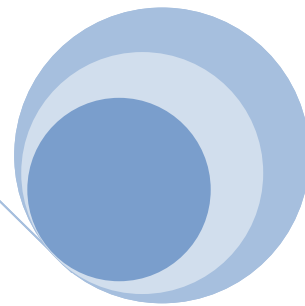
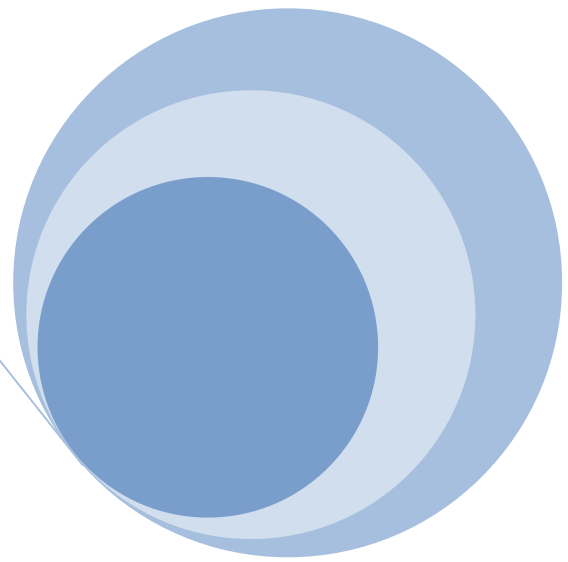


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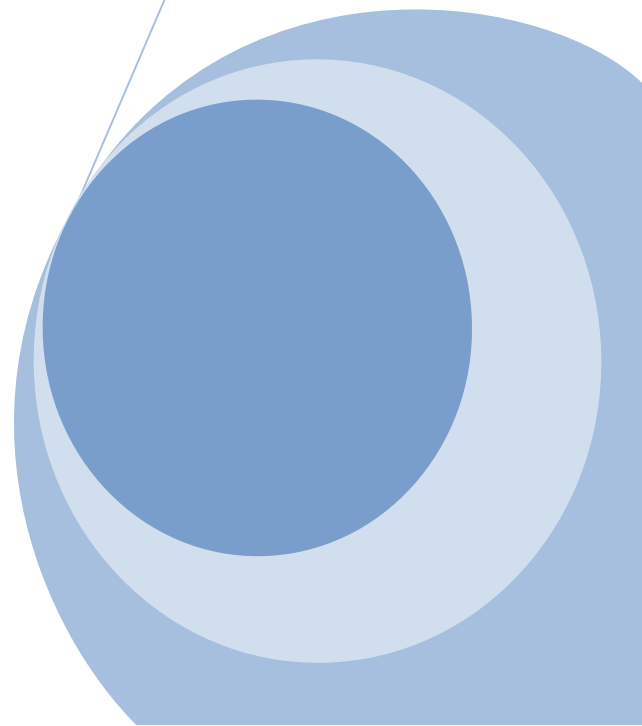


## **INSPIRATION AND ASPIRATION**

What comes out has a lot to do with what goes in

This paper cautions the over-interpretation of the National Curriculum requirements and suggests that, in reality, the sky is the limit when teaching in schools. The slides used for presenting this paper are included in this version.

**Peter Lacey**  
**September 2001**



# **INSPIRATION AND ASPIRATION**

**(or what comes out has a lot to do with what goes in!)**

**Peter Lacey**

**September 2001**

## **Preface**

Ten years ago I wrote a monograph entitled "Fitting the Pieces Together". It summarised my own learning from observing lessons and visiting schools over the period 1990 - 1991.

I was strongly discouraged from publishing this monograph by Humberside LEA but I was allowed to distribute it across my then "assigned schools". I left Humberside in December 1991 and, after working for the National Curriculum Council and then for the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority I returned to a new North East Lincolnshire in May 1996.

I learnt much in this period, and I have continued to learn since my return.

Something inside me drives me to share my learning, however imperfect and incomplete. I remain convinced that underachievement characterises English education, and that I am, with others, part of that story.

This latest monograph centres around a presentation I gave to new teachers in one of our schools in September 2001. Some of you might be intrigued by its similarities, or differences, with "Fitting the Pieces Together."

"Inspiration and Aspiration" recognises that teachers have within their grasp the possibility of transforming current practice beyond recognition. It suggests that what we perceive as ceilings are really floors and proposes real challenges to current perceptions of the national curriculum, national assessment, national strategies and external inspection.

"Inspiration and Aspiration" proposes that the new education revolution will come from changing the way we think. It will come from the researching teacher working in a school which sees itself as a learning community and is prepared to embrace radical changes to the organisation of teaching and learning.

"Inspiration and Aspiration" like "Fitting the pieces together" is not written to make people feel comfortable. It is yet another challenge offered to schools who have the intellectual and management capability to respond. We are privileged to have in North East Lincolnshire schools of such calibre.

