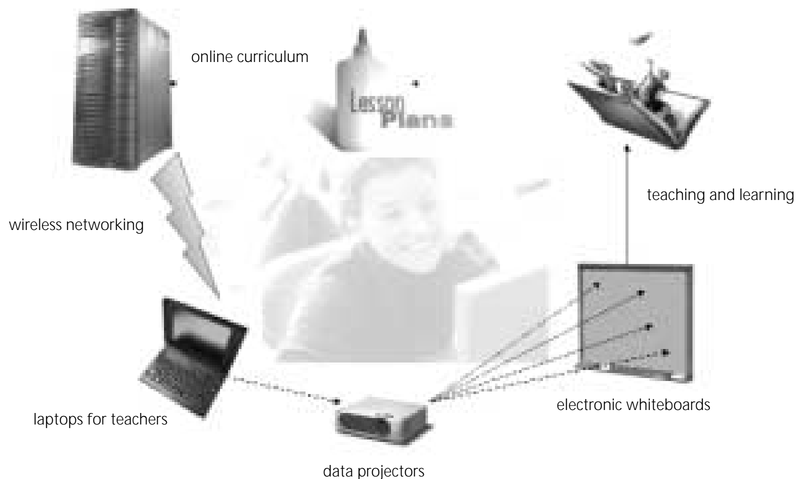
The establishment of a virtual community via the SEEVEAZ intranet encourages the sharing of ideas, lessons, planning, experiences and documentation. There is also access to discussion forums where teachers can share ideas and problems and "e learning" resources. The style of the project is collaborative seeking to encourage sharing and experimentation.

So how does this integrated ICT structure work for the benefit of pupils and staff? It enables the teacher to access high quality teaching materials and provides the mechanisms for easy modification and individual school application. It also enables a teacher to contact other teachers in the Zone who have used materials posted on the intranet that have been effective when used in the classroom.

When the laptop is used for lesson delivery then lesson notes and modifications made to information resulting from class contributions can be added to what is projected on the screen or generated on the interactive whiteboard. All the material can then be sent to the intranet by the laptop's wireless connection. Pupils can then access this material later through computers in schools or from home. Data is kept and, unlike in a conventional classroom, inaccurate or incomplete note taking by students is a thing of the past.

Access to lesson notes, etc, can be especially useful for pupils with special needs and can be easily drawn down or incorporated into additional school support for a particular pupil.

With the wireless technology, laptops can be used as registers with data being transmitted to the schools central administration system to provide a regular monitoring of pupil attendance. Equally pupil records held by the teacher on the laptop can feed into the school system and can be incorporated into school assessment, reporting and progress tracking.



SEEVEAZ provides high quality in-service training in the use of the equipment and has monitored the growing capabilities that teachers have developed in this area. The Zone also has 19 European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) accredited trainers who were able to use their recorded ICT capabilities to quickly obtain accreditation. Currently about 100 are teachers registered for ECDL training. The "Teach to the Future" programme accredited by Oxford University and sponsored by INTEL is available to staff for support in the implementation of higher levels of ICT across the curriculum.

In the current climate of teacher shortage and high levels of teacher turnover there could be a threat to the integrity of the virtual community. Teachers in schools at the inception of the Zone will have a different perspective from those who have subsequently joined schools. This issue has been addressed by recognizing the need to foster a sense of belonging and to provide plenty of opportunity for new staff to get up to speed. A recent contribution to the process has been the creation of a CD ROM, which contains comprehensive information on the structure and operation of the zone and supports the integration of new staff. ICT induction sessions for new staff are a priority of the Zone

It is hoped that the experiences of the Zone will convince government that the demonstrable, beneficial educational outcomes of the use of ICT in an integrated manner is a sound blueprint for the future. In theory there are no limits to the expansion of a virtual school community. Working in a collaborative way can only have benefits for all involved.

However, none of the infrastructure comes cheap and resources have frequently dogged educational development. All schools need and deserve access to high quality equipment and the training that is so crucial to its effective use. Many teachers still need encouragement and time to develop enthusiasm for ICT so its potential is appreciated and the full benefits understood.

Investment from government needs to be substantial and commitment sustained to ensure that all schools in England and Wales are able to access the educational and workload benefits that ICT makes available. Only then will we begin to have classrooms fit for the 21st century. ■

# The National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth

**Professor Deborah Eyre**

Professor Deborah Eyre is Director for the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth.

**Abstract:** *Managing the needs of pupils at the extremes of the ability range will always be a challenge for the education system. This article outlines how the newly established Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth will use innovative practice to encourage and support the learning of gifted and talented children and young people.*

IN THE White Paper, *Schools: Achieving Success*,[1] the Government announced its intention to establish an Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth. The University of Warwick was selected to host the National Academy. The Academy's remit is to develop, implement, promote and support educational opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people aged up to 19, as well as providing support for parents and educators. It is also to provide a nationally and internationally recognised centre from which to develop and deliver gifted and talented education in England.

The Academy has four core aims:

- To ensure that all pupils with high potential have the opportunity to become high-achievers;
- To locate the most able five per cent of young people and to help ensure that their educational needs are fully met;
- To increase the range of opportunities available to gifted and talented young people nationally, regionally, locally and in school; and
- To undertake research which will further understanding of the educational needs of gifted and talented young people.

## What difference will it make?

The creation of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth at the University of Warwick will lead to:

- Better support for parents and teachers and improved research into provision for the gifted and talented;
- Improved attainment, motivation and self-esteem for participating students, allowing them to fulfil their potential and make their full contribution to society;
- New opportunities for gifted and talented children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, enabling more to win places at prestigious universities;
- Opportunities for gifted and talented young people to learn together as part of a supportive community and in the normal school setting; and
- Placing England firmly on the world stage in gifted and talented education.

## A catalyst for innovative ideas?

A major reason for the establishment of the Academy is the recognition that we know relatively little about how best to encourage and support the learning of gifted and talented children and young people. Some good work has occurred in individual schools and some excellent opportunities have been made available to small groups of gifted pupils.

Not withstanding these achievements, social background remains a more reliable indicator of educational achievement than ability, even when a child has outstanding ability. Clearly the kind of rhetoric found in many school prospectuses indicating that the school helps every pupil to reach their full potential is still, in reality, in the working towards category.

Managing the educational needs of pupils at the extremes of the ability range will always be a challenge for the education system. The overall education system is constructed to suit the needs of the majority and whilst it may be flexible enough to accommodate a range of ability, pupils at the extremes present a real problem. The most able or gifted pupils require modifications to the curriculum to suit their needs and the more extreme their ability the more significant the modifications needed. The key issues in gifted education are how to make suitable modifications and who should benefit from them.

This is a long standing problem, but to date, the general education system has found it difficult to make significant progress in providing an appropriate education for the most able. In 1992 HMI[2] stated: "Very able pupils in maintained schools, primary and secondary, are insufficiently challenged by the work they are set."

The 2000-2001 annual report[3] of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector states: "almost two-fifths of schools are now making good provision for gifted and talented pupils". Yet whilst "much of the work in schools so far has consisted of activities to enrich and extend experience out of school hours…there has not yet been sufficient attention to integrating them with the mainstream curriculum to produce a coherent programme with a sustained impact on learning."

## What do we already know about what works for gifted pupils?

1. No one model fits all. Gifted pupils are a diverse and disparate group and therefore optimum provision will vary from child to child.
2. The best provision for gifted pupils is made by extending that which is available to all pupils rather than providing a completely different curriculum for gifted pupils. This is now well established and the challenge is how to adapt and modify.
3. Gifted pupils benefit from provision that is a blend of enrichment, extension and acceleration. Sometimes the roles of acceleration (moving ahead of others) and enrichment (learning supplementary knowledge and skills) have been put forward as opposing strategies but in reality it is difficult to avoid overlap between the two, and the best provision is a judicious mix of enrichment, extension (pursuing an area of study in greater depth) and acceleration.
4. It is undeniably the case that schools and teachers vary in their capacity to deal effectively with gifted pupils. The House of Commons Select Committee[4] found that many schools did not see the needs of the gifted as a priority, and that there was a widespread belief that gifted pupils did not require support. It also found that many teachers were unsure about how best to meet the needs of the gifted and were unfamiliar with the generally recognised range of effective strategies.
5. Careful monitoring is needed to ensure appropriate quality and take-up of provision. The opportunity for individuals to achieve highly can be denied by lack of access to appropriate curriculum opportunities eg higher tier or extension papers, by lack of recognition of potential, by inability to attend additional opportunities made available for the gifted, by lack of self-belief or low self-esteem. The fact that a school has opportunities available for gifted pupils is a good start but does not automatically guarantee that all those who could benefit from these opportunities do benefit. The process must be carefully managed.

## Where does the National Academy fit with other Government initiatives?

The National Academy is a key part of the wider national policy for gifted and talented children quoted in the White Paper, *Schools: Achieving Success*[1]*:*

- "Support the most gifted and talented in the country and in each school, particularly in disadvantaged areas;
- Provision building on pupils' particular strengths and weaknesses, making sure they too receive a broad and balanced education;
- Combine in-school learning with complementary opportunities

out-of-school hours;
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to progress in line with their abilities, rather than their age and, where possible, achieve mastery, rather than superficial coverage in all subjects; and
- Blend increased pace, depth and breadth in varying proportions according to the ability and needs of pupils. We want teachers to consider express sets, fast-tracking and more early entry to GCSE and advanced qualifications"

## Academy membership: locating the gifted and talented

The Academy will invite able students to apply for membership of the Academy. This will enable them to have access to the full range of opportunities offered, including on-line courses, outreach activities and summer schools.

Membership of the National Academy is gained by taking part in the Talent Search. This is designed to locate gifted students, initially in the 11-16 age range, who are in the top five per cent of pupils nationally in terms of their academic ability.

The National Academy will, in the long term be open to all gifted and talented young people aged up to 19. Gifted students are defined as having academic ability in one or more subject areas and talented students are those with ability in creative arts or sports.

The Talent Search offers a unique opportunity for innovation. It is recognised that no perfect method exists for identifying the top five per cent, but if provision is to be properly targeted, the Academy must establish some defendable criteria for membership. In its early stages the Academy Talent Search will ask participants to provide a portfolio of evidence of their ability. For example, results from standardised tests and public examinations, a reference from school and/or a personal statement. Opportunities will also be provided for participants to undertake the World Class Tests or the US Scholastic Assessment Test (the SAT) if they wish.

The Academy will also set up, in the course of the academic year 2002/2003, an "Expert Team" on assessment to explore ways in which the Talent Search can be improved. Expert Teams will consist of specialists and users, and the Academy would be pleased to hear from any teacher or other educationalist that would like to be part of such a team – or to participate in activities related to improving the Talent Search.

Students who wish to participate in any of the National Academy's activities, including the summer schools, will have to take part in the Talent Search and achieve Academy membership. Once registered with the Academy via the Talent Search, students will remain eligible to participate in its activities and remain part of the Academy community throughout their school careers.

## The Academy's work on in-school provision

The Academy recognises that the most important aspect of provision for gifted and talented pupils relates to day-to-day classroom activity. It will take a lead in working with schools to draw together examples of best practice and provide a framework for experimentation, development and change. The Academy will work to ensure that gifted and talented provision is embedded in general class provision as well as in out-of-hours learning. This offers extensive potential for innovation and for communities of teachers and/or schools to work together to shape future provision.

**The Academy recognises that the most important aspect of provision for gifted and talented pupils relates to day-to-day classroom activity.**

The Academy will be concerned to work with teachers and LEAs and to support them in their developments, also to encourage others to provide resources, materials and opportunities that will assist teachers in their work. This will naturally involve a close link between the Academy and teachers, and opportunities will be made available for those who wish to become actively involved. A feature of the Academy will be the way in which it works jointly with deliverers of other educational strategies eg Key Stage 3, World Class Tests, National College for School Leadership, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, etc.

## The Academy's programmes for students

### *Outreach programme*

The National Academy will work with a variety of partners to improve the range and quality of out-of-hours learning available for gifted and talented pupils. A regular programme of events will be made available and offered at a range of locations across England including: Saturday master classes; university-based conferences (with parallel activities for parents and educators); twilight taster events.

Outreach activities will be offered by Warwick and the Academy's partner universities and also by a wide variety of others who will seek to offer opportunities as a registered Academy provider. LEAs and schools will be encouraged to become Academy providers and anyone interested in offering an event as part of the Academy programme is welcome to make contact.

The Academy is seeking to extend opportunities and some innovative ideas may emerge through this process but a more definite area for innovation is in respect of the content and nature of outreach provision. Internationally very little work has been undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach provision for gifted and talented students or to establish criteria for designing

out-of–hours learning opportunities. Maker and Nielson[5] refer to creating a programme for the gifted that is “qualitatively different” from general provision. The Academy wishes to explore this phrase more fully in relation to out-of-hours learning.

### *Online learning opportunities*

On-line learning is fertile territory for gifted and talented students. It offers a major opportunity for innovation and development. Individual members of the Academy will be able to access on-line learning in their own time but schools may also wish to incorporate this element into their curriculum delivery.

To begin with the Academy will identify and evaluate the range of other existing on-line learning materials available for possible use by members and will recruit a group of enthusiastic and well-trained on-line postgraduate mentors to support on-line learners.

As part of the development activity the Academy will invite teachers and others with an interest in e-learning to work on the development of the e-learning courses.

The Academy will also aim to provide a high quality website, which is a genuine hub for a dispersed community of gifted and talented students and their parents and educators

### *Summer Schools*

The first three-week residential summer school was held at the University of Warwick on 22 July 2002. Around 100 students took part and evaluations from them demonstrated that such an opportunity was hugely enjoyable as well as educationally valuable. In 2003 the summer schools programme will be extended to offer 900 places at five different locations and in subsequent years expansion will allow for full regional coverage.

Everything about the summer school is innovative – its length, its choice of study topics, its style. The Academy has used the very successful model from Johns Hopkins University Centre for Talented Youth (CTY) as the basis of its provision but envisages creating a unique summer school programme developed in partnership with universities, schools, LEAs, students and parents.

## Research, evaluation and CPD

If the Academy is to improve the quality of provision for gifted and talented it will need to learn more about what works and why. Having a designated membership participating in a wide range of opportunities provides a new and unique context for this work.

