
education review

Does Every Child Still Matter?



volume 25 • number 1
Summer 2013

Education Review is the journal of the National Union of Teachers and has been 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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<u>Individuals, rest of the world</u>	<u>£40</u>

The Education Publishing Company Ltd
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EX17 3DY. Tel: 01363 774455.
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Education Review is produced by the Education and Equalities Department of the National Union of Teachers.

Head of Education and Equalities

Rosamund McNeil

Editors

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Tel: 020 7380 4717

The National Union of Teachers

Hamilton House

Mabledon Place

London WC1H 9BD

Tel: 020 7388 6191

Fax: 020 7387 8458

Web: www.teachers.org.uk

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

The process of designing the new curriculum and proposals for its implementation have been characterised by a lack of transparency and a seemingly insatiable desire for haste. The consultation period for the new National Curriculum closed on 16 April, just over two months after the draft Programmes of Study were first released on 7 February.

The proposed timescales will see a 'final version' of the national curriculum available from September, with an expectation that it will be taught in schools from September 2014. There has been no consideration of the implications for teachers' training needs and the impact on children, nor the cumulative impact of other curriculum initiatives such as the introduction of new A levels and GCSEs.

Meanwhile, questions about which expert opinion, if any, has informed the draft programmes of study, remain largely unanswered. For example, representatives of the historical section of the British Academy, the Historical Association, the Royal Historical Society and History UK, complained that the "details of the [new] curriculum have been drafted inside the Department for Education without any systematic consultation or public discussion with historians, teachers or the wider public".

But there are even more fundamental questions about the whole endeavour given that those schools which now have academy status are not, in fact, bound to follow the National Curriculum.

It is therefore extremely apt that this edition of *Education Review* focuses on issues about the purpose, ownership, design and implementation of the curriculum. Contributors have addressed this broad theme from a range of perspectives and backgrounds: as practitioners, academics and leaders of esteemed cultural institutions. They have also focused on a series of fundamentally related questions about the institutional, economic and social contexts in which the curriculum is taught.

It is clear, for example, that all schools, including academies, are subject to a range of centrally-defined accountability measures which, of course, include pupils' achievement of qualifications such as KS2 SATs, GCSEs and A-Levels. These are bound to have an effect on schools' curriculum offer and ultimately shape the content and nature of teaching.

It would therefore have made sense for the Government to approach reform of the curriculum and assessment in a holistic and methodical way, taking account of how changes in one will affect the other.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case. It was only due to an incredibly successful campaign in which I am proud to say the NUT played a central role, that the Government's proposed replacement for the GCSE – the confusingly named Ebacc certificate – was shelved earlier this year. The proposed new exam system effectively would have ignored creative and vocational subjects, imposing a narrow academic vision of educational success. However the Secretary of State was forced into an embarrassing U-turn when he realised the scale and breadth of opposition to his proposals.

Despite this potentially disastrous policy being averted, there continue to be pressures which threaten to undermine students' right of access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Some of these pressures come from within the review process itself; the proposals currently place a heavy emphasis on core knowledge and the learning of facts. Despite the stated aim of producing a slimmed down curriculum, the sheer volume of prescriptive content in the statutory core subjects will place a heavy burden on teachers, leaving them with less freedom to define and teach a school-based curriculum. It is essential that the curriculum provides an appropriate balance between learning facts and developing students' skills and ability to apply their knowledge in different contexts.

At the same time accountability measures are likely to continue to erode teachers' and schools' freedoms in relation to the curriculum. Not least amongst these is the E-Bacc measure which has become a central part of the school performance tables. This poses a serious threat to the place of arts' subjects within our schools and already appears to be having an impact, both in terms of the subjects offered by schools and the number of teaching jobs in those subjects that do not form part of the Ebacc measure.

So in what way can we say that the curriculum belongs to the profession, to schools, parents or children when there is little transparency about its authors, about which expert opinion informed it and about how it will work alongside other major reforms that the Government is proposing?

We have a government that is fond of talking about standards and rigour while its own policies display little concern for these values, and still less for those of openness, transparency and accountability.

Given the continuing pressure on the teaching of the arts within our schools and the importance of an alliance that includes both teachers and vocal champions from outside the teaching profession, I particularly welcome the contribution from Gregory Doran, Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, in this edition of *Education Review*. Greg argues powerfully for the importance of a direct engagement with Shakespeare's texts through performance. His piece reminds us that teaching, and the teaching of poetry, literature and drama in particular, should not be reduced to simply reciting great works. In order to fully explore the potential meanings and resonances within these texts, young people must be encouraged to think of themselves as "active, capable agents in the artistic process". His article also raises the question of how arts' organisations can use their influence to ensure that the teaching of Shakespeare remains central to our curriculum.

John Steers examines the historical roots of the "pecking order" of curriculum subjects to show that the marginalisation of the arts is nothing new. He argues, however, that the New Secondary Curriculum of 2007 offered a much broader and positive vision for arts' subjects, yet unfortunately this is now being rolled back.

Rona Tutt discusses the need for a coherent approach to curriculum design which allows teachers greater flexibility and autonomy. She highlights how league tables and floor targets lead to a narrow view of school performance and inevitably impact on what can be taught. In particular she focuses on issues of inclusion, arguing that children with significant SEN have generally been treated as an afterthought in the current review. As Rona notes, initiatives like the year one phonics check reveal that the Government still seems to believe that all children learn in the same way and progress at the same speed.

In her article, Annette Wiles addresses the importance of parents' views on the curriculum. PTA-UK has conducted research with parents to gauge their response

to curriculum reform which shows that most parents believe the curriculum should be determined by teachers, second only to those who want it to be in the gift of “experts in what and how children learn”. Only ten per cent of parents thought the curriculum should be decided by the Government. Furthermore, the majority of parents felt that a national curriculum should cover only a core knowledge and understanding and should not be prescriptive. The same survey asked parents what one thing the government could do to help their children’s education to which a majority of parents suggested stopping continual change of the system. Michael Gove seems unwilling to take seriously the views of teachers and education experts. Let’s hope he is more amenable to listening to what parents have to say.

Contributors to this edition of *Education Review* also address concerns around issues of professional autonomy and trust.

John Coe explores the way in which the Government became increasingly prescriptive in its approach to primary education over the course of the 20th century. This process has undermined teachers’ efforts to create a sensitive and nurturing environment for young children and has led to the marginalisation of play within the classroom.

Tony Eade explores the processes involved in teaching a class of young children. As he demonstrates, this involves teachers exercising professional judgement, adopting a wide range of strategies and seeing themselves as curriculum-creators. He identifies the opportunities and constraints which make it difficult to act and think in this way and concludes that primary teachers’ role is much more complicated and demanding than is often recognised, involving processes and pedagogy very different from an approach based largely on achieving short-term results in a narrow range of core subjects.

Lori Beckett’s article describes an initiative that brings together teachers and academic partners to co-construct responsive curriculum and classroom practices. The ‘Giving Teachers Voice’ CPD programme is helping to identify what it actually takes to ‘raise achievement’ and ‘close the gap’ in disadvantaged schools. It highlights the crucial role for practitioner research to inform investigations of pupils’ schooling experiences and classroom practices to enable teachers to reconstruct provision which better meets the needs of disadvantaged pupils.

Wider systemic issues and questions about disadvantage are raised by Carl Parsons. Carl underlines the extraordinary challenges faced by many teachers working in some of the country’s most disadvantaged communities. This has nothing to do with a culture of low expectation but is rather a call to ensure that there is realistic and meaningful discussion about the impact of poverty and disadvantage on young people’s learning. Carl’s piece also reflects on the devastating impact that sudden and seemingly arbitrary changes to league table measures and floor targets can have on schools.

I am delighted that as she approaches retirement at the end of this term from a lifetime’s work in education, most recently as Principal of George Green’s School in London’s Isle of Dogs, Kenny Frederick has found time to write an article in this edition of *Education Review*, entitled, “It’s time to focus on the girls!” Kenny questions why it is that that women remain underrepresented in public life and why, despite outperforming boys academically, girls are still losing out in the workplace 40 years after the Sex Discrimination Act became law. She argues that schools, colleges and universities need to refocus their efforts, put women’s issues back on the agenda and challenge the stereotypes and the traditions that keep women out. That so many young women remain unable to achieve their potential in a world

that is still very heavily weighted in favour of men is a real waste of resources, she concludes. I couldn't agree with her more. I'm sure Kenny will continue to make a valuable contribution to education long after her retirement and I wish her much happiness and fulfilment in this next stage of her life.

Like Kenny, *Education Review* is itself moving on and this will be the last printed edition of the journal as the NUT moves towards more electronic means of communication. I look forward to updating you in due course about future arrangements for the Union to engage with policy issues with its members and colleagues in the wider education world.

Christine Slawes

Generation Shakespeare

Abstract: *The debate and campaign around the EBacc brought the role of the arts in the curriculum centre stage. In this article Gregory Doran, the Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, argues that we must reclaim Shakespeare for a generation of students but we have to constantly re-discover the plays within the changing circumstances of the world in which we live. Important though it is that Shakespeare's place in the English curriculum is secure, it also needs to be constantly challenged and questioned so that we make sure we know why we're doing it and what its real educational value is.*

Most of us encounter Shakespeare for the first time at school. In my foreword to the RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers (recently distributed to all state-funded secondary schools in England, courtesy of the Department for Education) I explain that I certainly did (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2010). It was at primary school in Preston, I think that I first heard a recording of Mendelssohn's incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with extracts from the play performed by actors. When Puck declared that he would "put a girdle round about the earth, in forty minutes", I was amazed. My Dad had told me that Sputnik, the first space satellite sent up by the Soviet Union, took over an hour and a half to orbit the globe. Puck was twice as fast as Sputnik! The Russian satellite might have launched the space age, but Puck launched Shakespeare for me. I was hooked.

Shakespeare is probably the most prescribed author in education systems across the world. Responses to a survey conducted by the RSC and the British Council suggest that 50 per cent of schoolchildren across the world are encountering Shakespeare at school (Irish, 2011); it is hard to imagine another artist coming close to this. And school is probably where we decide whether Shakespeare, or theatre-going and theatre-making, are things we feel confident to engage in and want to find out more about or things we feel excluded from. I was lucky that my first encounter ignited a life-long relationship with the plays, but many find their first encounter with Shakespeare harder. Perhaps because the plays seem too wordy, the language feels old fashioned, or the stories might simply appear irrelevant.

We believe that Shakespeare's work, and the work of other writers presented by the RSC, are part of a cultural inheritance that belongs to all children and young people. But, like you, we also know that Shakespeare can be daunting and needs some careful introduction.

It's interesting to reflect on Shakespeare's place in the curriculum in the light of recent and on-going discussions about the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc). Before the most recent set of announcements, there had been a call to include arts subjects in the proposed Ebacc Certificate (by effectively expanding it to include the arts as a sixth subject area). Although plans for the certificate have now been scrapped, the Ebacc league table measure has not been scrapped and it is now proposed that it will be published alongside new school accountability measures.

Gregory Doran

Gregory Doran is the Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and has been described by the *Sunday Times* as "one of the great Shakespearians of his generation". He has directed over half the canon of Shakespeare's plays for the company.

The two league tables being proposed are:

1. One new league table based on how well young people do in English and Maths.
2. One new league table based on how well young people do in their eight best GCSE qualifications. These eight include English and Maths, three EBacc subjects and three other subjects of their choosing.

The 'three other subjects' are of particular interest to many arts and cultural organisations. The argument goes: should we push for the mandatory inclusion of an arts subject within the three remaining subject areas? Or should we be more concerned about the fact that arts subjects do not enjoy the same treatment as, say, Science and Humanities at GCSE? For example, whilst all Science and Humanities subjects have individual exam codes and will all count separately within the 'eight best' league table, recently introduced legislation means that certain combinations of arts subjects are grouped together and therefore will not be separately counted towards the 'eight'. These changes mean, for example, that only Dance OR Drama can count towards league tables at GCSE since they are not treated as two distinct areas in their own right. (This might seem quite a small point but actually it's a rather puzzling state of affairs. It may mean that schools are less inclined to offer a wide range of arts

“We believe that Shakespeare’s work, and the work of other writers presented by the RSC, are part of a cultural inheritance that belongs to all children and young people. But, like you, we also know that Shakespeare can be daunting and needs some careful introduction.”

subjects at GCSE. It probably means that students will have to choose between arts subjects in a way that they don't have to do with other areas of the curriculum.) Perhaps we have something to learn from the Science lobby that succeeded in developing a double award GCSE in the Sciences, recognising the strong links between different science subject areas and therefore supporting students to pursue more than one specialism.

There's another argument to say we shouldn't fixate on GCSEs at all and instead we should think about how arts experiences of all kinds, drama, music, dance, art, film-making etc can be enshrined as part of every student's journey through primary and the early secondary school phases of education. This then leaves the student free to make an informed decision about the subject areas they want to pursue at GCSE. My own personal preference is for this option, but I welcome the opportunity for the creative and cultural industries to have a closer involvement in defining the syllabus and examination requirements of art form subjects.

Organisations like Arts Council England and groups like the Cultural Learning Alliance and What Next? are currently considering all of these issues. We are contributing to those discussions and we hope that you will too. What we mustn't do is talk on behalf of each other. I think the cultural sector can get caught in a trap of focusing too much on the supply we make and not enough on the demand. I urge you to have your say on the future of arts subjects at GCSE and through all phases of education. The Cultural Learning Alliance points out that over the last ten years

take up of GCSEs in the arts by young people has steadily declined. We do not know whether any of the new measures will reverse this trend and certainly nothing that's been announced has been specifically designed to incentivise arts and culture in the same way that the EBacc is incentivising its subjects.

But what does this all mean for Shakespeare? There's one school of thought that says: 'Keep quiet, Shakespeare is still in the English curriculum so there's nothing to worry about.' There's another that says: 'Shakespeare is in danger of becoming an anachronism in the education system; it's the thing we have to do because we're told to, not because we want to or because we see its relevance to our students.'

I find both schools of thought worrying for different reasons. I want to ensure that through the work of our education department and our work on stage, we reclaim Shakespeare for a generation of students starting secondary school this September and into the future. In rehearsals, I encourage actors and creative teams working on any of Shakespeare's plays to treat them as if the ink were still wet on the page. I do that because we have to constantly re-discover the plays within the changing circumstances of the world we live in. The plays need to do what all great works of art do: help us learn more about ourselves, each other and our world. If the plays aren't doing that, why are we still performing them? If our educational experiences of Shakespeare's work aren't doing that, why are we bothering with them? There is an astonishing range of learning opportunities offered by Shakespeare's work when we see them as texts that require interpretation for performance. They explore light and shade, comedy and tragedy, love and hate; all encapsulated within a form of words that are like an invitation to solve a wonderful and rather complex puzzle. We can all enjoy the challenge of complex texts and we can all meet the challenges of those texts if we have the right tools. Finding clues in the language, nurturing and developing a curiosity about words and a confidence in our own powers of communication; all of these can be achieved when we work on Shakespeare's plays as living texts that we breathe life into.

The RSC recently celebrated its 50th birthday. During those years, and inspired by the work of our Voice Director Cicely Berry, we have found different ways of accessing Shakespeare's plays in the rehearsal room. We've had to do that because Shakespeare can be difficult. Many actors start their first day of rehearsals feeling scared they won't understand the language; scared that they'll get found out; doubting that Shakespeare has got anything to say to them. Generally, they change their opinion. That shift in attitude comes about because the actors engage with the language in active, exploratory and playful ways which take it from words on a page to meaningful, coherent performance.

Over many years of working with young people we have found that engaging students directly and physically with the sound, shapes and rhythms of the text allows them deeper access to it and invites personal responses from them about it. We know that it is the personal connections that young people make with any artist's work that has the potential to open up a life-long relationship for them with that artist or artistic practice. When we encourage young people to see themselves as active, capable agents in the artistic process, real learning and real ownership happen.

Thinking to the future, I would like us to open up the complete works of

“When we encourage young people to see themselves as active, capable agents in the artistic process, real learning and real ownership happen.”

Shakespeare for students across the country. Over the next six years, I want the RSC to produce and perform the complete works – certainly the 36 plays that make up the First Folio – and we’re starting this autumn with a production of *Richard II* starring David Tennant. I hope that in 2020 we can say that students leaving school that year, who started their secondary school careers in 2013, will have had an unprecedented exposure to Shakespeare’s work. And not just the plays written by Shakespeare; but Shakespeare in the context of other writers he was inspired by and whom he inspired. I hope that means we’ll be able to look at Ovid as well as staging the best of contemporary writing by playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill.