## Introduction

One of the first sections of the Times Educational Supplement that I read is called "My Best Teacher". I guess that I live in the vain hope that one day it will be me!! The closest so far is Steve Cramm who talked about his best teacher at Jarrow School - next door to where I taught at Hebburn.

There seems to be a common theme running through these accounts. "My Best Teacher" was inspirational and made a difference, and was memorable because of both these characteristics. Do you have a "Best Teacher" from your past? Reflect on that teacher's characteristics for a moment.

I think there are some common ingredients which make up these inspirational teachers:

- genuine interest in the subject to the point of passion
- genuine interest in how the subject is learnt
- genuine interest in young people and opening doors of enlightenment and opportunity
- probably slightly unorthodox, but passionate about igniting intellectual and creative curiosity and developing a love of learning
- they see the poet, the scientist, the artist or the mathematician that exists in us and they develop it
- they allow the learner to ask the questions and to follow lines of enquiry (As a pupil I used to enjoy setting the red herring! Little did I know that this was precisely what the teacher intended!)
- they make learning fun.

So, how does that teacher fit into the results-focused, assessment-driven, performance-managed, strategy-determined, competency-based, Ofsted-inspected classroom of today?

The answer is probably - very well. These teachers motivated, encouraged and taught their pupils well. And their pupils achieved highly - and their pupils probably continued with their learning post-16.

**Good teachers and good teaching are at the heart of a successful school. This is as true today as it ever has been.**

# **CHARACTERISTICS OF MY BEST TEACHER**

- **genuine interest in the subject to the point of passion**
- **genuine interest in how the subject is learnt**
- **genuine interest in young people and opening doors of enlightenment and opportunity**
- **probably slightly unorthodox, but passionate about igniting intellectual and creative curiosity and developing a love of learning**
- **they see the poet, the scientist, the artist or the mathematician that exists in us and they develop it**
- **they allow the learner to ask the questions and to follow lines of enquiry**
- **they make learning fun.**

Through our career choice, our life experiences, our skills, knowledge and attitudes we can all be inspirational teachers -BUT - there is a risk that inspiration is dampened or lost in the hurly-burly of everyday school-life. There is a danger that we settle for the "we can't because ....." position rather than the "we can if ... " position. There are constant threats to our own expectations and aspirations. Indeed the limits of possibility should be constantly challenged and reviewed.

So what defines these limits of possibility?

- what we believe is possible and our consequent attitudes
- our understanding and application of our knowledge of the brain and the learning process
- our subject and pedagogical expertise as teachers
- our perception of external constraints.
- the organisation of teaching and learning in the school

My personal view is that recent improvements in levels of attainment - especially those at Key Stage 2 - have been achieved by investing in training which improves teacher expertise.

Furthermore my view is that in pursuing only this line these rates of improvement will plateau. Many have told me that "the sponge has now been squeezed and there is little additional water left."

They may be right - but I believe that we are only scratching the surface. We are not squeezing the right sponge!

The real transformation of learning and teaching has yet to take place.

I am sure ICT will enhance techniques of teaching and learning but far more significant will be the **transformation of our beliefs and attitudes towards the art of the possible.**

We are currently locked in a "mind set" which defines its own constraints.

English education is characterised by a non-radical homogeneity, which refuses to respond to new research on the physiology of the brain and new insights into learning.

# **THE LIMITS OF POSSIBILITY**

- **What we believe is possible and our consequent attitudes**
- **Our understanding and application of our knowledge of the brain and the learning process**
- **Our subject and pedagogical expertise**
- **Our perception of external and internal constraints**
- **The organisation of learning and teaching in our school**

The new learning revolution will not be top down government initiatives but will be driven by thoughtful teachers, encouraged by their schools, including governors, informed by classroom research, and who believe that young learners are capable of far more than is currently being achieved.

Perhaps it is about accepting that teachers are learners too - and we all have a lot to learn.  
Perhaps it is about acknowledging that a school is a learning community for all.

As a first step - let's challenge some of these perceived constraints.



## **BREAKING THE MIND-SET**

- **There is a limit to what people are capable of**
- **Targets define an upper bound of attainment**
- **The National Curriculum and associated strategies determine the totality of what is taught**
- **The National Curriculum levels define the learning sequence**
- **National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades define what should be taught to pupils targeted for those levels and grades**
- **The national strategies and inspection framework assume and expect a particular pedagogical approach**
- **Educational research is something done by others and then imposed on teachers**

1. *There is a limit on what people are capable of. (no there isn't!)*

Our potential as human beings - our brain power - remain under developed. I guess there may be physiological limits - and these may vary across individuals but we are a long way from reaching these limits. We all need to develop our understanding of how the brain works and how we learn - but do we use what we know already?

"Robert can't ....." is really "Given the approaches used thus far Robert has not yet ..."

"Jane is only level 3". Locating someone on a ladder does not determine their highest position on that ladder.

But what if Robert or Jane don't want to progress? I hear you say.

I understand your question - learning is an optional activity - we choose what we learn but the inspirational teacher can motivate.