The Academy will take a lead in drawing together practice-focused, evidence-based research in order to inform national strategies, CPD for teachers and enhance delivery of its programmes. It will encourage and

support research activity and also work closely with LEAs and schools to ensure that what is learnt about effective provision is shared across the educational community through effective CPD.

## How you can get involved?

The National Academy is a collaborative venture for the whole education community and the invaluable contribution from schools, teachers and LEAs will be fundamental to its success. There are several ways in which you can get involved:

- In many areas there are already gifted and talented programmes providing excellent support to the young people in their locality. The gifted and talented provision available in your school or in the surrounding area can be linked to the provision at the Academy;
- You can support the Academy by identifying prospective students from your school or local area and encouraging them to take part in the Talent Search;
- You can provide a host location for a test centre;
- Schools and LEAs can get involved in the running of outreach activities which the Academy will be holding all over England;
- You can recommend suitable online material which the Academy can kite mark, or even design online materials;
- The Academy is keen to utilise existing knowledge and skills. Contributions can be made by sharing your professional expertise through working groups, research projects, etc;
- The Academy will also be looking for the services of enthusiastic and gifted teachers, higher education lecturers who are skilled in communicating with younger children, and postgraduate students to act as tutors or support National Academy summer school activities.

## Summary

The Academy at Warwick will provide a catalyst for the improvement of provision for gifted and talented pupils. The Warwick base will be the hub of the enterprise, but the Academy will work with many partners in its quest to improve the range, volume and quality of opportunities available to the gifted and talented.

The Academy offers enormous scope for innovation in curriculum, in organisation of learning and in management of gifted and talented provision. It also expects gifted and talented pupils themselves to be determining the nature and shape of their education. For the first time we will have a significant cadre of gifted and talented individuals who can influence the development of education available in and beyond school.

Finally, the Academy will only be successful if its membership is socially

inclusive. Since traditionally disadvantaged pupils are not well represented in gifted and talented cohorts in school, this may be the area which lends itself most readily to innovation. ■

## References


1. DfES, *Schools: Achieving Success* Cm 5230. London: TSO, 2001. Website: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/achievingsuccess/
2. DfES HMI, *The Education of Very Able Children in Maintained Schools.* London: HMSO. (Education Observed series), 1992.
3. Ofsted, *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools: Standards and Quality in Education 1999-2000.* London: TSO, 2001. Website: http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/ofsted/hc102/102.htm
4. House of Commons, Session 1998-99, Third Report of the Education and Employment Committee: *Highly Able Children.* London: TSO.
5. Maker C.J. and Nielson A.B., *Teaching Models in Education of the Gifted.* Texas: Pro-Ed, 1995.

# Mantra rites of passage:

## teaching and nurturing our boys to be men in the 21st Century

**Dr Richard Majors and Sara Nance Dewar**

Dr Richard Majors is an African-American educational psychologist and former Harvard Medical School Clinical fellow, he has written extensively on education, race, class and gender. In the UK he has been on working groups with the Commission for Racial Equality and a government task force promoting social inclusion. He is head of the Centre for Support and Learning at the University of Glasgow and an honorary senior fellow at the University of Manchester. Currently he is involved in rites of passage training in the UK, delivering training to a variety of educational establishments, including schools and colleges.

Sara Nance Dewar is a freelance journalist working mainly in the areas of social inclusion and education. She has written numerous articles about rites of passage.

**Abstract:** *This article outlines the work of Mantra, a rites of passage project that is designed to help smooth the transition from adolescence to manhood for both Black and white working class boys. Since boys are disproportionately at risk of exclusion, underachievement, involvement in truancy and criminal behaviour the goal of the project is to focus on macho value systems to divert boys from negative behaviours and steer them towards making more positive lifestyle choices.*

HISTORICALLY, many cultures have their own rituals to mark significant events such as birth, coming of age, marriage and death. Years ago there was much more emphasis on preparation for adulthood and acknowledgement of the significance of boys' coming of age, or what we now know as "rites of passage". Rites of passage is an ancient anthropological concept that is based on the premise that manhood is not a birthright, but has to be learned.

Any number of communities has made use of rites of passage for nurturing and developing their boys. In African culture, rites of passage were considered to be particularly important: the village elders would take boys into the wilderness to instruct them in the skills, roles and responsibilities of manhood. They would expose them to various events, activities and tasks. At the end of the training, when the boys were considered to have absorbed the elders' teachings, they would return to the village for a ceremony to celebrate their transition into men. As the African proverb goes: "It takes a whole village to raise a single child."

Other cultures have similar practices: the Jewish bar mitzvah ceremony celebrates boys' coming of age; friends and family from within the Jewish community attend the rites of passage celebration. As with all rites of passage ceremonies, the whole community is involved in the occasion.

Even England had its rites of passage rituals: medieval squires trained for years alongside a knight before winning his spurs at a ceremony that was also a sacrament. The evening before being knighted, the young man was purified before standing or kneeling for 10 to 12 hours in a sacred watch or at prayer, which was known as a vigil of arms.

## The elders

At the heart of the rites of passage concept is the involvement of older men whose skills and experience are held in high regard by the whole community or tribe. In African culture these men, known as elders, were entrusted with the task of developing and instructing the young men of the next generation. These men were not simply leaders within the tribe; they also acted as surrogate fathers to the boys.

The role of surrogate father is of vital importance, given the high proliferation of fatherless families in modern society. Too many boys are being raised by their mothers, with little or no input from the fathers, leading to major unresolved conflicts between the male generations. The boys feel isolated because they do not have a man with whom to confide or share their experiences. They may internalise their anger at being abandoned and become depressed. However, many of boys' negative behaviours could be forestalled by providing strong male role models, or elders, to guide them through the maze of adolescence.

## Masculinity

In our society, boys on the threshold of manhood are bombarded with macho images from the media, the world of advertising and other vehicles. They are also subject to influences at home and peer group pressure. Images of domestic violence and the portrayal of women as sex objects are absorbed by the boys: as they mature, these negative attitudes become ingrained and have a detrimental effect on their behaviour. They believe that they have to be hard, that school is not cool and that boys don't cry.

Boys are taught to cope with problems and resolve conflict in different ways to girls, which often lead them into self-destructive behaviour. They express themselves with a limited range of moods, mainly focusing on coping strategies involving humour or anger. Rites of passage training teaches boys emotional literacy, how to get in touch with their emotions and express their feelings. Oftentimes masculinity is defined in self-destructive ways: how much alcohol can he drink? How many women has he had sex with? Is his car the

fastest and most expensive model?

Although there has been more interest in gender over the last four or five years, the national social inclusion agenda still does not focus sufficiently on masculinity. So far, the gender debate has been limited to such issues as whether boys prefer non-fiction to fiction, but the debate needs to be broadened to other areas around gender.

Institutions such as the church, schools and stable family life that previously used to nurture and inculcate positive values have ceased to have much impact or importance in young people's everyday lives. Society is raising an MTV generation who spend hours gazing at a computer or television screen rather than interact with others. The development of youth culture with its emphasis on immediate gratification as offered by drugs constantly threatens boys' well-being and healthy development.

Only when boys are able to confront their own masculinity by learning alternative behaviours to bullying, violence and misogyny will they be able to realise their potential and fully contribute to society. Rites of passage training helps them to do this by raising the status and prestige of masculinity. In the final analysis, in order to raise attainment, combat truancy, counter challenging macho value systems and negative behaviours, it is critical that we focus on the importance of masculine identity.[1]

## Mantra

In recent years, rites of passage has re-emerged in places like the United States and Australia. The concept has been particularly successful in helping disaffected young men to make healthier lifestyle choices. While working in the United States, the first author observed the growth of rites of passage and the contribution that it was making towards turning boys' lives around, raising attainment and reducing behavioural problems.

In the late 1990s the first author emigrated to the UK and began work as an educational psychologist for an LEA in the North West, from where he piloted a small programme with Black pupils from primary and secondary schools. The programme was called Mantra, which means a word or phrase chanted or repeated inwardly in meditation. The first author wanted to focus on the aspect of absorbing the course's message and repeating it internally as a rehearsal for real life. Mantra is a social development programme rather than a behavioural one. It brings about change to the whole person by increasing motivation, self-esteem and self-efficacy; factors that ultimately impact on behaviour. The programme is based on a unique methodology that evolves around culture, youth culture and masculine identity. The materials that we use stimulate the students' interest because they are relevant to their lives: rap and rock music lyrics, contemporary film clips, movies and documentaries with masculine themes, pop culture and literature are all used as a way to

engage the boys.[2]

Given the success of the project, when the first author began working with a northern Education Action Zone, he decided to run another pilot for working class white boys in both primary and secondary schools. He teamed up with another educational psychologist at the EAZ, Steve Clarke.

One of the first special schools to become involved in the Mantra pilot scheme was Kingshill Special School. Participating students were aged from 10 upwards because at that period of their development, their ideas about masculine identity become more rigid. At this age, boys begin to make decisions about whether or not they want to learn. They also make other important lifestyle choices, such as choosing friends and become more aware of how others react to them.

Guided by an "elder"/tutor, the boys explored and challenged their own attitudes and beliefs regarding masculine identity, attitudes to fatherhood and misogyny. They learned about relationships through role-play: one boy might take the female part while he and a partner consider how they might speak to a woman. How appropriate is it to address her in that way? How would they feel? What are their attitudes to women in leadership roles?

For one assignment, students were asked to write a letter to their father, one that will never be posted, then they are asked to write one to an imaginary son. This exercise is used to help them to get in touch with their feelings, to help with healing the wounds of absent fathers and to redirect misplaced anger and bitterness.

The young people are encouraged to bond as a group. The Kingshill students designed a logo for their t-shirts: a special handshake encouraged them to feel part of a team. The boys took on names of people that they admired, perhaps an uncle or a well-known figure, to give them something to live up to.[3]

Positive incentives help the students to feel valued and are an important part of the Mantra approach; students who attended the sessions regularly would be rewarded, perhaps by a trip to MacDonald's or some other treat.

It is recommended that men other than teaching staff take on the role of elders/tutors. This contact with male role models is important for the boys, even if it is only for one hour a week, as over 90 per cent of educators are female. Role-play helps them to work through peer group issues, including the all-important art of face saving. At the end of the course there is an evening of celebration to mark the students' new status as young men. Michael Myerscough, head teacher at Kingshill, believes that Mantra helped some boys to share problems, in some cases for the first time. "The students have been able to give open statements about the way things impacted on them and the kind of behaviour they got into and why they should or shouldn't do things."

Our programme differs from others in that it is cyclical. Even when a

student has completed the Mantra course, he will remain a part of the rites of passage family. The boys graduate to acting as junior elders/role models by working alongside the elders/tutors who instructed them. As they mature, they are recycled in the community, either by setting up their own rites of passage programme or remaining involved with Mantra.

The success of the programme was determined by both anecdotal and scientific data. Although the numbers of students involved were relatively small, we believe that the participants' motivation improved as well as their self-esteem and more importantly, their self-efficacy. Pre and post measurements that were carried out to evaluate students' attitudes suggested that there had an improvement in both attitude and emotional literacy. The tests involved using a questionnaire with specific statements about self-efficacy, self-esteem, and other associated areas. We used a modified version of a masculinity scale developed by Robert Brannon to determine the pupils' masculine rigidity. We gave this instrument as a pre- test and post- test so we could determine whether or not there had been any changes by the end of the course.

Following the success of the EAZ scheme, other educational establishments began to express an interest, including FE colleges like City College Manchester. The programme was adapted for the FE students to take into account that they were mainly Black and aged from 16 to 21.

With these young men, we concentrated on promoting culture, history and identity, by focusing on African history. These sessions were intended to give them a sense of purpose and groundedness.

There was additional focus on resiliency, which was explored though rap lyrics, poetry and literature. Another unique methodological tool was the study of biographical accounts of not only famous men, but stories about men who coped with everyday trials such as unemployment and single parenthood; men who faced great challenges, but made it anyway. The theme of resiliency was further explored through essay writing to describe the coping tools used by the men to overcome hardship. The message to the students was that, no matter what difficulties they faced, racism, inequality in education and the workplace, low expectations and negative stereotypes, they would have the capability to endure.

The theme of spirituality, which is central to Black society, is also examined. Students see how faith offers hope for the future and a connection with spiritual forces as expressed in gospel music. There was also an emphasis on social justice issues. The young men also looked at the way in which we present different facets of our personalities through deportment, clothing and appearance.

Now into its third year, the City College project has seen many of the young men refocus their lives and start taking an interest in their education; some of them have won awards, others have gained places at university. Following this

positive outcome, the programme is in the process of being rolled out to other campuses at City College.

## The future

The programme is still in its infancy and we are currently in the process of standardising the format, developing a more comprehensive curriculum, producing more materials and conducting more scientific studies. In the main, the information that we have gathered from the pilots is from anecdotal and observational sources, in addition to scientific measurements. Our aim is to obtain funding to enable us to do larger scale and more scientific studies so that we can replicate our successes with more students across the country.

A unique and important aspect of Mantra rites of passage work is that it is cyclical: once a Mantra graduate, the boys will always be part of the Mantra family. It is our vision that junior elders/role models will be apprenticed to more experienced elders, within four or five years they will be running their own groups, inspiring and supporting other boys within the community. We believe that the Mantra programme can help boys to make a positive contribution to society and to realise their potential. ■

*For further information on Mantra email: rmajors@yahoo.co.uk*

## References

1. Sewell T. and Majors R., Black Boys and Schooling: An Intervention Framework for Understanding the Dilemmas of Masculinity, Identity and Underachievement. In: Majors, R. (Ed.) *Black Children: New Directions and Radical Approaches.* London: RoutledgeFalmer, p. 183-202, 2001
2. Majors R., *Mantra: Rites of Passage Curriculum.* Unpublished, 1998.
3. Dewar S., *Man and boy. Managing Schools Today.* April/May, p. 24-27, 2002.

## Further reading

Majors R. and Billson J. M., *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America.* 1st Touchstone edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. (Originally published: New York: Lexington Books, 1992.)

Majors R. (Ed.) and Gordon J.U. (Ed.), *The American Black Male: His Present Status and Future.* Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers,1994.

Majors R., *Educating Our Black Children: New Directions and Radical Approaches.* London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001.

Somerset,NJ., *Journal of African American Men,* 1, 1995 – quarterly. Transaction in collaboration with the David Walker Institute, Michigan State University.

