
education review

Trusting Teachers: Taking Control of the Profession



volume 23 • number 2
Winter 2011

Education Review is the journal of the National Union of Teachers. It is published twice a year. Correspondence about editorial matters should be sent to the editor, Celia Dignan at the Education and Equalities Department of the NUT. Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD. Tel: 020 7380 4717.

Education Review is published for the NUT by the Education Publishing Company Ltd., Devonia House, 4 Union Terrace, Crediton, Devon, EX17 3DY, to whom correspondence about business matters, including subscriptions and advertising, should be sent.

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Subscription rates for volume 23, 2011 are as follows. *Education Review* is available in traditional paper format and electronically, sent as a PDF file attached to an email. Individual subscribers should specify which format they want. Individual issues are available at £9 each.

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Institutions, Australia	A\$149
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Summer 2011

Education Review is produced by the Education and Equalities Department of the National Union of Teachers.

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

The coalition Government has been in power for a little over a year. In that time there has been an avalanche of education policies. The first was the hastily introduced Academies Act, designed to break up local planning and coordination of education and turn schools into stand-alone institutions, competing not cooperating for ever scarcer resources. It will also enable new free schools, employing unqualified teachers, to set up wherever their proprietor sees an opportunity, regardless of the consequences for existing schools.

This was rapidly followed by an education white paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, and the subsequent Education Bill. Despite lofty claims for this Bill, it enacts greater prescription over teaching and learning and entrenches academic and vocational divisions between and within schools.

Recently the Government has published its special educational needs green paper. This will deregulate SEN assessment, increase the role of private providers and bring about a return to the days when separate schools, rather than inclusion, were the order of the day for many children with special educational needs.

New accountability measures have been introduced. These include the ill conceived E-bac standard and phonics screening for six year olds. There are ongoing reviews of the curriculum at every phase as well as the assessment regime at KS2. There are cuts to local authority services for schools which provide support to those pupils most in need. These are in addition to cuts in school budgets resulting in both teaching and support staff losing their jobs and children being taught in bigger classes with less support for their individual learning needs.

It has been a dizzying year for the teaching profession and all the indications are that things are likely to get worse before they start to get better.

In a situation of constant turmoil there is a danger that teachers simply batten down the hatches and wait for the whirlwind of the current Government's educational reforms to die down. That would be a mistake. Now more than ever the voices of teachers need to be heard, asserting their professional opinions, arguing for and demonstrating what works in practice, critiquing Government initiatives, promoting alternatives and engaging in an ongoing debate with Government and policy makers. Teachers have the professional knowledge, skills and experience to respond with authority to the Government's reform agenda and it's vital that we continue to do so.

As this edition of *Education Review* demonstrates, those most involved in the teaching profession are committed to taking control of its future direction and ensuring that teaching remains a profession in which pedagogy, the curriculum, assessment and teacher continuing professional development are based on sound evidence of what works best in the classroom.

To that end this edition of *Education Review* has as its theme *Trusting Teachers: Taking Control of the Profession*. Once again the NUT's professional journal brings together a rich and diverse mix of views and opinions.

Professor Richard Pring's article provides a timely reminder of the history of teachers' involvement in partnerships with local education authorities and central Government in the development of the curriculum and for the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers. His article reflects upon what seems like a golden era when Government ministers deferred to the teaching profession on any matters requiring professional judgement. The current Government could learn a great deal from revisiting the history of the Schools Council which Richard describes.

Tony Eade, a teacher and teacher trainer and former Head teacher, argues in his article that improving children's learning requires a model of teacher professionalism which encourages teacher innovation and judgement based on a wide repertoire of pedagogical strategies. This requires an evidence-informed approach with teachers being trusted to exercise their professional judgement.

The Government's never-ending focus on high stakes testing is the subject of several articles in this edition of *Education Review*.

Professor Wynne Harlen argues the case for recognising the validity and reliability of teacher assessment as an alternative to the high stakes testing regime that the Government is intent on continuing.

Alison Peacock, Head teacher of Wroxham Primary School and leader of the Cambridge Primary Review National Network, is an inspiring example of a Head teacher who has had the courage to develop an alternative approach to assessment in her school. Teachers and pupils work in classrooms in which a culture of trust and cognitive challenge is fostered, free from fear of ranking. Her article provides a clear practical example of a genuine evidence-based alternative to high stakes testing developed by teachers which puts pupils' learning at its heart.

NUT Wales Executive member Beth Davies' article examines the education system in Wales since the abolition of SATs and how it has empowered teachers to teach children without the threat of "teaching to the test". It analyses methodology used within classrooms in Wales and shows how formative and qualitative assessment work effectively in practice. However, as Beth points out, the future of education in Wales is uncertain. Prior to the recent elections to the Welsh Assembly, the

Education Minister had set out a 20-point plan for reform which included the introduction of national reading tests for primary pupils and compulsory PISA assessments for all secondary pupils at age 15.

The NUT rejects this approach. We believe it is grossly unfair for ministers to make crude comparisons between standards of attainment in Wales and those in Finland, which ranks very high in the PISA league table international snapshot of attainment at age 15, without taking the countries' contexts and cultures into account. For example, Finland has a Government that trusts schools and teachers. In Finland teachers are highly trained, highly regarded by wider society and have freedom to plan a curriculum which reflects local concerns. In addition, the funding for Finnish schools is high, with buildings which are fit for purpose and with good quality resources. If only the same could be said for Wales! The NUT is campaigning for an end to the funding gap between England and Wales which currently stands at over £600 per pupil. As Beth makes clear, the recent changes to assessment practice in Wales must be given time to embed so that any evaluation is honest and detailed. Assessment for Learning strategies are for the long term and should be judged through a child's school life.

Professor Henrietta Dombey's article analyses the problems with the Government's new phonics screening check for six year olds. She illustrates the inadequacy of an approach which over emphasises the learning of simple phonic rules for the complexity of English language spelling and argues that this threatens children's enjoyment of reading and their ability to engage with a text. Most teachers would agree with these sentiments. The NUT is at the forefront of a campaign to promote reading for pleasure in schools. As the latest evidence from the international reading survey PIRLS makes clear, children in the UK lag behind other countries in their enjoyment of reading. Given the clear evidence of the importance of reading in developing children's learning across the curriculum and in raising standards of attainment, it is vital that the Government engage with the importance of reading for pleasure if it is serious about raising standards of attainment.

The E-bac is the subject of Sue Kirkham's article. Sue, a former language teacher and Head teacher, is an education policy specialist with the Association of School and College Leaders (ACSL). Like NUT members, members of ACSL have been united in expressing their anger at the Government's introduction of the E-bac without any prior consultation. In her article Sue points out that the E-bac is not a qualification but rather a performance indicator that will have the effect of narrowing the curriculum choices open to students at KS4. Despite this there is real interest in a debate about the development of a genuine baccalaureate for England that would ensure that all students received a well rounded

education, offer progression routes for continuing education and be meaningful to employers. This is a debate to which NUT members have much to contribute.

The Government's education reforms for England have not emerged from nowhere. As the winter 2010 edition of *Education Review, Standing Up for Public Education: The International Evidence*, demonstrated, the increasing marketisation and privatisation of education, coupled with high stakes testing, are a growing international phenomena. Many of the reforms advocated by the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, originate in the USA. Free schools, for example, are modelled on US charter schools. In the last year a succession of American education "advisers" has crossed the Atlantic to promote US-style education reforms for England's schools. In her article, Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers describes the problems that US colleagues have faced in getting the teacher's voice heard in an era of union bashing. She highlights two projects with which the union is engaged to support members to take control of their profession – one related to charter schools, the other to teacher evaluation. As Randi points out, "schools that are good for teachers are also good for students: teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions."

The absence of classroom teachers' voice, experience and perspective from public debate and policy making about schools prompted "The Teachers' Project", part of an Economic and Social Research Council research project entitled "Urban Classroom Culture and Interaction". Professor Roxy Harris, was deputy director of the research project and in his article he describes how, in a careful recording of the everyday classroom life of London comprehensive schools, students and teachers revealed widespread uncertainties about three dimensions of identity in schools – unsettled school identities; unsettled teacher identities; and unsettled student identities. The research, along with discussion, debate and analysis in teacher seminar groups has culminated in a forthcoming teacher training and CPD publication which will be of particular interest to NUT member in inner city schools.

In these difficult times it is important to be able to take a step back and take a more light hearted look at classroom life and no one does this better than Steve Eddison whose article provides the finale to this edition of *Education Review*. Steve will be known to many NUT members for his winning monologue for Teachers TV, *Locked Stockroom and Two Smoking Gerbils*, and his regular writings in the TES. Steve casts a humorous eye over the almost insatiable requirement for evidence in order to justify what is happening in our schools and classrooms. It is, he points out, symptomatic of an increasing lack of trust in teachers. I particularly enjoyed his cooking analogy and would commend it to the current Government:

“Teaching is like cooking dinner. It involves a range of recipes and certain essential ingredients. It involves a degree of time-consuming and often labour-intensive preparation. And it generally involves a lot of hard, messy work cleaning up at the end. However it is essentially a creative process, one that should be enjoyable, satisfying and generally fulfilling.”

This edition of Education Review also includes a selection of reviews of some of the latest books that will be of interest to education practitioners. These include the Teacher’s Survival Guide to Behaviour, Promoting Reading for Pleasure in the Primary School, Play and Practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Thinking through Pedagogy for Primary and Early Years, and Supporting Dyscalculia and Students Who Struggle with Maths.

I hope you enjoy the summer 2011 edition of *Education Review*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Blower". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christine Blower

Trusting teachers: Learning from a bit of history

Richard Pring

Richard Pring was Lead Director of the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training (Routledge, 2009). He was previously Professor of Educational Studies and Director of the Department, University of Oxford.

Abstract: *The Schools Council, established in 1964, embodied a partnership between the teaching profession, local education authorities and the Ministry of Education for the development of the curriculum and for the continuing professional development of teachers. The two were seen to be integral – no curriculum development without teacher development, and teachers were the dominant partner. The recent White Paper “The Importance of Teaching” has much to learn from this bit of history.*

No curriculum development without teacher development

When I joined the Ministry of Education, as an Assistant Principal in 1962, I quickly learnt that the civil servants responsible for running the system did not need to know anything about education. That was a matter of professional experience and judgement. The experts were the teachers and their colleagues in Her Majesty’s Inspectorate who were the “eyes and ears of the Minister”. Indeed, when Dr. Marjorie Reeves was appointed to the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) in 1946, she was told by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Reginald Maude, that the chief duty of the members was to be prepared to die at the first ditch as soon as politicians get their hands on education (Reeves, circa 2005, conversation with Richard Pring).

The expertise of the civil servants lay in making sure the system worked – the legislative framework, the supply of teachers, an adequate provision of schools and colleges, and that sort of thing. Meetings with the Minister (then Sir Edward Boyle) were always attended by the Chief Inspector or the relevant Staff Inspectors, to whom the Minister would defer on any matter requiring professional judgement. And these HMI

would form their professional judgement from the gathering of evidence from countless inspections around the country, and indeed from the evidence and conclusions drawn in major reports produced by the Central Advisory Councils for England and Wales, of which there were many in the ten year period from 1959 (Crowther Report on 15-18, Newsom Report on Half Our Future, Beloe Report on Secondary School Examinations, Lockwood Report on Schools Curricula and Examinations, Plowden Report on Children and their Primary Schools, Gittens Report on Primary Education in Wales, Robbins Report on Higher Education).

These Reports – extensive, independent and drawing upon the

Teachers and their professional bodies were central to these working parties, but it was the beginning of greater Government involvement, if not intervention, in the traditionally “secret garden of the curriculum”.

professional judgements of teachers and HMI – were taken seriously by policy makers, and they resulted in major and lasting reforms to education at every level.

However, that total “hands off” approach by Government to the governance of education could not last for ever. There were concerns about standards of achievement, about the content of the curriculum, about the suitability of the examination system as the education of the other “half our future” came under scrutiny, and about the promised raising of the school-leaving age.

In 1963 I was transferred to the newly created Curriculum Study Group within the Ministry – a small body of civil servants, HMI, and advisers in curriculum and assessment, which provided a core framework within which national working parties addressed matters concerned with the curriculum and examination. Teachers and their professional bodies were central to these working parties, but it was the beginning of greater Government involvement, if not intervention, in the traditionally “secret garden of the curriculum”.

Of crucial importance was the development of the new Certificate of Secondary Education, intended, in accordance with the recommendations of the Beloe Report (1960), to provide a public examination other than GCE ‘O’ Level for the next 40 per cent of ability. That examination was radical in its conception, having a Mode III in which the teachers were enabled to create the curriculum suitable for the learners they were responsible for, write the assessments for that curriculum and mark the examination papers.

All that was, of course, within a broad framework agreed by the respective Examination Boards, and subject to national monitoring to ensure equivalence of standards across Boards and across schools. The Staff Inspector, Gilbert Peaker, a statistician of international repute, created a system whereby teacher judgements were monitored to ensure validity, reliability and equivalence. (I remember well some of the trial workshops conducted at Dartington Hall in May 1964).

Three matters are worth emphasising here:

- First, teachers were central to the creation and to the assessment of the curriculum, and ways were researched and found in which their judgements could be checked and adapted if they were out of line with those of other teachers.
- Second, the development of the curriculum went hand in hand with teacher development, whether through the workshops on assessment or in the teachers' centres established in all local education authorities wherein secondary subject teachers and primary teachers would meet to discuss curriculum, teaching and assessment.
- Third, the Curriculum Study Group gave rise in 1964 to the newly established Schools Council, a centrally organised partnership between Local Education Authorities, the teaching profession and the Ministry, in which teachers had the majority of members. The teacher-led Council addressed the problems of raising the school-leaving age to 16, the primary curriculum following the completion of the Plowden Committee in 1967, and the teaching of the humanities, technology, mathematics, the arts, and (in partnership with the Nuffield Foundation) the sciences. Its publications, highly influential, reflected both commissioned research and professional judgement. And the emerging teachers' centres were centres for the dissemination and absorption of these studies and thereby for the continuing professional development of the teachers.

As Brian Simon commented:

“The whole ethos of the Schools Council – as articulated in the Lockwood Report recommendations – overtly stressed the responsibility of individual schools and teachers in evolving their own curriculum. The first and main recommendation . . . stressed this very precisely: ‘We reaffirm the importance of the principle that the schools should have the fullest measure of responsibility for their own work, including responsibility for their own curricula and teaching methods, which should be evolved by their own staff to meet the needs of their own pupils. We believe, however, that positive action is needed to uphold this principle.’

(Simon, 1991: 313)

That main recommendation was drafted by the civil servant, Derek Morrell, the first Secretary of the Schools Council and in effect, whilst joint Secretary of the Curriculum Study Group, the main architect of the new Schools Council. He argued in his Joseph Payne Memorial Lecture in 1966, reflecting upon the need for such a Council:

“Education has become much more than a system for maintaining an elite from one generation to another, or for conferring status on those who seek, or are lucky enough, to be educated beyond basic literacy and numeracy. We now consider that our educational purposes include the development of individuals to their full potential: increasing the amount of talent available within the community: the development of intelligence, quality in personal relationships, and indeed in the whole life of our society.” (Morrell, 1966)

To this end, Morrell argues that the curriculum must be much more than the covering of a subject matter – a transmission of knowledge embedded in the traditional subjects, a “grammar school education for all” as Harold Wilson is reputed to have said. There must be the links – logical and communicative – between that which the school has to offer and the communities of experience (home, neighbourhood, local occupational groups) which shape how the young learners understand and value what is to be learnt. And all this should meet, much required at a time of rapid social change, the “urgent demand for help in thinking about the nature of the human condition, and the purpose of life itself” (ibid.: 9).

That, for Morrell, meant shifting the curriculum emphasis from the impersonal (the receiving of the transmitted wisdom of the past) to the personal (the individual making sense of his or her experiences in the light of what the wisdom of the past has to offer). The classroom thus becomes a place where this dialogue takes place between the learner trying to make sense of experience, the other learners similarly engaged, and the teachers facilitating that growth of understanding through the provision of access to the wisdom of the past.

Thus, a new and distinctive role for the teacher in this conception of responding to social change and to the pursuit of “education for all” was seen to be crucial, and indeed was the central concern of the Schools Council. School teachers need to have not only a deep understanding of subject and craft traditions but also the pedagogical skills to relate them to the modes of understanding, experiences and concerns of the learners themselves.

To that end, it was seen necessary to “consider the role of the teacher in relation to the actual conduct of research ... problem solving research, shading into development work.” (ibid.: 22)

That vision of the teaching role was illustrated by the Humanities Curriculum Project, which occupied much of the work of Lawrence Stenhouse and his team from 1967 to 1972. This arose in response to the School Council 1965 Working Paper number 2, *Raising the School Leaving Age*, the main author of which was Derek Morrell. Teachers became the researchers of “what works”, the curriculum thinkers on the basis of evidence drawn from their professional experience. As explained by Elliott, the teacher as researcher was born (Elliott, 1991).

Teacher as deliverer

Why does that trust in teachers’ professional judgement and expertise seem so strange today? Teachers trained in the last 25 years would hardly recognise such an account.

It is a long and detailed story. Here I can but indicate two of the factors. First, the reservations of the teachers and the local education authorities in the 1960s, voiced in response to the creation of the Curriculum Study Group, about Government inroads into what were seen to be professional

matters, have proved to be correct. The Schools Council arose out of, and to meet, those concerns. It was a genuine partnership. But soon the Secretary of State felt that his voice was not strong enough to fulfil the Government’s responsibilities as the main paymaster of the system.

Gone was the belief in teacher autonomy, and gone with it was a notion of continuing professional development integral to curriculum development.

The Schools Council was abolished in 1982, to be replaced by two quangos, one to cover the curriculum and one to cover examinations, to be chosen and appointed by the Secretary of State himself (then Sir Keith Joseph). Basically, for whatever reason, the teaching profession was not trusted. A few years later the succeeding Secretary of State, Sir Kenneth Baker, introduced a National Curriculum, with a very detailed account of subject matter to be covered and an assessment system which ensured teachers would stick to it. Gone was the belief in teacher autonomy, and gone with it was a notion of continuing professional development integral to curriculum development.

Second, accompanying these and subsequent controls over curriculum, assessment, initial training and continuing professional development has been a shift in the language of education to one of performance management. The language of targets, content for reaching these targets, methods transmitting the content, assessment of whether the targets

have been hit, evaluation of what went wrong if the targets were not hit (were the targets wrong or the means chosen to hit them?) took over.

What once was referred to as “rational curriculum planning” (see Tyler, 1971) or, more benignly, “the virtuous circle”, became widespread in the new language of “performance management” – namely, that of targets or measurable outcomes, performance indicators, audits, learners as customers or clients and teachers as deliverers of the curriculum. Schools have their line managers and the substitution of chief executive for the honourable title of Head teacher is significant. Indeed, the science of “deliverology” is with us, and according to that science, the teachers, if they adopt the appropriate formula, should be able to hit the targets, given from elsewhere.

Sir Michael Barber, once in charge of research at the NUT, and more recently in charge of the Delivery Unit at Number 10, has been imported into the USA to help the systems there to deliver learning more effectively. To that end he has established the US Education Delivery Institute, and has recently shared with the Kentucky Department of Education staff his insights on “deliverology” – the systematic way for “driving progress” and “delivering results”. (kypost, 2010)

The challenge

The recently launched summary of recent major reviews of education “from cradle to grave” gives, as its seventh challenge to Government, the following:

“Teachers’ pedagogical expertise and professionalism are essential to educational quality, but this is not consistently understood or provided for in policy interventions and continuing professional development.”

(Pring and Pollard, 2011)

In response, there was a call for the recognition of the centrality of teacher expertise in the realisation of the aims of education. In opposition to the advocates of “deliverology”, the aims of education are not the sort of things which can be embodied in a limited number of measurable targets and then handed over, untouched, by the teachers whose technical ability will ensure delivery.

Rather teaching is an engagement with the learners – an engagement in which: first, they come to know and adjust to the learners’ capacities, strengths, weaknesses, aspirations; second, they relate the subject and practical knowledge they have to that knowledge of the learner; third, in doing so, they deliberate about the values and aims of education for these learners, not just about the methods of transmitting content which is packaged by others away from the classroom.

The professional status of the teachers therefore lies in:

- knowledge embedded in subject and craft traditions;
- expertise in pedagogy by which that subject and craft knowledge are transmitted; and
- expertise in curriculum development.

From this, consequences follow for the training, qualification and continuing professional development of teachers, particularly with regard to:

- development of pedagogical expertise, viz the theoretical and practical knowledge relevant to wise, adaptable and sensitive teaching (including use of technologies);
- curriculum development “No curriculum development without teacher development”;
- the need for deep understanding of subject matter or practice;
- understanding of the learning needs, the motivation and aspirations of the learners; and
- the opportunity for continuing professional development.

It is summed up well by Andrew Pollard in his definition of pedagogical expertise:

“The practice of teaching framed and informed by a shared and structured body of knowledge. This knowledge comprises experience, evidence, understanding moral purposes and shared transparent values. It is by progressively acquiring such knowledge and mastering the expertise – through initial training, continuing development, reflection and classroom enquiry and regulated practice – that teachers are entitled to be treated as professionals.” (Pollard, 2010: 2)

Teachers are at the centre of thinking about the development of learning opportunities for such a diverse group of learners. They should not be seen as “deliverers” of someone else’s curriculum. Initial teacher education cannot prepare adequately for such professional expertise. That requires continuing professional development – in subject knowledge, pedagogy, critical reflection on practice and classroom based research.

Moreover, the more experienced the teacher, the more they should determine the particular kind of professional development needed, as once conducted in teachers’ centres run by teachers or through the professional organisations.

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Beyond assessment levels: Reaching for new heights in primary education

Alison Peacock

Alison Peacock is Head teacher at The Wroxham Primary School, Hertfordshire, and Leader of the Cambridge Primary Review National Network. She is also a National Leader in Education and leads a School of Creativity.

Abstract: *This article challenges the assumption that ability is fixed and measurable. The author champions the view that national curriculum levels and targets should be removed and that progress should be redefined. She argues that teachers should be empowered to plan and teach through continual use of a repertoire of assessment techniques enacted within classrooms where a culture of trust and cognitive challenge is fostered free from ranking and fear. Practical examples of the approach to assessment used at the primary school where she is Head teacher are given to illustrate an alternative approach judged by Ofsted (2006, 2009) to be outstanding.*

Introduction

For too long we have obediently accepted the view that progress is easily measurable through tests and that intelligence is fixed. Consequently, the so-called “standards agenda” has been imposed upon the teaching profession as the deterministic pursuit of pushing children towards their presumed “potential”. If children are not making the expected progress relative to their peers, particularly in English and mathematics, there is an assumption that it is the teacher’s responsibility to force the child to the next rung of the ladder. The pressure for improved performance is felt not only by the child, but by their parents, their teacher, their school and their local authority. High stakes testing has led to pressure for measurable performance at the expense of learning and in order to define ability.

The problem with words such as “ability” and “potential” is they convey an assumption that each child has a pre-programmed capacity to learn. This in turn often leads to low aspiration and a paucity of

opportunity. The problem with the metaphor of learning as a “ladder” is that it assumes linear progression, rung by rung, most often associated with test performance. However, in real classrooms we know learning is anything other than linear; it is a vastly complex process that stops and starts, leaps and sleeps, is both restless and endless. To assume that learning can be neatly divided by evenly spaced rungs, or levels, is both naïve and limiting.

National Curriculum Levels and Target Setting

The ongoing consultation about the future national curriculum introduced the idea that levels are not sacrosanct:

“Currently schools use eight National Curriculum ‘levels’ to identify the level at which children are working in each subject Does this kind of reporting help you to understand how well your child is doing in school?” (Department for Education, 2011)

Primary schools in England are only statutorily required to report national curriculum levels to parents when their child reaches the end of KS1 (age seven) and the end of KS2 (age 11). The almost universal practice of giving children subdivided numerical targets with which to rank their

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performance against their peers has had a pernicious effect in many classrooms. A Year One child in a school I visited recently answered my questions about the wall display of laminated starfish (each with a child’s photograph on it) that were trying to reach “Target Island”. Children were moved towards the island depending on their performance in writing. I asked the little girl where her starfish was? “Down there it fell behind the radiator long time ago” she shyly confided, appearing relieved that no one had noticed.

Here is an excerpt from a study of a Year Five classroom:

“Shanhrul tries to make sense of the different levels he and his friend Houssain have achieved in a test despite the fact they work together and seem to be achieving

similarly in class. He needs to do quite a lot of work to make Houssain's lower mark okay:

Interviewer: *I don't know – what does it mean then? When you tell us. If I say to you “Houssain is 3a” what does that make you think?*

Shanhrul: *You're meant to get 4a and if you don't go fast – 3a – that means you're not that good but you are good. And if you don't go past 2a you're very, very ...you're bad (spits this last word out) excellently bad!*

Interviewer: *Does it make you a bad person?*

Shanhrul: *No, you don't work properly, you don't work hard*

Interviewer: *So does Houssain not work properly?*

Shanhrul: *No, he does – he is good – if you don't work properly you are bad and get a 2a in your test.” (Bibby, 2011)*

This kind of exchange illustrates the way in which test performance can so easily be equated with much wider judgements about the kind of person you are, your identity not just as a learner but as a human being.

“It is not testing which raises standards but good teaching”

The title of this section sums up the false pursuit of raising standards of attainment through testing. It is a quote from The Cambridge Primary Review, the most comprehensive study of English primary schools for 40 years (Alexander, 2009). Robin Alexander concludes that the current use of Key Stage 2 SATs “under-samples the curriculum and over-samples the population”. At present, in English schools, test results in English and mathematics are taken as a shorthand indicative judgement of each child's performance across the entire curriculum. The findings and policy recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review should inspire us to focus our energy on high quality teaching across the full range of subjects informed by relevant professional development and enquiry.

The positive effect of a classroom environment where children (and teachers) are not ranked is that the challenge to learn comes from within.

Learning without Limits

My classroom practice was researched as part of a study of nine primary and secondary teachers, from across the country, who taught without labelling children by ability (Hart *et al.*, 2004). This research found that each teacher believed in the transformative capacity of all their children. Our classrooms were underpinned by the core principles of trust, co-

agency and inclusion. Subsequently, as a Head teacher I applied the same transformative philosophy to leadership when I joined a school requiring special measures and led it to an outstanding Ofsted judgement within three years. I have written elsewhere about the process of moving the school out of the bottom set (Peacock, 2006). Parallels can be drawn between a “failing” school and a “failing” child. Both respond much better to an approach that assumes future success than to a fatalistic “sticking plaster” process of remediation leading to powerlessness and inertia.

An alternative approach

Working with children reminds us that progress in learning is never simply linear. At The Wroxham School we seek to know each child as an individual and to work in partnership with her/him to constantly provide rigorous opportunities for learning and assessment across the full range of a rich and varied curriculum. We do not label by ability in our school. We do not organise classrooms by sets or groups of hedgehogs and eagles. Ability focussed language such as “bright”, “gifted”, “slow”, “average”, “thick”, is never heard in our staffroom. Instead, we talk with our children about “real” challenges (rather than targets), about the skills they have, those they need to consolidate and those they need to develop in the immediate future.

This has now become a deeply embedded way of working in our school. Children do not rank themselves against each other because we do not talk about levels with children; parents do not ask about levels or SATs results and teachers are neither limited nor exhausted by pressures of external measurable performance indicators. This approach gives us the energy and space to concentrate on what really matters: providing an irresistible learning experience for every child and ensuring that each child experiences the necessary balance of success and cognitive challenge in all areas of the curriculum.

In order for a formative approach to assessment to be optimally effective there needs to be a culture of trust and shared dialogue within the classroom. Furthermore, this dialogue naturally focuses upon curriculum so knowledge transfer between different year group teachers occurs as a matter of course. Where this culture extends to the entire school, an exciting “can do” atmosphere pervades leading to the sense that almost anything is possible or within reach.

Choice of task

Instead of using ability groups to provide a range of differentiated activities we offer a range of tasks of varying complexity within lessons and our children rapidly learn to self assess and to choose a task accordingly. In such a trusting environment there is no shame in choosing to consolidate

learning by initially tackling a simple challenge and then moving on to something more complex. The positive effect of a classroom environment where children (and teachers) are not ranked is that the challenge to learn comes from within. If children appear demotivated we talk to them about why they are feeling that way. Again, this gives a clear signal that we are committed to working with the child to find out how we can help; rather than assuming a deficit approach to learning by the child.

Learning Review Days and Family Consultations

When children are used to talking about what they have learnt and know how to plan their next challenge it is an easy step to ask them to share their progress with their family. In Years Five and Six we hold meetings in my office during the Autumn and Spring terms which I attend together with the teacher, parents and the child. The crucial difference from the usual parents' meeting format is that the meeting is led by the child. In preparation for the meeting, each child produces a brief PowerPoint presentation illustrated with photographs from their class blog. The meeting begins with the child showing us their presentation using my desk computer and continues with everyone focussing discussion on how best to support future learning both at home and at school.

Similarly, in earlier year groups, the meeting centres on the child with comments made directly *to and from the child* instead of *about* them. This subtle but powerful shift has enabled every child to experience a sense of agency within the process, instead of judgement. This in turn has led to 100 per cent attendance at meetings by families who know they will be coming into school to engage in positive formative learning conversations without fear of being criticised. These meetings are characterised by the energy borne out of feeling in control and pride at achievements. It is my belief that every family wants the absolute best for their own child and it is this they want to be reassured of rather than labels and levels.

End of year reports written by the children

All children from Year One upwards in our school write their own reports electronically. The youngest children buddy with older children to complete the report format thereby enabling them to express their ideas comprehensively with the added benefit that both children have high quality time to reflect on the younger child's learning. The children's comments are then responded to directly by the class teacher. The example of a Year Four report below illustrates how the child's self assessment is built upon by the teacher:

English Progress

Successes

In English I have really enjoyed doing all the story writing and poems. I have also liked doing all the plays they were really fun with Mr B and Mrs M. We have done lots of diary entries and letters. And we have done informational books.

Your letters have been great, you have really remembered all of the different parts of the layout. I have enjoyed reading your diary entries over the year as you have really thought about how someone would feel in a certain situation. The work you did about evacuation was really good and it was obvious that you could empathise with the children and think about what it must have felt to have left your parents.

I think that you have tried really hard to get your planning for stories into a format that you feel comfortable with. When you find the method of planning you really like you will know and then it will make writing the story easier. You have some great ideas and you are now more able to convey them in your story, so that your reader feels engaged with setting and characters.

Challenges

I think that I should work on my hand writing and punctuation and paragraphs. And I need to improve on newspapers about the columns. I need to gather more brilliant words for poems. I think I am all right with the plays in English and more!!!

“I need to gather more brilliant words for poems”

What a great thing to say! I love your attitude to learning and I feel that you have really understood what we talked about in regard to trying to write in a more “grown up” style. I think you should dedicate part of your bedroom wall to a place for words! You could write them down, cut them out and stick them on a poster. Can you imagine what amazing poems you would write then?

Handwriting is important and it is great that you want to work on it, but remember, we are more interested in the content of your writing, we want you to be able to write amazing things that make the reader want to carry on reading.

Punctuation and paragraphs are easy, the only thing you need to remember is that reading books by lots of different authors is the way you learn about each of those areas. So, grab as many books as you can and get reading!

Gifted and talented?

In our school we refuse to label any child as gifted and talented. This is because we feel that the label itself is at best unhelpful and at worst sets a ceiling on future development. The work of Dweck on mindset is very revealing (Dweck, 2006). She discovered that when children receive process based feedback – e.g. “I can see that you employed a range of problem solving skills to that task” – they are encouraged to develop a growth mindset which inspires them to keep on attempting tasks of increasing complexity. Conversely, attainment based feedback e.g. “You are very clever, well done!” awards congratulation for innate ability, thereby unintentionally building a fixed mindset. The message communicated to the child in the second example implies that sooner or later their capability will reach a limit.

We do, however, recognise that some children are particularly excited to learn about different areas of the curriculum and already have a great deal of knowledge or expertise to share. Excellent teaching requires building on each child’s learning and allowing for flexibility without fear of moving into territory that has not been pre-planned. If we accept that learning is a life long process we should have no shame in seeking additional learning for ourselves when teaching a child whose knowledge is exceptional in a particular area.

How can children be involved meaningfully in assessing their learning in partnership with teachers?

From the earliest days in the Wroxham School children are involved in keeping records of their learning. Every class has a blog on the school website where they are invited to view photographs and videos of learning that has taken place during the week and to comment on it with their families. This also enables children to prepare for transition to their next class. Steven (Year One) told me that he used to go on the website every week with his mummy so that he could find out what he would be doing when he moved into his new class. We are only a one form entry school and this comment took me by surprise – surely the children knew what went on in our school? Of course, I am able to walk through every room every day and they are not, so an online blog provided a crucial insight for this little boy and gave him plenty to look forward to.

Some teachers give children time each day to complete a learning journal, others encourage reflection during activities such as circle time or provide meetings with learning mentors. Opportunities for instant feedback are provided through activities such as online spelling and mathematics programmes where opportunities to refine performance are provided by the computer without judgement.

Assessment network

Working in the way described above requires an approach to professional learning that continually asks questions and seeks new ways of understanding about what takes place in our classrooms.

This year we were granted funding by our local authority to develop our assessment skills in a cross-phase group. This enabled us to plan a programme of small scale action research focussing on assessment for learning in science. We have organised high quality, school based science education for teachers each term. These sessions have been followed up with joint planning meetings and opportunities to observe in each other's schools with a focus on assessment taking place "in the moment," observing how the assessment impacts upon learning.

This initiative is an example of a project where a group of schools working in partnership with the East of England Science Centre and the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge have planned a high quality sustained practical study of ways in which curriculum, pedagogy and assessment can be improved through a combination of research and practice. This model is the kind of future learning that may become a reality in many more schools under the proposed new freedoms offered by this government.

An alternative view of progress and achievement

We do not need to measure learning through testing. However, we do need our teachers to confidently engage in formative assessment and dialogue all day every day. Alexander asserts that currently "in England the assessment tail wags the curriculum dog" (Alexander, 2009). The curriculum has become narrowed towards the end of Key Stage 2 because of the pressures of testing and the associated accountability and league tables. This article has set out to illustrate that it is not tests and levels that ensure progress in learning, it is high quality teaching that makes the difference. We need more school leaders to courageously champion classrooms that build a culture of trust and cognitive challenge in an environment free of ranking and fear.

Alison Peacock's transformative leadership of her school is the subject of a book *Creating Learning Without Limits* (2011, forthcoming)

Join the Cambridge Primary Review Network at www.primaryreview.org.uk or follow us on Twitter @CPRnet

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Distorting the process of learning to read: The “light touch” phonics test for six year olds

Abstract: *In this article Henrietta Dombey discusses the implications of introducing a phonics test for six year olds. She argues that focusing on the teaching of reading as primarily a matter of simple phonic rules is inadequate for the complexity of English language spelling. It threatens children’s enjoyment of reading and their ability to engage with a text. Teaching reading effectively requires a range of word recognition strategies and a balanced attention to words and meaning.*

Speaking at a high school in Washington earlier this year, Barack Obama said:

“One thing I never want to see happen is schools that are just teaching the test because then you’re not learning about the world, you’re not learning about different cultures, you’re not learning about science, you’re not learning about math . . . All you’re learning about is how to fill out a little bubble on the exam and little tricks that you need to do in order to take a test and that’s not going to make education interesting. And young people do well in stuff they’re interested in. They’re not going to do so well if it’s boring.” (Obama, 2011)

The logistics of publishing mean that this article was written when the introduction of the phonics test for six year olds in England had been announced, but its implementation was still a month away. However, what we know about both testing and also learning and teaching reading provides a strong indication of the likely effects of this high-handed act.

And high-handed it certainly is. Announced when the Libyan escapade and the budget crisis were conveniently dominating headlines and public attention, the government’s decision to implement its proposal to introduce a “light touch phonic check” for six year olds in the face of

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massive opposition from the profession demonstrates a determination to see the teaching of reading as a straightforward matter and education professionals as self-serving incompetents. As usual, the issues are more complex than government action recognises.

International ranking

It is true that our ten year olds have been sliding down the international scale on the PIRLS reading tests (Twist *et al.*, 2003, 2007). The most recent international figures (from tests carried out in 2006) show England's ten-year-olds in 15th place out of 41 countries on a test of reading competence, down from 3rd out of 35 five years earlier. Although it scores significantly above the international mean, and higher than Austria and France, England is now out-performed by Russia, Singapore, Italy and many others. The PIRLS assessment process is also concerned with children's attitude to reading. In 2006 England had dropped to 24th position on the attitude scale: only 40 per cent of our children had a positive attitude to reading, compared to 64 per cent for Italy. So we do have a problem.

Learning to read English

It is not easy to learn to read English. Our complex spelling system means that, in the early stages of learning to read, children have much more to learn than children do in Italy or Finland (always near the top on any international literacy test in which they take part). Spoken English words have a more complex structure than the words of Italian, Finnish or Spanish: we clump two or three consonants together without any intervening vowels in words such as *stand*, *crank*, *splash* and *drink*, in marked contrast to the simpler consonants of words such as *vino* or *tavola*. English also has more vowel sounds than most other European languages.

This complex phonology is further complicated by an opaque orthography – a complex spelling system. Some of our numerous vowel sounds can be spelled in as many as seven ways, as is the unstressed vowel in *station*, *polite*, *career*, *decision*, *division*, *persist*, *table*, *figure*. To multiply this complexity still further, some letters or letter combinations represent five or more different phonemes, such as the 'a' in *mat*, *mall*, *make*, *mast* and *many*). Many of our spellings represent meaning rather than sound, such as *sign*, where spelling clearly links the word to *signature*, but does not so clearly tell the reader how to pronounce it.