The Queensland State Curriculum recognises that there are three dimensions to the curriculum:

- the concept domain (what is learnt)
- the process domain (the skills needed to learn and use it)
- the affect domain (the attitudes and behaviours needed to learn and use it)

The English NC is heavily tilted towards the concept domain, it marginalises the process domain (because it is difficult to measure) and the affect domain was abolished at its birth in 1988 - but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

Our knowledge of and interest in our subject and its learning can be used to motivate - we need to bring this into our planning and teaching. We need to acknowledge the process domain and recognise that learning to learn is more fundamental than learning the concepts. We need to recognise the connection between the curriculum and learning and that the curriculum should be designed and taught to promote learning.

# **HUMAN POTENTIAL**

**The potential of the brain for learning is, in neurological terms, limitless. It is estimated that there are something like 2000 billion brain cells, each of which has tens of millions of possible connectors, or 'hooks' to other brain cells. In other words there are billions of learning pathways, only a few of which are travelled. The untraveled paths become overgrown and fall into disuse. While this is, in part, a process of ageing, the capacity to learn throughout life, even into old age, depends on knowing how to make use of the brain's untapped potential.**

**The Intelligent School p.26  
MacGilchrist et al 1997**

**With thanks to Tim Brighouse in Birmingham LEA for bringing this to my attention**

**OHT 4**

2. *Targets define an upper bound of attainment* (no they don't!)

Our way of setting targets is to look at pupils' current attainment and to use national data to estimate where they will be at a future date.

Reflecting on this process reveals its fault-line. The national data is based on a historic "input mode". In other words the target is set on the assumption that what will happen in classrooms is the same as what did happen in classrooms. The input is constant and the outcome is the variable.

The real challenge is to set a target at least as high as the best nationally and to then consider how things might change in the classroom to deliver this high target.

If prior attainment is always the determinant of subsequent attainment then, from the first tests at age 5 years, a pupil's progress is predetermined.

The inspirational teacher sets targets which are aspirational and sees them as the least that can be achieved - she looks at ways of teaching her subject which will

- Motivate, and approaches which resonate with pupils' ways of learning
- She convinces her pupils that only the sky is the limit to what they could achieve.

3. *The NC and associated strategies determine the totality of what is taught. (no it doesn't!)*

The prescribed curriculum defines the minimum that should be taught to pupils and not the maximum. It was designed as a minimum entitlement for all pupils.

We risk closing down learning if we see the defined national curriculum as the totality of the learning territory. From a learning point of view we sometimes need to go beyond the NC so that what is in the NC is better understood. A view from the outside can provide insight on what is inside - an aerial view or view from outer space has helped us understand the geography of our own world.

If learning is about connecting ideas/concepts together - and I believe it is - then providing perspectives which make explicit these connections is fundamental.

If learning is about the learner asking questions, then we must be prepared to encourage learning trails that may take us outside the defined territory of the National Curriculum.

See the diagram on OHT 5

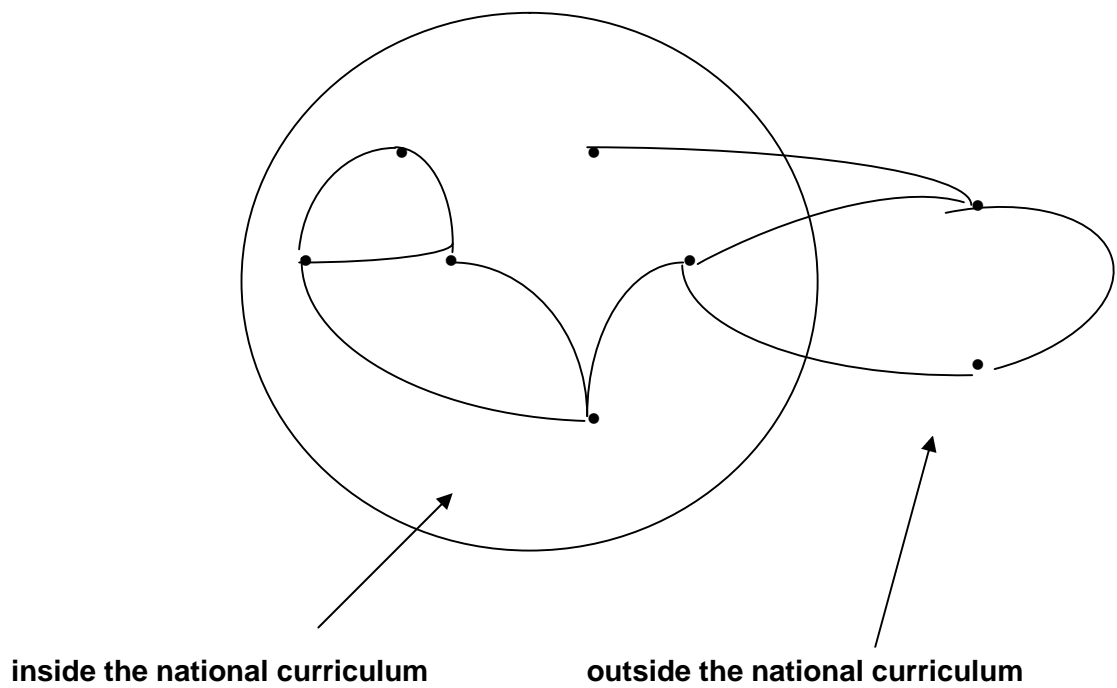
Teaching is, in part, to do with making the learner aware of what she has learnt. This habit encourages what we call 'independent learning'. Dedicating part of the lesson to this aspect is shown to be productive.