If we really believe in social mobility, we need to open up classical literature to all students as opposed to it being the preserve of the few. To borrow the Arts Council’s mantra, ‘great art really is for everyone’, I want to ensure we do as much as we can to broaden access to Shakespeare and that’s why the work we do with schools, teachers and students is so important.

Of course, I can say all of this about Shakespeare because I do not work within a curriculum or have a group of students to put through an exam. I understand the enormous task that teachers face in making the work of our house playwright vivid, accessible and enjoyable for students of all ages and abilities. It’s a challenge and there is a great deal of inspirational practice happening in classrooms up and down the country which rises to that challenge on a daily basis. However, it is my hope that the artists approach to this body of work, our theatre company’s perspective on the ways in which we have to work on the plays in order to unlock them for our actors, has some transferability to your classrooms and your teaching contexts.

Whether it does or doesn’t, let us know. We’d love to hear your views on Shakespeare in education or on any aspect of our work. Please do contact education@rsc.org.uk and tell us what you think.

I hope that Shakespeare’s place on the English curriculum is secure for many years to come. But I also hope it is constantly challenged and questioned so that we make sure we know why we’re doing it and what its real educational value is.

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A Curriculum for the Many or the Few?

Abstract: *The National Curriculum was designed originally to be followed by all maintained schools, with independent schools able to choose whether or not to follow it. With the growth of academies, the national curriculum has become less national. In addition, it was said to be a curriculum for all pupils, but in reality, those with significant SEN were treated as an afterthought, something which is still apparent in the latest version. The solution, argues Rona Tutt, lies in having greater flexibility and more trust in teachers' professional judgement.*

In the far off days when the National Curriculum first came into being, it was designed as a curriculum for all schools, and, supposedly, for all pupils. It took most teachers from having considerable autonomy over the educational experiences of their pupils to what Bob Moon has described as “One of the most virulent strains of centrally legislated curriculum to be found anywhere in the world” (Moon, 1997). Based on a secondary model of discrete subjects, it was particularly alien to primary schools. Those who were teaching pupils with significant special educational needs (SEN) had to wrestle with trying to make it appropriate for children and young people whose levels of development and rates of progress meant that the language of year groups, key stages and attainment targets were largely irrelevant. When the testing regime came in alongside it, still less was it appropriate for the whole of the pupil population.

So, 25 years on, what has changed?

Firstly, the educational landscape is entirely different in terms of the diversity of provision that exists today. Instead of a clear distinction between maintained schools that are required by law to follow the National Curriculum, and independent schools that have the choice of whether to do so, the difference between the two types of school has been blurred by the arrival of academies. Confusingly described as publicly-funded independent schools, they do not have to follow the national curriculum. Indeed, on its own website, the Department for Education (DfE) suggests that one of the reasons that a school may decide to become an academy is because of the freedom to choose whether or not to follow it: “Academies benefit from greater freedoms to innovate and raise standards. These include..... Freedoms around the delivery of the curriculum” (DfE, 2013).

This raises the question as to why it is a good thing for maintained schools to follow the national curriculum in order to improve pupil performance, if academies stand a stronger chance of raising standards by not having to follow it.

In this brave new world of diversity, which began under a Labour government and was embraced with crusading zeal by the present one, academies in all their various manifestations, including university technical colleges (UTCs), studio schools and free schools, are likely to be here to stay. Although it is difficult to determine whether or not they will continue to grow at such a rapid rate, with over half the secondary schools and a much smaller but increasing percentage of primary and

Dr Rona Tutt OBE

Dr Rona Tutt is a former head teacher and a Past President of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT). She has written or co-authored several books on education and is much in demand as a speaker, writer, reviewer and judge.

special schools already academies, there must come a point at which it is no longer appropriate to describe it as a national curriculum. It would make more sense to call it simply 'a curriculum' and to let all schools decide how much of it to follow.

Secondly, despite the national curriculum being created from the start as a curriculum for all state-funded schools, its authors never really considered how to

make it accessible for all children and young people throughout the ability range and with a variety of needs. Some special schools, in particular, went to enormous lengths to try to adjust and adapt it to suit the needs of their pupils, not an easy task when they had previously been able to mould their teaching to the needs of their pupils, rather than the other way round.

“In the same way that a jigsaw will not fit together if the pieces are designed separately, having experts in each subject working in isolation from each other, was always going to be a risky way to arrive at the finished product.”

In the same way that a jigsaw will not fit together if the pieces are designed separately, having experts in each subject working in isolation from each other, was always going to

be a risky way to arrive at the finished product. Driven, not by a knowledge of how schools work and pupils learn, but by a passionate belief that their particular subject area was the most important one on the timetable, each group demanded a level of prescription that was unprecedented and a breadth of knowledge, even at key stage 1, that meant the sum of the parts was much greater than the hours in the school day. In the event, the national curriculum was so bloated that it soon collapsed under the weight of its own pomposity and had to undergo a series of slimming down exercises. Millions of pounds worth of colour coded ring binders – one for each subject - had to be consigned to the bonfire and replaced by the single volume versions that have existed until now.

Some of these mistakes have been avoided in the current review and it is proposed that only English, maths and science have detailed programmes of study. However, it is disappointing that, 25 years on from the original version, there is still little recognition that children are all different, that they develop at different speeds, learn at different rates, have different experiences and interests, and vary in their ability to grapple with academic subjects. During the intervening years, there has been much talk of the need to differentiate lessons and even to personalise the curriculum more. However, this does not sit easily with a system that assumes that pupils should be put into classes according to their date of birth (meaning that summer-born children will always be at a disadvantage), that they will progress at a similar rate, and that they will reach or exceed an expected (formerly 'average') level of progress at the end of each key stage. When we consider the physical differences that are apparent in children of the same age, it is nonsensical to work on the premise that in all other ways their age can be taken as a true indication of their level of development, potential and understanding.

The way the phonics screening check was driven through in the face of all opposition, was a reminder that the Government really does believe that all children learn in the same way and will benefit from an identical approach, which might be effective if schools were full of identikit individuals. They are not. They are full of children who are delightfully different, although sometimes teachers may feel they

could do with a few more conformists in their classes!

Indeed, the whole edifice of year groups, key stages and levels of attainment is predicated on a belief that children are more alike than they are. This may not be too much of a problem for children who are lucky enough to fall into the average or above average category, or for the schools that educate them, but it is not much fun for pupils who see themselves as failures because their level of progress is not regarded as commensurate with their peers, or for those schools that take in more than their fair share of such pupils and are penalised for doing so by sliding down the infamous 'league tables'. At the time of writing, it seems clear that age-based year groups and key stages will remain, but that levels will go. What has not yet been announced is what will take their place. What seems likely is that the DfE is planning to have descriptive statements of whether pupils have mastered the contents of subjects by the end of each key stage. If their disappearance leads to rethinking the whole question of tables, tests and targets, which are relied on so heavily by Ofsted and lead to schools being 'failed' on a very narrow view of their work, this really would be an enlightened step forward. Unfortunately, it is unlikely to happen.

However, it could have been even worse. When, in June 2012, Michael Gove wrote to Tim Oates, Expert Panel Chair, in response to his Report (DfE, 2011), he said that he had carefully considered a suggestion in the report that, in primary schools, all pupils should be expected to have grasped core content before the class moves on (Gove, 2012). This would suggest that the writers have little idea of the breadth of ability to be found in most classes. Gove called this idea "both interesting and important." Happily, however, he seems to have realised that making classes proceed at the pace of the slowest might not be the best way of raising standards. In the same letter, Gove wrote that: "the programmes of study in mathematics, science and English are explicitly more ambitious than ever before" (Gove, 2011).

There is nothing wrong with politicians being ambitious as long as they realise that simply making standards harder to reach does not, in itself, mean that children will become more able to reach them, any more than constantly raising the floor standards will improve schools. There is always the danger that increasing the pressure on pupils and those who teach them can be counterproductive and take the enjoyment out of learning.

"There is nothing wrong with politicians being ambitious as long as they realise that simply making standards harder to reach does not, in itself, mean that children will become more able to reach them, any more than constantly raising the floor standards will improve schools."

In the same way that the Children and Families Bill (House of Commons, 2013) represents the biggest reform of the SEN Framework for over 30 years, the review of the curriculum that has been in progress since 2011, could have been a real opportunity to improve substantially on the original, which was concocted in a way that bore little resemblance to the needs of pupils. However, there are concerns that, with the Government's apparent belief that standards can continue to rise in an upward trajectory year by year, children and young people who have SEN will not

be at the forefront of Government thinking in terms of the curriculum.

Pupils who have special needs are not going to go away. Currently, they account for around 20 per cent of the school population and whether they are in mainstream classes or in some kind of specialist provision, their needs should be considered along with the rest of the school population. In addition, there are signs that a more complex population of pupils is entering the school system, due in part to the rise in the identification of children with neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism, ADHD, specific learning difficulties (SpLD) and specific language impairment (SLI). There is also the increase in the number of very premature babies who are surviving at an ever earlier stage and before the development of the brain that should have taken place in the womb, has been completed. The earlier they are born, the more likely it is that they will have long term learning difficulties. As our knowledge of different conditions has increased, so has the realisation that many children have co-existing cognitions, such as autism and ADHD, or dyslexia, dyspraxia and SLI. Teachers will need to offer some of these pupils individual packages of support by having the flexibility to fit the curriculum they deliver to the needs of the individual.

As the whole process of having a major review of the national curriculum has suffered from that well known Government phenomenon of 'slippage', there is a danger the next election will be looming before it is embedded. Originally, the core subjects were going to be introduced in September 2013, with the remaining subjects following a year later. Now all subjects are to be operational from September 2014.

Any further delays and it could suffer the same fate as Jim Rose's review of the primary curriculum, which was due to be brought in by Labour and was then abandoned when the Coalition Government arrived. Or perhaps the Government reckons that, given enough time, a national curriculum will not be needed, as so many schools will have become academies that it will be irrelevant. On a more positive note, Mr Gove is said to be seeking agreement from Stephen Twigg, his shadow counterpart, not to change everything if the Government changes.

The recognition that teachers need time to move from one curriculum to the next is to be welcomed, so that the school year beginning in September becomes a period of transition before the revised national curriculum is introduced in 2014. The aim of making sure that, this time, it does not take up the whole of the timetable, is also an improvement and should give teachers more flexibility. Reducing the prescription seems to have worked for some of the subjects, although the final details are not yet confirmed. But much more could have been done. This review was an opportunity to get away from phrases such as 'working below age-related expectations', which is only useful if it recognises the spread of ability likely to be present in most classes and does not imply that, given enough hard work on the part of teachers and those they teach, the natural distribution curve will be flattened, all pupils will be the average and above and all schools can come top of the league tables.

There is something to be said for an outline curriculum that enables schools to cover much the same essential ground and for pupils to be able to move between schools without missing out or repeating what they have already covered. But the Government needs to come clean about why this revised curriculum will be good for some schools while others will apparently benefit from not having to follow it. Even at this late stage, they could still ensure that teachers are given the final decision on what pupils with SEN should be expected to cover and what might be put in place as a more appropriate alternative. Only they are in a position to use their professional judgement in deciding what will benefit the pupils in front of them. An inclusive curriculum needs to allow for those who have high levels of academic ability, (some of

whom will also have SEN), right through to those for whom it is important to learn to make choices, to develop a level of independence and to engage with education on their own terms. Children have an entitlement to receive an education, but an entitlement to a curriculum that is inaccessible is no use. Teachers need to be in a position to ensure that what is taught in the classroom is relevant to all the pupils within it.

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Securing the arts in the curriculum: a Sisyphean task

John Steers

John Steers is Chair of the Council for Subject Associations and was previously General Secretary of the National Society for Education in Art and Design (1982-2011) and President of the International Society for Education through Art (1993-1996).

Abstract: *In recent years there has been a growing and wide international consensus on the importance of arts education yet this seems to have made little impression on the Government. With a recent report commissioned by the Department for Education confirming that the EBacc has led directly to a reduction in provision for creative subjects, there is no alternative but to continue the campaign to include all the principal art forms in the curriculum and as a 'sixth pillar' of the EBacc, argues John Steers.*

It is over forty years since I started teaching art and design in secondary schools. My career included posts as head of department, responsibility for all the arts subjects in a school, and subsequently 30 years as the general secretary of the National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD). Throughout that time – and in common with all arts teachers – I was clear that one key and rather tedious role was continuous advocacy for my subject. All too commonly the arts in schools seem to be regarded as 'a well-known good thing'; there is a vague awareness of their value and a general willingness to let them, within somewhat uncertain limits, get on with it. Now, under Michael Gove's 'reforms' the arts seem destined to be further marginalised with the 'tweaks' announced in February 2013 more cosmetic than effective.

From the earliest days of the National Curriculum a pecking order of subjects was established. Paragraph 13 of the consultative document stated 'Maths, English and science will form the core of the curriculum and first priority will be given to these subjects' (DES/WO, 1987, para 13). A list of foundation subjects followed comprising a modern foreign language, technology, history, geography, art, music and physical education. In relation to the arts two things soon became apparent. First, dance had been relegated to a component of PE and drama was lodged uneasily within English. Second, art, music and PE were really a third tier of the curriculum only to be considered when the Statutory Orders for all other subjects were in place.

The section of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) relevant to the national curriculum in maintained schools required:

"... a balanced and broadly based curriculum which:

- (a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society.
- (b) prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life."

The ERA has not been repealed although as the number of academies and free schools increase its provisions apply to fewer and fewer schools. In my view the

requirement for schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum is under serious threat.

Rationales for arts education

Countless rationales for including arts education as part of general education have been propounded over the years, some, admittedly, more convincing than others but none having the impact that their authors sought. Historically the rationale for introducing art education to schools in the mid-nineteenth century was to fulfil two apparently straightforward aims: to provide “an education of the eye, and of the hand, such as may indeed be the first step in the career of a great artist” (Committee of Council on Education, 1857-58, quoted in Macdonald, 1970), but also to meet the economic needs of the country. Both are aims that still have some relevance today although there is no shortage of further well-considered and researched rationales that emphasise the importance of arts and cultural education.

In recent memory these have included *The Arts in Schools* (Robinson, 1982); the subsequent report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) *All Our Futures: Creativity Culture and Education* (Robinson 1999); the UNESCO (2007) *Road Map for Arts Education: Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century*; and most recently, a report commissioned by President Obama, *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future Through Creative Schools* (PCAH, 2011).

In essence the NACCCE report argued for the importance of creative and cultural education with the aim of ensuring that these were explicitly recognised both in schools’ policies for the whole curriculum and in the National Curriculum in order to develop young people’s creative abilities and cultural understanding. The UNESCO *Road Map for Arts Education* (2007) explores the role of arts education in meeting a clear need for creativity and cultural awareness in the 21st Century, promoting arts education in the learning environment and its essential role in improving the quality of general education. UNESCO calls for a more complete integration of arts education into education systems and schools. A follow up UNESCO (2010) plan of action – The Seoul Agenda – called on member states to realise the full potential of high quality arts education to positively renew educational systems, to achieve crucial social and cultural objectives, and ultimately to benefit children, youth and life-long learners of all ages.

In the USA, the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities (PCAH) declared that art, music, drama and other creative subjects deserve an unambiguous place in the curriculum and have significant and lasting benefits to pupil achievement and should be at the heart of education reform: “Decades of research show strong and consistent links between high-quality arts education and a wide range of impressive educational outcomes” (PCAH 2011: vi).

Coalition government’s plans for curriculum ‘reform’

None of this wide international consensus on the importance of arts education appears to have made any impression beyond lip service on the Coalition Government. The international comparisons favoured by Michael Gove to frame his ‘vision’ are highly selective and often out of date. The Government’s 2010 White Paper decreed that a new approach to the curriculum was needed

“...specifying a tighter, more rigorous model of the knowledge that every child should expect to master in core subjects at every key stage” (DfE, 2010: 10). A curriculum review was announced with the aim of “...reducing prescription and

allowing schools to decide how to teach, whilst refocusing on the core subject knowledge that every child and young person should gain at each stage of their education” (DfE, 2010: 10). It seemed likely that this involved ‘slimming down’ the curriculum – that is removing or downgrading subjects from the statutory curriculum and concentrating on a defined canon of ‘core knowledge’ to the inevitable exclusion of much else.

The 2010 White Paper made one solitary reference to the arts in all of its 91 pages. Paragraph 4.31 reads:

“None of this wide international consensus on the importance of arts education appears to have made any impression beyond lip service on the Coalition Government.”