# A view from the bridge – but is it the Santa Maria or the Titanic?

## A personal perspective on the Surrey experience of "privatisation"

**Colin Caswell**

Colin Caswell is Division Secretary of the Surrey Division, National Union of Teachers but writing in a personal capacity.

**Abstract:** *In 1998, after calls for an innovative and new approach to tackling underachievement, Surrey LEA decided to use the private sector to manage a failing school. Since then two more schools have come under private management. This article looks at the impact that Surrey's experiment with the private sector has had on schools.*

"A private school has all the faults of a public school without any of its compensations"
*Cyril Connolly*

IF YOU can afford it – and many teachers now find that they can't – Surrey can be a pleasant place to live and work. It is an affluent area where the mean average income is the highest for any shire in England. "Leafy Surrey" is the popular image – stockbroker belt, partly rural with medium-size towns and pleasant looking villages that have few inner–city problems.

As an LEA, I think Surrey is a good one – with a large number of very able and dedicated staff. According to the OFSTED Inspection carried out in 1998 – "there is much that Surrey does very well; it has many strengths and relatively few weaknesses". Generally, schools perform above the national average(s). There is, perhaps, the view that they should.

Surrey's image is attractive but only partly true. Surrey has post-code areas that are less well favoured (in many meanings of the word) and, in terms of relative social deprivation, being "unsuccessful" in a successful area is all the more telling. There is also the independent school factor – with over 20 per cent of those educated in the county in them. In short, not all have equal chances.

The influence of the market system in education is a further process that militates against equity. We know that it is an extremely blunt instrument when it comes to assessing success (let alone defining it) and it tends to perpetuate and reinforce difference. Breaking the cycle is difficult – exceedingly difficult for individual institutions.

It would be a pretty poor LEA that did not recognise (or care) about such factors. Surrey does not fall into that category. For many years before OFSTED used the term, it had put into effect "special measures" to help schools that needed help in one form or another – providing a range of help to school with problems. On the whole, the approach was sensitive, sophisticated and helpful – although painful for some.

## Involving the private sector in Surrey schools – Kings' Manor

In 1998, Surrey hit the national headlines. It was reported that the Authority was privatising one of its schools. The school concerned was Kings' Manor Secondary in North Guildford. For some time it had been facing budgetary problems, falling rolls and the school's attractiveness seemed to be declining.

The cycle is well known to many. The school was branded by national tabloids as "failing" – where results and standards were portrayed as being low – although little real attention was being paid to the (substantially) higher than average numbers of pupils with special educational needs in the school. Speculation about the future of the school led to an undermining of confidence. When an inspection led the school to be placed in special measures, the pressures for something "effective", "radical" and (eventually) "innovative" grew. Public meetings were lively affairs and meetings with staff predictably tense. The answer eventually reached was "to privatise".

**Why was it, then, that Surrey (a supposedly good and high performing LEA) turned – or felt that it had to turn – to the private sector to help resolve a perceived problem?**

The news attracted international as well as national interest. The relatively newly – elected Labour Government seemed to be sending "mixed messages" about its position to the LEA – perhaps anticipating (or influencing) its later approach to involvement of private interests in education provision. Surrey,

effectively, was given an opportunity to experiment and thereby "blaze a trail".

Why was it, then, that Surrey (a supposedly good and high performing LEA) turned – or felt that it had to turn – to the private sector to help resolve a perceived problem? The answer to such a simple question is, of course, complex.

We also need to be clear about the question. Kings' Manor was not proposed as (nor is it today) a private school. It has become a non-denominational Aided School – receiving levels of funding for pupils on the same basis as other schools. It operates under all the usual rules of governance and both Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document and Burgundy Book conditions apply.

The real difference relates to the arrangements for management. A contract was to be let so that a third party would be responsible for managing, promoting and setting the curriculum direction for the school – although day to day management would be in the hands of the headteacher. That third party would also nominate persons to the governing body. It was to be a long term (ten year) contract – for which fees would be paid – and there would be performance targets (with agreed bonuses should targets be reached).

A number of bidders showed interest and the contract was eventually let to the 3 E's organisation – the trading/consultancy arm of Kingshurst City Technology College in Solihull. The Managing Director of 3 E's was (and is) Stanley Goodchild CBE – former CEO and Chief Executive in Berkshire – and the Chair is Prue Leith, the well known culinary expert. 3 E's took its name from the "education, education, education" Blair soundbyte and it promoted itself as a non-profit making company. Overheads had to be covered (of course) but any profit to be made from the contract was to be reinvested equally in the Guildford school and Kingshurst CTC.

Discussions on employment issues and staffing matters between the LEA, 3 E's and relevant unions were spread over many months. From the outset, we were informed that TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) would apply.

When, however, it came to the "appointment" of staff to the new school – Kings' College for the Arts and Technology – a sizeable number (around half a dozen) of experienced middle managers were not offered posts in the new college. There were no concerns raised about competency, experience or expertise – but they would not be offered posts, regardless of the fact that this was part of the TUPE exercise. All were on (roughly) the same salary levels and the school needed to save money. You may be able to figure out the connection.

The impact on those middle managers not offered posts was shattering – especially as they were also being charged with the task of helping to maintain the school as a going concern until it closed and the new school opened. Meanwhile the local authority sought other posts for them in other schools.

Ultimately, all those who were vulnerable did get other jobs – a number benefiting from opportunities for career progression. No more than they

deserved; the group had already demonstrated their expertise and talents and had been one of the mainstays of the school. It is important to note that the school came out of special measures in the summer term BEFORE transfer to 3 E's in September 2000.

Not all ex-Kings' Manor staff have prospered, however, and there is at least one very able teacher and middle manager who has become a victim in this reorganisation.

As far as the major principle of TUPE transfer was concerned, the NUT lodged a case with the Employment Tribunal. Eventually – and before the case was heard, there was a full recognition by the Authority (and 3 E's) that transfer would take place for those staff that had not (until that point) been offered posts. The NUT then withdrew the case. By that time, however, all of the vulnerable staff (some with help of the LEA) had found other posts in schools. In short, a sizeable number had "voted with their feet".

At the time of its opening there was a great deal of media coverage of Kings' College for the Arts and Technology. Those involved (naturally) were reporting great success. In some respects they were right. Applications to the school increased and rolls have expanded. Over £1 million of tax payers' money was invested in building refurbishment and the school looked very different. Since then, further not insubstantial resources from the DfES have been added. Whether the school will be more successful over time we have yet to see but its position in the market place seems to have improved.

## The experiment continued

Had Kings' Manor been a "one-off" episode perhaps it may be seen as bit of an oddity and then consigned to the history books. That is not the case. It has sparked interest elsewhere and is seen part of the general move towards involvement of the private sector in delivering services in education. Neither was it the last we had heard of the matter locally.

The year following the Kings' Manor reorganisation, France Hill School, Camberley, went through the same process. France Hill found itself in strange position – seen as an improving school – it had a chronic deficit problem that was difficult to resolve and it was caught in a highly competitive local market. It was not, in effect, a failing school – but was caught in the middle of bigger, more successful ones.

A bidding process similar to that of Kings' Manor was entered into and 3 E's were again the successful applicant. This time the discussions on TUPE were a little more straightforward but transfer of staff was less of a problem because many staff decided to leave before the transfer took place. Kings' International College for Business and the Arts officially opened in September 2001.

Nor did the involvement of the private sector in Surrey end there. Abbeylands School in Addlestone has gone through a seemingly similar

process (although in reality the contract is rather different). On this occasion, Nord Anglia have won the (narrower) contract but teacher and staff turnover has meant that there have been relatively few TUPE issues. The new school – Jubilee High – opened in September 2002.

There has also been a ramification of the improved market share for Kings' College in Guildford. Increases in rolls at that school appear to have had an effect on another local institution – the Church of England Aided Bishop Reindorp School. Rolls have declined (etc, etc) and there are plans to regenerate the school (etc, etc) by closing it and opening a new school (etc, etc) on the same site.

The plans propose a re-vitalisation – including some changes to the curriculum and its re-affirmation as a faith school. The plans have attracted interest for other reasons – especially the determination of the church to maintain an interest in the community of Guildford and the fact that the Steering Group established is headed by Lord Ron Dearing.

## The wider picture

What have been the connecting factors in these schools?

- All have been facing difficulties (ultimately, financial/budgetary difficulties);
- All have suffered from the market that operates between schools and - in relative degrees – suffered pressure on rolls;
- All schools had their fair share (if not more) of "challenges";
- All have had some exceptionally able and committed teachers working in difficult circumstances;
- In each case, the Authority found it difficult to "champion" one school ahead of other schools for which it had responsibility – and therefore saw the private sector (or in Bishop Reindorp's case, the Church of England) performing that role;
- By closing and re-opening, the school (with LEA agreement) was able to write off its deficit;
- All have had (or have planned) substantial new building or refurbishment of existing buildings (paid for by the LEA or by the DfES); and
- There has been relatively little private capital invested in the projects (so far).

So, have the privatisations been successful?

The answers are –

1) up to a point and
2) it is far too early to say.

Actually we must be more precise about the questions.

The real question for answer 1) should be "Has the change in status and image of the school(s) – brought about by a substantial investment of resources for rebuilding and restructuring along with personnel (with high profile) who have championed the school in the market place – led to short-term change in attractiveness and then to an increase in numbers on roll and hence improved its financial viability?"

If that is the question, the answer is probably "yes". Interest and numbers at the schools concerned have increased – arresting the decline in school rolls. The impact on other schools in the system, however, is a little difficult to assess at this point – although it is hardly rocket science to figure out that there must be one.

If the question posed is "Has so called privatisation led to a real sea-change for the schools concerned – leading to long term improvements for present and future students?" the answer must be "it is far too early to say".

This does not mean that there won't be – or can't be. Indeed, we are often told that it takes some time to help turn around schools in difficulty – at least five years (often the maximum time for a political term of office). We are also aware that, slowly, a school's attractiveness in the market place does go up and down anyway; the "flavour of the month" phenomenon – a process that can independent of privatisation or regeneration.

This is not to belittle the energies and achievements of those currently working in the schools concerned. I am confident that the professionals and support staff concerned will do what they always do – try their utmost for the young people in their care.

On balance, however, the answer must remain : "It is too early to say".

These thoughts raise another question: "Could it have been done in another way?" Some of us believe that it could. Indeed, if we didn't, we surely would have lost faith in the system in which we work.

## The motivation behind the actions

At the risk of too many questions – and not enough meaningful answers – let me return to my original question: "Why did Surrey – a successful LEA – turn to the private sector to deal with the 'wicked issues' surrounding school regeneration for these selected schools?"

This, actually, is a more difficult question to answer, given that a number of people with different motivations were involved. Indeed, it seems to me that motivation is crucial factor when considering the involvement of key personnel in this process.

There was a determination that certain areas (some of relative deprivation) should not be left without a community secondary school – and a perceived realisation that existing policies seemed to be having limited effect. Also, no-one in the process from the Authority's side was involved for personal gain. Indeed, I feel that there was a sincere belief amongst LEA officers that Government policy

was moving in this direction and that the LEA ought to control the process.

As a general perspective, when assessing the involvement of the private sector in public services we do need to consider motivations. Much has been said about "public service ethos" versus "shareholder value" – and whether it be oil and water mix or a dynamic synthesis of progressive forces.

And, we are told, there have been people making profit in education for years – the purveyors of desks, computers and, in the past, chalk and swishy canes. Those, however, were on the periphery of direct delivery. What we have now is the prospect of a more direct involvement of the private sector, much of it spurred on by the profit motive in the provision of schooling.

The question is – "Is that a bad thing?" Many believe that it is – given the potential that the profit motive may be a distorting, if not undermining, influence of traditional values in education and other public services.

## LEA partnership with the private sector

Surrey's dalliance with the private sector has not ended with the three schools listed above. As from last April, the major school support services (personnel, financial, curriculum and management advice) have been united into one body: 4S (Surrey School Support Services). There is currently a proposal with no formal decision yet made, to link up with a third party, yet to be decided, in a Joint Venture Company where the Authority's share would, for reasons of current legislation be 19.9 per cent. Such a share would allow unfettered trading beyond the margins. As I write the bidders have been reduced to two – and readers would not be surprised by the names of those involved.

Surrey's desire is to be "ahead of the game", the alternative being to be left behind and powerless – eventually to be devoured by a future predator. There is, of course, a danger that such early play helps to create the game and, ultimately, the greater danger that the game (or the market system') comes to control those who work within it.

The usual question asked in privatisation is this: "If profit is to be made, where will it come from?" An interesting question.

Union negotiators are often told (sometimes quite rightly) "there is only one pot of money". If that be the case, where can the resources for profit be generated? There are only a few possible sources:

a. they are taken from that which would go into direct provision;
b. they come from higher levels of taxes (local or central);
c. they come from "efficiencies"/savings (at whose cost is usually unclear);
d. they come from growth of the business.

On the face of it d. looks enticing – the new JVC will trade wherever there is a market and be selling services from Northumbria to Bangladesh. There are

more, not fewer jobs – and salaries and conditions of service may be even higher than before! Nobody loses – apart, of course, from those currently working in Northumbria and Bangladesh – and also those who may be employed after transfer should TUPE Plus not operate.

But let's not be too pious. Private companies may dress up what they say they are going to do but they are hardly shy about making profit. Private companies are out to make profit – it's up to the decision-makers in public service to be aware and wary of that fact.

We should also not assume that, on the ground, these companies will not do a good job. Theoretically, they have every chance of so doing – given the fact that the vast majority working for them have, until recently, been plying their trade in the public sector.

What of the motivation of those locally who are currently responsible for provision of such services? Here, I have little doubt. They believe that they are doing it for the best of all those involved – schools and pupils, teachers, and employees in the support services. There is also a perceived need to be "ahead of the game" dominated by market forces:

- to stop the drain away from Surrey of those personnel who may be enticed elsewhere;
- for there to be some measure of local control in the future by having a stake in the market;
- and not to be at the mercy of an inevitable growth of private providers that may operate from locations outside of Surrey (and where Surrey's interests are less central to that operation).

Are they right? Or will the demands of profit and growth in a sector rather alien to public service be supreme? The answer to that question is of interest to many people beyond Surrey.