The silent letters of words such as *lamb* and *knight* are reminders of how our ancestors spoke and of the fact that our spelling is more conservative than our pronunciation. We are the inheritors of a complex linguistic history in which all this variation reminds us of where our words have come from and how our language has changed. It should make us very wary of treating the teaching of reading as primarily a matter of simple

phonic rules. English spelling does not operate on a 1:1 relationship between phonemes and letters.

So learning to read in English adds up to much more than learning phonics. Children need to learn larger rhyme patterns since these are often, as in words such as *ball* and *bright*, a more reliable guide to how a word is pronounced than the straightforward sequence of letters. They also need to learn many words as “one-offs” or sight words, especially those used most frequently, such as *one*, *two* and *many*. A simple phonic approach will not deliver the pronunciation of words such as *move* or *love*, *work* or *ache*. Complementary word identification strategies are essential for effective word recognition.

If they are to recognise such words fluently, children need to make use of context cues. Context can resolve many of the problems posed by English spelling. We all use context to sort out those words with the same spelling that, in different sentences, deliver a very different pronunciation and sometimes a quite different meaning. We need it to disambiguate the noun *lead* from the verb *lead* and the noun *house* from the verb *house*.

Focusing all teaching on the correspondence between individual phonemes and the letters that represent them is not only inadequate for a language with such complex spelling patterns: it is also counterproductive and can turn into a blind alley.

So teaching reading effectively requires a range of word recognition strategies and a balanced attention to words and meaning. This, it should be stressed, is a properly scientific view of reading, based on decades of investigation into how children go about the task. In addition, studies of the brain show that reading is a complex, multi-stranded processing activity from the early stages (Wolf, 2008). To make this complex process familiar, children need to read plenty of text. They need to engage with the written word, to make satisfying meaning from it, so that the act of word identification becomes almost automatic and the focus is on the meaning made between the child and the text.

This is why children’s attitudes to reading are crucially important. It’s a virtuous circle: children who like reading do more of it and so get better at it. What should worry us most about our ten-year-olds’ ranking on PIRLS is that our children like reading much less than children in most of the other developed countries involved. This is the context in which the “light touch phonic check” is being introduced.

What the test involves

The test is an oral one, individually administered to every child in the year group. It is not in any sense a test of comprehension or even of decoding running text. Instead it presents children with three sets of items to pronounce:

- phonically regular ordinary words, such as *cat, dog, gate, sand*
- digraphs, such as *sh, th, ea*
- phonically regular nonsense words, or ‘non-words’, such as *mip, fack, glimp*.

Children are tested on their use of phonic knowledge to identify words and non-words in isolation. There is no reading of connected text.

The Government’s stated intention in introducing this test is to provide a “progress check” to help identify children needing extra support. They claim that “a light-touch phonics-based check will provide reassurance that children in Year One have learned this important skill” and “Parents want to know how their children are reading and this will tell them.” These claims should not be taken at face value.

What such a test cannot do

The test will not show which children are well on the road to learning to read and which are experiencing real problems. It has been well known for some years that decoding tests do not tell you about children’s progress as readers. This is for two reasons. Firstly, children who perform poorly on such tests may perform much better on real text (Walmsley, 1978-1979: 597). Children learning to like reading expect the text to make sense. They may well be disconcerted by a string of unconnected words and even more so by letter strings that do not produce recognisable words.

Conversely, success on digraphs, isolated words and non-words is not a predictor of reading for meaning. Children who do well on such a test may fail to apply the phonics rules they have learned when they encounter words in running text. They may also stumble with words such as *love* or *any*, or fail to recognise even the literal meaning of what they have just pronounced. In the old phrase, such children may merely “bark at print”. A phonics check will not supply sufficient information to either the school or the child’s family about individual children’s progress towards becoming readers. There will be both “false positives” – children identified by the test as poor readers who are actually well on the road – and “false negatives” children identified as making sound progress who actually dislike reading and are confused by running text.

The proposed test does not reflect what readers do in real life: effective young readers of English do not process every new word one letter at a time. As both Brown and Deavers (1999) and Goswami (2010) have shown us, children respond to the complexities of English spelling by moving between different sizes of unit. Sometimes they make use of their phonic knowledge by working words out letter by letter, an approach that works well with words such as *cat* and *dog*. Sometimes they look at familiar groups of letters, such as “all”, to identify the unfamiliar *call* from

the familiar *ball*. As they become more proficient, showing effective use of analogy, sometimes they look at whole word patterns, such as *little* or *bottle*, generalising from these to identify words such as *raffle* or *bobble*. And effective readers also make constructive use of the context to identify words that make sense.

We have much to learn from the United States. The DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) battery of tests is enormously popular with educational administrators and has been in use for over ten years. Like the phonics test for English six year olds, it is purported to help teachers identify those children in need of help. It is claimed that there is a high correlation between the various sub-tests and that they provide accurate predictions of children's success in making sense of what they read (Buck and Torgesen, 2003). But close research tells a different story.

There is a real danger that using isolated phonic skills as the sole index of progress will lead to children failing to attend to the meaning of what they are reading.

Scores on the sub-tests, on phonemic segmentation of words and non-words, on fluency in decoding both words and non-words do not correlate highly with each other (Manning *et al.*, 2006). Even the sub-test on Oral Reading Fluency, the only one carried out with running text, predicts only 36 per cent of children's scores on an established test of comprehension. Tossing a coin would yield better predictions (Seay, 2006).

The likely effects of this test

A shift in classroom focus

So what about the effect of introducing a test that deals with only part of what is involved in learning to read English? A compulsory test taken by all children will surely become a "high stakes" test. There will be pressure on schools to achieve high pass rates. Understandably, this is likely to steer many teachers to teach to the test. If they are judged on their students' scores on this test, only a very self-confident minority of teachers will have the courage to resist teaching to the test. In many classrooms, the teaching of reading will be skewed towards phonics: the focus will be on the accurate decoding of regularly spelled words – and even non-words – at the expense of the other word identification strategies effective young readers use.

Over-emphasis on a single strategy will inevitably lead to imbalance, with potentially disastrous effects on children with reading problems,

children who are disadvantaged in terms of access to books and stories and the growing proportion of economically disadvantaged children in the UK.

But even those without apparent reading problems will suffer, as lists of words and non-words supplant meaningful texts and the shared reading of Big Books is replaced by yet more lists. No doubt many teachers will contrive to make their lessons interesting and enjoyable. But will the children be learning to read? Will such lessons make them more or less likely to choose to read in their own time?

There is a real danger that using isolated phonic skills as the sole index of progress will lead to children failing to attend to the meaning of what they are reading (Scanlon *et al.*, 2008: 18). Both the reward and the central purpose of reading are to make sense of text. So children need to be engaged in the texts they read if they are to make real progress (Cunningham and Stanovitch, 1998).

The irony is that the phonics test, ostensibly introduced to push up our children's attainment in reading, could well lead to a drop in reading scores. Focusing on one strategy at the expense of others and on accuracy at the expense of meaning and pleasure is very likely to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs – the idea that reading is interesting, that texts have important and entertaining things to say.

Less time for teaching

This test has to be administered to each child in the cohort, individually. It is not a task that teachers can easily hand over to others. So teachers will have to spend teaching time not just in administering the test, one by one, to all the children in the year group, but also in keeping the test secure until the day of its administration, in marking the children's responses and in submitting these marks to the test agency. In addition they will have to send data on the test scores to government agencies and also read government reports on the test and explore their implications for their schools.

Then the children whose scores were low on the first test will need to be re-tested after "catch-up" tuition. Time taken by these chores will be time taken away from preparation and/or teaching children. And time spent on the test will, for both children and adults, reinforce the notion that it represents something crucially important – more important than any other aspect of learning to read. Yet teachers may well also feel a sneaking suspicion that for most of their children the test is a waste of time, as they are already making good progress in learning to read.

Less money for education

A test like this is not cheap to construct or administer (Brooks, 2010). To test all the 600,000 or so children in the year group involves a complex test-

construction process, which includes devising initial versions of the test, piloting these and calculating “pass marks” on the basis of the pilots, before the test is finalised. It also means constructing different, but demonstrably equivalent, versions of the test, so that, to avoid “cheating”, those absent in the week most children take it can be given a similar but not identical version. The company must then receive the results from schools and prepare analytic reports on these.

Non-word tests are particularly difficult to construct: it is not easy to compile lists of non-words that are equally strange to all children. Doing so requires close analysis of the non-words’ similarity to real words – not just in English, but also in the many languages our six year olds speak at home. The non-words then have to be exhaustively tested with real children. All this adds up to more expense and less money available for other educational purposes.

Failure to take account of these concerns in the process of test construction could seriously compromise any shred of validity the test might have.

And what can we learn from the imposition of DIBELS on school systems in the US? From a study of DIBELS in Alabama, Susan Seay draws the following conclusions (Seay, 2006). Children are misplaced: thoughtful, effective readers are identified as in need of extra help in phonics. Children who have difficulty in making sense of the words they

Every year the test will need to be refined, and the results analysed. It will be a nice little earner for the test agency. And politicians will have sets of figures to brandish. But for teachers and children there will be no real benefits.

pronounce are left to flounder. All children learn to take fewer risks. The “extra reading” groups are, as usual, largely populated by boys, children on free school meals and children from minority groups. Children allocated to these groups tend to stay in them, year after year, as they go over and over the same phonic ground and fall further and further behind their classmates in other subjects. Perhaps most tellingly, Seay found no significant change in state scores on the NAEP comprehension test between 1992, before the implementation of DIBELS, and 2005.

Benefits?

There will be some benefits. For the company constructing the tests and analysing the results there will be real benefits. Every year the test will

need to be refined, and the results analysed. It will be a nice little earner for the test agency. And politicians will have sets of figures to brandish.

But for teachers and children there will be no real benefits. The test will provide no information about how effectively children identify words with less regular spelling, how well they recognise regular words in running text, how they make sense of what they read, or their level of engagement in reading. All these aspects of learning to read matter: children who fail to make progress in these areas cannot be said to be learning to read.

Concluding thoughts

Of course phonic knowledge is essential to learning to read English. We have an alphabetic spelling system in which the letters provide much useful information. In every written word, even such an irregular word as *one*, there is information about at least one phoneme of its spoken counterpart. But there is other information too, that is not phonic, not about the representation of individual phonemes. Our spelling system also tells us about larger sound units and about meaning.

And learning to read is more than learning to bark at print. Children need to learn to relate what they read to their own experience, to enjoy the patterning of a story, to construct images in their heads, to build and refine expectations. To neglect what we have learned in decades of research into the process of learning to read is an act of supreme arrogance. It is a serious loss for the children who have to endure this test and the skewed curriculum it engenders. It is a serious setback for the teachers who have, in the past few years, profited from an increasing degree of autonomy in the teaching of literacy within the Primary National Strategy.

There will be some strong-minded individuals and courageous schools that resist the test, perhaps even refuse to administer it. This should not mean that they neglect to identify children with reading problems. We need to support such bold teachers and help them to use appropriate professional knowledge to identify those children not making satisfactory progress by the middle of Year 1. This means checking not just on their phonic knowledge, but on the flexibility of their approaches to word identification, on their use of phonic knowledge in running text, on the extent to which they make sense of what they read and on their readiness to go to books for information or pleasure.

Once those making slower progress are identified, we need to support teachers in providing appropriately balanced help for struggling readers. This means attention to engagement and the building of meaning, as well as to word identification, and it also means bringing the two together, so that the process of word identification is set within the context of reading for meaning.

Then we need to help politicians and the wider public recognise that tests should reflect the processes they are purported to assess and that teachers need support in the demanding enterprise of enabling children to experience the power of the written word, on paper and on screen, to inform and entertain, to enlarge their understanding and increase their control over the worlds in which they live. This test is likely to hamper rather than enhance this endeavour.

Obama's words have lessons for us in England too. England's six year olds may not have to learn about how to fill out (or in) little bubbles quite yet. But this test is certainly not going to make education interesting for them. We should never forget that "young people do well in stuff they're interested in. They're not going to do so well if it's boring."

At a time of severe budget cuts the introduction of this test should be seen not only as educationally counter-productive, but also as an act of inexcusable profligacy.

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Empowering teachers, empowering learners

Abstract: *This article examines the education system in Wales post SATs and how it has empowered teachers to teach children without the threat of “teaching to the test”. It analyses methodology used within classrooms in Wales and shows how formative and qualitative assessment works effectively in practice.*

“Please Miss what’s an ab?”

Are you confused by the question? Well, no more than the seven year old who asked it. To put this in context, I was asked this question by one of my Year 3 children in the late seventies. I taught in a three form entry primary school at that time. The child asked this question under test conditions. The actual question was part of a mental arithmetic test devised by a colleague for all children within that year group on the insistence of the Head teacher. To clarify, the children were asked to “draw a line a to b 8 cms long”. The child didn’t know what was required of him because he didn’t understand the terminology – obviously not because he hadn’t been prepared for the test. In other words my teaching style differed from the teacher who had written the test. I hasten to add here he was one of the brightest in the class who had a joy and love of learning. Test conditions meant that I couldn’t explain what was required of him and his hurt look remains with me today.

This is the effect that formal testing has upon our children – as teachers we spend hours of precious teaching and learning time preparing children for tests because we know that if we don’t our data will not look good and we will inevitably fail the next inspection. There is also the inherent feeling of “wanting our children to do well”. Now that Wales is

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free of SATs I look back and compare the way we are now with the way we were then. I remember the build up of tension in the summer term amongst teachers, children and parents and realise that it was very little different from my own horrendous experience as an 11-year-old having to go through the horrors of the scholarship tests of the sixties. I was one of the lucky ones who passed but some of my fellow class mates who didn't – now well into their fifties – still recall the disappointment and feeling of abject failure they experienced at that time.

This same failure was felt by children in the Year 6 classes in my school when they didn't achieve level 5s even although we treated the whole process with as much sensitivity as possible, incidentally begging parents not to offer them bribes of X boxes if they did well. I saw children bringing "lucky teddies" and "lucky mascots" with them to sit on their tables to "give them confidence". Even our six-year-olds didn't escape as teachers tried to ignore their questions, for fear of tainting the process of "the test". Often did I see teachers in tears in the staffroom as they told stories of

having to tell the children to be quiet because they couldn't help them and describing the fear on the children's faces as they tried hard to sit still and concentrate for lengths of time which were totally unnatural to them.

As teachers we spend hours of precious teaching and learning time preparing children for tests because we know that if we don't our data will not look good and we will inevitably fail the next inspection.

The Story now in Wales

As to the story in Wales, it is now a SATs free country thankfully because of the foresight of a Welsh Education Minister who came from a teaching background. Jane Davidson, commissioned the Daugherty Report in 2004 in response to the pressure from NUT Cymru and others.

In her cabinet statement she qualified that through this wide ranging review the findings clearly showed that "the current statutory tests....put teachers under pressure to teach to the tests....narrow the scope of the curriculumsubsequently have a negative effect on teaching and learning" (Davidson, 2004).

The evidence given to that review was considerable in that it involved parents, pupils themselves, teachers and academic experts from all over the world and at home. On 25th January 2005 the Minister announced that there had been over 400 responses, the highest ever given to a review.

The final report of the Daugherty Assessment Review group stated: "It is clear that test preparation and practice, a narrowing of curriculum coverage and styles of learning that contribute to good test performance

have become prominent features of the Year 6 experience of pupils in many schools.” (Daugherty Assessment Group, 2004, para. 3.4)

Professor Daugherty’s research is supported later on in 2007-08 by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam from King’s College, London. They found that the national tests for 11-year-olds in England are based on incorrect assumptions and worthless as a measure of educational progress. They went on in their evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee in 2008 to state that it is practically impossible to test more than a limited sample of a candidate’s abilities (Black and Wiliam, 2008: Ev203).

I must mention here that SATs at Key Stage 1 were abolished in 2001, much to the relief of teachers in Wales who were frustrated by the amount of work involved not only in marking but in moderating within cluster groups. This was apart from the interruptions to children’s learning time and the constant tensions of placing six-year-olds under test conditions.

A whole new approach

Eventually the change came quickly and both Key Stages 2 and 3 tests were initially made optional following the review. New teacher assessment moderation arrangements were put in place and a whole new approach to the way children are taught and assessed began. It involved Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Assessment of Learning (AOL). Transition between Y6 and Y7 became a key feature as clusters set up working parties to engage in moderation arrangements across the two phases. It has ensured that all schools are now making effective use of data which in turn informs teaching and learning policies to drive up standards.

Schools in Wales have embraced both the Thinking Skills and AfL methodology and philosophy (theory) and evidence (practice) has shown that learners are motivated and perform better. The 2008 National Curriculum KS2 orders are all about developing a learner-centred, skills-focused curriculum. This creates a continuum of learning from the recently introduced pioneering Foundation Phase (based on the philosophies of early education in Scandinavia and Reggio Emilia) through to Key Stage 2 and beyond into the comprehensive school stage. The focus will be on developing children’s communication, number, ICT, problem solving and decision making skills – ultimately giving them the opportunity to take responsibility for improving their own and others’ learning.

Vygotskii in the 21st Century

To many experienced teachers this methodology is nothing new. For those trained in colleges who used a Plowden philosophy and taught the research findings of some of the greatest psychologists such as Vygotskii it is as natural as breathing. Vygotskii’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was a concept which he used to argue against the use of tests which were

knowledge-based and academic in order to score a child's intelligence. His argument against testing is clear as he stated that it is important to examine a child's ability to problem solve independently and compare that to their ability to problem solve assisted by an adult (Vygotskii, 1896-1934: 86).

Today we call ZPD by a different name – scaffolding. This is defined by Balaban (1995: 52): "Scaffolding refers to the way the adult guides the child's learning via focused questions and positive interactions." In addition to the teacher working with the child scaffolding can be a good tool for peer mentoring with the assistance and support slowly being removed as the child becomes more confident and competent.

The skills-based learning carried out in schools in Wales shows a clear link to Vygotskii's theory and this can be further expanded to the theory of Tharp and Gallimore who spoke of examining competence and skills. The skill oriented zones they refer to are cultural, individual and skill-oriented.

How does it work in practice?

The strategies of thinking skills and AfL reinforce each other as they overlap considerably with the process of learning. Classrooms have become sensitive communities where all children are confident in the knowledge

that they can make mistakes. This actually helps the learner within an inherent process of reflection and self-evaluation. This is therefore progress along the continuum of learning.

It is important to note that children discuss their learning and how they have learned

with AfL strategies being employed to inform each step of the journey. In addition, assessment takes on two guises – informal daily observation as learning happens and "planned for" formal assessments. The three main areas are:

Questioning – the driving force of developing thinking and AfL – questions are open-ended, leading to discussion and drive teaching and learning.

Quality of feedback – good quality dialogue is critical. Written feedback helps the children focus on the issues of learning informing the next steps and is linked to learning objectives and success criteria.