“Children should expect to be given a rich menu of cultural experiences. So we have commissioned... [a report] to explore how we can improve music education and have more children learning to play an instrument. The ... Review will also inform our broader approach to cultural education. We will support access to live theatre, encourage the appreciation of the visual and plastic arts and work with our great museums and libraries to support their educational mission.” (DfE, 2010: 46)

The White Paper thus identified the Government’s key concern as knowledge of the arts and, other than learning to play an instrument, made no reference to practical creative activity. It is significant that the word ‘creativity’ was not mentioned and neither was it included in the title of the subsequent 2012 review *Cultural Education in England* (Henley, 2012).

It is hard to understand this neglect, not least because of the importance of the creative sector to the British economy. According to the latest estimates from the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS, 2011), in 2009 the creative industries contributed £36.3 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK economy and directly employed 1.5 million people – a figure that continues to rise despite the on-going recession. It is estimated that income from the creative sector will exceed that from financial services in 2013, more people are employed in the sector and they have certainly caused less trouble than those in financial services.

A secure place for creative subjects in the curriculum?

Recent experience in England suggests the importance of creativity in educational discourse sways in and out of fashion with every change of government and Secretary of State for Education. After some delay the last Labour government (1997-2010) set the education pendulum swinging once again in favour of creativity. Publication of the 1999 NACCCE report – after a slow start – proved to be a milestone. Tony Blair declared, “Our aim must be to create a nation where the creative talents of all the people are used to build a true enterprise economy for the twenty-first century – where we compete on brains, not brawn” (Robinson, 1999: 6). The report eventually had some real impact and support moved from political rhetoric to some well-funded education projects such as Creative Partnerships.

Creativity permeated the 2007 New Secondary Curriculum (NSC) – and not just the arts subjects within it. Included in the over-arching curriculum aims was the

development of successful learners who would be “creative, resourceful and able to identify and solve problems”. Prominent among the cross-curricular dimensions of the curriculum were “Creativity and critical thinking”, “Problem-solving” and “Entrepreneurship and Enterprise”.

The now defunct Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), an early casualty of the new government’s bonfire of the quangos, recognised that creativity involves the use of the imagination and the intellect to generate ideas, insights and solutions to problems and challenges. It argued that although:

“Creativity and critical thinking are not curriculum subjects, [...] they are crucial aspects of learning that should permeate the curriculum and the life of the school.”(QCA, 2007)

The NSC was developed and supported by a wide consensus. Music and art and design teachers welcomed, and many enthusiastically picked up, some of its challenges, especially in the development of well thought-through, cross-curricular work. From their point of view there was not a lot wrong and much that was right, with the NSC. It placed a strong emphasis on the importance of cross-curriculum dimensions such as: identity and cultural diversity; healthy lifestyles; community participation; enterprise; global dimension and sustainable development; technology and the media; and creativity and critical thinking. The detailed aims identified some of the major ideas and challenges that face individuals and society today and provided links for learning across the whole curriculum. All seem to be relevant to arts education. The Programmes of Study were challenging but not unreasonable or over complex. However, dance and drama teachers still lamented their on-going lack of recognition as separate subjects in the curriculum – but at least their position did not become more endangered as a consequence of the NSC.

All change in 2010

So far, so good, but the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government that came to power in May 2010 released an avalanche of highly experimental and ideological initiatives. Michael Gove wasted no time in denouncing the NSC (despite no evaluation having taken place and it was still ‘very early days’) and instigating a ‘root and branch’ review of the National Curriculum that would also include an inquiry into ‘Cultural Education’. The driver for this ‘reform’ was to be the introduction of knowledge-based curriculum founded, it seems, on the ideas of the American educationist E.D. Hirsch and his Core Knowledge Foundation.

At key stage 4 it is the shadow of the so-called English Baccalaureate (EBacc) that is the greatest concern. *The Effects of the English Baccalaureate* (Greevy, Knox, Nunney and Pye, 2012), a recent report commissioned by the Department for Education, confirms that the EBacc has led directly to a reduction in provision for creative subjects. 27 per cent of schools have withdrawn at least one subject as a result of the EBacc. Of these schools:

- Drama and performing arts have been withdrawn in 23 per cent;
- Art has been withdrawn in 17 per cent; and
- Design technology has been withdrawn in 14 per cent.

This is hardly a surprise given that the EBacc will take up seven of most students’ GCSE choices – with many students only taking eight GCSEs. It is inevitable that

the EBacc will crowd out other subjects like art, music and design and technology so skewing the curriculum away from both breadth and balance. In November 2012 the DfE declared drama to be a non-subject: “Ministers do not consider drama to be core knowledge, as it is more a question of pedagogy and therefore outside the remit of the curriculum review” (Brown, 2012). Further research by the NUT revealed how timetabled time was being reduced and specialist teachers laid-off in many schools while provision for EBacc was being increased (Henshaw, 2013).

Towards the end of 2012 and early 2013 the calls for Michael Gove to broaden the EBacc by including the arts as a ‘sixth pillar’ rose to a crescendo. The Secretary of State seemed impervious beyond making statements about his own love of the arts and the DfE’s oft-repeated mantra that there would still be 20 per cent of time for non-EBacc subjects – arguments that simply didn’t wash. In addition to calls for change from the great and good in the arts and business community the EBacc was roundly criticised by the House of Commons Education Select Committee – supposed to hold the Government to account – and the CBI, UCAS, Design Commission and many other commentators. The Henley review of cultural education drew a muted response from the Government and the more important points relating to the EBacc were ignored.

Approaching the end game

On 7 February 2013 the Government responded to the consultation on key stage 4 assessments and published draft Programmes of Study for Statutory consultation. Michael Gove abandoned plans to introduce the proposed new, harder English Baccalaureate Certificates (EBCs) but announced the current GCSE 16+ exams would be retained and made more ‘rigorous’ – EBCs in all but name. The EBacc is to be retained as a league table accountability measure with the addition of computer science as a recognised option. The campaign to add the arts as a sixth pillar of the EBacc fell on deaf ears although, confusingly, a further points-based league table measure for GCSEs is proposed. This will measure the average pupil scores from

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eight ‘best’ subjects: English; maths; three other EBacc subjects; and three additional subjects drawn from the EBacc, other GCSEs including the arts and certain vocational qualifications. It is possible that this will provide an incentive to enter individual pupils for subjects where they are most likely to succeed and this may benefit the arts. However, it seems that if both drama and dance are studied, only one will be counted in the ‘best eight’ performance tables. It is hard to understand the sense in having two performance measures, one of five subjects and another of eight. I suggest that Gove is really intent on keeping the EBacc as the principal measure and the ‘eight best’ has been introduced as a sop to the mounting opposition. Surely it would be less confusing to just have one eight-subject performance measure and call it by whatever name suits?

At the same time, draft Programmes of Study (PoS) were published for a 'knowledge-based' national curriculum prompting dismayed initial reactions from subject associations. The curriculum subjects remain much the same for key stages 1-3 with art and design and music having a statutory place. However, dance's visibility in the physical education curriculum is reduced and drama is absent from the English PoS. Certainly the PoS for art and design was far from challenging and seemed little more than an innocuous list of things the majority of schools already take for granted – neither challenging or 'world class'.

The announcements were greeted in the press with cries of 'humiliating U-turn' – immediately denied by former Schools Minister Nick Gibb who claimed the changes to original plans were merely a 'tweak'. On reflection there may be more than a grain of truth in this. EBacc certificate examinations have been abandoned for now; the five EBacc subjects accountability measure remains a priority; the arts only benefit by becoming optional subjects in an extensive pool in the 'eight best' performance measure – there is no requirement for students to study an arts subject at key stage 4. There is likely to be an on-going extremely lively debate about whether or not the proposals really are 'world class'.

Conclusion

There is no alternative but to continue the campaign to include all the principal art forms in the curriculum and as a 'sixth pillar' of the EBacc. The arguments for this are sound and very widely supported. Michael Gove simplistically counters these by pointing out the blindingly obvious – creativity is not confined to the arts. Agreed. Creativity is not the be all and end all; the arts have much more to teach that is crucial to a broad and balanced liberal education.

Teaching and learning in the arts cannot be reduced only to some narrow view of 'core knowledge' about the arts – learning the names, dates and principal works of the European (or just British?) canon. It requires a subtle balance of skills, knowledge and understanding. Elliot Eisner (2002: 75-92) has eloquently set out specific arguments for the arts' contribution to general education – the benefits of education through the arts. They are good at teaching how to make subtle, nuanced judgments and how to pay careful attention to qualitative relationships. They develop the ability to shift direction and to show a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of a work as it unfolds. They develop the ability to think through and within a material; to shape form and to create expressive content and thus to discover the range and variety of what students are capable of feeling. The arts provide permission and encouragement to use the imagination as a source of content and an opportunity to learn to frame the world from multiple aesthetic perspectives – there are many ways to see and interpret the world. These are all sophisticated cognitive skills that are vital for success in the twenty-first century.

The arts demand a secure place in the curriculum with adequate time and resources to allow students to explore their creative potential both practically and theoretically; to explore traditional and new media and technologies; to find appropriate ways to communicate ideas and meanings in appropriate artistic forms; and to gain an understanding of these across times and cultures. Much of this was achieved in the NSC – it felt as though the boulder was nearing the summit. Now it is rolling back down and threatening to crush arts education. The only choice is to continue to push on up – there is a mountain to climb once again.

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Must Do Better (and how we can)

John Coe

John Coe is a former teacher and primary head. He has also worked as Inspector of Schools for the West Riding of Yorkshire and was Senior Advisor to Oxfordshire County Council. In 1984 he became Leader of the PGCE Primary Course at the London Institute of Education, later moving to Oxford Brookes University. He is a Fellow of the University.

Abstract: *In this article, John Coe traces the evolutionary development of primary education and describes the state's recent, increasingly overt, intervention in primary class rooms. He argues that the Government is disregarding essential principles supported by research whilst encouraging test-driven school life. He sets out his proposals towards reform.*

The Education Act of 1870 should be regarded as the first acknowledgement that education is an entitlement for all children. In judging how far we have come in realising that entitlement we must remember that in 1870 a quarter of the population could not even sign their own names, that half of the children in London did not go to school at all and those that did, left at the age of ten.

Elementary schools gave way to the creation of primary schools some 60 years later with the publication of the Hadow committee's report (Board of Education. Consultative Committee on The Primary School, 1931). The report stated: "The curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored". Christian Schiller and Robin Tanner were HMIs charged with advising the committee and Christian in later life delighted in telling the true story of how he and Robin argued the evening away until an exhausted meeting finally agreed the words which remain the inspiration for excellent schools which put young children and the reality of their nature at the heart of their work. We can contrast the Hadow view of the curriculum with the actions of recent governments which have concentrated on the acquisition of facts and the imposition of 'expected levels' of attainment regardless of children's individual potential to learn and the circumstances of their lives.

It took time for formal instruction to evolve into teaching that better matched the vigorous, hungry for learning, lives of young children. Other powerful influences were at work and the contribution of writers and teachers such as Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori and Rachel McMillan found an immediate echo in the minds of those who taught the youngest children in nursery and infant schools. The very being of the young with all the energy and curiosity they brought with them into school made passive listening to the teacher so obviously inappropriate and it was perfectly understandable that the thirties saw the creation of infant classes where active learning through experience, often of play, was the keynote. It was Pestalozzi who wrote that: "The nature of the child must determine all the details of his education and an educational institution must be so organised as to afford room for adaptation to the inclinations and needs of the individual pupil" (Pestalozzi, 1894).

Survival rather than professional development characterised the war years but the peace brought an explosion of optimism and radicalism personified by thousands of returning servicemen. Many of these were emergency trained and, as they entered teaching, were determined to cut traditional links with the didactic past. Through the convictions of teachers who often worked from the heart strengthened by new

insights gained from cognitive theorists such as Piaget and cognitive constructivists, notably Vigotsky and Bruner, the evolutionary development of primary education moved upward through the school system, progressively affecting older children. This brought higher attainments and, just as important, many more children of ten who were as excited about learning as they had been at four.

In 1967 the Plowden Report was published (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967). This drew on a wide study of primary schools in action coupled with a review of research and academic findings. It must be emphasised that what Plowden did was to assess and record what was actually happening and then recommend this as the pattern for the future. Almost all of its recommendations, with the exception of a preference for secondary transfer at the age of 12, have been implemented by practitioners over subsequent years.

So it was that by the early seventies a distinctive approach to primary education had emerged in an evolutionary way. This approach was firmly established in a growing minority of primary schools and the principles which underpinned the approach are summarised as follows (the feminine pronoun is used for convenience and stands for both sexes):

- Children pass through similar stages of intellectual growth but each in her own way and in her own time.
- Children are innately curious and display exploratory behaviour quite independent of adult intervention.
- Knowledge is one part of an individual's personal experience and cannot be easily divided into neatly separated categories or disciplines.
- Children's capacity to make significant choices concerning their own learning increases as they gain in maturity. They have a right to make such choices.
- Children learn most powerfully from their personal and fully sensory experience. Understanding and the skills of literacy and numeracy which require understanding are best drawn out of direct experience.
- A rich environment which offers a wide array of manipulative materials encourages exploration and facilitates learning.
- Ultimately the quality of being is as important as the quality of knowing. Knowledge is a means of education and not its only end. Education is about the proper way to live.
- Personal creativity is central to human development and a vital component of learning right across the curriculum.
- The emotions are essential to the motivation to learn.

It will be seen that these principles rest upon the nature of the child. Yet teachers, on behalf of the community, must have learning objectives accepted as desirable and acceptable in an educated person. There must be what can be described as a reconciliation between the naturalness of the child and the skills, knowledge and attitudes which society wishes her to acquire. It is perfectly reasonable that the community should prescribe the aims of education which determine the courses of study to be followed. But progress along a course, the child becoming a reader for example, will depend upon the nature of that child and the skill of the teacher. It is akin to sailing a small boat - the course is set and then the sailor uses skill in handling the natural elements of wind and tide to make progress along that course.

Another deeply significant year in the development of primary education was

1976 when the then Prime Minister James Callaghan made a speech at Ruskin College in which he signalled the intention of Government to intervene in teaching and learning. No longer was the curriculum to be a 'secret garden' tended only by teachers: "Public interest is strong and legitimate and will be satisfied". And it was. The Schools Council, through which a partnership of teachers and the community advised the Government, was abolished in 1984 and the National Curriculum with its overloaded content and the word 'delivery' to describe teaching, became law in 1988. Ofsted was created in 1992 and in 1999 came the ultimate sign of society's determination to categorise teachers as assembly line producers of a product when national hours of work, 1265 hours over 195 days, became law. It is to their great credit that a large majority of primary teachers carried on as before. Their innate professionalism demanded much more.

The state's grip on education has tightened and this has culminated in the closing down of the General Teaching Council in 2010 together with other agencies where the practitioner had a voice. Now a vast array of powers are concentrated in the hands of government ministers and they control primary education, not through debate and an open exchange of views, but through national testing at the ages of six, eight and eleven. Children in Britain are the most tested in the western world and the testing is coupled with a rigorous system of school inspection which focuses on test results. The inevitable outcome is a narrowed and largely test-driven school life for children. Only a minority of schools, almost all of which serve relatively advantaged families, are able to meet the Government's demands for the expected level of test performance in the core skills while at the same time offering the breadth of curriculum which is children's birthright.

In a very real sense primary pupils are being denied their childhood. Play, the most natural and effective way of learning, is seldom encouraged in years one and two. Learning through personal experience, essential to the growth of understanding and important right through to year six, has had to give way too often to time devoted to the acquisition of measurable paper and pencil skills practised without relevance to the reality of children's lives. This denial of the natural attributes of childhood is illustrated in the following exchange posted by primary teachers of year six pupils in the week prior to national testing on the TES Connect blog. The tests were due to be completed on the Wednesday morning.

Question: "I am wondering – what is everyone doing for Thursday afternoon and Friday? Anything special?"

Answer: "We are pinching some of the stuff from the Foundation Stage on Thursday pm and letting them have some fun. Things like Lego and construction, outdoors stuff, musical instruments etc. My class last year really enjoyed it."

Of course they did. They were behaving in childlike ways denied them in their early education.

Another example of the gap in childhood created by the too early abandonment of play was provided by two 11-year-old girls who were with me as we showed some visitors around a school. The girls were excellent hosts and displayed a confident sophistication, that is until we reached the nursery unit. The moment the door was opened the visitors were deserted and the girls went straight to the sand tray where they began to play.

Of course they did. They were behaving in childlike ways denied them in their early education.

Successive governments have claimed that standards of achievement are

improving and base their claims on the results of the Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) taken during year six. However, such claims are exaggerated because they fail to take into account the effect on test scores resulting from the coaching of pupils for the tests, particularly those on the borderline of reaching the 'expected' level four. Coaching, the familiarisation of children to the format and demands of the tests, is not education. Any learning beyond the immediate outcome of achieving a higher score is not embedded and is all too quickly lost in subsequent weeks and months.