The decision to be involved with the private sector may appear to be the right one in the early days or when things are going well. It will be in times of adversity that we see how the beast reacts. It reminds me of the old saying "When you starve with a tiger, the tiger starves last".

What, then, is the "view from the bridge"? Is the ship the Santa Maria of Christopher Columbus, leading a journey of adventure and discovery and finding (to our eyes) a New World of opportunity and riches? Or is it one which, for our shared values in public service, will sail, like the Titanic, to disaster and bitter regret?

For those who argue the former, we do need to remember that

- those who went on the voyage were searching for fortune as well as fame;
- Columbus was heading for a place different from the one he arrived at;

- not all who sailed in the Santa Maria came back;
- the benefits accruing to the crew differed markedly; and
- the ship actually crashed on its epic journey and was dismantled.

There are no easy answers to the questions posed. The local experience of "privatisation" shows that the response of the LEA has been just that – local. Each example has been different and there has been a real attempt by the LEA to protect parties involved. Whether that has been successful is open to debate.

The fundamental question remains: "Can we square the circle between the different demands of private profit and public service ethos?" At the risk of oversimplifying, when I consider involvement with the private sector I am reminded of two quotes

> "A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way."
> *Mark Twain*

> "Damn it all, you can't have the crown of thorns and the thirty pieces of silver".
> *(Nye Bevan – as quoted by Michael Foot)* ■

# From staff room to innovation strategy room – can it be done?

**Gemma Blaker**

Gemma Blaker is deputy SENCO in a North London comprehensive school

**Abstract:** *Are schools the best places to encourage innovation? This article provides an insight into the difficulties that teachers face when trying to explore new ideas for teaching and learning. By citing examples from her own experience of teaching the author identifies the changes that need to take place if schools are to become environments that foster innovation.*

I HAVE a friend who works in an advertising agency. Whenever they have to think up new ideas, her boss gives her £50 and she goes down to Marks and Spencer and buys a bucket load of biscuits, sweets and crisps. Then she goes to a stationery shop and buys loads of sheets of coloured paper, marker pens (that actually work), those really funky post-it notes that come in funny shapes and those little coloured stickers that you always think will come in really useful and end up languishing at the back of your desk, only to be thrown out at the end of term.

Thus equipped, my friend and her colleagues put the answer machine on, shut themselves into their board room (or multi-purpose strategy room as I'm told it is called) and set about the complicated task of innovating. They brainstorm, doodle, move around the room, eat lots of biscuits and sweets, and do complicated origami with all those post-it notes. I'm told that the process can take days. Anyway, when they've eaten their fill, and used up all their coloured paper, out they come, refreshed, invigorated, and full of ideas to put together another award winning ad.

The whole calorie-laden process must work, because I'm told that all this agency does is pick up swanky prizes, so they must be doing something right.

So what do you need in order to think up new ideas? Judging from what my friend tells me, you need time in order to be creative, to make mistakes, to gather ideas, refine them and talk through them. You need resources. You need sustenance. You need a working environment that is conducive to producing good ideas and seeing them through. You may be catching on to the point I'm making. Are schools the best places to encourage innovation?

## Teachers as innovators – the difficulties

Of course if there was ever a group of people willing and able to innovate, I'd nominate teachers. Over my brief career in the classroom I have met practitioners of such awesome enthusiasm and talent that you want the whole world to come and spend just five minutes in their classrooms. Just walking into my staffroom and engaging a colleague in conversation during breaktime can lead to a whole raft of new teaching strategies, often conveniently in worksheet form, ready to be run off for your next lesson. My colleagues are sharing, supportive, and always ready to engage with new ideas.

So why does change seem so difficult in schools? Why does the media present us as backwards looking and resentful, longing for the glory days of minimal inspections and freedom from the National Curriculum? Why do I sometimes get a sneaky feeling that image may be true?

Let me give you a glimpse into a recent meeting I attended to try to introduce change into part of the Year Eight curriculum. It took place over a double period (that's an hour and 20 minutes in order to be innovative) and we had been allowed cover in case we happened to be teaching. Unfortunately, I wasn't teaching, and was giving up my only free periods of the week due to other meetings and commitments. I came to the meeting feeling rather resentful that of all the periods in all the week, they had to pick this one.

The feeling of reams of marking that is simply never going to get done produces the kind of nagging stress that is hardly conducive to encouraging good ideas. My colleagues who were teaching, being the conscientious teachers that they are, rushed off to set cover, check on text books, answer the odd question and settle their classes, which meant that we started 10 minutes late, and they kept on rushing out at intermittent times during the rest of the double period.

Someone had forgotten to bring biscuits, so we all got ourselves a coffee and then settled down to have a good old moan about how stressed we all were, and how we wanted to make changes, but hadn't really got round to the implementing the last lot yet.

Before long our first 40 minutes were up. We started to exchange some ideas, but then one of my colleagues who is a head of year had to leave to sort out a fight that had just erupted between lessons. As a large group of secondary school teachers, we had plenty to say, but inevitably we all ended up disagreeing.

Just when we thought we could talk through some of the legitimate concerns and ideas that had been raised, the bell for lunch had rung, and we all had to rush off to see to the million things that we all try to squeeze into a lunch hour. Innovations gained: nil. Frustration: great. Number of my Year Seven books marked: none. Half-baked ideas that may have come to something had we all had a bit more time and chocolate: quite a few actually.

You get the general idea. Not exactly similar to the whole advertising agency scenario. We've got the will to innovate, but the school structure of the day, pressures of time, and the inflexibility of the timetable means that even with a double period granted from on high, there just isn't the time to make it work.

And it's not just the initial double period that you need. Just say that we had come up with a life-changing strategy to re-vamp our Year Eight schemes of work that day. Everyone who has ever been on an "Into Middle Management" INSET knows that you have to give innovations time. You need to discuss, plan and produce. You need to put things into practice, change, discuss a bit more, monitor, evaluate and eventually adopt.

Innovations need a long-term, concerted time commitment, and often a school, however willing, cannot provide that because the business of having to teach lessons always gets in the way. You can't always innovate in your free periods or resentment sets in.

## The human factor

When thinking up new ideas, it is often easy to forget the pupils who are a crucial part of making something work. We work with a slippery audience. Children are not exact machines or specially selected focus groups. You can't just test things out on them, and get perfect results every time. I've had many a good idea ruined because in the break before my lesson, Karen called Maggie "a slag" and so they are "most definitely not going to work in a group together" even though I've spent all weekend making the resources to facilitate it.

My pupils don't always realise that they are being innovated on, and I don't blame them, the amount of new ideas that have rained down on them since their early years in primary school. The structure of the school year with the traditional six-week or half-termly scheme of work is not always sufficient to see an idea through, and the idea of having to write up long term, short term, medium term and next five second term plans for a longer period of time is just too awful to contemplate.

And let's not forget our colleagues. Anyone who has ever worked in a large, urban secondary school will know that just as pupils come in all shapes and sizes, so do teachers. It is not always easy to gather them into an efficient spearhead of collective action. One person's idea of a brilliant innovation may be another person's idea of a two week holiday in hell, and they sure as hell aren't going to bend over backwards to make it work.

Sitting over a particularly noisy Friday night supper, many years ago, my Grandma leaned over to me and said "Gemma, you have three Jewish people in a room, you'll have five different opinions." I always think of that joke when I walk into a staff meeting. Sixty teachers in a room, you're looking at 90 points of view, minimum. It can be hard to make things work.

## Imposed from above

My five years in teaching have been characterised by "innovation" after "innovation", all imposed from above. I've sat through loads and loads of identikit presentations with the obligatory inspirational video and then mind-numbing onslaught of overhead transparencies. This is innovation boiled down to glossy folders and reams of handouts, with all the enthusiasm, commitment and sense of ownership taken out. I've started this contrary mindset that means that however enthusiastic and well turned-out the kids look in the video is exactly how determined I am not to take any interest at all. Strangely enough, I begin to loose my will to live after yet another afternoon discussing the conventions of non-fiction text types with a complete stranger, when both us know that our classes are wreaking havoc with the supply teacher back at school.

Even when you think that some of these ideas might just have something in them, they are turned around so quickly, and so thoughtlessly, that you end up resenting them anyway. I never really understood what "throwing out the baby with the bathwater" meant until I tried to implement the Year Seven National Literacy Strategy last September with two weeks' training before the end of the summer term. You only have to experience 26 children banging each other over the heads with mini-whiteboards to know that all the glossy,

**I think that it worked because I had total autonomy to do what I wanted. I was trusted enough to make my own decisions, and I had enough money to resource my ideas well.**

pre-written schemes of work in the world are not a good substitute for having time to actually think something through for yourself.

Two years ago, I was given a large sum of money by my LEA to run a summer school for gifted and talented pupils. I was given a completely free rein to design my own curriculum, timetable, methods of assessment and resources. It was brilliant. For two weeks during the summer holidays, we

learnt as we liked. If something worked, we went with it, and had lunch later. If something didn't work, we abandoned it, and went on to the next thing. If the kids were grouchy, we played rounders, if they were enthusiastic, (and they generally were) we got through more learning than I generally do in a six-week half term.

I think that it worked because I had total autonomy to do what I wanted. I was trusted enough to make my own decisions, and I had enough money to resource my ideas well. Of course, I had to be accountable in my use of resources, but no-one was swooping down on me with a set of preconceived opinions as to how my summer scheme ought to be. There was not a tick box in sight. I had reasoned it all out carefully and my decisions as a (relatively new) professional were accepted. I owned those ideas, and because of that, I cared about them, and was willing to invest time and effort to ensure that the scheme worked well. All without a glossy brochure in sight.

I wonder how our experience of innovation would be if my idyllic summer scheme conditions could be reproduced, if we could have time and space and resources, and real, flexible autonomy. Not pretend autonomy that says "of course this brilliant new idea isn't obligatory but if you don't do it you'll have to come up with a bloody good alternative or something identical if you don't want to get hung drawn and quartered at your next OFSTED, you irreverent little upstart teacher. Oh, and PS, we won't give you any time to think of something else, so you'll have to do it over your summer holidays, and we will most definitely not provide any nice Marks and Sparks biscuits. So innovate all you want, sucker."

Maybe all schools should invest in a multi-purpose strategy room, and use it regularly. I'm not fussy about the post-it notes, but a couple of cakes thrown in would make the whole process easier. ■

# Professional development—it's Union work

**Amy M Hightower**

Amy M Hightower is an Assistant Director at the AFT, focusing on accountability and professional development. Prior to working at the AFT, she was a doctoral student at Stanford University, specialising in school district reform. She has also worked at Policy Studies Associates, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the Texas Senate Education Committee.

**Abstract:** *Professionalism is the linchpin for improving practice and increasing the performance of teachers and students alike. This article explains the context behind the AFT's growing commitment to professional development and the professionalisation of teaching, highlighting the scope of that commitment and offering some examples of professional development activities provided by the AFT. The article concludes with a set of recommendations and next steps developed by the AFT for enhancing the professional skills of educators.*

THE AMERICAN Federation of Teachers (AFT) is dedicated both to the well-being of its members and to the students they serve. Professional development and the professionalisation of teaching are areas the AFT at all levels – local, state, and national – takes seriously in order to build an empowered membership dedicated to improving the quality of their professional lives as well as the effectiveness of their practice.

The AFT is a professional union because it concerns itself with the whole landscape of professional issues, including the selection, induction, and professional development of teachers; endorsement and maintenance of professional standards; and increasing professional voice in decisions about practice. It plays a central role in the critical decisions that shape the profession, and assumes roles as advocate, broker, collaborator, and provider of high-quality professional development activities. Basing its actions on the interests of its members and the public they serve, a professional union:

- Understands that improving the institutions in which members work and the services they provide are the obligation and the responsibility of both

union and management;
- Negotiates professional issues along with salary and working conditions;
- Recognises the need to work together with management, developing bonds of trust that will allow them both to set aside old issues and focus on improvement and quality;
- Embraces high standards for practice and makes sure that only qualified individuals who have completed a credible teacher preparation programme and are prepared to assume classroom responsibilities are employed as teachers;
- Ensures that teachers receive initial induction as well as opportunities to improve practice on a continuous basis; and
- Paves the way for teachers at schools to use their expertise to make informed decisions about practice designed to improve student achievement.

## Context of AFT's involvement in professional development

In 1992, the AFT produced a report called *Futures I*, which recognised that our changing membership and work environment required changing roles and responsibilities for the union. This report called upon the AFT to make the transformation "from a union that has learned to represent our members' needs for fair rewards and decent working conditions, … [to] a union that is learning to further [members'] aspirations for professional growth and empowerment at the workplace." *Futures I* laid the groundwork for action around how a union enhances professionalism and the roles and responsibilities of those involved.

Why move to a union of professionals? Increasingly, the AFT has found that teachers who comprise the majority of today's workforce have different interests, needs, and concerns from teachers in the 1960s and 1970s. Many teachers today report being overwhelmed by diverse student populations, a lack of appropriate curricula, limited access to resources, and increasing demands for public accountability.

In numerous national polls, AFT members consistently identify "working for reforms to improve education and the teaching profession" as the most important activity for the national union. Similarly, polls of our new teachers indicate that when asked what they want their union to do, they commonly respond, "My union should help me do my job better." These new teachers see the need for more knowledge and skills to be successful in their work, and they are searching for opportunities and professional organisations that will help them achieve this goal.

In response to these changing demands and the recommendations in *Futures I*, the AFT convened a Task Force on Union-Sponsored Professional Development. The task force's charge was to recommend policies and

strategies to increase the capacity of the union to secure high-quality professional development for its members. This task force expanded the vision of how the AFT supports the practice of its members and enhances the quality of the institutions in which they work by broadening the union's role to include re-thinking organisational structures, resource allocations, organising efforts, and professional development strategies.

Based on the task force's initial work and in consideration of on-going efforts sponsored by the AFT that were already underway, the union adopted in 2002 a resolution around union-sponsored professional development (see http://aft.org/about/resolutions/2002/prof_dev.html).

This resolution is anchored in the beliefs that (A) the union at all levels should elevate professional issues generally, and professional development specifically, to a more prominent role in the organisation, and (B) the union, as a part of its core mission, must support members in improving their professional practice. The resolution acknowledges that achieving this vision requires a comprehensive, union-wide, sustained partnership among the national organisation and its state and local affiliates.

