Border crossings
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Improving Schools 2009 12: 81
DOI: 10.1177/1365480209104124

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>> Version of Record - Mar 16, 2009
What is This?
Border crossings

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Abstract
This article comments on international consequences of performativity cultures and curriculum standardization, focusing particularly on the situation in England. It highlights the divide between youth culture and school learning, and the particular damage for poorer students. It argues the impact of the English performativity regime on teacher morale and learner engagement, the negative effects of ‘workforce remodelling’ and the problems arising from incoherent inclusion policies. Despite the problems caused by the policy regime, the article ends by highlighting innovative schools which have been courageous enough to swim against the tide.

Keywords: accountability, curriculum innovation standards, performativity, poverty, well-being, youth culture

I have shamelessly borrowed a title from Henry Giroux as the most apt metaphor for a Scot working in England and viewing education from two sides of the geographical and cultural divide. In doing so it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain some of the myths of Scottish education, viewed so wistfully from the downside of the border. The mythology is becoming less and less credible as global competition presses schools more closely into the same mould.

Certainly I could point to a commitment to comprehensive schooling in Scotland while England persists, in many places, with selective grammar schools and a much higher proportion of children in independent schools. I could mention Scotland’s move to halt the publication of attainment, or ‘league’, tables. I could rejoice that Scotland has never gone down the perilous path of SATs and Key Stages, or adopted a National Curriculum. I could point to an all-graduate profession decades before England. I could celebrate that Scotland has not subjected itself to an Ofsted inspection regime nor even a National College for School Leadership. And it would be remiss to omit mention of Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence – its bold conception and widespread welcome by teachers. That Scotland went only half as far as England in devolved school management and a competitive educational market may be a further cause for celebration.

Yet, however significant the differences, both school systems are marked by the same deep fault line – a shared obsession with ‘raising standards’ – a term that has come less and less to refer to what teachers understand as ‘standards’. The need to radically revisit that corruption of a big idea has never been more urgent.
The 2008 OECD publication *Trends Shaping Education* identifies nine seminal trends. Four of these with perhaps the most far reaching impact on schools and systems of governance are:

- the new economic landscape and the rapid growth of knowledge-intensive service economies;
- widening divides between affluence and poverty, exacerbated by populations on the move, creating new diversities of languages, religions, lifestyles and values and in communities;
- transformative technologies which are not only proliferating exponentially but which assume new constellations of information, the users creating the content;
- changing social connections and values, with less social interaction, diminishing social trust and new complex configurations of home life.

All impact in fundamental ways on the nature of provision and its connect, or disconnect, with contexts of growing up.

**A new world of growing up**

A number of years ago Paul Goodman wrote a book entitled *Growing Up Absurd*. It was about the disconnect between the two worlds of childhood, school and society.

Five decades later the world is, in many respects, a more hostile place than it was when Goodman penned these words but the tensions between life in and out of school seems to have grown rather than diminished. The challenge for young people today is how to survive and navigate the hazardous social terrain of classroom and neighbourhood, home and peer group, the soft and hard economies of school and work. Is the explanation for the restless dissatisfaction of adolescence an artefact of contemporary society or of the institutional structures created to contain their volatile energy?

The disconnect is not, however, true of all children. Some bring with them to their classrooms a strong legacy of social capital from family and community, matching the culture and norms of the school and of their teachers. They are able to navigate school rules and conventions while the resonance between school and home learning is relatively unproblematic (although often frustrating for the most restless of intellects). Others, from less privileged backgrounds, struggle to come to terms with the tacit assumptions of school life, the expressions of authority, systems of sanctions and rewards which sit in uneasy juxtaposition with the norms and priorities of the peer group.

Success in school is not simply a matter of academic ability but assumes a reservoir of expertise necessary to understand and play the system’. Success is reliant on motivation, commitment, perseverance in the face of setback (see, for example, Dweck, 1986). It requires a resilience and self-determination able to defy countercultural peer group pressure (Harris, 1998). Without that built-in resilience, as Manuel Castells has shown in his brilliant trilogy (1996, 2000, 2001) the route back into society through the twilight economy – what he terms ‘ perverse integration’ – is rarely possible.