Now, in the spring of 2013, we have reached a peak in the state's intervention in primary education. The Government has published proposals for a new National Curriculum which includes a detailed specification of the core of primary learning. It is most unlikely that public consultation will lead to anything other than minor changes to the recommendations which can be summed up as more content earlier in the child's life. This,

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coupled with national testing and inspection, promises to dominate the primary curriculum leaving far too little time for schools to fulfil their statutory duty to teach the curriculum in its entirety. A more limited prescription of foundation subjects is offered but the opportunity this gives teachers to plan the school curriculum is illusory because schools will have to devote excessive time to the teaching of English and mathematics and will be forced to neglect the potential to teach and learn core skills through experiences provided through the wider curriculum.

In essence the focus of the state is on outcomes at the conclusion of formal education. The statutory requirements for primary children are a top down extrapolation and do not rest on our knowledge about how children learn. It is deeply revealing that ministers frequently affirm that the purpose of primary education is to equip children for secondary school. The focus is on preparation through the acquisition of knowledge - skills have a lower priority. This is so insistent that it is intended that the Programme of Study for mathematics must be specified for each primary school year. If a child's birthday falls within a span of 12 months then this is what the law will insist on that child being taught. It doesn't take more than an hour working with children in a primary classroom to know beyond question that the span of ability and readiness to learn must be numbered in years rather than a single year. *The Trend of Reading Standards* (Start and Wells, 1972) confirms that reading levels among 30 children aged between nine and ten are likely to range from that of an average seven-year-old to that of an average 16-year-old. Furthermore, this range of skill and understanding leaves aside the vital element of motivation to learn which the content laden National Curriculum ignores but which the school curriculum must take into account every single day.

The years of cross party government intervention since 1974 have brought only marginal gains in the drive towards the creation of an educated community. The naïve

reliance upon test results as an index of attainment has produced a distorted picture of progress and gains have now reached a plateau. Colin Richards, a former senior HMI, drawing on his experience of inspection and on PIPS (Performance Indicators in Primary Schools) assessments, affirms that, “the evidence suggests there was some rise in performance in the core subjects between 1995 and 2001, as measured by test results, but not as great as national test data has suggested. Following this there has been a levelling off” (Richards, 2005). Even more fundamentally there is no evidence that reported test performance relates to national standards, a crucially important factor which is confirmed by the widespread practice in secondary schools to ignore the primary SAT’s results in favour of setting alternative tests. Teachers know only too well that there is much coaching and private tutoring to lever up SAT’s results but that too often the gains are ephemeral and the level four in May becomes level three again by August. Some 15 per cent of the age group do not reach the level of test performance arbitrarily set by Government as a national expectation during the final year of their primary school life. Such children are not failures and we must hope that parents and teachers never allow them to think so. The slower pace of their personal development and acquisition of essential skills is very often related to their life in families without social and educational advantages. There is a well documented high correlation between disadvantage and low educational attainment.

We must take a hard look at international surveys of the UK’s performance in education. Our able children are among the most successful in the developed world. This is shown by our highest scoring 50 per cent who scored more highly than children in other countries with a similar overall score. But, when children at the other end of the spectrum are considered, major failure is revealed. The spread of scores for England is the widest of all OECD countries and our poorest five per cent scored

lower in comparison with all other children. Our levels of attainment and consequent position in international league tables are lowered by a long tail of underachievement. While 75 per cent of young people from the richest fifth of society gain five good GCSEs, just 21 per cent of the poorest fifth reach this level of attainment (Goodman and Gregg, 2010). The attainment gap between the richest and the poorest is evident in children as young as three years old largely in terms of the growth of vocabulary

and the use of the spoken word (Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012). Teachers, in both primary and secondary schools, are not only failing to narrow the gap but, sadly, are helping to widen it. And governments also are culpable through a failure to trust the profession and a repeated insistence on legislation which now assumes that all children can succeed if we teach them more facts at an earlier and earlier age regardless of their individual needs.

Very many parents and teachers believe that the greatest damage inflicted on education and indeed on the quality of life over the last 30 years has been the destruction of a good part of childhood. The pressure on schools by government has insisted that schooling must be overwhelmingly concerned with preparation for the future; that today is only worthwhile if it gets us ready and equipped for the future.

“We have to face the fact that we are creating unhappiness and recognise that this has a direct impact on educational attainment since happy and fulfilled children learn most easily.”

Teacher trainers are required to evaluate the learning which results from each individual lessons taught by the students, perhaps a lesson as short as 30 minutes. Such short-term evaluation is ridiculous and unjustified by any theory of learning. It would be more productive of learning to evaluate the quality of life experienced by the children and their young teacher during the lesson. However, this human consideration is not considered important measured against the assumption that the children must learn something of value for tomorrow.

The unwise and unproductive pressure on children and their teachers to produce immediate results has had a major impact on school life. In 2007 Unicef found that in terms of children's wellbeing the UK ranked below the other 21 OECD countries studied (Unicef, 2010). We were at the very bottom of the list. There has been a significant increase in the number of children suffering from conduct, behavioural and emotional problems and one in ten has a clinically diagnosed mental health issue. Our children have the highest rate of self-harm in Europe (Layard and Dunn, 2009).

We have to face the fact that we are creating unhappiness and recognise that this has a direct impact on educational attainment since happy and fulfilled children learn most easily.

How can we do better? Dealing with the weakness in UK education will neither be easy nor rapid because realising the unexplored potential of the worst casualties, the 15 per cent of primary pupils who are on course to becoming the similar percentage of 16 year olds not in education, training or employment, is as much a challenge for society as for the schools. However, there are some immediate steps the schools and a future government should consider:

This could be a beginning.

- Start forging a genuine partnership between government and the teaching profession. This means trusting teachers to deliver high standards. The level of trust nationally should be as great as the trust shown locally by parents and communities towards the primary schools which serve them. Constant and undeserved denigration of the profession has lowered morale and led to too many teachers becoming concerned only to deliver what a test obsessed government requires of them. International studies indicate that the performance of school systems depends upon the quality of each individual teacher (Levin, 2010). Primary schools need teachers who are confident, enterprising and willing to take initiatives whenever there is an opportunity. Such successful teachers are not technicians delivering a product designed and shaped by someone else, the special skill of the primary teacher who creates curriculum out of the interaction with the children must be trusted.
- Build a genuine partnership with parents and stop regarding them as consumers choosing schools as if they were choosing between competing supermarkets. Taking actions which identify parents as consumers gets the vitally important partnership off to a bad start. Schools should be trusted to forge true, mutually respectful, partnerships which draw on the strengths of both sides because they each have a key and complementary role in the children's upbringing.
- Start recognising the power of all parents to help their children. Include the most disadvantaged families because attitude is as important as affluence. Perhaps even more importantly, respect the hopes that all parents have for their children, keep expectations high and when, from time to time there are

inevitable difficulties, work as partners to overcome them and never, ever, describe a child as a failure.

- Minimise competition because it has little place in learning. Children should be competing against their previous best not against other children.
- Minimise and, if possible, eradicate, selection within schools. Even 'top tables' begin to condition disadvantaged children to have lower expectations of success. Worse still are setting and streaming. Recent studies show that one in six primary children works in a segregated, streamed class by the time they reach the age of seven (Hallam and Parsons, 2013). The adoption of streaming is the inevitable outcome of the national testing of primary children and the publication of results in league tables. There are profound effects on self esteem, motivation and the expectation of success but no effects whatsoever on pupil achievement regardless of pupil ability. Setting and streaming create an assumption of failure for too many children particularly those who come to school without a family expectation of success.
- Make learning real and relevant for children. Draw on their interests. Offer children more choices as they learn. Acknowledge the curiosity and the creativity of children and draw learning out of human experience rather than the text book and the computer screen.
- Above all else put the children first. With their parents and carers, consider what they need now to help them learn. In the early years and in primary school the child is at a peak in the potential to learn and this is the time when attitudes and expectations are embedded. The effective development of children can be observed by teacher and parent but not measured in any precise way. Yet how the child is growing up, what they are like as people, is as important as what facts they know and can regurgitate in response to a test paper. The skills they acquire most securely, which become part of the person, are the skills that are needed now and which are relevant to their life now, not acquired simply because they may be needed in the future. The best way for the young child to learn for the future is to live richly for today.

This article is based upon the Christian Schiller Memorial lecture given on the 28 June 2012 at the Lyceum School in London.

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It's time to focus on the girls!

Abstract: *As she approaches retirement following 17 years as head of an inner London comprehensive, Kenny Frederick muses on why it is that women remain underrepresented in public life. Despite outperforming boys academically, girls are still losing out in the workplace 40 years after the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act. While schools are only a small part of the problem they are also part of the solution and need to put girls back on the agenda, she argues.*

When I first started teaching in the 1970s we agonised about why girls were outperformed by boys in most areas of the curriculum. This concern continued into the 1980s when I remember being filmed teaching a mixed class so that we could look at it during an inset session. Watching this video with my colleagues was a painful experience as you can imagine, especially when I could hear myself droning on (in those days we had no guidance on appropriate amount of teacher talk!) and the camera cutting to children looking out of the window daydreaming! However, it was clear that boys were getting far more attention and were more demanding than the girls who often melted into the background hoping to remain unnoticed. It was as true then as it is now that boys dominate classrooms and take up most of the teacher's time.

Having been educated in a girls' school until I was about 13, I had not realised how confident I was in the classroom. When I came to England as a teenager, I was enrolled in a comprehensive (it was probably a secondary modern) school in east London. Although, I liked the idea of having boys around (I was slightly obsessed!) I was shocked to see what annoying creatures they were in a classroom situation. When a girl put up her hand to ask a question, a boy would invariably make a comment about the size of her bum or her boobs and she would become the butt of their immature jokes. Was it any wonder most of the girls did not put themselves forward and that boys dominated! Surprisingly, I did not let it hold me back and it just confirmed in my mind that it was all due to the fact that boys matured far more slowly than girls and I felt a bit sorry for them.

I remember doing a lot of work with youngsters (boys and girls) helping them to challenge the stereotypes when it came to career choices. Sadly we are still doing this today as things have not changed very much. I used to organise a careers 'What's my line?' for my Year 9 group who were about to choose their career options. For this I used to assemble men and women from a range of careers and the children had to guess what job they did from a simple mime. This was always fascinating and confirmed all the stereotyped images they had in terms of gender and ethnicity. The male nursery nurse, who arrived in wall-to-wall leather, was probably the most surprising. Going for the shock factor I can remember approaching a rather glamorous young female street cleaner, who was so relieved when she realised I was

Kenny Frederick

Kenny Frederick is Principal of George Green's School in the Isle of Dogs in east London. The school is an inclusive comprehensive in the centre of the local community. She has been a head teacher for 17 years.

not trying to pick her up that she willingly came to the school and talked to the pupils. We had the usual collection of female fire fighters, engineers and business women. This was fun and educational and helped students think more about their career choices but I am not sure how much difference it made in the long run.

I then went on to become a deputy head in a girls' school where we took a lot of positive action to get the girls to think differently about their lives and their careers. We wanted them to challenge themselves in terms of their future and indeed within their relationships. We worried about the fact that there were so few women in positions of power and influence and we brought in role models who had broken through that glass ceiling. We were confident that the girls we taught would go on to change the world. Some of them did, but not enough.

“I remember doing a lot of work with youngsters (boys and girls) helping them to challenge the stereotypes when it came to career choices and sadly we are still doing this today as things have not changed very much.”

At some point (I can't remember when exactly) the tables changed and it is now the case that girls outperform boys in almost all subjects at school. Instead of celebrating this turnabout and working out why things have changed (analysing what it is that girls do and how they think in a way that helps them outperform boys) we agonise about the boys lagging behind. Lots of research has been undertaken

on the topic as we seek to find solutions before we have a generation of lost boys. However, despite the success girls are having in terms of examinations, they are still not breaking through that glass ceiling in any great number.

A recent publication, *Sex and Power*, was researched and written by the Centre for Women & Democracy on behalf of the Counting Women In coalition (Centre for Women and Democracy, 2013). This important document reminds us that it is almost 40 years since the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act and over 80 years since women got the right to vote. However, the report points out that women are still all too often missing from politically powerful positions in the UK. The research points out that at the current rate of progress, a girl child born today will be drawing her pension before she has any chance of being equally represented in the Parliament of her country. The report concludes that Britain is run largely by men. We already know this but perhaps we don't think of it very often – especially in schools.

Following on from this report, equality campaigners demanded urgent action to tackle the gender pay gap after a new study showing female graduates can expect to earn thousands of pounds a year less than their male counterparts. The study carried out by the Warwick Institute for Employment Research on behalf of the Higher Education Careers Services Unit showed women who had just received their degree were more consistently at the lower end of the salary range (Purcell et al., 2012). Men by contrast were more likely to earn much higher salaries. The gap remained stubbornly high even when graduates had studied the same subject, achieved an identical UCAS score or attended the same institution. Furthermore, it found the problem was replicated across nearly all chosen career paths except the not-for-profit sector. The private sector had a larger gender gap in annual earnings for recent graduates than the public sector. Thankfully, education provided the most

equal employment path whilst the biggest differences in starting salaries were in banking and finance, followed by agriculture, mining, oil and gas, and the utilities.

These damning research reports remind us that we still have a lot of work to do in terms of gender equality. In my view this is not just about their careers and earning capacity but also about the self-confidence of girls and women to be themselves and do things in their own way – not take on the mantle of their male counterparts. Girls are often apologetic about performing better than boys and will not always put themselves forward. This is often evident in interview situations and in the workplace where women are not inclined to sing their own praises or blow their own trumpets! Instead they sit back and watch their male counterparts mouth-off about their considerable abilities or talents. Women (and I generalise of course) are far more reflective and honest about what they can and can't do. I know this because I have made this mistake myself when being interviewed for several senior posts. I remember being asked about my financial expertise and I answered honestly rather than pretending this was something I was good at. Most men I know in similar situations would not have been so honest....after all, they reason, this is something I can learn.

Interviewing for posts in my own school, one of the questions I always ask candidates for a teaching post is how their lesson went and what they would do differently next time. I am looking for teachers who are reflective and who are striving to improve. Normally most teachers, male as well as female, are able to give at least one point for improvement. However, many of the young female teachers I interview will really go to town telling us what they would change – typically everything, even though the lesson was good! Ask a woman what her strengths are and she will struggle, but ask her what her areas for development are and she will tell you in great detail! This is something we as women need to think about and prepare for so we don't fall into the trap. I believe assertiveness training is essential for all women – not just teachers – as it can help in their professional and personal lives.

In our school we have spent a lot of time tackling issues around racism and homophobia with good effect but we know that we can never tick the box and say our work is done – it is always on-going and we need to find new ways of getting the messages across. However, we realise that we have not spent enough time looking at sexism and ensuring girls are comfortable with who they are and are not limiting themselves in terms of career choices. Tackling women's and girls' issues is also important in terms of their relationships and how they expect to be treated by young men. We have been shocked by some of the negative attitudes from many girls of all different ethnic groups. Many girls have said that a boy has a 'right' to get angry or to hit them if they are talking to another boy or if they have displeased them in any way. They see a possessive attitude as a sign of love. Although this is an extreme example it is one held by many girls. Boys too need to be challenged and helped to understand that some of their attitudes towards women are inappropriate to say the least. Most schools are doing good work on this but I think the pressure on exam results has squeezed the time and energy to run such programmes. Youngsters need time and expert input to facilitate discussions and to challenge inappropriate attitudes.

The media plays a huge part in seemingly confirming young women's negative role in society. Whilst I am sure this is not a deliberate policy, it is nonetheless an important factor. Our screens are full of young beautiful women who are rarely successful in their own right but are instead often married or partnered to a rich

and powerful man. There are of course many positive women on our televisions but there are not enough of them. Magazines are full of models and celebrities who have made their names from appearing on reality TV or having affairs with celebrities and then kissing and telling. I have been told that girls in primary schools will often say their ambition is to marry a footballer or to be a celebrity or a glamour model. How sad is that? Yet these are the sort of women that are lauded as being successful. We must challenge this. We are not going to be able to change the media but we can teach our young people to understand what is being presented to them and how to interpret what they see. Media studies need to feature in some guise in the school curriculum so that young people are not fooled by slick marketing and production. Our pupils need to know what propaganda is and be able to analyse what they see.

Despite all this, when it comes to career choices it seems clear that most girls and women are generally not motivated by money. Girls (particularly those who are high fliers) will choose professions where they can make a difference, where they can collaborate and work together. They tend to shun the target-driven city type jobs where competition is all. Girls often don't have the same competitive edge and can't get worked up about the same things as men. In the political field, women find

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it hard to toe the party line when they totally object to the policy being proposed. I think they must also struggle with the male oriented political structures and process. Women want a good quality of life where they feel valued and where they don't have to sacrifice their femininity. There are obvious exceptions of course! As I near retirement, I have been thinking about my next step and next career. I am really interested in politics and have seriously thought of getting involved in local politics to see if I could bring about some change. But when I look at politicians as a group I can see nothing that would encourage me to dive into what seems like an old boys' club where you have to have such a big ego. It has no appeal whatsoever.

I once worked for a woman who took on the very worst of male attributes (rather like Maggie Thatcher) in her role as a leader. She adopted an aggressive bullying style of leadership and walked over others to get what she wanted. She took no prisoners. Her compassion was non-existent. She had favourites and bore grudges for those who crossed her. She was the queen of manipulation, setting colleagues against each other for her own purposes. I swore that I would be a very different type of boss. Sadly, she was seen by outsiders as being a very successful leader. I know that if I had adopted a similar style I might have been far more successful in my career than I have been but I would not have had any job satisfaction and would have been in charge of a very unhappy institution.

In my experience the best woman leaders are those who have managed to be themselves and their way of working has been adopted by the organisation and its

culture has changed accordingly. This is more difficult in larger organisations while in older organisations or institutions, tradition usually dictates that men are men and women stand little chance of getting through the doors in the first place. If they do succeed in gaining entry, they will often be pushed out or leave voluntarily because of the inflexible male-oriented culture.

Perhaps we need to acknowledge that many women are not attracted to work in particular careers and we should not beat ourselves up when they don't want to become engineers or fire fighters or bankers. We are teaching girls to be self-confident and assertive so we should not be surprised when they choose career paths that

we don't approve of! It's their life after all. However, we must make sure they aim high and don't settle for low paid jobs that have no progression or training. We must also make sure they have a really good education (not just subjects and exam passes) so that they have a real choice and are not left to take the jobs that men don't want.

We can't get away from the fact that women are the only ones who can have babies and that in most cases they want to stay at home (often for a year) after they have given birth. When they do go back to the workplace, work may no longer be their first priority. Many employers look at young women and assess how long it will be before they will be taking maternity leave. I remember, when I told my then head teacher that I was pregnant but would return to work three months after the birth, he patted me on the head and said I would change my mind once the baby was born. I didn't! I had no choice, as I could not afford to take more time off. I have to acknowledge as a head teacher that it is difficult to manage when teachers take maternity leave. Pupil achievement invariably suffers no matter how good their replacement is but it's something we cope with and plan well for. However, I know how difficult it is for ambitious young women teachers to decide when it is the best time to have children. Although the law protects their job it is hard to go for a senior post and make a huge commitment if you know you want to have children in the next few years. I know many women whose body clock is ticking who are ready to become head teachers but are holding back from applying. They don't want to take on such an important job and then get pregnant. There are many who have done it but it's a difficult choice and one that men don't have to make.

There are lots of very successful women around and we need to make sure we celebrate their achievements and get them mentoring our young people but we also need to refocus our efforts in schools and colleges and universities and put women's issues back on the agenda. We need to challenge the stereotypes and the traditions that keep women out. There are so many young women who will not be able to achieve their potential in a world that is still very heavily weighted in favour of men. It's a real waste of resources.

“There are lots of very successful women around and we need to make sure we celebrate their achievements and get them mentoring our young people but we also need to refocus our efforts in schools and colleges and universities and put women's issues back on the agenda.”

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How do expert primary classroom teachers really work?

Abstract: *In this article Tony Eaude considers how primary classroom teachers work. He argues that their role is highly complex and involves teachers being confident to take ownership of, and adapt, the curriculum for the needs of particular groups of children. The opportunities and constraints which make this difficult are discussed. He presents 12 propositions about how expert primary class teachers really work.*

This article summarises ideas in my recent book (Eaude, 2012) about how primary class teachers with a high level of expertise really work. The first two sections identify key points from research, mostly from the United States, on expertise and teacher expertise, drawing on chapter 21 of the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2010). This is followed by a consideration of the processes involved in teaching a class of young children. This involves teachers exercising professional judgement, adopting a wide range of strategies and seeing themselves as curriculum-creators. The opportunities, and constraints which make it difficult to act and think in this way, are then discussed. The article ends with 12 propositions about how primary class teachers with a high level of expertise really work, presenting a picture of the role as much more complicated and demanding than is often recognised.

Expertise

It may help to start by thinking about an activity in which you are an expert - perhaps cooking or photography, sport or driving a car - to identify how experts in that field work. Do not be modest or put off by the term 'expert' but think about how you work and think, whether for instance you just follow a set of rules or are always aware of why you act as you do.

Research (e.g. Glaser, 1999; Sternberg and Horvath, 1995) suggests that expertise, in any field, is:

- prototypical - so that there are many different ways of acting as an expert;
- situated - so that it is specific to a particular context; and
- largely tacit and intuitive - so that it is hard for both the expert and an observer to identify and understand what their expertise involves.

So, for instance, expert cooks do not all work in the same way, are likely to be better at making some dishes than others and adapt recipes on the basis of experience. Likewise, expert doctors draw heavily on their previous experience and may find it hard to articulate quite how they make decisions because this has become 'second nature' to them. Since expertise is situated, one needs to consider how an expert operates, interacts and responds within a particular context, over time.

Dr Tony Eaude

Tony Eaude was head teacher of a multi-cultural first school for nine years. He now works as an independent consultant and KS2 teacher. He has written on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, pedagogy and teacher expertise. See: www.edperspectives.org.uk

Glaser (1999: 91-2) highlights six generalisations about experts, that:

- their expertise is very specific, derived from specialised knowledge that drives their reasoning, though some aspects are transferable between contexts;
- they perceive meaningful patterns, with “pattern recognition occur(ring) so rapidly that it appears to take on the character of intuition”;
- their problem solving entails an efficient and selective search of memory or use of general problem-solving tactics;
- their knowledge is highly procedural and goal oriented (so that they know how to achieve their aims);
- their knowledge enables them to use self-regulatory processes with great skill; and
- their proficiency is often routinised, efficient and accurate, but they can adapt and exercise opportunistic planning.

Shulman (2004) emphasises that the complexity of a situation determines how expertise is defined. In situations where there is little interaction, as in chess or driving a taxi, expertise is judged largely by results – by who wins the match or whether one arrives at the right address. The more complex and unpredictable the situation, such as conducting an orchestra or teaching a class, the more expertise is manifested in processes, because there are multiple aims and how these are met depends on the response of the musicians or the children.

Berliner (2001: 466) highlights that expertise is not just a characteristic of the person, but of the interaction of the person and the environment in which they work. The context affects how the expert can, and does, act and ‘what works’ in one context may not be appropriate in another. So, to understand how primary class teachers with a high level of expertise act and think, we must relate the features of teacher expertise, in general, to the specific context of teaching a class of young children.

Teacher expertise

Teacher expertise is often characterised as domain and craft knowledge, though I argue in Eaude (2012) for the importance of personal/interpersonal knowledge, especially in teaching young children, drawing on the work of Elliott et al. (2011)

We have seen that expertise is prototypical. Berliner, (2001: 469) identifies 13 prototypical areas of teacher expertise, here grouped under five headings.

Using teacher knowledge

- better use of knowledge
- extensive pedagogical content knowledge, including deep representations of subject matter

Setting objectives and providing feedback

- more challenging objectives
- better monitoring of learning and providing feedback to students
- better adaptation and modifications of goals for diverse learners
- including better skills for improvisat

Understanding and responding to events

- better perception of classroom events including a better ability to read cues
- from students
- better problem-solving strategies

- more frequent testing of hypotheses
- better decision-making

Creating and sustaining climate and context

- better classroom climate
- greater sensitivity to context

Manifesting attitudes and beliefs

- greater respect for students
- display of more passion for teaching

Alexander (2010: 418) states that these were “correlated with measures such as students’ higher levels of achievement, deep rather than surface understanding of subject matter, higher motivation to learn and feelings of self-efficacy”, especially with younger and low-income pupils.

However, it is not much use to talk of ‘better’ use of knowledge, decision-making or strategies without exploring, as the next five sections do, what this actually means when teaching a class of young children.

Using teacher knowledge

Subject knowledge is, for all teachers, important but is only the means to an end - pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Shulman (2004: 203) defines this as:

“a particular form of content knowledge that embodies the aspect of content most germane to its teachability ... the most useful forms of representation ... the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations and demonstrations - ...the ways of formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others.”

In other words, subject knowledge is valuable for teachers mainly to help them present material in ways that help children to learn.

Primary class teachers will not have the depth of knowledge in every subject of a specialist and are almost certain to have varying levels of subject knowledge in different curricular areas. Those with a high level of expertise have a breadth of PCK across the curriculum and are able to make cross-curricular links and enable children to do so, especially in applying skills and adopting different methods of enquiry. So, while a depth of subject knowledge makes it more likely that the teacher will be confident and open to children’s ideas, questions and comments, what really matters is how such knowledge is used to meet the disparate learning needs of the class. This emphasis on craft and personal/interpersonal, as well as subject, knowledge therefore makes the primary class teacher’s role more like that of a GP than a surgeon.

Setting objectives and providing feedback

The importance of PCK emphasises the need not just to set challenging objectives but to match objectives to children’s current understanding, providing challenges which are engaging and achievable, rather than decontextualised and demotivating. Primary class teachers with a high level of expertise build on the different interests and abilities which children bring, modifying their teaching accordingly. They offer positive feedback, but without being afraid to challenge and to criticise as appropriate. They recognise that feedback needs to be (reasonably) immediate and specific and takes many forms, with non-verbal means of reinforcement or

disapproval, particularly important with young children. Such teachers encourage those aspects of Assessment for Learning such as peer- and self-assessment which help children to develop higher-order thinking skills.

Understanding and responding to events

Good teaching in any age group involves understanding and responding to events, observing what is happening to recognise how well teaching strategies are working and how they should be altered. This matters especially with young children because they are less experienced and predictable learners, highlighting the importance of in-the-moment assessment of children's level of understanding and responding

“Primary class teachers with a high level of expertise recognise that their role involves a wide range of aims - related both to academic as well as spiritual, moral, social and cultural development - for a group of children with varying backgrounds and abilities.”

appropriately. It also highlights the subtle, fluid, often intuitive, aspects of pedagogy such as those which John (2000: 98-101) identifies: problem avoidance, interpretation of pupil cues, opportunity creation, improvisation and assessment of mood.

So teachers need to create and take opportunities which may not be obvious in advance and to plan flexibly so that they can exercise what Sawyer (2004: 13) calls “disciplined improvisation” rather than “scripted instruction.” Such a view of teacher expertise emphasises processes, recognising the complexity and unpredictability of the classroom, but without oversimplifying children's learning or reducing expectations of what they can do.

Creating and sustaining a climate for learning

One vital aspect of teaching a class is to establish a climate for learning which includes and motivates children with many different backgrounds, interests and abilities. In the short term this may involve altering the mood of a class, for instance after a difficult lunchtime. But over a longer period it entails setting up expectations, such as that all children will work hard, respect each other and become increasingly resilient; and being inclusive, especially of those who are finding learning difficult.

Two fundamental changes of thinking, applicable to learners of all ages, which the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (James and Pollard, 2006) suggested are that:

- “the conception of what is to be learned needs to be broadened beyond the notions of curricula and subjects associated with schools”; and
- “more prominence needs to be given to the importance of learning relationships.”

The first of these is particularly important to motivate young children and help them relate their school learning to their experience out of school; and the second because evidence such as that of Donaldson (1993) and Rogoff (1990) indicates that young children's understanding is strongly influenced by relationships with trusted

adults and that they learn a great deal by example and through an apprenticeship model.

Manifesting attitudes and beliefs

Primary class teachers with a high level of expertise recognise that their role involves a wide range of aims – related both to academic as well as spiritual, moral, social and cultural development – for a group of children with varying backgrounds and abilities. So they provide a broad and balanced range of opportunities. Such teachers care for children, with all their individual interests and concerns, as well as challenging them, recognising how social and emotional issues affect cognitive learning. They manage to find ways of meeting these aims over a long period of time without being too controlling or focusing too much on short-term results. And they recognise that different aims may conflict, for instance where the demand for immediate results may inhibit creativity and lateral thinking.

Underlying all these processes are teachers' attitudes and beliefs about children, about learning and teaching and about ideas such as ability (see Dweck, 2000). This includes respect for all children, regardless of background and ability, and a belief that they can achieve more than may seem likely. For primary class teachers, this involves addressing the needs of the whole child, including, but not only in, literacy and numeracy, so that children develop the skills, attitudes and dispositions required for lifelong learning, within and beyond the school environment. While it may be difficult, if not impossible, for class teachers to display enthusiasm and passion for learning in every subject area, their interest in children's lives and responses are major factors in enhancing motivation and achievement.

Practical implications

Recalling the statements above about experts in general, primary class teachers with a high level of expertise:

- have specific knowledge not only about subjects, but about how to present such knowledge in ways appropriate to a particular group of children;
- understand what is happening very quickly, and often without conscious thought, rather like driving a car;
- avoid, and solve, problems based on experience of similar situations;
- recognise and work towards goals which are long-term and related to children's whole development, rather than just short-term or based on results in a few subject areas;
- pay more attention to children's ideas and responses than to their own behaviour; and
- plan and work efficiently, but are prepared to adapt their planning and to improvise, to react appropriately to children's responses, rather like a jazz musician.

As the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2010: 55) argues, "teachers should work towards a pedagogy of repertoire rather than recipe and of principle rather than prescription." While true of all teachers, this is so especially for primary class teachers because of the range of aims to be achieved and the variety of learning needs in a class of young children. This requires pedagogical content knowledge across a range of subject areas and the ability to manage classroom processes with sensitivity and confidence. However, it also means that such teachers are – and see themselves

as – curriculum-creators rather than deliverers; and that they exercise professional judgement, often in-the-moment, to reflect the reciprocal and unpredictable nature of young children’s responses. Rules and programmes may help, but teachers with a high level of expertise use these flexibly.

“In a context of monitoring and inspection, often based on an expected style of teaching and focused largely on a narrow range of subjects, teachers tend to become cautious and compliant and to doubt their own judgement.”

As
Grimmett and
Mackinnon
(1992: 437)
argue, “craft
knowledge
is vastly
different from
the packaged
and glossy
maxims that

govern ‘the science of education’ ... (It) has a different sort of rigour, one that places more confidence in the judgement of teachers, their feel for the work, their love for students and learning.”

The processes described above capture, for me, the messiness and unpredictability of how primary classrooms really operate when teachers and children are acting normally rather than when ‘on display.’ However, the opportunities for, and constraints on, working like this are considered in the next section.

Opportunities and constraints

Teaching a class of young children for a year presents wonderful opportunities to establish relationships, over time, which enable children to be creative and enquiring, to take risks and to make connections with themes previously studied and other subject areas. The amount of time spent with a class provides the chance to meet multiple aims and to make links across the curriculum – and with children’s experiences and interests out of school. However, this requires confidence and judgement and the task is made difficult by constraints both internal to how classrooms work and as a result of external demands.

One major pressure in teaching a class is to maintain control of children’s behaviour, which understandably makes teachers anxious. This tends to encourage teachers to over-control and to limit the opportunities for children to exercise their creativity; and to adopt transmissive styles of teaching rather than encourage children’s talk and exploration. When added to the demand to cover a great deal of content, and to achieve short-term results, this encourages superficial teaching, rather than the reflective and higher-order thinking necessary for children to gain a deep understanding. In a context of monitoring and inspection, often based on an expected style of teaching and focused largely on a narrow range of subjects, teachers tend to become cautious and compliant and to doubt their own judgement. There is some evidence (Nias, 1989) that the extent to which primary teachers invest their identity in their role means that a loss of autonomy may affect them particularly strongly. Class teachers with a high level of expertise with young children manage to overcome these constraints, but it is difficult to do so.