The recommendation and corresponding action steps provide a framework for the union as it collectively strives to shape a culture of professionalism that retains the principles on which the AFT was founded. Depending on the situation, the union can do a number of things to ensure that members have opportunities for high-quality professional development. Unions can:

- Advocate – All leaders can advocate for high-quality professional development. With knowledge about what good professional development looks like, leaders will be able to make the case before policymaking bodies about ways in which effective professional development increases performance. In making this case, they will be able to argue more persuasively for increased funding, support, and time for members to engage in professional development;
- Broker – Most local and state leaders have, or can develop, the capacity to broker professional development for members with other organisations that offer such training. Brokering enables the union to leverage existing programmes to increase the array of professional opportunities available to members;
- Collaborate – Working with partners, including employers, the union can expand the kinds of professional development it offers. The collaborator role relieves the union of the burden of financing professional development on its own or developing the wide range of professional offerings that members need while allowing the union to be a full partner in ensuring the quality of programmes to which it attaches its name; and
- Deliver – Many local and state affiliates already offer their own union-

created and funded professional development programmes; however, union-sponsored programmes are almost always funded through negotiated agreements with management and may be supplemented by monies from the union, private grants and the local, state or federal government. Collectively, AFT locals and state affiliates across the country are playing all of these roles, but not every organisation is able to assume every role simultaneously; moreover, reaching the highest level of activity in each role takes time. Nonetheless, the AFT believes that every local can be aware of the issues embedded in union professionalism and incorporate them some way in its work.

## Current scope of AFT's professional development activities

Making members' professional needs a union priority requires broadening the scope of involvement to new areas and taking on new leadership roles. Challenging the conventional wisdom about what unions do is part of the process of becoming a professional union, and this process begins with union leaders. For instance, for union leaders to be effective in these roles, they require a new kind of leadership training to help them develop and enhance skills that were useful, but not essential, in their more traditional roles.

Leaders must be prepared to advocate for high-quality professional development and, where feasible, involve the union in offering it; make strategic professional development choices linked both to members' and client needs; negotiate new contract provisions or other labour-management agreements that provide time, support, resources and incentives for members to engage in effective professional learning; and find means to dedicate the necessary resources to make professional development central to union efforts to improve professional practice.

Along with honing traditional skills, our union leaders are becoming knowledgeable about professional development and skilled at educating members on professional issues, so that members can help ensure high-quality, on-going training that best meets their needs. Leaders are becoming powerful communicators on professional issues, both to their members and beyond, effectively making the case for the union's involvement in what often is seen as a new domain.

Our union leaders also are becoming adept at identifying and building strategic alliances with other organisations with similar professional goals, and working collaboratively with management in raising funds and developing programmes around improved professional practice. They are becoming directly involved in the budgetary and decision-making processes that affect their members, which necessitates access to state and/or district budgets and a command of the professional issues that members face every day – be they

standards-based education, knowledge of new procedures, mastery of new technology, and the like – making choices when funds are tight, and protecting budgets from random cuts.

Most importantly, AFT's union leaders are learning what constitutes high-quality professional development; they are recognising which policies will enable or constrain continuous professional improvement for members; and they are positioning themselves as the first line of defence against shoddy programmes and ill-conceived policies.

## Examples of AFT sponsored professional development activities

The AFT has developed programmes and policies of which it is justly proud. The union was an early supporter of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and today is engaged in efforts to identify criteria of effective teacher preparation programmes. The AFT's advocacy of peer assistance and review and new teacher induction reflect the union's commitment to well-structured, standards-based support for improving practice. Our initiatives share in common the following five characteristics:

- they create consistent, focused opportunities for teachers to improve practice;
- link research to practice;
- support education reforms;
- foster opportunities for unions and management to work together; and
- provide continuity for participants.

We profile two of our most primary activities below.

***AFT's Education Research and Dissemination (ER&D) Programme.***
The ER&D programme is an AFT-sponsored, research-based professional development programme that builds the local union's capacity to deliver high-quality professional development services to members either alone or jointly with the school district and/or other partners. ER&D prides itself on connecting research about teaching and learning with practical applications. Over 250 local unions and state affiliates are engaged in ER&D, which begins with nationally sponsored institutes for highly proficient teachers. In a train-the-trainer type model, these teachers study to become ER&D coordinators in their districts, who in turn select and prepare a cadre of colleagues to become peer trainers.

Participants select from about a dozen courses developed by the AFT in collaboration with highly regarded researchers across the country. These courses range from improving classroom environment, managing student behaviour, and delivering effective instruction to increasing reading comprehension and mathematics understandings. One course focuses directly

on creating partnerships with parents that support improvements in student performance. The courses run from seven to ten days and offer hands-on experience in applying research to fit the needs of teachers' classrooms.

Over its 21-year history, this programme's success has come to speak for itself. It has received praise from participants, union leaders, school administrators, teacher educators, and members of the research community. The local and state federations that have made full use of the programme acknowledge it as indispensable to strengthening their union. They see it as a way to recruit new members and engage uninvolved members. They also have found ER&D to be effective in building broader and deeper support for the union, both among members and the community at-large.

***Using technology to further professional development activities.*** Effective use of technology can facilitate the compilation and dissemination of information about recognised, research-based professional development practices to assist state federations and locals in their roles as advocates, brokers, collaborators, and delivers of professional development. Moreover, technology can aid in the development of electronic teacher networks that are content-specific, provide accurate and timely information to members, and encourage collegiality and joint problem solving.

**Leaders are becoming powerful communicators on professional issues, both to their members and beyond, effectively making the case for the union's involvement in what often is seen as a new domain.**

At the national level, the AFT is expanding its web site to include model state language and contract language for members' professional development opportunities. In addition, the AFT is developing several professional development online products and services for local and state affiliates. These programmes will provide teachers with flexible opportunities to build content knowledge and improve teaching pedagogy.

Components of AFT Professional Development Online include video-based professional development courses with film clips of exemplary demonstration lessons; on-line communities that enable teachers, facilitated by professionally trained staff, to interact with peers; and face-to-face training that provides follow-up and a link between on-line learning and classroom practice.

## AFT's proposed next steps for increasing union professionalism

The American Federation of Teachers strongly believes that the union's future depends in part on our ability to elevate the teaching profession by securing

high-quality professional development for our members. The union cannot do this alone, nor should it have to, but it has shown how it can be a critical force in enhancing professionalism of the teaching profession. We have found that we can secure quality professional development when our leaders integrate professional issues into their work and develop partners who will fund and assist in delivering high-quality service to our members.

We recommend that our national, state, and local affiliates take the following next steps to increase union-sponsored professional development:

- Review and expand professional development efforts, aligning internal structures and practices with an enhanced commitment to professional issues and professional development;
- Develop and implement new or expanded programmes that will enable union leaders and staff to integrate professional issues into the core of their union work;
- Disseminate information about recognised, research-based professional development practices and programmes to assist state federations and locals in their roles as advocates, brokers, collaborators, and deliverers of professional development;
- Use technology to increase leaders' and members' access to and communication about professional issues;
- Build the capacity of the union to effectively expand its current partnerships and develop new strategic alliances around professionalism; and
- Provide ongoing information about and support for professional issues

We propose these steps not only for our AFT members and affiliates, but also for the field as a whole. Professionalism is clearly the future of unions that support and advocate for teachers. The more unions recognise and act upon this professional imperative, the more they will be able to achieve it. ■

# Transforming the School Workforce Pathfinder Project

## – freeing teachers to teach: an individual school's experience

**Stewart Harris**

Stewart Harris has worked at Phoenix School for the past 12 years and has also taught in mainstream secondary, day special and residential special schools. The school is a member of the East London Schools Initiative. Stewart Harris has participated with the Leaders in Action Course with Unilever managers.

**Abstract:** *The DfES Transforming the School Workforce Pathfinder Project aims to reduce teacher workload by encouraging schools to explore new ways of making the best use of people, technology, time and space. This article provides an informative account of one school's experience of taking part in the Pathfinder Project and details how the Project came about.*

### Phoenix School as a Pathfinder

In March 2002 Phoenix School, a Special School in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, was invited to take part in the Transforming the School Workforce Pathfinder Project. The attraction for the school included the promise of laptops for teachers and a number of other associated benefits. After discussion with staff and governors, it was agreed that we register our interest and so, in April 2002, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) invited me, as headteacher, to the launch event. By this time the Project had expanded to encompass areas that could further reduce teacher workload including support staff, bursarial opportunities, teacher preparation areas and further ICT developments.

In May there was an event for headteachers, which included a workshop on the opportunities for change and approaches to setting up Change Teams in individual schools. We were encouraged to "think outside of the box" and the previous Secretary of State, Estelle Morris, gave a motivational address. The work of setting up our Change Teams and starting work on our Change Plans began back at our schools where the mood was very optimistic.

At Phoenix we decided on a Change Team of 10, drawn from both teaching and non-teaching staff. We held an “away day” and were assisted by our allocated advisor to facilitate some aspects of the work. The day was very successful; it brought the Team together and produced our main aims and way forward. This was consolidated into our Change Plan Document and submitted to the DfES. Shortly before the end of the summer term we received agreement and were allocated financial resources to implement the plan.

## The national context on teacher workload

### *PricewaterhouseCoopers' Teacher Workload Study*

In March 2001, the DfES commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) to carry out a review of teacher workload. PWC reported to a steering group whose members included a representative from the NUT as well as others with a professional interest in their findings, including the DfES, the secretariat to the Welsh National Assembly, relevant unions and professional associations, OFSTED and ESTYN, two independent members and relevant employers.

A range of options were put forward in the final report[1] to help teachers manage their workload whilst continuing to raise standards. These included: guaranteed non-contact time for planning, preparation, marking and reporting (PPMR); more flexible use of support staff; wider access to information and communication technology (ICT) to support work across a school; and support for headteachers in leading change. The report also recommended that the DfES should take account of the impact on schools of their policies and reporting requirements.

### *Remodelling agenda*

The White Paper, *Schools: achieving success*[2], which announced pilot projects to “create a more manageable teaching job” was published in September 2001 and in November 2001, just prior to the publication of PWC's report, the Secretary of State moved to extend the debate on teacher workload.

In a speech to the Social Market Foundation, published in the pamphlet *Professionalism and Trust*[3], Estelle Morris set out her vision for teachers and teaching in the future and acknowledged the need to ensure that teachers were given the time and support necessary for individualised approaches to learning. A central proposal was the adoption of a remodelling agenda for the whole school workforce, not just of the teaching profession .

## The School Teachers' Review Body's (STRB) review of teacher workload

In addition to inviting debate over future measures for remodelling and how to ensure a manageable workload for teachers, the Secretary of State asked the

STRB in December 2001 for a supplementary report on tackling teacher workload. The PWC report was included as evidence to the STRB.

The STRB review[4] was published in May 2002 and contained a number of recommendations concerning limits on the hours teachers could be required to cover for absent colleagues, guaranteed time for PPMR, additional days for continued professional development, and the progressive reduction in teachers' weekly hours to achieve an average of 45 hours per term-time week within four years. To help reach this target the review body recommended that appropriate work should be delegated to support staff. The DfES was asked to ensure the strict management of initiatives and reporting requirements.

## School Workforce Remodelling Working Party

In her remit letter about the workload review, the Secretary of State advised the STRB that she had established a working party on the remodelling of teaching, with a wide brief including the development of new career structures for school support staff. The working party continues to meet regularly and the Secretary of State takes their discussions into account in developing future policy and deciding how best to direct resources. Membership is based on the PWC steering group and includes representatives of the employers, unions (including the NUT) and teachers' associations and others who work in schools.

## The School Workforce Pathfinder Project

The Remodelling Working Party takes an interest all aspects of the remodelling agenda and are regularly up-dated on the progress of the School Workforce Pathfinder Project – a project announced in January 2002 through which up to £4 million plus a capital fund has been made available to fund 32 pathfinder schools to explore new ways in which they can remodel themselves to make the best use of people, technology, time and space to "free teachers to teach". The project runs for this academic year and is subject to a comprehensive evaluation by a team from Birmingham University.

Each pathfinder school has formed a School Change Team from all sections of their workforce. The teams are being encouraged to put forward radical ideas for transforming the way they work. The emphasis is on remodelling, involving the whole school workforce, to ensure that more of teachers' time is spent on teaching and learning - that must have their professional input. (A significant finding in the PWC report was that about 20 per cent of teachers' time was spent on administrative and other tasks that did not directly support their teaching.) Headteachers are receiving training and support in change management.

All the schools have been given the opportunity to increase their ICT capacity, for example, a laptop or equivalent for each teacher and a school network accessible to teachers for pupil data, curriculum sharing, etc. Training and technical support is provided.

Amongst other initiatives being supported are:

- Creative use of timetabling of school day to facilitate non-contact time;
- Small, rural schools working in a cluster to share lesson planning and making use of video conferencing to share lesson delivery;
- Development of ICT "Learn Centres" where curriculum activities are available on-line;
- Various approaches to behaviour management, including development of "Inclusion Centres" staffed by non-teacher specialists;
- Development of resource centres staffed by adults other than teachers outside school hours to support teachers in planning, resource preparation, etc;
- Appointment of bursars specialising in financial management and specialist pastoral support staff, to release teachers' for PPMR, curriculum development, etc;
- On-line learning and internet connection for e-home-working for teachers and pupils.

## Schools invited to take part in the project

Phoenix School is an all age Special School which focuses on teaching children with a wide range of special educational needs, including at the younger end 35 pupils with autism. The school is also responsible for providing Outreach for Autism throughout the LEA.

We are one of 32 schools in the country taking part in the project. The Pathfinder Project has given the schools involved a tremendous boost and at Phoenix we have embraced the opportunity to join with other schools and share this learning opportunity.

## The impact on Phoenix School

The project timetable was ambitious, so once the Change Plan had been agreed, specifications and quotes for ICT equipment needed to be obtained quickly; advertisements placed for support staff and plans for the school buildings drawn up and planning permission obtained. The process was required to be speedy but thorough. This was a considerable learning curve to achieve.

Staff now have laptops, which can connect remotely to the wireless network system, a server is located in a dedicated ICT technician's room who manages the system and supports staff in maintaining equipment and providing technical expertise. In addition, an ICT consultant has been engaged to oversee the smooth implementation of this significant investment. New software is being purchased to enable staff to work more efficiently in preparing materials and the recording of pupil data centrally.