On three key OECD indicators of child well-being the UK comes 21st out of 21 countries. These are (a) subjective well-being, (b) family and peer relationships and
(c) behaviour and risks. On the risk behaviour index (a composite of alcohol, drugs, promiscuity), the UK tops the league table by a very significant distance and is first out of 21 countries on the experience of violence index, considerably ahead even of the United States.

Only with the scarce commodity of time are we able to gain some insight into the precarious path that young people have to tread in order to attain a level of physical and mental health which allows them to engage with what schools offer them. Only then does the rhetoric of ‘fulfilling potential’ begin to make some sense. Yet having time to tune in to the emotional concerns of the young is the scarcest of all commodities in teachers’ lives. Teacher listening has rarely had a pre-eminent place in classrooms but much less so with the progressive tightening of the curriculum and assessment imperatives. ‘Teachers teach and children learn. It is as simple as that’, wrote an English Chief Inspector (Woodhead, 2002) and it is within this tacit – and facile – assumption that the deep fault line lies.

As Mary James (2008) points out, it is no longer possible to entertain the transmission model, or the knowledge acquisition model, and there can be few teachers who believe that it is possible to ‘achieve one-to-one correspondence between what is in the teacher’s head and what the pupil learns’ (James, 2008: 21). What lies behind the façade that 30 or so young people present to their teachers within the classroom? What autobiographies connect the teacher to the individual lives lived out, or temporarily suspended, within the classroom? How different might learning be if there was a genuine dialogue, a quest for meaning?

Teachers spend most of their day talking, often as a strategy of control, often because a ruthlessly cumulative curriculum demands ‘coverage’, not because teachers wouldn’t like to spend more time in genuine dialogue. Indeed they relish, and gain deep professional satisfaction from the rare occasions when they converse with their pupils as human beings, discussing things that matter, sharing common interests and expressing disagreement within a reciprocal and respectful relationship. That is why extra-curricular activities, outdoor education, residential trips and other forms of ‘out of hours learning’ are so highly valued and so crucially important.

Patrick Lewis in his book How We Think, But Not in School (2007) describes the ‘Hydra curriculum’ – as each head is lopped off another appears to take its place. Personal Social and Health Education or Citizenship may be squeezed into the curriculum but the way in which these ‘subjects’ are taught is likely to sit uncomfortably within hierarchical structures, within authoritarian cultures and with selective mechanisms which exclude some children and which stream and set children into different social and ability groups. There is in fact no room for new ‘subjects’, nor for cross-curricular themes such as environmental education, as the core curriculum occupies an uncompromising central space, locked firmly in place by inertia and vested interests. Any attempts at cross-curricular teaching and learning, therefore, soon fail because of an assessment system firmly tied to the subjects that really matter (though not necessarily to the learner).

So, as teachers are pressed into covering content, what they are required to assess and account for less and less reflects what is important or relevant to the lives of children and young people. The standardized, sequential, subject-based, age-related curriculum
allows little compromise between the learning needs and interests of the child and the demands of a bureaucratic system.

Teachers may suggest a connection between learners’ interests and experience and the school curriculum, but that is more of a ploy to motivate learners to absorb the meat and potatoes of the academic curriculum. Tests rarely ask for personal connections or commentaries; they want the curriculum rendered back in its pure academic form, untainted by personal associations. (Starratt, 1998)

Reprising Herbert Spencer’s tract ‘What knowledge is of most worth’, John White edited a series of books inviting critics from a range of subject backgrounds to make an argument for or against the inclusion of their own pet subject in the compulsory curriculum. The publication of Why Learn Maths? in particular, provoked a heated response primarily because of the challenge to the historic, hallowed status of Mathematics at the core of the curriculum. We have become so accustomed to traditional canons of the academic curriculum that it is hard to see learning in any other way than through the lenses bequeathed to us by the mediaeval quadrivium and trivium.

The performativity culture

Within these global trends, England stands out in pioneering new forms of performativity culture in education. It has served as a role model for some and a warning signal for others. As the 2007 Eurydice document School Autonomy in Europe: Policies and Measures shows, England is the regime which has gone furthest down the autonomy, and allied performativity, road. As the report contends, it is not a movement that has been desired, initiated or embraced by teachers themselves but rather imposed by governments for various, and essentially political, reasons. According to 2008 OECD comparative data 91 percent of decisions in England schools are taken at individual school level, mainly by the head teacher and senior leadership team. The advantages claimed for ‘new freedoms’ have, however, to be offset by the nature of decisions taken and by the constraints within which that decision-making operates. The ‘strong framework’ described is one of national targets, key stage testing based on prescriptive curricula and classroom methodologies, public reporting of attainment and value-added measures, inspections and intensification of pressures on teachers and head teachers. What has been described as the ‘recruitment and retention crisis’ is largely explained by the increasingly unattractive nature of the demands on head teachers and teachers.

Broadhead’s description of teachers as ‘the ultimate gatekeepers of change’ may be translated as the ultimate gatekeepers of standards over which they have little, if any, control. It is the teacher who is held responsible for the attitudes, behaviour and (apparently) rising levels of illiteracy. It is teachers who must answer for lagging national performance in comparative country league tables. Data from OECD, TIMMS and the European Commission has provoked a widespread urgency (some might say moral panic) among policy-makers with teachers as the most obvious body to be held to account.

Four consecutive studies in England between 2002 and 2007 with my colleague Maurice Galton, including questionnaires and interviews in primary, secondary and
special schools, closely parallel findings from the recent Primary Review (Alexander, 2008). The key themes emerging consistently through these various studies are:

- a loss of status within the teaching profession;
- formulaic approaches to teaching undermining professional autonomy;
- overload of testing and teaching to the test;
- frustrations in trying to make inclusion policies work;
- demoralizing effects of constantly changing policy directions;
- teachers leaving the profession due to pressures on targets;
- rising levels of indiscipline and violence;
- lack of support from parents.

This raises the question: are these discrete problems or are they by any chance related?

**Loss of status**

Loss of status, although much to do with perceptions of teachers themselves, is related to a number of factors, the de-professionalization of teaching, the formulaic approaches to lessons, the undermining of professional autonomy, the relentless pursuit of targets and the demoralizing effects of constantly changing policy directions. All contribute to the disillusionment, and sometimes despair, expressed by teachers in each of our four successive studies, paralleling findings of the Primary Review.

I have lived/taught through a period where we were respected as professionals and if asked we would do whatever was requested. Now heavy accountability has replaced this. I have excellent examination results, the pupils love my lessons and write to me after leaving describing what they ended up doing and thank me but I now hate the job and am considering leaving for a career in entomology. (Science teacher, 21 years' experience)

I'm leaving the profession I love because I want my life back. It will break my heart to leave those kids.

The lack of excitement in teachers’ accounts was matched by comments from pupils. This, from an interviewer’s notes, tells a story that we found all too depressingly familiar.

*What's the best thing you've done in this school? When you're as old as me what will you remember when you look back?*

Dead silence! I was really struck by how unexcited they were by school. They had no Eureka moments, nothing really memorable, everything seemed really dull. They just wanted to get good grades so that they could get good jobs. They certainly weren’t excited by learning (or that was the impression they gave me).

**Formulaic approaches: testing and teaching to the test**

In the new policymakerspeak of government, learning is ‘delivered’ through the intervening medium of the teacher for whom the three/four-part lesson is now standard fare. The burden falls on school heads to monitor adherence to government guidelines on
curriculum and assessment. As one head teacher put it, ‘I should be able to go into any classroom and ask the teacher, and the children, what level they’re working at, and parents too should know their child’s level and potential’. So learning becomes a matter of labelling and sorting and assessment becomes an instrument of government, driving the school’s agenda, its priorities, its focus, its strategic direction, its accountability and the ways in which it represents to an external audience its quality and effectiveness. So learning has less and less of an intrinsic value and an increasing instrumental or proxy value. What children learn as measured by tests provides a benchmark for the efficiency of teachers, of school leaders and return on investment for the economy. Before the current state of the economy, in her book *Does Education Matter?* Alison Wolf explores the mythic relationship between school learning and the economy, arguing that the government’s pursuit of the economic agenda has shrunk ‘narrowly’ and ‘abysmally’ the pursuit of learning.

On the day we launched our book *Teachers Under Pressure* (Galton and MacBeath, 2008) in the House of Commons, the invited press did a swift U-turn as, by pure coincidence, the Minister Ed Balls had belatedly chosen that very hour to announce the abolition of Key Stage 3 testing.

**Remodelling the workforce**

Workforce reform or ‘remodelling’ has had a major and significant impact on the staffing structure of schools, with teachers now in many schools outnumbered by a plethora of new roles – Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), Teaching Assistants (TAs), Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HTLAs), Learning Managers, Standards Managers, Bursars and Learning Mentors. As the most recent School Census reveals, there is an almost exponential increase in support staff, the largest increases being in the most poorly paid sectors – TAs, clerical staff other than secretaries, part-time teaching staff and overseas teachers without teaching qualifications.

As Gunter (2007), Stevenson (2007) and others have argued, this new division of labour has served to create a divorce between those who plan and those who execute, between teaching and pastoral care. Behind the grand design of a highly structured business-like delivery system, now more efficient in ensuring outcomes and meeting targets. The price for liberating teachers from routine tasks has been to tie them more closely to expedient measures of performance, linking pay more explicitly to performance, a ‘technical delivery of subject content and the achievement of pre-specified learning outcomes’ (Stevenson, 2007: 236).

The price to be paid for introduction of Professional Planning Allowance (PPA time) has been the extension of the role of unqualified staff who now are used to ‘cover’ lessons. Buying in expensive, but specialist, cover at £180 a day is being replaced by cover managers and cover teams, often comprising Teaching Assistants and HTLAs, many of whom are the first to admit to their lack of requisite expertise, and the inadequacy of three days training.

I am just thrown in to do a lesson and when it’s over I often say to myself ‘God, I’m rubbish’ and feel totally inadequate stepping into someone else’s shoes like that. Three days training didn’t quite do it for me. (HLTA, primary school)
It is concern shared by teachers who, while welcoming the liberation that PPA time brings, see it as a threat to standards, in the broader sense of that term.

PPA time benefits me but it doesn’t benefit the children. When there are specialists like the Italian teacher or the drumming lesson, that’s OK but we leave ‘easy’ work for children to do when TAs are taking the class. (Key Stage 2 teacher)

Another HLTA describes her job as ‘slave labour’ encompassing, among the 24 tasks on her schedule, medication, behaviour review, responding to queries from teachers, dealing with parental complaints, organizing parent evenings, sorting out food, managing resources, fund raising, setting up classrooms, organizing, managing and supervising and assessing TAs as well as class cover. She expresses surprise at the apparent willingness of TAs to continue with their high level of commitment in the face of ‘miserable’ and ‘denigrating’ pay.

**Trying to make inclusion policies work**

Workforce reform is closely allied to the continuing trend to greater inclusion of children with special needs within mainstream classrooms. It has been welcomed in principle by teachers in our study who worried that exclusion of certain children from the main stream of school social and academic life could not only harm SEN children but also render them invisible to their peers, thus depriving those children of facets of a social and political education. However, the realities of inclusive practice often took highly problematic forms.

In the third of our four studies which focused on inclusion, we found scant evidence of young people with special needs coping successfully within mainstream classrooms without some form of withdrawal, individualized or group support. Typically, a TA or LSA would work on a one-to-one basis with a child, so allowing teachers to attend to the rest of the class. When questioned about individual children, teachers often referred us to the LSA, as teachers themselves had very little contact with, or knowledge of, the children in question. They had neither the time to prepare sufficient materials appropriate to that child nor time for consultation with LSAs which would have allowed the latter to prepare materials under teachers’ direction. However, teachers themselves often lacked the requisite expertise to be able to provide that professional advice.

In some schools there were special ‘isolation’ units, places to send children who were disruptive. It was typically special needs young people who ended up in these units, as the expedient response to ‘bad behaviour’ did not necessarily discriminate among causal factors such as routine ‘naughtiness’ or a cry for help. It fell to Teaching Assistants to keep these children engaged, often with games, drawing, colouring in or worksheets, sometimes occupied in the kind of tedious tasks that had sparked their behavioural protest in the first instance.

Those assigned to supporting children with severe learning difficulties were no more likely to have received training than others performing more general duties. TAs were often recruited informally; a parent of a pupil, a school secretary, a member of catering staff, or exceptionally an ex-teacher who didn’t want the responsibility of a class and the planning and marking that went with it.
Heads often spoke in glowing terms of TAs who had a natural instinct for working with young people but TAs themselves were the first to admit that they were carers rather than pedagogues. Nonetheless, it was common to find TAs/LSAs taking responsibility for differentiating the curriculum, voluntarily and in their own time. For example, an LSA in charge of a child would take home the lesson planned for the following day and devise a simplified version of that lesson. While on occasion this was informed by consultation with the class teacher, heavy workloads meant that it was often left to LSAs to manage differentiation of learning on their own. This was commented on in the 2002 Annual Ofsted report.

. . . pupils with SEN depended on teaching assistants to break the tasks down further so that they could participate. In these lessons the focus of the teachers’ planning was on how the pupils with SEN could be kept engaged, rather than on what the pupils needed to learn next. There was not enough stress on how to improve their understanding and skills. This was a common reason why a significant number of pupils with SEN made too little progress, despite good teaching for the majority of the class. (paragraph 72)

‘Inclusion without education’ as one teacher put it, without adequate resourcing and expertise has adverse consequences for all parties – for children, their parents and their teachers. The sense of guilt and failure was often poignantly expressed:

I think, it's a funny thing to say, I think they [SEN children] add guilt to my job. I go home sometimes and feel I haven’t done a good job because I haven’t given them enough time and I think it’s because the progress they make is so slow that you can think that you’re failing. (Reception teacher)

We were doing something in Maths last week and they still hadn’t got it and I felt a failure in myself. I got so emotional and I said to my TA because I was close to tears 'I've got to go out of the classroom'. I felt it was something I was failing in – I couldn’t cope with it any more. (Primary teacher)

For teachers ‘muddling through’ without expert support, having to carry the burden of responsibility for children’s welfare could weigh heavily. The care, imagination and commitment of school staff we found was generally exemplary but even in the leading edge inclusive schools questions remained as to the viability of policy which had not given adequate thought to the impact on teachers’ work and job satisfaction. In summarizing our 2007 study we identified concerns expressed by LSAs, teachers and head teachers as:

- lack of entitlement to learn and develop emotionally and intellectually for children with special needs;
- restriction of entitlement for learning for children who appeared to be coping well and were less demanding;
- lack of acknowledgement of the needs of children without ‘Special Needs’ in that a disproportionate amount of time is given to a few;
- feeling of inadequacy among teachers who recognized their lack of specialist expertise;
- pressure on school staff due to inadequate resourcing by government and local authorities;
• ‘successful’ schools attracting parents of SEN children and reaching a critical mass;
• inadequate and inappropriate professional development;
• heightened tensions between the inclusion and testing agendas;
• increased workload among teachers, LSAs and senior leaders.

Lack of support from parents

A 2005 paper by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) highlighted the issue of ‘very serious parental misbehaviour’, criticizing policies and guidance which ‘totally fails to address’ such issues as intimidation and attacks on the homes of staff. It suggests: ‘If the relationship between home and school has irretrievably broken down there must be a mechanism to deal with these extreme cases.’

Although the nostalgia for the days of supportive parents may be a little misty-eyed, the evidence from our own and other studies makes it very clear that today’s parents are less likely to be compliant, less likely to accept the teacher’s version of events and to support teachers in sanctions for unacceptable behaviour. Parents, more often than in the past, it is said, are more likely to take umbrage, to side with the pupil rather with the teacher and to express themselves aggressively and occasionally with violence.

While many of the anecdotes of assault, alcoholism, drugs, firearms and gang warfare, are the stuff of lurid headlines, it was also a reality for teachers in some areas of cities and outer estates. The negative balance of intake because of a geographical concentration of poverty was compounded by some schools being treated as dumping grounds; schools which already sit low in the local pecking order because of their location and consequently have unfilled places are then forced to take in pupils excluded by other schools keen to maintain their attainment profiles. This is the law of ‘unnatural proportion’ in which social, economic and housing policies ‘ghettoize’ parents and children, concentrating and compounding the effects of poverty and the associated health and welfare issues that go with it. For schools located in these communities, on the edge of the social and educational mainstream, the roots of ‘extreme’ behaviour are complex and multi-layered.

Where teachers were afforded time to listen to parents’ concerns, what became apparent was that parents themselves were struggling with a generation with whom they had lost touch.

Parents do come in upset, angry, expressing a sense of injustice. If you take the time to listen, to be calm and hear them out they eventually confess that they are struggling with discipline. Their children are out of control. Their partners have left. They can’t pay the bills. They are fragile, volatile. (Teacher of English, secondary school)

Many parents, often lone parents, working to support a family of four or five children were perplexed and frustrated by a new and challenging world that their children were growing up in. Blaming parents, the counterpoint to blaming teachers, is simply to provide another scapegoat. As David Berliner has written, children live ‘nested lives’:

Children and young people live nested lives, so that when classrooms do not function as we want them to, we go to work on improving them. Those classrooms are in schools, so when
we decide that those schools are not performing appropriately, we go to work on improving them, as well. But those young people are also situated in families, in neighbourhoods, in peer groups who shape attitudes and aspirations often more powerfully than their parents or teachers. (Berliner, 2006)

Two of the most potent influences on children’s attitudes and achievements are the neighbourhood and peer effect. The neighbourhood effect refers to the immediate culture and norms of the places where children grow up, the other children they meet, play with or fight with, thepeer pressures they experience and the adults who model behaviour. In their study Kincheloe and Hayes (2006) offer evidence that neighbourhood effects transcend family effects both for good and ill. Social capital grows when there are adults who provide resources, opportunities, models of activity and social norms, when there are adults who provide helpful networks and exert social control over deviant behaviour. By the same token, neighbourhood effects may trump even strong family social capital. Wacquant’s term ‘advanced marginality’ (1996) describes a situation in which young people become increasingly marginalized by a cluster of economic and social pressures which impact most powerfully on poor neighbourhoods, polarizing economic growth, casualizing the labour market and the street economy, and reinforcing political alienation.

Wacquant’s findings have wider resonance with studies of schools ‘on the edge’ in which, as a Cambridge evaluation team, we followed a group of eight of the most disadvantaged schools in England. These were bountifully financed by the DfES to raise standards but the initiative was prematurely curtailed after three years because of a lack of evidence of tangible or sustainable effect. One of the ‘octet’ (The Ridings) was closed a year later.

All of these schools, like hundreds of their counterparts across England, were struggling in the face of:

- economic and social disenfranchisement;
- lack of social capital;
- insularity and disillusionment;
- transience and instability;
- erosion of work-based identity;
- racism, violence and intimidation;
- media images, rumour and disinformation;
- lack of family mobility and navigational know-how.

In general, teachers we interviewed were less likely to point the finger at pupils or parents, rather seeing the tensions as due to systemic factors lying outside the school and in national policies. Despite PPA time and government efforts at freeing up the curriculum, the single most inhibiting factor was still lack of time, lack of time to plan adequately, lack of time to tailor work appropriately to individual needs, lack of time to find appropriate support to get beneath learning and behavioural difficulties, lack of time for collaborative work with colleagues, lack of time to deal with students on an individual basis, lack of time to fundamentally rethink the fundamental nature of what school is for.
Is there a happy ending?

It would, however, be very misleading to stop the story there. It would be grossly unfair on so much of the inspired work in schools, classrooms and communities, often unseen and uncelebrated. Unfair too on policy initiatives such as the Children’s University, Playing for Success and Study Support all of which include truly groundbreaking activities but sit uneasily alongside the uncompromising mandates of mainstream policy.

In a Bourneville (Birmingham) primary school, children take part in an away-day conference discussing what a good school and an engaging curriculum should look like. As a follow-up a pupil committee helps to write the school’s new curriculum policy, another tackles behaviour policy and another the school development plan. Their research reveals a widespread dislike of the fragmentation of time which disrupts their learning. So they have opted for more sustained and co-operative endeavours with entire afternoons given over to project-based work.

In Sheffield, the schools’ self-evaluation and transformation story is graphically portrayed through a highly polished DVD newscast, anchored by a secondary boy and girl with interviews and roving reports provided by children from age five years of age upwards. For parents, inspection teams and other audiences the DVD and accompanying workbook tell the story of an improving school more powerfully than a Self-Evaluation Form or a plethora of paper documents while for children the experience of making the newscast gave a huge boost self-efficacy and a newfound body of skills.

In Bradford, children are engaged in a project in collaboration with the Victoria Space Centre in Melbourne, Australia, on a mission to send bees into space to pollinate Mars in 2030. A visit to Russia for children, some of whom had rarely ventured beyond Bradford itself, offered a life-changing experience, including a question and answer session with Russian cosmonauts. Bradford is one of 30 Children’s University sites which offer children opportunities to engage in extended activities beyond the school day in universities, airports, museums, theatres and other sites where learning occurs without teaching. Individually and in collaboration, children explore topics such as robotics, telecommunications, electronics, theatre make-up and cartoon creations.

At Ipswich Football Club a group of primary age children take part in mock press conferences, playing the roles of club manager, agent, newly signed player and press reporters, videoing these and sending them back to team managers for appraisal. At Norwich City FC children sit in the commentary box and practise commentaries on a game projected on to a video screen. Other activities which exploit the venue of the football stadium include:

- Leisure and Tourism, looking at the business side of the club and its marketing;
- Radiowaves, creating online radio programmes;
- Canary Reading Stars, bringing in players to inspire young people to read;
- Kick into Reading, building links with local libraries;
- Kick It Out, anti-racism and citizenship workshops.

Canary history days support the KS2 module ‘Britain since 1948’ using footballing artefacts across the ages as stimulus for deeper social history. Across the country a host of
engaging activities are taking place in football clubs, rugby clubs, cricket clubs, tennis clubs and racecourses, all part of Playing for Success.

Many more stories could be told, of border crossings, beyond the curriculum, beyond the school day, beyond the limits of timid imagination. Many more stories could be told of sustained, self-directed, collaborative and convivial learning, because, in the final analysis, however constraining the policy environment, imaginative leaders (whether heads, teachers, support staff or educators at large) will find a way to swim upstream, against the tidal current. Their optimism and commitment to what matters keeps hope alive and reminds us that, in spite of it all, the impulse to learn and the fulfilment in teaching can never be entirely extinguished.

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Notes

1 Four studies commissioned by the National Union of Teachers were conducted between 2002 and 2007 by a Cambridge team of researchers, exploring the professional lives of teachers in primary, secondary and special schools, and the impact of inclusion policies in mainstream schools.


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