Peer and self assessment – children will achieve the learning intentions

Pupils must feel safe to select their own resources to support their learning, even using each other as a resource.

when they understand what they are, and can assess their own work and the work of others. They become active in their learning, which in turn informs future teaching.

Teaching strategies employed

The following teaching strategies are very successful:

Questioning – no hands up, group responses from collaboration, asking the BIG questions.

Quality of feedback – instant feedback, allow time, two stars and a wish.

Self and peer assessment – thumbs up/down, self marking and peer marking to success criteria.

The elements that underpin AfL are:

- good quality pupil-teacher, pupil-pupil interaction;
- active, responsible pupils; and
- collaboration between learners.

To be successful, learners need to understand themselves as learners by posing the following questions:

- where am I?
- where do I need to be?
- what do I have to do to get there?

Children are then able to discuss their learning by using these questions:

- what helps us to learn?
- what stops us learning?
- what do successful learners do?

The Supportive Classroom

The classroom environment is very important. Pupils must feel safe to select their own resources to support their learning, even using each other as a resource. Learning walls are a good resource which are developed from discussions with the children. Titles such as “Our learning goal for the week is ...” are used and the children select one goal as a focus for a specified period of time. The wall is always accessible so that they can move themselves along it when they achieve their set goal.

Question boards not only pose questions but are prompts or stems with the children raising questions from their learning which they post for future research and enquiry.

Displays also support learning and a good example of this in every classroom is “WALT” (We Are Learning To) and “WILF” (What I’m Looking For) boards. These boards must be accessible, visible and referred to constantly as they outline the learning objectives and necessary outcomes on which children’s learning will be assessed. Finally, children decide which displays they need in order to support their learning.

Evidence of Success

As with all changes to the curriculum it is important that time is given to embed new approaches and that evaluation is honest and almost forensic. AfL strategies are for the long term and should be judged through a child’s school life. In 2008, DCELLS (the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills) commissioned an evaluation of the programme to review its implementation and impact upon children’s learning. This review found an “overwhelming support” for the programme, evidence that learners were more engaged, with greater understanding of learning approaches and evidence, even within a short period of time, of improvements in a range of areas.

The Future?

Unfortunately, the future is uncertain now in Wales. The Education and Skills Minister has already begun to change the course of education. In a speech to an invited audience on 2 February 2011 entitled “Teaching makes a difference” (Andrews, 2011) he criticised standards across the education sector. This was his response to the recently published PISA results where Wales ranked low in the named OECD countries. The reaction from education professionals across the country has been mixed.

As for the NUT, the official response is one of great disappointment as most of the criticisms in the speech are unfair and do not look at the bigger picture. For example, the success of Finland, ranking high in the PISA league table. The stark comparison to Wales is that our Finnish colleagues, whose government trusts schools and teachers, are highly trained, highly regarded by their society and have freedom to plan a curriculum which reflects local concerns. In addition, the funding for Finnish schools is high with buildings which are fit for purpose and resources of very good quality.

The speech is significant for its twenty points of action, one of them being the introduction of national reading tests which, he stated, will be “consistent across Wales and will be designed to ensure that far fewer pupils are falling behind their designated reading age” (Andrews, 2011).

As to the secondary sector, children will be expected to sit the PISA assessments at age 15 and to integrate them into school assessments.

It is interesting to note here in response to these statements that the Daugherty Review of 2004 stated: “Inter-country monitoring would be

achieved by using a sample of attainments linked to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)". The report also noted the importance of developing formative assessment practices (Daugherty Assessment Group, 2004).

The NUT's official response raises concerns that we will now return to preparing pupils for the tests and that answering PISA questions will do very little to raise standards. This is a retrograde step that will again be tested in time.

I must emphasise however, that there is no mention of returning to the dreaded SATs for which the profession is thankful. A new government is now in place in Wales and we wonder what the future will bring.

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Voicing concerns, crafting solutions: Unions in the age of teacher bashing

Abstract: *Teachers, and their unions, are dedicated to improving all schools. Although often bashed as anti-reform, in truth they are only against so-called “reforms” with poor track records. A recent example would be underfunding a neighbourhood school with 3,000 high-needs students while opening a charter school’ in the same building for 300 new students, despite research showing the charter is not likely to be better. To bring about meaningful changes that support better teaching and more learning, teachers must have a voice. Through collaboration, collective bargaining becomes a means of enhancing the profession of teaching and crafting effective school improvement plans.*

“**D**emocracy in education; education for democracy” has been the motto of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) since its earliest days. What “democracy in education” means to me is that everyone involved—from students to teachers, from parents to administrators, from local employers to national politicians—should have a voice in determining the nature and operation of public schools. What “education for democracy” means to me is that all those involved will use their voices responsibly, that we have a shared goal of preparing all children to be full participants in our democracy and in the global community. Through collaboration, we will listen to all voices, and we will prepare all children to be responsible and productive citizens.

Sounds great, doesn't it?

The problem is, teachers—and their unions—have a tough time finding partners who are truly interested in collaboration and the hard work it requires. Few leaders, be they in business or politics, want teachers

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to have a voice. Many want to hold teachers accountable, without holding themselves accountable for providing adequate resources to *all* schools. Many want to eliminate due process and collective bargaining without eliminating the poor working conditions that make due process and collective bargaining so essential (Sawchuk, 2011). Many want to highlight the good work that some charter schools' are doing, without also highlighting either the great work that thousands of regular public schools are doing, or the average-to-poor work that most charters are doing (Gleason *et al.*, 2010; Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009).

Charters are a fascinating window on how the unwillingness of many leaders to engage in collaboration and compromise is preventing our public schools from improving. The idea for charters emanated from my mentor, the late Albert Shanker (who was president of the AFT from 1974 to 1997). In a speech at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, in 1988, Shanker called for teachers who believe they can do a better job to be able to apply for charters to start their own schools. These schools would be (1) held to high standards, (2) closed if they did not succeed, and (3) if they did succeed, responsible for helping other schools adopt their

effective practices. A few such schools have been created.

But by and large, the 20-year history of charter schools is one of conservative critics using the mantra of parental choice to avoid the massive investments in poor communities that are essential to closing the achievement gap.²

The problem is, teachers—and their unions—have a tough time finding partners who are truly interested in collaboration and the hard work it requires.

Blaming teachers is the easy way out—and scapegoating their unions is even easier. But parental choice just hasn't resulted in better schools, as even some staunch supporters of charters have recently admitted (Finn, 2010; Ryan, 2011). To be clear, the AFT is not anti-charters. While president of New York City's United Federation of Teachers, I helped start three charter schools, and the AFT represents teachers in 150 charter schools. I'm still enamoured of Shanker's concept of charter schools—but that does not prevent me from taking an honest look at the research. If charters have proven anything, it's that what matters to a good education is *not* the school's management structure—what matters are well-qualified and well-supported teachers with ample opportunities to participate in education policy making, a rich and rigorous curriculum, parental involvement, and wraparound services tailored to the students' needs (Ravitch, 2010). Simply put, great charter schools and great regular public

schools look a lot alike. So, for the most part, we know what works, and the primary barrier to widespread implementation is a stubborn unwillingness to collaborate with the professionals who work with the students every day.

Today, teachers and their unions are being attacked even by their long-time friends. Liberal “reformers” have adopted much of the conservative education platform—such as favouring opening charters over improving neighbourhood schools, and favouring firing teachers over implementing research-based strategies. Instead of seeing that teachers and their unions have been for *meaningful* reforms, they have decided that we are against *all* reforms.

The current craze to evaluate, pay, and fire teachers using measures of value added (a complex means of determining how much growth in student test scores is likely to be due to the school and/or teacher) is a good example. We are painted as being against value added. But we are not. We are against using value added irresponsibly—like publishing teachers’ value-added ratings in newspapers without any context to explain to the public the many, many ways in which those ratings are flawed (Harris, 2011). And we are against using value added alone. At best, value added is a *rough estimate* of a teacher’s performance. Therefore, we believe it should be just one part of teacher evaluation. What could be another part? How about peer assistance and review (PAR)? Negotiated almost 30 years ago by the AFT local³ in Toledo, Ohio, PAR is an intensive professional development programme in which expert teachers invest huge amounts of time in mentoring and evaluating both new teachers and struggling experienced teachers (Goldstein, 2008). This is a programme with an excellent track record. It makes teachers responsible for their profession, weeds out ineffective teachers at a much higher rate than principals’ evaluations, and greatly accelerates the learning of new teachers. Many AFT locals have advocated for such programmes, but they are almost always rebuffed. Without support from political and business leaders, it is all but impossible to overcome district leaders’ unwillingness to give up some of their turf—even though almost everyone admits that districts typically do a terrible job of supporting and evaluating teachers. Teachers asking for help in improving their practice, and teachers’ unions asking for responsibility in ensuring teaching quality, just don’t fit the story line.

Whenever we do have a chance to collaborate, we are willing to do the hard work of devising the best possible plan, and we have seen some fantastic results. The fact is, schools that are good for teachers are also good for students: teachers’ working conditions *are* students’ learning conditions. So it should come as no surprise that listening to and collaborating with teachers leads to better teaching, school improvement, and higher student achievement.

To further our work in helping our members take control of their profession, the AFT created an Innovation Fund in 2009. We could just fund our own locals, but we don't. We require our locals to find district and community leaders who are real partners, and to secure commitments to making the improvement efforts stick. Among the 15 projects we've funded so far, let me highlight two—one related to charter schools and one related to teacher evaluation.

In Minnesota, an AFT affiliate is seeking to become a charter school *authoriser*. An Innovation Fund grant to the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers has allowed the union to create a non-profit organisation, assemble a board of advisers, and apply to the state for authoriser status. Even though they only had a few months to prepare, they almost won charter authoriser status from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) last autumn. MDE strongly encouraged them to apply again, so they expect to attain authoriser status this year. Called the Minnesota Guild of Public Charter Schools, this soon-to-be authoriser is focused on reclaiming the promise of charter schools as laboratories of innovation—not public school competitors. Currently, the Guild is focused on how their future charter school employees should be represented, and are considering something similar to the Chicago Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff. Ultimately, becoming a charter authoriser will allow the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers to better meet the needs of both teachers and students. As they wrote in their most recent Innovation Fund progress report, teachers are seeking “options that will allow them professional autonomy without sacrificing professional unity. They see a system of schools (rather than a school system) run by unionised teachers as something more sustainable and better able to meet the needs of students, families, and the teaching profession.”

The New York State United Teachers and the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, along with many of their local affiliates, are sharing an Innovation Fund grant to establish a multi-district approach to more rigorous and meaningful teacher development and evaluation process. They are exploring ways to combine multiple forms of evaluation—including teaching standards, student learning data, teachers' content knowledge, classroom observation, and other factors—to provide a well-rounded picture of a teacher's practice. Designing an evaluation system that continually helps teachers to improve is complicated, but they are off to a great start. Last year, the AFT won an Investing in Innovation grant from the U.S. Department of Education based on this powerful collaboration, which (among other things) will help train evaluators and administrators to use the new system they are developing. In addition, these efforts were a major factor in both Rhode Island and New York winning Race to the Top grants, also from the U.S.

Department of Education.

Although grant money does lure partners, the Innovation Fund will never be an infinite pot of money, capable of reaching all of the schools and students that need help. To reach as many schools as possible, we're getting better and better at using collective bargaining to shape school reform efforts. Traditionally, collective bargaining has been limited and adversarial—but it doesn't need to be. It can be a process in which teachers and administrators work out the details of what reforms to implement and how to make them successful. We've increasingly been able to use collective bargaining as a creative tool to codify collaborative approaches to improvement: Baltimore, Maryland; Cleveland, Ohio; New Haven, Connecticut; Douglas County, Colorado; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, are just a handful of the places where we've recently made meaningful breakthroughs at the negotiating table. In Baltimore, for instance, we have

This reform churn stands in stark contrast to what the highest-performing nations—like Finland and Singapore—have been doing for the past 30 years.

negotiated new teacher development, evaluation, and compensation systems. The new systems measure the ways teachers contribute to their schools, improve their practice, and increase student achievement; these systems give teachers more control over how, and how fast, they progress in their profession.

Codifying school reform through collective bargaining is especially smart because it counteracts one of the most damaging aspects of reform itself: the constant churn of programs and policies. Each new superintendent (Hess, 1999) and each new politician wants to make his or her own mark, so press conferences are called, and new programs are simultaneously announced and declared successful. Soon (sometimes in just a few months), newer and even more successful programs are announced. Nothing takes root, educators grow weary, and students suffer. Collectively bargaining reforms stops this endless churn. Codifying reforms increases everyone's commitment to making them work and provides a clear vehicle for revising and improving on those ideas instead of tossing them out. In addition, new ideas must be vetted at the negotiating table. Some will decry the negotiation as slowing down the reform, but we have to get it right. From charters to testing to prescriptive pedagogies, we've been churning through one reform fad after another for more than 30 years—and we have precious little to show for it.

This reform churn stands in stark contrast to what the highest-

performing nations—like Finland and Singapore—have been doing for the past 30 years. Both started far behind the United States, and both are now far ahead. Both honour and invest in teachers by paying for teacher training, and ensuring that the training is intensive, extensive, and of the highest quality. Both have written rigorous academic standards and developed excellent instructional materials. Both trust in teacher expertise, listen to their teachers' ideas, and encourage teachers to creatively bring their students to mastery. Both fund schools equitably. Both have engaged in sustained, incremental reforms over the past 30 years (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Since its inception in 1916, the AFT has been helping teachers gain control over their profession. While our early fights were for basic rights—such as schools not being able to dictate that female teachers “not receive gentleman callers more than three times a week”—our current fights for a seat at the policymakers' table, research-based reforms, and shared accountability are no less important. Far too many of today's so-called reforms—like calling for charter schools while bashing the dedicated teachers who serve our most disadvantaged students in under-resourced neighbourhood schools—are fundamentally flawed: they are about rescuing a few students, not about solving the underlying problems so that no one needs to be rescued. The members of the AFT care about all students, not just some of them.

Our narrow-minded critics propose shutting down schools because they are more concerned about making the news than about what's best for kids and communities. But, as education historian Diane Ravitch has pointed out:

“Our schools will not improve if we continue to close neighbourhood schools in the name of reform. Neighbourhood schools are often the anchors of their communities, a steady presence that helps to cement the bonds of community among neighbours. Most are places with a history, laden with traditions and memories that help individuals resist fragmentation in their lives. Their graduates return and want to see their old classrooms; they want to see the trophy cases and the old photographs, to hear the echoes in the gymnasium and walk on the playing fields. To close these schools serves no purpose other than to destroy those memories, to sever the building from the culture of its neighbourhood, and to erode a sense of community that was decades in the making. Closing a school should be only a last resort and an admission of failure, not by the school or its staff, but by the educational authorities who failed to provide timely assistance.” (Ravitch, 2010: 227)

The members of the AFT know the value of neighbourhood schools. So we will not accept the false choice that pits charters against neighbourhood

schools. We will work to improve neighbourhood schools and, in places where they would be beneficial, work to open charter schools. We will seek partners who want to collaborate, and we will work with those partners to enact meaningful reforms. Every child must have access to a great education—not by chance or choice, but by right.

Footnotes

- 1 In the United States, charter schools are publicly funded schools that are granted autonomy from some state and local regulations in exchange for meeting the terms of each school's charter. State laws, which vary widely, govern who can authorise charters, who can apply for them, and the total number allowed. Today, there are more than 4,500 charter schools across 40 states and the District of Columbia, enrolling more than 1 million children.
- 2 When the charter idea was first spreading, conservatives often claimed that charters could achieve better results with fewer resources. In fact, high-performing charters typically have grants that provide far greater resources than those available to average public schools. Parental choice became the main reason for charters once conservatives realised that charters cannot do more with less.
- 3 In the United States, each local teachers' union typically negotiates a contract with its local school district.

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Compliance or innovation?

Enhanced professionalism as the route to improving learning and teaching

Abstract: *This article argues that a model of teacher professionalism based on compliance is inappropriate for both learners and teachers. Instead, the author argues that improving children's learning requires a model that encourages teacher innovation and judgement, based on a wide repertoire of pedagogical strategies. An enhanced professionalism will depend on teachers being prepared and encouraged to base their pedagogy on a well thought-through and evidence-informed approach and being trusted to exercise professional judgement.*

Michael Fullan (1991: 117) writes that "educational change depends on what teachers do and think. It's as simple and complex as that." This article suggests that the centrality of the teacher-as-professional has too often been overlooked by policy-makers in the search for higher levels of attainment; and that it is essential for teachers to build their capacity for evidence-informed professional judgement and for policy-makers and politicians to learn to trust this.

Focusing especially on teachers of young children, the article looks at the nature of professionalism and the history of teachers as professionals. Professional knowledge and the importance of pedagogy and the link between how children learn and how they are taught are then considered. It is argued that, especially in a rapidly changing world, an enhanced professionalism is needed, based on a pedagogy which emphasises innovation and judgement.

Teaching as a profession?

The struggle for teachers in England and Wales, especially those working

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with young children, to be treated as professionals was long and difficult, with the NUT taking a leading role in arguing for all teachers to be trained and then for teaching to become a graduate profession. Among the many reasons are the view that teaching is largely about subject knowledge and the (mistaken) belief that young children are easier to teach. These have conspired to re-inforce a perception that teaching involves applied common sense rather than professional expertise, especially when referring to young children. So, it is useful to ask in what ways teaching is a profession, and what aspects need to be strengthened, if an enhanced professionalism is to be achieved.

Quite what professionalism entails is not simple. For example, older professions such as medicine and the law have exercised self-regulation in terms of determining who should be a member. Furthermore there is no consensus about whether professionalism entails speaking out against, or accepting, external demands which one believes to be misguided. However, among the typical characteristics or traits of a profession are:

- mastery of a knowledge base requiring a long period of training;
- tasks that are inherently valuable to society;
- a desire to prioritise the client's welfare;
- a high level of autonomy; and
- a code of ethics to guide practice.

(John, 2008: 12)

While these may seem obvious, recent history and cross cultural comparisons indicate that many are contested rather than taken for granted. Social changes have resulted in a reduced level of deference and a greater willingness to challenge the knowledge previously thought to be the preserve of professionals. Educational changes of the last 20 years have made it harder for schools and teachers to know who their "clients" are – children, parents, employers – and therefore whose welfare should be prioritised. They have led to a "contractual performance" rather than a "professional covenant" model, resulting in less confidence, fulfilment and spontaneity. (Osborn, 2008)

There is a stronger tradition in many European countries than in England and Wales of teachers being qualified to a level beyond initial training and of the profession articulating the rationale for teaching strategies. This remains relevant, for example in relation to the increasing use of support staff and whether teachers in "free schools" need qualified teacher status. As Swann *et al.*, (2010: 551) argue, one problem was that not even teachers themselves were generally convinced that their expertise was primarily "based on theoretical knowledge, and attempts to base teachers' professional education primarily on such theoretical knowledge ... tended to be unsuccessful."