Two new teacher preparation areas have been provided and a third will

follow within the next few months. These facilities give staff the opportunity to prepare lessons in modern well-equipped areas supported by good ICT and media resources. A full time media resources officer has been appointed to assist teachers and maximise the benefits of the facilities.

The school has part funded a new administrative post to lessen the burden of administration on teachers, which has increased dramatically over the past few years. Phoenix has increased the number of support staff, who work directly supporting teacher preparation. Lunch time supervisors have been appointed to undertake some of the duties currently done by teachers.

These developments have contributed enormously to the smooth running of the school enabling greater time to be devoted to preparation and school management. Adults, other than teachers, are an essential part of the school workforce and with good training and development this group of supporting staff will enable teachers to be free to teach in a calm and profession environment.

A new enlarged school office area has been developed and now provides a visually improved reception along with two new workstations and enough space for liaison with teaching staff.

Staff training is an essential element of the work at Phoenix. This has always had to take place after school hours because of lack of suitable accommodation. Staff training during school time is now possible with the provision of a new flexible learning area which is conducive to learning and is useable both for teaching and for working with colleagues.

The Pathfinder Project has provided a new opportunity for Phoenix School to develop its staffing, infrastructure and building in a very short space of time. Staff are motivated and excited by the Pathfinder Project because we all have the same agenda to raise standards and free teachers to teach. At Phoenix we have been given the opportunity to drop the "yes, buts". We have seized the opportunity with enthusiasm and are now able to think positively about where we want to be and how we are going to get there. ■

## References


1. PriceWaterhouseCoopers, *Teacher Workload Study: Final Report* – 5 Dec, 2001. Website: http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=932
2. DfES, *Schools: Achieving Success* Cm 5230. London: TSO, 2001. Website: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/achievingsuccess/
3. *Professionalism and Trust – the Future of Teachers and Teaching: A Speech by the Rt Hon Estelle Morris …to the Social Market Foundation*, Nov. 2001. London: DfES, 2001. Website: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/speeches/12_11_01/DfES-SpeechDocCOVER.pdf
4. School Teachers' Review Body, *Special Review of Approaches to Reducing Teacher Workload.* Cm 5497. Chairman: Tony Vineall. London: TSO (The Stationery Office), 2002. Website: http://www.ome.uk.com/downloads/732615_CM5497.pdf

# SchooLets /Time Banks for SchooLs

## An innovative approach to engaging parents and the wider community in the school

**Joe Hallgarten and Jodie Reed**

Joe Hallgarten is a Senior Research Fellow in Education at the Institute for Public Policy Research. Prior to this, he was a primary school teacher in London and Manchester, and a researcher at the National Union of Teachers' Education Action Zone Unit. He has recently co-edited a collection on the future of the teaching profession, *From Victims of Change to Agents of Change.* He has also written a report on parent-school relationships, *Parents Exist OK!?* (IPPR, 2000), and co-edited *Tomorrows' Citizens* (IPPR, 2000), a collection of essays on citizenship and education.

Jodie Reed is a Research Assistant in Education Policy at the Institute for Public Policy Research and is also currently working as a Specialist Adviser to the UK Parliamentary Select Committee on Human Rights. She is recent graduate in Politics and Modern History from the University of Manchester.
j.reed@ippr.org.uk

**Abstract:** *IPPR is piloting two types of community currency schemes in 12 schools in England. This article describes the background to this innovation and how it should work. It is hoped that the scheme will stimulate much wider benefits for schools and their communities than just the exchange of services to promote active citizenship and partnership with the public services.*

LOCALLY denominated community currencies have been in use throughout the world for hundreds of years, complementing mainstream currencies. In the last 20 years these currencies have been "designed" to make them more robust and sustainable. The currencies are used to measure the value of transactions between a group of people who agree to exchange goods and/or services, not as one-to-one bartering but with this pooled system of credits and debits. Thus, they create a local currency which can only be spent within this group.

Perhaps surprisingly, community currencies remain, as yet, largely untried in the school setting. The time to trial such schemes in schools feels ideal, with an emerging citizenship education agenda impacting on curricula around the world, strong evidence-based research showing the importance of parental involvement in school life, and the re-visioning of schools as community hubs.

The Institute for Public Policy Research, Britain's leading progressive think tank, is doing just this through an action research project that will pilot two different types of community currency in 12 schools across England. The currency systems are called Time Banks and SchooLets. The long term aim of the project will be to learn lessons from these pilot schools to produce a

resource pack to enable all schools to start their own community currencies independently.

As the project progresses, the authors are keen to stimulate a discussion in the education community about the potential of SchooLets and Time Banks. Could this innovative system prove a sustainable and popular means of forging new partnerships with parents, helping to determine the future of learning communities? This paper will, hence, outline the terms of the project, and then proceed to highlight the benefits and potential pitfalls for schools.

## How does it work?

On providing a service, traders earn local currency units which are issued by other traders. These are then registered as credits in a locally managed central account. Traders then spend from their account with any other members of the network. All credit and debit balances are interest-free and cannot be transferred to use outside the community. Such currencies can build social capital and enable marginalized and wealthier communities to identify and pool local resources to meet local needs.

The two most commonly used systems are Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) and Time Banks. The main difference is that Time Banks participants are rewarded using a time based currency for exchanges where an hour = an hour of any person's time, no matter what the service they provide. In contrast, LETS operates as a barter currency, which is fixed by participants and tends to be determined by the value of the exchange to each individual. Those with more advanced skills may feel mainstream currency offers them more value.

Due to the lower valuing of complex skills under the Time Banks system, it is more common for complex skills (such as electrical maintenance and alternative therapies) to be exchanged through LETS and simple, undervalued tasks (such as gardening and community work) to be exchanged through Time Banks.

This in practice means that Time Banks are predominantly seen as a tool for developing social capital; reaching and appreciating untapped skills in the community. LETS tends instead to be seen as an instrument for local economic development; setting up a fairer alternative economy which can be used alongside mainstream currency. However, the similarities between the two currencies outweigh their differences, and hybrids of the two systems are emerging.

There are over 400 LETS in the UK, containing between 30 and 300 members. In the USA, some LETS systems have thousands of members. Time Banks originated in the USA in the 1980s. There are now 35 Time Banks in the UK, and 88,000 hours have been traded.

The IPPR project will be setting up both types of community currencies. Five schools in Liverpool and Leeds will be using the LETS model, while seven schools in the South will use the Time Banks model. Both types of school-

based currencies will aim to engage parents, teachers, pupils and any organisation within the community and utilise a wide range of skills and resources. Examples could include:

- A pupil receives Time Credits for the hours he spends as a learning mentor for a younger pupil. He uses the Credits to pay for some sports coaching from another pupil;
- A parent receives Time Credits for assisting with the school garden one weekend. Her child uses Credits to pay for an after school activity;
- Another parent earns LETS through supporting children's ICT learning. The parent spends the LETS to buy books from a local shop that is participating in the LETS scheme. The shop may spend the LETS on an advert in the school newsletter (designed by the pupils);
- A teacher needs his bicycle fixed, and pays a parent in LETS, which he has earned from running an after school activity.

The 12 schools will be launching their currencies some time during the 2002-2003 academic year, and will be supported and evaluated for at least one year. Although each school will be free to determine its own objectives for the currency, schools will be encouraged throughout to share experiences and resources.

The accomplishment of the schemes will depend on the active participation of a paid broker in every school. This could be a teacher or teaching assistant or any other member of school staff. A key task of the broker will be to help determine the boundaries of acceptable transactions and membership to reflect the best fit for their school.

The brokers' other responsibilities include: developing and managing the currency by recruiting members, linking them up and keeping the accounts; identifying and promoting trading opportunities. Brokers may also be responsible for organising group events and involving businesses and community groups in the currency. Many of these tasks could be delegated, especially to older pupils, but the broker is responsible for overseeing the currency. At CitiSchool in Milton Keynes, the students will take on much of the brokering role themselves.

The success of the project will be measured according to:

- the vibrancy of each currency, measured by number and diversity of transactions and participants;
- the extent to which each currency has contributed to the three themes of parental involvement, school as a community hub, and citizenship education (each school will also be evaluated on the objectives it sets for its currency);
- the sustainability of the currencies in the pilot schools beyond the life of the

project; and
- the number of other schools who express an interest in starting their own currency.

## The potential benefits

### *Greater parental involvement in school life and children's learning*

The crucial role of parents as partners in their children's learning is universally recognised. Positive engagement with parents has also emerged as a key factor in school quality, especially in schools in disadvantaged areas, where such participation can act as a protective barrier against the multiple factors that cause underachievement. The benefit of the "parent effect" can impact on individual families as well as the wider community. If more parents are using their energy positively within the school setting, and children see their parents as achievers, this should also lead to greater parental involvement in the learning journey of their own children[1].

Community currencies could encourage parents (especially the "not yet reached") to engage with schools in new ways, harnessing a full spectrum of untapped skills and passions. Parents would not only be volunteers, but shape school culture through such involvement. The increased engagement with a wider variety of parents is the key objective of primary schools participating in the project. Yet such currencies could benefit all schools in enabling families and schools to become mutual support mechanisms.

### *School as hub of the community*

SchooLets could also provide schools with a mechanism to reach out beyond their parents and become a hub of local exchange networks. Schools could use a currency to become social capital banks, where families and the wider community can invest, deposit and withdraw various forms of support. Organisations and individuals from both private and voluntary sectors could also be co-opted into such currencies.

**Community currencies can engender the kind of atmosphere of collectivity, not individuality, which is crucial to creating a "citizenship school".**

There may also be opportunities for currencies to be organised across neighbouring schools, thus fostering co-operation and interdependence. As transactions demand personal interfaces, increased contact within the community could help build solidarity and trust. This is especially important for older pupils, who can counteract the deficit model of "modern youth"

perpetuated so often by elements of the media.

Additionally, through promoting this active form of citizenship, SchooLets and Time Banks could become an integral part of a school's citizenship curriculum. Citizenship is now part of the English and Welsh National Curriculum, compulsory in secondary schools. Community currencies can engender the kind of atmosphere of collectivity, not individuality, which is crucial to creating a "citizenship school". They could provide a practical way of teaching social and moral responsibility, and an alternative form of "financial literacy". This would be enhanced further by the fact that, in secondary schools, the involvement of pupils is central. As well as participating in trading their own skills and resources, the currencies should, as far as possible, be co-ordinated by pupils.

### *A good for the community at large*

According to Edgar S Cahn, the creator of Time Money, both Time Banks and LETS systems potentially "offset or remedy some of the more toxic ramifications of the global economy". He is referring both to the capacity to rejuvenate local social connectivity and the capacity to keep resources within the community thereby helping individuals gain access to resources they otherwise would not have had. These broader benefits must be given due weighting if we are genuinely going to start visioning schools as part of a wider social context.

There is a strong body of thought that believes that community currencies can be instrumental in local economic regeneration. Evidence of skills and qualities such as initiative and punctuality may go a long way to boosting the CV of somebody who has been out of work for a long time (or a school pupil without any experience of paid employment). At Rydens School in Guildford, student involvement in the Time Bank will count towards Surrey LEA's new "graduation certificate".

Community currencies also have the potential to tap into, and re-ignite, local volunteering resources. Research in the US has shown that Time Banks not only increase local trust, but involve people who never normally volunteer, and keep them active longer.

In the long term, community currencies should impact on learning outcomes and achievement, in the broadest possible sense. They will not interest schools looking for immediate returns in the form on SATs or GCSE results. Thankfully, and in spite of some of the external pressures on schools, a surprising number of schools are far less blinkered and short-termist than they might be. Community currencies can contribute to a positive environment for learning, the key foundation for raising achievement.

## The potential pitfalls

It may be tempting to get carried away with imagining a world where

complementary currencies became as important as "real money", and everybody's skills are valued equally, or according to the needs of friendly neighbours. Worth bearing in mind nonetheless, is the common failure of large-scale local currencies in the UK to be sustained in the long term. Partly based on these experiences, it is still possible to pick out some of the practical, political and ethical problems that may potentially arise later on in the IPPR project.

Looking at the practical side first, it should be asked: Would all members of a community be keen or able to offer enough time and effort to keep firing the scheme? In the current climate of the state schooling system, where teachers are tending to feel over burdened and under-valued, this question could prove particularly poignant. Even if the task of acting as a broker is taken on by a non-teaching member of staff, would enough teachers want to participate in the exchange of skills and time to make a school-centred system feasible? We have spoken with over 50 schools about the project, and many have been enthusiastic, but reluctant to commit due to fears of excessive workload.

Politically, the system may be challenged by those coming from a business perspective. They may pose the question: What is the value of teaching an "alternative" financial literacy given the reality of the global economy? While the reality of the citizenship agenda in schools should put pay to such criticism, perhaps there is a need to address the misconceptions that might spring up. A financial system with interest-free debit and credit, where large profits are not necessarily a good thing and, where individuals have nothing to fear from the prospect of personal bankruptcy does not reflect the actuality of the mainstream economy.

Ethically speaking, there are a number of potential problems, largely revolving around the use of volunteers to prop up public services. Could community currencies be seen as sanctioning a wilting Welfare State? If local civil societies are to adopt certain obligations and duties, hitherto provided by the state, this surely is a risk.

Perhaps there is an even bigger risk of community currencies undermining the voluntary sector by turning good will into a marketable commodity. Will Mr McKellar, the community spirited English teacher, start viewing the after-school creative writing club he has always run for keen Year Seven as "work"? If the community currency collapses, and he can no longer get any kind of payment for his efforts, will he stop running it altogether? And, will parents who have always engaged with a school on a purely voluntary basis be resentful if this turns into a transactional relationship?

At this stage of the project, these issues can only be aired. Because the currencies are school-based, the project is also acutely aware of insurance and child safety issues. However, if, as is envisaged, the next stage of change in schools is to be driven by schools themselves, rather than from the top down, these are the risks that schools will need to take. In two years time, the project

should be rejoicing in the successes of some vibrant school-based community currencies. Yet as a project, and an education system, we must also be brave enough to celebrate failures.

