



AUSTRALIAN PRINCIPALS CENTRE

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Estelle Morris,
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that is summarised in this paper,
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EDUCATION HELPING TO BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL: THE BRITISH EXPERIENCE

BY ESTELLE MORRIS

EDITOR'S NOTE

This paper is an edited version of a keynote address to the APPA National Conference in August 2002. The address was delivered informally rather than as a written paper, and the conversational style has been retained as much as possible.

INTRODUCTION

Until ten years ago, I was a teacher in the secondary school sector. Now, as a politician, I have had the chance to look at what's happening in education within and beyond the UK, and to reflect on some of the developments. I sense that education is late in coming to the notion of sharing ideas internationally. I suspect that if you look at another profession, like medicine, for decades now medics have been exchanging information about good practice, as we would hope they would.

Educators have always understood the importance of education within the nation, so why have we been so late in learning that we have something to learn from each other internationally. I think all of us understand that every education system, by its very nature, has to be different from every other nation's system. In part that is about the transmission of values, in part about the transmission of a national heritage, and in part about looking forward to what the needs of your own nation are.

Increasingly, however, over the last decade, we have understood that in the area of pedagogy – teaching and learning – we have much to learn from other countries and other education systems worldwide. Unashamedly, we looked around the world while we were in opposition, and borrowed from everybody else's ideas about teaching literacy and numeracy to 5-11 year olds. Now, in government, the literacy and numeracy strategy has been one of our great successes so far.

Many of the things I shall talk about here will ring a bell with you because they reflect much of the Australian experience in the same field. This is my second visit to Australia. I welcome the relationship, especially with those at the University of Melbourne and in New South Wales and other States, as well as with the federal government. We have basically now a two-way journey, both of people and ideas — an evidence base, plans, programs, progress, ambitions and aspirations. I know we are richer for it.

I also know that if you are a teacher, you are sometimes the last to understand, or be aware, that this transmission of ideas between nations is actually happening. When I talk to my colleagues from UK primary schools who came here with me to the Australian Principals' conferences, I sense that perhaps what they value most is having "time out" to reflect on their own practice, in a different context.

Teaching now is so pressurised — certainly in the UK and I imagine also in Victoria — that teachers rarely get space to think about their own practice and ask: "What is going well? What am I good at? What can I do better?" They certainly don't get that space to ask: "Who's doing well and better than I'm doing? And when can I share ideas about good practice with others?" Since we're not good at giving teachers that space to think and reflect, we must do better at building that into the system.

STRENGTHS OF THE UK EDUCATION SYSTEM

In light of the comments I have made, I would like to reflect on what I think are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the UK system.

It would be true to say that in general our primary sector is stronger than our secondary sector. That is not to say that all the teachers are better, or all the schools are better, or that secondary schools are awful. It's just that working together collectively — government, teachers and

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local education authorities (LEAs) — since the Labour Party came to power we have made more progress in the reform process with our primary schools than we have with our secondary schools.

How do I know that? A number of things you can measure, and a number you can sense. For instance, you can measure how well our children can read and write; how well they test at age 7 and 11; and how well our teachers teach. The quality of teaching, and of leadership, in our primary schools is better than it has ever been.

In terms of perceptions, most parents in the UK are very happy to send their children to a maintained primary school. We have a very small private/independent sector; only around 7 per cent of children are educated outside of government schools. In London the proportion is slightly higher, closer to 10 per cent. Even so, it is a very small number compared with the Australian system. However, whether you are in London — where our education system is weakest — or in urban areas outside the capital, or in rural areas, parents on the whole are very satisfied with the quality of primary education that their children get. Our problem is that as children get older and move into secondary schools, parent satisfaction becomes less. There are many reasons for this, which I won't explore in this paper.

So, we have a strong primary sector. We have invested a great deal in it over recent years, and we are now noticing the difference.

SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On paper the UK school system probably looks very centrally-driven. To some extent it is. National government, where I play a role, has all the levers. The equivalent of Australia's State government — our local authority level — has very few levers. That is one of the differences I notice immediately when I come to Australia. I sense that the influence and power in Australia — the relationship between school education and government — is largely at State level. Our teachers would tell you that they have a relationship with their local authority, but really the main levers — the finance, the push, the ideas, the legislative powers — all come from central government. How might we develop in that context?

We have around 24,000 schools, 19,000 of them primary schools. They all teach a national curriculum. This means that all schools have to

make available the same subjects; the national curriculum sets out the skills, knowledge and subjects that a child should cover and learn in each of the years. The curriculum doesn't specify that you have to do something in a particular Term of a particular Year, but it will say that at some point — between the ages of 7 and 11, for example — the child must cover certain things and develop certain skills.