Although those teaching in the early years have managed this better, teachers in the primary and secondary phases have never articulated convincingly, to themselves or to the outside world, the range of pedagogical knowledge and skills used by good teachers; or to win the argument that continual updating of this knowledge base is essential to the welfare of both teachers and learners. Teaching remains a profession with a suspicion of research and of evidence other than that of experience.

Michael Barber, one of the architects of the 1988 Act, argued explicitly that a phase of prescription, and a loss of autonomy, was necessary as a route to improving the school system (Barber, 2005). So, the pedagogy – the *how* of teaching – has increasingly been externally prescribed, most obviously through the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, with this linked to high stakes accountability through Ofsted inspections. This has led to a situation where teachers' professional confidence, especially in terms of pedagogy, is uncertain and, in the Cambridge Primary Review's words, to a culture of compliance (Alexander, 2010).

This is not to argue that there was ever a golden age. There is always, in a public service, a balance to be struck between accountability and autonomy. The period before 1988 was too often one where there was insufficient curriculum coherence for all and a lack of accountability for the progress of children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The time since has been one where the formal curriculum has been an overloaded syllabus and high stakes accountability has led to narrowing of children's learning experiences, in practice.

The more complex and unpredictable the situation, the more one needs different types of knowledge.

The new Government's message on these issues seems rather mixed. On the one hand, there is a welcome rhetoric of interfering less in how teachers teach (with the exception of synthetic phonics), yet this sits strangely with the view of teaching as a craft best learned by watching and working alongside other teachers, rather than underpinned by a deep understanding of how children learn. And the reduction in specialist services to schools threatens the sharing of good practice across schools essential to updating of professional knowledge. It is vital that the profession define more closely, and develop, the types of knowledge necessary to be a teacher.

Professional knowledge and pedagogy

A traditional view, based on a model of secondary schools, is that the

knowledge base on which teachers draw is largely related to a subject. What this entails is less obvious for teachers of younger children. I suggest that this must be underpinned by a thought-through pedagogy based on an understanding of child development and a recognition of the complexity of the interaction between cognitive and affective aspects of children's learning and of the relationships and processes operating within the classroom. (Eaude, 2011).

The Cambridge Primary Review refers to different types of knowledge (categorised as "domain" and "craft" knowledge) as essential to teaching. Learning, at whatever age, does not just involve factual knowledge or skills learned in isolation, but a combination of propositional, procedural and personal knowledge – what one might call knowledge *that, how and of* (Alexander, 2010: 413-4).

Think, for instance, of the "knowledge" involved in learning to ride a bicycle, of preparing an allotment or starting a new job. Too rigid a distinction between factual knowledge and skills is unhelpful, one's

Teachers must be prepared to innovate, to try out new ideas, to make mistakes if children are to do the same.

learning is often affected by prior experience and emotional responses and many of the necessary "life-skills" are interpersonal. The more complex and unpredictable the situation, the more one needs different types of knowledge. Classrooms, are

inherently unpredictable places, especially with young children. This highlights the need for judgement, to respond to the unexpected, and a repertoire of skills, techniques and strategies to enable, and support, such judgement. So, "pedagogy seems to require the systematic approach of the scientist, the imagination of an artist and the practical wisdom associated with a craft." (Eaude, 2011: 14).

The Cambridge Primary Review emphasises "deep representations" of subject matter. While a knowledge of grammar or geography, for instance, is likely to be valuable, this would seem to matter less than a deep understanding of how children learn, of how a particular child or class may learn and of the barriers they may have to overcome. For instance, I suspect that I teach mathematics and science better than spelling and history, because my own learning pathway helps me see the difficulties of learning the former more than the latter. And unless teachers recognise the impact of prior experience and external factors such as racism or a culture of low expectations, it is hard to identify and help overcome these barriers to successful learning.

The Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) identifies ten principles of good teaching and learning. However, as one of three

fundamental changes required whatever the age of the learner, it calls for more prominence to be given to learning relationships. In the search for improved performance, the increased importance of relationships and context for those who are least experienced and least resilient – as we all are in situations where we are anxious – is easily overlooked for learners of all ages, but this matters most when teaching young children.

The second and third of the TLRP's fundamental changes are that:

- “since learning processes do not fundamentally change as children become adults, the interventions of teachers or trainers are most effective when they are planned in response to how learners are learning”; and
- the conception of what is to be learned needs to be broadened beyond the notions of curricula and subjects associated with schools (Teaching and Learning Research Programme, 2006).

Again, these, especially the former, may seem obvious. However, if teaching is to be responsive to how learners are learning, formative assessment must be central and planning must incorporate a considerable degree of flexibility. A curriculum which does not recognise, and draw on, the wide range of children's experiences and interests in and out of school, but focuses on a narrow range of skills, risks some children becoming disengaged from learning; and is increasingly inappropriate to prepare children for the challenges and opportunities presented by changes resulting from technology and globalisation.

The link between learning and teaching

One important, but too little noticed, lesson is the reciprocal relationship between how teachers teach and how children learn. In part, this is to do with the example they set. A caring teacher will tend to promote attitudes such as respect and compassion. One with high but realistic expectations will usually help children to do well. A teacher who is interested or inquisitive will tend to encourage such attributes, unless children become anxious. Since, as Alexander states, “pupils will not learn to think for themselves if their teachers are expected to do as they are told”, teachers must be prepared to innovate, to try out new ideas, to make mistakes if children are to do the same (Alexander, 2010: 308).

However, to add a cautionary note, the impact on the learner must be the central consideration. For instance, to use All Our Futures' distinction, teaching creatively is not the same as teaching for creativity and the challenge is always to draw on, and enhance, the children's own creativity (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999: 89). Equally, while an enthusiastic teacher will tend to pass on her enthusiasm, this can put children off unless their interest is engaged by

activities and experiences at the appropriate level.

If children are not engaged with learning or lack a sense of agency, then opportunities for learning are restricted. I argue (Eaude, 2011) that one of the teacher's key roles is to encourage and sustain the attributes of successful learners, such as the 4Rs – resilience, resourcefulness, reciprocity and reflectiveness – (Claxton, 2002) and curiosity and confidence.

The type of knowledge, activity and experience involved matters, but how these are planned and presented and the attributes expected of the children depends heavily on the specific context and needs of the class – which requires judgement.

Young children, especially, need a breadth and balance of activities and experiences, not only because an educated person requires a broad range of experience and knowledge, but as a route to interest and engage children and to uncover and develop their unsuspected gifts and talents. While the rhetoric of legislators and policy makers recognises the need for a broad and balanced curriculum, in practice too great an emphasis on “the basics” and measurable outcomes restricts the opportunities available to children. When backed by accountability mechanisms focussing largely on results, this limits teachers' scope for innovation; and disproportionately so in schools and areas where the children's background makes high levels of attainment difficult to achieve. Too great a focus on outcomes can stunt children's attributes as successful learners.

Thinking through the implications for teachers

Alexander (2008: 36) highlights two main approaches to teaching: *didactic* and *exploratory*, with the teacher, in the former, being largely in control, and in the latter the learner centre-stage. He goes on to identify different “versions” of teaching, including transmission, negotiation, initiation and facilitation. In Desforges' words, “direct instruction is best used for knowledge transmission, for showing, telling, modelling and demonstrating. It is never, on its own, sufficient to ensure deeper understanding, problem solving or creativity” (Desforges, 1995: 129). So, expert teachers select from, and move between, different teaching strategies, depending on what they seek to achieve. As the Cambridge Primary Review states, teachers should “work towards a pedagogy of repertoire rather than recipe and of principle rather than prescription” (Alexander, 2010: 511).

Hargreaves (2003: xviii) argues that teaching for the “knowledge society” “involves ... developing deep cognitive learning, creativity and ingenuity among pupils; drawing on research, working in networks and teams, and pursuing continuous professional learning as teachers; and promoting problem-solving, risk-taking, trust in the collaborative process, ability to cope with change and commitment to continuous improvement

as organisations.’

Hargreaves goes on to describe a triangle of competing interests where teachers have the potential to be:

- *catalysts* of the knowledge society and the opportunity it promises; and
- *counterpoints* to the threats which the knowledge society brings in terms of inclusiveness.

However, they risk being:

- *casualties* where higher expectations are often met with standardised solutions, provided at minimum cost (see Eaude, 2011: 175-6).

This highlights the role of teachers in mediating knowledge, not just “delivering” information and skills, if children are to develop the attributes and learn the skills necessary in a rapidly changing world. It also affirms teachers’ key role in trying to ensure that the benefits of the “knowledge society” do not become disproportionately the preserve of the already privileged; and that those most at risk of exclusion are not further disadvantaged by being exposed to a narrow range of opportunities.

For teachers to be expected to comply without question not only undermines teacher professionalism but inhibits children’s learning. There are many expectations with which teachers should comply, especially those based on the children’s welfare, such as legal requirements which seek to ensure children’s safety or that all children receive the educational opportunities to which they are entitled. However, in matters of pedagogy, they must be prepared, and be encouraged, to exercise judgement, which implies taking some risk and not being too heavily criticised for making mistakes. As Hargreaves indicates, teachers can easily become casualties in the current climate, unless they are well supported.

Thinking through the policy implications

If it is right that, as Fullan argues, educational change depends primarily on what teachers do and think – and this is only one of many factors – and that teachers’ actions must be informed by their professional judgement, policy should enable and encourage innovation, rather than prescribe and expect compliance (Fullan, 1991). For example, professional development should concentrate on capacity building, teachers should be encouraged to innovate and accountability mechanisms should be formative rather than punitive. In Bruner’s words, “an education enterprise that fails to take the risks involved becomes stagnant and eventually alienating” (Bruner, 1996: 15).

The future presents major challenges to policy makers, some of them counter-intuitive. There is a danger that a system which concentrates too

much on outcomes fails to achieve its objectives because its focus becomes too narrow. So, to strive too directly to improve measurable outcomes and one's place in league tables – whether at school, local or national level – may be neither the best route to do so nor prioritise the welfare of children, if this entails too much pressure or the loss of breadth and balance.

This calls for a model of enhanced professionalism, with a greater level of autonomy and professional judgement. Such a process affects not only policy makers, but is one in which the profession and individual teachers must play their part. This does not involve teachers acting individually without accountability, but working together and being able to provide a rationale for their actions on the basis of evidence. Evidence may come, in part, from experience, but this is too restricted a source, unless backed by insights of research. So, such a model requires both a commitment from teachers to review and update their professional knowledge base and the opportunities to do so in a sustained way, where the emphasis is on teachers' professional development rather than on diktat.

Conclusion

A model of teacher professionalism based on compliance and mistrust is inadequate to meet the needs of learners or teachers in an increasingly uncertain world. Improved learning and teaching requires an enhanced model; and in the words of the Cambridge Primary Review "pedagogy is at the heart of the enterprise" (Alexander, 2010: 307).

This article has suggested some different types of knowledge, understanding and skills required to meet young children's learning needs, though many of the lessons are applicable whatever the age of the learner. The challenge for teachers is to regain a professional confidence where they are able to teach creatively and innovatively based on judgement, both collective and personal, backed by a range of evidence; and for policy makers to ensure that the framework of guidance and accountability enables this.

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Do our students need an English baccalaureate?

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Abstract: *This article looks at the introduction of the English baccalaureate and its impact on schools. The author questions whether young people will gain anything from something which is essentially a performance measure and urges government to take a more coherent approach.*

When the Secretary of State announced that the English baccalaureate (E-bac) would serve as a performance measure for schools in the 2010 performance tables the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) received an unprecedented number of complaints and expressions of concern from its members. They were not all of one mind about the concept of the E-bac, but they were united in expressing their anger at its hasty introduction without any consultation, and at the use of performance indicators to push ill-thought through curriculum change. There was also considerable annoyance at the uncertainty surrounding details of the measure, and at learning about it from the media without any clear information about how it would be implemented. Communication with school and college leaders about changes which members were expected to implement was insufficient and came too late.

On the other hand, our members are very interested in taking part in a debate on the development of a genuine baccalaureate for England that would ensure that all students received a well-rounded education in preparation for life and work in the twenty-first century. ASCL has long argued for just such an award (Secondary Heads Association, 2001) and has supported all those (from Tomlinson onwards) who have worked on 14-19 developments which would engage all learners.

Education history is littered with examples of awards and qualifications which have been introduced too hastily, without proper consultation and discussion, and which then disadvantage those students who have been used as guinea pigs. Our young people should not be used

in this way. They only have one experience of the secondary school system and the qualifications which they gain will stay with them for life.

E-bac: qualification or performance measure?

Despite its name the E-bac is not (or not yet) a qualification, but a performance indicator. As all performance measures are likely to have perverse consequences they therefore need to be carefully considered and modelled before introduction. It is undeniable that recent measures have had an undue effect on the curriculum for some students and school leaders. Teachers would have been happy to contribute to a discussion of how to avoid such perverse incentives in the future.

As a performance measure, the E-bac threatens to introduce negative consequences for learners if schools believe that they have to alter their curriculum and push young people into changing their choices in order to meet its demands. It simply replaces one perverse incentive with another.

Education history is littered with examples of awards and qualifications which have been introduced too hastily, without proper consultation and discussion, and which then disadvantage those students who have been used as guinea pigs.

When the Secretary of State first spoke about the E-bac, he described it as a performance measure and a certificate for pupils. It has since become clear that no planning has been undertaken for the introduction of a certificate for young people, and no time-scale for its introduction has been announced. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how such a certificate could be produced; the relevant qualifications will have been achieved through different awarding organisations, possibly at different times, and there is currently no process for the collation of awards to individual 16 year olds. If such a certificate were to be introduced, a costly process (such as that introduced for the awarding of the diploma) would be needed.

Since there seems to have been no discussion with either higher education institutions or employers to find out whether this would represent a certificate, or even a combination of subjects, that they would welcome, the measure does not appear to have any particular value for students. No higher education institution has yet quoted the E-bac combination of subjects as a requirement for future entry, yet many parents and students have formed the idea that it will be essential. ASCL members have had many examples of parents asking questions about this at Y9 options evenings.

It would appear that the E-bac was introduced as a school performance measure in order to nudge schools into changing their KS4 curriculum. Yet regulations already state that all KS4 pupils must follow the national curriculum in maths, science and English and that they have an entitlement to study a humanity subject and a modern foreign language. All students in England therefore already have the opportunity to follow the subjects included in the E-bac. Nevertheless, since the decision to make languages and humanities an entitlement rather than statutory subjects, there has been no incentive for schools to push students into choosing these subjects against their will; indeed many parents have resisted such moves by schools.

Schools have, however, made clear to students through their information, advice and guidance programmes that highly selective universities and employers would be looking for a range of GCSE results in demanding subjects at very high grades. Provided that students have English, maths and science, many universities now appear to be more interested in the number of grade As or A*s than in the specific subjects. Some highly selective medical schools have even been known to advise students to drop a subject (including languages) if they expect only to gain a grade B or C.

As a linguist I share the concern about the smaller number of students taking a modern language at KS4, but I am not convinced that this move will strengthen languages overall. There are already signs that it is encouraging schools to drop language courses other than GCSEs and focus their language teaching on a smaller number of students – yet another perverse incentive.

Schools were rightly angry to be told that, for their 2010 results, they would be judged on criteria which were not known in advance. Furthermore, outcomes depended on the choices made by their students in 2008 or were effected by the school's specialism. Not surprisingly, schools specialising in languages averaged 30.9 per cent in the E-bac table, while for schools specialising in maths and computing the figure was 16.5 per cent.

So the E-bac is a measure that provides information about student choice in 2008 but tells us nothing about school performance. The rather arbitrary nature of the qualifications included exacerbates the problem. To take just one example; it was not possible to foresee in 2008 that a Cambridge certificate in French would be considered more valid than a GCSE in Applied French.

The E-bac: the impact on the curriculum

The range of subjects included in the E-bac, either as a genuine qualification or a performance measure, is extremely narrow and reflects the needs of the

past rather than the present. There are a number of specific anomalies which are of concern: the omission of religious studies, humanities, classical civilisation, economics, and business studies from the “humanity” category being the most obvious.

The name itself is misleading. This is not a baccalaureate as understood internationally where the term is usually taken to mean an award which provides evidence that a student has followed a broad and balanced education. This would include both basic subjects (such as maths, science, the student’s own language and a second language), and a range of other options, encompassing subjects that represent the arts and technology as well as the humanities. A baccalaureate usually also demonstrates achievement in knowledge and skills in a range of contexts, both academic and practical, giving credit for learning in class and in the wider community.

The omission of subjects in the areas of creative media and the arts, design, technology, information technology, engineering and business is particularly worrying. It is clear that many young people currently in school will be taking up careers in these areas of high demand. Students need to sample these subjects at KS4 so that they can decide whether to pursue them in further post-16 study.

Many school leaders have felt obliged to change their curriculum plan for KS4 from September 2011, either as a response from parental pressure or out of concern about the introduction of this new performance measure. The timing of its introduction could not have been worse and showed a complete disregard for the practicalities of secondary school organisation. It came just at the moment in the year when options brochures and evenings were being planned (or were already planned) for Y9 students. Parents and school leaders felt rushed into making changes without having sufficient information about the importance of this new measure.

Many have made changes, not because they feel that it is in the best interests of the students, but because of concern that Ofsted or others will judge their school on this measure in the future, and find it wanting. Schools have become used to such a culture in recent years. They are angry at having to make these decisions in such a hasty manner when the Government has not made its future intentions clear in terms of performance judgements and accountability.

In a few cases school leaders have become so concerned about improving their performance in the E-bac measure as quickly as possible (usually those under strong pressure from external bodies), that they have encouraged Y10 students to change GCSE subjects which they had already been studying for six months. There are also examples of students being pressed to take part in after school sessions for GCSE history and geography, and students studying two modern languages being asked to drop one and take geography instead.

Where Y9 students do move towards E-bac subjects and away from those not included (whether because of school, parental or media pressure) schools will have to change their staffing structure for September 2011. This is not easy for a variety of reasons: the timescale for redundancy processes and the lack of high quality language teachers being the most significant.

There is already evidence from subject association surveys that music, art and business studies teachers are being warned of reductions in their number to enable the employment of more humanities and language teachers. Even leaving aside the issue of its rights or wrongs, any change to the curriculum needs careful introduction over time, especially when resources are scarce. A curriculum review is currently underway and the Wolf review of vocational qualifications only reported after the announcement of the E-bac. Both will have an influence on curriculum decisions made by schools and colleges. It was therefore surprising that the E-bac was

As an over-arching qualification, the E-bac is seriously wanting. It is too narrow in its scope, fails to include the arts or technology, and over emphasises one approach to learning.

introduced before the outcomes of these two reviews were known. Schools are likely to be making costly changes to their staffing structures which they may have to alter again in line with

future proposals. If Britain is to compete with the best in the world, we need coherent education policies, not piecemeal changes of this sort.

The E-bac: impact on students

For all of these reasons and above all, in the interests of students, ASCL has advised its members against hasty change. However, school leaders and governing bodies feel threatened by yet another performance measure and feel that they have to take whatever steps they can to improve their statistics. This is not surprising given the punitive culture of accountability and the uncertainty of future developments in this area.

It is possible that young people currently in Y9 and Y10 (and in subsequent years if this measure is maintained) will be disadvantaged by the E-bac. They will, be pushed into option choices which are not based on impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) or their own talents, preferences and future progression, but on the school's need to meet a performance target. An ASCL member recently wrote "The changes we made to our KS4 curriculum have increased the flexibility available to us, ensuring a personalised curriculum pathway for each and every one of our students. This focus has increased the range of opportunities open to our young people and presented them with positive options where success and

progression are achievable. The introduction of the E-bac, in which students will be measured on whether they achieve a set of very narrowly defined subjects, is a real step backwards.”

There are many international examples of baccalaureates which provide over-arching awards. Most of these ensure that young people gain knowledge and understanding as well as skills and attitudes through a broad and balanced curriculum. They include the main traditions of learning whilst also being future orientated. Our young people deserve to have a baccalaureate which compares favourably to those on offer elsewhere.

As an over-arching qualification, the E-bac is seriously wanting. It is too narrow in its scope, fails to include the arts or technology, and over emphasises one approach to learning. It has not been piloted or undergone any of the tests that would be required of a new qualification. There has been no discussion about its introduction or value with the profession, students, parents, employers or higher education institutions. What is more, there are already regulations in place which make this particular choice of subjects available to all young people at KS4.

A genuine desire to ensure that our young people can compete with those from other countries should lead us to look carefully at the structure of 14-19 education in those nations which appear to be performing at a very high level. We should consider and compare their awards and qualifications before making hasty changes to our own. One of the interesting features of this comparison (but one rarely mentioned by the Government) is that those countries that appear to be doing better than the UK in international educational tables often have a more stable curriculum and qualification system which is not affected by a change of government.

Our young people should no longer be subject to constant change in these areas. Politicians seem keen to emphasise the importance of history in the curriculum but few appear to be able to apply its lessons to the recent history of education. The CVs of people now in their twenties and thirties read like a summary of government initiatives; full of qualifications which no one now remembers or understands. We need a groundswell of professional action to call a halt to this constant change for change's sake, each time there is a new Government or Secretary of State.

A curriculum is for life not just for the term of a Secretary of State

ASCL has therefore joined forces with other interested parties to campaign for a genuine baccalaureate and is strongly urging its members to plan their curriculum around the needs of their students and their future progression.

English students do need an English baccalaureate, but they need one which will recognise their achievements across a wide range of learning, offer them progression routes for their continuing education and mean something to employers during the rest of their working life.

Read more about this campaign to develop a better bac at www.abetterbaccalaureate.org and express your support.

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Taking charge of assessment

Abstract: *Although assessment and reporting pupils' achievements has always been part of teachers' role it is regarded as less trustworthy than information from external tests. This article discusses evidence that challenges this view and indicates what is needed to increase confidence in teachers' judgements.*

The idea of taking assessment by teachers seriously was implicit in the recommendations of the TGAT (Task Group on Assessment and Testing) report (National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing, 1988), which proposed a system that supports assessment for formative purposes, with summative assessment of pupils' learning being a combination of teachers' own assessment and the results of external tests. As we know only too well, as the proposals were translated into action the formative purpose was absent from the arrangements put in place and the focus in implementing summative assessment was on formal, time-limited, external tests.

Since that time we have learned a great deal from experience, and from a rapidly expanded number of research and evaluation studies of the process and effects of assessment about the impact of tests. We have also learned about the value of formative assessment and the potential for greater use of teachers' assessment. This paper considers what has been learned and what may need to be done to establish greater trust in teachers' judgements.

Assessment, learning and the curriculum

The experience of 20 years of national assessment makes clear that we can no longer say that assessment should follow and not lead the curriculum. The relationship is far more complex than either one leading the other. Part of the complexity is due to the greater recognition of the role that assessment has to play in helping learning; assessment for learning or formative assessment.

Assessment, as a process of collecting evidence and using it to make inferences about what pupils know and can do, is recognised as an

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essential part of effective teaching. It is the basis for teachers and pupils being able to “decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there” (Assessment Reform Group, 2000).

High degrees of validity and reliability are clearly desirable but the interaction between them makes it very difficult to maximise both in any form of assessment.

It is common to contrast formative with summative assessment. Summative assessment has the purpose of informing pupils, teachers, parents and others of what has been achieved at a certain time rather than to help learning. However, making a distinction

between formative and summative assessment on the basis of whether or not it helps learning is hardly tenable. Indeed Gardner *et al* argue that “assessment of any kind should ultimately improve learning” (Gardner *et al.*, 2010: 31).

This is obvious in the case of the formative use of assessment, where the whole purpose is to assist learning; assessment that does not do this cannot be called “formative”. It is perhaps less obvious in the case of the summative use of assessment. But any decisions taken on the basis of summative assessment ought to help pupils’ further learning, whether in the short-term or long term. Even the results of national and international surveys of achievement ought to be used in making decisions to help learning, if not of those involved, then of pupils in the system as a whole.

The validity and reliability trade-off

The foremost implication of using all assessment in some way to help learning is to ensure that what is assessed fully reflects the intended learning. This refers to one of the key qualities of assessment, its validity, meaning how well what is assessed corresponds with the intended learning outcomes.

The second important quality is reliability, the extent to which the results are of acceptable accuracy for a particular use. This is often expressed as, and measured by, how similar the result is when the assessment is repeated. These are key concepts in the debate about assessment procedures. High degrees of validity and reliability are clearly desirable but the interaction between them makes it very difficult to maximise both in any form of assessment. This is because attempting to cover a wide range of learning outcomes will mean including some – such as creativity, critical thinking, problem solving – where judgements are less clear and results less reliable. Increasing reliability means either avoiding such outcomes or limiting the tasks so that the validity of the assessment of these outcomes is reduced.

Thus there is always some kind of trade-off between validity and reliability, and the outcome will depend on the use that is made of the results. In the case of formative assessment, the use is by the teacher and pupil; no judgement of grade or level is involved. Validity is paramount and reliability is not an issue, since evidence is gathered frequently and the effect of any mistake in interpretation will be easily and readily corrected. However, reliability is an issue when results are used for other purposes, particularly when pupils are being compared or selected.

The more weight that is given to the results – the “stakes” attached to the assessment – the more important is attention to “fairness”. This is usually taken to mean treating all pupils in the same way and having procedures in place for ensuring reliability. It is easy to see how this leads to a preference for tests and examinations, where conditions are controlled and appear to give everyone the same opportunity to show what they can do. The trade-off favours reliability over validity.

The problem is exacerbated by the impact of the high stakes on teaching. The pressure to optimise scores inevitably leads to what is tested or assessed being given priority and so teaching is narrowed to what is included in the tests of assessed tasks. Research by James *et al* (2006) indicated that teachers feel that they have no alternative even if it sometimes inhibits “their ability to teach in a way they understand to be good practice” (Marshall and Drummond, 2006).

Even where teachers’ assessment is used, the existence of high stakes can lead to the standardisation of procedures and tasks which narrow what is assessed to performance in stereotyped exercises (Black *et al.*, 2004) or to moderation procedures which restrict the evidence that teachers gather and report (Donnelly *et al.*, 1993).

In favour of teachers’ assessment

The consequences of high stakes tests have been well researched and reported (for example Harlen, 2003) and need not be rehearsed here. But it is relevant to point out an inherent limitation of tests which is always present however valid the individual items or tasks may be and regardless of how the results are used. No test can cover all the learning that is set out in the curriculum. What is included can only be a sample of intended outcomes – and, as noted, a sample biased in favour of reliably marked items.

There is always a chance that a different sample of the work would produce a different result for some pupils. William (2001), taking the case of the national tests at age 13 in England as an example, estimated that even if the measured reliability of the test is 0.85, about 40 per cent of pupils will be awarded the wrong grade level. This source of error can be avoided if evidence is gathered across the whole range of work, which is

possible when teachers take charge of the assessment.

It is not just the extent of the evidence that favours assessment by teachers but also its quality. Valid assessment of outcomes of education regarded as essential for the 21st century, such as problem solving, critical thinking and ability to continue learning, requires pupils to be undertaking tasks that enable them to demonstrate these abilities, in situations where they are faced with real problems and the need to link experiences together.

Over the period of time for which achievement is being reported (a term or half year for regular reports to parents and one or more years for external certification), pupils have opportunities to engage in a number of activities in which a range of skills and knowledge can be developed. These same activities, provided for learning, also provide opportunities for the development to be assessed by the teacher. In other words, the limitation of the restricted time that a test provides does not apply when assessment is teacher-based.

Using teachers' assessment has the potential to encourage formative assessment, since the evidence gathered as part of teaching can be the basis for judgements when reporting achievement. Thus the evidence can be used for two purposes providing that for summative use it is judged against the reporting criteria that are the same for all pupils.

For summative assessment the evidence from formative assessment needs to be brought together and judged against the criteria used to indicate the various grades or levels used in reporting. This involves finding the "best fit" between the evidence gathered about each pupil and one of the reporting levels. In this process the change over time can be taken into account so that, preference is given to evidence that shows progress during the period covered by the summary judgement or report.

Quality assurance

Teachers' assessments are often perceived as having low reliability and being the subject of bias resulting from teachers taking into account non-relevant information about pupils when they are assessing them. The evidence for this comes from situations and studies where no moderation or other form of quality assurance has been in place. When steps are taken to moderate the results, the reliability of teachers' judgements is comparable with that of tests (Harlen, 2004). Moreover the moderation process is itself widely recognised as being a valuable form of professional learning.

Clearly some quality assurance of the process of arriving at judgements is necessary, particularly when the results are used for decisions that affect pupils' future learning opportunities. There is no shortage of tried and tested ways of increasing reliability of, and assuring confidence in, teachers' judgement. For example:

- the provision and use of progressive criteria, based on the level descriptions in the curriculum, which teachers use in a best-fit approach to assigning levels for reporting;
- moderation meetings within and across schools, where teachers discuss their judgements of pupils' work and their interpretation of the level descriptions;
- use of exemplars of pupils' work at particular levels;
- accreditation of procedures by an outside body; and
- use of assessment tasks introduced into regular classroom work at appropriate points.

Criteria identify what aspects of pupils' work are significant in assessing whether certain levels of achievement have been reached. They can be stated at different levels of detail and can be task-specific or more general. One of the main dilemmas of criterion-referenced assessment is deciding among these alternatives. The more detailed the statements, the more numerous they are and, in the extreme, they become unable to reflect complex and particularly higher-level learning outcomes.

Dividing levels into sub-levels and skills into sub-skills risks turning assessment into a mechanical process of using atomistic over-detailed and reductionist criteria and has severe implications for teachers' workload. On the other hand, more general statements can be more ambiguous and less easy to use reliably. Both research and practice suggest that criteria that describe a progressive development in understanding or skills but are not task specific provide the best help to reliable assessment by teachers.

Moderation meetings involve teachers meeting to review samples of pupils' work. The discussion goes beyond confirming judgements of achievement of particular pupils and ensures shared understandings of criteria and how they are applied. Similarly, exemplification, which involves already assessed examples of work, indicates how certain aspects relate to the criteria of assessment and helps in conveying what the criteria mean in practice. Good examples also indicate the opportunities that pupils need in order to show their achievement of skills or understanding. Examples can be used in group moderation, but are particularly useful for individual teachers unable to participate in group moderation meeting.

The accreditation approach to quality assurance applies when teachers' assessment procedures are approved as meeting the standards of a body external to the school. This has been practice for some time in the award of vocational qualifications, where responsibility for assessment is devolved to centres (schools, colleges or work-places) and trained assessors and "internal" verifiers ensure that procedures have been followed. A proposal for similar accreditation of schools to conduct assessment by teachers in accord with requirements of statutory assessment and reporting was made

in the Daugherty Review of the school curriculum and assessment in Wales (ACCAC, 2004).

Finally there is the use of special tasks which have been designed to provide opportunity for certain skills or understanding to be used and assessed. Teachers could find it useful to have such tasks to supplement their observations of pupils or when it has not been possible to obtain evidence of a particular kind about all pupils. Ideally these would be embedded in normal work to avoid the anxiety associated with tests.

When such tasks are standardised they also serve to confirm teachers' judgements of levels achieved. The use of standard tests to confirm

teachers' judgements, as in Scotland where it is an optional moderation procedure, has to be distinguished from the single-level tests trialled in England. These externally set and marked tests were intended as the measures of achievement rather than a moderation of assessment essentially based on teachers' judgements.

Pupils want to know how they are doing and since they only get this from tests they want these to continue. Parents have the same desire for feedback and in many cases see no alternative to testing in order to obtain this.

The views of users

More than 20 years of national testing has meant that a generation of teachers, pupils, parents and carers have experienced testing as part of the educational landscape. Rather than being an occasional event, experienced only at the end of key stages, the reality is that tests and preparation for them has become the norm. According to research carried out for the Wellcome Trust between January and June 2009 a majority of pupils and parents wanted science SATs to remain (Murphy *et al.*, 2010).

Both groups considered that the existence of the tests made pupils learn. This perception of the positive impact of the tests has been part of the rationale for national testing and for the use of results to set schools targets. It is clearly a pervasive – and persuasive – argument, which needs an equally persuasive response. Digging beneath the surface of the evidence, what becomes clear from this research is that both pupils and parents wanted feedback. Pupils want to know how they are doing and since they only get this from tests they want these to continue. Parents have the same desire for feedback and in many cases see no alternative to testing in order to obtain this.

These attitudes are formidable obstacles to serious use of teachers' assessment. Overcoming them requires, among other changes, a better public understanding of the nature and limitations of different forms of

assessment. The automatic equating of assessment with testing has to be challenged. Indeed, when probed, the pupils in the Wellcome Trust study recognised that they did not get feedback from SATs and preferred testing by teachers because they obtained the feedback which could show them how to improve (Ibid., 2010). This is one important step towards teachers taking charge of assessment and choosing the best methods to fit the purpose at a particular time. It also strongly supports the use of formative assessment, whilst further blurring the distinction between the two.

In conclusion

Teachers already conduct summative assessment for internal school record purposes and for reporting to pupils and parents. Teachers who use assessment for learning as part of their teaching have the information they need for their summative assessment when they are required to report progress. Teachers' assessment has a high level of validity because it can encompass all types of learning, but if it is to be used for reporting achievement steps need to be taken to ensure reliability.

Tests are not as reliable as they are generally assumed to be and teachers' assessment, suitably moderated, can be just as reliable. Sharing the assessment and moderation procedures with the users of assessment – particularly parents and school governors – would help to develop confidence in teachers' assessment.

Teachers taking charge of assessment does not mean rejecting all tests or external devised tasks. Indeed, a well-designed set of assessment tasks available for teachers to use has several benefits: as exemplifying the situations in which skills and understanding are used, guidance for teachers in developing their own embedded assessment tasks and being of particular value to newly-qualified teachers. However, high stakes use of the results can distort any assessment.

To avoid this means ceasing to use pupils' achievement, in whatever way it is assessed, as the sole measure of teacher and school effectiveness. It requires a change in the whole system of assessment such that teachers and schools not only take charge of pupils' assessment but also have a greater role in giving an account of their performance in terms of the curriculum, other activities, teaching methods, and pupils performance across the full range of emotional, personal and cognitive development.

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Urban classroom culture

Abstract: *This article describes research that is relatively unusual in that it is based on a careful recording of the everyday classroom life of London comprehensive school students and teachers, complemented by the detailed reflections of teachers themselves on these scenarios. This has produced a teacher training and CPD publication.*

This article reports on part of an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) research project entitled Urban Classroom Culture and Interaction (RES-148-25-0042), conducted 2005-2008¹. Our project was one of 25 national projects within the ESRC's Identities and Social Action Programme.

Though the research concerned many aspects of identity, here I want to discuss what we called "The Teachers' Project". At the outset our perception was that the ordinary classroom teacher's voice, experience and perspective were remarkably absent from public debate and policy-making about schools.

Dominant views and the predicament of teachers

Schools and classrooms in urban areas have, in recent years, been heavily influenced by changes associated with globalisation (e.g. heightened population mobility, ethnic plurality and linguistic diversity, and the ubiquity of popular culture and digital cultural devices). However, the absence of adequate up-to-date descriptions of the realities of classroom life has too often allowed public discourse to depict it as merely the chaotic product of bad teaching. In our view a more realistic apprehension of urban classroom life is overdue. Teachers often have a sharp understanding of these realities, but their opportunities to participate in a sophisticated

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debate about them are generally restricted by the terms of official policy (national curriculum, Ofsted) and public debate (ministerial and media statements and assertions).

In this public educational universe there is a strong sense of certainty about what classroom life should be like and what would constitute a

“teaching ideal”. A “teaching ideal” has developed as part of the modern nation state’s project of universal compulsory schooling. In this conceptualisation the teacher has a monopoly of knowledge, is the controller and focal point of the classroom and the arbiter of the authorised modes and styles of communication. This classroom “teaching ideal” is represented in the following summary:

In a large number of secondary schools, and for very many teachers, traditional “ideal” pedagogic approaches are extraordinarily difficult to enact for reasons not necessarily under their control.

“communication is centred on the teacher. It is he or she who talks and decides who else is to talk, asks the questions, evaluates the answers, and clearly manages the sequence as a whole ... [A]ppropriate participation requires of pupils that they listen or appear to listen, often and at length. They have to know how to bid properly for the right to speak themselves, often in competitive circumstances where a balance has to be found between striving so zealously to attract attention that the teacher is irritated, and volunteering to answer so modestly that their bid is ignored ... In orderly classrooms, the teacher takes turns at will, allocates turns to others, determines the topics, interrupts and reallocates turns judged to be irrelevant to those topics, and provides a running commentary on what is being said and meant which is the main source of cohesion within and between the various sequences of the lesson” (Edwards and Westgate, 1994: 40 (cited in Rampton, 2006: 48)).

In late modernity, in urban comprehensive schools in London, these assumptions have been disrupted, without the consequent new realities being explicitly and sufficiently acknowledged in official discourses. In a large number of secondary schools, and for very many teachers, traditional “ideal” pedagogic approaches are extraordinarily difficult to enact for reasons not necessarily under their control. Even for relatively committed school students the teacher’s voice is often no longer central to classroom life, nor does it automatically carry weight and authority.

From extensive, long-standing interaction with them, we know that many teachers are highly committed to understanding the social processes in their classrooms. They are also troubled by the routine public

representations of their work, which tend to treat contemporary urban classrooms as the chaotic product of incompetent pedagogy, supported by a bankrupt progressivism. This inhibits recognition of good practice adapted to contemporary conditions, and leaves the professionals who work in these schools with little room for anything but feelings of failure or inadequacy. As one of the participants in our Teachers' Project seminars put it,

"There is a drive towards things like excellence and that drive means that you are measured, teachers are measured, I mean you can talk about pupil performance but teachers are also measured, tested, measured, hung drawn and quartered (laughter) in what we are doing as well. I think this has brought about our need to perform. We have got 20 point lesson plans which are supposed to ensure that we are teaching excellent lessons. We have local inspectors, national inspectors, area inspectors, every type of inspector you can think of . . . we are scrutinised to the nth degree and I think that has brought about this performance level that we supposedly adhere to all the time" (Isaac – Maths teacher aged 30-40 – nine years teaching experience).

What follows presents:

- a brief summary of how we conducted our classroom research;
- some of the realities, dilemmas and ambiguities presented by contemporary classroom and school culture, which emerged from our detailed discussions with teachers about our research data; and
- examples of direct commentary by teachers about the wider cultural forces affecting their work.

The Research

The School (when the data was collected in 2005 and 2006)

The school participating in the study was an inner London comprehensive with a sixth form attended by approximately 1,000 students. The student population was extremely diverse with a large majority of pupils coming from ethnic minority backgrounds, with South Asian and African-Caribbean ethnicities forming the two largest groups. They also came from a variety of social class backgrounds with both above average numbers on free school meals, and a recent increase in the number of middle class students. The school had recently received a positive Ofsted report and seen steady improvements in its exam success rates.

Data Collection

We completed two phases of data collection in two classes, following nine students from Year 9 into Year 10. Each of these students wore a radio-

microphone as they proceeded through a typical school day inside and outside the classroom. They did this for two days each in Year 9 and again in Year 10. During the study, the focal students, five female and four male, were 14-16 years old. They were from a range of ethnicities and varied greatly in their academic performance. In total we collected approximately 180 plus hours of radio-microphone recordings, eight focal student interviews, ten (mainly group) playback interview sessions, ten plus hours video recordings, and an observational field diary covering, among other things, impromptu conversations with staff, and assembled supplementary documentation covering Year 9-10 demographics and school performance, staff and parent handbooks, lesson handouts and so on.

Teachers' Project

In 2007 and again in 2010 we organised seminar sessions with groups of teachers with experience of teaching in London comprehensive schools to discuss in detail four audio recordings (with transcripts) of routine episodes of classroom life. It was decided that the episodes presented to the seminar participants should not be sensational ones. Rather, they were as far as possible representative of the prosaic tenor of the classrooms that we had both observed and recorded over an extended period spread over two academic years (2005-06, 2006-07). The selected episodes highlighted a particular aspect of the routine culture of these classrooms. There were: (a) the "troubles" faced by teachers in getting students to participate in a lesson and in eliciting responses from them when they were questioned about curriculum tasks; and (b) the "troubles" surrounding the marking of expected boundaries of formality/informality and authority/deference between students and teachers.

We organised 11 teacher seminar groups in London, comprising 78 teachers with a combined 973 years of teaching experience – some groups met up to three times. The teachers overwhelmingly stated that the recorded classroom episodes they had listened to and discussed were strongly familiar in their experience of urban secondary school classroom culture. We recorded, transcribed and closely analysed all the seminar sessions.

Unsettled classroom identities

A strong sense emerged from the seminar groups of widespread uncertainties about three dimensions of identity in schools

1. *Unsettled school identities* (what is school for? how is it different from a social club? what agreed rules of conduct should govern its operations?);

2. *Unsettled teacher identities* (what is a teacher's role? – instructor/authority figure – or enabler/equal/friend? – or entertainer?); and
3. *Unsettled school student identities* (what is a school student's role? – learner/obedient subordinate? – or consumer/socialising youth/young adult with rights?).

Space does not permit a full exploration of these issues here, but a short summary of salient considerations will clarify what appears to be at stake.

School Identities – Urban comprehensive schools have been displaced from their former position (in working class and lower middle class communities) as unambiguous centres of learning, monopolising authority over the definition and transmission of agreed legitimate knowledge. These schools are now sites of negotiation rather than sites of authoritarian imposition. Without these practices of negotiation these schools would be sites of chronic unworkable conflict. The accomplishment of these schools and classrooms as

The spirit of negotiation which teachers need to apply in their daily interaction with their students in classrooms, and school managements in their interactions with parents, reflects wider cultural developments in society in which parents and students are strongly aware of their rights as quasi-consumers in relation to schools and teachers.

mainly harmonious spaces producing relative success for the majority of their students now relies on a negotiated consensual approach. In this environment teachers and senior management are compelled to work very hard to win consent from students and parents for most of what they want to do.

Teacher Identities – Teachers in these schools feel that they are under some pressure to be entertainers as opposed to teachers or instructors. That is, they feel themselves to be under pressure from, and in competition with, a 24 hour digital popular entertainment culture to which their students have instant and constant access and allegiance. These pressures are reinforced by the requirements

of the inspection regime of classroom teaching implemented by Ofsted and others. However, a significant amount of the curriculum content of their subject disciplines is not necessarily amenable to being attractively presented in a way which is free of the “pain” of struggling with difficult or unfamiliar concepts or bodies of knowledge.

The spirit of negotiation which teachers need to apply in their daily interaction with their students in classrooms, and school managements in their interactions with parents, reflects wider cultural developments in society in which parents and students are strongly aware of their rights as quasi-consumers in relation to schools and teachers.

The ubiquity of student possession, in classrooms, of a multiplicity of digital technology devices (e.g. classroom computers with internet connection, mobile phones, mp3 players, portable game consoles, etc), has generated a growing problem of regulation and control for urban secondary schools and teachers. This digital technology, strongly linked to the consumption of popular culture, is characterised by the way in which it affords students constant access to sources of information, entertainment and communication in sites remote from the classroom, as well as communicative resources for contact with each other inside the classroom. The capabilities of many of these devices for audio and visual recording add to the complicating factors.

Student Identities – In traditional conceptualisations of student identities, school students appear unambiguously as people expected to be learners and receivers of instruction. By contrast students in many contemporary urban comprehensive schools conceive of themselves as quasi-consumers, with rights to negotiate over matters such as teacher instructions, whether or not to participate in curriculum-related classroom activities, and entitled to pronounce openly on their perception and assessment of the quality of the teacher performances they are receiving. This stance is not adopted by students as a self-consciously insolent one, but as a stance which feels natural, normal and in tune with the contemporary process of schooling.

All of these unsettled identities, and the significant ways in which they challenge the traditional culture of the school, have generated major debates and dilemmas amongst teachers – as the following selection of statements from teachers working with our research data shows.

Debates and dilemmas: Teachers' Voices

Digital Culture, regulation and control

"I have seen situations where teachers have confiscated where parents have come into school irate and given the teachers a hard time for taking their phones ... despite the fact that they weren't supposed to have them in the first place" (Carol aged 40-50/ MFL & English/ ten years' classroom experience)

"The parents have to come and actually collect them [mobile phones] they are not allowed to have them unless the parents come in. But you see parents argue with us. They go 'there are security reasons why they should have them they need to be contacted urgently'. So we tend to turn a blind eye because if we don't see them we don't know" (Deborah aged 50-60/ RE & Humanities/ 20 years' classroom experience)

"They just use their phones or they'll have um one earpiece which will go up one side and through their jumper and it will just be up here (murmurs of agreement) and um their hair will cover it" (Jonathan aged 50-60/ English & Media Studies/ 25 years' classroom experience)

"But my problem was I only confiscated them twice and I locked them in the cupboard in my room and when I came back the cupboard had been burst open ... but I wouldn't confiscate again for the same reason and then you're personally liable again for the money and the school I work at has made it very clear that if we confiscate something and it goes missing it's our personal money so I wouldn't confiscate" (Harriet aged 20-30/ English/ three years' classroom experience)

"If they have to have them [mp3 players] they must be turned off in the classroom. That is sometimes breached and occasionally they are sometimes allowed to listen to music when they are working on writing once the teachers [have] stopped talking you know the kids say 'can I listen to my music sir' some teachers say yes" (Ruby aged 30-40/ English/ EAL/ nine years' classroom experience)

Authority or negotiation?

"I don't think that we can maintain discipline in schools any longer simply by us keeping you know laying down the law and you know keeping them under the thumb I think it is consensual (murmurs of agreement) there is a negotiation that has to happen" (Olive (age n/a)/ Science/ 20+ years' classroom experience)

"I think it [the relationship between adults and children] has become far less formal"

you know the idea that you know the adult is right and the students do what they are told has broken down in wide areas of society certainly in my little bit” (Caroline aged 40-50/ EAL/ 24 years’ classroom experience)

Teachers, students and classroom communication

“... we need to look very hard at how we educate young people today we cannot do it anymore from standing in front of the classroom I believe” (Tom aged 40-50/ MFL / (Asst. Head)/ 17 years’ classroom experience)

“You get to a certain stage with certain classes ... for you to be able to stand up in front of them and talk at them for 10 minutes and they will do exactly what you want them to but that is rare and that has only happened a couple of times to me with a couple of classes in my time here” (Samantha aged 30-40/ English & Media Studies/ five years’ classroom experience)

“I think Ofsted almost demands singing and dancing shows now and I think certainly in the staff room we’re all aware of that um we do need to entertain them and it’s sometimes a matter of crowd control” (Laura aged 20-30/ English, Media & Drama/ three years’ classroom experience)

“I think the idea of teachers as entertainers is kind of worrying but there is an onus on teachers, certainly at this school you would be frowned upon if you were to take on a traditional role if you were at your desk for example” (Gethin aged 20-30/ English/ three years’ classroom experience)

Student identities (consumers with rights?)

“There are so many areas of potential conflict which we have to negotiate around, it’s a minefield ... and you’ll be seen as being unfair and you will lose any backing of the parents because they [students] can present a very plausible case that the member of staff is grossly unfair and they’re good at that now ... we’ve taught them about self-respect and how to manage situations. And when they need to they will claim their rights and the responsibility [for their transgressions] just sort of gets shuffled [off]” (Tom aged 40-50/ MFL / (Asst. Head) 17 years’ classroom experience)

“Children are bright now. You know we have got a whole different climate now. Children know what they are entitled to. Children will tell you “that was a crap lesson, it was boring, you read that story with no feeling”. But they are right to do that if we are crap you know whereas I wouldn’t have dreamed of saying anything. I would have sat and be bored” (Deborah aged 50-60/ R.E. /Humanities/ 20 years’ classroom experience)

“There’s been a shift um from when I was at school when the teacher had complete authority I think there is a shift in the way in which um young people perceive themselves in relation to adults and they’ll all tell you what their rights are” (Olive (age n/a)/ Science/ 20+ years’ classroom experience)

Urban Classroom Culture – The Book

Our research, together with the discussion, debate and analysis in the teacher seminar groups, has culminated in a forthcoming publication *Urban Classroom Culture* (June 2011). It will contain classroom recordings and transcripts; analyses of these episodes; teachers’ commentaries and proposals; and supporting material from outside school. It will interest Initial Teacher Educators and CPD organisers. For further information contact Dr Roxy Harris (roxy.harris@kcl.ac.uk).

Footnote

- 1 Ben Rampton (Director), Roxy Harris (Deputy Director), Alexandra Georgakopoulou, Constant Leung, Lauren Small (Research Assistants) [King’s College, London], Caroline Dover (University of Westminster).

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Evidence, evidence, evidence

Steve Eddison

Steve Eddison is a Key Stage 2 teacher at Arbourthorne Community Primary School in Sheffield. A regular contributor of humorous pieces for the TES, Steve also wrote *Locked Stockroom and Two Smoking Gerbils*, the 2007 award winning staffroom monologue for Teachers' Television.

Abstract: *My friend Margaret, a successful primary school teacher for 25 years, has been driven to crimes against vegetables after a recent Ofsted visit. Their insatiable demand for evidence, evidence, evidence, is weighing heavily on the bags under her eyes. And she is not alone in her desperation, as classroom practitioners everywhere contemplate eschewing a life and the occasional opportunity for torrid sex in a desperate bid to come up to Ofsted's impossible standards.*

Slices of raw carrot do their utmost to flee the scene of carnage. Anywhere in the kitchen will do. Two take refuge in the fruit bowl, another two under the drainer, and several more escape down the narrow gap between the dishwasher and the tumble dryer. The unlucky few that are left on the chopping board are scooped up and cast unceremoniously into the cooking pot.

That is when I realise the truth. This is personal. This is no longer casserole preparation. This is something much bigger than dinner.

"Apparently my children were not engaged enough," says Margaret, turning her attention to parsnips. "It's my fault of course. My lesson was not differentiated enough ... my resources were inappropriate to the task ... my low ability slash SEN group clearly would have benefited from a more kinaesthetic approach ... my non-focus group would have fared better with a clearer explanation of the activity ... insufficient progress was made by the majority of children ... and whilst under the old Ofsted criteria I might have been judged satisfactory, under the new Ofsted criteria I'm shite ... and schools in challenging circumstances need all teaching to be at least good ... or if not good, better than good ... and mine isn't ... so that is that! Twenty five bloody years it's taken me to become a crap teacher!"

Margaret whirls round. She prods ten inches of keenly honed, stainless steel to within rather less than ten inches of several of my vital organs. At this point – if you will excuse the pun – I'm thinking to myself ... *Okay, put the knife down and step away from the chopping board, I said put the knife down and step away from the chopping board...*

"Look, why don't we take a break from cooking, sip the rest of your

camomile tea and, while you practise your breathing techniques, we can talk about it?" I lead her gently into the living room. Behind us I detect what can only be described as an audible sigh of relief from the vegetable rack.

Sadly, there are few audible sighs of relief coming from primary schools these days, particularly those like ours that serve areas of social challenge. And the worrying thing from my point of view is that stressed out teachers like Margaret are no longer the exception. The sound of quiet weeping emanating from classrooms, toilets, store cupboards and Head teachers' offices is on the increase. It is the sound of exhaustion. It is the sound of broken spirits. It is the sound of teachers no longer able to cope with the demands placed upon them.

Competing demands are reaching levels that threaten an inundation. Teachers are no longer waving, they're drowning.

The barrier that should have been provided by the work load agreement has long since been engulfed. It has been swept away as easily as a child's sandcastles by the relentless tide of more and more progressively detailed and increasingly unrealistic expectations. Competing demands are reaching levels that threaten an inundation. Teachers are no longer waving, they're drowning.

Since the TES – Times Educational Supplement – began publishing my writing a few years ago, an increasing number of primary teachers – colleagues and friends – have begun turning to me for advice, which just goes to show how desperate some people have become. "It seems to me your friends have an entirely exaggerated opinion of your professional ability. Or they've never actually read anything you've written. Or maybe you're having torrid sex with them?" said my wife, shortly after Margaret's tearful phone call begging me to come over.

"I can assure you I am not having torrid sex with anyone," I protested. To which there was no reply.

Anyway, putting to one side questions about my competence to be a teachers' agony uncle or a torrid lover, the view from the front line – what we used to call the chalk face but is now best described as the Interactive Whiteboard Interface – is a stark one. The proliferation of tears and tantrums, of bitter complaints and irritated grumbles, of heartfelt threats to simply leave teaching in favour of having a nervous breakdown, attempting suicide or working on the checkout at Tesco, have a common cause. And that common cause can be summed up by the new mantra that

is sweeping down from the corridors of power and charging along the corridors of our most challenging primary schools: *evidence, evidence, evidence.*

“Yes, we accept that young Shane is unlikely to make two sub-levels progress this term on account of his dysfunctional family life, his severe emotional and behavioural problems and the fact that he walks out of class every two minutes, but you need to evidence this by detailing all the efforts you have made to help him overcome these barriers to learning; even if this means providing twenty pages of documentation, a catalogue of annotated photographic evidence and a short documentary-style film about his life saved to DVD!”

The first thing to notice about the use of the term *evidence* here is that it is a verb and not a noun. And the thing about verbs – as I frequently explain to my KS2 children – is that they are action words. Therefore the implication is that in order to *evidence* something, somebody has to *do* something. They have to *collect* the evidence, *sort* the evidence, *organise* the evidence and then *present* the evidence. And that somebody is usually the classroom teacher, and the scale and detail of the things that happen in a classroom – and as a consequence need *evidencing* – seems to be growing.

This almost insatiable requirement for *evidence* in order to justify what is happening in schools and classrooms infers an increasing lack of trust in teachers. And because the demand for *evidence* is driven not by the needs of children but by the needs of administrators and politicians, who have little or no idea of the practicalities of classroom life, the whole process is becoming more and more unrealistic. The *good teacher* in their eyes is a bit like the Emperor’s Coat: something that outside of the imagination does not exist. Their idealised view of schools is an educational Wonderland. And while it might be perfectly alright to *believe* six impossible things before breakfast, *performing* them is another matter entirely.

This drive towards *evidencing* almost every activity they undertake means that there are now two distinct types of teacher in our primary schools. There are those that exist in reality and there are those that exist in the heads of people who don’t actually teach. (Actually there is a third type of teacher who is essentially the first type but with aspirations to be the second type. The existence of such a teacher must, however, be an ephemeral one at best in that they either progress rapidly beyond the classroom, or disappear up their own vapour trails.)

The truth is most teachers do their best to conform to the ideal type where possible, but are realistic enough to know that they cannot sincerely meet all the *evidencing* requirements and consistently teach high quality lessons, into the bargain. Torrid sex is almost certainly out of the question.

As though to confirm my own thought processes, Margaret, who has

been dabbing bravely at the mascara smeared bags under her eyes, takes another sip of camomile tea, and continues with her story...

“It’s not just the bloody lesson observations that piss me off either ... it’s all the other crap that goes with them ... apparently my marking doesn’t have sufficiently detailed comments to help children progress to the point where they can actually *read* my detailed comments ... my long term, medium term and short term planning doesn’t provide a clearly differentiated and properly personalised term by term, week by week, day by day, minute by minute, blow by blow accounts of everything that will happen in my classroom ever or at any given moment in time ... my assessment folder is missing several thousand colour coded tick boxes ... my resources have not been personalised to the needs of every conceivable learning style under the sun, and my working wall appears to have gone on strike.”

Now she’s making me feel despondent. “Look, Margaret, I’m thinking that what you really need is strong anti-depressants, but as I haven’t got any you’re going to have to make do with a few words of comfort. Now do you remember when we were idealistic young PGCE students and we were introduced to Piaget’s theory of child development? Do you remember what they told us? That until the age of about seven, children’s thought processes are one dimensional. They can’t, for example, estimate the amount of liquid differently-shaped containers will hold? Well think of those nasty inspectors as seven year olds. Think of them as children who don’t yet have the capacity to recognise the bleeding obvious: that you can’t get a quart out of a pint pot ... or blood out of a stone ... or expect a normal human being to develop the ability to shower children with whizzy, action-packed, hyper-engaging lessons five and half hours a day for five days a week while still keeping on top of an ever growing mountain of evidence-based paperwork. Well not unless they come from the planet Krypton, that is.”