The next stage of public service reform, as espoused by the Prime Minister, is to “redesign public services around the needs of the user”. This aim, although admirable, views the users of public services as passive recipients of services. Pigeonholed as consumers of education, it is unlikely that the rising expectations of pupils and parents can ever be met. Yet what if we attempted to generate a public service ethos amongst service users as well as amongst public servants? What if public service users were seen as co-producers of services? If we are to move from an outdated “transmission model” of learning to one based on “network learning communities”, this is the change in thinking that would be required. Community currencies could only ever be part of the answer, but have the potential to remould the relationship between producer and user, parent, teacher and child, school and community. ■

*Further information about the project is available at www.ippr.org, or contact j.hallgarten@ippr.org.uk. Schools interested in participating in the project should also contact Joe.*

## References

1. Hallgarten J., *Parents Exist, OK!?: Issues and Visions for Parent-school Relationships.* London: IPPR, 2000.

# Curriculum innovation in Education Action Zones

**Marny Dickson**

Marny Dickson is a Research Officer in the Education Policy Research Unit at the Institute of Education. She is a sociologist, currently researching the formulation and implementation of the Education Action Zone policy.

**Abstract:** *Introduced as a flagship policy by the New Labour Government, Education Action Zones were encouraged to develop "innovative" approaches to teaching and learning in order to raise standards and reduce social exclusion within areas of social and economic disadvantage. This article considers the nature and extent of curriculum innovation within EAZ schools and identifies some of the barriers to more radical curriculum change.*

Located within areas of educational "underperformance" across England, 25 "first-round" Education Action Zones (EAZs) were established between September 1998 to January 1999, followed by a further 48 "second-round" zones in the period September 1999 to April 2000. Allocated via a process of competitive bidding, a typical EAZ consists of around 20 schools (usually two or three secondaries with their feeder primaries) who are expected to work together in "partnership" with public, private and voluntary sector organisations to raise educational standards and combat social exclusion. To support them in this task, EAZs receive government funding of up to £750,000 per annum for three to five years, which they are expected to supplement with £250,0000 per annum sponsorship in cash or "kind" from the private and/or voluntary sector.

DfEE/DfES (Department for Education and Employment/Department for Education and Skills) guidance and subsequent press releases have encouraged zones to be "radical", "experimental" and "imaginative" in their

efforts to implement local action plans.[1,2,3,4,5] In relation to the curriculum, EAZs are able to alter the content of core curriculum programmes; the design of the curriculum (by introducing new programmes of study or cross-curricular themes); and the organisation of the curriculum (including greater use of non-classroom settings).

Advocates of EAZs have claimed that the policy could transform educational provision in areas of educational under-performance,[6] whilst early critics raised concerns about the possibility of zone schools offering (predominantly working-class and/or minority ethnic) pupils a “second-class” education based on a narrow “Gradgrind” curriculum[7,8].

This article draws on findings from an Economic and Social Research Council funded study: “Paving a ‘Third Way’? A policy trajectory analysis of Education Action Zones.” One strand of this study has been examining the nature and extent of curriculum innovation within three EAZs – and the implications of these innovations for particular groups of pupils.

## Researching EAZs

Data for the curriculum strand of our study involved early and late stage qualitative fieldwork conducted in a geographically diverse sample of three zones that indicated their intention to pilot particularly interesting or “radical” curriculum innovations in their original applications. The first stage of fieldwork was conducted around a year after the introduction of the three zones.

Members of the project team spent up to a week per school in four schools within each zone, observing classes and interviewing headteachers, teachers and pupils in order to explore the progress, permeation and sustainability of zone-based curriculum innovation. Two years later, at a time when zones were beginning to wind down, these original twelve schools were revisited for a second stage of data collection.

Although the rich qualitative data collected over the course of our study does provide a detailed picture of how curriculum innovation has impacted on teachers and pupils in practice over an extended period, it is important to recognise a number of factors that served to complicate the evaluation. Not only do zones differ from each other, but the implementation and uptake of zone projects in schools within the same zone also tends to vary considerably.

In addition, many zone initiatives are of a short-term nature and there are difficulties in distinguishing between EAZ initiatives and effects from those emanating from a host of other related policies since any given school is likely to be receiving targeted funding for similar types of initiatives from a variety of different sources. Finally, some innovations that were initially piloted in EAZs have since been extended to non-EAZ schools, while existing initiatives within schools have sometimes been “re-branded” as zone innovations.

## EAZ rhetoric and reality

It soon became clear that the nature and scale of the curriculum innovation in the three study EAZs differed substantially both from the initial claims of policy advocates and critics and from much of the subsequent publicity material released by both the Department of Education and Skills and individual zones. Despite a policy intention to promote grassroots innovation, experimentation and diversity, the types of initiatives supported by case study schools were notably similar. We identified three main strategies common to all three EAZs.

While all strategies are likely to have raising attainment as an end goal, for example, by providing new resources or changing attitudes towards learning, cognitive strategies focus directly on improving cognitive skills and learning outcomes. Examples include the allocation of additional learning support assistant time to boost learning in key skill areas, the appointment of specialist teachers, and the introduction of targeted remedial programmes in literacy and numeracy.

In contrast, behaviour modification strategies are geared towards changing attitudes or modifying behaviour, often using psychotherapeutic approaches. Examples include the introduction or expansion of mentoring programmes, individual and group counselling. The third key strategy, facilities provision, increases access to services and facilities that have not previously been available. Examples include investment in new ICTs, play equipment and curriculum resources, and the extension of out of school hours provision.

Very few EAZ initiatives in our case study schools directly affected mainstream classroom teaching and learning, and it was clear that many headteachers and teachers saw their zone primarily as a provider of relatively disparate “extras” or “frills”. Although there was a real and unanticipated emphasis on creative arts, and investment in and use of new ICTs increased,

**Although there was a real and unanticipated emphasis on creative arts, and investment in and use of new ICTs increased, this did not appear to lead to radically different forms of teaching and learning.**

this did not appear to lead to radically different forms of teaching and learning. In part this was due to a heavy focus on target-reaching which encouraged schools to focus additional support on numeracy and literacy in conformity with national strategies. Concrete changes to the curriculum were largely visible only at Key Stage 3 and above, with the introduction of more vocational options in some EAZ schools

Although our data suggest that EAZ curriculum innovation has not "transformed" educational provision in our case study schools, the worst fears of zone critics have also not been realised. There was little, if any, indication in the three zones of moves to a "Gradgrind" curriculum which is narrowly focused on basic skills and/or work-related learning. Nor has the curriculum of zone schools been subject to far-reaching "commercialisation."[8] In fact, as we have indicated elsewhere, business involvement in EAZs, although highly variable, is much less significant than either policy advocates or critics expected.[9]

Moreover, the existence of multiple, potentially conflicting policy objectives have on occasion provided space for some rather unexpected curriculum initiatives. For example, while efforts to increase access to creative arts in all three EAZs may be consistent with the goal of promoting local innovation, they sit rather uneasily with a strong governmental focus on "basic skills" and target-reaching. However, although headteachers and teachers often argued that their "innovative" EAZ arts programmes served as a means to redress "short-comings" within the National Curriculum, such initiatives had a relatively minor impact on core curriculum provision and delivery.

There is some evidence to indicate that the number of pupils reaching performance benchmarks has risen within zones – especially at Key Stage 2. However, it is currently unclear whether improvements in test scores have reduced within group differences of attainment – especially in the light of research that shows that the relative performance of disadvantaged groups may remain static whilst the absolute performance of such groups improves.[10]

Our fieldwork identified instances in which resources were targeted on pupils who were just below a given performance benchmark. Although this practice was certainly not characteristic of all zone initiatives, and is not unique to zones,[11,12] it does suggest that increasing pressure to reach performance targets may have perverse consequences for pupil equity.

## Policy tensions: innovation, standards and market competition

Our findings accord with those of Riley *et al*[13] who argued that first wave EAZ applicants all submitted fairly "timid" proposals, the majority of which failed to propose major changes to either teachers' work or the curriculum of zone schools – safety prevailed over innovation.

More recent reports from the Centre for Education Leadership and School Improvement,[14] NUT/PricewaterhouseCoopers[15] and OFSTED[16] have also questioned the extent of "genuinely innovative action" occurring with EAZs. All of the above reports agree that EAZ innovations are typically new to an area or school rather than new to the education sector as a whole and that EAZ funding has often been used to enhance or extend existing initiatives.

In part this lack of "radical innovation" may be due to the timescale for

submitting first wave EAZ bids which was too short to allow for detailed consultation. In addition, although EAZ schools have been encouraged to experiment, the benefits as opposed to risks of doing so are unclear. Many EAZs suffer from severe teacher recruitment and retention difficulties, and although zone schools are often situated within areas with longstanding multiple social and economic disadvantages, the level of additional resources they attract is relatively low.[17] In addition, individual zone schools are still subject to league tables of performance, national assessment tests and inspection regimes – indeed EAZs have introduced yet another layer of target setting and monitoring. These are all conditions that arguably mediate against the types of risk-taking that more radical innovation requires.

The introduction of new, "innovative", roving specialist teachers whose task it is to support the use of government approved approaches to teaching, literacy, numeracy and ICT is a typical product of these seemingly conflicting priorities.

## Future challenges

It is important to recognise that although typical EAZ curriculum "innovations" may not be groundbreaking in the sense of being EAZ-specific or perhaps even EAZ-initiated, many initiatives are still new to some schools. While EAZ funds have been given to some pre-existing projects, more frequently they have been used to introduce or extend initiatives in a wider range of schools.

At the level of an individual school then, participation in an EAZ has meant access to initiatives or resources that they may not otherwise have been able to either organise or fund. In light of the Government's decision to wind down the EAZ policy, sustainability has emerged as a key issue for many zone schools.

Historically, curriculum innovation has proved exceedingly difficult to foster – in the recent past both City Technology Colleges and Grant-Maintained Schools failed to meet the levels of curricula experimentation and innovation which policy advocates had hoped for.[18,19,20] EAZs appear to be no exception and it seems that the Government has underestimated the challenges involved, and overestimated the capacity of schools within disadvantaged areas to "innovate" within short timescales in a context characterised by a number of competing policy priorities. ■

## References

1. DfEE, *Education Action Zones: An Introduction.* London: DfEE, 1998a.
2. DfEE, *Handbook for Education Action Zones.* London: DfEE, 1998b.
3. DfEE, *Guidance on Completing the Form.* London: DfEE, 1998c

4. DfEE, *Meet the Challenge: Education Action Zones.* Sudbury: DfEE, 1999.
5. DfES, *Education Action Zones 2000/2001 Annual Report.* London: DfES, 2001.
6. Barber M., The Four Pillars of a First-rate Education. *The Independent* (Review Section), 23 June, p.4, 1998.
7. Maden M., A Piece of the Action, *Education Today and Tommorrow*, 50(1), p 13-14, 1998.
8. Socialist Teachers Alliance, *Trojan Horses – Education Action Zones: the Case Against the Privatisation of Education.* London: STA, 1998.
9. Dickson, M., Gewirtz, S., Halpin, D., Power, S. and Whitty, G., Education Action Zones. In: Glendinning, C., Powell, M. and Rummery, K. (Eds) Partnerships, *New Labour and the Governance of Welfare.* Bristol: Policy Press, p. 183-198, 2002.
10. Mortimore P., Sammons P., Stoll L., Lewis D and Ecob, R., *School Matters: The Junior Years*, London: Open Books, 1998.
11. Gerwitz S., Ball, S., J. and Bowe, R., *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education.* Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995.
12. Gillborn D. and Youdell D., *Rationing Education: Policy, Practice, Reform and Equity,* Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000.
13. Riley K., Watling R., Rowles D. and Hopkins, D., *Education Action Zones: Some Lessons Learned from the First Wave of Applicants.* London: The Education Network, 1998.
14. Canterbury Christ Church University College. Centre for Education Leadership and School Improvement. Evidence of Progress: An Independent Review of Evaluation Activities in *Education Action Zones.* Canterbury: CELSI, Canterbury Christ Church University College. Commissioned by the DfES, 2002.
15. PricewaterhouseCoopers. *Evaluation of the Role of Teachers in Education Action Zones. London: NUT, 2001.*
16. OFSTED, *Education Action Zones: Commentary on the First Six Zone Inspections*, Feb 2001. Website: http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/public/docs01/eazcommentry.pdf
17. Plewis I., Inequalities, Targets and Zones, *New Economy*, 5(2), p104-108, 1998.
18. Whitty G., Edwards T., and Gewirtz S., *Specialisation and Choice in Urban Education: the City Technology College Experiment.* London: Routledge, 1993.
19. Halpin D., Power S. and Fitz J., Opting into the Past? Grant Maintained Schools and the Reinvention of Tradition. In: Glatter R., Woods P.A. and Bagley C.A. (Eds.), *Choice and Diversity in Schooling: Perspectives and Prospects.* London: Routledge, p. 59-70, 1997.
20. Power S., Halpin D., and Fitz J.,The Grant Maintained Schools Policy: The English Experience of Educational Self-governance. In: Pole C.J. and Chawla-Duggan R. (Eds.), *Reshaping Education in the 1990s: Perspectives on Secondary Schooling.* London: Falmer Press, p. 105-115, 1996.

# Book reviews

**GROWING MINDS: AN INTRODUCTION TO COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Stephanie Thornton

*Palgrave MacMillan **£15.99** ISBN 0–333–77742–5*

Reading this book from cover to cover reminded me of the advertising promotion for a well-known wood preserver, "It does exactly what it says on the tin". Indeed, Stephanie Thornton's book is a neatly balanced collection of accepted theories and quaint anecdotes that provide a valuable introduction to cognitive development.

It is very readable, which helps if you are a struggling undergraduate trying to balance research and a hectic social life, or indeed if you are a 24/7 housewife studying for that all important child care qualification to get you back into the world of work.

As a teacher and part-time trainer for CPD I enjoyed being reminded of the insight and controversy of Piaget and Vygotsky and marvelled at the immense variety of quotes and references from a wide range of research. Although I felt that having so many references disrupted the flow of the text somewhat.

While the style is easily acceptable to all types of reader, it is not patronising or "dumbed-down". Each chapter ends with a concise summary followed by exercises that could be carried out by an individual or a study group. Those looking to impress their tutor or whose grey matter screams for more can follow the annotated suggested reading that follows each exercise. It is the sort of text that can be dipped in to as you watch a child grow or read cover-to-cover following development from conception through the education system and beyond.