We also have national testing. We test all our children, and we do that on the same day, in the same week, in the same month, right across the country — at age 7, 11, 14 and 16. Essentially, these Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) are snapshot tests of the performance of our children at each of the specified ages. The tests are mainly in literacy, numeracy and science at primary level. At 14 we cover more subjects, and at 16 we begin looking towards our school leaving tests.

When the SATs are marked we publish the results so that they are available for everybody to see. Once the government has published them, the newspapers convert them into performance tables, which they print in the national press. There is one week in November when all the nation's 11-year-olds' test results are published. Any parent can find the results and check how their local school has done. There is an ongoing argument between government and teachers about this process.

As well as the national curriculum and testing, we have a national inspection system, called the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). Relatively infrequently — once every 4-6 years — every school will be inspected. What this involves will vary — from looking at the school's planning documents to looking at its test results.

The key element is that teachers are observed teaching. In a small primary school there might be between 3 and 5 inspectors and a teacher might expect to be observed teaching two or three times during the week of inspection. In a larger secondary school, it could be a larger team of 12-14 inspectors that comes in. The results of the inspection are made public as well, and can be accessed on the OFSTED web site.

So, in summary, the key elements of the system are:

- national curriculum,
- national testing,
- publication of results,
- inspection,
- publication of inspection,
- availability of results to everyone.



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There are huge strengths in this approach, although in some ways it is also a high risk accountability system if you are a Headteacher. Just think about it. Everything you do with the children in your school; how well they achieve; how well they compare with the children down the road; how well you're doing compared with the best in the LEA; how well you are doing in terms of the national average; it's all there for everybody to see. And when the OFSTED report comes out, the local paper writes about it as well.

It is high risk, but for a balanced view you need to think about this as the accountability framework; the national prescription. I can make an argument that it is, in fact, fairly minimal. It's what you teach, not how you teach; it's inspection every 4 to 6 years. You're only testing children four times throughout the whole of a compulsory school life. When I was a child, we were tested every single year, and two or three times a year.

If you think about it logically then, as an accountability framework, the current system doesn't seem too onerous. But I can tell you that it does **feel** onerous if you're a teacher in the UK. I know that from them. They will tell you, when they have a chance to say it.

Why do they have that perception? Because it's so very public. In the UK, teaching is now the most publicly accountable of the professions. By contrast, I can't tell you what the current success rate is for surgeons in my local hospital — at doing appendix operations, for example (although we will be able to access that information shortly, as a new system is being introduced).

At the moment, it is the teaching profession that has led the way in making itself publicly accountable and in making sure that the results of its performance are available for those who use it. Public accountability is part of the deal. It has to be. If you teach in the UK at the moment, you're told continually that you have one of the most important jobs, that what you do in a school not only determines the life chances of the pupils who come your way, but actually the future of our nation — in terms of economic prosperity and social cohesion. I believe that is the case. The other side of the coin is that if you are that important, you have to be that publicly accountable. In addition to having their performance measured and evaluated, members of the profession need to be coaxed and helped to improve, because what they do is so important.

One of the dilemmas for all of us who work in education is how to manage a service that is under such pressure to succeed. One of the risks

for us in a society where we value education more and more is that we go for those things we can measure, because they are the tangible result of what our investment is bringing about. We need to think about how to avoid losing those important elements in the education service that are not about measuring and weighing — things that are more about sense of purpose, moral underpinning, excitement, creativity, joy, satisfaction, pleasure, getting on with people and social relationships.

Thinking about how we can get the balance right is where I am having one of the most engaging and interesting conversations with the profession. My judgement is that in this period of change we have come from having an "OK" profession, a relatively important service, to being the most important public service in our country.

The government has matched this change in terms of funding. In the five years since we came to government, the expenditure per pupil has increased about 20 per cent. Departmental budgets have just been settled for the next three years and there will be a 6 per cent increase in education spending, on average, over that period. That is a lot of money. It could have gone to Health, to improving the railways, or to a host of other public services. Instead, from the money that we use to keep the economy growing, the government chose to give the bulk of the increases to education.

So, at present we have a government that:

- believes in the social capital of individuals
- wants to make education its top priority because it knows our future is in teachers' hands
- is prepared to match that with the most significant investment of resources over a longer period of time than our country has ever seen.

In return, it wants from the profession:

- more work
- more accountability
- more change
- more flexibility
- high standards
- greater public satisfaction, and
- better performance than it has ever had before.

If you work in education in the UK at the moment, that makes teaching one of the most exciting jobs you could be in. It also makes it one of the toughest — there will be no go-slow, the pressure will not stop, because what teachers



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do is so important. However, the resources and support will keep coming in, along with the pressure.

Speaking as a politician — and remember we all work in the same service — I feel that how well we manage that change, and how well we help the profession to manage that pressure, will determine how well I can do my job and how successful we will be as a nation in delivering education to our children.

SOME PERCEIVED WEAKNESSES IN THE BRITISH SYSTEM

I have painted a picture of a nation that seems to be committed to education, to making a reasonable start by putting its money where its mouth is. Where are we weak? What do we not do well?

One weakness in our system lies in the difference in standards between and within schools. If you look at any set of results, where we are weakest is that we have not broken the link between social class and educational underachievement. If you are poor, your chances of achieving academically are less than if you are middle class and if you are rich, and the gap is too big — wider than in any of our OECD competitive nations by the time students get to 16.

Consider some of the statistics that indicate just how far we have to go in order to break this link. In the UK, around 41 per cent of those under 30 go on to university (not just those who go straight from school). A child who is middle class stands about an 80 per cent chance of going to university. If you are the child of a non-skilled/manual worker, the figure is 15 per cent. In the 21st century, in an immensely wealthy nation which has been committed to education for many decades, which has brilliant teachers and an education system to be proud of, why do we still such a gap?

Why do so few from the working classes go to university? One answer, obviously, is that they do not achieve at A Level (our exam for 18 year olds). However, they also do not achieve as well at our 16 year olds exam, our 14 year olds exam, the 11 year olds exam, or the baseline assessments when children go into school at five.

One of the saddest things I find is that when I go round our pre-school nurseries, the Heads, teachers and assistants there will tell you about the language poverty in three year olds, which at

this early age already marks out the potential difference between social class and educational attainment. It is marked as early as 22 months in the investigative work we have done.

If you ask me what makes me most angry or frustrated — or, if you turn that around to be more positive and ask me where I think I have to make some difference in order to justify the job that I am in — it is about closing that gap. My politics, as well as my background as a teacher, told me that. Not to have policies to try and close the gap between social class and educational attainment, would be to call into question the value of having Labour Secretaries of State for Education.

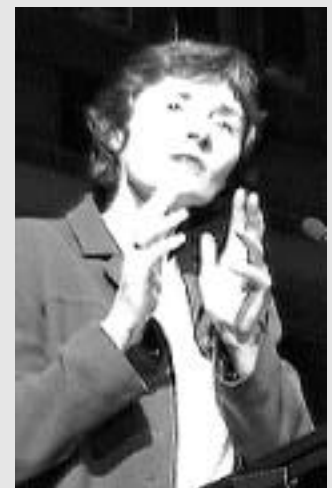
Our challenge is to raise standards for everybody and close the gap between the low performing students and those who are performing better. However, it is more complicated than that. You will find that some schools do brilliantly with children from the sorts of social background that I've been describing, while other schools are failing similar children. The biggest danger in our school system is that everybody knows those statistics. If you know that children of the working class perform less well, there is a danger that your expectations of them will be that this is inevitable, and that you will say things like:

- “That’s life.”
- “That’s the way the world works.”
- “Nothing you can do about it.”
- “It’s been like that since the year dot” and
- “Who am I as Joe Bloggs in my little school to be able to make a difference to the link between social class and educational attainment?”

For years we have been bedevilled by low expectations of attainment by children from less affluent backgrounds. When I started my teaching days in the seventies, which in the UK were ones of progressive education, I taught in the inner city of Coventry. I can remember that we used to look at out our sixteen year olds’ results and say things like:

- “You know, they’ve done damned well, considering where they’ve come from.”

And in that phrase lies a real historic problem with the British educational system. Because the political Left understood the barriers to achievement that working class children have, they actually excused underachievement. The



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political Right weren't that interested in it, since they didn't have a vision of society that needed everybody to have a high level of skill. We had an economy in the 70s that only needed a certain percentage to have a high level of skill. The rest of them needed to do as they were told once they went to work. So, the political history of how we ever got to this point is interesting, since I think both the Left and the Right share a lot of the blame for not breaking the link between social class and educational attainment.

Since 1997, we have tried so hard not to allow a phrase, a conversation, an attitude, a viewpoint that smelt of "...considering where they've come from." That's not to say that we don't understand that some children find it more difficult to achieve. We do understand. But just using these kinds of words actually transmits low expectations — to the children, the parents, the staff who work with you, to the whole society.

