

Reclaiming Pastoral Care

Introduction: What is this broadsheet about?

Pastoral Care promotes relationships for learning. Through good communication and listening to the learner's perspective, it offers support to achievement for all. By promoting good relations and feedback between all parties, it is a key element of successful schools and schools that learn. Yet recent trends in UK schools ignore such principles and practice of pastoral care. This broadsheet reviews recent evidence and is produced in association with the NAPCE Annual Conference, "Voicing the Vision: Forget the Factory".

What's wrong with some recent trends?

The last fifteen years, with successive Governments, have seen:

- An emphasis on pupil performance in one-off tests
- Learners who do not perform well in tests thinking less well of themselves
- Pupils from disadvantaged groups becoming more disadvantaged in tests
- More teacher-centred classrooms
- A narrowing of the curriculum
- A mechanistic view of teaching and of schools as organisations.

Such trends could lead pastoral care in UK schools to be de-emphasised, marginalized, or distorted. This would be regrettable, especially as these trends do not lead to high performance, so fail even to achieve the limited performance agenda of Government.

Testing. Current tests encourage performances of display and fail to assess the skills and dispositions that matter most: they are inadequate as indicators of student learning or school quality¹. Schools that manage to improve test results may well do so at the expense of meaningful learning, in the process driving good educators out of the profession².

Performance. The dominant emphasis on performance supposes that learning automatically follows, more so if pressure is applied. For example:

"How does one learn as a human being, except through pressure and threat?"

Chief Inspector of Schools, writing in the Spectator 1995.

"We're putting the teaching profession under a lot of pressure and we're doing it for a simple reason: there are a lot of people putting us under pressure."

Prime Minister, on Independent Radio News, February 2001.

"I've got to put the pressure on, because the Prime Minister is putting the pressure on me."

Head of the DfES Standards and Effectiveness Unit, at a seminar, January 2003.

The message is 'if you're under pressure, pass it on'. But pressure on pupils does not lead to better results. A study of 174,075 15-year olds in 32 countries found that:

*"'Achievement press' which was measured by students' perceptions of the extent to which teachers emphasise academic performance and place high demands on students, is only moderately related to performance, and the effect on performance, on average across OECD countries, on the mathematical and scientific literacy scales is not statistically significant"*³

Setting targets without developing the process for achieving them is unethical. Pupils with a rich understanding of their learning may be able to translate targets into personal action, whereas others will not. Rather than spend time on targets, time should be spent on each pupil gaining a richer understanding of her/his learning – this leads to higher performance.

Pupil Self-esteem. Before National Curriculum Tests were introduced there was no correlation between self-esteem and achievement as measured by standardised tests. With National Curriculum Testing, however, there is a significant correlation between measured self-esteem and achievement⁴. Failure is now more destructive.

Disadvantage. High stakes testing programmes have been shown to increase high school drop-out rates, particularly among minority populations⁵.

Teacher centredness. When teachers are deemed responsible for pupil performance they become more controlling in classrooms. Government interventions such as the National Literacy Strategy may officially endorse 'interactive whole class teaching' but the evidence is that such strategies encourage teachers to use more directive forms of teaching with few opportunities for pupils to explore and elaborate on their ideas⁶. Government interventions, designed at the centre, replicate the schooling patterns of the past. The classroom scenario is maintained where:

"teachers regard students the way their superiors regard them - that is, as incapable of dealing responsibly with issues of power, even on the level of discussion"⁷.

Narrow curriculum. Recent surveys of successful primary schools repeat the earlier finding:

"...there is no evidence in the survey to suggest that a narrower curriculum enabled children to do better in the basic skills or led to the work being more aptly chosen to suit the capacities of the children"⁸

Mechanistic view of teaching and schooling.

"A public discourse has been established which accounts for successful teaching in mechanistic and superficial terms as a set of external behaviours which are not linked to an understanding of learning. It is based on teacher performance, not interaction between teachers and learners"⁹.