The author's experience in the classroom has led to the production of a book that engages the reader with thought provoking questions. The theory is clearly explained and the personal anecdotes are those that we can all relate to if we have any experience whatsoever of babies, toddlers and those delightful infants known affectionately in the trade as "ankle biters" or "pocket hangers". You will smile at the story of the Great Dane and the Chihuahua and possibly shudder at the implication of the visual cliff! The story of the propelling pencil adds a new twist to the cliché about not having any lead… but I think mine may well be snapped! If you find these notes at all enigmatic you must read the book.

**NIGEL ASH**

## MANAGING YOUR LEARNING

Geoffrey Squires

*Routledge 2002* ***£13.99*** *ISBN 0-415-23765-3*

Metacognition may be in danger of becoming something of a buzzword; but making it a target for student improvement has much more to commend it than just the likelihood that it would irritate Chris Woodhead.

This book suggests that students should analyse their cognitive strengths and weaknesses and understand better the factors that influence them. They can then use this knowledge to approach learning situations in a manner and with an attitude that will allow them to learn more effectively.

To anyone outside or preparing to leave compulsory education, Squires offers a series of lists, questions, criteria, and words of wisdom which can be used to determine their preferred learning styles and improve their learning habits. The author focuses on the whole range of aspects of learning – both internal and external to the student – including use of resources, interaction with other students, teaching styles, learner-teacher relationships, motivation, and assessment. These refer to both formal and informal learning.

In suggesting that his framework is used for self-assessment, Squires recognises that students do not need anyone else, not even a teacher, to analyse and understand how they learn best and apply that self-awareness.

But Squires is not recommending isolation. Nor is he predicting the decline or demise of the teaching profession. As he suggests, the book may be most interesting and valuable when it is used by pairs or groups of students as a framework for discussion about learning; and/or it is used by teachers to stimulate such discussion. In any case, is there any point to becoming a better learner unless there are lots of great teachers around?

Of course, making the most of learning opportunities does not guarantee the outcomes. In a memorable TV moment, Arthur Daley informed his “Minder”, Terry, that whilst in prison his nephew had just graduated in sociology. “So will that stop him thieving?” asked Terry. “No”, said Daley, “but he knows now why he does it”.

Squires suggests that if they develop an individual learning profile and work out a personal action plan, learners are more likely to achieve the outcomes that they aspire to or are expected of them. That must increase learner satisfaction. In addition, being regarded by others as having fulfilled your potential and avoiding the label of being an underachiever, are both made more likely.

It’s well worth learners avoiding wasting time by spending some of it improving their metacognition.

**RICHARD STAINTON**

## CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION (Third edition)

Tina Bruce and Carolyn Meggitt

*Hodder and Stoughton 2002* ***£19.99*** *ISBN 0-340-84628-3*

The scope of this book is remarkable. In nearly 600 large pages it tries to cover all aspects of care for children up to the age of eight in a variety of settings. It is absolutely crammed with information and covers a huge range of subjects, from conception to child protection, from religion to rabies.

The target audience is students on child-care courses. However, it has the potential to be useful for more experienced staff as well. But, in trying to be comprehensive, the authors risk putting in too much detail, and so failing to highlight different levels of responsibility and what is most important. I would have liked more encouragement for readers to exercise their judgement, by reflecting on dilemmas rather than being offered too many solutions. The new chapter on observation and assessment for this edition exemplified this. There were good examples and formats to adopt, but too little clarity about what is really essential and what might be useful only in certain circumstances.

The decision to start from exclusivity and equality seemed initially very appealing but I increasingly found the structure confusing. There seemed no logic, for instance, in discussing the physical care of babies immediately after the curriculum for older children. It is not, though, a book to read from cover to cover, but much more like a reference book, so I am reviewing it as such, concentrating on what I know most about.

Of course, this approach tends to make one focus on authors or ideas missed out, or given a different emphasis from one's own. So I was surprised that a discussion of child development did not mention Margaret Donaldson's work and it was curious to see the positive aspects of the National Curriculum highlighted while more critical elements are left embedded in the text. However, in several other areas, the coverage was full and insightful, with very interesting discussion, for instance, of the learning environment.

One really irritating aspect was the poor level of proof-reading. Without going through with a fine tooth-comb, I found several references which had not been properly checked. This may not reflect inaccuracy of information but tends to undermine one's confidence. So I am left somewhat ambivalent. It is certainly worth having, but needs to be read critically rather than seen as the answer to every query. If it runs to a fourth edition, a sharper focus and less information would be beneficial.

**TONY EAUDE**

---

## AN INTRODUCTION TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (Second edition)

Michael Alcott

*Hodder and Stoughton 2002* ***£11.99*** *ISBN 0 340 84818 9 (pb)*

This second edition updates the popular and accessible guide for those working with children with special educational needs (SEN). It considers the recent legislative developments, such as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). It is aimed particularly at those beginning their teaching career or who want to consolidate their existing knowledge.

It would have been useful if the author had clearly distinguished between the definition of "special educational needs" in law and the definition of a "disability" as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). The book would have benefited from a greater focus upon the disability equality aspects of the SEN and Disability Act.

Alcott provides a useful overview of legislation, although it would have been helpful to focus more on recent developments rather than the lengthy section on the Warnock Report, as significant as that report was. In particular, Alcott concentrates too much on the previous Code of Practice rather than on the revised version (two pages are spent discussing the defunct five stage model of SEN assessment, for example). A brief summary of the recent legislative changes, perhaps in table format, would be useful for teachers.

The author recognises the continuing and valuable role for special schools and gives an interesting case study of the work of a special school, although he does not discuss the place of outreach work to mainstream schools.

Chapters Two and Three focus mainly upon the medical aspects of various types of SEN and disability. While this provides a reference point, classroom teachers will be unlikely to need such detail, and individual and sometimes complex needs mean that such "categorisation" is not always useful.

Chapter Four is organised rather oddly, beginning with an overview of techniques to facilitate communication, such as Braille and Makaton, which would be served better as an appendix. This is followed by an examination of provision in early years, primary, secondary and special schools. The section on early years could have focused more upon the requirements in the revised SEN Code, particularly given its emphasis upon early intervention.

Unfortunately, the book does not address in detail the particular challenges of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). Although it contains good descriptive accounts of special needs and disabilities, further emphasis upon good practice in the areas of special needs would be useful. Much research exists on successful inclusive schools. Research findings could be included to give an indication of how to ensure that children with special educational needs and disabilities have positive experiences of schooling.

Towards the end, the book addresses some wider issues that would have

been more useful earlier in the book. Teachers' understandings of inclusion, and the issues around models of disability, for example, often determine the way children with SEN and disabilities are viewed and how SEN provision is implemented. These issues would be of greater interest to many educators than the sections on medical conditions that tend to dominate the book.

Alcott's use of language does not reflect the "social model" of disability. It gives some legitimacy to the term "handicapped", for example, a term not used by those in the disability equality movement. Throughout the book, the use of the masculine form "he" is disappointing, and inadequately justified in the introduction. Ironically, the importance of language and terminology is stressed in a section on "equal opportunities". Language use is, admittedly, a sensitive and evolving area. Such sensitivities, and the political issues around them, are not however addressed in any depth here.

Alcott does not commit to a social model of disability, preferring to look at the place of both the medical and social models. This, together with the author's contestable definition of "equality", will make for a frustrating read for those involved in the disability equality movement.

For teachers facing the opportunities and challenges of inclusive education, this is a starting point, in particular for where to get more help and advice. A basic list of web sites is included, but not, strangely, that of the Disability Rights Commission. The focus on viewing children as individuals, and the case studies, are valuable, although hearing the voice of the child would add greater interest. Student teachers will find the book most useful, particularly bearing in mind the greater emphasis in the QTS standards upon having an awareness of SEN and disability issues.

**SUZANNE MACKENZIE**

---

## CHILDREN WITH LIMITED ENGLISH – TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR THE REGULAR CLASSROOM

Ellen Kottler and Geoffrey A Kottler

*Corwin Press/Sage Publications 2002* ***£18.99*** *ISBN 0761978380*

This 142 page paper-back book is the second edition of a practical handbook by two American authors so the statistics on immigrants relate to the USA. With an increasing number and diverse population of immigrants with limited English entering our education system, this jargon-free book will not only be of great value to the ordinary classroom teacher but also SENCOs, advisory staff, teacher-trainers and their trainees. It aims to help teachers to function more effectively with this student population and to enhance their classroom environment. The publisher also produces other handbooks dealing with English as a second language.

The eight chapters follow a logical sequence which resembles what teachers

actually do when they find non-English speaking pupils in their class.

Chapters one and two focus on getting to know the student and establishing a comfortable environment in which to learn; while chapters four to six deal with strategies for teaching, how to use normal methods of language teaching and using computers and other technologies (including the media). Chapter seven looks at how to involve others and chapter eight, most importantly, talks about putting it all together. The suggested activities for the reader at the end of each chapter are comprehensive and relate to what the teacher can do as well as what can be done with the pupils.

Those who have the 1994 edition of this book will notice a two-fold increase in size of this expanded second edition. It now includes techniques for involving the school, family and community; discussion of learning styles and multiple intelligences; application of cutting-edge brain research and teaching innovations into practice; updated sections on cultural background and values and practical strategies for improving language skills using the media and technology.

There is an emphasis on multi-sensory activities and a useful summary of strategies adapted from traditional ways of teaching second languages, all in the context of a friendly, welcoming environment (such as sitting in a circle), participation, assigning a "buddy" and use of music.

**IAN RIX**

---

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Linda Evans

*Continuum Books 2002* ***£18.99*** *ISBN 0-8264-5364-3*

Linda Evans is Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Education, University of Warwick. Her own research has included studies into teacher morale and job satisfaction. In this book Evans aims to show how researchers can develop so that "restricted" research skills become "extended". The rationale is based on her concern that there are significant deficiencies in current educational research. She highlights the fragmented nature of much educational research, suggesting that researchers fail to work collegially to develop cumulative research.

Evans begins by making some general observations on how competent researchers might develop extended research skills so that their work achieves greater impact in terms of policy and practice. Part two of the book provides detailed explanations of how this can be achieved through advanced research skills such as questioning, comparing and categorising. There are accessible exercises included to support explanations of processes, for example in practising comparative analysis skills.

Evans compares her research into teacher morale with her work on the impact upon teachers of the National Curriculum. She concludes that

suggestibility in research design and delivery is an area that warrants further investigation and outlines ways in which bias can be tested. Moving from a focus on questioning to realistic interpretation of data she suggests mechanisms which reduce the effects of partisanship.

In the final chapters of the book Evans advocates “greater use of research as a basis for practical ideas through pragmatising…theoretical findings”. There is the inclusion of logical exercises, which assist the reader in understanding how researchers can enhance their theorising skills.

This book is an accessible read for those with a general interest in achieving a more questioning approach to their assessment of educational research as well as for those preparing to extend their own research skills.

**PAM COLLINS**

---

## UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL EXCLUSION: CHALLENGING ‘PROCESSES’ OF DOCILITY

Charlie Cooper

*Education Now 2002* ***£10.99*** *ISBN 1-871526-55-8*

This book is based on a study of eight pupils aged 11 to 16 and aims to explore “the nature of school exclusion from the perspective of excluded pupils themselves.” We are also given the perceptions of parents/carers, of teachers and of support workers. On this ground alone it would make a salutary read for all teachers, many of whom will concur with one of its findings: “while many teachers and support workers advocated a philosophy of education with inclusion at its heart, the majority of respondents did not feel that this was achievable in the present system.”

In the final chapter the author draws upon the work of Michael Foucault to argue that the New Labour policy of social inclusion is doomed to failure unless the Government ceases de-professionalising teachers by insisting that they transmit a “highly prescriptive and largely questionable curriculum”. The chapter also looks at the broader context in which many children live surrounded by poverty, difficult neighbourhoods and lack of hope for the future. Definitely a salutary read for education ministers.

**MALCOLM HORNE**

---

## Reviewers

**Nigel Ash**, primary school head and education consultant
**Richard Stainton**, member of staff, NUT Education and Equal Opportunities Department
**Tony Eaude**, headteacher of St Mary John First School, in East Oxford
**Suzanne Mackenzie**, member of staff, NUT Education and Equal Opportunities Department
**Ian Rix**, senior advisor teacher working for Norfolk Psychological Services
**Pam Collins**, member of staff, NUT Education and Equal Opportunities Department
**Malcolm Horne**, Past president of the NUT

Like a

# horse and carriage

Innovation and professional development are meant for each other!

Professional development can be a spur to innovation; and it is certainly the case that innovation will not be a lasting success unless it is underpinned by appropriate and effective professional development.

The NUT is proud of the innovative approaches which characterise its Professional Development Programme. The development of Teacher2Teacher programmes; the pioneering of classroom investigations focusing on the teaching of thinking skills; and the promotion of peer coaching as a means for teachers to take control of their own learning, have been at the heart of the development of the Programme.

The Union is equally proud when its CPD Programme is associated with innovation by others:

- Brighton and Hove, Birmingham and Croydon LEAs have all offered NUT-organised Teacher2Teacher Programmes as part of their pilot Early Professional Development Programme for teachers in their second and third years.
- Following the launch of 16 Creative Partnerships throughout England, several of the Directors have encouraged teachers from within their partnership to apply for the new "Developing Creativity Across the Primary Curriculum" programme.

Equally, the Union is very pleased when its Professional Development Programme acts as a catalyst to innovation in schools:

- The Royal Spa Nursery School, Brighton, enrolled its whole staff on "Playful Teaching in the Foundation Stage'" to support its Development Plan.
- Stanford le Hope Infant School, Thurrock, followed up a leadership seminar focusing on participatory leadership by applying the strategies to its improvement plan for literacy; and found that "actions happened more quickly and enthusiastically than some other projects".
- Gayhurst Primary School, Hackney, created a "critical mass" of teachers skilled in peer coaching by sending four pairs on Teacher2Teacher programmes.
- Cardiff High School built on the involvement of some of its teachers in the NUT's CPD Programme and was awarded a Whole School Initiative Grant by the General Teaching Council (Wales) to develop "thinking skills'" approaches throughout the school.

**To find out more about what the NUT's CPD Programme can offer you and/or your organisation, visit: www.teachers.org.uk/cpd; telephone: 020 7380 4719/4787; or request details (giving your name and address) by e-mail nutcpd@nut.org.uk; or write to CPD Programme, NUT, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD.**