But the reality is you don’t have to be from another planet to be a good teacher (just to officially recognise one) because there are lots of them already; teachers of all ages, shapes and sizes; teachers who are in the job for the right reasons; all of them performing minor miracles day after day with some of our most needy children, and in the most difficult of circumstances. And the danger is this, if we don’t begin to trust them without continually subjecting them to more and more *evidence*-based scrutiny, then we are likely to lose them. And I’m not just talking about those, like Margaret, who are in their fifties and feel they no longer have the energy levels to cope with increased expectations. Out of six of my twenty seven year old daughter’s university and school friends who went into teaching, five have already quit the profession citing the need to have a life, and just occasionally torrid sex, as the reason for doing so.

Trusting teachers has to begin with a relaxing of the need for a huge

burden of *evidence* that we are doing a good job. Any Head teacher who wanders into his or her classrooms on a regular basis; who watches teachers teaching (as opposed to performing); who observes the classroom environment; who talks to the children while they are working; and who takes an interest in what they are doing, knows whether good teaching is taking place. It's hardly rocket science. The rigid monitoring of detailed

planning, of micro-marking and of endless pages of tick-box assessment criteria, is for the benefit of gathering evidence in order to survive a visit from Ofsted or a local authority inspection team; as is the even more ludicrous gathering of evidence from lesson observations based on Ofsted criteria.

Teaching takes place in a social and emotional context. In fact it takes place in such a complex social and emotional context, that any attempt to analyse the process by reference to an imagined blueprint or 'ideal model' is doomed to failure.

The very idea that someone who hasn't taught a class of children since dinosaurs ruled the Earth can walk into a classroom – armed with nothing but a comprehensively compiled *what-good-teaching-looks-like* checklist, a set of contextualised data and an obscure taste in fashion – and in less time than it takes me to thoroughly mark one piece of assessed writing, make sound judgements about my ability to teach, is a complete nonsense. Teaching takes place in a social and emotional context. In fact it takes place in such a complex social and emotional context, that any attempt to analyse the process by reference to an imagined blueprint or 'ideal model' is doomed to failure.

Of course the whole *evidencing* culture is predicated on the belief that the revolution in information and communication technology has provided the tools by which almost any activity on Earth can be successfully micro-managed. This view is an entirely erroneous one. Just because you can collect, collate and correlate an infinite amount of data in an infinite variety of ways does not mean that you need to do so. Neither does it mean it will be of any use when you've completed it.

I blame the current trend for micro-analysing activities that were never meant to be micro-analysed on disgraced ex-soccer pundit Andy Gray. As an avid football watcher I found Andy's most irritating fault – much worse than his misogynistic views which to some extent go with the territory – was his annoying need to break down a few seconds of high intensity action into its constituent parts. The premise that a clip of action – involving up to twenty two rapidly interacting players, a fast moving ball, slippery conditions and 50,000 baying fans – can be broken down into ten

minutes of detailed, slow-motion, frame by frozen frame analysis, simply to conclude that Wayne Rooney should have passed the ball zero point zero seven seconds earlier, is madness. But is it any less mad – or any less useful – than asking a teacher to perform in front of a total stranger holding a clipboard with a comprehensive list of criteria that will define good teaching?

The human brain – and by definition that ought to include Wayne Rooney's brain – is an astonishing thing. It has a hundred billion neurons to work with and more internal thought pathways than there are atoms in the universe. Which is great, except it still has to work in real time, in the real world and with real people. I'm not keen on formal lesson observations at the best of times, but hand-on-heart, if ever I am asked to perform in front of a film a crew for a balding Scottish ex-international footballer toting an interactive computer screen that can analyse my every mistake by reference to high-definition, slow-motion action-replays, I'll be on the checkout at Tesco before you can say "*do you want some help packing your groceries, love?*"

Which happy coincidence brings me right back to the culinary theme introduced by my friend Margaret at the beginning of this piece. I hope the following analogy will help her and all those other teachers who feel crushed between the competing demands for *evidencing* that which is not humanly possible while *doing* all that is humanly possible for their children.

Teaching is like cooking dinner. It involves a range of recipes and certain essential ingredients. It involves a degree of time-consuming and often labour-intensive preparation. And it generally involves a lot of hard, messy work clearing up at the end. However it is essentially a creative process, one that should be enjoyable, satisfying and generally fulfilling.

For me the best lessons are a bit like trying to cook my favourite Jamie Oliver recipe: Roast Chicken with Lemon and Rosemary Roast Potatoes. Usually this is a complete triumph, but there are times when, because of other commitments – possibly I've been evidencing the fact I've done the ironing by photographing each freshly pressed item and making an annotated scrapbook of them – I am not properly prepared. I find I don't have a chicken, and I've run out of rosemary, and my squeazy plastic lemon has dried up, and my potatoes have gone to seed and the last time I saw my large baking tray was the week before Christmas when my friend's youngest child was using it as a sledge. At such times you have to just do the very best you can with what you've got available, and if that means not having time for torrid sex, well so be it.

Book reviews

THE NEW TEACHER'S SURVIVAL GUIDE TO BEHAVIOUR

Sue Roffey

Sage Publications Ltd 2011 ISBN: 9781849207447

Teaching is educational research. Every time you go into a classroom it is an experiment. Even if you are teaching "the same" lesson it is very unlikely to actually be the same. You are bound to adapt it to the group you are teaching. Experiments sometimes go wrong. This is quite daunting for new teachers.

Believe me it is daunting enough for old teachers. This book is certainly not just for neophytes. If teachers don't believe they always have something more to learn, then who does?

Sue Roffey's work is research-based. Inevitably it refers to findings, reviews of findings and even reviews of the reviews of the findings! The strength of that is the reader can be sure the book does not contain some notions an ivory-towered expert sucked out of their thumb. It is based on real classroom practice.

Rather than telling new teachers they need to develop empathy and self-control she writes about how you go about developing these skills and how you interact with the pupils in your class. A lot of emphasis is placed on circle time philosophy and practice for democracy, caring, inclusion and fun.

And the book is full of practical tips on how to get the desired outcomes in social behaviour. Sue Roffey's experience in teaching children and young people with challenging behaviour, working with schools and families, and involvement with school counsellor trainees has, over the years, created a detailed formulation of what works in promoting positive behaviour and addressing difficulties effectively.

She believes that a behavioural model of reward and punishment has only limited impact and many psychiatric labels are not only inappropriate but actively damaging. When the focus is entirely on the individual child and treatment it stops us exploring what else might be changed to ensure a more positive outcome for everyone.

An eco-systemic model which acknowledges everyone's rights and responsibilities is much more likely to work if it focuses on competencies rather than deficits and explores what is meaningful for the child or young person. Emotional literacy in its broadest sense is also crucial for those who are faced with hard to manage behaviour.

**Derek
McMillan**

Derek McMillan teaches at Sackville School in East Grinstead and has 30 years' experience in secondary education. He runs a helpline for stressed teachers on behalf of the West Sussex Teachers' Association, where he is also the union learning representative. He is a keen advocate of life-long learning.

Behaviour is not looked at in isolation. The theme of the work is an interconnected view of the education process. One example: a school had laminated posters "This is a put-down free zone" in all the classrooms and public areas, the staffroom and the Head's office. Instead of focussing on the behaviour of individual children they sought to create a completely different atmosphere for pupils and staff.

This second edition of the book is updated to include: the latest research developments in resilience, wellbeing, positive psychology and teacher-student relationships; reference to the Every Child Matters agenda and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning in the UK, and the Values Education and Safe Schools Framework in Australia.

What I liked most about it was the interactive nature of the book. It poses questions and tasks for the reader and invites you to interact with the discourse and relate it to your classroom practice and the practice you see about you. Its starting point is the self-perception of the new teacher and their reasons for working in teaching.

And of particular interest for me was the international research on why teachers leave the profession. If you want to read all about that fascinating insight you will have to read the book. Bully your library into getting a copy.

And check out Sue Roffey's website <http://www.sueroffey.com/> for details of her other works. If you want to discuss any of her ideas it also has contact details.

PLAY AND PRACTICE IN THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

Edited by Natalie Canning.

Sage publications Ltd 2010 ISBN: 9781848609976

This book is a new and completely topical look at play, both the theory and the practice. The cover appealed immediately to me as an early years professional and once I started to read it I wanted to read it all and get all my staff to read it! The nine knowledgeable contributors range from academics to practising nursery and children's centre staff and the mix of research and its practical application works very well. The book gives a variety of new perspectives on this much written about topic.

Each of the four sections of the book looks at play in relation to one of the Early Years Foundation Stage themes, A Unique Child, Positive Relationships, Enabling Environments and Learning and Development.

Play is a motivating factor for children's engagement and participation; this book motivated me. It also reassured me that the changes we have made since becoming a children's centre nursery were the right ones. It truly focuses on what it means to be "child centred". Following children's interests is now widely accepted as the way we should be working in

Sue Suleyman

Sue Suleyman is Head of Roundabout Nursery, a large and "outstanding" children's centre nursery in Brighton. She has been an early years professional for 35 years, as a nursery and infant teacher, an Ofsted inspector and an Early Years Consultant for the local authority. She has also been NUT Division Secretary for over 20 years and was a member of the NUT's Foundation Stage Working Party.

nurseries but explaining to parents and to new staff or trainees what this looks like in practice is not always easy. The case studies and the way the writers use these to link theories about play to how to improve current practice make it easy for anyone to understand and to use to justify what we do.

Listening to children's voices about their play and learning is a fairly new concept which has been championed in early years but is difficult to carry out. The writer of chapter two explains very clearly why we need to listen to children and how to do it. There is a critical analysis of the use of adult observations, a common nursery practice. The author suggests that we start observations with pre-conceived ideas about what we want to see based on the learning outcomes. Throughout the book the writers urge us to respect each child's uniqueness and challenge us to evaluate what we do and see if we really celebrate and build on what children "can do" and want to do rather than working towards an adult view of outcomes. This is particularly striking in the chapter about inclusion.

Linking theories about play to a practical case study in each chapter makes the theory relevant; the down side being that the case studies are not real but deliberately contrived to illustrate a point, a strategy which succeeds better in some chapters than others where the scenario is hard to believe. The weakest part of the book is the section on partnership with parents although even this has some new ideas which challenge the current focus of this work.

There are carefully thought out training plans at the end of each chapter, called CPD Opportunities. These use a variety of strategies to get early years practitioners to reflect on their practice and scaffold improvements. Although easy to follow, none of them are simplistic and even experienced staff would find the activities useful. I will definitely be using some on our next training day.

Tina Humber

Tina Humber is a Deputy Head teacher and SENCO in a large primary school in King's Lynn, Norfolk. She has taught for 14 years, ten of which were in the London Borough of Brent. She sits on the NUT's Primary Advisory Committee.

THINKING THROUGH PEDAGOGY FOR PRIMARY AND EARLY YEARS

Tony Eaude

Learning Matters; 2011 ISBN: 0857250639

"Thinking Through Pedagogy for Primary and Early Years" is a book every teacher should dip into, new or old to the profession. As the author states, "Whoever you are, it will be valuable for you to continue to think about pedagogy throughout your professional life." The topics covered are based on specific skills which really help the reader to engage with critical thinking and reflect on their own professional practice.

Theory and practice is woven together seamlessly, and for an academic

book it is truly an enjoyable read from start to finish. I particularly like how each chapter starts with a clear focus, states key ideas to be discussed, which poses a question that is then explored in detail, and lists the relevant QTS Standards that each chapter particularly relates to. Each chapter also ends with suggested further reading to help develop knowledge and understanding around a particular topic. This material is up-to-date and relevant to current practice.

Tony uses case studies in each chapter based on past education practice and his own teaching experiences over the last 30 years, in a special school and then in suburban, new town and multicultural primary schools. It poses questions and gives information that is thought provoking and makes the reader want to share that with others and know their responses, thoughts and opinions.

This book is a fantastic tool to help students/teachers, in Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) as well as Key Stage 1 and 2, to develop their skills, expertise and improve as practitioners. It goes beyond what to teach and focuses on engaging the reader to think through how to enhance children's learning. Tony makes it clear that, "Pedagogy is more complicated and interesting than teaching in terms of transmitting knowledge, or the mechanics of planning and assessment." This book provokes things as a practitioner you want to address in your practice and see the positive effects it will have on the pupils you teach.

As a primary Deputy Head teacher who coordinates continual professional development (CPD) I will introduce this book to the staff to allow them to think about different aspects of pedagogy and help some teachers change their practice for the better. Hopefully this will impact on standards, giving pupils better life chances and a positive learning experience.

PROMOTING READING FOR PLEASURE IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Michael Lockwood

Sage publications Ltd 2008 ISBN: 9781412929677

According to the OECD, reading for pleasure is even more important than social class in determining academic success. Reading, when given free rein, changes lives for the better. It might, therefore, seem strange that a book on "Promoting Reading for Pleasure" is needed. But needed it is.

Over the last 20 years, the whole concept of reading has been steadily eroded. Literacy became reduced to a narrow notion of phonic decoding, with meaning and understanding tested through fragmentary excerpts and by the dreariest of closed questions. Presented like this, for many children reading becomes an irksome chore. No wonder the "Progress in

Peter Flack

Peter Flack is Assistant Secretary of the NUT in Leicester. He is also a member of the Project Board of the "Whatever it Takes" literacy strategy in Leicester which seeks to guarantee that every child is a successful reader by the end of primary education.

International Reading Literacy Study” (PIRLS) reported that reading for pleasure was undertaken less often in England than most other countries. The joy of reading has been forcibly expunged from their lives.

Yet, in many respects, reading for pleasure is the key to successful learning. Literacy, properly conceived, is a liberation activity. Viewed in that light, Michael Lockwood’s book is a timely encouragement to teachers to set free their pupils’ imaginations and promote reading for pleasure for its own sake, secure in the knowledge that the research says that reading of itself is a powerful stimulant for learning.

Based on his own original research on what schools and teachers have found to work, the book carefully moves through the different aspects of making schools “reading friendly”. This includes guidance on becoming a “Reading for Pleasure School” and the application of this to different age groups and, importantly the reluctant readers amongst boys.

Ideas like book days, book weeks, author visits, parents coming in to school as “story tellers”, establishing “reading corners” where pupils can go off to read plus deliberately involving pupils in book choices and purchasing all help to place reading at the centre of the curriculum. Key, however, within this is the teacher as a role model. Pupils need to see staff as “enthusiastic readers”. Alongside this, it is important teachers have a good knowledge of the range of fiction and non-fiction for children, beyond the tried and trusted old favourites.

Lockwood’s book also contains lots of case studies of individual schools and simple, but helpful, tips on strategies that teachers and whole schools can adopt in order to promote reading for pleasure, including through work with parents. In a delightful contrast to the National Literacy Strategy, the action points during and at the end of chapters contain broad, open questions intended to engage the reader in considering how ideas might be translated into practice in their own school(s).

My one real disappointment with the book was its limited ambition in terms of audience. While changing an individual classroom or a school is always worthwhile in terms of the benefits to children, Michael Lockwood failed to look at the broader challenge of how we change whole local authorities in their attitudes to reading and to reading for pleasure. Some, like West Dumbartonshire, Wolverhampton, Rotherham and my own in Leicester have already embarked on LA wide initiatives to transform reading. Winning whole local councils to a policy of encouraging and promoting “reading for pleasure” in every school has got to be a goal worth fighting for. In Leicester, ours is called “Whatever it Takes”. I think that aptly sums up how all teachers should approach it.

OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES WITH NUMBER: SUPPORTING DYSCALCULIA AND STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLE WITH MATHS

Ronit Bird

Sage Publications Ltd 2009 ISBN: 9781848607118

Right from the start this book sets out to be a practical, ideas filled book providing activities and games to “develop logical thinking and mathematically sound cognitive models”, so providing students with dyscalculia or other mathematical difficulties with a firm base on which to develop their mathematical understanding.

The book starts with a very clear, brief summary of dyscalculia and a list of indicators which would be particularly useful for class teachers who have little knowledge of dyscalculia and mathematical difficulties. Dyslexia and dyspraxia are given a brief overview and how these difficulties affect maths is commented on. Also provided is a quick and informal way of identifying pupils who need extra help or further assessment. A good list of ways to support learners with difficulties in maths is provided rooted, as is the rest of the book, in the use of concrete examples, visualisation and multisensory practice.

The book then is split into four sections

- *How to stop pupils counting in ones*

Counting in ones is one of the most common obstacles that must be overcome if a pupil is to progress in mathematics. This chapter seeks to provide activities and games to enable children to see number as more than a series of ones but as units and chunks that will help with calculations.

- *The bridging technique*

The chapters in this section develop early number bond recognition and move on to provide a wide range of ideas for teaching bridging through 10 and multiples of 10. It demonstrates how to support pupils as they move from concrete addition and subtraction to the abstract.

- *The area model of multiplication and division*

This section takes learners from early multiplication and division skills to establishing a secure understanding of complex algorithms. It provides a detailed guide for teaching the area method of multiplication and division again starting with the concrete manipulation of apparatus.

- *Reasoning strategies*

The final section of the book deals with explicit teaching of reasoning strategies, how to derive new acts from those previously known and making appropriate connections.

Alison McHugh

Alison McHugh has worked as a primary teacher for the past 13 years. She has been an Inclusion Manager in a primary school and is now a specialist teacher at Croydon Literacy Centre. She has a particular interest in the needs of dyslexic, dyscalculic and dyspraxic children.

For each section of the book the author starts with a brief overview of the skill, putting the teaching points into context and highlighting briefly the problems faced by pupils with mathematical difficulties. She then goes on to list certain essential pre-skills which have to be mastered before learning the new material. These are clearly laid out and provide a good checklist for teachers to use as informal assessments of progress prior to moving on to new skills. A wealth of games and activities to support pupils who are struggling with key mathematical concepts is then provided.

Most of the activities make use of materials that are easily available in the classroom or can be downloaded from the CD included with the book. There are games and activities to take pupils slowly and thoroughly through their learning ensuring a firm foundation before progressing to more complex, abstract ideas.

The author provides some interesting thoughts and challenges to conventional teaching methods and strategies when she tackles the fact that pupils with dyscalculia and other mathematical difficulties have huge problems when counting backwards. This places a large burden on their short term and working memory resulting in inefficient calculation methods and little understanding of the process. Instead of conventional methods of subtraction and division which may result in pupils with dyscalculia counting in ones for longer than necessary she recommends that they are taught subtraction and division as complementary and repeated addition moving forwards rather than backwards on a number line.

In conclusion, Ronit Bird has produced a highly practical book and CD which is easily accessible to all teachers and would also provide teaching assistants with a wealth of ideas to support struggling mathematicians. It provides a clear, succinct explanation of dyscalculia and what that would look like in a classroom. A thorough sequence of teaching activities ensures that pupils move in small, highly focused steps with plenty of reinforcement that will enable pupils to “overcome difficulties with number” and become confident mathematicians.



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COMPANY LIMITED

Education Publishing Company Ltd, Devonia House, 4 Union Terrace,
CREDITON, Devon, EX17 3DY. Tel: 01363 774455. Fax: 01363 776592.
Email: er@educationpublishing.com. Web: www.educationpublishing.com



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education review

volume 23 • number 2 • Summer 2011

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Recommended Price: £9