I think we have changed culture over the last five years, and in our schools now the thing I am most proud about is that the language I used to be guilty of using in the 70s and 80s — thinking there was an inevitability about lower achievement — has almost gone from our schools, apart from a few vestiges.

Our approach is based on a combination of high pressure and high support, where we ask all schools to have the highest expectations of every child, but we recognise that some schools will need more support than others in order to reach the level that we expect — particularly where they serve deprived neighbourhoods.

One of the ways in which we've been able to do this is to use the strengths of our accountability system. For any school that says to me:

"How can you expect me to perform better than I do, given the prior attainment and backgrounds of the children that I have?"

I can use the results that we have from every single school, to say:

"Well, how come this school, with very similar children to yours, with similar background, is doing better than you?"

Using the data, you can compare yourselves not with schools who have different intakes, but with schools that have intakes like your own. What we have in the UK at the moment is a data-rich school system, where any of our Heads can use the internet web sites for own department and other sources, to find schools in similar catchment

areas — down the road/around the country, rural/urban, big/small, ethnic minority back-grounds, English not the first language, whatever characteristics — and compare results. You can find a "twin", or a match, and think to yourself:

"They can do it. Why can't I?"

It is painful for teachers to have that information about their performance in the public domain — it is great if you're performing well; it's very painful if you're not. But having the data in the public domain has been one of the things that's helped us drive up standards. Having said that, the key strength lies in how we use that information, not that we have it.

What the data gives me as Secretary of State — if I am working on policy development, for example — is the knowledge of which school is doing particular things well. I don't have to go looking for the information or write them letters; I can tell from the data who is doing literacy well, doing numeracy well, raising standards for children from ethnic minorities. Having that type of system levers standards up. It means you can use your good schools to support your weak schools. As a politician, you can develop policies based on known examples of what is happening in schools.

Good education makes good politics. Bad education makes bad politics. As a politician developing education policies, I have more first-hand experience than many Secretaries of State for Education have had, since I happen also to be teacher, but I'm ten years out of the classroom now, so in some ways I am out of date. How can I develop appropriate policies for the nation if I do it in isolation from best practice in our schools? We are aiming to learn from that best practice and make it the basis for our policy.

If you think of it that way, my job becomes the easiest job in the world, because for any teachers who bring me a problem they are facing in their schools, I can find a school somewhere in the UK that is beginning to solve that problem. There is no problem in UK education today that someone somewhere isn't beginning to find the answer to. It might not be in the UK; it might be in Australia, in the USA or Europe. One of you teachers will be working on it, but the problem is that you won't realise it and the politicians don't know where you are.

If you have a data-rich education service, however, the development of policy can be based on finding out which of you are doing best at solving any one problem, and working from there.

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My job, basically, is going around and locating our best teachers' best ideas and converting them into national education policy. I say that lightly, but it is actually very important to me that my government's education policies are rooted in what really works in schools. I'll tell you why. It means that when I ask even more of our teachers — which realistically we will be doing year after year — I must be able to say:

“Look, what I am asking you to do is not impossible; I have seen it being done somewhere; I know somebody who is beginning to get it right; I have seen the seeds of something that can actually achieve what I am asking you to do.”

That's how I want the nature of my relationship with teachers and schools in our system to be. We're all in the same service; we just happen to have different roles in it.

So much for the strengths and weaknesses of our system. I now want to look at a few specific policy areas.

POLICY IN ACTION

Literacy/Numeracy is one area that I'm exceptionally proud of, and so should our primary Heads and teachers be. As I've said, we measure children's attainment in Literacy/Numeracy at 7 and 11. In 1997, just more than 40 per cent of eleven-year-olds were below the reading level expected for their chronological age. That meant they were leaving primary school not illiterate or innumerate, but unable to read and write well enough to access the secondary curriculum. They tended to become disaffected, and often had behaviour problems.

The situation has been exacerbated by the fact that in the UK, historically, secondary teachers have not been taught to teach reading and writing, and have assumed that by the time children reach 11 they have mastered those basic skills.

We made improvement in Literacy/Numeracy our main goal, and we were unrelenting about it in our first term. We told primary teachers that was what we wanted them to concentrate on; that was how we wanted them to use their money, time and professional development. As a government, that was where we would put our money; there would be no excuse.

In the Department during those four years, if anybody had an idea for policy for primary schools, the challenge was to ask:

“What will this do to help the Literacy and Numeracy strategy?”

If it would help, fine; if it would get in the way, then it would be more a case of saying:

“Come back in five years time!”.

Basically the strategy is a framework of how to teach reading, writing and number, from age five to age eleven. It is a very substantial and prescriptive document. It does specify what lesson should be taught at a particular stage. Its introduction meant that we needed to retrain every single primary school teacher in best practice.

We started the training process with the Heads and Literacy Co-ordinators — every school had to have a Literacy Co-ordinator and a Numeracy Co-ordinator — then a Governor and the Special Education Needs person. They went back into their schools and trained everybody else there.

In the second year, we trained more teachers face-to-face, and we trained the classroom assistants — most of whom had never had such formal training in their careers. Those schools with furthest to go we gave more training and more resources. So, for five solid years we invested in the professional development of our teachers and school support staff. We introduced Literacy in one year and Numeracy in the following year.

The strategy has produced the biggest change and the hardest work that any generation of teachers in the UK has ever done. They have put their heads down and gone for it. We never had the powers to **make** them do it. There is not one law in our country that can make our primary schools do the Literacy Strategy or the Numeracy Strategy. Different “levers” come into play, for example the need for schools to have achieved high results when they come to be inspected by OFSTED. In the event, all 19,000 schools undertook the training and implemented the Strategy.

In practice it turned out to be a journey of faith, of optimism. I noticed a difference after one year and I take off my hat to my primary colleagues. In the first year I used to go round and ask how Literacy was going. They would tend to scowl and say something like:

“It's very, very prescriptive. I'm having to change everything I've done”.



People have a model of the future based on continuation from the present — tomorrow will be like today — which fails to anticipate changes in direction.



The biggest pleasure comes in terms of the areas where the increase was greatest — deprived, working class areas.

And I would listen, then ask:

“But what is it like quality-wise?”

Then they would say something like:

“Oh, it’s quite good”.

When we got to the second year, I started to notice a subtle difference. I would go into a school, ask how Literacy and Numeracy were going, and the teachers would reverse the order of what they had said the previous year, to:

“It’s very good; mind you it’s very prescriptive, and it’s meant a lot of hard work for me.”

It’s been a very long time since I went to a primary school where they said they hadn’t learnt from it. They don’t say it’s perfect. They usually say something like:

“Yes, it’s had something to offer. Mind you, I’ve changed it a bit. I’ve adapted it a bit to my own needs. I’ve geared it to the needs of my children.”

To that I say:

“You are professionals; that’s your job; that is what professional teachers do”.

But it was necessary to make them do it in the first place, in order to get them to the stage where they could exercise informed professional judgement — about which bits of it they wanted to use, and which bits they thought weren’t most suitable for them.

I know in my heart that if we had made it optional, the stronger schools would have jumped to take on the Strategy. The schools that would have chosen not to go with it were those that needed it most. The biggest risk for our government was that it could have damaged our long-term relationship with the profession. It did for a while. We might never have recovered from it, but in fact it has been the best thing that we ever did.

Politically, in the Labour Party, the thing we most prize from the 1945 Labour government is the formation of the National Health Service. I am convinced that when the history of the Party is written, in twenty or thirty years time, the next generation of Labour politicians will look back on the current period of government and think that what made the biggest difference was the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

Why? The improvements in results across the nation, they are phenomenal, with a 13 per cent increase in English and 11 per cent in maths.

The biggest pleasure comes in terms of the areas where the increase was greatest — deprived, working class areas. The most improved Local Education Authority was Tower Hamlets, where about 90 per cent of the children are from Bangladeshi backgrounds, don’t have English as their first language, were asylum seekers living in acute poverty, coming from homes where there is not an understanding of the UK educational system. In Tower Hamlets, the improvement has been between 22 and 25 per cent.

So, we have raised standards for everyone, but we have succeeded in raising them most for those who were furthest behind. Think back to the statistics that I gave you about social class. Remember the 80 per cent of middle class children and the 14 per cent of working class children who went to university, and think of the low results for working class children in the earlier age groups. If you look at the results from 11 year olds now, around five out of seven children from middle class backgrounds are reaching the level expected, and four out of seven working class children reach the level expected.

I think that is absolutely transformational, particularly looking forward. We have given these children the best possible platform of skills. They are the ones who will help us crack the issue of entry to Higher Education.

AREAS TO ADDRESS

Where are our problems? What causes me to stay awake at night? I’ll outline a few areas, and if you’re the school that has the solution to any of these, please contact me, so we can see whether your ideas can be applied in our context.

Professional skills

I worry about the profession itself; its skills and its structure. A 1920s surgeon walking into a 2002 operating theatre might recognise some of the simpler equipment — like swabs and so on — but would not be able to operate or survive as a surgeon. A 1920s teacher entering a 2002 classroom would find it looks remarkably familiar — slightly smaller classes, but still based around 30 pupils, one teacher, in a classroom, 9 till 4, lessons split up into 40 minute packages. The teacher might or might not be standing there with

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a piece of chalk, or using a whiteboard, or an overhead projector. But think how education has changed. Eighty per cent of what we know about the human brain has been discovered in the last ten years ... and we work with children's brains, as our "raw material", if you like. Given the new knowledge that we have, why haven't we changed the way we teach children more? Why haven't we used the knowledge to update the profession and its skills, and the organisation of schools?

I worry that unlike the surgeons we have failed to make the most of the evidence that there is — which in our case is about children's learning. I would hate to think that surgeons operating today on me, or my family, had not had an opportunity to update their skills since being trained in the 1970s. The truth is, by contrast, that when I left teaching in 1992, I had not had my skills updated substantially, nor had I undertaken much professional development, since my initial training. We still don't accept that it is an evidence based profession; teachers need ongoing training, so that their skills are kept up to date.

Staffing and resources

We face a major dilemma: we have more teachers in the UK than we have ever had in history — 20,000 more than we had in 1997 — but we also have more vacancies. Both things are true. The problem is that as the government increases resources for education, Principals use their increased funding to create new teaching posts. I don't blame them; they reduce the size of their classes, or they think they will have a teacher for home links, or an extra teacher to help with literacy for the less able students. It's all "good stuff", but I cannot possibly keep persuading that many young graduates to go into teaching.

At the moment, we have to induce 30,000 people a year to enter the profession. If you really want to feel daunted, think about the fact that I need to recruit 40 per cent of all those people leaving university with maths degrees this summer, to meet the targets for maths teachers. It is no secret that we will not achieve that. We will fail this year, the year after, and the year after that. If you are young, with a maths degree, you have lots of choices, more than there ever were before. Teaching is only one option.

I am faced with a dilemma. What do I do about this situation? How do I persuade schools to stop creating more posts? Let me be argumentative about this. I could make a strong case that we do not need any more teachers at all. Perhaps some of our schools could actually do with fewer

teachers than they have at the moment ... although that might not be a popular suggestion. What I think they could do with is more people with different skills.

My vision is to move away from the familiar staffing model of Headteacher plus Deputy plus quite a few teachers and a few people who do other things. Very roughly speaking, that is still the model for most schools in the UK at present. I believe we need to move to a model where there are far more classroom assistants, technicians and administrative posts.

Surveys show me that teachers spend 20 per cent of their time doing things they shouldn't be doing — like collecting money, photocopying, cleaning the room, preparing work sheets, dinner duty, playground duty, bus stop duty and so on. My vision for schools is as places with a greater mix of skills. The key people there are the teachers, who:

- have a teaching qualification
- know about pedagogy
- know how knowledge about the brain has developed in the last ten years
- are up to date with the best evidence in the world about how children learn, and
- know about how the best teachers teach.

They need to be able to concentrate on these things, but supported by an army of classroom assistants whom we could trust to do far more than they are allowed at present, so long as we train them better. I really don't have a problem with an assistant taking fifteen children in a room by themselves if they are trained to do it, but it is illegal at the moment in our country and is the subject on ongoing debate with the profession.

I would want that supplemented with support from administrators and bursars, from mentors and counsellors to look after the social welfare of the children, from people who do just want to clean the paint pots, and from people who can make the link between home and school.

In summary, I see the school as a community that is:

- centred on the skills of the teacher
- based on the best evidence about what works with teaching and learning
- supported by a range of people with varied skills.

Remember what I said about Literacy and Numeracy. I had to find levers to encourage people to take on the strategies. I have very few



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levers to persuade them to spend their money in ways other than employing teachers. They have great power over their own budgets and can spend it as they wish. So, top of my list of problems at the moment is how to solve what is seen as a teacher shortage — knowing I cannot solve it by merely providing more teachers, but believing that I can solve it by re-focussing what teachers do, and bringing other people in to support them — and how to persuade the teaching profession to work in these new ways.

How to manage change

Primary teachers tell me that they are fed up with change, weary with initiative after initiative, tired. They want a break. What they say most is:

“We want consolidation. Leave us a while and let us consolidate what we have”.

How do I listen to them and answer their request, and simultaneously listen to and answer the public, who tell me that they want more from our schools than they currently get. In a society that has made education its number one priority, how do we, between us, manage change?

Student behaviour and social and parental responsibility

Behaviour and social responsibility have been more of an issue in the secondary sector, but the problem is getting to be a primary one as well. I don't want to overplay this, or paint an untrue picture, but two decades ago I felt there was in the UK a belief by parents that teachers and schools were to be respected, supported, listened to and worked with. We have pockets in some of our most difficult urban areas where it is almost as if parents' belief in education's capacity to deliver has gone. The parents are not supporting teachers in the way that they should.

Although behaviour in UK schools is generally good, OFSTED reports show that it has deteriorated over the last two years. It is not significantly worse — it's around one in twelve secondary schools where behaviour is poor, and one in fifty primary schools — but five years ago it would have been better than it now is.

I worry that some of the social problems that plague western society at the moment — increases in violence and drug taking, a decline in social cohesion, a breakdown in family structure, for example — are impacting on schools. How do they cope when children bring

into the school social issues like these, from outside school? How, for example, do schools cope with student mobility? In my Birmingham constituency, and in other large cities, at the end of the year 60 per cent of the students are not the same ones who were there at the start of the year. They move on — because of family breakdowns, housing problems, or a range of other factors.

How can a school system cope with this? The simple answer is that we will cope with that and other problems. I firmly believe that education has a capacity to design and invent the future that is given to no other profession. Sometimes — when teachers have their heads down, during the long hours that they work, when it seems that they are having to deal with initiative after initiative — they need to remember that through children we shape the future. In entering the teaching service, we have chosen a job where we do this through our work with children's minds, their learning, their self esteem, their confidence, their aspirations for themselves, their families, their communities, their nation, their world. We are not the main people in all of this. Their parents and families are. But the teachers and educators are key in helping to shape that future.

Whatever our role in our country's education service at the moment, this factor is the same, whether we are in Victoria, London or Detroit. As our histories have developed, we've found new ways to try and achieve that end.

CLOSING COMMENTS

On this trip to Australia I will learn things and take them back, unashamedly, and make them available to our schools. I hope that my colleagues and I will leave behind us things that Australian educators will find of use.

On that note, I return to where I started — with the notion of international exchange. Knowing what other people do well, knowing what you are frightened about, knowing what worries you — all of that actually helps you and others. It helps us in what is a national quest in the UK, to make education the number one public service, and to see if we can be the first generation of teachers and the first government to bring life to a phrase that politicians like me use all too often, which is *“to make sure that we deliver for every single child”*. The UK system has never done that and I suspect the same is true for Australia. It has always delivered brilliantly for a few. Until it delivers for every single child, none of us can choose to be satisfied with what we do.



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APC Monograph Number 10

Education Helping to Build Social Capital: the British Experience by Estelle Morris

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions were invited from the audience.

1 *The Secretary of State was asked to comment on teacher morale in the UK, particularly in terms of the inspection process. In summary, she replied as follows:*

Morale is not as good as it should be. Given the performance I have described, and how much teachers have improved in terms of the results, they have every reason to have exceptionally high morale. It is better than it was, because they have come to terms with the pace of change.

That change has not only related to this government. It was the previous Conservative government that introduced testing and OFSTED inspection; we kept that going. I think low morale came about because teachers felt inundated with change. As I say, it should now be better. There are two things I would say about that: British teachers are highly self-critical.

I often comment that if I make a speech to teachers and say that the vast majority of teachers in the UK are absolutely brilliant, but we have some who are not very good, every teacher thinks I have just told them they are awful. If I make a parallel speech to politicians, every politician thinks I've just told them they are brilliant.

Teachers are not good at listening to the praise they are given. They are too quick to pick up the criticisms. That may help to make them good teachers, but it makes them difficult partners at times for me.

The second thing, as I outlined in this paper, is that I don't think schools are staffed in a way that has made it easy for either the profession or the schools to deal with change. They have certainly dealt with the wave of change on some levels — for example, if it has meant them doing more photocopying, they have done it; if it has meant them making more links with parents they have done it; if it's meant them working more hours, they've done it. They have piled it on themselves.

It's as though it's only them who can deliver in their schools.

I think what I have to do is help them staff their schools and structure their working lives to make it easier to cope with the change.

The change cannot stop, so they have to structure things differently. I think they have come to terms with OFSTED; they don't like it and probably never will, but everybody understands that it is there to stay.

There is a new head of OFSTED who should be well-received. We are also trying to have differentiated inspections, so if a school's results are good it will be inspected less frequently and less arduously than would otherwise be the case.

2 *A question was asked about experience in the UK in dealing with non-attendance at school. The answer referred to a specific case, and is summarised as follows:*

Mrs Amos had two daughters of secondary age who had not been to school for a long time. She was jailed for six months in about May 2002. I am sorry that the situation arose whereby she was jailed, but I am not sorry that the magistrate chose to send her to jail. That sounds hard, but let me say why.

We expect a lot of teachers, but they are limited in what they can do unless the children are actually there in school. You can all think of a family in your school where you worry about a parent's parenting skills, how it is transmitted to the child, and most all how that child will treat his/her own children in due course.

Now, it is against the law in our country not to send the children to school, but if you don't, eventually, after two years you get taken to court. Usually, the magistrate imposes a small fine, often allowing the fine to be paid off a small amount at a time over a long period. Not surprisingly, it is common for parents to still not send the children to school.

So, what we have done in the past has had no impact. Politicians and teachers have been saying that we need to be getting children to school, but there has been no consequence for not getting children to school.

I am good at telling teachers what their responsibilities are. Over the last few months, I have been trying to be much more forthright about saying what parents' obligations are in our education process. The vast majority of parents do things well, but they all have the responsibility to send their children to school. It is not about us being bossy; it is part of their role in the civil, civic society where we live.



... if I make a speech to teachers and say that the vast majority of teachers in the UK are absolutely brilliant, but we have some who are not very good, every teacher thinks I have just told them they are awful.

If I make a parallel speech to politicians, every politician thinks I've just told them they are brilliant.



Part of our next phase of education reform will be to go to our best schools, and get them to help design the future, pedagogically. They will do that if we make sure that they are rewarded for their innovative work.

I cannot keep demanding from teachers that they work miracles with the most disadvantaged children, if parents are not doing what they should. I am not asking parents to work wonders either; it is as simple as saying things like:

- “Send your child to school, work with the teacher.”
- “Do not go into the school and shout at the teacher.”
- “Do not go on to school premises and question their authority.”
- “Under no circumstances whatsoever do you go into a school and hit a teacher.”

That last item is there because this happens in a hundred or so cases in the UK every year. There has been a drift, and it’s about time that we said if education is that important, it is important for everybody’s child, including those who are not getting support from home.

We’ve all worked with parents who find it difficult — that’s not hard for us as teachers. Whether they can read or write, or whether or not they have been to university, they care about the children, and all we want is for them to do the basics, to turn up and work with us as partners.

What happened after the Amos case, when the mother was sent to jail? Almost immediately children who had not been attending started turning up at school, many after long periods of absence. We have not solved the problem, but a clear message has gone out now that if you do not send your child to school there will be consequences.

3 A question was asked about the need to support innovation. The answer is summarised as follows:

If we are not careful, we will squeeze out risk taking. You must be allowed to fail. You know that from your dealings with your children. Part of growing up is learning to deal with failure and learn from it. Part of teaching is helping children to do that.

In the UK, with such a high risk accountability system, there is a danger that teachers will feel that they cannot risk innovation because they might fail. We are establishing an Innovation Unit to encourage risk taking to deal with this issue.

One thing we need to do is change the way we measure things in order to change behaviour. For example, we are obsessed with teacher:pupil ratios rather than adult:pupil ratios.

We also need to change the questions we ask. For example, OFSTED could go into a school and ask the Headteacher to identify when s/he took a risk in the last year, or what had been the biggest failure, and what was learnt from it. At the moment, they do not say that; they are looking for success, and if they are looking for failure it is as though the two are black and white.

The government needs to do is support them politically in varying this approach. My responsibility is to try to gear the accountability framework to encourage innovation while still guaranteeing minimum standards. That is crucial. Schools have to be careful and responsible, not to take innovative steps that are so risky they might harm somebody’s chances in life.

If OFSTED went in and asked the sorts of question I have suggested, that would soon change the way that schools and teacher behave. Our problem at the moment is that we have an accountability framework that encourages compliant behaviour. You need that for a phase, to bring everybody on board and build a cohesive system, but once that is done, you need to change it — so that the accountability framework will ensure minimum standards but encourage a degree of risk taking.

Part of our next phase of education reform will be to go to our best schools, and get them to help design the future, pedagogically. They will do that if we make sure that they are rewarded for their innovative work.

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Education Helping to Build Social Capital: the British Experience by Estelle Morris

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