How expert primary class teachers really work

While all teachers work differently, this analysis enables me to suggest 12 tentative propositions about how class teachers with a high level of expertise with young children really work. These are that such teachers:

1. Are more concerned with a broad range of pedagogical content knowledge and ways of working and thinking within subject disciplines than simply with subject knowledge.
2. Seek to match activities and experiences to children's current level of understanding, but allow scope for individuals and groups to adapt these.
3. Regard assessment, especially in-the-moment, and disciplined improvisation, rather than planning with predetermined outcomes, as integral to teaching.
4. Adopt a range of teaching approaches, depending on what is to be learned, but with a strong element of apprenticeship, enabling children to be active and take increasing control of their learning.
5. Are attuned to the emotional and cognitive needs, both of individuals and of the whole class, to inform both planning and methods of feedback.
6. Create and sustain, over time, an inclusive learning environment sensitive to, and respectful of, children's culture and background, but helping to expand their cultural horizons.
7. Provide a broad and challenging range of activities, experiences and opportunities to sustain children's interest and to broaden, strengthen and deepen, the skills, attributes and dispositions associated with lifelong learning.
8. Encourage risk-taking and creativity, both independently and in groups, but protect children, especially the least resilient, from the emotional cost of failure.
9. Seek to understand and influence, rather than control, children's behaviour, recognising the many factors which affect this and the importance of caring relationships.
10. Recognise that education involves multiple, and often conflicting, aims and maintain an emphasis on children's long-term needs, helping to encourage intrinsic motivation.
11. Believe that every child can achieve more than s/he thinks that they can, and encourage and support them in having and meeting broad as well as high aspirations.
12. Have the confidence to make their own professional, and informed, judgements, both long-term and in-the-moment, in response to the group's needs, rather than simply to comply.

Conclusion

This article has presented a view of the primary class teacher's role as very demanding, involving processes and pedagogy very different from one which emphasises a recommended approach based largely on achieving short-term results in literacy and numeracy. It is one which involves such teachers meeting a wide range of aims, over time, through providing a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum offer; and seeing themselves as curriculum creators, exercising professional judgement. In the current policy climate, this is enormously challenging, but if young children are to sustain and develop the attitudes and dispositions for lifelong learning in a world of constant change, it is this view of the class teacher's role that policy-makers and the profession will need to encourage.

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Parents matter too

Abstract: *The new National Curriculum won't make the difference it is aiming to achieve unless parents are involved in their children's education, argues Annette Wiles.*

Leave it to the experts

LWhen the Coalition Government initially stated that curriculum reform was a key objective, PTA-UK conducted research with parents to gauge their response (PTA-UK, 2011). This was emphatic; most parents thought the curriculum should be determined by teachers (43 per cent), second only to those who want it to be in the gift of “experts in what and how children learn”. Only ten per cent of parents think the curriculum should be decided by the Government.

Furthermore, the majority of parents (50 per cent) felt that a National Curriculum should cover only a core knowledge and understanding and should not be prescriptive. When asked about exam reform, just eight per cent of parents felt they should go back to an older style with exams solely at the end of the course.

There is a danger that the latest round of education reforms will leave parents behind not just because they aren't widely supported but also simply because it represents further change. In the same survey, when asked about what one thing the Government could do to help their children's education, parents suggested ending continual change of the system.

Parents and education policy

The new National Curriculum and the reforms to exams and accountability mechanisms announced at the same time are not the only changes that affect parents – arguably there has been a fundamental shift in the role of parents within education policy. Prior to May 2010, the importance of involving parents in their children's education had been gaining momentum. There was a growing emphasis on parental engagement as demonstrated by the Ofsted framework launched in 2009 which invited parents' views and tested schools on the strength of their parental involvement. Policies such as Extended Services put engaging and supporting parents in their children's education at the heart of their practice.

Since May 2010, parents have become important in terms of the role they play in exercising choice and holding the education system to account. The Education Bill, which received Royal Assent in November 2011, refocused Ofsted routine school inspections on four key areas justified as being those that matter most to parents.

This is the bill which also enabled free schools to be set up in communities where there is demand from local parents for “a good, new school”. The Children and Families Bill published early this year provides a further example of how parents are now regarded by the Government. The aspiration to extend the availability of high quality childcare was described as “responding to a widely shared gripe among parents” by Liz Truss, the childcare minister and again places parents in a position of choice.

When pressed directly by PTA-UK, the Government expresses no aversion to parental involvement but considers this something for schools to determine themselves. However, the lack of any policy consideration has pushed it down the agenda with momentum being lost.

Annette Wiles

Annette Wiles is Policy and Research Manager of PTA-UK, the largest network of home-school associations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The importance of parental involvement

The development of expertise around parental involvement expertise in the UK began with the literature review conducted by Charles Desforges in 2003 on behalf of the then Department for Education and Skills (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003). This concluded that "...parental involvement in the form of 'at home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's attainment and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation". This is further qualified, "Research affords a clear model of how parental involvement works. This model is described in the report. In essence parenting has its influence indirectly through shaping the child's self concept as a learner and through setting high aspirations". In these early stages, Desforges found that the evaluations of interventions to support parental involvement were technically weak and that it was impossible at that stage to describe the scale of impact on pupils' attainment.

In 2007, Desforges' mantle was picked up by the University of Warwick where Alma Harris conducted a research project commissioned by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (Harris and Goodall, 2007). Their report, 'Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement – Do parents know they matter?' concluded: "Parental

“Three quarters of parents reported they would like more information from their school with almost half saying they receive feedback too late to be able to act on any problem that could impede their children’s learning progress.”

engagement is a powerful lever for raising achievement in schools. When parents and teachers work together to improve learning, the gains in achievement are significant”.

An Ofsted report of 2009 that looked at family learning, one form of parental involvement intervention, stated that such programmes:

“...had a considerable impact on the achievements of both children and adults. In almost all of the providers surveyed, adults were developing good or very good skills, behaviours and parenting attitudes or were achieving success in gaining qualification. Wider benefits and progression outcomes for adults included increased involvement in school life, gaining employment, and an increased social network. The children's class teachers reported that since attending family learning, the children had settled better in class, improved relationships with their peers and teachers, and improved their communication, interpersonal skills and self- confidence.” (Ofsted, 2009)

In 2007, the Department for Education and Skills published Every Parent Matters, concluding: "Parents and the home environment they create are the single most important factor in shaping their children's well-being, achievements and prospects”.

What children say

Importantly, children themselves recognise the importance of parental involvement. As part of their research, the University of Warwick found that children value parental involvement for the moral support it provides, (“If they weren’t interested, then you wouldn’t be”); because parents qualify the value of education, (“Your parents are your main influence, really – if they don’t care about it, you don’t take as much of an interest in it”); they are a key influence on achievement and behaviour, (“I try to be good for her” – the student’s mother); and parents make homework happen, (“If parents know what it is they should be doing then they’re more likely to do it”) (Harris and Goodall, 2007).

Getting involved

The Department for Education commissioned a longitudinal study of parents from 2001 to 2008, which showed significant improvement in their involvement in their children’s learning (Peters, Seed, Goldstein and Coleman, 2008). In 2008, around half (51 per cent) of parents felt involved in their children’s school life, up from 20 per cent in 2001 and 38 per cent in 2003. It may come as a surprise to some that the desire to increase their involvement was strongest amongst disadvantaged groups. However, this is supported by the research by the University of Warwick which found that: “Parents who are viewed as ‘hard to reach’ often see the school as ‘hard to reach’”. Parents of children who have been identified as having some form of special educational need (SEN) but who are not statemented are likely to be the least positive about their involvement in their children’s education. However, this study has ceased with the new administration.

An indication that some of this progress might have been lost comes with the publication of a new study recently (ParentMail survey of 2,500 parents, February 2013) which has found that the vast majority are not getting the level of information they need and would like about their child’s education to be able to support it. Three quarters of parents reported they would like more information from their school with almost half saying they receive feedback too late to be able to act on any problem that could impede their children’s learning progress.

Barriers to participation

The developing research has found that there are clear barriers that prevent parental participation in their children’s learning. The University of Warwick in its 2007 study states: “One of the most cited reasons for parents not being involved in schooling is work commitments. Lack of time and childcare difficulties seem to be significant factors, predominantly for women and those working full-time” (Harris and Goodall, 2007). Single parents are highlighted as those most likely to feel restricted. The DCSF’s 2008 study into parental involvement in education found a range of reasons why parents are not confident in supporting homework. Parents stated that they are unfamiliar with current teaching methods; don’t understand children’s work; and

“Collaboration should be proactive on behalf of the school and not just reactive; the objective should be to engage all parents and collaboration should be sensitive to the wide range of families’ circumstances; and parents’ contribution to the education process has to be valued.”

they were not taught certain subjects at school. Particular difficulty is identified with numeracy and parents state they are concerned that their involvement will confuse children or that they will simply do something wrong (Peters, Seed, Goldstein and Coleman, 2008).

Rowdy Robots get Dads involved in primary education

Ofsted's report into Family Learning highlights how fathers and other male family members got involved in their children's education through a "Rowdy Robots" programme. Each event typically involved over 50 fathers, grandfathers, uncles and older brothers and their children, in a technology project that was delivered in the early evenings at primary schools. Each family group collectively produced a simple 'robot racer' using easy-to-follow guidance. One father commented: "I thought I'd come to a robot-building session, but it's not building robots, it's building families". School staff were particularly positive about the benefits children gained from the event, where it became the topic of assembly and class-based discussions and activity (Ofsted, 2009).

Family learning in secondary education

The Ofsted report also provides examples of family learning for secondary education. At one school, parents who would not normally participate took part in family learning with day and evening sessions to help them understand maths and to encourage them to help their children. In one example, 14 out of 18 pupils on the courses were assessed as making significant improvement in maths following the family learning sessions; with their National Curriculum level increasing by one or two sub-levels higher than had been estimated. Twelve pupils had significantly increased their concentration and application; while 10 of the 16 families had significantly increased their joint activities in the home. Outcomes for parents were equally positive: 15 out of 16 parents increased their confidence in maths, felt more confident about supporting their children's numeracy and increased their confidence in working with the school (Ofsted, 2009).

Success factors

Desforges (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003) in his literature review highlighted a range of success factors for a parental engagement programme:

- The commitment of senior management is required and a whole school approach must be adopted.
- Schools need to raise parental awareness as well as ensuring the views of parents are understood.
- Emphasis is placed on the quality of communications with parents and all parents need to be supported, with targeting used to support those who might be harder to reach.
- Other parenting issues that might prevent parents' involvement need to be addressed.

Making it happen

Desforges established some simple but effective principles on how to make parental involvement happen. These set out that: collaboration should be proactive on behalf of the school and not just reactive; the objective should be to engage all parents; collaboration should be sensitive to the wide range of families' circumstances; and

parents' contribution to the education process has to be valued. (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

Getting started

Desforges also provided some simple tips for getting started. A comprehensive needs' analysis is required at the outset to understand what any programme is trying to address. It is recommended that the school establishes mutual priorities with parents – there is little point in the school aiming to achieve something that parents don't support. A whole school evaluation of resources and necessary organisational adjustments should be undertaken to ensure there is an ability to achieve the stated objectives and it is important to raise awareness to help parents and teachers understand and commit to a strategic plan to develop parental involvement (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

Support

If your assessment is that your school doesn't currently do enough to engage parents and support them to get more involved in their children's education, there is third party support and expertise available to help you. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has undertaken a major project on engaging parents to raise achievement which includes Parental Engagement Seminars and a quality standard mark to recognise and celebrate schools achievement in parental engagement. Additionally, the Leading Parent Partnership Award (LPPA) is a national award that provides a coherent framework through which schools, early years setting and other educational organisations can deliver effective parental engagement from early years to post-16. Finally, the Effective Partnerships with Parents (EPPa) is promoted as an easy-to-use tool to help schools meet the parent and community involvement challenges expected of schools, academies and children's centres with the strategy being extensively trialled in London and the South. PTA-UK recommends that you talk to other schools that have already used these resources to find out which might be the best for your school.

How Can PTAs help?

Clearly schools are able to support and influence parents' engagement with their children's learning at home and PTA-UK would argue that your PTA has a role to play in this. We are firm advocates of schools using their PTA strategically, looking at how it can add value to the school improvement plan. Can PTA events be used to break down barriers and engage those that are traditionally hard to reach? We've seen PTAs that have successfully targeted segments of the parent population and have managed to engage them in a way not previously achieved. PTAs also have additional resources – funding and supportive volunteers – that could be harnessed to support the development of a school's parental engagement strategy. For more information and support, please contact PTA-UK (info@pta.org.uk/www.pta.org.uk).

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The Learning Parent Partnership Award details can be found at: <http://www.lppa.co.uk/> (Accessed: 5 April 2013)

The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust seminars on engaging parents to raise achievement details <http://www.ssatuk.co.uk/ssat/programmes-support/community/parental-engagement/> (Accessed: 5 April 2013)

Giving teachers voice – getting school democracy!

Abstract: *Disadvantaged schools, formerly ‘challenging schools’ now ‘underperforming schools’ are subject to high policy- and time-pressures to meet expectations in line with government benchmarks and floor targets. ‘Closing the gap’ is one reading of the complexities in teachers’ work with disadvantaged pupils, and raising aspirations one strategy to improve learning outcomes. This article describes an initiative that brings together teachers and academic partners to co-construct responsive curriculum and classroom practices. This provides an evidence base and empowers teachers to raise their voice and advocate for realistic policy and practice in the run-up to the 2015 national elections.*

At issue for so many disadvantaged schools are the enormous challenges based on existing definitions of success and failure. These take a cue from the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove’s view of the type of teaching that raises standards and narrows the attainment gap (see Gove’s Foreword to the 2010 Schools White Paper). Likewise Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, takes the view that a school’s success is marked by average point scores for English and maths with a focus on pupils eligible for free school meals and others (see Wilshaw’s letter dated February, 2013, to all schools). These definitions are supported by Minister of State for Schools David Laws, who suggests that ‘closing the gap’ requires thinking creatively about raising the aspirations of disadvantaged pupils (see Law’s letter dated 22 February, 2013, to the University Council for the Education of Teachers).

This familiar way of framing schooling in England promotes the use of conventional strategies like ritualistic teaching acts (Haberman, 1991a, 1991b), coupled with classroom observations for inspection purposes. There is policy logic at work, given high stakes to achieve higher and higher national benchmarks and floor targets, and to conform to the changed Ofsted inspection categories. Head teachers and school leadership teams put pressure on teachers to improve performance and in the process promote ‘raising aspirations’ as an attractive ‘common-sense’ strategy. Some pupils (and families) respond well to different interventions and action plans, but others continue to underachieve and results plateau. The pressure to improve performance is relentless, and there comes a time when the profession needs to reconsider these policy demands.

Teachers take a stand

The policy reality in disadvantaged schools is that teachers can only do so much, especially in the face of pupils often marked by poverty and deprivation and from families with deep needs. They come from very diverse communities. There are multi-ethnic and multi-lingual families who are immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who have experienced trauma and dislocation. There are also white working class families, many of whom, with de-industrialisation have experienced

Lori Beckett

Lori Beckett is the Winifred Mercier Professor of Teacher Education in the Carnegie Faculty at Leeds Metropolitan University and Co-Convenor of the British Educational Research Association Practitioner Research Group. She works as an academic partner to local practitioner researchers.

intergenerational unemployment. It makes no sense to increase the policy pressures, which simply add to the burden with so many pupils becoming more and more disengaged and alienated. In some disadvantaged schools, including academies, under instruction to meet government targets, it is ironically teachers who are becoming more and more disempowered and disaffected from their chosen career.

It needs to be acknowledged that teaching in disadvantaged schools requires more than incessant policy demands and the hounding of teachers and pupils. Teaching is much more than training to deliver pre-determined content to be tested and graded. It is a considered intellectual activity that should be research-informed and evidence-based, which requires proper resourcing and system support. There needs to be recognition of the complexities in teachers' work with disadvantaged pupils, which should call into play some nuanced thinking about social markers like poverty, deprivation and social class. At the same time, there needs to be a detailed interrogation of the meanings of 'closing the gap' and the ways this is inextricably intertwined with social and educational inequalities.

In this short article, I posit that with adequate time for professional learning and development head teachers and teachers are open to intellectualise the experiences of the different forms of disadvantage that characterise their school-community; the learning needs of pupils in poverty who consistently underachieve; and the sort of teaching that ensures these pupils receive rich rewarding learning experiences. These practitioners see the worth in developing a research perspective on practice in order to strengthen their professional judgment and encourage critical self-reflections. It is my experience that they embrace jointly determined continuing professional development (CPD) programmes that bring practically relevant ideas, concepts and theories into the school, alert to its context, demographics and school census. They are open to interweave this knowledge from practical enquiries into reading the school's Ofsted inspection report and developing the School Improvement Plan. They are amenable to reconstructing school priorities, alert to social analyses of RAISEonline data and knowledgeable about school interventions. They are receptive to increasing the information that goes between the schools and universities to co-develop a professional knowledge base that works to support practitioner thinking and theorising (see Beckett and Struthers, 2011; Struthers and Beckett, 2011).