There is a danger, in the current orthodoxy, of planning every lesson around a defined end point, which must relate to a learning objective that is specified in the NC or KS3 strategy. There needs to be a balance. Sometimes a lesson can be planned around a stimulating start point which can generate questions and learning trails which take the learner beyond any preconceived end points, e.g. a piece of poetry, literature, a mathematical, scientific or technical problem.

I call this enriching the curriculum and **enhancing** learning.

# ENRICHING THE CURRICULUM

## “ENHANCEMENT”



I particularly remember this one from science:

“I am sitting in a boat in a lake. Someone on the shore throws me a brick, which I catch. I hold it for a while and then throw it into the lake. Describe the changes to the height of the water over the duration of this episode.”

4. *The national curriculum levels define the learning sequence (no they don't!)*

NC levels were designed as national standards so that performance at a national level could be gauged. Selected items from the programmes of study were chosen to indicate (not define) features of performance at a particular level.

They were designed to be used at the end of each key stage so that teachers could match a pupil's all-round performance in a subject with the level descriptions and judge which one best described that pupil's performance.

They were not designed to describe a detailed learning sequence.

"Learning is a messy business" said Lord Dearing in 1994. It is certainly a highly complex activity and is not a simple linear process. As an additional complication, learning is idiosyncratic. We construct individualised maps of connections. We have flashes of insight which take time to consolidate, we forget things and become rusty in some skills, we leap forwards, we slide backwards, we become engrossed, we lose interest, we struggle with a particular concept, we practise certain skills. As teachers, we work with our learners to navigate and chart learning pathways recognising that different pupils learn in different ways and that the ability to construct pathways is fundamental to learning.

The NC levels may well suggest 'layers of territory' but they do not define the pathways learners make across and between these territories.

Text books which focus on a single NC level are an abomination.

The inspirational teacher recognises **the priority of establishing learning pathways.**



5. *NC levels and GCSE grades define what should be taught to pupils targeted for those levels and grades (no they don't!)*

Here lies a significant danger to raising levels of achievement. I have already mentioned that establishing learning pathways takes precedence over that which is described in the programmes of study and in the order described by the NC levels.

If we teach only what is externally assessed we are in danger of disabling learning. There is also the danger that our targets of expected attainment limit the learning opportunities we offer to pupils. **Summative assessment should reflect learning not determine it.**

The inspirational teacher connects pupils with the subject, its history, its luminaries and its learning.

We are at risk of disconnecting learners from the subject by letting structures get in the way. For example:

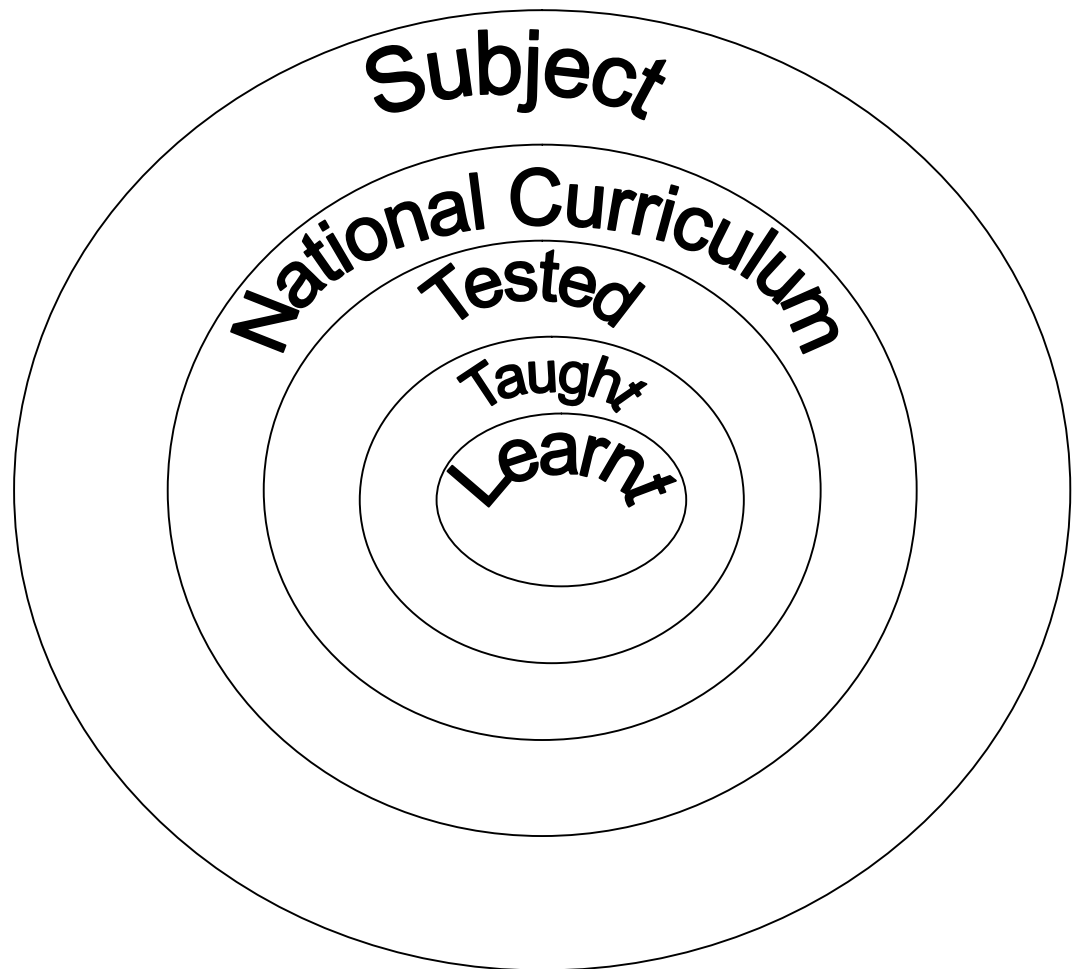
See the diagram on OHT 6

A pupil may be expected to attain level or grade  $n$  but that must never prevent that pupil having the opportunity to encounter the territory of  $n + d$ .

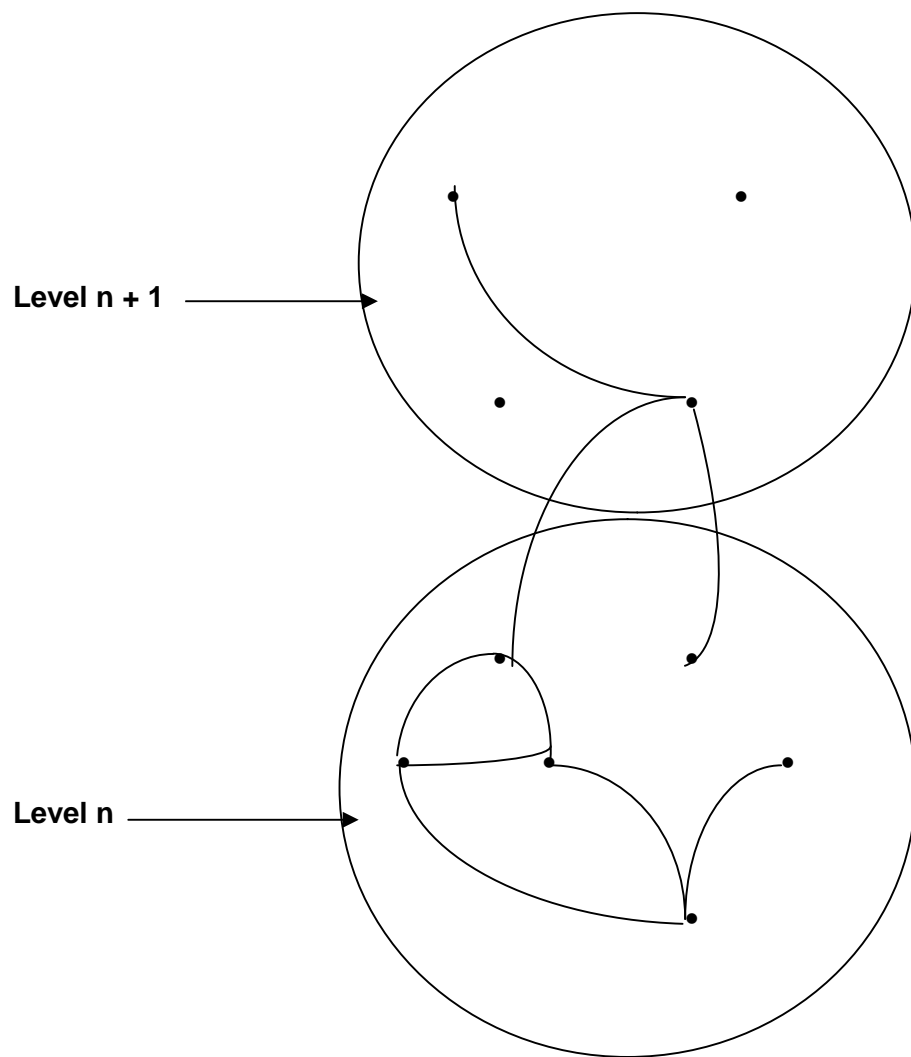
Going beyond the targeted territory gives opportunities for better understanding of the targeted territory. This is another example of enriching the curriculum, which I call curriculum **extension**.

See the diagram on OHT 7

# DISCONNECTING LEARNERS FROM THE SUBJECT



OHT 6



## ENRICHING THE CURRICULUM

“EXTENSION”

Most of my life has been spent in coal mining areas. I am reminded of the metaphor that there is a cutting edge in a pit and then others follow behind with the pit props - consolidating and making safe the new gallery.

Pupils are entitled to enjoy the experience of being at the cutting edge of their learning - breaking into new territory. This needs to be made safe with consolidation.

The external assessment regime should reflect the area made safe and not determine the cutting edge.

Some years ago, in Newcastle, I worked with some sixth formers on something I described as "off-piste" mathematics. It comprised a selection of highly challenging starting points which required a degree of mental acrobatics but were unrelated to the examination syllabus. Over a number of weeks we revelled in mathematical debate and argument and, from time to time, we returned to some formal teaching of some necessary tools. I can remember having to teach parametric equations to describe a curve 'parallel' to  $y = x^2$ ! Returning to the "piste" the students attacked their work with new confidence.

**Enriching the curriculum through enhancement and extension brings learning gain, not learning loss.**

Curriculum enhancement and extension does not necessarily take place within the area of a single subject. Enrichment may mean establishing learning pathways across subject boundaries. Each subject is enriched through seeing its relationship with other subjects. The concept of curriculum coherence should be applied across the whole curriculum and not only within subject areas. Focusing on a narrow curriculum in order to achieve high results is a flawed logic. **The broader and more cross-braced the foundation, the higher will be the final structure.**

6. *The national strategies and inspection framework assume and expect a particular pedagogical approach (no they don't!)*

There are many myths and misconceptions surrounding external inspection. Let me tell you this - as an Ofsted inspector. I go out of my way to establish where the cutting edge of learning is.

I am not judging compliance with strategies nor am I judging that what is taught exactly matches content described in the programme of study or those elements identified in the level descriptions.

Are pupils engaged with and involved with their learning? Are they aware of their learning? Are they applying their learning to learn more? Are they cutting and consolidating? Are they connecting new learning to that consolidated? Have they high expectations of themselves? Are they aware of their learning pathways? Do they have a grasp of their subject? Are they motivated and keen to learn? Can they talk about their subject and their learning of it? Are pupils asking questions?

Is the lesson designed to promote learning? Does it have a sense of purpose? Is there an opportunity for pupils to reflect on their learning? Are there opportunities for pupils to ask questions and discuss their learning? Are appropriate resources available?

These are the important questions. Answers to these questions help to formulate evaluations or judgements: about the quality of learning, about the quality of teaching, which secures this quality of learning, and about the achievements of the pupils, in terms of the extent to which they are engaged in pushing forwards the cutting edge of their learning.

Of course lessons should have a beginning, a middle and an end but there is nothing sacred about the specified three part lesson. Sometimes a piece of learning will extend across more than one lesson, sometimes a lesson will naturally break into a new topic. What is important is that **the lesson is planned to promote learning and that the learners are part of this process.**

There is not a prescribed format or formula.

7. *Educational research is something done by others and then imposed on teachers  
(no it isn't!)*

Teachers are at the heart of school improvement. I despair at school improvement approaches that are based only on top down models. We have been successful in this locality in securing TTA funding for teacher research and I have been impressed by what I have heard from these researching teachers.

Teachers have been funded to investigate the impact of doing things differently in their classrooms. Through robust research methodology of using control groups and valid and reliable measurement they have identified approaches which enhance and extend learning. Where these have proved effective new practices have replaced old. **A process, which constantly replaces less effective by more effective practice, drives continuous school improvement.**

This typifies the evolutionary transformation of learning and teaching. As important as the research has been the dissemination of findings to others. Even more significant has been the dissemination of the research process itself. An increasing number of teachers in this area now see research as part of their professional responsibility.

A good school encourages and learns from classroom research.

The teacher as researcher is a feature of an improving school, which sees itself as a learning community.

**Teacher research and pupil learning are opposite sides of the same card in an improving school.** Cut one and you cut the other.

## Conclusion

So what has this monologue been about?

It has been based on the premise that the whole of the English educational system is underachieving and that you - as new or renewed teachers have within your grasp the opportunity for the most significant transformation in English educational history.

It challenges you to alter your mind set –

- to connect with research about learning
- to continue to develop your subject expertise
- to engage in purposeful classroom research
- to understand and accept you can make a difference and improve the life-chances of young people and even transform tomorrow
- to be confident enough to override perceived constraints to pupils' development and learning
- to recognise that professional responsibility is defined in terms of what you give rather than what you take

And your possible response to this challenge?

- join a subject association
- engage in research so you too become a learner
- ensure your school is a learning community

And the consequences?

- the learning revolution is launched
- personal exhaustion tempered by satisfaction
- pupils leave school better prepared to build a better tomorrow
- and, who knows,
  - ◆ more school leavers embark on a career in teaching
  - ◆ you might even be featured in "My Best Teacher" in the TES in 2020!

Good luck to all of you, and thank you.

## **Postscript for school managers and governors**

My comments thus far have been directed at teachers and subject leaders but they need to be understood by senior managers too. The leadership of a school should recognise the possibilities and structure the school in ways which allow, enable and encourage these possibilities to be realised.

School targets should be aspirational and school development plans, with learning and teaching as their top priority, should determine how inspirational teaching will be assured.

### **Inspiration in: Aspiration out**

What does this look like in practice?

It does not mean that careful measurements of pupils' attainments should be aborted. A school needs to know exactly where pupils are, particularly at the start of each key stage. These measurements inform the scale of the task to be undertaken. Diagnostic measurement will inform the nature of the task.

It does not mean dropping the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching. These evaluations inform the pattern of continuous professional development and the processes for sharing best and successful practices.

Transformation requires strong leadership and thoughtful management, and a recognition that establishing and maintaining a school as a learning community might mean that the organisation of learning and teaching looks very different in five years time to how it looks now.

As well as unlocking the potential of young people a learning community addresses the unlocking of the potential of teachers.

The management and governance of a school is characterised by the work of groups, sub-groups and committees. This is sensible. It carves up responsibilities and helps channel the best experience and expertise to work on specific aspects of school development and operation. What is surprising is the small number of schools that have a **group which focuses on learning and teaching.**



I am suggesting that such a group, made up from a cross-section of school staff, including governors – and perhaps wider stakeholders – could act as the energy source for school development, improvement and transformation.

Schools will develop their own terms of reference for the learning and teaching group, but it requires to be constituted around a number of principles and practices.

It should:

- recognise that young people have the potential to achieve far more than they do currently;
- gather, document and disseminate examples of the most successful practices in the school;
- seek evidence of the most successful practices in other schools and disseminate it across the school;
- establish, encourage and evaluate classroom based research in the school, and advise on how more successful should replace less successful classroom practice;
- establish dialogue and communication networks across the school so that discussion on learning and teaching becomes a natural feature of professional interactions;
- be recognised and valued by senior managers and governors and seen as a major contributor to school improvement planning;
- relate constructively with other groups in the school, such as monitoring, continuous professional development, target setting etc;
- link with like-minded groups in other schools, the LEA, Higher Education and subject associations;
- focus on the attitudinal shift from “I can’t because ...” to “We can if ...”.

Governors need to respond quickly to this proposal. They should establish their own “learning and teaching” sub-group and give every encouragement to a similar group being set up across their school.

Headteachers might find this proposal challenging or even unnerving. I am clear about my position. Unless power is vested in those who drive the transformation of learning and teaching we will continue to wallow in underachievement fixed in a culture of low expectations.

The transformation is rooted in the belief that a lot more is possible. It critically depends on senior managers in schools understanding the difference between power and responsibility – and that these two characteristics may reside in different locations in a school's structure. Teachers with management tasks are paid additional “responsibility points” and not “power points”.

OHTs 8, 9, 10 and 11 are included to prompt thinking around this issue.

Headteachers, with governors, have a crucial role to play in the new revolution of learning and teaching. Indeed, they can either encourage it or dampen it to extinction. It is all about having the courage and resolve to do things differently, informed by the findings of classroom-based research. Mary Boole, in 1902, said that in seeking to improve, teachers are doing more of what they are already doing too much.

English education is currently characterised by entrenchment, institutional interest and investment in the status quo. We need to break the mould. National prescriptions have replaced LEA orthodoxies and both strangle the inventiveness, creativity and professional potential of teachers. The retention rate of teachers frighteningly correlates, in inverse proportion, to the extent of their perceived decision making domain. **Take away the power: lose the teachers.**

The new world will be characterised by research, open-mindedness and collaboration with learning and the learner at its centre. It may be a dream, but the alternatives are the stuff of nightmares.

# **ENERGY STATES IN SCHOOLS**

## **ENERGY CREATORS**

- **Enthusiastic and always positive;**
- **Use critical thinking, creativity and imagination;**
- **Stimulate and spark others;**
- **Practise leadership.**

## **ENERGY NEUTRAL**

- **Competent, sound practitioners;**
- **Willing to service the task;**
- **Good at 'maintenance';**
- **Capable of improving against their previous best.**

## **ENERGY CONSUMERS**

- **Have a negative view of the world;**
- **Use other people's time excessively;**
- **Resent change and practise blocking strategies;**
- **Do not feel good about themselves.**

With thanks to Tim Brighouse in Birmingham LEA for bringing this to my attention

# **MODELS OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE (PART ONE)**

## **ENSURING COMPLIANCE:**

- **Decide what is right;**
- **Promulgate single solutions;**
- **Regulate and inspect;**
- **Punish in public deviants and inadequates.**

## **PROBLEM SOLVING:**

- **Find a felt need and identify the problem;**
- **Analyse causes;**
- **Analyse solutions;**
- **Develop an action plan.**

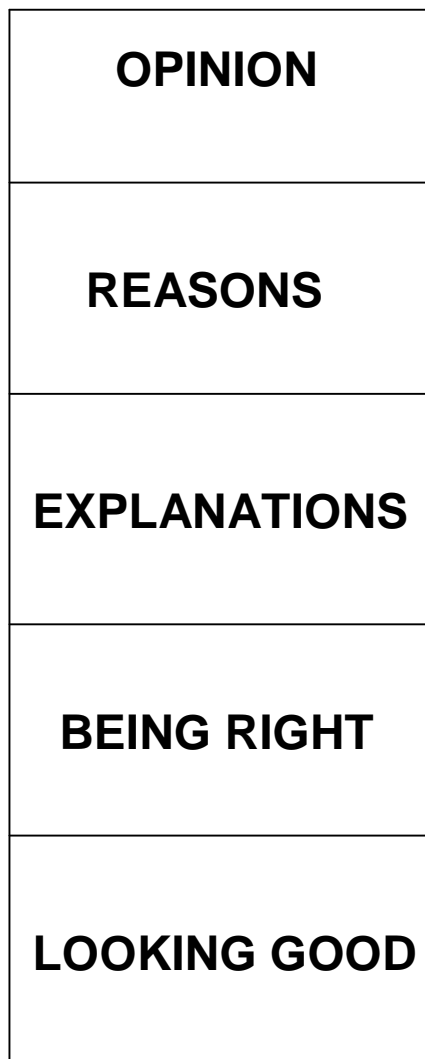
## **APPRECIATIVE ENQUIRY**

- **Appreciate the best of 'what is';**
- **Envision: 'what might be';**
- **Dialogue for new knowledge and theory: 'what should be';**
- **Create the vision: 'what will be'.**

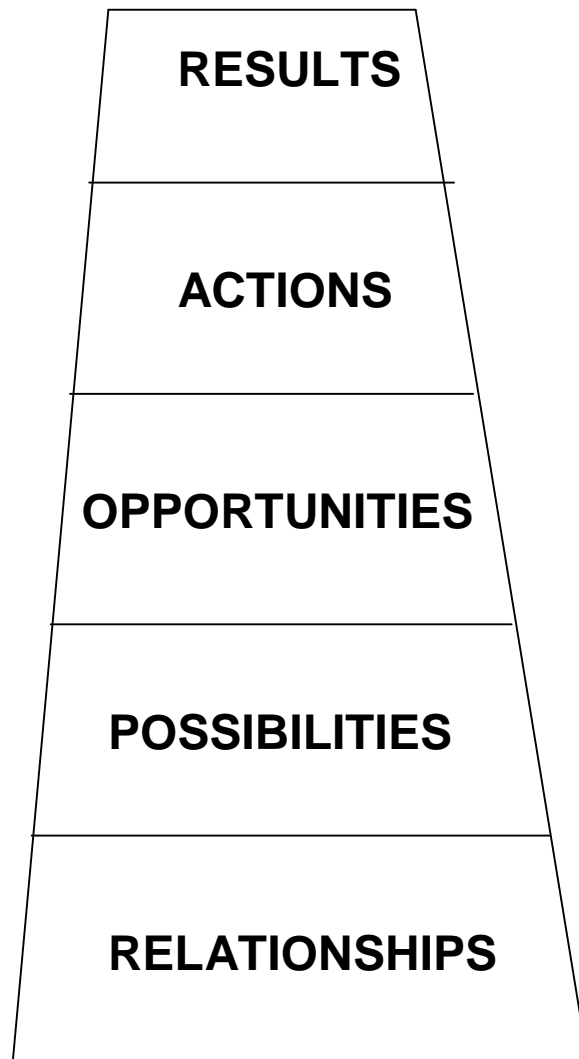
With thanks to Tim Brighouse in Birmingham LEA for bringing this to my attention

# MODELS OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE (PART TWO)

## Looking back



## Looking forwards



With thanks to Tim Brighouse in Birmingham LEA for bringing this to my attention

# **A SHARED MODEL OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

- **Exercising leadership**
- **Practising management**
- **Establishing and developing the environment for learning**
- **Practising collective review and evaluation**
- **Establishing, nurturing and valuing staff development and research**
- **Majoring on learning and teaching**
- **Establishing and developing parental involvement**

With thanks to Tim Brighouse in Birmingham LEA for bringing this idea to my attention

## OHTs

1. Characteristics of my best teacher
2. The limits of possibility
3. Breaking the mind-set (list of seven)
4. The potential of the brain
5. Enriching the curriculum      enhancement
6. Disconnecting learners from the subject (Venn diagram)
7. Enriching the curriculum      extension
  
8. Energy states in schools (from Birmingham LEA)
9. Models of organisational culture (part 1)
10. Models of organisational culture (part 2)
11. A shared model of school improvement