This mechanistic discourse has its effects on teachers too, turning them into functionaries for the organisation, rather than professional learners. As one teacher put it: "we are led to believe that the only reason we may want to speak to each other about our learning is how it will directly affect the school and the way it is run". When teachers are treated as functionaries and schools as a machine, teacher recruitment issues are addressed by devolving functions to an increasing number of roles added to the school.

Improving performance comes from improving learning and relationships

High-level learning doesn't come from teachers teaching their socks off. A crucial ingredient in high performance is to help learners become more active, more planful and more reflective. As a result engagement in learning develops. Pupils who plan get 30% better GCSE grades¹⁰. The GCSE scores of pupils who reflect least are just one third of the scores of those who reflect most¹¹.

Such improvement is not achieved through instrumental means: it is an essentially social process, most successful when relating to learners' felt purpose, experiences of success, supportive interpersonal relationships and a sense of becoming the person we want to become. And no amount of clever delivery of subject matter will capture the imaginations and energies of students who feel that their opportunities for social development lie elsewhere than school.

Caring must not be separated from achieving - in tutoring relations, classroom relations and the whole school. When classrooms are characterised by collaboration, helping and enquiry, they become learning communities and well-researched programmes demonstrate that the range of benefits is great: "higher educational expectations and academic performance, stronger motivation to learn, greater liking for school, less absenteeism, greater social acceptance, fewer conduct problems, reduced drug use and delinquency, and greater commitment to democratic values"¹².

Beyond the factory mentality

Successful schools focus on learning and relationships. But dominant ideas of successful schools currently embody a mechanical “sausage machine” view, and continue teacher-centred practices. Improvement becomes “What can teachers do to pump out improved results for the school?”. This again risks ignoring both social relations and learning.

It is social relations that build the connection to school and achievement. Pupils are more highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school when they experience acceptance, and a sense of belonging. Engagement and commitment are closely linked to student performance, and, more importantly, to the quality of student learning¹³.

It is a focus on learning which improves performance. UK Secondary schools in which pupils have improved their performance above the rate of national improvement in the last decade have taken various approaches, some tactical (to look good in the performance tables) and others strategic. But the evidence shows that the highest improving schools have gone beyond these two approaches and into an area which builds its capacity to improve, through an overarching focus on learning¹⁴

There are implications for the style of leadership. A study of 96 secondary schools concluded that the key elements in student outcomes are participation and engagement¹⁵, Successful leadership in these schools stressed support, care, trust and participation: this contrasts with current Government rhetoric of leaders having ‘drive’, acting decisively, giving clear direction and having impact by persuasion.

Viewing school as a community rather than a factory is essential for the connection between high pupil performance and teachers’ views of themselves. If teachers feel they are workers in someone else’s factory, pupil results suffer, whereas if they experience efficacy – the sense of being able to make a difference in the world – results improve: “collective teacher efficacy is a significant predictor of student achievement”¹⁶.

What’s the contribution of pastoral care?

Going beyond the factory metaphor involves focusing on the experience of learners, supporting them in making sense of the otherwise fragmented experience of secondary school. In the curriculum of successful primary schools good use is made of links across subjects sometimes using themes for their planning; a strong emphasis placed on the humanities, physical education and, especially the arts, and the curriculum is enriched through a wide variety of carefully planned activities. This encourages pupils to value learning for its own sake. One key to success is that “The pupils understand the nature and purpose of their learning, in some cases contributing to the planning and evaluation of the curriculum, and they know what they have to do in order to make progress”¹⁷.

- ❖ Pastoral care attends to the voice of the learner.
The key person who has an overview of each student can learn of the many things which may affect their learning. And by reviewing with them the experience of school, many ways can be generated for all contributors to make that a better experience of learning.
- ❖ Tutoring supports engagement in school
“There is strong evidence to suggest that positive leadership from the tutor focuses pupils on learning and achievement, encourages them to participate in a wide range of school and community activities, and develops their sense of self worth”¹⁸
- ❖ Pastoral care enhances the skills that matter
The tutor group is a place for taking a perspective on the different elements of school life. It is also a group where crucial skills can be developed - skills of respecting others, helping others and of collaboration.
- ❖ Pastoral care supports the connected school
The picture which pastoral teams gain of students’ experience of learning is of great value to the rest of the school and needs to be shared through good year coordination.