For example, practitioners working with disadvantaged pupils in school communities with deep needs have to know about social and educational disadvantage to improve teaching. They need professional knowledge to take into account pupils' family and social backgrounds and the ways these interrelate with pupil achievement. They need to develop critical understandings of the ways poverty and deprivation impact in their classrooms, through additional learning needs, for instance. They need to recognise the intricacies of the problems of pupils' underachievement and why it persists so they can devise appropriate intervention strategies.

In response to this Coalition Government's 'closing the gap' agenda, they know it is ill-considered when it simply targets individual pupils and their parents/carers, suggesting their lack of ambition and expectation might be at the root of the problem. They see that there needs to be a more nuanced understanding of the variance between the learning outcomes of disadvantaged pupils and groups of pupils and others who are more advantaged. The reasons for the differences and disparities in achievement are complex and multi-layered, exposed by research-informed deliberations about pupils, their families and communities, the work of schools, and the wider society including global society. They recognise it is ill-advised to simply trumpet 'what works' because what in fact does work in one local school

may not in another, given contextual sensitivities (see Beckett, in press).

Giving Teachers Voice

The 'Giving Teachers Voice' project is exemplary work. At Leeds Met the series of free stand-alone public seminars called Carnegie Conversations provide practitioners with a taste of the sort of knowledge work that marks the professional teacher. This restores their professional confidence to engage in discussions and debates about the complexities of teaching pupils who experience child poverty in disadvantaged schools. The schedule of interactive workshops in the 'Leading Learning' CPD programme witnesses academic partners working with teachers to build their professional knowledge, derived from international research and experience in tandem with local research and experience. It allows them to interrogate the existing data but also use/make multiple data sets and banks of evidence to support their arguments about responsive curriculum and classroom practices. The allied MA 'Achievement in City Schools' supports practitioners to really deepen their professional knowledge bases. In the following paragraphs I explain how this programme came about.

Proactive knowledge work

Colleagues in Leeds – teachers and teacher educators – came together to discuss local schools' needs, couched in terms of promoting teacher leadership, supporting schools' research capacity especially in regards to RAISEonline data, and feeding social analyses into school action plans. A small group agreed to band together, forge a collaborative team of teachers and academic partners that crossed the school-university divide, share collective intelligence and embark on some pilot studies. These ran in pilot schools over six years, initially as an expression of goodwill on the part of the Carnegie Faculty, then with some funding in 2008-2009 from the Training and Development Agency for Schools' 'CPD in schools in challenging circumstances' project, and again gratis in 2010-2011 (see Beckett, 2012; Beckett and Wood, 2012). These early CPD trials broadened and deepened our professional knowledge about teaching pupils who experience child poverty, and connected our teaching. Over time and in reply, academic partners at Leeds Met developed the responsive three-tiered Giving Teachers Voice project, designed by teachers and academic partners for proactive knowledge work: free stand-alone public seminars called Carnegie Conversations; a schedule of continuous interactive seminars/workshops on campus and in schools called the 'Leading Learning' CPD programme; and the allied MA 'Achievement in City Schools'.

From the beginning academic and teacher partners set out to co-construct the Giving Teachers Voice project mindful of local/national policy agendas to improve school performance as well as the social realities of schools serving pupils, families and communities in poverty. They wanted it to be responsive to these schools' needs, but also to explore the schooling experiences for pupils who were underachieving and underperforming, and who were alienated and disengaged from learning intellectually, socially, culturally, and linguistically (see Pink, 2012). The team believed in an active role for practitioners in school improvement, but acknowledged that there were no quick fixes, simply a rather long history of seemingly intractable problems: stark differences in the family and social lives of those pupils who experience child poverty; cumulative disadvantage; the 'dependency culture'; parents' and pupils' low aspirations; some teachers' low expectations; and 'hard to teach' pupils. These were coupled with critical readings of remedies that are recycled

to ameliorate the effects of poverty (see Wrigley, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Perry and Francis, 2010; Mortimore and Whitty, 2000).

In the remainder of this article, I want to share the details of this Giving Teachers Voice project, so named because it encourages practitioners to voice their concerns about teaching in disadvantaged schools and have a democratic say in advocating for more realistic policy and practice. It calls on academic partners to support school-based practitioners to develop intellectually; to bring them into contact with bodies of critical scholarship on 'poverty and schooling'; and to equip them with an arsenal of critical ideas to engage in professional conversations about pupils who experience child poverty and the best courses of action in regard to responsive curriculum and classroom practices.

This means actively negotiating the best of what is known and practised internationally in respect of child poverty, social class and the patterns of pupils' social and educational disadvantage, including disengagement and underachievement. Such work sees a role for school-university partnerships and for teacher educators currently designated initial teacher education (ITE) lecturers to be academic partners for this new era of school-based teacher education. It takes direction from international research and experience on teacher learning (see Lieberman and Miller, 2008; Sahlberg, 2011; Darling Hammond and Lieberman, 2012). This includes a teacher union initiative in New South Wales, Australia, called the Priority Action Schools Programme (see Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis, 2004).

Carnegie Conversations

These teacher knowledge tasters in the form of two-hour twilight sessions called 'Carnegie conversations' have been organised around issues of current professional concern and designed in consultation with the practitioners who are featured in the programme. Each one is stand-alone, but they interconnect through a common format. They are interactive to facilitate critical discussion and problem solving. They draw on local knowledge but also introduce new ideas and strategies from around the world. The topics have been identified to support teachers under pressure to raise achievement and improve performance. The intention is to come together to address key issues and to share participants' professional knowledge, draw on international research and value experience. The purpose is to develop suggestions for school-based investigations to address professional concerns which will inform future practice-focused CPD.

I do not have the space in this article to share the details of all the sessions, but I will look in more detail at the session entitled 'Underachievement among white British pupils'. This draws on work done by a group of practitioner researchers in a local school. They were concerned that their white British pupils were some of the most challenging and least academically able in the school, as reflected in poor attendance and disappointing results.

They asked:

- Why do white British students in this school perform below the national average? and
- Why do the students on free school meals gain far fewer qualifications than other cohorts?

This led practitioner researchers to gather data designed to elicit information on white British pupils' family and social background; their experiences of schooling; the specifics of teaching and learning; and pupils' ideas about ways forward, including advice to teachers. They mined the data for details about the impact of poverty and

deprivation, drawing on their professional readings about 'poverty and schooling'. It resulted in teachers' learning about the ways pupils' schooling experiences are inextricably intertwined with their social lives, which provided directions on tracking students and swift interventions.

Leading Learning CPD Programme

The 'Leading Learning' CPD programme was developed in response to requests from local schools and local authority partners for a sustained but non-accredited series of interactive workshops focused on 'raising achievement' and 'closing the gap'. There are six on-campus and six in-school sessions, one each per half term, over the school year. The programme brings together teachers and academic partners to grow their professional knowledge, mentor budding practitioner researchers, encourage the identification of professional concerns about working with pupils who experience child poverty, plan joint investigations and develop informed action plans. The participating teachers share their findings and contribute to building a professional evidence-base for democratically determining school improvement and change, oriented to equity and social justice (Wrigley, Thomson and Lingard, 2012).

This work is planned to scaffold participating teachers' learning about pupils' learning, lives and schooling experiences, supported by sequential worksheets and practice-based activities to encourage practitioner research activity. Again I will home in on one campus-based session dedicated to 'Schools in Context' and a sample of practitioner research activities:

- A worksheet exercise focused on developing a preliminary understanding of school context using the work of Lupton (2004), intended to support practitioners' critical thinking about the importance of the school's local context and the claim that circumstances do not count. Taking a sample proposal on school context, participating school heads and teachers had to share their thoughts, provide some data/evidence and write a critical commentary.
- Another worksheet exercise this time using the work of Thrupp and Lupton (2011) to encourage school heads' and teachers' critical thinking about key messages and theorising about ideas that inform their school practices. They had to choose a sample idea in the reading and say why it was useful.

Academic partners drew on the work of Lupton (2004, 2006) and Thrupp and Lupton (2011) to show there are conflicting views and explanations about discrepancy of results between 'poor schools' and others. While the dominant view is that the problem lies within the school, an alternative view is that the school's local socio-economic context must be taken into account. Practitioners are encouraged to share their reflections on the proposals, show any data/evidence to support their claims, and develop a counter-argument to take account of the school's context/circumstances, which feeds into the school action plan.

MA in Achievement in City Schools

The new allied MA 'Achievement in City Schools', which started in April 2013 with 16 practitioner researchers, was designed to meet the challenges of 'underperforming schools'. It addresses issues such as child poverty, mobility, new starters, fair access admissions, students new to the UK, English as a second language, changing youth

culture and social and educational needs. It helps teachers make a thoughtful and caring response to the policy pressures, which impact on children and young people's experiences of schooling. Professional learning relates to multi-ethnic inner-city schools, council estates with high levels of unemployment, and more mixed schools with a tail of low achievement. This MA is multi-disciplinary and draws together knowledge from sociology, curriculum studies, literacy, teaching and learning, social justice, and school leadership and development.

There are six modules and a dissertation. Each module lasts a school term, including two extended Saturdays at Leeds Met and distance learning. Assessments are related to the practical situations in schools, and involve practitioner investigations and school development.

An example is the module named 'Productive pedagogies: enhancing the quality of teaching and learning'. This module is based on extensive research into teaching methods, curriculum, assessment and teachers' professionalism (see Lingard, Mills, Christie, Hayes, 2003; Hayes, Mills, Christie, and Lingard, 2006).

It sits well with the intention to articulate the dimensions of quality teaching and enunciate its relationship to pupil achievement by merging research, theory, policy and practice. This module points to practices which re-engage disaffected and disappointed young people; develop school cultures posited on the notion that students are 'at promise' rather than 'at risk'; and create leadership to 'turn around the school' – literally – to face its community; and curriculum and pedagogy which is dialogic, collaborative, critical, creative and concerned (Wrigley and Smyth, 2013).

Conclusion

It is high time that teachers voiced their concerns about teaching in disadvantaged schools, and marry this with their policy advice on the future directions of the English system of teaching and teacher education in the run-up to the 2015 national elections. Their voice needs to be heard, so I would encourage teachers to lobby local MPs and feed their practitioner research evidence into policy advocacy coordinated by the NUT, other teacher unions, the UCU and other academics' unions, together with teacher education bodies like The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers and its constituent groups. All these practitioners need to provide critical constructive feedback to this Coalition Government as well as other major political parties, and take the initiative to co-design projects.

Taken together, the component parts of the Giving Teachers Voice CPD programme help identify what it actually takes to 'raise achievement' and 'close the gap' in disadvantaged schools so they are in a better position to argue that some familiar ways of working are counter-intuitive. An insistence on conventional strategies like raising aspirations, ritualistic teaching acts (Haberman, 1991a, 1991b) and classroom observations for inspection purposes will not necessarily engage pupils marked by poverty and deprivation. Rather there is a crucial role for practitioner research that promotes practitioners' critical questioning and informs investigations of pupils' schooling experiences and classroom practices so classroom teachers can reconstruct provision. This will better meet disadvantaged pupils' learning needs with a view to improving their academic and social learning outcomes and their social lives. The stipulation is that practitioners in the school-university partnerships need to engage intellectually and with each other to raise their professional voice. The profession then gets school democracy, which is akin to O'Grady's (2013) idea of industrial democracy in an alternative vision for post-crash Britain.

Acknowledgement

I must acknowledge Leeds Met colleagues: Dr Jon Tan, with whom I worked in pilot study schools to construct the 'Leading Learning' CPD programme over three years, as well as Visiting Professor Terry Wrigley who co-constructed the allied MA 'Achievement in City Schools'. I would also like to acknowledge other colleagues who have agreed to present the Carnegie Conversations in the Giving Teachers Voice project:

Information on the above projects can be found at: <http://placementsonline.leedsmet.ac.uk/uploads/docs/cc-gtv13.pdf>

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Who is responsible for low educational attainment?

Abstract: *International comparisons show that the UK has higher levels of inequality and a larger proportion of children growing up in poor households than our European neighbours. Yet successive Governments have persisted in blaming teachers for poor educational outcomes and have failed to acknowledge or address the real causes: high levels of child poverty; a lack of political will to intervene consistently over the life courses of those growing up in deprived areas; and unfounded faith in school improvement initiatives, argues Carl Parsons.*

This paper draws on the author's recent book, *Schooling the Estate Kids*, and argues that it is a convenient and immoral deceit to claim that low educational attainment is primarily the fault of teachers and schools. 'Blaming' is always carried out most effectively by the powerful. Effective blaming necessitates labelling something as a problem; in this case it has repeatedly been hammered home that 'standards in our schools are too low'. In particular, standards are too low in some schools. This blaming also requires a significant level of public agreement about those who are at fault – teachers. The next stage in the blame process is to involve some teacher educators, education researchers and teachers themselves in debate and development work to solve the perceived problem in teaching, while largely ignoring other causes of low attainment outside school. This tacit admission of fault, I would argue, has weakened the teaching profession's ability to defend itself and, in so doing, strengthened the position of those that accuse teachers. A more pertinent response to the question of low attainment would focus on three contributing factors. First, successive governments have done too little to address inequalities and reduce levels of child and family poverty in the UK; second, concerted, integrated long-term interventions across children's life span have never been funded; third, the school improvement and school effectiveness movements have made it appear that attainment in so-called 'failing' schools can be raised through staff, curricular and organisational developments alone.

Laying the blame and making it stick

Governments - Labour, Conservative and Coalition - have been setting targets for schools since the Education Reform Act of 1988 where statutory instruments set out the core subjects, the National Curriculum and attainment targets. The populist pressure to achieve targets continued throughout the 1990s, with junior education minister Stephen Byers naming and shaming 18 schools with low examination attainment results immediately after Labour's election victory in 1997.

In order to gain ideological dominance, a scapegoat must be identified and the public convinced of their culpability. There is nothing new in governments taking on unions and professional groups but the British have a peculiar tendency to think that attack is brave and necessary. This contrasts with what we know of most other countries in Europe and the way in which these governments maintain relationships

Carl Parsons

Carl Parsons was Professor of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University where he now holds an emeritus position. He is a Visiting Professor in the Research Centre for Children, Schools and Families at the University of Greenwich. He recently published *Schooling the Estate Kids* (Sense Publishers, Rotterdam).

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with expert, educated sections of the workforce.

The political elite in the UK are less likely to send their children to state school but nonetheless exercise enormous power over the state education system. Successive governments have presided over a situation in which Ofsted has increasingly become the punitive arm of the educational state. Since September 2012, Ofsted no longer uses the term 'satisfactory' but instead labels schools with the term 'requires improvement'. There is seemingly no understanding of how averages work, with the expectation that most schools should perform above average, a mathematical impossibility. To name and shame those below the average level for attainment, to attack them publicly and to humiliate those at the very bottom harms these schools, their teachers and their pupils, reducing confidence and self-esteem. The 'requires improvement' label is part of a punitive and divisive trend that does not help schools to improve.

The secondary school - an academy since 2005 - which was the focus of my book *Schooling the Estate Kids*, consistently had 50 per cent of its children on the special needs register and double the national average on free school meals. In 2009, when results for five A*-C GCSEs at the school were within four per cent of the national average, it became a DCSF case study for its vocational curriculum, pastoral systems and extended school. However, floor targets for attainment in GCSEs were subsequently altered to include mathematics and English in the five A*-Cs measure. The result was to put the school into the bottom 20 in the country and the school was given a 'notice to improve'. This arbitrary change devastated a school which had seen hard times but which had improved by designing a curriculum suited to the local community only to be suddenly set changed targets for which it was not prepared. This was further aggravated by the Coalition Government's subsequent devaluing of vocational qualifications. Locally, the hierarchical, competitive context contributed further challenges to the academy as excluded children and transitory pupils were directed towards it because it had spare capacity.

School improvement initiatives

The school improvement/school effectiveness business rose to prominence in the 1990s. It involved hundreds of researchers, university centres for school leadership and improvement and bookshelves of publications. The international journal, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* includes significant UK scholar involvement and the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) is the uniting annual event for this industry.

School improvement literature is strong on action internal to the school as though it is the main site for action on raising attainment. While most researchers acknowledge that other forces are powerful, this is usually only in the form of an aside

As an example, Alma Harris and colleagues offer congratulatory and optimistic material on how schools can make a difference to life chances and on how external support and resources can enable schools in the most difficult circumstances to succeed against the odds. It is only in the prefatory material that the author admits that while "in the long run, broader social policies will contribute more to reducing attainment differences than any educational intervention or school improvement programme, it does at least give us a place to start while we wait" (Harris et al., 2006: xi). The importance of broader social policies should be acknowledged in more than this perfunctory way so that academic research efforts might represent more accurately the social, economic and educational context.

MacBeath and colleagues offer Atkinson's 'Marshal plan' for schools on the edge which is comprised of the following essential elements:

- class sizes are fewer than 20 students;
- staff full time, permanent judged to be good or better;
- continuing professional development;
- extensive range of extra-curricular activities;
- involvement of professionals other than teachers, such as social workers, counsellors and educational psychologists;
- parental engagement and family learning;
- good physical environment; and
- good resource level.

(MacBeath et al., 2007: 126)

There is nothing at all new in this, but it is not so easy to actualise in a school facing challenging circumstances. School improvement and school effectiveness projects, with punitive Ofsted inspection and reporting and DfE demands for raised standards in the background, will yield meagre results without greater income redistribution and efforts to reduce poverty.

Reasons for low attainment

1. Toleration of high levels of poverty and inequality

Much research, stretching back to the 1960s, indicates that schools are responsible for only a small part of the educational accomplishments of their pupils. Why should we expect it to be otherwise when the more intense and meaningful environments in which pupils spend most of their time are their family and their neighbourhood?

In the 1970s Basil Bernstein put the case that "school cannot compensate for society" (Bernstein, 1977). Since then, various estimates of the proportion of attainment that can be attributed to 'the school effect' have been published based on large data sets. In a radio interview given in 2012 Harvey Goldstein, Professor of Social Statistics at Bristol University, suggested the proportion was about ten per cent (Analysis: Do Schools Make a Difference, 2012). Professor Stephen Ball (2010) offered "between five and 18 per cent". These overall figures are complicated by the fact that datasets relating to student learning are never complete. Gorard sensibly, and with well-judged margins, gives us the best understanding of where to allocate credit for pupils' educational attainment: "Of the 30 to 40 per cent that can be explained, the vast majority of this (75 to 90 per cent of it) is attributable to the prior and individual characteristics of the pupils" (Gorard, 2010: 54). Taking the most optimistic view from this – that 40 per cent of pupils' attainment can be explained and that 25 per cent of this is down to the school – brings us back to ten per cent. Nonetheless this is an inconvenient truth which politicians often choose to ignore, preferring instead to espouse tales of 'heroic leadership', 'going the extra mile' and 'succeeding against the odds'.

The fact that only a relatively small percentage of student attainment can be reliably attributed to the 'school effect' does nothing to reduce the importance of schools and does not suggest that we should dismiss the efforts of teachers or devalue the achievements of pupils. Of course well-run schools will do better; good teaching will produce better learning, pupils working hard will achieve better results. Within this reality there can be great variation, but forces outside the school have a greater

influence. Most obvious amongst these forces is poverty, whether represented by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) or the simple free school meals (FSM) entitlement measure. These stand as proxies for the cumulative disadvantage brought about by the stress of low income, tiredness, lack of time, lack of space, poor diet, poorer health and low parental educational attainment.

“School improvement and school effectiveness projects, with punitive Ofsted inspection and reporting and DfE demands for raised standards in the background, will yield meagre results without greater income redistribution and efforts to reduce poverty.”

Psychologists researching brain function have found significantly less development of frontal lobe activity at six months in babies from poorer backgrounds than in those from better off families. On average, children from lower socio-economic groups are measurably behind at 22 months. The Foundation Stage Profile measures at age five put children in the poorest fifth of the population 25 points behind those in the most affluent fifth. The gap is similar at age 11, and by 16, among the 18 per cent of children eligible for free school meals in 2012, 36.4 per

cent achieved five A*-C GCSEs including English and maths while 62.8 per cent of the remaining 480,000 non-FSM pupils achieved this level (Department for Education, 2013). Young people from manual working class families are half as likely to go to university (House of Commons. Public Accounts Committee, 2009).

There are interesting correlations too between local authority mean scores for children at age five and results at age 16 (Department for Education, 2012). Primary and secondary schools with high levels of FSM are more likely to be among those falling below the ever rising Government-stipulated floor targets (521 primary schools and 195 secondary schools in 2012). These differential results recur year on year. ‘Closing the gap’ policies will never have more than a partial effect if the concentration remains solely on what happens in school.

In international comparisons, three measures should shock policy makers and give ammunition to those arguing for broader and deeper change.

1. The Unicef (2012) league table of child poverty in rich countries shows that amongst the older EU member countries, only Portugal, Italy and Spain have higher rates of child poverty. Despite a big drop over the decade, the UK is way above the rates prevailing in, for example, France, Germany and Holland;
2. The Gini coefficient values as a measure of inequality show only Portugal as a more unequal country than the UK (Income equality – UN Gini Index, 2012);
3. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2010) report shows Great Britain as the country with the strongest correlation between parental socio-economic status and that of their children.

We conveniently shame schools for underperforming by comparison with others but do not apply the same critical outlook in comparing our anti-poverty policies with

those of our European neighbours. All UK political parties signed up to The Child Poverty Act (2010). In 1998 Labour set a target for eliminating child poverty by 2020. The 2010 interim target was missed by a considerable margin (Cribb, Joyce, and Phillips, 2012) and there has been debate about abandoning targets that are claimed by some to be unattainable. This lowering of moral aspiration, justified by 'economic realism', is highly significant.

2. A lack of sustained, integrated long-term interventions in high poverty areas

Well-funded, intensive, holistic, locality-based interventions, which focus on an area, its problems, deficiencies and lack of resources but also its strengths and assets, have much to offer. These would serve a neighbourhood, acknowledging the multiple, interlocking disadvantages and would work to counter the root causes of alienation, disaffection, underachievement and other personal, family or locality-related negative forces.

Reducing the numbers of children growing up in poverty, defined as 60 per cent of national median income (£13,347 for a couple with one child in 2009/10) is an absolute prerequisite for other strategies to build on. If family poverty were reduced, interventions could address cultural barriers to children's achievement, complement the extended, full-service school and penetrate to the causal substrata of social milieu.

The interventions could take the form of the Family Intervention Projects, extended, consolidated and linked with other statutory services. Most importantly, they could recognise the challenges poor children face over their lifetimes and organise support from the womb to age 18 and beyond. They would not follow the format of initiatives such as health visiting for new-born, followed by Sure Start, the now disappeared On Track policy in primary schools followed by mentoring and Aim Higher at the secondary level, since there has been a lack of continuity and persistence in such interventions across age-ranges. Instead, services should be reconfigured around communities (rather than providers) so that whole families, not individuals, are the key target, and single family key workers, rather than multiple and uncoordinated professionals, become the norm.

Such strategies would also be characterised by a healthy scepticism towards the view that early injections of effort and support are enough to protect the child against environmental disadvantage into adolescence and early adulthood.

While Total Place projects have been piloted around the country they appear to have been a cover for cost cutting even when in local hands; looking for 'more for less'. Many pilot initiatives and low-budget fixes have been faint-hearted and short-term. Having grown out of the latter days of the last Labour government they seemed to collude happily with the Coalition Government's rhetoric on the 'big society' and 'localism' but were then further reduced in power and scope in the economic squeeze.

Localism could have been played out as tight collaboration amongst services and sustained work with local families, complementing necessary national policies to reduce family poverty and countering the corrosive effects of low income. Such an approach would require substantial investment to achieve a local focus and tackle the known needs.

Local, co-ordinated strategies would provide for all the pre-birth and early childhood services recommended in recent reports on poverty, social mobility and education by Frank Field, Alan Milburn and Graham Allan (e.g. Allen, 2011; Field, 2010; Millburn, 2012). They would involve, reading recovery, catch-up sessions

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and parent collaboration. Raising aspirations, increasing resilience, mentoring and motivation and life skills work would also play a part. Cash incentives could be offered to attract and retain the best teachers and promote collaboration between schools. Competition between schools should be ended in order to emphasise a sense of shared responsibility for providing quality education for all children in the area. Schools with more favoured intakes would not insulate themselves from local difficulties but share in their solution. Schools would also benefit from this broadened, collaborative approach in an arrangement where education could be seen as part of the provision from the Foundation Stage to university or post-school learning. An emphasis on the totality and drive of the effort in the locality, sustained over time, adjusted according to local monitoring, and not seeing the job as done until beyond school-leaving age could see increased social mobility and the life chances of children greatly improved.

Conclusion

Current approaches to so-called poorly performing schools individualise and psychologise success and failure; these are attributed to the character of individuals or schools. But the solutions to underperformance or low attainment are not to be found only, or even mostly, within the school.

The beleaguered comment from a senior teacher at the *Schooling the Estate Kids* case study school sums up the limitations of such an approach:

“The school is in such a vulnerable position that you have to be good at everything. A school in a more advantaged situation could have a weakness here and there and would be fine. We do not fit into the expected framework for achievement... [We] had a certificate one year to say we were one of the most improved schools in the country. Then the criteria were changed and we were failing. It is arbitrary, farcical” (Parsons, 2012, p.116).

“Well-funded, intensive, holistic, locality-based interventions, which focus on an area, its problems, deficiencies and lack of resources but also its strengths and assets, have much to offer.”

By 2013, there seems to be consensus around the need to ‘close the gap’ in schools in areas of high poverty and extremely challenging circumstances, that sustainability is a problem and that effective leadership in schools is only part, and maybe a quite vulnerable part, of the solution. Educational professionals and researchers have not been strident enough voices in support of solutions to poor outcomes amongst children from deprived communities which involve redistribution, a reduction of income inequalities, more generous welfare payments and an acknowledgement that the UK is meaner and more punitive than its European neighbours.

The teaching profession, weakened in England if not the UK, over the last 25 years, has been managed, judged and criticised by those with more power but less knowledge. Education professionals and allies need to make sure the evidence is heard and the policy solutions are appropriate.

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Book Reviews

The Subject Leader: An introduction to leadership and management

Steve Garnett

Crown House Publishing; 2012 ISBN: 9781845907969

Steve Garnett is a trainer rather than a practitioner but he clearly understands the requirements of a modern subject leader. He has produced a useful primer for those taking on this role as well as for those who are more experienced but would benefit from a checklist of tactics and strategies for keeping on top of what has become an increasingly bureaucratic job.

The book's editor, Phil Beadle, states that the author is advocating the "subject leader as lead specialist improving the learning experience for students". This rather idealistic view ignores an important aspect of the role of a middle manager. Garnett occasionally tips a wink towards the idea that subject leaders are "working in the engine room of school life" but his focus is still on the cog in the machine rather than the machine itself. The metaphor of an engine room implies more than simply the idea of a department or subject comprising a smoothly working part within the structure.

Effective middle management is being part of a cohesive group of peers who jointly provide the thrust and power that drives a school under the direction of the senior leadership team (SLT). If the SLT is displaying good leadership then middle-tier leaders will be able to play a vital role in the direction of travel and will operate a cohesive layer of joined up thinking and sharing of good practice across the whole structure of the school. A longer and more reflective book might have picked up on these themes.

Naturally the first focus of a good subject leader is to be a good leader of that subject and this book covers all the bases. There are useful chapters on topics such as the difference between leadership and management and the importance of being a good leader rather than just an administrator. He deals with the increasingly important area of effective data management with some sensible and practical tips.

The author's credentials as a trainer are perhaps best displayed through the aspirational approach he encourages to subject leadership. He attempts to inspire a highly positive approach to what can be a pressurised and thankless task and his advice on how to manage and use data is a good example of this. He emphasises the importance of using data as a way of improving the learning experience for students rather than as a bureaucratic form of accountability.

The chapter on self-evaluation continues this theme of collecting and analysing data in order to focus on improving teaching and learning, creating a varied and enjoyable range of teaching activities and involving all subject colleagues in the process.

From a union perspective the section on lesson observations provides good practice for both mentoring and monitoring colleagues. The developmental perspective is paramount in both areas and there are bullet point tips for each, with guidelines that are designed to relieve the stress and encourage creativity and

John Pemberthy

John Pemberthy is Divisional Secretary for Gloucestershire NUT and a member of the NUT National Executive

risk taking. This is a key area as there are still far too few schools that manage to get this right and take too punitive and high stakes an approach to what should be a supportive process. Where schools do get this right there are much greater outcomes for students and a much happier and problem free working environment for teachers.

Finally there is a useful section on how to deal with difficult staff and colleagues. Useful tips and advice here include the idea that you should never express your feelings towards a colleague in a negative way. To do so almost always inflames the situation in a bad way. A grid of problems and possible solutions to dealing with 'can't, won't or don't' types of colleagues provides sensible answers to common problems and there is a reminder to use praise to reinforce improvement. Whilst seemingly obvious there is plenty of research that shows that not enough praise is used by school leaders with teachers even whilst it is standard practice with students.

Steve Garnett's book will not revolutionise practice since it is a synthesis of what already goes on in good schools but it does provide a good round up of what it takes to be an effective subject leader in an easy to read and accessible text.

Jenny Cooper

Jenny Cooper has taught in special schools for 23 years. She currently teaches at The Village School, Brent. She is also the Health & Safety Adviser for Brent NUT and a member of the NUT Advisory Committee for SEN.

Understanding Stammering or Stuttering

Elaine Kelman and Alison Whyte

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012, ISBN 9781849052689

Three days after reading this book, it is still in the forefront of my mind. I have always said the sign of a good film is that it's still making you think when you wake the next morning. Since finishing the book, not only have I thought about its contents but I have also referred to them, almost subconsciously, in my head, whilst teaching. As with any good advice addressing a particular client group, I believe all children, not just those with stammers, would benefit from the advice to teachers and parents found here.

The book itself is simple, does not answer all your questions and possibly tells you what you already knew or at least suspected. The authors touch on the issue of right side/left side brain and the fact that people who stammer can very often sing fluently, act without hesitations, and so on. They go on to list famous stammerers throughout history, such as Marilyn Monroe, Aldous Huxley and Isaac Newton. And yet, research remains incomplete and inconclusive as to the causes and origins, genetic or otherwise, of stammers. I found this frustrating and to a certain extent the book gave me more questions than answers.

I also found some of the advice contradictory. We are told that a large proportion of children who stammer grow out of it. Yet we are advised to get help and intervention as soon as possible. It is also suggested that reading aloud in class can be stressful for the child who stammers and that we must never finish the child's sentences for them. But we are also told that most of these children would like to read aloud in class and that some are happy for some people they know well to finish off their sentences.

On reflection, though, I believe that these contradictions get to the real heart of the problem for any child struggling with a condition and any parent of such a child. And that is that there are no easy answers. The authors know this because between

them they have over 46 years of experience in dealing with this condition. So what they have chosen to do is to use this real life experience to inform us.

Here is the real strength of the book- its source material; countless quotes from children and parents which form the starting point for discussion on all aspects of the condition. These are the words and voices that have been haunting me since the weekend. Children ask to be listened to, to be given time, to have eye contact with us, to be able to finish sentences, to not be expected to speak or answer more quickly than they can manage. Children, essentially, are asking for a decent education and, like teachers, they wish we could have more time in the school day to commit to the needs of individuals. One can't help wondering if this minority group of children are yet another group adversely affected by everything that is wrong with education today.

To read so many words said by children who cannot speak fluently, to have insight into their feelings and to become aware that we may even be teaching children without realising that they have this condition has made me extremely grateful to have read the book. I think this is a must for every staffroom.

Thinking at Every Desk: Four Simple Skills to Transform Your Classroom

Derek Cabrera & Laura Colosi

W. W. Norton & Company; 2012 ISBN: 9780393707564

Now that I have read this book I have bought multiple copies for the staff at my school to read. I believe that reading is a brilliant continual professional development tool and in a time of financial restraints a book can be passed around, revisited and doesn't exclude any member of staff. It is a book worth reading whether you are an NQT or head teacher. After reading this book, a teacher who has been teaching for 30 years said to me that she recognises that there are elements of her teaching practice that she can now improve.

This book is cutting edge for 21st century educators. Cabrera & Colosi explain their research into thinking (cognition), thinking about thinking (metacognition), and the teaching of thinking (pedagogy); as well as about how thinking works, how it can be taught and how knowledge is structured. The chapters set out the four simple universal structures that underlie the process of creating knowledge: distinctions, systems, relationships and perspectives. Each chapter is packed with illustrations and explanations, relevant and necessary information for teaching children or adults of any age to learn at a deeper level. The authors make it clear in the first chapter that pupils need to be knowledgeable, not just information-full; which is an interesting and current topic at the moment because of the proposals by the Secretary of State for the new National Curriculum.

I agree with other reviews of this book who have commented on how it might make teachers work differently by deepening their knowledge and understanding of the learning processes and transforming practice at all levels – getting back to teaching for learning? I think Cabrera & Colosi may well create a movement to change the world, one desk, one mind, one teacher, one classroom at a time!

Tina Humber

Tina Humber is Deputy Head Teacher and SENCO at Reffley Community School in King's Lynn, Norfolk.

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