To achieve this contribution, pastoral care in secondary schools needs to resist the distortions which occur when mechanical or divided views of education hold sway. Some years ago we identified the following¹⁹:

- The pastoral/curricular “split”
- The discipline fixation - “fire fighting”
- Watered-down welfare
- Administrative overload

Today we are at risk of adding another to that list:

- Telling Them Their Targets

To reclaim pastoral care from the worst of recent trends requires a re-statement of the teachers’ professional voice and the wider goals of school. The largest survey of teachers’ views in England, with over 70,000 responses recently gave evidence that the factor which most motivated the majority to become a teacher was the wish to work with young people, and that this remained the largest factor motivating them to continue (whereas the factors which most demotivated them were workload, initiative overload, and the target-driven culture). The ways in which they would like to see the role of the teacher develop in the 21st century emphasised concentrating on teaching and learning, adapting the curriculum to meet learner needs, and the freedom to use autonomous and creative teaching and learning approaches²⁰

If our schools of the 21st century are to really support the development of life-long learners, rather than a life-long addiction to teachers,

There is a contribution to be reclaimed.

Chris Watkins, November 2003

¹ Kohn A (2000) “Burnt at the high stakes” *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51:4, 315-327. www.alfiekohn.org

² “Young staff flee factory schools” *Times Educational Supplement*, 20 July 2001, page 1

³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2001), *Knowledge and Skills for Life: first results from the OECD “Programme for International Student Assessment” (PISA)*, Paris: OECD. page 205

⁴ Davies J and Brember I (1998) “National curriculum testing and self-esteem in year 2 the first five years: a cross-sectional study”. *Educational Psychology* 18: 365- 375

⁵ Madaus GF and Clarke M (2001), “The adverse impact of high stakes testing on minority students: evidence from 100 years of test data” in Orfield G and Kornhaber ML (Ed.), *Raising Standards or Raising Barriers? inequality and high stakes testing in public education*. New York, Brookings Institute.

⁶ Hardman F, Smith F and Wall K (2003), “Interactive whole class teaching’ in the National Literacy Strategy”, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(2): 197-215

⁷ Sarason SB (1990), *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform, can we change course before it's too late?* San Francisco, Jossey Bass. page. 83

⁸ HMI (1978) *Primary Education in England: A survey by Her Majesty’s Inspectors*, HMSO.

⁹ Wrigley T (2000), “Misunderstanding school improvement”, *Improving Schools*, 3(1): 23-29.

¹⁰ Hughes, M. (1993) *Flexible Learning: Evidence Examined* Stafford: Network Educational Press

¹¹ Atkinson S (1999), “Key factors influencing pupil motivation in design and technology”, *Journal of Technology Education*, 10(2): 4-26

¹² Lewis C, Schaps E and Watson MS (1996), “The caring classroom’s academic edge”, *Educational Leadership*, 54(1): 16-21

¹³ Osterman, K. (2000) Students’ need for belonging in the school community, *Review of Educational Research*, 70(3), pp. 323–367

¹⁴ Gray J, Hopkins D, Reynolds D et al. (1999), *Improving Schools: performance and potential*, Buckingham, Open University Press

¹⁵ Mulford B and Silins H (2003), “Leadership for organisational learning and improved student outcomes - what do we know?” *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(2): 175-195

¹⁶ Goddard R, Hoy W and Hoy A (2000), “Collective teacher efficacy: its meaning, measure and impact on student achievement”, *American Educational Research Journal*, 7(5/6): 439-454.

¹⁷ HMI (2003) *Curriculum in Successful Primary Schools*, London: Ofsted page 34

¹⁸ Ofsted (1998), *Secondary Education 1993-1997: a review of secondary schools in England*, London, The Stationery Office, page 70

¹⁹ NAPCE (1997) *Governors and Pastoral Care*, Coventry: NAPCE

²⁰ General Teaching Council England (2003) *GTCE/Guardian/MORI Survey of Teachers in England*, London: