

**School Effectiveness and School Improvement:  
questioning the paradigms**

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## ABSTRACT

## DECLARATION

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## The Papers

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- B Wrigley, T. (2004) School Effectiveness – the problem of reductionism. *British Journal of Educational Research* 30(2), pages 227-244
- C Wrigley, T. (2006) In search of inclusive pedagogies: the role of experience and symbolic representation in cognition. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 2(1), pages 57-71
- D Wrigley, T. (2006) Schools and poverty: questioning the Effectiveness and Improvement paradigms. *Improving Schools* 9(3), pages 273-290

\* References contained in A are not duplicated in this section.

## Abstract

School Effectiveness and School Improvement have achieved a hegemonic position as paradigms of educational evaluation and development, both as research paradigms and as discursive practices shaping policy and practice. This is true internationally but with particular strength in the governance of English schools, thus the texts which constitute this doctoral submission - namely a book and several journal articles, and an extended commentary upon them - are grounded specifically in that context. The concept of *paradigm* is deployed in order to question systematically their (often tacit) methodological and political assumptions and to establish some foundations and justification for alternative models of school quality and educational change. A particular emphasis is placed upon the neglect, within these dominant paradigms, of educational and social aims, curriculum and pedagogy, and their inadequate framing of the relationship between schools and social context. These texts also focus strongly upon the situation of schools serving inner city and other high-poverty neighbourhoods, as a kind of border situation which exposes the limitations of these paradigms.

## **Declaration**

I declare that the thesis submitted here as a commentary on the research papers is my own work.

In addition, all of the research papers are individual work, without co-authors.

None of this work has been submitted for the award of another degree.

Terry Wrigley



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No writer develops knowledge in isolation, and I am grateful for the formative influences, in the more distant past, of Raymond Williams and Douglas Barnes, two great university teachers who in their time were able to reform thinking in their respective fields in ways which continue to inspire me.

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## **School Effectiveness and School Improvement: questioning the paradigms**

### **The Commentary**

#### **Questioning paradigms: writing from a ‘border country’**

In his autobiographical novel *Border Country* (1960), Raymond Williams’ reveals the grounded nature of his writings on literature, culture and society. He portrays the Welsh border village of his childhood, his family, working lives, a world away from Cambridge University where he taught. It explores the significance of class as a fine-textured lived experience. It conveys the ‘structure of feeling’ and the change brought about by time. The need to reflect on the roots of my own published writing and its relationship with other strands of my life connects me again to Williams’ project. The idea of a *border* positionality may help situate the ongoing scrutiny of paradigms in which I have engaged.

School Effectiveness (SE) and the currently hegemonic version of School Improvement (SI) have many critics, operating from a variety of subject positions – different biographical and career paths, values, and locations in academic or other fields. How, in my case have critical reflection on schooling, and my particular challenge to the Effectiveness and Improvement paradigms, come about? What are the biographical and intellectual roots of my own position? What is the relationship between my academic writing and a wider political engagement?

The foundations are partly experiential, and go back to my own schooling. The secondary school I attended underwent a deep transformation, driven by the energy and vision of a new headteacher. I was already a high achiever, but school now meant a rich musical culture, and a spirit of intellectual openness and debate. It was a Catholic grammar school, in the days of selective education, but serving largely the descendants of Irish immigration; those of us still living in the poorer parts of town were able to flourish socially and academically and fulfil our parents’ thwarted ambitions without the sense of marginalisation we might have felt elsewhere. As a young teacher, I was shocked to find that other schools were not like this: I saw the worst of formal grammar schools and decaying secondary moderns, as well as an innovative comprehensive school engaged directly in the major curriculum reforms of the 1970s. I have never been happy with the complacency of those who deny the possibility of change. From the start (see Wrigley 2000:4) I have rejected a kind of sociological determinism which denies the possibility of school success for working-class and migrant learners as much as the blinkered

pragmatism of those who, in effect, step over the ‘background factors’ and expect schools to get on with the job of ‘improvement’.

Cambridge University was a culture shock. I cannot claim to have ‘enjoyed’ student life there, but the intellectual stimulus was enormous, including Raymond Williams’ sustained challenge to the traditional norms of English studies. He was an early role model: for the way in which he combined political and social breadth with a fine-grained analysis of texts, and for the connectedness between his academic specialism and a wider social engagement. The international student revolts of the late 1960s involved not only a political awakening, but a questioning of academic paradigms in many fields (e.g. Blackburn 1972). This has remained part of my intellectual heritage, including an earlier research degree (MPhil) in which I was able to examine the fundamental transformation of the subject English in secondary schools that I experienced as a teacher.

Many years later, I worked as a school inspector (1993-99) - another border position. After working in a local education authority, I found it difficult to re-enter teaching as I had intended, but was very uncomfortable with the Ofsted inspection regime in England. This coincided with the rising influence of School Effectiveness and School Improvement, and their incorporation within the governance and discourse of schooling. I was becoming increasingly aware of the inadequacy of a nexus of regulations and practices intended to secure the ‘effectiveness’ of schools, including league tables, an emphasis on direct teaching, the naming and shaming of ‘failing schools’, an insistence that they could be ‘turned round’ rapidly through expert leadership and tough action, and the pervasive emphasis on monitoring through testing as the prime mechanism of quality control. In the course of over a hundred inspections, I was able to experience first hand, albeit within limits, the strain between a particular model of evaluation and the real life in the school. I came across headteachers who had ticked every box but still not ‘turned the school round’. My awareness grew that factors were at work in school success and improvement which fell outside an increasingly hegemonic SE/SI model, and particularly in the case of schools in poor or inner-city neighbourhoods. The encounters provided the foundations for my first writings on school improvement, which were already, to a degree, critical of the new orthodoxy.

I am also aware that this critique has been developed from outside as much as within. Much of my work has consisted in paying close attention to the internal regularities of the paradigms, but the critique also arises from my wider political beliefs and habits of mind, as a socialist in a

troubled neo-liberal world. This is never far from the surface in my writings. Another contributory factor is my knowledge and reading ability in a number of different languages, giving me access to texts about quality and change outwith the SE/SI paradigms. Finally, I have always read widely: some would call this eclecticism, but it has provided tools for alternative constructions of reality. All of these factors have supported this current paradigm critique.

Finally, it is important to reiterate that I have never denied that some schools are more successful than others, or that schools can and must get better. My disagreement is with the particular understanding of 'quality' known as School Effectiveness, and its associated model of School Improvement. Hence, the focus on *paradigms*. It is my contention that the structures of thinking and core assumptions of SE, and of a dominant SI paradigm which depends closely upon it, whilst strongly institutionalised in some education systems, do not help the education of young people growing up in a troubled world. Close scrutiny of the paradigms might help clarify the thinking of other critical educators, including those who position themselves confidently within the school improvement and others who prefer alternative descriptions such as 'educational change'. At the same time, I am convinced more than ever that much 'improvement' has been little more than an intensification of existing practices and that we need to rethink education, not simply 'improve' it. Without wishing to lose the positive lessons about change processes derived from School Improvement studies, it has been my intention to work towards new understandings of educational change based upon a commitment to social justice and global citizenship. This cannot be separated from a wider struggle against neo-liberal assumptions and policies, involving both political action and theoretical debate.

### **Aims, background and structure**

This paper constitutes a commentary on a book and a number of articles which form part of an ongoing critique of School Effectiveness (SE) and School Improvement (SI), and which collectively, along with this commentary, constitute my doctoral submission. These twin paradigms, methodologically distinct but otherwise in close partnership, have had enormous influence upon education policy internationally, though nowhere more so than in England. The critique is, therefore, more than simply an academic debate, as it necessarily raises questions about the future development of schooling and the curriculum. Moreover, it extends into an attempt to lay foundations for alternative models of educational change.

To call SE and SI ‘twin paradigms’ is appropriate; they have very different methodologies but are alike in other important respects, as the subsequent discussion will show. They did not come naturally from the same womb, however; they are twins more in the sense of ‘town twinning’ rather than as siblings. Until the 1990s there was little connection (see Fullan 1991:5 seq; Fullan 1992:21seq; Reynolds et al. 2000:207-8), and School Improvement’s origins are to be found mainly in attempts to overcome implementation difficulties of externally-imposed curriculum innovations. The twinning process, indeed, was deliberately engineered, and involved the founding of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) in London in 1988, and the journal *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* in 1990.<sup>1</sup>

A key document is Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll (1993) *Linking School Effectiveness Knowledge and School Improvement Practice: Towards a Synergy*. The authors speak explicitly of paradigms and paradigmatic change, but view these primarily as methodological issues, to the neglect of ontological, epistemological and ethical dimensions. They are silent about the political context they are working in, and their marriage proposal begs many of the questions that my own work has had to grapple with.

These key researchers do however explicitly distinguish different paradigms of School Improvement, and it is important to acknowledge that the term Improvement can be applied to diverse models and theories, including national variants, in addition to the SE-influenced SI paradigm which has become dominant. I have focused particularly on the English situation, and often refer to ‘official’ or ‘mainstream’ or ‘hegemonic’ School Improvement; these qualifiers should be assumed even where I speak of School Improvement *tout simple*. I also use the abbreviation SE/SI to refer to the conjuncture of paradigms. It is not my intention to include in this paradigm critique everyone who seeks to make schools better, studies the processes of educational change, or uses the term *improvement* in their writings. Indeed, a large part of my second book (text A) is devoted to making available to an English readership the ideas of key writers who either sit on the critical boundaries of the SE/SI tradition or do not identify explicitly as ‘School Improvement’.

The present commentary sets out to locate my selected texts within this ongoing meta-theoretical challenge to the mainstream School Effectiveness and Improvement literatures, including some brief references to some of my other publications and those of other critics. Within the limited space available, it also seeks to extend some of the theoretical arguments beyond the selected

texts. The process of writing this commentary has provided the welcome opportunity of stepping back to re-read and refine some of the arguments.

The requirements of the degree also involve the immodest task of establishing a significant personal contribution. This is, inevitably, a task of dubious objectivity, but writing the commentary has helped me re-evaluate, with the help of colleagues, the nature of my own contribution within a wide and often international debate.

This commentary therefore has a number of interrelated purposes:

- to demonstrate and further develop a clear theoretical position in relation to mainstream SE and SI and the alternatives
- to reconsider my critical engagement with SE/SI, reflecting on aims, methods and arguments
- to consider the appropriateness of the term *paradigm* as applied to SE and SI
- to examine more closely the methodologies of SE and SI, and some key terms such as *culture* in comparison with wider usages
- to further relate SE and SI to policy formations, partly with the benefit of hindsight, given subsequent developments
- to extend the argument relating SE and SI to wider debates about neo-liberalism and globalisation
- to relate these selected texts to my other writings, and compare my own work with that of other critical academics, including demonstrating a significant personal contribution
- to focus on two issues in particular, schooling in contexts of serious socio-economic deprivation, and democratic citizenship as a key aim of education, in which the adequacy of the SE/SI paradigms appears particularly problematic
- to summarise my attempts within these texts to articulate some alternative theoretical foundations for rethinking professional practice and educational change.

The space available inevitably places limits on the above, requiring a selective focus. It is certainly not possible to pursue any of the above list with the rigour each demands. It would be possible, for example, to write several full-length books simply to identify and evaluate the network of thinkers active within mainstream SE/SI in the UK alone. It would not be too

difficult to write a monograph focusing solely on the lost potential in the limited application of *culture* as a key term in the School Improvement literature. My work is not intended to serve as a history of these paradigms, nor of their attempted merger in the English context during the 1990s. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this commentary will give a sense of coherence to the texts selected for presentation for the degree, and help to demonstrate their value as a contribution to an important practical and theoretical debate within education.

Effectiveness and Improvement are deeply ideological terms, firstly in the sense that they sound self-evidently a 'good thing' - rather like looking after your health or being kind to animals. Part of their persuasive power derives from this appropriation; it would appear either destructive or silly to argue that schools should be *ineffective* or should get *worse*. More precisely, the academic research under these headings has made contributions which are of lasting value and cannot simply be written off. Yet, for all this, SE and SI are not neutral technologies of measurement or change management; they have come to signify a particular nexus of practices, concepts and (often tacit) beliefs and values, which are deeply imbricated with educational and social policy at a critical time of political and cultural change. They significantly affect the daily practices of school management and classroom teaching, and have helped to establish a discourse of schooling and education which is often taken for granted and seemingly invisible. Given the all-pervasiveness of this way of thinking, this discourse, the way it has become embodied in everyday thinking and action, it is tempting to imagine Foucault returning from the dead to write one last book. He would, however, be forced to recognise that power can be simultaneously highly centralised and dispersed, and that coercion and hegemony can coexist and complement each other.

This is especially so in the case of England, on which this study concentrates. Here, under New Labour, School Improvement theory flourished once grafted onto School Effectiveness.<sup>2</sup> In part, the merger was necessary because School Effectiveness, under the Conservative government, had in effect made schools 'accountable' without explaining how change might be brought about. The incoming Labour Government could not espouse a simple market-based argument that weaker schools should be allowed to collapse and be replaced. School Improvement offered more than top-down demands for the application of a list of 'key characteristics'. One way of summarising the adoption of School Improvement in mid 1990s England is that *soft management was placed at the service of hard policy*. This adoption involved the transformation of SI into the paradigm discussed in my writings.



The incoming government's Third Way ideology required the sense that something practical and apparently sensitive was being done to overcome poverty-related underachievement but without challenging the premises of neo-liberal economic relations or the modes of school governance established by the previous government - a quasi-market of school choice leading to gradual erosion of a comprehensive system, combined with a highly centralised curriculum and strong mechanisms of quality control. Here School Improvement helped to create a dominant discourse and discursive practice; it was thoroughly imbricated into these modes of governance – and was itself substantially reoriented during the process. The slogan 'pressure and support', for example, served to hide the contradiction between School Improvement's emphasis on willing participation in the change process and the continuing top-down control of schools.

It is however an essential part of my argument that there are alternatives. Firstly, despite the extent of policy borrowing - and even compulsory lending through the World Bank and other agencies – SE and SI are not as universally adopted and embedded as their promoters like to believe. My contacts with colleagues in many different countries, and an ability to read the literature of educational change in various languages other than English, have shown enormous diversity as policies and ways of thinking are applied to different traditions, refracted and resisted. We should not underestimate its spread to other parts of the world, but neither should we exaggerate it or fail to recognise the hybridisation that occurs in the processes of globalised policy transfer (Ball 1998a; Dale 1999; Ozga and Lingard 2007). Closer to home, alongside the tacit assumptions and normative practices which pervade the English system, alternative practices do emerge, partly as overt resistance to official policies and partly as contradictory strands of official policy.

The situation here in Scotland itself deserves specific analysis and evaluation: it is a situation of intense contradiction and instability - on the one hand, for example, versions of literacy teaching imposed by some local authorities which make England's *National Literacy Strategy* seem enlightened, and on the other the progressive ambitions of *A Curriculum for Excellence*, albeit still largely rhetorical. Although Scotland has few academics who would locate themselves within SE or SI, there are nevertheless extensive signs of impact on education authorities and schools.

One reading of the present situation is that SE / SI is in deep crisis, even in the English system. Its leading proponents are deeply compromised within a policy regime which, in effect, ignores some of the more democratic or balanced conclusions of the Improvement literature - for

example, that there are no 'quick fixes', and that sustainable change depends on shared understanding and deep conviction. As I argue later in this commentary and in D, this way of thinking is too limited to help raise achievement and improve the quality of education in the poorest or more troubled neighbourhoods. A focus on improving specific measurable outcomes has, arguably, led to superficial learning for the test and to slippage in other equally important areas, for example foreign languages, or the high proportion of 17 and 18-year-olds in the UK without even part-time education or training. The neglect of wider aspects of education and young people's welfare was highlighted in a Unicef (2007) report. Meanwhile, the wider world presents increasingly critical issues (global warming, poverty, war in the Middle East) which cry out for a very different kind of educational change.

It is for this reason that I have attempted, in these texts and elsewhere, to devote as much attention to curricular issues and pedagogical practices as to developing a critique of hegemonic models of change management. This has involved recovering practices from the past and from schools in other education systems, revisiting some earlier debates and critically resituating them in their relationship to educational change, and beginning to frame an agenda for future research and school development.

The text which follows begins with an examination of the concept *paradigm* in various fields (pages 9-24), before applying it to School Effectiveness and to School Improvement (pages 24-28). This involves a distinction between the two but also an understanding of their interdependence (pages 28-35). The discussion focuses on their neglect of *power* as a concept and the inadequate conceptualisation within the Improvement literature of the term *culture* (from page 31). As I will argue, examining SE and SI as *paradigms* facilitates a process of opening up to critique ways of studying education which have become hegemonic in policy and practice, particularly in England, to the extent that they are widely regarded as self-evidently correct. To identify them as *paradigms* is precisely to de-normalise these 'normal sciences', to destabilise them and to create out of their silences a critical intellectual space from which new paradigms can emerge.

The subsequent section (pages 36-39) reviews alternative conceptualisations of educational change, highlighting the closure of the SE and SI mainstream to these alternatives. This section ends by highlighting how SE / SI's much repeated challenge to 'raise expectations' requires a well theorised rethinking of common sense notions of intelligence and ability. The subsequent section of this commentary (pages 40-47) highlights the exploration of pedagogy and curriculum

in my chosen texts – surprisingly given only marginal attention in the mainstream Improvement literature – including (from page 43) a discussion of education for democratic citizenship. The commentary then focuses (pages 48-57) on SE/SI’s neglect, or inability to respond to, issues of social justice, attempting, albeit briefly, to situate these twin paradigms within the political context of neo-liberal globalisation. Finally, it summarises some of the possibilities and resources for a reconceptualisation of educational change beyond SE / SI.

For the purposes of this degree, I have chosen to present:

- my second book *Schools of hope: a new agenda for school improvement* [Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 2003; referenced here as A, chapters as A1, A2, etc.]

and three papers, the first of which is substituted for A1:

- *School Effectiveness – the problem of reductionism* [British Journal of Educational Research, 2004, 30(2); referenced as B.]
- *In search of inclusive pedagogies: the role of experience and symbolic representation in cognition* [International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning, 2006, 2(1); referenced as C]
- *Schools and poverty: questioning the Effectiveness and Improvement paradigms* [Improving Schools, 2006, 9(3); referenced as D]

Sources provided in A are not repeated in the reference list at the end of this commentary.

### **Paradigms: towards a definition**

Though I had used the term *paradigm* on various occasions on the assumption of a shared understanding, I began to define it more precisely in D. This section of the Commentary thus provides an opportunity to expand that discussion of paradigms and paradigm change in a variety of fields, and to evaluate its potential relevance to an account of School Effectiveness and Improvement. I have preferred the term *paradigm* to related terms such as *discourse* or *genre* for its span across ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical dimensions. (See Appendix for further discussion.)

The concept of *paradigm* has transformed our thinking about competing or successive schools of thought and modes of action in numerous academic fields. Little used before 1960, the term was

popularised as a result of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Almost simultaneously however we find parallel examples in various fields of a deep and holistic questioning of established ways of thinking (e.g. Laing 1960, Foucault 1961/1967, Williams 1958). On a broader scale, of course, we might also see positivism, liberalism, marxism and postmodernism as meta-paradigms shaping much of 20th Century thinking.

Despite Kuhn's initial suggestion (1962:15) that paradigms may not exist in the social sciences, social science researchers were soon referring to the *paradigm wars*, and currently there are over a hundred UK-published social and political science books with *paradigm* in the title.

Particularly at the height of postmodernism, the concept of 'paradigm' was often deployed to relativise truth-claims, such that arguments could only be established within a specific frame of reference and by appeal to a specific interpretive community. This eventually attracted criticism:

Thus talk of 'paradigms' can readily stand in for Wittgensteinian talk of 'language games', cultural 'forms of life', etc.; for Rorty's idea of 'final vocabularies' as the furthest we can get in justifying scientific or other sorts of truth claim; and again, for the all-purpose notion of a 'discourse' as it figures in those various archaeologies (or genealogies) of knowledge pursued under the joint aegis of Nietzsche and Foucault. In each case the analogy with Kuhn enters by way of claiming scientific / philosophical warrant for the view that all facts, theories, observation sentences, etc., relate to some language, discourse or cultural paradigm whose criteria determine what shall count as a valid statement at any given time, and whose limits remain necessarily invisible to those who think within them. (Norris 1997:82)

But thinking about paradigms can also be liberating, in that it historicises and denaturalises hegemonic ideologies. As I argue in D (273), the concept of paradigms:

... gives us a tool to grasp the inner logic of a dominant way of thinking and acting; of seeing links between knowledge and power; and opening up a space of possibility within an apparently closed system.

Such ideas enable us to relativise (in a different sense than Norris's) the ideas and structures of our own age. Turning Bourdieu's claim on its head, they allow the fish to see the water and not just swim in it (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 127).

This is particularly relevant where a set of ideas and practices pervades an entire field of activity, such as the governance of schooling in England. If Foucault were alive today, there could be no better topic for his attention than School Effectiveness and School Improvement, not simply as academic sub-disciplines, but as regulatory practices at every level of action in educational policy and practice. As Foucault repeatedly asserted of discourses, they are not simply descriptive but help to constitute that of which they speak (e.g. Foucault 1972).

The application of the concept *paradigm* to School Effectiveness and School Improvement, in Kuhn's terms, seems particularly important at the present time as a means of penetrating and subverting the *normality* of these discourses and practices, their 'taken-for-grantedness'. Kuhn's contribution included demonstrating that social processes are at work even in the epistemologically 'innocent' field of the natural sciences. I have sought to argue that orthodox SE and SI experts, whilst using a neutral technical discourse of effectiveness and improvement and even believing themselves to be working scientifically, can be as blinkered as Kuhn's 'normal science' researchers. However, since education is a field of social science and social practice, there are also enormous ethical and political issues involved in the closures and silences of SE and SI.

This is not an attack on key academics working within this tradition. Indeed, I sought as far as possible in A to avoid focusing on individuals. Examining a paradigm means focusing on a structure of thinking which has a normative power beyond the intentions of individual contributors, and which can make it difficult to develop a coherent argument along alternative lines. Many of the leading English writers in SE-related School Improvement have, in fact, either moved away from this field, or sought to resolve their unease by dividing themselves between School Improvement and a field in which they feel more able to express their unease about the education system (e.g. Kathryn Riley's work with Rustique-Forrester on school exclusions, 2002). This has not reduced the power of the SE/SI paradigms; rather, they are so strongly institutionalised that we might view administrators, headteachers, School Development Officers, School Improvement Partners, inspectors, NPQH trainers and so on as the equivalent of Kuhn's 'normal scientists' beavering away on their laboratory research. The paradigm would exist even if all its originators had disappeared or changed their minds. A recent illustration is the imposition on schools of 'School Improvement Partners' who are supposed simultaneously to respect the autonomy and individuality of the school *and* to report them to the education authority if they do not do as they are told (DfES 2006a; see MacBeath 2006 for more detailed commentary on these tensions). This accords with my focus in A3 on the unacknowledged contradiction between seemingly collegial school-level processes and the political surveillance of schools.

One should also not forget the centrifugal force of agency against the centripetal force of paradigmatic structure, which might in time lead to a new paradigm. (See for example A:42-3.) The outcome is, needless to say, uncertain, as indeed is the question of whether this will be

known as School Improvement or by some other name. Those who might bring it about include some who identify as part of a School Improvement club and others who do not. My own position is itself ambivalent - sitting on the border fence, perhaps. As editor of a journal entitled *Improving Schools*, I am publicly identified with School Improvement but have used this role to move debate beyond the dominant paradigm. Some key figures within ICSEI have made strenuous efforts to welcome critical thinkers from outwith the SE/SI paradigm into its annual meetings, though some of ICSEI's founders clearly regard this with dismay. The difficulty of categorising is well illustrated by the case of Andy Hargreaves, a welcome contributor to ICSEI but who describes his field as 'educational change'. Some of his work fits within the SE/SI paradigms, as does most of Lorna Earl's, but their collaboration with Jim Ryan produced *Schooling for change: reinventing education for early adolescents* (Hargreaves et al. 1996), which in its breadth and critical stance lies well outside that tradition. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) entitle their book *Profound Improvement*; its focus is solidly on the *process* of change, with relatively little space devoted to curricular or social issues, but it presents a more subtle and developed model of capacity building which pushes the boundaries of SI, as well as supporting progressive pedagogical and social positions. This highlights the error of viewing SI as a single and uniform entity, but does not diminish the importance of understanding the paradigmatic pull of SE-related School Improvement.

My own writing represents a modest effort to challenge the truth-claims and spurious universality of these twin paradigms, in terms of their inner logic or epistemology and their practical effects. They also demonstrate some ways of opening up alternative and more hopeful perceptions of educational change. Many of the lessons about change processes deriving from School Improvement remain valid, but have been distorted by their relationship to damaging educational policies; my hope has been to work towards new understandings of educational change based upon a commitment to global citizenship and social justice.

### **Paradigms in natural sciences**

Kuhn's (1962) introduction of the term *paradigm* to refer to a distinctive way of viewing and studying phenomena was groundbreaking. By extending its meaning from 'exemplary achievement' to 'all the shared commitments of a scientific group', he enables us to focus on the (often tacit) frames of reference which unite an academic community.



In various attempts to define paradigm, he includes 'instrumental, theoretical, and metaphysical commitments' and various 'objects of group commitment' such as 'symbolic generalizations, models and exemplars' (1970:297). His use of the term stretches wide but is quite slippery.

Paradigms in the sense of exemplary solutions are more effective than abstract rules, but this does not exclude theoretical elements. He argues that exemplary achievements or classic texts include a wide range of theoretical and methodological elements and functions:

- entities, forces and laws - key concepts, relationships and causes
- models – whether seen as heuristic or ontological
- legitimate problems and acceptable solutions
- methods and instruments.

In addition, Kuhn uses *paradigm* to refer to a period of relatively stable consensus in a field; he distinguishes *paradigms* from *preparadigmatic* periods. Later however he concedes that even in less stable times when no school of thought has dominance, each competing school necessarily has its own paradigm(s).

Kuhn presents a historical dynamic which breaks with accepted norms of science as gradual progress. Using the term *revolutions*, he shows the new as a serious break with the old, involving not only different practices but a fundamentally different world-view, though it is the contradictions in the old world which give rise to the new. The outgoing world-view cannot, ultimately, survive contrary evidence, but the breakthrough is resisted as a result of the outgoing paradigm - people explain away problems as *anomalies*. A growing number, however, can see that established structures are inadequate, and that there can be no progress on specifics without a broader sweeping aside of the old world order. Kuhn argues that social / subjective as well as epistemological factors are at play in both revolutionary periods and 'normal' periods of scientific development.

As in political revolutions, Kuhn argues the fundamental incompatibility of different scientific paradigms:

When paradigms enter, as they must, into a debate about paradigm choice, their role is necessarily circular. Each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defence. (1970: 94)

It is this fundamental *incommensurability* (Kuhn's word) which has generated intense epistemological debate, and the term makes it easy to question the rationality of the process. This results from the deployment of Kuhn's work by some postmodernists in support of their own relativism, but some of the confusion must be ascribed to Kuhn's Humean empiricism. (Norris (1997:82-96) calls this 'ontological relativism'.) An alternative account would involve a *realist* epistemology/ontology (Bhaskar 1975): epistemological 'truths' may change, as the best currently accepted approximation to ontological reality, without endangering the constancy of the material world.

Despite some confusing expressions ('the scientist afterwards works in a different *world*' 1970:121), Kuhn crucially shows how scientists' new world-view enables them to 'see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before' (ibid:111).

For a balanced evaluation, we need to understand that, alongside Kuhn's emphasis on social and subjective elements of decision making, terms such as 'persuasion' and 'conversion', and the demonstration that new theories may be presented or even adopted *in advance of* sufficient verification, he does not in finality abandon a fundamental commitment to scientific (experimental / observational / rational) procedures (ibid:42).

Within this basic commitment to evidence-based rationality, Kuhn's essential contribution lies in understanding that science is not a process of pure autonomous reasoning; scientists inevitably work within the framework of a shared world-view or paradigm. In 'normal' periods, the scientist works within a (perceived) world organised according to paradigmatic entities, laws, perspectives, parameters and expectations. Even in times of change, scientists first see counter-evidence as an *anomaly*, an accidental exception within an existing paradigm. Most shocking of all to some, at the point when scientists become persuaded of a different paradigm, Kuhn argues that this is not always on the basis of adequate evidential proof: the dots are only gradually joined up in the 'normal science' period which follows.

Against Norris (1997), I would argue that regarding observations as seriously affected by preconceptions and as 'theory-laden' does not necessarily lead to anti-Realism. Norris is right to argue that Kuhn opens a gate for postmodernist relativism, but paradigm-denial is not the best answer. Norris's single-minded campaign against postmodernist relativism (1992, 1996, 1997) leads him to neglect the more important radical features of Kuhn's *paradigm* concept, namely



the acknowledgement of the influence of human, social and political factors in knowledge production even of a scientific kind.

Despite the above problems, Kuhn's essential contribution lies in demonstrating how, even in science, a change of paradigm can bring about a radically different perspective or framework through which we seek to understand the world. This reaches beyond laws and relationships into the very entities we regard as the building-blocks; it establishes parameters for what can be observed, studied and spoken about, the questions which can be asked and the nature of possible solutions. He shows how the intense productivity of periods of 'normal science' within an established paradigm may be at the cost of a narrowing of vision and loss of critical faculties.

### **Paradigms in social sciences**

It is difficult to sustain Kuhn's proposal that paradigmatic change may not be relevant to the social sciences. The contest between positivism (Comte 1830, 1844, 1851; Mill 1843 and interpretivism / hermeneutics (Droysen 1868; Dilthey 1883, 1900; Simmel 1892, 1918) dates back to the origins of the social sciences. This latter group insist on a mode of understanding (Verstehen) which goes beyond scientific explanation (Erklären) in that it requires empathy (Einfühlung) and a sense of intentionality in human action. Kuhn's argument that social sciences are 'pre-paradigmatic' appears correct only in the limited sense that there is no clear historical *succession* of different schools of thought; there clearly are distinct paradigms but they often exist simultaneously. Differences remain unresolved and may not be capable of resolution. Paradigmatic pluralism in the social sciences may be endemic because it reflects not only methodological disparity but fundamental disagreements about social perspectives, ethical frameworks and political values.<sup>3</sup>

From the 1980s, it became commonplace to refer to 'paradigm wars' in the social sciences, albeit sometimes understood simplistically as an opposition between quantitative and qualitative *methods*. A paradigm is always more than just a methodology. Initially Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that an historic shift was occurring between positivist and 'post-positivist' paradigms, though acknowledging (page 46, note) some confusion as the latter term was also adopted by neopositivists.

Subsequently, reporting a conference which brought together key social science researchers, Guba clarifies the argument by speaking of three distinct paradigmatic challenges to positivism:

postpositivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Guba 1990). These are contrasted in terms of ontology and epistemology as well as methodology. This raises issues for SE / SI as paradigms – though Education as a field involving policy and practice has additional complexities.

### *Methodology*

Paradigms involve more than simply methodology: we need to relate methods to epistemology and to questions of scope and legitimacy in a paradigm.

Methodology and epistemology are linked. Ways of knowing are guided by assumptions concerning what we are about when we inquire and by assumptions concerning the nature of the phenomenon into which we inquire. ... To study a methodology is to explore a logic of justification or a meta-framework for understanding the exercise of method, that is, for examining the principles and procedures by which we formulate inquiry problems, develop answers to those problems, and evaluate the correctness and profundity of those answers. (Schwandt 1990:262)

At the same time, we cannot regard methods as unimportant:

It does not follow that distinctions like quantitative-qualitative or scientific-constructivist-critical science are meaningless. Each of these is a different practice shaped by different aims, standards, values, and social and political realities, and... situated within a complex web of background knowledge. In other words, these paths to inquiry are rooted not simply in matters of epistemology but in relations of power, influence, and control in communities of inquirers (Eisner 1988)... To view inquiry as a kind of technical project characterized only by types of logics or methods in use is to empty inquiry of its significance as a kind of practically and historically situated undertaking. (ibid:276)

It is worth reflecting, in the educational context, that SI and SE are methodologically distinct but ideologically and contextually related.

### *Moral, ethical and political judgements in social science*

Various contributors criticise the positivist insistence on excluding ethical considerations from the social sciences, and argue for their legitimacy, indeed necessity. Schwandt questions the way that positivists and neopositivists shelter behind their 'scientific' methodologies:

A salient feature ... is their insistence on separating normative and empirical theory... Scientific methodologies deal with social facts; the stuff of normative theory – social and political goals, aims, morals, and values – is not their concern. (ibid:264)

Indeed Popkewitz (1990: 58) argues that the insistence on neutrality and 'disinterest' in the social sciences in the USA has been a political construct and strategy, arising from historic pressures exerted by businessmen on universities. A previous, more engaged, grounding of

social scientific thought in either Christian or socialist ethics was displaced by ostensibly value-neutral versions of social sciences as normative academic disciplines.

This norm of value-neutral ‘objectivity’ has, of course, been contested from many directions, including varieties of postmodernism and Marxism, as well as humanistic and religious approaches. Nor is this a new debate (see Flyvbjerg 2001, drawing on Aristotle’s *phronesis*).

It is worth noting here that the proponents of School Effectiveness locate themselves as ‘positivists’ or ‘post-positivists’, arguing that their scientific method ensures objectivity and impartiality (see B:238-241). School Improvement is more ambiguous (see for example Hopkins 2001: 19-25), though its marginalisation of socio-political debate suggests that change processes can be ideologically and ethically neutral. By this I mean the assumption that SI provides a generic technology of change management which can be applied, promiscuously, in any school environment – whereas in reality there is a deep imbrication of SI and neo-liberal educational reform. At a methodological level, the ‘normality’ of a particular view of educational change has been reinforced by SI’s reluctance to engage with wider pedagogical or sociological theory, at the same time as deriving much of its data from consultancy relationships, which in their turn depend upon a particular type of demand on a school to ‘improve’ (explored in A2 and A3). This has created a circularity and closure of which the mainstream proponents of SI seem unaware.

#### *The possibility of a realist ontology*

Guba (1990) argues that both postpositivism and critical theory share a ‘realist’ position, as opposed to the ‘relativism’ of the ‘constructivists’. In his argument however, confusion then arises due to the entanglement between ontology and epistemology. Guba (for the Constructivist camp) argues that the theory-ladenness and value-ladenness of facts, the underdetermination of theory, and the interactive nature of the inquirer/inquired-into dyad leads necessarily to a position of ontological relativism. As we can see in Bhaskar’s (1979) work on the social sciences, all these problems can be accounted for coherently within a sophisticated realist ontology (see Collier 1994:137-204).

To clarify, there is a distinction to be made between our sensations and understandings of the world and whatever reality lies behind that (between epistemology and ontology). Secondly, in the social sciences, whilst recognising other people’s perceptions of the world as subjective or culture-bound, the researcher must attempt to step back from them, establishing some critical distance. (See Bourdieu’s jibe: the ‘antiscientific caveats of the advocates of mystic union’;

Bourdieu et al. 1999:607.) Thirdly, despite the values factor, factual investigation and theory have a key role in challenging hegemonic values (Collier 1994:170-200). Thus, my critique of School Improvement is not merely ‘another point of view’ based solely on different values and beliefs; I argue in (D) that the orthodox SI paradigm is ontologically unsound, epistemologically inadequate and practically unhelpful in its engagement with schools in the most difficult circumstances. The problem is not resolved simply by adding a moral gloss to the dominant paradigm.

Eisner, merging a postmodernist subjectivism with a classical *empiricism*, inadvertently illustrates the consequence of a failure to make such distinctions between subjectivities and reality:

‘Truth’ is ultimately a kind of mirage that in principle cannot be achieved because the worlds we know are those crafted by us and because we cannot uncouple mind and matter to know the world as it ‘really’ is. (Eisner 1990: 87-88)

This statement is a classic candidate for deconstruction: in what sense have we ‘crafted’ the world? did anything of the world exist before our engagement with it? who is the *we* who know and craft the world? do *we* all believe in the same ‘truth’ or can some of us challenge the version of reality that *others of us* hold? might there also be a *they* who wish to impose their particular views of the world on *us*, and have the power and means to do so?

*Can the truth claims of different paradigms be compared?*

Phillips (1990) argues against Kuhn that mutual comprehension is possible between paradigms. He acknowledges firstly that there is no *pure* observation:

Hanson’s theories may be stated in one sentence: ‘The theory, hypothesis, or background knowledge held by an observer can influence in a major way what is observed.’ Or, as he put it in a nice aphorism, ‘There is more to seeing than meets the eyeball’ (Hanson 1958, p7). In other words, observation is theory laden – it is not a theory-neutral foundation. (Phillips 1990:34)

However, he then asks us to imagine two astronomers with different cosmologies: would they see the same thing at dawn? Following Hanson, he argues that they would both see the sun increasing its relative distance above the Earth’s eastern horizon – though they would explain it differently.

People with different frameworks nevertheless can have some views – or can hold some data – in common, and these things can serve as the basis for further discussion and clarification of their respective positions. (Phillips 1990:35)

Phillips extends this to the social sciences:

Freudians do understand – but, of course, disagree with – Skinnerians, and neo-Marxist social scientists understand colleagues of more conservative bent, and vice versa. The point is that paradigms ... serve as lenses, not as blinders. (ibid:41)

It is from a Critical Theory position that Popkewitz questions the constructivists' methodology / epistemology based on getting as close as possible to their field:

Much current research accepts the logic and reasoning found in schooling, arguing that researchers and policymakers need to respect teachers' talk. Yet, the style of argument in teaching cannot be taken for granted. It presupposes the particular cultural competence found in schooling, with its interpretive stances and cognitive frames. (Popkewitz 1990:64)

Critical realism requires that we see social phenomena and beliefs as rooted within historical processes, but with the possibility of false consciousness and ideology. On the one hand, we are studying a reality 'out there', but if a particular mode of understanding becomes dominant, our paradigms themselves will change the reality and not simply the way we view it.

These arguments become particularly relevant when we are dealing not simply with an academic paradigm *per se*, but with a set of hegemonic practices which is both underpinned by the academic paradigm and reinforced, within an economic / social formation, by political directives. Challenging the academic paradigm becomes, almost inevitably, a part of a wider political challenge, as is evident from *Schools of Hope* (A) and elsewhere. It is, I believe, possible to engage critically with orthodox SI, but the process depends on including an ethical and political perspective, rather than simply arguing methodologies.

#### *Paradigms in everyday life*

Several contributors shed light on the impact of research paradigms on real-life activity, including educational examples. Eisner argues that positivistic evaluation affects teaching and learning:

Policy is a set of ideas reflecting certain values and beliefs that are created to guide decision making. The policies... constrain and stimulate practice... Policy that publishes in local newspapers the achievement test scores of students on standardized tests on a school-by-grade basis reveals a set of values about what really counts in that school district and inevitably influences what teachers are likely to attend to in their classrooms. (Eisner 1990:95-6)

He relates this to evaluation which overemphasizes quantitative methods:

What we count counts. What we measure matters. What we test, we teach. After all, adaptation is a primary form of survival, and our appetite for assessment requires forms of adaptation in teaching that make survival possible. (ibid:94)

He regard the dominant paradigm in school administration as tacitly based upon a linear rationality (ibid:96).

Interestingly, LeCompte criticises psychology's paradigmatic hold on educational studies:

The focus of psychology is the isolated individual, decontextualized, and laboratory bound. It provides neither a complete nor an ideal model for studying social, cultural, and historical men and women. (LeCompte 1990:249)

These various examples illustrate how a paradigm, as a mode or school of research, can substantially affect the daily practices of teachers and school administrators. What is at stake here is not only particular methodologies, but the basic entities which are deployed and privileged, the relationships between actions, the sense of what is legitimate and worthwhile, the appropriateness of specific ways of investigating and evaluating practice.

All these endemic problems of the social sciences can be found in education, but more. Indeed, in education, once the paradigm has become established, it is sustained by the routine activities of headteachers, inspectors, administrators, and so on, insofar as they fail to reflect critically on their situation and actions. Education draws upon social scientific theory and practice, but does not fit neatly. It is both a field of practice and a field of research, with inevitable tensions between normative practices and analytical research. Educational researchers are concerned with

- a) a set of everyday practice in schools (disciplinary as well as pedagogical), involving agency but within systems, institutions and traditions
- b) which is underpinned, governed and redirected by policy and regulation
- c) and investigated by methods deriving from the social sciences.

This is already too simple, but may serve to emphasise the possibilities for circularity when a particular paradigm (c), concerned with the whole (rather than a part, such as a subject or age-related methodology, or the needs of a particular category of pupil), achieves hegemonic status as a result of policy and politics (b), in such a way as to radically affect daily classroom practices (a). It then becomes essential to transcend the paradigm theoretically, as a step towards liberation at the levels of policy and practice.

In the light of the above discussion of paradigms in the social sciences, we will need to consider with regard to SE and SI:

- their characteristics in epistemological and ontological terms, not simply methodological
- explicit and tacit assumptions that they are objective or value-neutral, including exposing their hidden values
- a requirement (at the same time) that we challenge them in terms of truth claims, and not only as a result of ethical disagreements
- the possibility (albeit limited) of engaging in debate with their proponents, rather than simply assuming ‘incommensurability’
- the necessity of challenging their assumed normativity as part of a practical challenge to the dominance of a set of discursive practices.

Before doing that, however, the concept of paradigms will be examined further by looking at two other cases.

### **Paradigm changes in other fields: literature and psychiatry**

Finally, this section uses examples in the fields of English literature and psychiatry to highlight further features of the paradigm concept. Both are contemporaneous with Kuhn’s *Structure*.

Though neither Raymond Williams nor Terry Eagleton used the term ‘paradigm’, their project turned out to be equally radical. Williams, in *Culture and Society* (1958), reinserts canonical literary figures within a socio-political history, and within a wider set of social critics such as Burke, Cobbett and Carlyle, rather than reducing the latter to mere ‘background’ to the literature, thus fundamentally changing the parameters and perspectives of the field.

For example, Williams rejects the notion that

... the Poet, the Artist, is by nature indifferent to the crude worldliness and materialism of politics and social affairs; he is devoted, rather to the more substantial spheres of natural beauty and personal feeling. (1958:48)

He reminds us of the direct political involvement of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Southey and Byron.

These activities were neither marginal nor incidental, but were essentially related to a large part of the experience from which the poetry itself was made. (ibid: 48-9)



Williams' reframing of Literature addresses the ontology of 'English': it affects the key entities (writers and texts) and the force-field connecting these with social affairs. As will be clear later, there are parallels with SE/SI's downplaying of social and political context.

Eagleton extends the paradigmatic shift by probing entities and relationships: what has counted as Literature at different times, the relationship between 'Literature' and readers, the 'uses' to which it is put, and so on. He questions fundamental categories, relationships, parameters, understandings of the field of study, ideological assumptions and so on:

In eighteenth-century England, the concept of literature... meant the whole body of valued writing in society: philosophy, history, essays and letters as well as poems. (Eagleton 1983:17)

He questions the dominant belief that Literature is 'non-pragmatic'; firstly historicising it (as above), but then showing the ideological impact of this definition:

[It] would probably have come as a surprise to George Orwell to hear that his essays were to be read as though the topics he discussed were less important than the way he discussed them. (ibid: 8)

Like Williams, Eagleton zooms out again to make broader cultural statements:

Liberal humanism is a suburban moral ideology, limited in practice to largely interpersonal matters. It is stronger on adultery than on armaments, and its valuable concern with freedom, democracy and individual rights are simply not concrete enough. (Eagleton 1983: 207-8)

Both writers succeed in demonstrating that the tacit assumptions of a field of study (its assumed entities, boundaries etc.) are deeply ideological, and that absences and silences in a text can reveal as much about a paradigm as what is actually voiced. Their challenge, though involving methodological shifts, goes well beyond this: they raise ontological, epistemological, political and ethical questions about the entity of Literature, the parameters of the field, the relationship between texts and readers, the purpose of study, the perspectives from which writers view their world against the perspectives of readers and critics, and so on. This soon gave birth, in conjunction with Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall and others, to the new field of Cultural Studies.

R.D.Laing's attempt to reform psychiatry has an even more obvious relevance to SE/SI, as it involved a set of institutional practices as well as an academic discipline. Though his challenge was marginalised and soon eclipsed - see Ingleby (2005) for a retrospective evaluation of the reasons - it clearly illustrates the interconnection between ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical dimensions. Slightly anticipating Foucault, Laing is clearly also



speaking about power/knowledge or a 'regime of truth'. Starting from an instinctive revulsion at the treatment of patients in mental institutions, Laing clearly understood the mutual necessity of transforming practice and developing a new theoretical paradigm: identifying key problems with the medical model, he proposed social phenomenology as an epistemology which could provide a more adequate understanding of 'schizophrenia'.

Drawing on Goffman's (1961) study of total institutions, Laing questioned the basic entities of psychiatry, including the role of *patient* and the categorisation of their problems as *mental illness*. This redefinition of entities shifts the basic perspectives:

A large part of his study [i.e. Goffman's *Asylums, 1961*] is devoted to a detailed documentation of how it comes about that a person, in being put in the role of patient, tends to become defined as a non-agent, as a non-responsible object, to be treated accordingly, and even comes to regard himself in this light. (Laing 1967: 92)

The traditional clinical stance pathologises the patient through decontextualising his/her actions, whilst normalising the behaviour of the psychiatrist. By contrast, Laing's project (e.g. 1960) entails deriving meaning from the words and actions of the 'patient', but also studying social situations rather than just individuals. He thus reveals a 'wider network of extremely disturbed and disturbing patterns of communication' (1967:94):

If their patients were disturbed, their families were often very disturbing. Psychotherapists, however, remained committed by their technique not to study the families directly. (ibid:93)

Laing, in effect, shows how the *invalidation* of a person's experience through a clinical approach (i.e. by declaring the person an *invalid*) and the wider machinery of psychiatric institutions, reinforces an invalidation of their experiences within the family. He shows that 'defences' are 'not only intrapersonal, they are transpersonal' (ibid: 31).

Laing seeks to replace a positivist methodology and epistemology which frames and objectivises an individual as a *patient* with a *disease*. He rejects the objectification and reductionism of the positivist / scientific model:

Just as Kierkegaard remarked that one will never find consciousness by looking down a microscope at brain cells or anything else, so one will never find persons by studying persons as though they were only objects. A person is the me or you, he or she, whereby an object is experienced. Are these centres of experience, and origins of actions, living in entirely unrelated worlds of their own composition? (ibid:20)

To replace the clinical paradigm, Laing draws upon a paradigm of *social phenomenology*.

The other person's behaviour is an experience of mine. My behaviour is an experience of the other. The task of social phenomenology is to relate my experience of the other's behaviour to the other's experience of my behaviour. Its study is the relation between experience and experience: its true field is inter-experience. (ibid:15)

This enables a fundamental change in perspective. He reinscribes the *illness* as a person's *strategy* (meaningful albeit often flawed and self-destructive) for dealing with an irresolvable situation. He questions assumed normativity:

One plane may be out of formation. But the whole formation may be off course... The plane that is out of formation may be also more or less off course than the formation itself is. The 'out of formation' criterion is the clinical positivist criterion. The 'off course' criterion is the ontological... It is of fundamental importance not to confuse the person who may be 'out of formation' by telling him he is 'off course' if he is not... (ibid:98-9)

Laing's hopes for a paradigmatic reform were not realized. Ingleby locates this disappointment partly in Laing's failure to find a strategy, but also in terms of wider political and ideological circumstances: economic crisis, an increasing demand for mental health services, Thatcher's budget cuts and the era of 'managed care', producing a 'new alliance of positivism and managerialism'. (Ingleby 2005)

Laing's challenge to psychiatry shows how far down a critique of established practices must go, requiring both philosophical debate and social action. As I will argue, opposing the SE/SI paradigms requires both a practical and a theoretical challenge.

### **The relevance to School Effectiveness and School Improvement**

In all of the above examples, the difference between paradigms stretches between ontology, epistemology and methodology. As summarised earlier, a paradigm involves:

- entities and the forces / relationships that connect them
- models and theories
- legitimate problems and acceptable solutions
- methods and instruments.

However, within the humanities and social sciences, as also within fields of social practice such as education, two further dimensions are entailed:

- the *political*
- and the *ethical*.

By 'political', I mean primarily that a paradigm might privilege some perspectives and interests more than others, or it might overlook important differences of power. By ethical, I am referring both to the practitioner's and the researcher's responsibility for moral evaluation of practice – it is not enough simply to ensure that it 'works'.

Perhaps it is the political and ethical dimensions which make it almost impossible to resolve paradigm debates in the social sciences. It is not so much that they are *pre*-paradigmatic as that resolution requires agreement about political and moral values. This may be because a particular model explicitly privileges certain perspectives. It may also result from versions of truth in which, in positivist fashion, the values remain unstated or obscured and their proponents insist they are adhering to objective and neutral technologies of truth. This claim in itself is ideological; for example, in a divided society, to insist on blindness to these divisions and power differentials involves a tacit claim that they are unimportant. Moreover, we might argue that the invisibility of the political dimension can actually exacerbate the problem:

Power is at its most effective when least observable. (Lukes 2005:1)

[Power] is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. (Foucault 1980:86)

Gronn (2000:60) makes the interesting point that *leadership* has become a favoured concept in education whilst being disconnected from a family of similar terms designating 'modes of human conduct and engagement' such as 'power, authority, influence, manipulation, force and persuasion'. This is a pertinent illustration of how discourses operate as much through their silences and closures as by what they speak.

It is not possible simply to separate the political and ethical dimensions from the other features of a paradigm; they may closely affect / be affected by the focus on particular entities or relationships, the legitimacy of problems and solutions, and the boundaries of a field. The political understanding and positioning of the researcher may be interconnected in complex ways with these other features of a paradigm; although there is no automatic link, it is also no accident that Williams and Eagleton, for example, seek to re-read English from a particular class perspective which connects with their own origins and loyalties. Laing's position is rather more complex, but involves more than detached rationality: a driving force was his emotional revulsion to

normative practices and relationships which he had been expected to learn as professional habitus. Similarly, I would argue, the power relationships of a particular time and place, and the way in which a researcher locates him / herself in them, can radically affect the selection of entities, the parameters of a field of study, and so on. It might also affect which paradigms receive political support and achieve hegemony.

### **The paradigmatic features of School Effectiveness**

The process of articulating a clear critique was slow but grounded. Particular support came with the publication of two books critiquing the SE/SI approach, Slee and Weiner, with Tomlinson (1998), and Morley and Rassool (1999). Both books provide a wealth of arguments against the dominant policy direction and its practical manifestations, though neither is particularly systematic or makes a clear enough distinction between SE and SI.

I sought to overcome these limitations in '*School effectiveness*': *the problem of reductionism* (B), originally presented to BERJ (British Educational Research Journal) in April 2002; one version appeared in *Schools of hope* (A1) before the revised version was published in BERJ in 2004. I remain grateful to the anonymous referee who helped to clarify my thinking on epistemological aspects by directing my attention to Bhaskar's *critical realism* (see B:230-1).

Bhaskar explores the relationship between ontology and epistemology, and provides a more complex account of the relationship between (real) causes or forces and the phenomena we experience: actions are brought about by real forces, but not all forces are actualised, since in reality multiple and often conflicting forces are at work. Conversely a correlation between events does not necessarily indicate causality; therefore, researchers should not be satisfied with demonstrating statistical correlation but must search for real causal mechanisms. He argues that this is particularly necessary in open systems where multiple forces are at work, and where a single factor cannot be isolated as in the laboratory. The examples he uses (1975:119-123) are the fields of history and meteorology, but clearly this would also apply to most fields of social practice including education.

It was an important realisation that the problem did not lie in the use of statistical methods *per se*; these have indeed been used with very different intentions and results by, for example, David Gillborn and colleagues in his work on social inequality and achievement (e.g. Gillborn and

Mirza 2000). I was able to develop a much more specific critique of the use of quantitative methods in SE (see for example B:232-6).<sup>5</sup>

While developing this argument, I spent time uncovering one of the foundations of SE in the (largely US-based) Teaching Effectiveness research summarised in Rosenshine's metastudy (1971). Another helpful influence was a close reading of some of the texts which SE regards as exemplary e.g. Rutter et al. (1979); Mortimore et al. (1988). These are in fact far richer investigations than often assumed. The latter is a mixed methods study in which qualitative observation and careful educational discussion lead to considered conclusions. For example, the authors conclude that some transfer of information as pupils proceed from one year to the next is an aid to effective teaching and learning, whether this takes the form of report sheets including grades or of a portfolio of work; there is certainly no basis in their work for the later obsession with summative assessment, which SE's 'key characteristics' supposedly justify (B:233).

I directly followed up numerous references in Teddlie and Reynolds' (2000) *International handbook of school effectiveness research*, in the course of critical reading which revealed many of SE's shortcomings. This was supported by the polemic between these authors, in their capacity as editors of the journal *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* (12/1, 2001), and Martin Thrupp. I was helped to distinguish between SE and SI as methodologies by leading Improvement advocate David Hopkins's contribution to the *International handbook of educational change* (Hargreaves A. et al. 1998).

Thanks to my eclectic reading habits - important when confronted with the closures of an hegemonic paradigm - I found in H and S Rose (1976) an argument about reductionism in natural and social sciences which I was able to adapt to underpin my critique of SE. Reading Rose et al. (1984) provided insights from which I generated my four categories:

- *methodological reductionism* (mechanistic causality, e.g. a belief in one-to-one correspondences)
- *contextual reductionism* (a failure to examine environmental influences when tracing causal relationships internal to a system)
- *historical reductionism* (a lack of self-awareness about how ideas develop and become popular at a particular time)

- *moral / political / teleological reductionism* (a blindness to the theory's social aims or impact).

Methodologically, the paper articulates in detail a scepticism about the procedures of SE research even in its own terms, as sound quantitative analysis; B:231-233 raises important questions of scientific rigour. Perhaps the most important of these, however, was the realisation that the mathematical exactness was at odds with the conceptual vagueness:

Many 'key characteristics' identified in the literature (for example, 'a clear and continuing focus on teaching and learning') are semantically incapable of being assigned unambiguously to some schools and denied to others, as would be required for valid *statistical* modelling. How can researchers decide that one school has this characteristic and another does not? (B:232, point f)

This provides one explanation for the complaint that the findings of SE research are not 'actionable'; the 'key characteristics' are too ambiguous to be useful. 'Strong leadership' may be anything from inspirational to dictatorial; an emphasis on assessment can mean anything from authentic assessment or Assessment for Learning to the SATs; ensuring a close focus on teaching and learning might either involve teachers working collaboratively to design cognitively challenging learning based on social constructivist principles or following tightly scripted and centrally prescribed lesson plans.

### **The relationship between Effectiveness and Improvement**

Initially, I had made no clear distinction between SE and SI, quite a common error both in popular usage and in academic texts. Indeed, Teddlie and Reynolds (2001:48-49) resort defensively to SI examples when SE is accused of narrowness, arguing that SI is a sub-set of SE. It is not entirely clear in Reynolds et al. (1993) what kind of partnership or merger is envisaged; and Hopkins (2001:57), though clearly seeing School Improvement as superior, speaks of the emergence of a new group of 'pragmatists' who are combining elements of SE and SI into a new paradigm and will 'pull levers' from both traditions. A better understanding of the SE/SI relationship was essential for writing A2 and A3.

Hopkins (2001:56) distinguishes SI from SE, in terms of methodology (qualitative as opposed to quantitative) but also, partially, in terms of political differences. I say *partially* because this is confined, in effect, to an emphasis on the internal dynamics of school change. School Improvement has a democratic emphasis to the extent that it focuses on the involvement of

teachers (and sometimes other staff, occasionally parents and pupils) in the process of change. A2 hinges around two serious difficulties, however:

- a) the failure of most English SI texts to examine the contradiction between this insistence on democratic participation *internal* to the school and strongly hierarchical ‘top-down’ direction from *without*
- b) the failure of the literature to debate the *purposes* of educational change.

This latter point ties SI closely to SE; indeed, the measurable outcomes which SE requires methodologically, and which the system of governance and accountability need politically, are taken as read by SI, as educational aims *per se*. Although School Improvement is, in general, undertheorised, other than in terms of its own tradition (including frequent mutual citation, itself the marker of a paradigm), it is significant that Hopkins (2001) refers to Habermas as his theoretical justification. Actually we can critique Hopkins precisely in Habermasian terms: Hopkins appears to regard the ‘ideal speech community’ either as something which already exists in schools, or something which can be created internally by building ‘capacity’, regardless of the impact of the macro-political environment (national educational policy and global socio-economic change, both related to neo-liberalism).<sup>6</sup>

The greatest support, in dealing with (a), came from a growing body of English educational sociologists and philosophers who sought to examine the impact of the educational policy regime on school ethos, the teacher role, and teacher-pupil relationships. A2 and A3 bring together quotations and analysis from diverse fields, including Helen Gunter’s (2001) critical perspectives of *leadership*; Gerald Grace’s (1995) Catholic perspective on change; curriculum expert Fred Inglis’s (1989; 2000) analysis of managerialism; Mahony and Hextall’s (2000) study of the transformation of teacher professionalism; Paul Clarke (2001), one of the more critical SI consultants; and Michael Fielding’s (1999; 2001c) philosophical discussions of the policy discourse and its impact.<sup>7</sup>

In dealing with (b), the biggest single impetus was undoubtedly, and perhaps surprisingly, the political aftermath of 9/11. Struggling to write an editorial for *Improving Schools* in November 2001 (largely reprinted in the introductory chapter of A, page 7), after overcoming an initial sense of the triviality of School Improvement in this wider context, I came, at a fairly rudimentary level, to a number of seminal realisations:



- that SI tended to focus on the *change process* alone, neglecting to discuss educational and social aims – and this despite its frequent use of the term *vision*
- that improvement was being confused with intensification – a speeding up of the conveyor belt
- that the Improvement project needed to be re-focused on important social / political aims.

In this process, I began to understand that, although SI was methodologically distinct from SE, in other respects it remained closely related and even dependent – hence my reference to them as *twin paradigms*. Despite the apparent openness and neutrality of Hopkins’ language (e.g. enhancing ‘student outcomes’ as its key aim; in Hargreaves et al. 1998:1036), the context shows a failure to question the *vision* of a policy regime based on high-stakes accountability or the centrality of those educational outcomes which can most easily be measured.

Methodologically we can contrast School Improvement as a qualitative mode of enquiry with School Effectiveness as quantitative / statistical research, but there are deeper similarities, and even a dependency of SI on SE. For example:

- they both ascribe an exaggerated autonomy to the school as a fundamental entity<sup>8</sup>, as well as overemphasising the agency of the headteacher
- they tacitly regard the aims of schooling and the curriculum prescribed by central government and its agencies as sacrosanct.

Of course, referring back to my earlier analysis of paradigms, these are matters not only of the basic entities and forces, and the parameters of the field, but having fundamental ethical and political implications. There is, ironically, an underlying awareness that schools are not quite so autonomous, indeed that the actions of school leaders are heavily constrained by a politically imposed *accountability* regime (A3). The texts tend to marginalise these considerations structurally, often by disposing of them in an introductory chapter, then operating as if this were not the case – business as usual. (Thrupp and Willmott (2003) call this ‘subtle apologism’.) This inevitably leads to a perspective which overlooks contradictions, and emphasises voluntary incorporation within a hegemonic disciplinary regime.<sup>9</sup>



## Capacity and culture in the Improvement literature

Whereas School Effectiveness regards as the driving forces a list of quasi-autonomous behaviours (the *key characteristics*), School Improvement prefers a more holistic perspective, speaking in terms of *capacity* and *culture* (though involving a nexus of more specific processes such as leadership, planning and staff development). In a sense, SI operates at a kind of meta level with regard to SE's *key characteristics*. It provides a kind of response to the problems of an open system (see the discussion in B:231). But whilst *capacity* is holistic (within the parameters of the school as a bounded entity), it is also deracinated.<sup>10</sup> This leads, I would argue, to a different kind of reductionism than that of SE but reductionism all the same, because it does not pay enough attention to the complexity of the many levels in a stratified open system. (cf Collier 1994:117)

Much is to be said for such an holistic view. Indeed, in their classic *Fifteen thousand hours*, Rutter et al. (1979: 177-9) concluded that the *combined* and *cumulative* effect of various social factors was more important than any individual effectiveness characteristics. However the negative side of this holism is its vagueness and disconnectness – the ability of words such as culture, ethos or capacity to change shape or dematerialise, as well as their sheer promiscuity, i.e. their apparent applicability to any change process whatsoever. *Capacity* in mainstream SI texts becomes an abstract force which appears to exist independently of teachers' work within, and reaction to, a pervasive disciplinary system (in an everyday as well as Foucauldian sense) of surveillance and control. It is thought to increase through a process of 'leadership' which binds teachers together through practices of collegiality whatever their political, social and ethical values. (The reality often comes closer to the *contrived collegiality* described by Hargreaves, 1994.) To an extent, compared with the mechanistic positivism of SE, we might regard SI as philosophically idealist; although *capacity* is something which is developed through particular processes, it becomes reified in its generality and as a consequence of its rootless disconnection from other levels of socio-political practice and belief. (See also A:176 for a brief introduction to other semantic shifts in SI.)<sup>11</sup>

The deployment of the term *culture* in some well known and influential SI texts is even more problematic, and often means little more than *capacity* in the literature. It is a keyword in the Improvement literature, and for good reasons: it invites a less mechanistic understanding than the SE lists. The *culture* concept is enormously powerful, but also slippery: Raymond Williams

(1976:87) claims that it is ‘one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’.

It has been deployed in diverse and rich ways in educational research, e.g. Willis’s (1977) analysis of working-class male adolescent cultures in English schools; McLaren’s (1987) study of rituals and norms; Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1970/1977) analysis of cultural difference and unequal exchange (cultural capital); the ‘multiculturalism’ debate. In *School Culture* (Prosser 1999), a wide range of usage is shown, including Power and Whitty (the impact of market reforms on school culture), Nias (the ‘culture of care’ in primary teaching), Mac an Ghaill (masculinities), Munn (bullying), Moss and Attar (gender and literacy), Weber and Mitchell (teacher representations in the media) and Prosser and Warburton (visual sociology, with important lessons for SI researchers).

Perhaps the narrowest use in Prosser’s volume is to be found in Louise Stoll’s and David Hargreaves’ chapters, both focusing on school culture as a managerial concept. The Hargreaves (1999: 51) quadrant of *hothouse*, *welfarist*, *formal* and *survivalist* is a valuable analytical model which helps us to understand degrees of social control and cohesion, a tool for analysing and acting upon a school, but it is disconnected from the felt experience of learners, from pedagogy, from the history of schooling, and from tensions in the wider society.

Stoll’s chapter provides an exemplary<sup>12</sup> summary of *culture* as deployed in orthodox SI texts – but which unconsciously exposes its own inadequacies. Despite acknowledging briefly (page 33 and 35) an anthropological sense of culture as significant ‘customs, rituals, symbols, stories and language... the artefacts of culture’, she then follows Schein (1985) in stripping away the materiality in favour of a ‘deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation’. The words are revealing: in which sense are different people ‘members’, and how exactly are these assumptions and beliefs ‘shared’? Who, for that matter, decides what is ‘basic’? Her chapter title provides another major clue: school culture as either ‘fertile garden’ or ‘black hole’ for school improvement. By ‘black hole’ she means that attempts at innovation can simply be swallowed up, disappear and have no impact on some schools. To deconstruct her metaphor, this is to suggest that such schools have no visible patterns, no inner meanings – that these schools represent a destructive and incomprehensible chaos. The table (page 37, originally from Stoll and Fink 1996) shows the cultural ‘norms of improving schools’ as a list of positive feelings among staff:

1. Shared goals – ‘we know where we’re going’
2. Responsibility for success – ‘we must succeed’
3. Collegiality – ‘we’re working on this together’, etc.

Again there is some value in this summary, but as the *Weltanschauung* of school improvement, this is somewhat bland and one-dimensional, taking little account of the many contradictions, of teachers’ and pupils’ lives outside, and of external pressures both political and socioeconomic. There is no concession that some innovations might be ill-conceived, that professionals have a right and duty to evaluate them, or that some changes should be resisted. There is a warm glow about this notion of culture, emphasising a rather uncritical cohesion, which can conceal some of the turmoil outside.

I have argued (A2: 34-37 and D:283-284 in particular) that School Improvement operates with a restricted sense of *culture*. Seymour Sarason (1971) is often cited, but his questioning of the taken-for-granted norms of school culture are overlooked. From here, culture quickly becomes synonymous with capacity (D283) – the readiness of an organisation to undergo change – and culture becomes a managerial tool – the central role of leadership being to ‘manage culture’ (Deal and Peterson 1999). *Culture* equates with *cohesion* or even *manageability*. Whilst this usage has seeped in from industrial / commercial management, more critical texts from that field are overlooked (e.g. Alvesson 2002).

I sought (in A2:34-37) to outline a broader agenda of enquiry into culture which might match up to the real issues of quality and equality, as well as a rethinking of educational aims. This was wide ranging, including daily rituals, the experience of school learning, the norms of discourse, cultural difference and inequality, assumptions about ability, teachers’ understandings of pupils’ families and neighbourhood cultures, and so on. This is inevitably full of tensions which are skated over by culture-as-managed-cohesion. It requires a different sense of basic entities and field, as I have argued in D:287, for example:

- looking at schools within wider communities, and the transition of young people who move daily between these different cultures
- developing a stronger understanding of the implications of economic, social and cultural change for schooling

as well as new theories and methods:

- drawing on sociological thinking which casts light on this experience, for example Bourdieu's theories of exchange and in/validation (cultural and social capital)
- engaging in more sophisticated and critical forms of qualitative enquiry, drawing for example on traditions of ethnography and social phenomenology.

One of the benefits of the concept *culture*, I would argue, lies in a unity of material reality and ideas: it concerns objects (artefacts, classroom displays, the school environment) and behaviours (rituals, responses, regulations) as *signifying and significant*. This aspect is lost when culture is treated solely in terms of disembodied 'values' as Stoll and others have tended to do. Culture cannot be separated from structures – from either economic and social inequalities or the structural inequalities of traditional schooling (see A2:35). Both of these are, of course, run through with power, and they may reinforce each other. Nor can school culture be fruitfully studied without reference to a youth culture which is deeply penetrated by commercial culture (Kenway and Bullen 2001), or without recognition of the profound cultural transformation which Bauman (2000) calls 'liquid modernity'. (See also Lingard and Gale 2007 for a discussion of some of the implications of these profound cultural changes for education.) If we forget these, *culture* is hollowed out as a concept.

The insistence of the SI mainstream that we should 'change school culture rather than structure' (Harris 2002)<sup>13</sup> has led to a neglect of organisational features of the school and, in effect, given a false sense of universality to certain forms of school organisation. Chapter A:9 seeks to unsettle this by looking at available alternatives within and beyond Britain. Firstly I introduced alternative forms of secondary school organisation which provided a closer relationship between a team of teachers and a population of pupils, as in Norway or the Essential Schools of the USA. Secondly I reminded readers of the strong British tradition of community schools. Without wishing to appear too deterministic, one might see structure as the material basis, or perhaps frame, for culture – not in any mechanistic sense, but as providing the conditions within which particular choices become possible and which make it more likely that cultural changes can be brought about. I was able to follow up one aspect of this subsequently through a comparative pilot study of a Scottish and a Norwegian secondary school. Other aspects relate to the relationship of schools to communities, and various versions of 'community school'.

I argued (Wrigley 2000, and in A) that ethos and the wider community, as well as pedagogy and curriculum, are as important as leadership and the school development processes in any genuine

improvement of education. Unfortunately, the structural and political conditions which might promote better ethos and parental involvement have been overlooked; ethos has been viewed instrumentally, as a means towards higher attainment, and parents seen almost as a vehicle to get their offspring to school punctually, homework in hand, without real lives of their own.

There is a reciprocal relationship - a vicious circle - between the lack of critical edge and the methodological norms of many established School Improvement writers, which I am tempted to call (*pace* Ryle and Geertz) 'thin description'. It is evident that visits are often either very short, with the main focus being a headteacher interview, or the research methodology is flattened out or collapsed by being grounded in a consultancy relationship. This works towards reinforcing hegemonic assumptions about the key forces leading towards effectiveness and improvement, and the neglect of other more complex or contradictory voices. It does not typically lead towards the richly interpretative descriptions achieved by more self-aware ethnographers.

My first book *The power to learn* (2000, partially summarised in D:281-283) is too much a beginner's work to serve as a model, but there are features of its methodology which set it apart from mainstream SI.

1) Though three days per school is too short for genuine ethnographies, this was in a number of cases additional to a prior knowledge of the school. The time was largely spent on classroom observation, and a wide range of individuals were interviewed, not only senior managers.

2) A dynamic of empowerment soon became apparent, running counter to the dominant assumptions of top-down control or managed cohesion. Subsequent observations served to illustrate and elaborate that vague notion of empowerment, giving it meaning through a process of 'saturation' (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Aspects included a prevalence of social constructivist pedagogies, curriculum relevance, an ethos based on mutual respect, and an empathetic relationship with parents and the local community.

3) Thirdly, the strong emphasis on pedagogy and curriculum distinguished it from the managerialist tendency of many orthodox SI texts, i.e.. managerial processes were not isolated from and privileged over substantial educational activity. (Some of the lesson observations formed a basis for subsequent theorisation (e.g. 2000a and C in this submission, as well as A6-8).

## Alternative models

As indicated above, my first book (2000) broke new ground in terms of methods and perspectives. It is time to place this, and the subsequent work included here, in a wider context.

To some extent my book followed the precedent set by *Success against the odds: effective schools in disadvantaged areas* (National Commission on Education 1996). The supporting framework of the latter book, however, was an SE list of 'key characteristics', albeit used by some contributors more than others. Greatest use was made by Barber, who then felt able to give them a minimalist interpretation, for example regarding the existence of school prefects as a sign of substantial pupil involvement and participation in a school. (This helped me to realise that many of these SE *characteristics* were floating signifiers, as discussed earlier.) Some of the contributions focused on ethos and community (e.g. Jean Rudduck's case study of a community college). The only contribution emphasising curriculum and pedagogy was MacBeath's study of a special school.

A clear contrast can be found in Blair and Bourne (1998), which investigated ten successful multi-ethnic schools serving mainly African Caribbean communities. Despite superficially adopting the SE genre of lists of 'characteristics', the identified factors were different from SE norms. Based on qualitative research, they focused on social justice, such as challenging overt and structural racism, including low expectations. Though well known by writers on multiethnic schools, little notice has been taken of this volume within the SI mainstream, which, I would argue, illustrates a mechanism by which paradigms sustain themselves by deliberate or unwitting closure to oppositional research.

This occlusion of inconvenient texts has been a feature of School Improvement, and certainly my own work has largely been ignored by the English mainstream, though resulting in international invitations to give lectures and presentations (e.g. the keynote to its main international conference, ICSEI, Rotterdam 2004).

Similarly, now that a group of writers (Harris et al. 2006; Ainscow and West 2006) have at last turned their attention back to inner-city schools, they appear to have overlooked the few existing UK-published volumes of recent years, all of which could have provided them with significant insights. (In addition to the above, I am thinking of Pat Thomson's *Schooling the rustbelt kids* (2002); Richard Riddell's *Schools for our cities* (2003); Tony Cotton et al. (2003) *Improving primary schools, improving communities*.) The exception to this pattern has been the work of



Paul Clarke; though closely associated with Harris, Ainscow and West and director of the prestigious IQEA consultancy established by Hopkins, his editorship of *Improving schools in difficulty* (2005) successfully brought some of these different voices together.

Moreover, a large body of American literature on urban education was overlooked (e.g. Nieto 1999; Noguera 2003), despite substantial trans-Atlantic connections, and an extended Literature Review (Muijs et al. 2004) by key researchers in the field (Alma Harris but also Louise Stoll, one of the most experienced SI writers and a member of the *School Matters* team). Not only was significant US research literature, distributed by such well-known publishers as SUNY or Teachers' College Press, overlooked, but entire networks of schools devoted to educational reform such as the *Coalition of Essential Schools* and the *Accelerated Schools Project* (e.g. Finnan et al. 1996). I was able to draw attention to these networks, and substantial bodies of research, in A (see its index for page references).

It is difficult to pin down the reasons why these networks were overlooked, but some of the reasons may be that they place a stronger, and more questioning, emphasis on pedagogy than the SI mainstream is comfortable with. This is a paradigm effect. Ironically, Hopkins, arguably the founding father of SI in England, has made stronger use of USA-based reforms and placed a greater emphasis on teaching and learning, but his pedagogical preferences have been towards the heavily-scripted Slavin approach (Slavin and Madden 2001), as well as the rather self-contained and static 'models' developed by Bruce Joyce (Hopkins 2001; Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins 1997).

In some ways, I have had an advantage over some influential SI authors in having a wider professional focus, including a substantial teaching background, a research degree in curriculum studies, a strong interest in aspects of education and social justice, a broad political involvement, and a keen interest in pedagogy. It has been a blessing, as well as an inconvenience, not to be primarily focused on sustaining a career which is principally based on leadership, effectiveness or improvement. The pedagogical and curricular interest, for example, led me towards Queensland's *New Basics* (A6). I read a number of European languages, which gave me access to such collections as Altrichter et al. (1998) and Murillo and Muñoz-Repiso (2002) which show greater breadth of approach than most SE-linked SI. The former combines a substantial body of German-language research and practice on the dynamics of school development - relatively unaffected by top-down government directives - with chapters on gender- and environment-focused reform, etc. The Spanish volume connect Anglophone Improvement theory with rather



different school reform experts such as Dalin; its case studies focus on curriculum reforms driven at school level. This international awareness has been a source of confidence in challenging mainstream SE/SI. For example, Xaver Büeler (1998) elaborates a clear alternative which draws strongly on ecological systems (see B:234; A:26).

Even skimming the chapter headings of *Schools of hope* (A) will demonstrate that the book is wide-ranging in its scope; there are chapters on theories of intelligence, pedagogy, curriculum, community education, and social justice. However, it is not a loose agglomeration of diverse themes. These chapters (A5-10) serve not only to take the book beyond critique into the new territory of laying foundations for a different model of educational change, whilst repeatedly connecting critically with and reframing key issues in mainstream SI.

For example, 'raising expectations' has become a by-word in both SE and SI literature. Aligning with earlier comments in this paper, as a category in quantitative SE research, the vagueness does raise methodological questions (how does the researcher decide whether or not to tick this box?); in SI, it is treated more discursively but in a decontextualised and vaguely moralistic way, in a manner which rarely connects with the complex cultural issues, pupil and parent subjectivities, the problems of cultural capital, and so on.

I have argued (e.g. D:280 and D:286) that 'raising expectations' in urban schools is often far more political than is reflected in most of the literature, requiring a more subtle hermeneutic approach to research. In A5, I raised the underlying but unspoken question of how teachers understand ability. Simply willing pupils to achieve more, as a sheer moral effort, is undermined if we hold that intelligence is either innate or too tightly bound to socio-economic environment. The common sense view of 'ability levels' stretches from teachers to policy makers. For example, the White Paper *Higher standards, better schools for all* (DfES 2005) is grounded in a hierarchy of 'gifted and talented', pupils who are 'struggling', and the 'just ordinary'.) A5 reviews 20<sup>th</sup> Century conceptualisations of 'intelligence', drawing together critiques which have fallen from view.

However, the chapter goes beyond this process of academic recovery by connecting the debate, culturally and pedagogically, with implications for School Improvement. I summarised these issues as:

- questions about the social and experiential development of intelligence
- the relationship between practical activity and theoretical learning

- the forms of language which are valued in schools
- the accumulation of facts and concepts through teaching which is insufficiently experiential
- the way in which working-class children experience figures of authority
- the ways in which children accept their positioning as passive and often silent learners
- the relationship between school learning and community needs as experienced by working-class children and adolescents. (A:83)

Again, this represents a possible agenda for an entire lifetime's research.

In the later parts of the chapter, I also extended the discussion by looking at the implications for school improvement of Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences; Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron 1970/1977); and the exciting notion of *distributed* intelligence developed by Perkins (1995) and his Project Zero colleagues (Salomon 1993, also A86-9 for other references). (This continues the development of activity theory and situated cognition by Rogoff, Cole, Engeström, Lave, Wenger, Moll and others. See for example Rogoff and Lave 1984; Wenger 1998; Engeström et al. 1999; Cole et al. 1997; Moll 1990.) All these ideas have deep relevance for any genuine project of improving the quality of education, particularly for disadvantaged young people, and if taken seriously would help to move thinking about educational change beyond the vague moralism and political pressure of calls to 'raise expectations'.

As I have argued in various places, part of the closure of the School Improvement paradigm, and one reason for its impasse when dealing with schools in particularly challenging circumstances, is its exclusive focus on *managing change*, and its neglect of books to be found on all the other shelves of the education library (sociology, psychology, pedagogy, inclusion and so on). The other chapters of A seek to remedy this. The remaining sections of this commentary, therefore, highlight how the selected texts focus and develop new understandings of pedagogy, curriculum, education for citizenship, and social justice.

## Pedagogy and curriculum

It scarcely seems possible to discuss the school quality or educational change without a central focus on the curriculum and pedagogy. A neglect, or flawed discussion, of such questions raises issues which go to the heart of the SE and SI paradigms, involving entities and forces, models and theories, legitimate problems and acceptable solutions, and research methods. The treatment of curriculum and pedagogy also has deep political and ethical implications.

School Effectiveness is clearly incapable of the kind of fine-tuned attention that would provide an illuminating pedagogical analysis. Some of its difficulties are methodological: it seeks to correlate specific observable behaviours to outcomes, but is unable to cope with the different significance of such behaviours within the lesson or sequence as a whole, or with the interpretation and response of different students. Moreover, as is evident from Rosenshine's (1971) metastudy of teacher effectiveness research in the USA, it relies for its output measures on tests which often reflect limited learning outcomes. There is the clear danger of a circularity between limited, and often behaviourist, teaching and superficial learning.

Using visible behaviours to evaluate teaching, in a seemingly neutral technological manner, evades the need to articulate an underlying theory of learning. A key example is the word 'pace', one of a number of sub-headings laid down for OfSTED inspectors as a criterion on which to judge lessons (A113-4). This has had an ongoing impact on teaching and learning in England, within a culture of performativity, and makes it very difficult to abandon such markers even when a rather different pedagogy is envisaged. For example, some of the lesson plans in the *Key Stage 3 Strategy* which seek to promote collaborative investigation in groups restrict the opportunity by too tight a pre-definition of outcomes and an impossibly tight time allocation (see Wrigley 2006:26).

Some more holistic attempts to look at teaching effectiveness have been problematic. Bennett (1976) ascribed the descriptors *informal*, *mixed* and *formal* to teaching styles in such a way that only the most disorganised or anarchistic teacher would fit the first category. Not surprisingly, 'informal' teaching proved 'ineffective'. Mortimore et al. (1988) is better, a mixed methods study depending on substantial open-ended observation. Muijs and Reynolds (2001), in their book *Effective teaching: evidence and practice*, lean heavily towards behaviourist theories, hold a limited view of teaching as the transmission of testable knowledge and skills, and prove limited in their understanding of many of the issues they tackle. (See Wrigley et al. 2002 for an

extended critique.) Moreover, there is a telling admission (page 175) that most of their evidence in fact derives from primary numeracy lessons.<sup>16</sup> Often, School Effectiveness is limited to vague statements about the amount of ‘focus’ on teaching and learning.

The neglect of pedagogy in much of the Anglophone School Improvement literature is a problem acknowledged by Hopkins (personal conversation), who in many respects was its founding father and greatest influence in the British context. I have to qualify this statement by reference to Hopkins’ own collaboration with Joyce (Joyce et al. 1997), but also to a recent stirring of interest centred at the Institute of Education in London (e.g. Carnell and Lodge 2002; MacGilchrist et al. 1997). This latter move has produced valuable research, but it focuses on pupil attitudes and approaches to improving their work, and falls short of a rounded understanding of pedagogy, whether we are using that word as a synonym of methodologies, or in a more extended Germanic sense including ethical, psychological and sociological considerations. Another growth area has been the attempt to relate this type of work to school development processes, through the linking concept of ‘learning school’ (see for example Stoll et al. 2003; Mitchell and Sackney 2000). This represents, perhaps, one of the centripetal forces which could help to establish a new paradigm – agency against paradigmatic structure.

Adey and Shayer’s (1994) book *Really raising standards* provides a telling contrast with the SE/SI mainstream. Indeed, its provocative is itself a challenge to managerialist ‘improvers’. The book is substantially researched, well grounded in psychological theory, refined through empirical research, and implemented practically through the extended development project *Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education* (CASE), with parallel projects in other curriculum areas (e.g. Shayer and Adey 2002).

From a different direction, the case studies in Wrigley (2000) provided an empirical basis for my rethinking of the SE/SI paradigms. I entered with a predisposition towards social constructivist pedagogies, but was surprised how much they predominated in my fieldwork schools despite the official emphasis on whole-class ‘direct teaching’. Three related strands emerged:

- (i) cognitive challenge through problem-solving, with a strong emphasis on group work
- (ii) the use of varied sensory channels for knowledge acquisition (‘multiple intelligences’)
- (iii) the exploration of social and ethical questions, especially relating to identity and cultural heritage, and involving various artistic forms.

The analysis is sharpened in *Pedagogies for Improving Schools* (Wrigley 2000a), in which I described (iii) as *cultural reflection and repositioning*. This use of creative art forms (drama, creative writing, visual art, etc.) provided a safe space for young people from minority ethnic families to re-live and reflect on their cultural heritage, but also to play with alternatives in a contemporary context. This helped provide a basis for A6-8 and C. This identity and culture work is related to that described in Weis and Fine (2000) and Thomson (2006); its relevance to school culture and working on the cultural gap between school and home / peers / neighbourhood needs further development.

The main purpose of A7 was to attempt to breach the Chinese wall between SI and many other shelves of the education library through a series of short critiques and positive illustrations:

- 1) Pages 113-115 contrast the positivistic assumptions of official advice in England with Stigler and Hiebert's (1999) more interpretive observational research, equally focused on raising standards of achievement. Stigler and Hiebert were able to compare mathematics teaching in the USA, almost entirely based on the demonstration and practice of algorithms, with the more effective problem-posing methods in Japan.<sup>18</sup>
- 2) A contrast is drawn between the 'direct whole-class teaching' privileged by English government agencies since the early 1990s and Perkins' (1995) emphasis on learning by applying knowledge to new situations or translating it to new problems.
- 3) I then argue (following Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham, 1997) that transmission teaching tends to produce learning as *replication* – a form which fits neatly with the requirements of a testing regime.
- 4) Using the Scottish model of 'modes of teaching', I argue (A116-7) that surface-level categories provide limited information about teaching quality, since each can be interpreted at different qualitative levels. For example, many teachers will describe a lesson as discussion which is a teacher-directed question-and-answer session about a vaguely controversial topic.
- 5) Pages 118-120 recovers research on classroom discourse which was well known in the 1970s and early 1980s but since neglected (e.g. Barnes, 1969). I also connect this with Freire on critical pedagogy and literacy (1974).
- 6) A122-3 argues the value of social constructivist pedagogies, through some illustrations deriving from the case studies (Wrigley 2000). In reviewing these earlier observations, I was

also able to relate them to Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences. (This argument was substantially revised later, in terms of the connection between experience and symbolic representation, in C.)

7) The chapter ends (A: 128) with an original pedagogical model seeking to relate methodology, curriculum, social context and psychology / learning.

Other chapters of the book extend this discussion in terms of a) education for citizenship, and b) a political or ideological model for understanding curriculum.

The former is mainly pursued in A8, including a short analysis of two contrasting approaches, one from a popular Scottish Modern Studies textbook, the other from a book of guidance to German teachers of Political Education. The former is more limited, as it tends to position the teacher as the authoritative source of information, emphasises knowledge as fragmentary facts (to be reproduced in examinations), and divorces school learning from community action.

This connects with part of the earlier chapter on Curriculum (A6: 100-101) which, under the concept of *authorship*, questions the limited scope given to learner choice and initiative in Britain compared with Denmark. Interestingly the Danish guidance to teachers of social studies for 14-16 year olds discourages them from overplanning in case this hinders the *negotiation* with learners about what and how they will study - in contrast with centrally directed systems such as England's, where teachers are expected to plan meticulously the *delivery* of lessons whose content, and increasingly methodology, is nationally prescribed.

The discussion of education for democratic citizenship in chapters 6 and 8 highlights School Improvement's marginalisation of this curricular aim, and its failure to address the issue of democracy and agency – a focus which could make a substantial improvement to learner motivation. The SE/SI literature is replete with recommendations that teachers should have 'high expectations', but has little to say about intrinsic motivation. School Improvement tacitly accepts the positioning of learners as inactive and without decision-making powers. For all its emphasis on 'raising standards', it pays little heed to the possibility that learners' interests and desires may be a force behind such improvement. Once more, we see that the limitations of a paradigm go right down to the entities and forces that it privileges or neglects.

The remainder of chapter 6 provides a discussion of curricular aims – a serious neglect in English SI in particular, and one which sits oddly with the origins of School Improvement theory internationally. This is largely because of an acceptance, since the 1988 Education

Reform Act (England and Wales), that the curriculum is determined by organs of state; *is* all too easily becomes *should*. Indeed Michael Barber is reputed to have described the National Curriculum as one of the 'four pillars' of accountability - surely a case of the tail wagging the dog, since, on that argument, it would matter little whether learning is worthwhile provided that it is uniform and well suited to national testing.

The curriculum analysis found early in A6, based on Kemmis et al. (1983), argues that both a traditional academic curriculum and a vocational one share a conservative political orientation. This has particular relevance in the light of recent legislation in England (DfES 2006), which divides fourteen-year-olds into two distinct tracks, academic and vocational. Vocational courses are not offered within a broad and balanced curriculum; rather those who choose the vocational track are denied access to history, geography, a foreign language, art, music, drama etc. as well as more creative and critical elements of English. (See Wrigley 2006: 47)

Currently training for work is held up as the appropriate curriculum for the children of manual workers, especially those less successful in more academic subjects. Writers within the SE/SI paradigms have largely been silent on this trend, or endorsed it uncritically, since they tend to regard curriculum as basically not their business, or to be judged quantitatively through the analysis of test results. The argument in A6, on the other hand, is that greater realism and relevance must be sought not only in terms of preparation for work, but in terms of education for democratic citizenship.

Paper C extends this discussion from curriculum to pedagogy by examining the relationship between abstract and situated knowledge, against a background of class differences in educational engagement and achievement. Reiterating some of the earlier arguments about 'intelligence' (A5), it highlights the tacit privileging of abstract knowledge and the disconnection of symbolic representations from experience and sensory perception. This discussion connects back to successive theories about working-class and minority ethnic achievement, and provides an alternative theory to Gardner's multiple intelligences (1993 and elsewhere). Returning to Bernstein's critics Rosen (1972) and Labov (1969), it is apparent that they are validating more grounded forms of cognition and critical thinking.

The paper connects this argument to recent developments of Vygotskyian psychology known as *activity theory* or *situated cognition*, including Wenger's argument (1998:134seq) that human learning involves a dialectical unity of *participation and reification* – though I have preferred to



substitute 'symbolic representation' for his latter term because it seems to me less confusing. It revisits Piaget's stage theory, Adey and Shayer's research (e.g. 1994), and Vygotsky's (1986:150) discussion of concepts and abstract thinking, as well as re-presenting some of the examples in my earlier fieldwork (Wrigley 2000). Finally, it offers as a model (C:68) a 'spectrum of representations', from the most abstract to those which sit closest to lived experience. On this basis, linked with earlier theories (Vygotsky 1976 and 1986; Bruner 1968), I argue:

- a) that teachers need to be more aware of the difficulties of more abstract forms of representation, and to reconnect more abstract modes with lived experience to help pupils acquire real concepts rather than the 'empty shells' (Vygotsky 1986) of rote learning
- b) that, despite this, more abstract representations can prove the most powerful, as they enable us to operate at higher levels of generality and criticality

but also:

- c) that another more experiential terrain exists in which reflective and critical thinking can take place – the level of simulation.

Simulations of various kinds, whether children's play, gaming and role play, virtual realities, novels and drama and paintings, help us to re-live or re-create much of the sensory richness of real life experiences without the harsh consequences of reality. The philosopher of science Wartofsky (1973:208-9), starting from a discussion of scientific modelling, speaks of *tertiary artefacts, imagined worlds* or a kind of *off-line* activity which is not so tightly constrained by economic necessity and can allow scope for greater creativity. Such artefacts and activities can provide a space for critical reflection but also a sense of openness to alternative ways of being and doing. Thus we have two ways of transcending everyday reality, one theoretical and the other poetic.

Reflecting back to my fieldwork examples (Wrigley 2000), I became aware of a further dynamic achieved by stepping out of the simulation, similar to debriefing in role-play. Skilful teachers thus enable pupils to use the terrain of simulations, the 'imagined world', model or 'micro-world', to help learners recall or imagine a real situation in an accessible way (regardless of any linguistic barriers), but also as a secure foundation for more abstract conceptualisation and debate.

Not only does this address the key issues of accessibility which troubled Bernstein (1971), leading him to his problematic formulation of ‘restricted code’ (A5; C:59seq), but it also facilitates a critique of the kind of uncritical ‘realism’ offered by the vocationalist solution – an induction into (one aspect of) real life which lacks criticality and openness to change.<sup>19</sup> Whilst in many ways a parallel to Gardner’s (1993) shifting theory of multiple intelligences, it has the advantage of providing an explanatory model which supports analysis of classroom practices in terms of class-related underachievement.

It will be evident from the above that the discussion in the papers referred to, and included in this doctoral submission, has moved a long way beyond the examinations of teaching and learning in either School Effectiveness or School Improvement. In a later paper (D), I argue that the inadequacy of SE/SI’s pedagogical understanding is most exposed when it deals with schools serving poorer neighbourhoods or ethnic minorities. It is useful here to return to my earlier framework model for analysing paradigms, based on Kuhn:

- entities, forces and laws - key concepts, relationships and causes
- models – whether seen as heuristic or ontological
- legitimate problems and acceptable solutions (its sense of field)
- methods and instruments

and supplemented, after consideration of the social sciences, by

- the political orientation resulting from the privileging of particular perspectives and interests, and the marginalisation of issues of power
- the ethical, in terms of the practitioner’s and the researcher’s responsibility for moral evaluation of practice – rather than simply a search for functional efficiency.

I have referred above to the problems within the SE paradigm, when it deals with teaching effectiveness, of attempting to evaluate and account for the quality of teaching in terms of a number of easily visible behaviours. We can explain this error, in Bhaskar’s (1975) terms, as *actualism*: the assumption that the effects we observe equate to the real causes at work. Beyond this, there has been a chronic neglect of pedagogical theory by SE and SI. In terms of the above model, this silence about teaching and learning impacts right down to the entity being studied: if you are not examining pedagogy, you are not looking at a *school!* Studying schools as if they are just another kind of organisation is fatally flawed: you cannot get to grips with the most

important forces at work – the pedagogical commitment and practices of the teachers and pupils – by re-imagining them simply as *leaders* and *followers* (or even, more equally, ‘participants in a change process’).

The neglect of pedagogy also connects to other problems of paradigmatic SI which were discussed earlier. For example:

- Reducing *culture* to *capacity* has produced a number of models to assist managers take a temperature check on staff attitudes and cohesion (see the various typologies and quadrants of A Hargreaves (1994), D Hargreaves (1995), Stoll and Fink (1996)) but not models such as A:128 and C:68 which might actually assist teachers with harder-to-reach pupils.
- Whilst purporting to deal with primary forces such as leadership, the field of study – its legitimate problems and solutions – is educationally tangential, having little to say to teachers and learners except insofar as it is able to reposition them as leaders and followers, ‘accountable’ and to be accounted for.
- The research methodology places too great an emphasis on interviews with senior management, neglecting for example classroom observation and pupil-focused ethnography.

Finally, the above distortions and limitations have serious political and ethical consequences. The curricular irresponsibility of leaving questions of curriculum to state agencies legitimises the neo-conservative ‘academic’ one-size-fits-all of Thatcher’s National Curriculum, and now the neo-liberal ‘vocationalism for the hard-to-teach’ of Blair’s Education and Inspection Act (DfES 2006). It leaves unsupported those teachers who argue that active learning extends beyond the vocational field, and whose aims involve an Education for Citizenship that is genuinely critical and democratic. An ethical dimension to educational change should not be a mere afterthought, to receive minimal attention after you have dealt with ‘effectiveness’ or built ‘capacity’: it is central and fundamental to any discussion of change in an area of policy which is responsible for shaping the next generation of citizens. This is true now more than ever, given simultaneous and global crises of poverty, environment and war. Those who claim expertise in raising educational standards, whilst having little to say about the why and how of what children might actually learn, are hollowing out the concept of *improvement*.

## Effectiveness, Improvement and Social Justice

The neglect of key dimensions of social justice by the SE / SI paradigms is just as clear, and perhaps even more surprising, than the meagre treatment of pedagogy and curriculum. I say ‘more surprising’ because the narrative of origin of SE is based precisely upon the supposed fatalism of educational sociology with regard to low achievement in poor and minority ethnic neighbourhoods, including theories of reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970/1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, many of the early American classics in this field focus precisely on how schools might overcome poverty-related underachievement (see for example Weber 1971; Edmonds and Frederiksen 1979).

From the start I should clear up a possible misunderstanding by insisting that examination results and formal qualifications do matter for working-class and ethnic minority pupils. Indeed, if you have the ‘wrong’ postcode or skin colour, you need such qualifications more than anyone, for example to overcome the prejudice of potential employers. In a hierarchical society, education is a positional good as well as a good in itself and a good for the world. The problem is that it becomes *counterproductive* to overemphasise attainment, for two major reasons:

- a) insufficient attention is paid to the recognition (identity, self-esteem) aspect of social justice (see Fraser 1997) which underpins personal struggles to succeed in school and in later life
- b) an overwhelming emphasis on the exchange value of learning can result in curriculum and pedagogy which lack enjoyment and engagement. (See, for example, the very powerful argument on literacy and identity in Cummins 2003.)

The case against SE has been well rehearsed (including B:234-6). Indeed, there is scarcely a mention of poverty in Teddlie and Reynolds’ (2000) encyclopaedic *International handbook of school effectiveness research*, nor indeed in Sammons’ (1999) *School effectiveness: coming of age in the twenty-first century*. The mainstream School Improvement literature, despite having recourse to the same justification and narrative of origin, has produced few texts in the past decade which focus on social class or poverty. The important exceptions have been *Success against the odds* (National Commission on Education 1996), with its successor volume (Maden 2001); Stoll and Myers’ (1998) *No quick fixes: perspectives on schools in difficulty*; and recently

three volumes connected to DfES commissions and projects, Clarke (2005), Harris et al (2006) and Ainscow and West (2006). To this, we should add Macbeath et al's (2007) *Schools on the edge*, based on a DfES-commissioned evaluation of one of these projects. Among these, two books do not follow the usual patterns: Clarke's book includes a commissioned chapter from myself and also Richard Riddell, whilst Macbeath et al. rigorously challenges the conclusions reached by Harris et al. I will focus on Stoll and Myers (1998) in this commentary, partly because this book represents almost a pantheon of English SI and SE experts: in addition to its editors, there are chapters by Barber, Hopkins, Harris, MacBeath, Learmonth, Lodge, Reynolds as well as North Americans Fink (SI) and Stringfield (SE), and various lesser known authors. It was also written as these paradigms were actively 'twinning', and as the New Labour project was becoming a reality.

In this book, there is a stunning silence about the poverty in which so many children grow up; rather these children are viewed from the school's perspective, as 'challenging circumstances', a discursive sleight of hand. Returning to my paradigm points, the school is the key entity and field, with the dominant characteristics and narratives of children's lives viewed as mere background difficulties. Ethnicity is scarcely mentioned, except on two occasions where minorities are regarded as a 'nuisance factor', indeed almost blamed for creating difficulties. Reynolds (p166) sums up his position as follows:

In this particular school, the racial balance of the pupils in the school had reached the crucial 'threshold' of being comprised of 35-40 per cent Asian, Oriental and Afro-Caribbean children, the level at which 'white' children often become somewhat threatened and accordingly indulge in racist attacks, racial abuse and the like. The numerous racial incidents in this school became paralleled by considerable racial conflicts between 'Asian' and 'white' governors, which meant that the governors were unable to give a unified response when the school needed leadership to deal with the 'special measures' routine of OFSTED and the associated involvement of local education authority inspectors.

Apart from such blatant examples of 'blame the victims', the solutions proposed throughout this volume are managerial in nature, focusing around issues of 'capacity' and 'leadership'. Pedagogy and curriculum are barely mentioned, other than references to the challenges of low levels of literacy and bilingual pupils (seen as a problem), with meagre understanding shown in either case. Relationships and ethos within the school are discussed with a disciplinary emphasis, in either a harder (traditional schooling) or a softer (Foucauldian) sense.

The neglect of the lives of students, their parents and neighbours shows the extent to which SI has mirrored SE at a deep level, despite the methodological differences. It is even more remarkable when we recall a comment made just a few years earlier by one of the editors Kate Myers (1990), referring critically to the prevalent *equiphobia*. I am reminded of Angus' (1993:361) comment on SE:

Family background, social class, any notion of context are typically regarded as 'noise', as 'outside background factors' which must be controlled for and then stripped away so that the researcher can concentrate on the important domain of school factors.

This deep similarity, in terms of the acontextuality of both SE and SI, illustrates the importance, when examining paradigms, of seeing beyond the level of methodology. This silencing stands in stark contrast to books such as Thomson's *Schooling the rustbelt kids* (2002), Riddell's *Schools for our cities* (2003), or the work of American educators such as Lois Weis, Michelle Fine and colleagues (e.g. Weis and Fine 2000 and 2005). To parody Bourdieu (1999), for School Effectiveness and Improvement the world is almost *weightless*.

This neglect of social 'background' (the word is itself significant) is equally stark in the recent books by Harris et al. (2006) and Ainscow and West eds (2006) – and we must remember that these are the very rare books within SI which are dedicated to 'schools in challenging circumstances'. Interestingly, MacBeath et al. (2007) have published a more oppositional account, almost a 'minority report' on the same research project, which includes a more solid and contextualised description of pupils' lives.

There is no need to repeat in this commentary the extensive discussion in paper D within this submission. Suffice it to underline my argument that poverty and often race are proving stumbling blocks to SI, throwing up *anomalies* which expose the weaknesses of the paradigm, its theory and advice. The paper (D:287) ends with a proposal to rethink the most basic characteristics of the paradigm.

A10 *Social justice – or a discourse of deficit?* opens with a reminder that questions of social justice have in fact permeated the whole book. It recalls this chapter by chapter, for example (A:154):

(4) the discriminatory effects of selective school systems and the quasi-market

(5) the importance of overcoming constructs of ability which lower expectations and restrict opportunities

(6) suggesting alternatives to a centrally controlled curriculum which does little to motivate young people and hinders them from understanding poverty and racism.

Chapter 10 sought to bring together advanced thinking from a range of sources about diverse aspects of education and social justice: social class and poverty; pupils with physical and learning needs; school exclusions; 'race', bilingual pupils and refugees; gender, sexuality and boys' achievement. Needless to say, no single chapter could hope to do justice to all these themes. The unifying issue, however, is how to avoid labelling and creating a deficit discourse when attending to learners' needs. Essentially this means avoiding approaches which locate a 'problem' within individuals or a particular group, whilst regarding institutions as fundamentally stable - often termed a 'medical model', though this is unfair to the best current thinking in Medicine.

It would be a redundant exercise to reiterate the various examples here, but the central argument is that a genuine improvement of education requires an openness to rethinking those aspects of education which create the greatest social and learning difficulties for substantial minorities of pupils. This even makes sense in crude 'effectiveness' terms: one of the key findings of the PISA 2000 study was that most countries show similar attainment at the upper end, but their differences lie in the extent of disadvantage at the lower end of the attainment scale, i.e. a wider downward spread of attainment. Thus, the main characteristic of high-ranking countries such as Finland lies in their lack of a 'tail' of underachievement.

The examples and theories derive from wide reading in many different specialisms, which again exposes the failure of mainstream School Improvement to visit other shelves in the education library. Ironically perhaps it also in part results from connections made through ICSEI, the main international conference for SE and SI, which in addition to helping to cement the SE / SI relationship, has also opened them to other thinking on quality and change. In some of its annual conferences, ICSEI has drawn successfully upon the educational culture of the host country. For example, the Copenhagen conference helped make me aware of a radically different approach to differentiation, one that operated without stigma and without fixing pupils into a particular 'level' (Krogh-Jespersen et al. 1998). This is based on a relatively open challenge or activity which enables pupils, increasingly conscious of their own learning and progress, to plan the nature of their response. This wider awareness and reading help to avoid short-term responses to issues such as proposals to improve boys' reading through single-sex classes or responding to



'male' interests; as Martino and others (2001; 2003) have demonstrated, this has the danger of reinforcing the macho anti-intellectualism which is largely the source of the problem.

The other principle running through this chapter is the need to acknowledge issues of power. Schools are extremely dangerous places in this regard: their internal power structures and disciplinary cultures can easily collude with and reinforce power inequalities and discrimination in the wider society. This point is missed by improvement strategies which focus on attainment *averages* or *quotas*, and which unduly privilege measurable attainment above wider aspects of learning and social development.

This is not to suggest that hegemonic School Improvement is overtly discriminatory, but rather that its silences result in a reinforcement of normativity which serves to exclude very many pupils from successful participation. It becomes counter-productive, even in its own terms. Thus for example it draws on a Leadership literature which largely neglects the social understanding and engagement of many successful school principals serving marginalised communities. School Improvement, in its hegemonic version, has focused on making the vehicle run more smoothly without questioning whether a new design is needed; it prefers the pragmatic approach of applying more or better oil to the same moving parts.

The silence about power, and indeed a failure to give voice to disempowered groups, does not of course combat or remove power. As Lukes (2005) has coherently argued, power is often strongest where it is invisible and unspoken. The tacit assumptions about school norms, reinforced by a complicity with governmental processes of surveillance and control, sustains a tone of pragmatism and moderation which objectively colludes with injustice and inequality. (See also Thrupp and Willmott 2003 on 'subtle apologism'.)

The neglect of power issues extends also to a failure to question *in whose interests* - essentially the question why SE and SI have been so readily accepted and promoted politically and administratively as the 'only show in town'. The final pages of *Schools of Hope* (A11) raise a number of broad challenges regarding educational reform in a changing world. They recapitulate and reinforce the two recurrent themes in my writing: educational reform for social justice and for democratic citizenship. With the benefit of hindsight, they provided a rhetorical foundation but did not reach a sufficiently clear political analysis.

Ontologically this depends on a sense of class, in two different senses. Educational sociology relies heavily on an occupational distinction between manual workers and white collar /

professional families, to explain children's different attainment levels. This has been extended by examining the additional difficulties resulting from poverty (and, though often seen as disconnected, 'race' and gender). It is essential to retain this focus, whilst at the same time considering a Marxist distinction between capitalists and workers, increasingly operating as forces on a global scale. The latter definition underpins the importance of defending schools as a site for citizenship education, in opposition to attempts to gear schools more closely to economic functions. In its turn, articulating this depends upon an understanding of neo-liberalism as a class ideology and practice (see Harvey 2005, among others). Some recent studies seek to interpret educational reform in these terms, including (with reservations) Hargreaves (2003), and (more directly) Sears (2003) and Ball (2007). Andy Hargreaves' book begins to see through the policy rhetoric of the 'knowledge society'; he argues that large sections of the population work at low paid 'McJobs' to support the 'weightless' work of the 'knowledge economy', and increasingly their teachers are being retrained in very limiting ways through what he calls 'performance sects' rather than deep staff and school development. Alan Sears' (2003) *Retooling the mind factory* argues that schooling today is being made to fit the needs of 'fast capitalism' in a slimmed down way, involving a reorientation towards basic skills and vocational training, and a socialisation of young people 'as self-commodifying individuals, prepared to take their place in the market as sellers of their own capacity to work (labour power)' (page 13). Ball (2007) presents a scholarly analysis of privatisation as economic transformation and as discourse. He sees England as a 'laboratory of political transformation which exports policy solutions across the globe' (page 5), new ways of using the state as a 'commodifying agent' (page 5) to promote new opportunities for private enterprise under the shield of 'partnership'.

Both Sears (page 4) and Ball (page 4) demonstrate how a manufactured 'crisis' of the public sector serves to create a 'necessarian logic' to privatisation (Watson and Hay 2003, cited Ball 2007:33). The culture of performativity is 'insatiable'; it

changes meaning; it delivers re-design and ensures 'alignment' It objectifies and commodifies public sector work; the knowledge work of educational institutions is rendered into 'outputs', 'levels of performance' and 'forms of quality', that is this process of objectification contributes more generally to the possibility of thinking about social services like education as forms of production, as 'just like' services of other kinds and other kinds of production'... They are standardised, calculated, qualified and compared. More generally performativity works to edge public sector organisations into a convergence with the private sector'. (Ball 2007:27-8)

In chapter 6, *Selling improvement / selling policy / selling localities*, he demonstrates how demands for ‘continuous improvement’ enable companies, in prospectuses which are ‘breathlessly enthusiastic’ (page 137) to offer

‘solutions’, ‘holistic change’, ‘vision’, ‘customised change’, ‘values-led approaches’, ‘creative challenges’ and repeatedly ‘transformation’ to schools and education authorities. (page 138)

It is no longer tenable to discuss school improvement in the English context without recognising its entanglement with a neoliberal project of privatisation.

The relationship between contemporary school reforms and neo-liberalism is complex and does not submit to any reductionist one-to-one matching. It requires a well-developed critical sociology of policy, and internationally the analysis is still embryonic. Nevertheless some features have a direct relevance to understanding the SE / SI paradigms and their possible future development:

- the argument that test scores will attract investment, in a situation where national governments are felt to have little leverage
- the use of ‘league tables’ to generate a quasi-market, and subsequently their deployment within a more radical privatisation process
- the accountability discourse as a means of creating a new utilitarianism
- the avoidance of any debate about educational values and purpose
- the increasing reduction of primary education to ‘basic skills’ and of secondary to vocational preparation. (See also Wrigley 2006:18-19.)

Many of these points are already outlined in A. However, my most recent book (2006) builds on these, and seeks to interpret current changes in England, including a government drive to privatise the management of schools as ‘academies’ or ‘trust schools’. *Another school is possible* (2006:8) boldly summarises the historic tensions surrounding educational development:

Capitalism needs workers who are clever enough to be profitable, but not wise enough to know what’s really going on.

In a context of global crises – environmental (global warming), economic (debt, development, poverty) and military (war in the Middle East, the arms trade) – there is a drive not only to vocationalise secondary schooling, but also to minimise opportunities to develop in-depth critical understanding. This leads, in the English context, to a critique of current policy,

including the Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners (DfES 2004), the White Paper (DfES 2005) and the Education and Inspection Act (DfES 2006).

This new book, whilst drawing on A, represents a new departure in that it was written in collaboration with teacher union activists for a very wide audience, and published at a price which is selling far more rapidly than most academic books. I am led to reflect on the relative value of an academic challenge to School Improvement, in comparison with a more political engagement with a wider constituency of teachers and parents. It is also time to raise the question, in the context of this commentary, of how much longer the popularity and hegemony of SE and SI will last. Of course there is a powerful political interest which will serve to sustain this dominance, through English educational institutions such as OfSTED, the DfES and NCSL. However, the value of SE research and the mechanisms to which it is related are significantly undermined when the data are perceived to be unreliable (see Wrigley 2006: 13-18 for a summary). Mainstream SI, trapped within similar assumptions and perspectives, seems destined to keep repeating the same messages about *capacity* and *leadership* (whether singular or distributed), and, as argued above, is proving incapable of dealing with the challenge of poverty and low achievement. At the same time, structural and curricular reforms (privatisation, new forms of selection and vocationalism) are increasingly critical for all involved in school development, but are resolutely evaded by the mainstream Improvement experts. Finally, we might even be reaching a point when a general feeling emerges that the School Improvement orthodoxy has little more to say.

It is difficult to speculate on the future of School Improvement in the English context, now that policy is going down new avenues with the determination to transfer many schools to privatised management (academies and trust schools). Ball's analysis (2007:135-146) points strongly towards improvement (or perhaps 'innovation', 'transformation') as a marketable commodity to be sold to schools from outside. Of course this new policy direction, or rather next step in neo-liberal reform, is not inevitable, and there is considerable resistance.

Much depends on whether teachers are able to see beyond present modes of schooling and can organise to transcend them. Under these conditions, it would be possible to utilise some of the earlier gains of SI in terms of understanding collegial change processes, whilst re-connecting to other educational knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not this will be known as 'School Improvement', we would in effect have a different paradigm, more closely resembling earlier, less compromised

versions. In any case, new hybrid theories will inevitably arise, in Britain and elsewhere, as theories of educational change.

Just as it is a mistake to assume that policy transfer can occur, due to global agencies, without negotiation with vernacular traditions (see Ball 1998a; Dale 1999), it is also naïve to imagine that progressive educators can simply adopt innovative practices from other parts of the world. Nevertheless, in a situation where particular practices and discourses have become hegemonic, it becomes important to spread awareness of innovation elsewhere. This was one of the purposes of A6-8, and even more so Wrigley (2006). These include consideration of curriculum and school reforms including the American networks. It is also important to note some change of mood – a desire for a more satisfying curriculum – expressed in small-scale experiments in England (e.g. NESTA Future Lab), the new discourse of ‘creativity’, and Scotland’s *Curriculum for Excellence*.

It is hoped that this exploration of SE and SI as twin paradigms will contribute by subjecting current orthodoxies to critical scrutiny, in a systematic and theoretical way, in order to demonstrate that they are a kind of Kuhnian ‘normal science’ rather than truth *per se*.

In conclusion, albeit tentatively, I return to my framework for understanding paradigms, in order to suggest what a more powerful mode of research into educational change might look like. Such research would work with the following assumptions:

- As *entities*, schools are not simply organisations-to-be-managed; they are sites dedicated to learning and socio-cultural development, communities within wider communities. The primary *forces* which lead to stability or change go beyond and deeper than management, leadership and ‘capacity’; they must include the pedagogical desires and satisfaction of teachers and students, and the dynamics of transition and cultural contradiction among young people who move daily between the different worlds of neighbourhood and school.
- Educational change needs to draw upon and develop sociological *models and theories* which cast light on this experience, for example Bourdieu’s theories of exchange and in/validation, utilising and reworking concepts such as cultural and social capital. It needs to draw upon new pedagogical *theories* of learning, such as situated cognition, and engage seriously with new *models* of intelligence which challenge dominant assumptions about ‘ability’.
- The *field* of legitimate enquiry is no less than a *rethinking* of education. Simply *improving* schools within their current norms and historic traditions is insufficient, in the face of

dramatic technological and social change in the wider world. Rather than oiling the wheels of a poorly designed machine, we need to consider what kind of education will best help a new generation of young people to face up to the challenges presented by a world in crisis.

- The study of educational change needs to be more wide-ranging and even eclectic in its adoption of *methodologies*, for example engaging in more sophisticated and critical forms of qualitative enquiry from the traditions of ethnography and social phenomenology; finding new ways of listening to young people's experience of schooling and society; and more critical forms of statistical research. It needs to develop a greater awareness of the diversity of pedagogical practices and theory within and beyond the English-speaking world.
- The process of rethinking education still requires close attention to process, but must *connect* the local in-school dynamics with a critical understanding of the implications of wider *economic, social and cultural change*. We need to be increasingly aware of the relationship between national school reforms and the wider forces of neo-liberal globalisation.
- It must re-centre on the critical issues of social justice, particularly poverty and class, and on the central importance of citizenship: educating future citizens who are capable of dealing with the simultaneous global crises of poverty, environmental disaster and war. It must evaluate the *ethical and political* implications of different forms of school organisation and conflicting models of change, and engage in debate about curricular aims. It must be rooted in a commitment to democracy and social justice.

This is a substantial challenge, particularly as it runs against the grain of current power structures and policies, but developing a critical awareness of the limitations of the dominant School Effectiveness and Improvement paradigms might help to regroup and reorientate those who are concerned about this task. My work in attempting to destabilise the twin paradigms is hopefully contributing to the emergence of such an agenda, and taking us nearer to alternative paradigms.



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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the journal has tended towards the SE pole, and the relationship between SE and SI has often been a troubled one in the International Congress, especially when other versions of School Improvement have been heard.

<sup>2</sup> Although the focus in this study is on paradigms as structures of thinking, it is possible to locate the material existence and cohesion of SI as a 'school'. I recently used the device of asking three different leading academics within this field for a list of whom they considered to be its major contributors, setting this alongside the board of the journal I edit, *Improving Schools*. The following names appeared on three or all four of these lists: David Hopkins, Mel West, Louise Stoll, Tim Brighouse, Alma Harris, Paul Clarke, John Gray, John MacBeath (UK); Andy Hargreaves (USA, formerly UK and Canada) and Michael Fullan (Canada). In addition, the following appeared twice: Mel Ainscow, Kate Myers, Kathryn Riley, Felicity Wikely, Clive Dimmock and Michael Fielding (UK), along with Tony Townsend (Australia / USA) and Lorna Earl (Canada) appeared twice. The list is not unproblematic: Fielding has moved from being 'critical friend' to a distant and sharp critic; Gray is more closely associated with SE than SI; MacBeath has determinedly sought to open up Anglophone SI to the influences of European traditions of school reform; Kathryn Riley has increasingly pursued an interest in school ethos and inclusion. For the most part, however, they constitute a close network or school.

My informants then helped me trace multiple connections: almost all had worked with other members of the group at a handful of universities (Cambridge, Nottingham, Manchester, Institute of Education (London), and OISE (Toronto)), with the opinion leaders moving between two or more of these; there were multiple connections of co-authorship and joint research; almost all had been prominent in ICSEI (International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, the annual world conference for the field), most having delivered keynotes. One of my informants pointed to critical stages in the development of school improvement in England, in terms of its relationship with New Labour ideologies and policies, and Michael Barber's crucial role in cementing this ideological and pragmatic relationship. (Barber was, for a short time, a Dean at the London Institute, before being given charge of school improvement strategies at the Department for Education shortly after Blair's election success.) Although a more detailed mapping of these interrelationships would be revealing, it goes beyond the purposes of this Commentary, except to the extent of demonstrating the material existence of a school of leading proponents of the SI paradigm.

The coherence of SE is easier still to establish, with David Reynolds (UK) and Charles Teddlie (USA) acting virtually as its gatekeepers through their co-editorship of its leading journal *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, and the *International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research* (Teddlie and Reynolds 2000). A major though less prominent role has been played by Pam Sammons and Daniel Muijs.

<sup>3</sup> This does of course raise the question why, and under what circumstances and influence, SE and SI have achieved such an unusual degree of dominance in the field of educational policy.

<sup>5</sup> See also Nikolas Rose (1999).

<sup>6</sup> Further than this, if we take a Foucauldian position, an extra-disciplinary 'ideal speech community' may not even be possible as power is pervasive and inescapable.



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7 At the time of writing, I had not read Mitchell and Sackney (2000), which take a position strongly opposed to regimes of top-down control and surveillance. Their analysis links this to the disciplinary structures regulating the lives of students, as well as to pedagogical and assessment norms, seeing all these as part of a 'systemsworld' thinking (Sergiovanni 2000:4). The 'profound school improvement' they espouse aligns with social constructivist pedagogies; creating a 'learning community' involves a transformation of learning for teachers and students alike.

<sup>8</sup> Ironically, this is despite frequent findings in the SE literature that within-school differences, and particularly between teachers, are far greater than between-school differences.

<sup>9</sup> Hopkins' role was particularly crucial here, partly because of his habit of sliding between an apparently critical or progressive discourse and acceptance of almost any policy mandated by central government. He speaks of 'finding a balance' between centralised policy initiatives and local improvement efforts (1994:75); sees 'bottom-up' responses as providing 'energy' and 'school-based implementation' for top-down policy aims, strategy and operational plans (p79); and describes the National Curriculum, 'the prescriptions of the effective schools research', and the requirement for school development plans as 'doors' to school improvement (p86). It appears to matter little to what ends, and in which policy environment, a curriculum or school development plan is produced.

<sup>10</sup> Elmore (2003) reworks the concept 'capacity' in examining the complex and contradictory responses of schools to high-stakes testing. He recognizes the problems of compliance and superficial learning, but appears to make too many concessions to the imposed accountability regime.

<sup>11</sup> To the extent that School Improvement recognises the complex interaction of different forces, it tends to melt down *complexity* into *chaos* – Fullan's preferred term. Rather than analyse the nature and interlinking / interference of these multiple causal forces (cf Bhaskar's *stratification*) 'leadership' is summoned up, its primary role being to 'manage culture' and 'build capacity'.

<sup>12</sup> I use the term deliberately, in the sense that Kuhn refers to certain experiments, models and texts as exemplary for a paradigm.

<sup>13</sup> Earlier however Hopkins et al. (1994:87), following Andy Hargreaves, emphasised the complementarity and mutual impact of cultural and structural change.

<sup>16</sup> This has been echoed more recently when literacy tests based on decoding or recognising individual words out of context are used to justify a strongly phonics-based approach to teaching; tests which emphasise understanding produce very different results. See critique in Berliner 2005.

<sup>18</sup> It is ironic that they did so on the very terrain of mathematics which SE researchers Muijs and Reynolds had found most favourable to their case, see above.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, some features of a vocationalist curriculum, such as 'enterprise' projects, have an extremely tenuous hold on reality: no employee is exploited, paid meagre wages or laid off, and no entrepreneur fights aggressive take-over battles or is declared bankrupt.

<sup>20</sup> The oft-repeated claim that Coleman asserted that 'schools make no difference' is refuted by Hayes et al (2006: 176-8).

<sup>21</sup> Hayes et al. (2006) provide an interesting model for such a reworking of concepts of learning community, leadership and professional development.

## Appendix

### Paradigms, epistemology and relativism – a philosophical note

The concept of paradigm connects up ontological, epistemological and methodological concerns more directly than alternatives such a discourse or genre. In one summary:

‘paradigm’ encompasses everything: a generally accepted theory including exemplary problem solutions, governing research, with implications for what there is in the world, how it behaves, what questions we may ask about it, what methods may be used in pursuit of these questions, and what answers we may expect. (Hoyningen-Huene 1993:142)

Indeed, according to the same source (pages 142-3), Kuhn himself made attempts to narrow down the concept he had developed, but by this time it had popularised so much that it was too late.

At the same time, Kuhn’s work in highlighting systematically different explanations, along with an allowance that subjective elements may be involved in paradigm change, immediately opens the door to relativism, in terms of a possible argument that the alternatives may be equally valid. Kuhn’s use of the term *incommensurability* has caused most controversy; indeed, Hoyningen-Huene (1993:207) provides over a hundred references in a single footnote.

Norris (1997:82-96) argues that Kuhn does indeed fall into ‘ontological relativism’, and that, in his attempt to respond to this criticism, he simply articulates a Humean empiricism or scepticism with regard to any reality which may lie behind our sensations. Norris insists that Kuhn, at the time of writing, did have alternative epistemological and ontological positions available to him, and in a grand flourish, Norris associates:

Quinean ontologies, Kuhnian paradigms, Wittgensteinian language games, Foucauldian ‘discourses’, Rortian ‘final vocabularies’ or whatever. (ibid:61)

The term *incommensurable* appears to have come from Feyerabend, a committed relativist who scandalously defended the Inquisition as appropriate within its own times and cultural framework (Feyerabend 1987:247-264). Kuhn did, however, also insist upon the importance of evidence and scientific rigour:

Finally, at a still higher level, there is another set of commitments without which no man is a scientist. The scientist must, for example, be concerned to understand the world and to extend the precision and scope with which it has been ordered. That commitment must, in turn, lead him to scrutinize, either for himself or through colleagues, some aspect of nature in great empirical detail. And if that scrutiny displays pockets of apparent disorder, then these must challenge him to a new refinement of his

observational techniques or to a further articulation of his theories. Undoubtedly there are still other rules like these, ones which have held for scientists at all times. (Kuhn 1970:42)

Arguably the ontological question is even more difficult in the social sciences, since ways of seeing the world (concepts, values, discourses) can be the object of enquiry as well as a factor in its interpretation. Further, if an academic paradigm acquires hegemonic status in the wider society, the resulting circularity can be difficult to break. We should note, however, that this is also possible with the natural sciences, for example recent arguments that Baconian, masculine or Eurocentric perspectives sanctioning dominance over nature have given an ecologically damaging direction to technological development.

The conference referred to in the main text (Guba ed. 1990) explicitly sought to discuss alternatives to positivism in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Some of the discussion, unfortunately, confuses these levels, including the editor:

Ontologically, if there are always many interpretations that can be made in any inquiry, and if there is no foundational process by which the ultimate truth or falsity of these several constructions can be determined, there is no alternative but to take a position of relativism. (ibid:26)

There appears to be a logical error here in his use of the word *ontologically* to preface an argument which is clearly *epistemological*; the difficulty of establishing truth says nothing about the ultimate existence or otherwise of the material reality under investigation. Similarly, Popkewitz, who argues for a 'modified realism':

First, I would accept a modified realist view that there are real objects in the world. We do pass through doors and can hurt our knees if we fall off a bicycle and hit the pavement. Things occupy physical space and time. Yet, once that is said, I still have to take a modified view of realism and, therefore, of objectivity. To say that there are trees is also to recognize that tree is an arbitrary name that assumes particular and possibly different meanings as it is placed within symbolic fields. ... Our categories and distinctions assume significance because of the ways in which they are positioned within language and as that language is made part of the rules and standards of social practice itself. (Popkewitz 1990:56)

This is not entirely convincing. Firstly, we need to make a philosophical distinction between our sensations and understandings of the world and whatever reality lies behind them, i.e. between epistemology and ontology. Secondly, in the process of enquiry, there is a necessary distinction between other people's perceptions of the world which are inevitably subjective and culturally influenced, and the researcher's own (subjectively and culturally influenced) position. This is especially important when the researcher and the respondents share the same culture or

worldview. This is crucially what distinguishes a Critical Theory paradigm and the kind of relativism or subjectivism which Lincoln, Guba and others espouse as part of their interpretivist approach. Without this critical distancing, we end up - as Norris (1996; 1997) asserts of postmodernism - with no belief or argument being any more true than another.

The danger of relativism is clearly increased by the values factor. However, here Bhaskar's philosophy provides the basis for a more adequate discussion of the relationship between facts and values, including the key role of factual investigation and theory in challenging established values. (See Collier 1994: 170-200 for a summary, based substantially on Bhaskar 1986.) It might be argued that my critique of School Improvement simply represents 'another point of view' based solely on different values and beliefs; however, in *Schools and Poverty* (D), I have sought to argue that the orthodox SI paradigm is also ontologically unsound, epistemologically inadequate and practically incompetent in its engagement with schools in the most difficult circumstances.

As stated earlier, inadequate paradigms for analysing reality can ultimately distort the reality they are seeking to analyse. Indeed, Elliot Eisner, in his contribution to the conference, points out how that was already operating in the USA in terms of a linear rationality which holds sway in the paradigms for school evaluation and pedagogy. This ultimately affects structures and creates a new habitus and identity for teachers.

In conventional paradigms, action is idealized as a premeditated, goal-directed, cybernetically driven system. To act rationally, you have to have specific goals; the goals, in turn, determine the means you are to employ; the means you employ are then to be evaluated by their effects to determine the congruence between prespecified goals and the behaviour of students. (Eisner 1990:96)

In effect, what is at stake is a whole way of *both* understanding *and* acting on the world. The uncritical researcher easily becomes caught up in this.

It is this overarching and pervasive world-view that Raymond Williams seeks to understand, and for which he invents the concept of a *structure of feeling* (Williams 1958). Thus in addition to creating a new paradigm for English studies at university, Williams is also engaged in locating systematic patterns of feeling in society at large. This may run across a culture at a particular point in time, or transmit down the generations. The notion of 'structure of feeling', I would argue, gives a materiality to social psychology, as against the individualist and idealist way in which feelings and emotions are often discussed. Williams locates, in the literature, broad

patterns of thought, feeling, action and relationship which reflect what is hegemonic in the wider society.

These novels, when read together, seem to illustrate clearly enough not only the common criticism of industrialism, which the tradition was establishing, but also the general structure of feeling which was equally determining. Recognition of evil was balanced by fear of becoming involved. Sympathy was transformed, not into action, but into withdrawal. We can all observe the extent to which this structure of feeling has persisted, into both the literature and the social thinking of our own time. (Williams 1958: 119)

Such systematic ways of viewing the worlds – cultural paradigms – characterise an entire cultural situation (though Williams is careful to disallow a determinism which prevents resistance and change). Thus he examines why novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Bronte, as well as Dickens, cannot move beyond sympathy for the suffering of ‘the poor’ into engagement with workers’ political demands and movements (ibid: 99-119). He exposes Jane Austen’s limiting historical and geographical perspectives:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that Jane Austen chose to ignore the decisive historical events of her time.’ (1973:113).

In *The country and the city* (1973) Williams explores an enduring pattern of nostalgia about the countryside in English culture, tracing back the lost golden age, ever receding, until he eventually reaches Piers Plowman. This last example unites a critique of an academic paradigm, the Leavisite model of literary studies, with a wider cultural exploration.

It is when examining R. D. Laing’s work that we see how paradigms work in a field of institutionalised social practice such as psychiatry – or education. There are strong connections between academic paradigms, discourses as public frames of reference, and institutional structures. In a classic (we might say in Kuhn’s original sense of exemplary, a paradigmatic) example, Laing shows, by italicising the psychiatrist’s actions, just how questionable this is:

Here are a man and a young girl. If we see the situation purely in terms of Kraepelin’s point of view, it all immediately falls into place. He is sane, she is insane: he is rational, she is irrational. This entails looking at the patient’s actions out of the context of the situation as she experienced it. But if we take Kraepelin’s actions (in italics) – he tries to stop her movements, stands in front of her with arms outspread, tries to force a piece of bread out of her hand, sticks a needle in her forehead, and so on – out of the context of the situation as experienced and defined by him, how extraordinary they are! (1967:89)

Here *incommensurable* takes on a new meaning, in that the agent (in this case the psychiatrist) is so caught up in his professional habitus that he loses the ability to reflect on his own mode of

action. The extent of blockage and denial shows how strongly such ways of knowing the world are entangled with power – power/knowledge, as Foucault (1980a) expressed it.

If Jack succeeds in forgetting something, this is of little use if Jill continues to remind him of it. He must induce her not to do so... He may make her feel guilty for keeping on “bringing it up”. He may invalidate her experience. This can be done more or less radically. He can indicate merely that it is unimportant or trivial, whereas it is important and significant to her. Going further, he can shift the modality of her experience from memory to imagination: “It’s all in your imagination.” Further still, he can invalidate the content. “It never happened that way.” Finally, he can invalidate not only the significance, modality, and content, but her very capacity to remember at all, and make her feel guilty for doing so into the bargain... “How can you think such a thing?” “You must be paranoid.” (Laing 1967:31)

In such situations, perhaps unconsciously, one individual goes to great lengths to enforce a particular way of looking at the world.

The knowledge / power connections also, of course, operate at a macro-political level. A recent lecture on Laing’s legacy illustrates how the acceptance or rejection of a new paradigm depends strongly upon the wider economic and political situation:

Social approaches to mental health began to stagnate after the 1970s. Sociological approaches were everywhere in retreat, and the more extreme claims of critical psychiatry were discredited. In Britain, at least, the movement seemed to have been swept away as if it had never happened. Within mental health services a gradual shift of power back to psychiatry began to occur. These changes took place against a background of recurrent financial crises. Demand for mental health services increased, but the oil crisis plunged Western economies into recession. Mrs Thatcher introduced “Reaganomics” into Britain and the budget for health and social services was cut drastically. This ushered in the era of Managed Care – a new bogey for professionals and patients alike. This new alliance of positivism and managerialism created strange bedfellows. Managed Care represents an attack on professional autonomy, whether the professional happens to be a phenomenologist or a brain surgeon. During the same period, organic psychiatry made a spectacular come-back: once vilified, it now became prestigious – the 1990s were “the decade of the brain”. Psychiatry entered into an alliance with the pharmaceutical industry and discovered an enormous market. (Ingleby 2005)

Many of the above examples illustrate the limited understanding which arises when the object and activity of scientific study are assumed to be entirely separate from thought and feeling and human interaction. Kuhn’s recognition of the subjective and cultural dimensions of scientific discovery challenges this dualism, as does Laing’s objection to those established modes of clinical diagnosis which objectify the other. The opposite error is shown by relativist positions which submerge the researcher into what is being researched or assume that all conclusions are equally valid.



There is a danger of this in Flyvbjerg's (2001) recourse to Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* as ethical enquiry, which he distinguishes from *episteme* and *techne*. *Phronesis* necessarily involves human values and feelings, and it is important to counter those who seek to remove values from social sciences. However, Flyvbjerg suggests too rigid a separation between *phronesis* and *episteme*, as if factual verification did not matter in the social sciences. Let us consider what would occur if *techne* (craft skills or technology) were divorced from *episteme* (as scientific knowledge). Boats would sink and chairs would fall apart.

I return to Stephen and Hilary Rose (1976) for a way of resolving this. Whilst arguing against reductionism, they fully recognise the value of simplifying situations in order to concentrate on particular features. Indeed, they see the whole experimental tradition as involving reductions (isolating variables, producing mathematical representations). At the same time they argue that scientists should rebuild what they have taken apart, and reconnect those features which they have isolated for experimental purposes to the complexity of the wider world from which they were torn. This is an important way of reconciling the split between quantitative and qualitative methods in the social sciences generally; and of distinguishing between those quantitative studies in education which serve the cause of human development and social justice and those which simply reduce educational evaluation and change to government by numbers.



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## 'School effectiveness': the problem of reductionism

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School Effectiveness (SE), as a research paradigm and, more widely, as a set of political practices in school management and development, is examined in terms of the concept of 'reductionism'. The article serves to systematise an ongoing critique of Effectiveness by Ball, Morley, Fielding, Slee, etc. Building upon studies by the biologist Steven Rose and colleagues of reductionism from psychology to biology, the reductionism of the Effectiveness discourse is analysed in its methodological, contextual, historical and moral aspects. Finally, the article explores the impact of SE upon the dominant model of School Improvement in England in particular, and the need for transformation within that paradigm.

A growing number of writers have been pointing towards the reductionism of school effectiveness research. As far back as 1980, in a critique of Rutter's *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, Tony Burgess identified one limitation of the discourse: 'My fear has been that managerial goals are being offered as a substitute for more fundamental debate about curriculum and pedagogy' (Burgess, 1980, p. 13). Hazel Francis referred to its methodological simplification:

It takes no account of the nature of the situation in which these variables are identified and measured ... What we really want to know is how these [variables] and the many others that we could think of, together with the ecological variables we could identify, are interrelated for a particular child, or for many, in a complex real-life fifteen thousand hours story. (Francis 1980, pp. 19–20)

This critique has submerged and resurfaced periodically (e.g. Angus, 1993; Grace 1995; White & Barber, 1997). The question of reductionism is never far below the surface in the powerful critiques of school effectiveness discourse in two recent books (Slee & Weiner, 1998; Morley & Rassool, 1999). This article aims to draw together the arguments, setting them alongside defences by the principal gatekeepers of school

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effectiveness (SE), in order to attempt a systematic analysis of both the research paradigm and its impact on policy and practice.

It is important to clarify that I would not wish to argue against the existence of a 'school effect'. Despite a scepticism about certain claims and proofs, it seems indisputable that some schools achieve greater success, in examination and test results but also in terms of a wider view of educational achievement, than other schools in similar environments. The problem lies rather in an inadequate articulation of what counts as success, why some schools achieve it to a greater degree, and how other schools may aspire towards it.

Firstly, it may be necessary to establish a working definition of *school effectiveness*. In general use only since the 1970s, and in Britain especially since around 1985, the term has some international currency, partly due to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) influence<sup>2</sup>, but is not so widely established as is often believed. It is only strongly established in Britain, the USA and the Netherlands, with secure roots in a few other countries such as Australia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In popular use, 'school effectiveness' (SE) and 'school improvement' (SI) tend to be used interchangeably—understandably, given the enormous impact of SE on SI in Britain. However, drawing a clear distinction between the two paradigms, David Hopkins (a leading SI researcher) characterises SE as follows:

- a pragmatic response to policy initiatives
- a commitment to quantitative methods
- a concern with the formal organisation of schools rather than with their more informal processes
- a focus upon outcomes which were accepted as being a 'good' that was not to be questioned
- a focus upon description of schools as static, steady-state organisations generated by brief research study. (Hopkins, 2001, p. 57)

He contrasts this with the SI tradition, with its 'bottom-up' orientation, a qualitative research methodology, an emphasis on the dynamics of organisational processes, and a concern to 'treat educational outcomes as not *given* but problematic' (2001, p. 56). While concurring on the whole with Hopkins's distinction, I would wish to question this final point: School Improvement has been all too ready to accept the quantifiable outcomes privileged by school effectiveness research.

Teddlie and Reynolds (2000, p. 3), the chief international gatekeepers of the SE paradigm,<sup>1</sup> confuse the issue by presenting SI as a subset of SE, though their encyclopaedic *International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research* (2000) is almost entirely devoted to quantitative SE studies. This annexation serves as a convenient sleight of hand whenever SE is accused of narrowness, when its defenders will simply cite an SI study as evidence of greater breadth (e.g. Teddlie & Reynolds 2001, pp. 48–49).

In this article, I will be sticking to Hopkins's definition of SE, while recognizing that school improvement efforts, in Britain at least, have been seriously influenced and often distorted by the dominance of School Effectiveness.

## Biology, psychology and education

A useful precedent, especially for educationalists, is Steven Rose's (and colleagues) critiques of reductionism in natural sciences, and especially of attempts to analyse sociological or psychological phenomena in biological terms.

Firstly, we must acknowledge (H. Rose & S. Rose, 1976) that reductionism has been a necessary feature of experimental method for Western science, and has contributed to its rapid development, despite present concerns that a blinkered view leads to ecological and social damage. Experimental method typically involves holding a variety of other factors constant in order to examine quantitatively the relationship between one chosen input factor and a particular output. However, difficulties arise due to a belief that 'events in high-level sciences can be reduced on the basis of a one-for-one correspondence to events and hence laws appropriate to the lower-level science' (Rose & Rose, 1976, p. 97). (Biology is regarded here as 'higher' than physics or chemistry, and sociology and psychology 'higher' than biology.) Rose and Rose (1976; also Rose *et al.*, 1984) exemplify this in terms of genetic determinism, intelligence testing, biologyism (for example, treating war as an extension of animal aggression) and behaviourism.

From these various studies, it is possible to categorize four aspects of reductionism which can then provide a structure for examining school effectiveness. These are:

- (i) a mechanistic causality, e.g. a belief in one-to-one correspondences;
  - (ii) a failure to examine environmental influences and effects when tracing causal relationships within a system.
- I shall refer to these related issues as *methodological* and *contextual* reductionism. However, the problem is confounded by a failure of writers to examine the research environment itself; that is:
- (iii) how ideas develop, and why they become popular at a particular time;
  - (iv) the theory's social impact.

I will refer to these as *historical* and *moral* (or political/teleological) reductionism.

In order to rehearse for the subsequent analysis of reductionism in school effectiveness research, I will briefly exemplify these strands by examining Burt's promotion of the theory of innate general intelligence, as evaluated by Rose *et al.* (1984).

*Methodological reductionism.* The concept of IQ refines a broad spectrum of abilities to a single quantifiable factor, which can supposedly be measured through a written test. It inappropriately uses physical science metaphors such as 'capacity':

Capacity must obviously limit content. It is impossible for a pint jug to hold more than a pint of milk; [likewise] for a child's educational attainments to rise higher than his educable capacity permits. (Burt, quoted in Rose *et al.*, 1984, p. 87)

*Contextual reductionism.* Ability (quantified as IQ) is seen as innate, and unaffected by learning. (Here, Burt departs radically from Binet.) Amazingly, from intelligence tests on the children of Oxford academics and of manual workers attending very

different schools in the city, Burt concluded that this must be hereditary! (Burt, in Rose *et al.*, 1984, p. 87) (cf. also Burt's fictitious 'identical twin' studies, in Rose *et al.*, 1984 pp. 98 ff.)

*Historical reductionism.* Burt's data escaped close scrutiny during his lifetime, despite the vaguest reference to evidence: 'The majority remain buried in typed memoranda or degree theses' (Burt, 1943, in Rose *et al.*, 1984, p. 102). Correlation figures which remained identical to the third decimal place, however many pairs of identical twins were studied, failed to arouse suspicion (p. 103). Clearly, the notion of IQ served a political purpose in its time, justifying serious limits on the education of most working-class children whilst progressing a small minority to overcome the post-war skills shortage. (Cowburn [1986] argues that it was no longer possible to speak openly about fitting working-class children for their 'station in life' after the rise of the labour movement.)

*Moral reductionism.* The assertion of a scientific methodology makes it easier to place policies beyond dispute. It appeared irrational to demand secondary or higher education for most working-class children. If this led to the reproduction of social inequalities, a scientific cause could be found in the lower IQ inherited by the poor. Political arguments for democratic reform (comprehensive secondary schools) were kept at bay by pseudo-scientific determinism.

#### Scientific realism and school effectiveness research

Nash (2002), reflecting on the nature of statistical proofs in educational sociology, argues for an integration of quantitative and qualitative methods. Numbers in themselves are inadequate, and need to be complemented by an 'explanatory narrative'. This position derives in turn from Bhaskar's argument, in the philosophy of science, that even in a simple closed system, an explanation has to be provided to verify that the connections between cause and effect are not merely accidental: 'There is a real difference ... between the fact that when I heat the kettle of water it boils, and the fact that it boils when the time is half-past two' (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 200). A Humean epistemology would assume that, once regularity is discovered, there is nothing else to be said (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 175). According to Bhaskar, pursuing an anti-Humean position, the discovery of regularities is only a starting point: the scientist must move immediately to the construction of possible explanations, which can subsequently be tested out. Bhaskar argues that scientific explanation seeks a necessary connection between events, a 'generative mechanism', a 'power' or 'tendency' (for example, rooting the conductivity of metals in their atomic structure—the possession of free electrons) (1975, p. 223).

For Hume, regularity does not establish proof but it is as far as one can ever go. Bhaskar, on the other hand, argues that causality exists even when regularity is thwarted: 'Consistency with the facts is neither necessary nor sufficient for a theory' (1975, p. 138). This is particularly true in 'open systems' when multiple factors interact, for example, in history or the weather (1975, pp. 119–123). In such cases, it

becomes even more essential to develop adequate causal explanations: 'Tendencies may be possessed unexercised, exercised unrealised, and realised unperceived (or undetected) by men; they may also be transformed' (1975, p. 18).

This account, at once epistemological and ontological, seems to me more helpful than the simple quantitative–qualitative opposition which often surfaces in the field of education. It enables us to make a distinction between a realist and a positivist use of quantitative data. Thus, it is not quantitative methods themselves which are the problem, but their application within a positivist epistemology.

This is a central problem in school effectiveness research. There is a tacit assumption of reliable correspondences between inputs ('key characteristics') and outputs. Given the multiplicity of factors, it is further assumed that the most significant inputs can be discovered through a process of statistical correlation. This ignores the complexity of open systems, as Rose has indicated in refutation of a genetic determination:

The ultra-Darwinists' metaphysical concept of genes as hard, impenetrable and isolated units cannot be correct. Any individual gene can be expressed only against the background of the whole of the rest of the genome. Genes produce gene products which in turn influence other genes, switching them on and off, modulating their activity and function. (Rose, 1998, p. 215)

This is even more true in human organizations such as schools. Within a growing tradition of 'School Development' (*Schulentwicklung*) research in German-speaking countries, Bütelel explains a preference for a case-study approach:

In complex systems, causes always appear in bundles, and only the presence of a whole series of conditions guarantees success. Linear thinking is not good enough: we need to think of causal networks, in which multiple factors make each other operational. (Bütelel, 1998, p. 672)

Bütelel argues the value of ecological models derived from a study of the development histories of living systems. (1998, p. 675) Even this is insufficient to deal with the complexity of human systems in which shared meanings, developing cultures and the possibility of resistance play a part.

Neither the need to provide causal explanations nor the difficulties of irregularity and unreliability within open systems are accounted for in the effectiveness researchers' accounts of their own methodology, which tend to focus upon increasingly complex statistical procedure rather than epistemological justification (see, for example, Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000).

#### School effectiveness: a reductionist paradigm?

##### *Methodological reductionism: what makes schools effective*

School effectiveness research implicitly builds upon a positivistic natural science in establishing conclusions about input–output relationships. In doing so, within a complex human environment, it faces many problems.

(a) The identification of outputs is problematic, as schooling has a multiplicity of outcomes. When, occasionally, affective or social outcomes are included in school effectiveness research (SER), this is limited to such measurable factors as

- attendance (scarcely an educational purpose!) or (negatively) delinquency. The inevitable privileging of quantifiable outcomes has inevitable consequences for educational development.
- (b) Given the multiplicity of factors and the impossibility of keeping a sufficient number of factors constant, effectiveness research tries to substitute statistical correlation for physical science's experimental method. However, this cannot overcome the problems of irregularity/unreliability identified by Bhaskar. Statistical procedures cannot hope to map the complex interrelationship, mutual reinforcement and interference of specific actions. SER's assemblage of a list of 'key characteristics' does not resolve the problem. (It is for this reason that school improvement research has preferred a more holistic examination of 'school culture', i.e. of a nexus of meaningful actions [see Wrigley, 2000, pp. 27–30, and chapters by Busher, Bennett, McMahon and others in Harris & Bennett, 2001].)
- (c) A false assumption is made that correlation demonstrates causality (see Fidler, 2001). Hypotheses about such causal relationships can only be explored through qualitative investigations of case study schools, which might come nearer to producing causal explanations or, in Nash's words, 'narratives' (2002).
- (d) The attempt to separate contextual from school factors is flawed. School cultures are a 'product of the interaction between the official culture of the school and the cultures of pupils' (Harter, 1998, p. 280). Thrupp (2001, p. 27) argues that 'many school processes considered to contribute to school achievement may be less independent of school mix than typically allowed'. The complex process by which economic and cultural features of the extra-school environment are carried into the school through the individual and collective consciousness of pupils, reworked by teachers' assumptions and reactions, and transformed into school cultures cannot be modelled by statistical methods which attempt to partial out responsibility between societal, school and individual factors.
- (e) The input–output model is itself problematic. Many inputs and outputs are better described as intermediate factors or *process variables*, and are placed at other points in a causal relationship by different researchers. Attendance, for example, can be regarded as a basic causal input, but it is also a consequence of student satisfaction. Though many researchers prefer the term 'key characteristics' to 'inputs', the terminology is less important than their place within the grammar of school effectiveness, in which they are clearly positioned as *causes* (cf. Hamilton 1995, p. 126).
- (f) Finally, however reliable the mathematical calculations, their truth depends on the validity of categories, as expressed in natural language. Many 'key characteristics' identified in the literature (for example, 'a clear and continuing focus on teaching and learning') are semantically incapable of being assigned unambiguously to some schools and denied to others, as would be required for valid statistical modelling. How can researchers decide that one school has this characteristic and another doesn't: it is rarely a matter of yes or no, and what exactly do the words mean? Since the definitions are less exact than the calculations which follow, this undermines the reliability and validity of the mathematical calculations. Though it is not hard to accept that weak leadership can create difficulties, we are left with the

problem that 'strong leadership' can mean many different things, from supportive or inspiring to dictatorial. Some meanings are context-dependent. When Mortimore *et al.* (1988, p. 223) pointed to the importance of assessment, this was to distinguish between primary schools whose teachers either passed on a grade or examples of work to the next teacher from those in which no transfer of information at all was used to support pupil progression. It is fallacious to extrapolate from this a message that, within the current assessment-saturated culture of the English school system, more assessment might somehow correlate with higher performance.

The looseness of terminology is hidden by the 'certainty' conferred by mathematical exactness. Though 'characteristics of effective schools' are rarely capable of precise delineation, the appearance that they can be conveys an aura of scientific objectivity while simultaneously leaving them open to political reinterpretation and manipulation. Increasingly complex methods for measuring the relationships serve only to create a layer of mystification, rather than dealing with this fundamental problem.

However sophisticated the statistics, one is left wondering how it is possible to distinguish and apportion a wide range of 'key characteristics of effective schools' to their consequences. How does one decide which of the numerous possible factors has a significant bearing on a school's effectiveness? In the classic British study (Mortimore *et al.*, 1988, p. 248) the researchers acknowledged that the choice depended on professional judgement rather than statistical 'objectivity'. Likewise, the multitude of factors found in a plethora of SER studies did not assemble themselves into the 11 'key characteristics' of Sammons *et al.*'s metasudy (1995). This point has recently been conceded by a leading Dutch effectiveness researcher, Scheerens:

It is not easy to assess the exact empirical basis of the list of factors ... Most reviews do not state the statistical significance nor the size of the effects of the various factors in terms of association with adjusted achievement results ... The fact that numerous designs of school improvement projects have already taken these factors as a source of inspiration underlines that they appear to make sense' ... The messages that we can draw from the school effectiveness literature are general orientations rather than very precise recommendations. (Scheerens, 1998, pp. 1110–1113)

Repeatedly, beginner teachers at my university, in their shadow studies, attempt to correlate a teacher behaviour such as an emphasis on direct teaching or the frequency of questions with effective learning (or usually the proxy measure of 'on-task' behaviour). They quickly realise that the situation is vastly more complex, and all sorts of qualitative, curricular and interpersonal issues come into play. Much effectiveness research, in its attempt to find 'scientific' answers, actually *trails* behind novice observers in believing that input behaviours can map onto attainment outcomes. Reynolds and Teddlie (2001, p. 101) acknowledge that their methods 'can loosely be called positivistic'. They recurrently slip into a quantitative discourse:

Our 'touchstone criteria' ... concerns whether children learn *more or less* because of the policy or practice. (p. 104)

School effectiveness research had been well aware of the immense difficulties involved in measuring the variable 'curriculum'. (p. 110, my emphasis)



In consequence, the research is invariably distorted towards the most easily measurable outcomes. They assert that the research 'is now engaging with, and learning from, the new paradigms in the field of learning and instruction' and 'a new range of social or affective outcomes ... relevant to the highly complex, fast moving world of the early 21st century' (p. 111). However, there is no supporting evidence in this key defensive article.

The methodological reductionism of SER must be seen not only within the research methodology, but in terms of the public discourse:

Ten years after ERA [Education Reform Act], we find teachers not as cultural workers able to engage freely in critique and self-definition, creating new spaces within which the parameters of educational debate and pedagogical possibility could be redefined. Instead, we find them rigidly locked into the technicism of school effectiveness taxonomies focused on quality control which, in turn, are subjected to a myriad of external and internal bureaucratic forms of control. (Morley & Rassool, 1999, p. 33)

This hegemony of statistical forms of evaluation configures the word 'value' as 'exchange value' rather than 'worth'. Thus, it places important curricular questions beyond discussion; what children learn is a 'given', and the teacher's role is merely to deliver it so that the transmission can be measured.

Here again, the differences should be noted between school effectiveness, as a predominantly Anglo-American tradition, and European traditions of school development:

Whereas in German and French speaking countries, a quite broadly defined concept of 'quality' is prominent, the Anglo-Saxon countries prefer the narrower concept of 'effectiveness' which is empirically tangible but consequently limited to only a few of the effects of schooling ... In Germany, there is an intensive debate about good and bad schools, but case studies are preferred to systematic empirical-analytical research. That is because we no longer see schools as mechanical input-output systems but as complex social systems which are defined by processes rather than products. If you see holistic personal development as the aim of such systems, then school effectiveness analysis becomes rather difficult. (Büdel, 1998, pp. 666-669)

#### *Contextual reductionism: pushing the world to one side*

No school is an island. School effectiveness research recognizes this only tangentially and perversely, in its attempt to separate out the relative influence of home and school on attainment.

The relationship between a school and its environment is complex, dynamic and reciprocal. Some schools in high-poverty areas become more successful through an intelligent and hopeful engagement with the community; the school's improvement may sometimes even contribute to an area's economic regeneration. In other cases, school and community seem bound to each other in a downward spiral of helplessness and despair. Effectiveness research takes our attention away from the interrelationship, since its methods involve statistically removing the environmental effects from the frame in order to concentrate on the 'school effect'. Riddell *et al.* argue that:

Social class is reduced to a variable to be controlled for and thereafter ignored, rather than recognized as a vital element in terms of accounting for the level of measured effectiveness and strategies for school improvement. (1998, p. 184)

Similarly, Angus comments:

Family background, social class, any notion of context are typically regarded as 'noise', as 'outside background factors' which must be controlled for and then stripped away so that the researcher can concentrate on the important domain of school factors. (1993, p. 361)

Teddlie and Reynolds (2001, p. 57) counter by arguing that SER does not 'ignore context variables'. This reductionist formulation paradoxically confirms what is being denied: the communities which schools serve cannot be reduced to a numerical data set.

There are some further problems with SER's understanding of social class and school effectiveness:

- (i) SER generally concludes that schools can raise attainment despite their environment by applying a neutral set of recommendations. In reality, the interaction of successful schools with their environment is complex and dynamic, and one which teachers have to negotiate on a daily basis. For example, the important qualities of successful multethnic schools (Blair & Bourne, 1998; Wrigley, 2000) are quite different from the generalized list in the key metastudy by Sammons *et al.* (1995). Important qualities in these schools include a capacity to listen to the community voice, and to have a curriculum which is inclusive towards community experience, whilst filtering out any negative impacts of a macho street culture. My hypothesis is that successful schools in 'adverse circumstances' are effective precisely because they take the background fully on board. 'Turning around' a struggling inner-city school may involve precisely turning the staff around to connect and negotiate with the community and its circumstances, as opposed to building higher institutional walls.
- (ii) The typical grammar of effectiveness research, since it defines itself unidirectionally in terms of a search for school effect, involves positioning the outside world as a background factor to be controlled for. Other forms of statistical study are assumed to fall within a sociological, rather than effectiveness, paradigm. They use similar statistical processes but reverse the terms. A key example is Gillborn and Mirza's (2000) study of the relative importance of class, race and gender in the UK, which establishes issues of crucial importance relating social justice to school success. Similarly, Bruce Biddle (1997) uses statistical modelling to challenge the US funding system, which reinforces disadvantage; he demonstrates that poverty reinforced by poor funding in the USA identified by TIMSS (the Third International Mathematics and Science Study). This is, of course, not a conclusion that researchers are paid to reach.

- (iii) The success of the 'most effective' schools in poorer areas is relative to other similar schools, though often spoken of as if it were absolute. SER has had an enormous impact on state-funded education for over a decade. National data

shows that, by the age of 16, even the most effective schools with high poverty levels barely touch the attainment levels of the least effective schools with few poor children (Department for Education and Skills [DEES], 2001). Indeed, the comprehensive data available to the English inspectorate shows that, of all secondary schools with 35% or more pupils entitled to free school meals, only 2% reach national average attainment (Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted] 2000).<sup>2</sup>

(iv) Though occasionally (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993, pp. 30–31) a few low-SES (socio-economic status) schools outperform some less effective middle-SES schools, this does not alter the general situation. Across the whole education system, and within individual schools, the attainment gap remains, and correlates strongly with social class factors such as parental occupation, income and education. This is in spite of the high levels of dedication, time and effort, and the quality of leadership, required to become a relatively effective school in an area of social deprivation. This would seem to suggest that current policies of intensifying competitive pressure on individual schools in poorer areas to increase their examination success may not be the most effective way to promote social and educational inclusion.

(v) Studying successful schools 'against the odds' falsely suggests that social disadvantage can be overcome across an entire population or education system without dramatic social transformation. Almost alone among effectiveness researchers, Peter Mortimore (with Geoff Whitty, 1997) has spoken out publicly against this conclusion, and the way which politicians have used it to excuse inaction about poverty in the field of welfare provision, employment, housing and so on. These writers argue that improving schools' effectiveness for pupils generally does raise attainment but leaves the attainment gap between rich and poor undiminished. Indeed, Mortimore even suggests that the gap may widen as all schools become more effective. Moreover, if in the process the currency of examination results becomes debased, then students from more disadvantaged backgrounds may find themselves in possession of certificates which have little exchange value. (Mortimore & Whitty, 1997, p. 9)

Recent attempts (cf. Elliot & Sammons, 2001) to use value-added data to judge schools imply that once attainment at, say, age 11 is 'controlled for', all pupils, whatever their circumstances, should make equal progress. This is manifestly not the case. It is clear from the 'Autumn Package' (DFES, 2001, and annually) that the gap between schools serving richer and poorer communities substantially increases during the secondary years: by age 16 the highest attaining schools in the poorest areas barely match the attainment of the lowest attaining schools in the most affluent areas, despite considerable overlap at age 11.

A further issue in the contextual closure of SER is the way its gatekeepers seal the boundary to exclude much research which ought to be of interest. For example, the 400 pages of the *International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research* (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000) neglect the rich studies relating to the effectiveness of strategies for minority ethnic and bilingual pupils (Cummins, 2000, p. 247; August & Hakuta's

metastudy, 1997), as well as the extensive evaluations of the Accelerated Schools movement in the USA. It would appear that the school effectiveness paradigm is not simply a methodological specialism, but a 'selective tradition' in Raymond Williams's sense.

Indeed, there are surprisingly few references to SES as a variable within the *International Handbook*. The most important section (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000, pp. 165–170) cites mainly US-based studies, and very little within the last 10 years. Sadly, the few studies of relatively 'effective' inner-city schools cited exemplify a culture of top-down surveillance and professional control, and a curriculum which is restricted to 'basic skills'. This is in stark contrast to patterns of curriculum development within the substantial American networks such as Essential Schools and Accelerated Schools.

#### *Historical reductionism: research in a vacuum*

In recent decades, scholars in many different fields have learnt the value of self-awareness—being conscious of their personal perspectives and of the origins and positioning of their disciplines. It is no longer possible to regard academic disciplines as free entities floating outside time. Even in natural sciences, the current paradigm and the surrounding culture, not to mention the funding sources, influence how research questions are framed.

Such self-awareness is doubly important in the social sciences as the human actors are not only objects of study but also human agents. The meanings created within a discipline impact discursively through these human agents, thus radically transforming the reality the discipline seeks to describe. Hence the importance of Habermas's distinction (1972, pp. 310–315) between a practical mode of human understanding, which tends towards reinforcing consensus, and an emancipatory mode which is able to question its own direction and functioning.

SER seems remarkably unaware of its own history. It accounts for its origins in opposition to the Coleman report (1966) as if this were merely a methodological turn. The Coleman report, repeatedly denigrated in SER literature, was ground-breaking for the USA in demonstrating the links between racial oppression and poor school attainment. SER has developed, as a paradigm radically separate from sociology, to highlight the impact of the school; whilst producing some useful conclusions, it has deflected attention from issues such as Coleman raised. Its conclusions, indeed the entire discourse resulting from its terms of reference, have comforted neoliberal politicians intent on minimizing social spending and rolling back welfare structures.

SER took off in the UK as a consequence of the marketization of education in the 1980s (Rea & Weiner, 1998, p. 22; Morley & Rassool, 1999, pp. 12–13; Harris, 2001). The 'quasi-market' and SER are mutually reinforcing: competition pressures headteachers to scan the literature for 'quick fix' ways to raise attainment, and conversely the emphasis on statistical 'effectiveness' measures increases this pressure by giving the 'customers' (parents) misleading reasons for choosing one school over another. SER has given scant attention to the intense and unfair competition which has produced 'failing schools' (for example, the notorious case of Rydings School, an

11–16 'non-selective' school in a low SES area surrounded by grammar schools, other 11–18 schools and church schools operating various forms of covert selection). The term 'ineffective' serves to imply that schools are autonomous units responsible for turning inputs into outputs by operationalizing 'key characteristics'. Angus (1993, p. 343) expresses this as:

an isolationist, apolitical approach to education in which it is assumed that educational problems can be fixed by technical means and inequality can be managed within the walls of schools and classrooms provided that teachers and pupils follow 'correct' effective school procedures.

*Moral reductionism: schools without values*

SER's positivism is not merely a methodological limitation; it is intimately linked with the moral reductionism whereby researchers can wash their hands of responsibility for the social impact of their work. Lauder, *et al.* (1998) refer to an 'abstracted empiricism' which ignores 'policy, cultural, political and historical questions'. The nature of the academic discourse leads to a self-concept on the part of its researchers as 'objective' or 'scientific' and thereby absolved from moral judgements.

The principal gatekeepers, Teddlie and Reynolds describe themselves variously as 'positivist' or 'pragmatist' (see Reynolds & Teddlie, 2001, p. 101; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2001, p. 67). Pragmatism here appears to refer simply to a greater methodological variety rather than to a greater reflection on values. They miss their critics' essential critique of value-blindness, and indeed continue by insisting on a pragmatic acquiescence with dominant political forces.

The 'narrow agenda' of pragmatists working in SER is more realistic at this point in time than the 'redistributive politics' of the critical theorists. (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2001, p. 70)

Pragmatists, working within the SER paradigm, believe that efforts to alter the existing relationship between social class and student achievement by bringing about broad societal changes are naïve, perhaps quixotic. We prefer to work within the constraints of the current social order. (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2001, p. 71)

Elsewhere, Reynolds (2001) argues that greater progress has been made by eschewing a debate about values:

Disciplinary advance has been furthered by the possession of an agreed methodology, which can loosely be called positivist, that has generated a common set of judgements as to which knowledge is valid and which is invalid.

This echoes Rose's point that a reductionist experimental methodology may bring about rapid advances but at the expense of understanding the social and moral consequences of discoveries. By the same token, Reynolds fails to answer—or even pose—the question 'progress towards what?' By analogy with many scientists researching nuclear fusion or genetic engineering, Teddlie and Reynolds wash their hands of any responsibility for the application of their research (2001, p. 51). This is disingenuous, given the intimate relationship, especially in the UK, between SER and its government sponsors. Stephen Ball (1998, p. 73) rightly speaks of a 'Faustian deal-making between the academic and politicians'.

This is not to suggest that researchers should reject funding from official bodies, but rather, like Mortimore, that they should have the integrity to recognize the dilemmas and speak out against the misuse of their research findings—often channelled via media soundbites into moral panics and then by government into 'quick fix' policy moves.

Nor do I wish to downvalue the importance of statistical and other quantitative research, which, as shown above, can be used for fundamentally different purposes. The categorization of some research as 'sociology' rather than SER further demonstrates that we are dealing with a profoundly ideological phenomenon. The very different orientation of Gillborn and Mirza's and Biddle's work has already been referred to. It would be salutary for Anglo-American researchers in the school effectiveness tradition to examine recent statistical work on the PISA study from the Max-Planck Institute in Berlin—exemplary in combining statistical rigour with political and philosophical evaluation (see Baumer & Schümer [2002] for summary in English).

There is a signal failure to question the effect of effectiveness research, for example, through the channel of teacher supply. 'High-stakes testing' and high-profile comparisons between schools' results inevitably deter many teachers from risking enduring career damage by choosing to work in more difficult schools. Thus, the impact of a school effectiveness discourse may be to *produce* more ineffective schools in poorer areas, as Reynolds has cautiously hinted (2001, p. 31).

A regime of accountability, assessment and target-setting is also resulting in a marginalization of areas of the curriculum which are less susceptible to measurement, such as the humanities and the arts. The pressure to meet targets in literacy and numeracy is squeezing out other studies (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, 2001; Her Majesty's Inspectorate, 2001). Characteristically, a recent book by Mujs and Reynolds entitled *Effective Teaching* (2001) generates most of its examples from numeracy, and scarcely mentions the arts, humanities or education for citizenship.

Taking the curriculum for granted is a key aspect of SER's moral reductionism—a failure to question educational aims. Debate about content and values is replaced by technicist recommendations on how to 'deliver' it, within this positivist/pragmatist paradigm. This may even lead (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986) to the conclusion that the curriculum must tend towards 'basic skills' in the poorer areas. The social consequences of such curricular 'necessity' and the meaning which is then attached to the term 'effective' are not examined. Similarly, vocationalism is often seen as the answer in inner-city schools, to the neglect of students' need to understand the social and economic forces which render them poor. The school effectiveness discourse is silent on social justice: 'Equity is submerged within the rhetorical exhortation of the achievement in test scores' (Sleq, 1998, p. 111) It is of course essential that students from the wrong end of town, including minority ethnic students, should achieve good examination certificates: they are a crucial passport for overcoming discrimination and opening new opportunities. This is not, however, sufficient, since black and working-class students also need to engage in collective social debate and struggle in order to gain control of their futures.



### Reductionism and political reaction

The relationship between reductionism and political conservatism is complex, both in Rose's examples and for SER. One could argue that Burt was driven towards a reactionary conclusions by his positivist methodology, were it not for evidence of a pre-existing set of (class-based and eugenicist) values steering him towards a particular method. Note the following entry in his undergraduate notebook:

The problem of the very poor—chronic poverty: Little prospect of the solution of the problem without the forcible detention of the wreckage of society or otherwise preventing them from propagating their species. (in Rose *et al.*, 1984, p. 87)

There is, at the very least, a mutual reinforcement between methodology and ideology. It would, however, be erroneous to suggest that effectiveness researchers have deliberately set out to produce a reactionary discourse. On the contrary, many operated from a concern to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged students. It is, rather, the terms in which the whole field is framed which tend to sow illusions that increased efforts by teachers will result in greater social justice. We have a modern version of the Victorian ideology of the 'self-made man':

Any capitalist there, who had made sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence, always professed to wonder why the sixty thousand nearest Hands didn't each make sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence, and more or less reproached them everyone for not accomplishing the little feat. What I did you can do. Why don't you go and do it? (Dickens, *Hard Times*, 1854, III/1)

At the same time, effectiveness researchers are inevitably affected by a political and cultural environment in which financial values predominate over human or religious ones. The dominant discourse is of 'economic rationalism', whose tacit purpose is concealed by non-discussion of educational aims. Lingard, *et al.* (1998) relate 'economic rationalism' in education—the replacement of a values discussion by one about 'performance' and 'efficiency'—to the wider moral reductionism within capitalist economy and culture:

Economism recognises no other form of interest than that which capitalism has produced, through a kind of real operation of abstraction, by setting up a universe of relations between man and man based, as Marx says, on 'callous cash payment' ... (quoting from Bourdieu, 1990, p. 112)

Postmodernism has had little direct impact on educational studies. Nevertheless, the postmodernist denial that any shared 'Enlightenment' values are possible, the extinction of any 'grand narrative', the fragmentation of public values discourse, has served to reinforce the power of the raw cash nexus of a society which means fundamentally *laissez capiteux* rather than *post-anything*. This neo-liberal ideology provides the context for the specific practices of school effectiveness, and for versions of school improvement which, in their teleological blindness, depend upon it.

By contrast, Grace (1998, p. 124) appeals for a 'values-added' inquiry, not just 'value-added' research. He argues that it is no use just talking of 'effectiveness' and schools making a 'difference'—we must ask 'difference to what?' (1998, p. 120) He speaks of a 'mission reductionism' which has been particularly uncomfortable for Catholic schools. Similarly, my own research into educational success for bilingual

pupils (Wrigley, 2000) shows the extent to which social commitments have to be inscribed into the words and actions of the whole school community in cases of real improvement.

But the reductionist paradigm and discourse of SER does not merely derive from a reactionary ideology prevalent within the wider society. Through its discursive closure to any debates about educational aims and social values, its 'pragmatic' rejection of 'quixotic' theories which get in the way of its efficient pursuit of 'effectiveness characteristics', school effectiveness actively reinforces the hegemony of economism by placing essential value issues out of bounds.

### The impact of school effectiveness on school improvement

School improvement research follows a different logic from Effectiveness. Hopkins (2001, p. 56) defines it as more qualitative in orientation, focusing on ownership of an improvement process by the whole staff, and with a close eye to specifics when analysing organizational processes.

However, in Britain at least, the macro-politics of a strong accountability drive, an imposed curriculum and assessment, a government intent on promoting educational advance (though incapable of theorizing what this means), and a will to use education assertively in an intensely competitive globalized market have proved fertile ground for the discursive practices of SER. Effectiveness has indeed made the running: its language is the discourse of education as competitive exchange value which remains vague about its use value—the educational counterpart of a globalized economy where the interests of finance capital override the developmental needs of industrial capitalism, let alone production for local human needs. Thus, school improvement in Britain has been read by government and by many headteachers in terms of processes for delivering greater 'effectiveness', as narrowly defined. School Improvement's increasing sophistication, and its illuminating emphasis on culture, complexity theory, and processes of corporate reflection, cannot in themselves challenge the moral limitations derived from the Effectiveness tradition.

Though some movement within the paradigm is evident, among writers such as MacBeath, who are increasingly focused on issues of democratic development, and by various contributors at the Toronto and Copenhagen ICSEI (International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement) conferences (see reports in *Improving Schools*, 2001[1] and 2002[1]), school improvement as a whole remains far from the emancipatory model towards which Hopkins (2001, p. 19) would like to steer it. There is an enormous gulf between the British tradition, based on assumed consensus and agreement with government aims for education, and the wider and more critical values base to be found for example, in the international collections edited by Hargreaves *et al.* (1998) and Altrichter *et al.* (1998).

This is reflected in the widespread disquiet within schools as teachers feel the dissonance between the official 'improvement' discourse and their own professional and social values, between a ruthless pursuit of higher and higher targets and the students' need for educational satisfaction and social inclusion, between singular demands for academic results and 'education for citizenship'.

In recent years, various writers (e.g. Stoll & Fink 1995; Reynolds *et al.*, 1996) have embarked upon discussions about a 'merger' between school effectiveness and school improvement. I would wish to argue that they have actually come too close to one another, and that the effectiveness discourse has had far too limiting an influence on how improvement is conceptualized:

Much of the high-level government interest in school improvement has led to an intensification of teaching, accountability, league tables, teachers feeling deprofessionalised and disenfranchised (or leaving), a relentless drive for more though not always better—and silence on the question of *educational purpose* ... Have our schools been driven towards *efficiency* rather than *genuine improvement*? (Whitley, 2001)

The extent of disillusionment, the exodus of new teachers from the profession, the angst of school leaders and the international strength of dissident voices are creating a genuine opportunity, despite the global drive towards effectiveness in 'economic rationalist' terms, to build a movement for real improvement in education.

## Notes

1. The frequency of reference to Reynolds and Teddlie in this article is not accidental, but relates to their key role as editors of the *International Handbook*, and their articulate defence of School Effectiveness as a paradigm within their journal *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* and elsewhere.
2. The most recent data from the DES (after this paper was submitted) shows a sudden rise in attainment scores for schools with over 50% free school meals. There are indications that this is due to an anomaly in the method of calculation, whereby an Intermediate GNVQ now counts as four GCSE A\*-C grades. Many schools under threat have responded by buying a distance learning package in ICT, which has brought a sudden upsurge in the percentage of pupils with five or more A\*-C grades 'or the equivalent', though at great cost in terms of curricular balance.

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## In Search of Inclusive Pedagogies: The Role of Experience and Symbolic Representation in Cognition

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### Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between social class and low academic achievement in the light of recent developments in pedagogical theory. It revisits historically influential theories (innate intelligence and language deficit) using the lens of situated cognition and activity theory as conceptualisations of knowledge and learning which embed thinking within action, experience and context. Drawing on Wenger (1998) and others, it argues for a more skilful grounding of theoretical learning in experience, so that good opportunities are given to exercise voice and agency. The paper includes positive examples from lesson observations in urban schools. The methodology is that of a critical and historical review of key theories, followed by a theoretical discussion of recent pedagogical developments and specific examples drawn from the writer's fieldwork studies of successful schools in areas of disadvantage.

### Introduction

An important normative feature of school learning is the privileging of abstract reasoning over thinking which is experientially grounded. Although practical activity has had a place in schools, it has often been positioned as of low status and seen in terms of trained actions rather than as situated learning (a key exception to this being the development of Design and Technology to replace craft subjects). At the same time, forms of learning in more cognitive or 'academic' subjects often involve abstract verbal explanations with very little experiential involvement or use of other sensory channels.

I would like to argue that this basic culture of learning is likely to have a particularly damaging effect on students from marginalised communities. Firstly, if the school is perceived as failing to attach value to manual work, the cultural assets of the neighbourhood are not converted into cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1983). A significant gulf emerges between the learning culture of the school and forms of manual activity in poorer communities – and indeed patterns of everyday informal learning which are often more 'situated' than traditional school learning. Secondly, access to learning is made more difficult for pupils who lack the out-of-school experience to interpret their teachers' explanations or who are less accustomed to abstract linguistic registers.



The privileging of abstract reasoning has been a recurrent feature informing hegemonic theories of ability and intelligence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, the notion of intelligence as generic and innate, and subsequent language deficit theories, have been deployed, *albeit* for different motives, to explain the relatively lower attainment of pupils from manual worker families. We are now able to review such constructs and discourses with the benefit of hindsight, because of the different way in which activity theory and situated cognition frame the relationship of symbolic representation to experiential involvement. Beyond this pedagogical analysis, the subsections of the following section also attempt to provide some historical explanation of the popularity and explanatory power of these theories.

## Conceptualising Reasoning, Language and Experience

### *Cyril Burt and the concept of innate intelligence*

From roughly the 1920s to the 1950s, Cyril Burt, London's first educational psychologist, was able to shape professional and popular understanding around a concept of innate intelligence, supposedly measurable by IQ tests. 'Intelligence' was constructed in terms of highly abstract forms of reasoning, with logical puzzles such as "Rectangle is to square as ellipse is to...". It is hardly surprising that children from professional families tended to be more successful than those from manual workers' families who were more accustomed to dealing with less abstract but equally complex real life problems. (Illogically Burt, in an early study, jumped to the conclusion that differences in measured IQ between the children of Oxford university teachers and those of manual workers in the town must be due to heredity rather than environment. Rose, Kamin and Lewontin [1984, p. 87] argue that this is the result of the hegemony of Social Darwinism as an ideology but also of Burt's class prejudice. While still an undergraduate student at Oxford, Burt had noted: "the problem of the very poor – chronic poverty: little prospect of the solution of the problem without the forcible detention of the wreckage of society or otherwise preventing them from propagating their own species".)

As Neisser (1976) points out, such tests are designed by people with a particular type of intelligence to identify others with a similar type of intelligence:

Academic people are among the stoutest defenders of the notion of intelligence....[T]he tests seem so obviously valid to us who are members of the academic community....There is no doubt that Academic Intelligence is really important for the kind of work that we do. We readily slip into believing that it is important for every kind of significant work. (p. 138)

It has been suggested that this model was particularly influential because of its ideological convenience. According to Cowburn (1986), the increased power of the labour movement in the early years of the 20th century made it impossible for the British ruling class to continue arguing overtly, as they had in Victorian times, that manual workers' children must not be educated 'above their station'. In parallel to this, the desperate skills shortage after World War I meant that some limited upward mobility was needed, with 'intelligence tests' at age 11 serving as a gatekeeper to allow some working class children access to a secondary education, whilst leaving intact the basic social divisions in the school system.

*Basil Bernstein and the concept of language deficit*

Once the concept of innate intelligence lost favour – and after Burt’s research was exposed as largely fraudulent (Rose, Kamin & Lewontin, 1984, p. 98) – theories of verbal deficit emerged as the preferred explanation for differential levels of school achievement of pupils from different backgrounds. (More extended critiques of language deficit theories can be found, among other sources, in Rosen [1972], Labov [1969], Gordon [1981], Tizard and Hughes [1984], Edwards and Westgate [1994] and Edwards [1976].) At this time, across Britain, established structures of two- or three-tiered secondary schooling were being abandoned and comprehensive schools established, though it was already being realised that that would not automatically bring about equality of outcome. (It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the reasons behind the parallel growth of deficit theories in the United States of America.)

In their most primitive forms, language deficit theories were based on a crude prejudice which saw certain dialects and accents as inferior. The colloquial speech of working class pupils was described in quasi-moral terms, as bad grammar, slovenly speech, sloppy pronunciation and foul language. Such judgments often showed high levels of linguistic misunderstanding and social prejudice.

Bereiter et al. (1966, p121) frown on pupils who reply to the question ‘Where is the squirrel?’ by saying ‘In the tree’ rather than ‘The squirrel is in the tree.’ Riessmann (1962, p75) writes: ‘The communication of the deprived is famous for its use of imaginative nicknames and shortenings – the British “never-never” for instalment buying, “telly” for TV, “pub” for bar or public place [*sic*]. (Gordon, 1981, p. 50)

Particular dialect forms such as double negatives were assumed to be *illogical*; they had to be eliminated in young children in order to make them fit for schooling. In the United States of America, the Black English Vernacular of African Americans became a particular target, with features such as the double negative (“I ain’t going nowhere”) or missing copula (“She no good!”) regarded as a barrier to cognitive development. An old kind of prejudice was emerging as a new quasi-scientific explanation.

In Britain, however, a more sophisticated language deficit theory came from Basil Bernstein (e.g., 1965, 1971, 1973). (Bernstein himself denied that it amounted to a deficit theory. The point is skilfully argued by Gordon [1981, pp. 66-89], who provides a penetrating commentary on Bernstein’s inconsistencies.) His argument, in a nutshell, was that working class children’s speech is largely determined by a “restricted code”, whereas middle class children frequently use language which it regulated according to an “elaborated code”. “Restricted code” utterances make sense within the shared experience of a familiar or immediate context; “elaborated code” denotes utterances which are more explicit. “Elaborated code” is appropriate when speaking about a situation which is not immediately present to the speaker and listeners, or at least familiar to them both. Bernstein listed a number of grammatical markers of each code; for example, “restricted code” tends to involve more pronouns, whereas “elaborated code” involves more nouns.

The problem centres on the relationship of language and other symbolic forms with experience, or more precisely on the complementary contributions of symbolic forms and lived experience in producing meaning. This is the dominant question of this

paper, connecting language deficit theories and Burt's decontextualised 'intelligence', and underpinning the pedagogical problems of decontextualised abstract instruction which will be discussed later.

Bernstein experienced particular problems in constructing his explanation for low attainment; his arguments depend on unclear causal links among class, family type, linguistic code, speech and educational attainment. (The term "code" is itself obscure. Bernstein uses it to refer directly not to patterns of speech but to an underlying organising principle which leads to the production of certain types of speech. The essential point, in the end, is that a distinction is being made between two different types of language.) (See Edwards [1976] for an extended discussion of these posited causal links.) However, even the basic empirical evidence was flawed. The most famous demonstration was through an experiment in which 'working class' and 'middle class' children were asked to describe a drawing of boys playing football and accidentally kicking the ball through a neighbour's window. (Like many sociologists, Bernstein uses the terms "working class" and "middle class" to make a broad distinction between manual and white collar employment. These broad definitions are a source of further problems, since there is no differentiation, for example, between different levels of skill in manual occupations or between routine clerical work and the higher professions. There is often a degree of social stereotyping in his notion of a working class home or community.)

The middle class version of the description of the drawing is more explicit:

Three boys are playing football and one boy kicks the ball and it goes through the window the ball breaks the window and the boys are looking at it and a man comes out and shouts at them because they've broken the window so they run away and then that lady looks out of her window and she tells the boys off.

The working class version uses pronouns, assuming that the listener will understand:

They're playing football and he kicks it and it goes through there it breaks the window and they're looking at it and he comes out and shouts at them because they've broken it so they run away and then she looks out and she tells them off. (Bernstein, 1972, p. 167)

(Like other 'evidence' in support of Bernstein's arguments, we do not have access to real quotations but only to the research assistant's reconstruction of typical versions. The research assistant, Hawkins [1969], calls them "slightly exaggerated" versions.)

Ironically, the researchers missed the point – that the children, and the listener, have the drawing in front of them all the time. Pronouns are quite sufficient in this context. If anything, it is the first child's use of language which is inappropriate. Bernstein does not argue that working class children are incapable of more explicit syntax or that they do not have the grammar but that they simply tend to use language differently. An alternative explanation would be that the middle class children in the experiment have a different social understanding of the situation – namely, that it requires a more formal register.



Bernstein was hurt by accusations that he held a deficit view of working class speech, yet it is hard to avoid that conclusion. In retrospect, it would have been perfectly possible to use more neutral terms such as “abstracted” and “contextualised” rather than “elaborated” and “restricted” codes, or even to reverse the polarity with “disembodied” and “situated”.

Bernstein’s theories were received enthusiastically and became, in crude popular versions, a kind of professional folklore. British teachers in the 1970s would frequently claim that working class parents “don’t talk to their children, they just hit them” or that the children arrive at school “without any language” (Tizard & Hughes, 1984, p. 159).

#### *Alternative explanations*

The deficit view, in its North American version, was vigorously attacked by Labov (1969), who provided evidence of black youth debating theology and politics on the streets of the Harlem ghetto:

There is no reason to believe that any non-standard vernacular is in itself an obstacle to learning. The chief problem is ignorance of language on the part of all concerned....Teachers are now being told to ignore the language of Negro children as...useless for learning. They are being taught to hear every natural utterance of the child as evidence of his [*sic*] mental inferiority. As linguists we are unanimous in condemning this view as bad observation, bad theory and bad practice. (p. 34)

In England, Rosen (1972) made similar points about the rich verbal culture of militant working class areas in Britain such as the London Docklands and the coalmining regions:

No attention is paid to that vast area of critical working-class experience, the encounter with exploitation at the place of work and the response to it....Collective bargaining, demonstrations, strikes and so on...can occur only if language is available which is adequate to the task. What kind of people imagine that the 1972 miners’ strike, for example, was made possible merely by the incantation of a few rabble-rousing slogans?

It would be valuable to revisit Labov’s (1969) and Rosen’s (1972) argument through a closer examination of the discourse of high level debate in such environments. My hypothesis would be that it would depend much more than most classroom-based argument on the interweaving of narrative with abstract language. Such discourse would probably also make greater acknowledgement of different voices (real or hypothetical), rather than the voice (or rather voicelessness) of “decontextualised rationality” (Wertsch, 1990) – a register which silences and conceals conflicting perspectives and interests beneath the pseudo-objectivity of Enlightenment discourse.

Here Bourdieu’s (1983) concept of cultural capital is relevant: it is not so much the characteristics of a particular class culture as whether it is validated by the school. As other opponents of the language deficit view have pointed out, we should also take account of the limitations of the school as a discursive environment:

- a) Spoken language in the classroom is largely dominated by closed questions, giving the pupils little opportunity to speak for more than two or three words. Some researchers have pointed out that the language practice of working class homes is actually richer than that of the school, in terms of the negotiation and development of meaning, and that in reality schools do little to compensate for the supposed deficit (see Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Wells & Wells, 1984).
- b) School language operates at a high level of abstraction, making it difficult for many pupils to connect concepts with experience. School learning does require some explicit communications about situations that are not physically present. However, it happens too frequently that teachers use abstract language without providing photographs or real objects, as if the teacher and pupils shared a common experience.

As Edwards and Westgate (1994) noted:

The characteristic identified most often as the main source of difficulty is the high level of abstraction which pervades so much classroom talk (and, of course, classroom writing). It is argued that most of the expository language of teachers, and of textbooks, is 'language at the apex of a pyramid of experience' – that is, language which offers summaries of, or generalizations about, objects and actions and events (Rosen 1967). That would not be a problem if more of the pyramid had earlier been in view, because we are all accustomed to first 'telling a story' and then 'giving the gist' of it. Problems arise where there has been no 'story' – where the abstractions are free-floating, unattached to those detailed empirical referents which can alone give them life (Barnes et al, 1969; Edwards, A. 1978; Hull, 1985). (p. 35)

Vygotsky (1986) argues that in such situations words are acquired as empty shells rather than as real concepts:

Direct teaching of concepts is impossible and fruitless. A teacher who tries to do this usually accomplishes nothing but empty verbalism, a parrotlike repetition of words by the child, simulating a knowledge of the corresponding concepts but actually covering up a vacuum. (p. 150)

Pupils whose families have provided the relevant experiences, whether visiting museums or watching and discussing television documentaries and nature programmes together, will make sense of the teacher's words; for other children, it is not their language where the deficit is located but the visual and other sensory elements in the teacher's presentation. For these children, it is important to provide rich learning experiences as a foundation for developing verbal explanations and to scaffold the pupils' transition towards more abstract and formal kinds of speech.

### Transforming School Learning

It would be wrong, on the other hand, to regard abstract thinking as inappropriate or unnecessary for working class pupils. Even if we accept Labov's (1969) argument that the street language of the Harlem ghetto can be a medium for high level political and theological debate, as well as the growing body of knowledge about alternative modes of reasoning in diverse environments (e.g., the alternative mathematics of non-school situations [Lave, Murtaugh & de la Rocha, 1984; Scribner, 1984]), abandoning the

more theoretical discourses of academic learning is not necessarily the best way to raise working class achievement. Whilst arguing for learning which is better grounded in experience and for more careful transitions from colloquial to academic language, I would wish to reject any notion that sensory experience by itself is enough. This would be seriously limiting. (This position was adopted by Bantock [Lawton, 1977, p. 24], a contributor to the extreme right wing Black Papers, who argued for two forms of education: a literary, logical, intellectual curriculum for a small minority; and a sensory and affective curriculum for the majority, including basic literacy skills but with minimal cognitive requirements. This position, I believe, is restrictive and elitist.)

The central issue, I would argue, is how best to *connect language* (and other symbolic forms such as maps, algebra or musical notation) *with experience* in ways which *restore voice and agency to the learner*. A theoretical foundation for this can be found in Vygotskian social constructivism, as developed and elaborated in the last two decades under rubrics such as activity theory and situated cognition. Vygotsky (1978) had shown that learning is primarily social, depending upon the cultural inheritance of artefacts and language, as well as direct cooperation with others. The interpenetration of thinking and activity, and the extent to which learning and thinking are embedded in social and cultural contexts, have been increasingly understood through the work of writers such as Rogoff and Lave (1984), Wenger (1998), Engeström, Miettinen and Punamäki (1999), Salomon (1993) and others.

#### *Experience and symbolic representation in a community of practice*

I find particularly illuminating Wenger's metaphor of the flower and the computer. Wenger (1998) poses an old Zen problem: what does a flower know about being a flower? The answer is: in one sense, everything but in another, nothing at all:

Being a flower is to no one as transparent, immediately obvious, fully internalized, and natural as it is to a flower: spreading those leaves, absorbing that specific spectrum of light from the sun, taking the energy in, building protein, sucking nutrients from its roots, growing, budding, blooming, being visited by a bee....But ask the flower to teach a botany class, and it will just stand there, knowing nothing about being a flower, not the first thing. (p. 134)

He follows this with the question, "What does a computer know about being a flower?". Again his answer is everything and nothing – but the opposite way round to the flower. The computer can handle all kinds of data about flowers but experientially it has no understanding at all about being a flower: "Type 'photosynthesis', 'petal', 'stem', and so on: perfect answers. The knowledge is all there....But if...you buy your computer a half-dozen roses, then the computer will sit there, awaiting some input. It knows nothing" (p. 135).

Wenger (1998) argues that human learning must involve both experience and symbolic representation. He calls these *participation* and *reification*. Having an *experience of meaning* involves both of these in close interconnection.

It seems to me that this analysis of a dialectical relationship between *experience* and *symbolic representation* (I prefer these terms to Wenger's *participation* and *reification*) is the key to understanding successful learning, in and out of school. It has particular relevance as a tool for grappling with the issue of underachievement in marginalised

communities. It casts light on the fallacies of judging intelligence through tests of abstract reasoning or condemning language as 'deficient' on the false assumption that words alone must be sufficient to carry a meaning.

If we pursue Wenger's argument, we soon encounter the term *community of practice*, which supplies the missing element: the social environment in which the interplay of language (symbol system) and experience (a sensory involvement with material reality) takes place.

#### *Facilitating cognitive development*

Piaget's stage theory distinguishes between contextualised and abstract reasoning (concrete operational/formal operational), with a transition around the age of 12. Repeating his experiments in inner London schools and then with a representative cross sample in England and Wales, Adey and Shayer (1994, pp. 28-33) concluded that this does not happen spontaneously at that age, and for many the transition comes much later, if at all. (In the population as a whole, fewer than 30 per cent of 16 year olds were showing the use of even early formal operations. That means that the majority of the population was leaving school using only concrete operations [Adey & Shayer, 1994, p. 31.]

They developed methods to support and accelerate this transition, by embedding the learning of key scientific concepts into cooperative problem solving activity. Based on a constructivist psychology, their five steps are:

- concrete preparation (involving rich experience and introduction to new vocabulary)
  - cognitive conflict (the learners find an event or observation puzzling/discordant with previous experience or understanding)
  - construction zone activity (collaborative mental activity – "a magic place where minds meet, where things are not the same to all who see them, where meanings are fluid")
  - metacognition (self-reflection and higher level modelling on the part of the learner)
  - bridging (the conscious transfer of a theory to new situations and problems).
- (adapted from Adey & Shayer, 1994, p. 75)

As an illustration, I will use a science lesson which I observed in a school in Leicester in the United Kingdom with high levels of poverty and where most pupils were bilingual (South Asian) and a significant minority struggle with English (Wrigley, 2000, pp. 47-60). The study of evolution began with groups of 13 year olds designing islands – drawing them and deciding the climate and vegetation. After this concrete preparation, the teacher stimulated cognitive conflict by placing the wrong animal on each group's island – a model penguin on a sandy tropical island, a camel in the Antarctic, etc. The groups discussed this vigorously, identifying particular physical features of the animal. Working now on large sheets of paper (big enough to show to the rest of the class – a real audience), each group drew an animal and labelled features which were well-adapted to an environment – an elephant's thick skin and trunk, a penguin's feet, etc. This, and the discussion that followed, fit Adey and Shayer's (1994) notion of "construction zone activity". The series of lessons was not complete until concepts of adaptation and evolution had been consolidated at a more abstract theoretical level and the transferability to many other problems was clear.



The learning was successful because theoretical learning was skilfully grounded in an experience which the students found interesting and challenging. It was a clear example of *voice* and *agency*: it provided many opportunities for authentic discussion, for choices to be made, for active learning, for sharing with others – a real audience, a product. It also involved students in making campaign posters for Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace – a sense of political voice and agency.

Wartofsky (1973, p. 209), discussing various types of models and representations, speaks of a special category which he calls “tertiary artefacts” or “imagined worlds” – a locus of playful learning where alternatives can be explored. In this lesson, the students are actively creating an ‘imagined world’ using islands and posters as semiotic models within which complex theories can be accessed. Although not the ‘real world’ as such, they provide a sensory-rich model of it, a simulated environment in which young people can relate symbols with sensory experience. They are both a model or form of representation in themselves and a field in which other representations can become meaningful.

It seems to me that schools need to seek out two kinds of field to give a greater sense of reality to learning. One is to go out into the real world – fieldwork, placements, surveys, etc. – and the other is various kinds of ‘play’ or ‘imagined worlds’. This concept of play can be applied at all stages of education and provides the possibility of the open exploration of possibilities, testing out options for change. It is a kind of “off-line” activity (Wartofsky, 1973, p. 208) which is not so tightly constrained by economic necessity and can allow scope for greater creativity. Such simulated realities also allow for the possibility of stepping back out of role during a ‘debriefing’ stage to discuss what has occurred at a meta-level, using more abstract language.

I came across many productive examples of simulations when investigating successful inner city schools with large numbers of bilingual pupils (Wrigley, 2000):

- interviews for the post of parish priest in a medieval village, which revealed the power relationships at play in that society
- interviews for the vacancy of Enzyme – students drew up job descriptions, wrote CVs, planned questions and made a successful ‘appointment’
- a family at the time of the English Civil War, debating which side they should support.

They provide rich illustrations of social constructivist pedagogy, in contrast to the fast-paced transmission teaching which has been granted official favour in England. One example involves a class of seven year olds in a Bradford school, where many children from Pakistani and Bangladeshi families speak little English prior to enrolling at school. The school believed firmly in rooting literacy skills in an integrated and experience-rich curriculum (Wrigley, 2000, pp. 112-116).

One classroom wall represented their neighbourhood, to which the children had stuck photographs and maps and drawings from their many visits out of school. It was labelled in English and Urdu. Another wall was a large map of a remote Scottish island – the children were reading one of the Katie Morag stories. This provided much discussion about the geographical contrasts and new vocabulary appeared on the walls

– “settlements”, “bay”, “ferry”. On the day of my visit, the teacher had written a newspaper in large print about the myth of the Loch Ness Monster. An eyewitness report appeared in column 2, and the teacher (in role as reporter) soon discovered that the children misunderstood the source of the information: “Miss, you found it in the library”; “Internet, miss!”. Finally one small boy, very excited: “Miss, that man said... that man saw it...”.

Here was an opportunity to open up the two-dimensional text into three-dimensional experience, and to make a past tense report more immediate. The teacher brought the boy to the front, he quickly invented a persona as eyewitness, other children (holding glue-pens as pretend microphones) acted as reporters interviewing him – they were just as quick to give their newspapers names and develop an identity. After this, the activity was repeated in pairs, so that each child had lots of practice, and finally the class moved on to writing.

In another class, I saw children learning the genre of instructions by writing a recipe. First, the teacher demonstrated how to mix the ingredients for a cake, speaking it aloud. The children baked a cake together, each child performing one action before passing to the next person and speaking each step aloud. Learning how to read and write for these children is a big step, since their English is still limited; in fact, they have to do three things together: develop spoken English; learn how to read and write; and acquire curriculum knowledge in different areas. The development of symbolic representations has to be skilfully interwoven with direct experience (in Wenger’s [1998] words, the combination of “participation” and “reification”). In these two examples also, we might speak of the shared construction of *imagined worlds* in which the second level symbolic processes of literacy can be developed. (For Wartofsky [1973], the category of ‘imagined worlds’ also includes works of art such as paintings and novels.)

### More Open Architectures for School Learning

The recent large-scale reform strategies in England have mainly involved attempts to discipline teaching by imposing particular structures on individual lessons, dividing each 40-60 minutes into three or four different activities. Though not explicitly acknowledged, there has been a strong emphasis on teaching as the transmission of knowledge. Despite the declared intention of raising attainment for all, the benefit to students from poorer families has generally been limited. (Government claims that the attainment gap is shrinking are often based on flawed assessment tools [see Wrigley, forthcoming, ch. 1]. Some key officials, including the Chief Inspector, have publicly acknowledged that the attainment gap has not decreased.)

Internationally more open pedagogies are available which might engage these students more and provide a greater excitement in learning. Key criteria would be:

- the interrelationship between *experience* and *symbolic representations*
- engagement in *activity* in a learning *community* – a ‘community of practice’
- a sense of empowerment by restoring *voice* and *agency*.

The concept of simulation is a familiar one. Simulations are better than discussions or debates for various reasons:

- learners participate in a rich imaginary context

- participants engage in role, thus ensuring that conflicting views are heard
- ideas are connected with real world situations
- there is less possibility for the teacher to dominate.

Some other open architectures for learning involve a shift of focus from the single lesson to larger units of time. We might see the following as a family of such methods – creating spaces for exercising voice and agency, involving decision-making and real audiences and frequently also leading to real and significant outcomes:

- 1) Project method
- 2) Problem-based learning
- 3) Storyline
- 4) Design Challenge.

1) Project Method, as developed by Kirkpatrick (1918) in collaboration with John Dewey and commonly practised in Northern Europe, begins with a theme or issue introduced by teacher or pupils. This is discussed freely, so that ideas and questions emerge. The next stage is independent research or enquiry, with each group or individual choosing to investigate a particular aspect. In the final plenary stage, each group presents to the class and stimulates further debate. There might also be a fifth stage, involving a real world outcome. (One German variant involves the town council or a community group presenting a real problem to the school and asking the students to present possible solutions.)

2) Problem-Based Learning is a version of Project Method developed for medical education in North America but subsequently used in Scandinavian and Dutch universities in different specialisms (now also with Education students at the University of Edinburgh). (For various case studies, see Schwartz [2001].) It begins with a situation, description or scenario which is difficult to 'diagnose'. The next step is for students to begin to articulate the possible problems. It then continues as Project Method. Applying this to teacher education, a course on social justice in my own department asks students to debate a scenario in which teachers are acting according to a basic professional 'common sense' but which is in effect unjust, damaging and discriminatory. Students are required, after a period of reading and enquiry, to present two endings or sequels in some kind of narrative format (story, description, letter from a parent, enacting a staff meeting, etc.) along with a more abstract meta-level 'theoretical commentary' on the situation and their proposed responses.

3) Storyline is a form of thematic work structured by a narrative. This can be based on a novel but more often the bare outline of a story forms the skeleton. Like the other methods, it gives scope for independence within a community of enquiry. It typically begins with a situation (e.g., a location at one point in time). The learners invent characters for themselves (e.g., employees in a hotel, families in a town). The teacher (perhaps in role as postman, politician or newsreader) moves the story forward by announcing an event. Each such event is the stimulus for research, fictional or formal writing, improvised drama, art or discussion. Although the method was invented in Scotland for young children, it is regularly used with 13 to 16 year olds and older in Scandinavia. (See [www.acskive.dk/storyline](http://www.acskive.dk/storyline) or [www.storyline.org](http://www.storyline.org) for further information.)



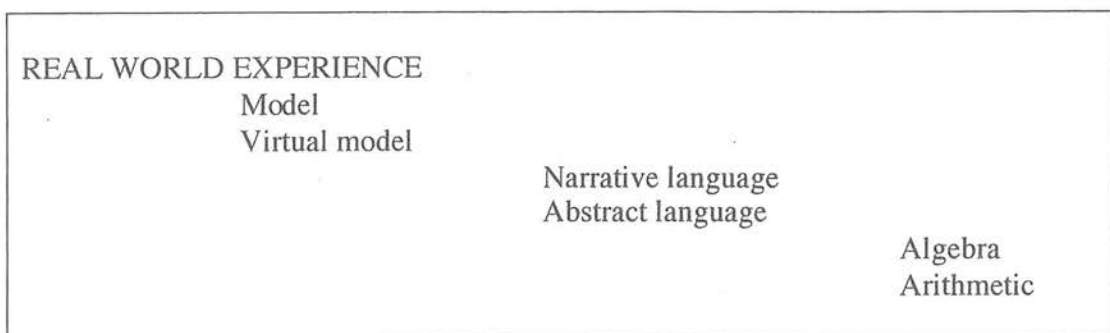
4) Design Challenges were invented at the University of Syracuse in the United States of America, as Education by Design (EBD), and disseminated in Britain as the Critical Skills Project ([www.criticalskills.co.uk](http://www.criticalskills.co.uk)). (See Critical Skills Programme, 2001; Weatherley with Bonney, Kerr & Morrison, 2003.) This method presents problems to students which involve investigation and lead to creative solutions which are presented to an audience. I saw one class, in their first month at secondary school, in a challenge involving many different learning skills (library and computer-based research; spoken and written communication and PowerPoint presentations; small group cooperation and planning) as well as geographical and scientific knowledge. It began with a video message from the Emperor of the Galaxy about his proposal to build a superhighway across space from the capital to a new holiday resort. Unfortunately this would mean destroying the earth. The earthlings' challenge was to prove that Earth was worth saving.

These various 'open architectures' provide spaces for learning communities to develop, for engaged learning which is critical and creative, for new interrelationships of experiential involvement and symbolisation in a range of media and for the exercise of voice and agency. They provide possibilities for engaging students from marginalised communities and overcoming feelings of low status and powerlessness. They provide a broader and often richer means than vocational training (the usual offer to disengaged young people from working class backgrounds) to engage in learning which is active and feels relevant. They help to bridge the gap between language embedded in immediate experience (Bemstein's "restricted code") and more abstract theoretical registers (his "elaborated code"). They provide, in their different ways, for both the "ways of knowing" valued by Bruner (1968): the logico-scientific; and the narrative modes.

### A Spectrum of Representations

It is possible to imagine different kinds of representation as lying on a spectrum ranging from the most concrete to the most abstract (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Spectrum of representations



Let us consider the three pairs shown above, beginning with the most abstract:

a) Vygotsky (1986), who argued that words which are not rooted in experience remain an empty shell rather than a concept, also recognised the importance of "higher" or more abstract concepts: "The new higher concepts [algebra] in turn transform the meaning of the lower [arithmetic]. The adolescent who has mastered algebraic concepts has gained a vantage point from which he [*sic*] sees arithmetic concepts in a

broader perspective” (p. 202).

Arithmetic already generalises quantity, shape, etc. ( $2 + 3$ , regardless of whether these are oranges or orangutans) but algebra takes this one step further by focusing on the relationship ( $x + y$ ) regardless of the quantity. For any of this to make sense, however, connections between symbolic expressions and everyday experiences have to be made. This is harder in the case of algebra – i.e., towards the more abstract end of the spectrum – but potentially more powerful.

b) Bruner (1968) speaks of “two modes of thought”, two “ways of knowing”:

- the paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode
- the narrative mode.

He argues that both are important, though the former is unduly privileged in traditional schooling. Bruner argues that much is lost if teachers insist on excluding narrations of lived experience and that stories have their own way of explaining the world. Learners need the facility to move between these two modes, building concepts on retellings of experience but also testing out more abstract formulations through remembered and simulated events.

c) Similarly, a simple model of an electrical circuit (battery, bulb, wire, etc.) connects more directly to everyday experience but a virtual model in the form of a circuit diagram on the computer can be much more powerful; we are able to play with alternatives in the circuit and test out the consequences of adding a second bulb or a more powerful battery – provided that the learner can connect this with reality.

A particular case is that of simulations as a kind of imagined world (Wartofsky, 1973, pp. 208-209) which have a special role to play in learning. They help to bridge various forms of symbolic representations and lived reality in two senses:

- they are themselves a kind of alternative world or micro-world which parallels the real world visually, tangibly and so on;
- they provide a field in which the learner can move comfortably among different types of representation, shifting between narrative and academic language, between arithmetic and algebra.

This is particularly important for pupils whose family or neighbourhood culture is built more on immediate and practical operations than on abstract argument – for example, the children of manual workers or of ethnic minorities with strong rural roots. They provide a means of drawing on the ‘funds of knowledge’ from the home and community (see Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

## Conclusion

Pedagogies which shift easily between symbols and experience, and along a spectrum of concrete and abstract representations, have considerable potential for enhancing the educational progress of marginalised young people. In the past, too many assumptions have been made about the supposed intellectual inadequacies of disadvantaged pupils, without questioning tacit constructs of ‘ability’ (often based implicitly on notions of innate intelligence or linguistic competence). In parallel to this, because abstract reasoning is privileged within our academic culture, too little has been done to transform pedagogy, including discursive patterns in the classroom. Both these factors

– the construction of individual ability and the dominant pedagogical traditions – have depended upon a Cartesian separation between thought and action.

This has been particularly damaging for pupils whose families do not share the culture of the school and its teachers. When teachers provide abstract explanations or require learning by memorisation, without enabling their listeners to participate directly or vicariously in relevant experiences, their words may be comprehensible to pupils who have previously enjoyed such experiences but others are disadvantaged and come to feel inadequate as learners. They simply do not have the experiences to connect with the words and enable the co-construction of meanings.

Recent theoretical developments, under the rubrics of activity theory or situated cognition, and based upon Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) seminal explorations of the sociality of learning, provide a new basis on which to develop more inclusive pedagogies. The argument of this paper is not for a return to earlier versions of progressive pedagogy, based on 'learning through experience' alone, but for a carefully planned bridging between symbolic representation and experience.

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# Schools and poverty: questioning the Effectiveness and Improvement paradigms

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## Abstract

This article uses the concept of paradigm, with examples from various fields, to examine some defining features of School Effectiveness and School Improvement. The situation of schools serving areas of poverty and associated deprivation is seen as a challenge to these paradigms. The struggle to understand and intervene in these schools is stretching the resources of a paradigm which privileges leadership and change management whilst marginalizing pedagogical and sociological perspectives. Some alternative approaches are introduced outwith the mainstream of the School Improvement tradition.

**Keywords** leadership and change management, paradigm, poverty, School Effectiveness, School Improvement

## Introduction

The term *paradigm* has been extensively used in diverse fields – natural sciences, social sciences, politics, literature, education, history and others. Even a simple bibliographic search of book titles currently in print in the UK alone produces over 400 instances.

The concept has been criticized by some writers for introducing a degree of relativism into scientific studies of the world, replacing the apparent objectivity of established methods and fields of study in ways which, to some, appear arbitrary and subjective. But thinking about paradigms can also be liberating, in that it historicizes and denaturalizes hegemonic models and ideologies. It gives us a tool to grasp the inner logic of a dominant way of thinking and acting; of perceiving links between knowledge and power (Foucault); and opening up a space of possibility within an apparently stable or closed system.

The current dominance of School Effectiveness and School Improvement – not simply as discrete academic paradigms but in their entanglement with public policy and practice – can be questioned in terms of their (often tacit) general assumptions and exemplary practices and models. More specifically, there is cause to challenge them for their inability to explain and respond to the educational underachievement of young people from manual worker or minority ethnic backgrounds, especially those experiencing high levels of poverty and deprivation.



This article will first consider the nature of paradigms and paradigm change in a variety of fields before considering School Effectiveness and School Improvement and their application to schools serving areas of disadvantage. The following section summarizes some alternative evidence and models of understanding outwith the mainstream School Improvement tradition. I then question the limited deployment of 'culture', a seminal term for School Improvement, with examples of other ways in which the concept has been used in educational studies. The final section explicitly challenges the School Improvement paradigm and proposes some more adequate approaches towards understanding and supporting schools in poorer urban areas.

### Paradigms and revolutions: an introduction

Thomas Kuhn's (1962) deployment of the concept *paradigm* to examine changing scientific understandings of the natural world has had a profound effect in many other areas of knowledge. The word had originally been used in the sense of *exemplars* (for example, in grammar), but was then applied to those key experiments, discoveries or texts which set a standard for a school of scientific thought. Kuhn extended the meaning further to cover 'all the shared commitments of a scientific group'. In this he included 'instrumental, theoretical, and metaphysical commitments' so that a paradigm might involve:

- entities, forces and laws – key concepts, relationships and causes;
- models – whether seen as heuristic or ontological;
- legitimate problems and acceptable solutions;
- methods and instruments.

His review of the history of science led him to examine not only the tacit ground rules and assumptions of the settled periods of 'normal science', but also the 'scientific revolutions' which lead to a replacement of one set of paradigmatic assumptions by another. He paid particular attention to how an established model or theory (for example, Ptolemaic astronomy or phlogiston theory) is unsettled by anomalous experiences and data. However, Kuhn is clear that the process of epistemological revolution can be protracted and involve many subjective elements. Scientists struggle to adjust worn-out models long after their self-by date, by stretching them to accommodate the 'anomalies'. Conversely, Kuhn insists that the adoption of a new paradigm is often evidenced, even for many years.

Hegemonic theories and practices, and challenges to them, are not of course restricted to the natural sciences. Social sciences have seen their own 'paradigm wars'. These are sometimes understood simply as a contest between qualitative and quantitative methods, but more deeply they involve different epistemological and ontological assumptions, that is, a different way of understanding the world, going right down to the basic entities and forces which constitute the field we study. Debates in the social sciences have been marked by fundamental disagreements stretching across methodology, epistemology and ontology (Guba, 1990). In a sense we might even refer to positivism, post-structuralism and Marxism as meta-paradigms underpinning multiple schools of thought or approaches to research.

Paradigm shifts in the social sciences also entail two further dimensions, the political and the ethical. Both of these have serious implications for fields such as school evaluation,

leadership and change. Politically, a paradigm might reflect the interests of one social group but not others. An 'improvement' for some may not be for others. (It is chastening to remember that the Enclosures and Clearances which left the English and Scottish peasantry destitute were both referred to, from another class perspective, as 'improvements'.) Ethically, some paradigms (including those grounded in postmodernism, critical theory, or Marxism, as well as humanistic and religious approaches) are intrinsically more likely to consider moral implications than positivistic paradigms which seek to imitate natural scientific procedures to the extent of eliminating ethical questions.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Flyvbjerg (2001) argues, following Aristotle, that the social sciences should be based on *phronesis*, a practical context-related ethical rationality, rather than struggling to compete with the natural sciences by adopting *episteme* (scientific rationalism) as a methodology and truth criterion.<sup>2</sup> This, clearly, has implications for debates about educational change.

We can enrich our view of paradigms still further by looking at other fields, both of which illustrate the extent to which methodological and perceptual changes are inter-related. Though neither Raymond Williams nor Terry Eagleton used the term *paradigm*, their challenge to established approaches to the study of 'English Literature' has clear parallels to Kuhn's scientific revolutions (see, for example, Williams, 1958; Eagleton, 1983). They make fundamental challenges to basic assumptions about:

- the nature of literary texts (including which texts count as Literature);
- the relationship between these literary texts and a wider history, society and culture;
- what it means to study Literature and engage in Criticism (or Theory).

Their work clearly demonstrates the importance, as a force for change, not simply of evidential 'anomalies' but of social and political perspectives. Williams' and Eagleton's working-class backgrounds sensitized them towards asking questions about the way the world was represented in the literary canon,<sup>3</sup> as did many others later from feminist or postcolonialist perspectives. Their questioning of fundamental categories and perspectives eventually gave rise to the new paradigm of Cultural Studies, which offered different frames for understanding texts.

A further example from the same period is R.D. Laing's challenge to psychiatry (1960 and later works). Here, as with School Improvement, Laing was concerned with practical action, organizations and policies, not just a field of academic study. Laing's reaction to the treatment of those labelled schizophrenic led him to question the fundamental framing categories of *patient* and mental *illness*, and the location of diagnostic explanations in the individual rather than the person's family and social experience (1967, 1971). He sought to find meaning in the apparently incoherent utterances of 'schizophrenics'. This paradigmatic reframing inevitably entailed a methodological shift from quasi-medical diagnostics to social phenomenology (1967).

All this is highly relevant to the field of educational change, and casts some light on the twin paradigms of Effectiveness and Improvement which have become normative in terms of current understandings and practices of educational change. For example:

1 Schools struggling in areas of poverty may in a sense be regarded as rather a large Kuhnian *anomaly*, that is, a piece of reality which causes us to question the adequacy of the established paradigm whether in terms of interpretation or intervention.

- 2 They may lead us to question our view of basic entities and relationships, that is, whether our centre of attention should be the (supposedly) self-managing school-qua organization, as a basic entity, or perhaps the relationship between school-as-community and the wider communities to which students belong (neighbourhood, class, culture).
- 3 They raise questions about *perspective*, such as whether we regard them in deficit mode, as 'struggling' exceptions within an otherwise healthy system.
- 4 They compel us to ask whether there are resources of educational knowledge which have been overlooked, being regarded as beyond the *field* of School Effectiveness and School Improvement.
- 5 They inevitably raise questions of *methodology*: when we compare the rather thin descriptions of many Improvement case studies with the more patient but also critical approach of the ethnographic tradition.

### The twin stars of Effectiveness and Improvement<sup>1</sup>

Despite the confusion of some writers, including both proponents and critics,<sup>5</sup> School Improvement is fundamentally different in its methodology and interests to School Effectiveness. Hopkins (2001) lists the following as defining characteristics of School Improvement:

- a 'bottom-up' orientation in which improvement is owned by the individual school and its staff;
- a qualitative orientation to research methodology;
- a concern with changing organizational processes rather than the outcomes of the school;
- a concern to treat educational outcomes as not 'given' but problematic;
- a concern to see schools as dynamic institutions requiring extended study more than 'snapshot' cross-sectional studies.

In many respects, School Improvement (SI) is itself a paradigm challenge, both to School Effectiveness (SE) lists, and to earlier mechanistic top-down models of change. Of central importance is its deployment of the term 'culture' in an attempt to take a holistic look at schools and their potential for improvement (more later). School Improvement involves a basic understanding that schools are complex organizations, and that change cannot be brought about by the mechanistic application of discrete measures.<sup>6</sup>

A number of writers from the School Improvement and related camps<sup>7</sup> present a narrative of origins in terms of rejection of an earlier paradigm involving centralized, top-down and mechanistic attempts at reform.<sup>8</sup> Fullan (1993) called his 'Eight Basic Lessons' a *New Paradigm of Change*, emphasizing the dynamics of implementation at school level. The new paradigm placed emphasis on school-level 'implementation' (Fullan), 'organizational development' (Miles, 1992); and 'capacity' building (Hopkins et al., 1994: 3). However, we should also recognize a deeper dimension to this shift. The earlier models of change were criticized as technological (House, 1981), and based on 'instrumental reason' in the 'empirical analytic tradition' (Hopkins, 1984: 7, following Habermas). Claims were made that the new paradigm of School Improvement would be based on 'phenomenological or critical-theoretic paradigms' (Hopkins, 1984: 7), and on various types of political and cultural analysis (Dahm, 1998), though it is

difficult recognizing these intentions in mainstream School Improvement texts in the UK at least.

In other respects however, Effectiveness and Improvement are intimately related. Their best-known proponents frequently write together (e.g. the recurrent partnership of Reynolds and Hopkins); and intellectual merger bids date back many years (e.g. Hopkins, 1990). In practice, under highly regulated policy regimes such as England, Hopkins' fourth bullet point falls by the wayside, given the strong centralized determination of valued outcomes, particularly test results. In such a context, School Improvement has too frequently adopted the outcomes prioritized by the state (which are the same as those which SE has become skilled at measuring).

There are other limiting features of the dominant School Improvement paradigm, which particularly affect schools facing the greatest social challenges. The key entity, for both SE and SI, is the school as a quasi-autonomous unit. Angus spoke of the relegation of parents and the wider community to 'background' factors:

Family background, social class, any notion of context are typically regarded as 'noise', as 'outside background factors' which must be controlled for and then stripped away so that the researcher can concentrate on the important domain of school factors'. (Angus, 1993: 981)

Few School Improvement studies have given serious thought to how schools engage with the community. This is a critical issue for schools in the poorest neighbourhoods, especially if the environment is troubled. An exaggerated and limiting emphasis on schools as managed organizations connects, in practice, with placing a heavy burden of responsibility, indeed blame, on teachers and principals. Parents are viewed as consumers rather than as partners; they are seen instrumentally, as a vehicle for ensuring that pupils arrive at the school gate homework in hand, without much sense that they also have significant lives, opportunities and troubles. It becomes all too easy to frame parents and the wider community within a discourse of deficit. In addition, many of the Improvement texts either ignore the wider policy environment in which schools have to operate, or exemplify a 'subtle apologetics' (Thrupp and Willmott, 2003). For instance, the difficulties caused by the wider policy regime are summarized in the opening pages but then forgotten, the message being that the head and staff should simply get on with the job and stop moaning.

Neither Effectiveness nor Improvement have paid adequate attention to pedagogy. School Effectiveness characteristics make vague references, such as 'a focus on teaching and learning'. This is unintelligible as either a theory or a guide to action. Behind this however lies an assumption that transmission methods were simply 'more effective' (Muijs and Reynolds, 2001). For many years, School Improvement texts were silent on teaching and learning. Hopkins was a key exception, but his advice was often untheorized, including an adoption of Joyce's discrete 'models' (i.e. specific methodologies as scripts which teachers could be trained to implement) (see Joyce et al., 1997). The more recent interest in learning, located particularly at the Institute of Education in London, is welcome but has tended to concentrate on attitudes and habits of learning without critical consideration of pedagogical theory (e.g. Carnell and Lodge, 2002; Watkins et al., 2000).

One of the great ironies of 'decentralization' in the English mode has been its limitation to administrative issues, whilst jurisdiction over the curriculum has been increasingly



centralized. Standardization becomes a particular problem when pupils are more distant from the dominant culture. Teachers are expected to motivate pupils, but denied any influence over what they might study, let alone the facility to negotiate this with the learners themselves.

Finally, School Improvement, like School Effectiveness, is almost silent on the question of curricular and educational aims and priorities. In a world of globalization, neoliberal politics, poverty, war and potential environmental disaster, this is nothing short of complacency. More recently, it is assumed by government that the most important innovation for the most disadvantaged section of the population is a vocational curriculum – not as part of a broad and balanced curriculum, but as a separate track in which a large section of the population will be denied the basic scientific and humanistic knowledge needed to understand such issues, or the cultural tools to express their views (see in particular Clause 61 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006).

These limitations are weaknesses for School Improvement theory as a whole, but have particular relevance to schools serving marginalized communities. We should consider the hypotheses that:

- (a) relationships with parents and the local community are potentially more problematic, and require more effort, where there is a greater social and cultural gap between teachers and parents, where the community is in any way troubled, or if parents have reasons to be disillusioned with or antipathetic towards schools;
- (b) a centrally prescribed curriculum might need greater adaptation in order to engage working-class or ethnic minority pupils in meaningful learning;
- (c) a deeper and better theorized pedagogical enquiry is needed to help underachieving pupils.

School Effectiveness and School Improvement both deal inadequately with 'schools in challenging circumstances' (see, for example, the scant treatment in key texts such as Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000 and Sammons, 1999). Harris et al. (2006) acknowledge this neglect, as well as the theoretical and practical inadequacy of recent interventions. Effectiveness research has been exploited to underpin government attempts to blame teachers for the relatively slow progress of pupils growing up in poverty.<sup>9</sup> Claims have been made that 'value added' tables are fairer to these schools, yet it seems clear that, particularly at secondary level, children suffering deprivation or disruption make less progress even when measured against the same baseline data. Despite the claim that the core mission of School Effectiveness was to overcome poverty, compared with a sociological determination which saw this as impossible, little attention has been paid in reality to schools serving the poorest neighbourhoods. The rare advice from SE research (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000) amounts to little more than discipline and a 'back to basics' curriculum. This has been compounded by official advice to schools struggling in difficult circumstances, supposedly based on Improvement research, as in the quick-fix authoritarianism of OFSTED's advice to 'special measures' schools. We are informed that schools which have moved out of special measures have:

- ensured strong leadership is provided. Many schools ... have appointed a new head-teacher just before or soon after the inspection of the school;

- taken vigorous action to improve the quality of teaching, pupils' progress and levels of attainment quickly;
- produced and implemented school policy documents and schemes of work;
- taken steps quickly and effectively to improve pupils' behaviour. (OFSTED, 1997)

With few exceptions, until recently, School Improvement writers have neglected schools 'in challenging circumstances'. The few British texts which deal seriously with such schools (e.g. Blair and Bourne, 1998; Cotton et al., 2003; Riddell, 2003; Wrigley, 2000a) are hardly ever referenced by more orthodox School Improvement writers. The recent attempts to put this right suffer from what Raymond Williams used to call 'a selective tradition': for example, the literature review by Muijs et al. (2005) which somehow managed to overlook alternative traditions of school reform and educational change (in the USA alone, the Coalition of Essential Schools; the Accelerated Schools network; Lois Weis and her colleagues at SUNY, etc.). School Improvement specialists rarely visit the wealth of relevant literature on other shelves of the education library (sociology, inclusion, anti-racism, community education, bilingualism, cognitive theory, and so on).

### Lost opportunities of an alternative paradigm

#### *Success against the Odds*

*Success against the Odds* (National Commission for Education, 1996), subtitled *Effective Schools in Disadvantaged Areas* was one of the best known of the early Improvement texts in Britain. This had all the potential to be paradigmatic, that is, exemplary, for other studies. It is interesting to review this collection of case studies with hindsight.

Some recurrent weaknesses are common to many chapters, particularly regarding pedagogical issues. With the exception of John MacBeath's illuminating report on a Scottish special school, most of the comments on teaching and learning are thin, formulaic and untheorized. For example:

Teaching methods cannot be characterized as either traditional or progressive. A range of methods are used and elements of both of these stereotypical approaches are used as appropriate to the task or individual needs. (p. 51)

At the same time, and despite shallow reference to teaching 'styles', there are indirect indications of very rich pedagogies reflected in references to a renewal of staff interest in teaching and learning (e.g. 'a passionate interest throughout the staff team', p. 51), and the quality of pupils' response (e.g. 'a vibrant exciting atmosphere', 'happy and hardworking children who are proud of their achievements', pp. 14–15).

Qualities which shine through in most of the reports include:

- a curriculum which provides a broad cultural experience, including visits and participation in the arts, and many opportunities for outdoor activities;
- innovative approaches to parental involvement and engagement with the community, including opportunities for community education, based on a clear and supportive recognition of the difficulties many families faced;

- a strong emphasis on raising pupils' self-esteem;
- engaging and satisfying teamwork focused on improving curriculum and pedagogy;
- shared leadership combined with a committed headteacher who symbolically enacts the values s/he seeks to foster in the school.

Behaviour is a standard sub-heading, yet a closer reading suggests something more is happening here than the enforcement of a disciplinary code. For example:

It was not crudely behaviourist but focused upon children's self-discipline: it was about children valuing themselves and raising their self-esteem and staff valuing them as people and forming relationships with them. (p. 26)

In some chapters, the discourse is significantly richer than normally found in Improvement or Leadership texts, showing a certain degree of political and social understanding. For example, instead of the vague and formulaic invocations of 'high expectations', we read of:

a belief that all children can succeed; that education is a vehicle for the emancipation of working-class children; that equality of opportunity is an absolute entitlement; and that teaching and learning must be based on mutual respect and the raising of self-esteem. (p. 63)

### *Creative and idiosyncratic leadership*

While working as a school inspector in the mid-1990s, I became increasingly aware of the inadequacies of both the Effectiveness lists and the decontextualized 'change management' advice of orthodox School Improvement. On the one hand, there were schools whose heads had ticked every box on the Effectiveness list, and also tried to develop a collaborative culture, arranging numerous meetings but without any significant impact on the school's success. On the other hand, there were schools which had succeeded in very challenging situations on the basis of an eclectic and idiosyncratic leadership which made little reference to the official agenda. A significant driving force appeared to be an intelligent and responsive understanding of the school's relationship with its community, and the determination to provide all learners with rich and satisfying experiences of learning beyond the constraints of a centrally imposed curriculum.

Around this time, I had the privilege of revisiting a school in the Education Authority where I had previously worked (Heywood Community School, Rochdale).<sup>10</sup> The school had survived a major reorganization thanks only to the intervention of its ward councillor, then Chair of Education Committee, who insisted on maintaining a secondary school on this council estate and helped make an inspired appointment to the headship. Critically, in its first year, this newly reorganized 11-16 school, with a capacity for 180 pupils per school year, attracted only 60 entrants. Within four or five years the school was full and the proportion of pupils with five or more higher grade GCSEs had risen from 7 per cent to 47 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

The new head, before taking up post, spent time sitting around in pubs and cafes engaging in anonymous conversations. He concluded that local people had come to believe that no school on their estate could possibly be any good. His first priority as head was to change public perceptions, for example by having a mural painted up the full height of a chimney – an eyesore at the entrance to the school; personally directing a musical;

establishing excellent relationships with the local newspaper and supplying them with weekly reports on events and achievements.

He also understood the need to overcome traditional barriers between the school leadership and pupils, staff and parents. The head and deputies moved out of their offices into a large empty classroom, removing the door from its hinges. From now on, no one would need to appeal to the better nature of a receptionist to book an appointment. This change was clearly cultural and symbolic as well as organizational, and heads of year soon followed by moving their desks into an open space next to their year group's newly established social area.

Enormous emphasis was placed on changing the way in which pupils were perceived – their self-image, how teachers viewed them, and their parents' sense of their potential. I repeatedly heard the pupils referred to as 'first generation academics', turning on its head traditional deficit views. Assemblies became an extended celebration of achievement – talent shows, rewards, presentations, music, dance. Getting pupils on stage was seen as a crucial symbolic act in the process of raising self-esteem. At four o'clock one day, I saw one of the cleaners rehearsing pupils for a dance they planned to present at assembly the next day.

Finally, a concentrated effort was made to secure examination success for a critical mass of pupils, since assumptions of endemic and inevitable low achievement had to be broken.

To classify all these initiatives as 'cultural leadership' is appropriate but insufficient: 'raising expectations' had an accent of political defiance, rejecting traditional assumptions that students growing up in such neighbourhoods had little hope of a decent future.

### *The Power to Learn*

This book (Wrigley, 2000a) consists of 10 case studies of schools which, by normal assumptions, have to overcome three different barriers to achieve success for their pupils: class, ethnicity and language. It was only by engaging creatively with these factors that the schools were able to succeed.

I embarked on the fieldwork with few preconceptions, apart from a determination to give voice to success stories, as a counter to the bad press that teachers in inner city schools (and elsewhere) regularly faced. Although I only had three days at my disposal for each school, I already knew some of them through previous visits. Beyond a general orientation to qualitative enquiry (the norm in School Improvement studies), I was determined to spend most of this time in classrooms, observing patterns of teaching and learning; and to engage in semi-structured interviews with a wide range of individuals (students, parents, community-oriented staff), not just senior managers. I had no initial theory or hypothesis, but my first headteacher interview was to give rise to both the book's title and to a central hypothesis of 'empowerment'. The headteacher, beginning with an explanation of how she had obtained funding from the electricity board, told me that her (upper primary) pupils, not the teachers, reviewed new software; how they ran courses in ICT for their teachers; and computing courses for their parents.

There was a wonderful moment last year when a Sikh boy taught his grandfather how to use the internet and access photographs of Indian cities he hadn't visited since he was a child.

Word of this spread fast, and we are now seeking funding for a community ICT room, which we hope will evolve into a full-blown community learning centre. (Wrigley, 2000a: 38)

I interrupted, saying 'We're no longer talking about sponsorship or computers, we're talking about empowerment'. Her reply was 'Isn't that obvious?' On reflection, it seemed to me that similar stories might simply not be getting through the filter of a normative School Improvement discourse which had become compromised by a top-down control regime.

Through my approach certainly could not be described as grounded theory, in Glaser and Strauss's sense (1967), their concept of 'saturation' is useful to explain what happened next. Gradually in the course of fieldwork in the 10 schools, the notion of 'empowerment' acquired a richness of meaning, in terms of five complementary aspects of school life:

- curriculum
- pedagogy
- ethos (internal relationships)
- the wider community
- leadership and the processes of change.

This represented a decisive break with 'managerialism', understood as the elevation of management and organization over more substantive aspects of school life.

Core skills and particularly literacy received strong emphasis in these schools, but within a rich and exciting curriculum with an emphasis on the arts, community events, and socially critical versions of citizenship. The curriculum was based on respect for the parents' cultural heritage, but not limited to this, and opportunities were found for learners to reflect on cultural change and difference, as well as issues of power (i.e. anti-racist, not just multicultural).

Social Constructivist pedagogies were predominant, with an emphasis on cooperative problem-solving and investigation. In one school (pp. 61–74), planning was based on identifying not only the specialist vocabulary of a topic, but the deep concepts (e.g. hierarchy in medieval history; equilibrium in science). Then, each unit was designed around an activity that required pupils to process knowledge rather than passively absorbing it. Typically, this might involve a switch of media or genre, for example requiring students to make use of information about medieval power structures by writing a letter from a dying king to his heir, or enacting (albeit anachronistically) an interview for the post of parish priest. The concept of 'Multiple Intelligences' was used to encourage a rich multi-sensory approach to learning. I subsequently (Wrigley, 2000b) labelled one particular version of a social constructivist pedagogy 'Cultural Reflection and Repositioning': typically this involved using a form of artistic expression such as drama or writing to reflect on cultural heritage, but also as an opportunity for young people to consider their own position or beliefs, that is, to 'reposition' themselves, if they wished, and envisage a future which was different from the past. Thus, an RE teacher asked pupils to write their own creeds; these generally began with quite orthodox expressions of religious beliefs but quickly moved to a consideration of present dilemmas and strongly held personal views. In a drama class, 15-year-old girls from a variety of backgrounds improvised the scene from *Romeo and Juliet* that Shakespeare had failed to write: Juliet, her mother, and her nurse

(three powerful women) responding to Juliet's father's threat to throw her onto the street if she refused to marry the man of his choice.

Rather than *discipline* or *behaviour*, the recurrent word in these schools was 'respect', with a rich cultural resonance. In a year assembly, nine-year-olds were asked to name somebody they should respect. The senior teacher reacted very positively when one boy replied, 'Me, miss!' (in many schools this would have been regarded as impertinent). A discussion followed about respecting others and respecting yourself (p. 78). Reflecting on such incidents, it became clear that ethos and relationships were not regarded instrumentally (cf. Fielding, 2001) but children's lives at school and their personal and social development were important for their own sake.

Similarly, the school's relationships with parents went beyond regarding them as a vehicle to ensure attendance, punctuality and homework. Family and community networks in the neighbourhood had a life of their own, and schools sought to interact constructively and supportively with them. Whether officially funded or not, all the schools were, in a sense, community schools.

Finally, alongside leadership from the head (who seemed to personally symbolize the school and its mission – see Deal and Peterson, 1999), there were well established habits of shared leadership, strengthening the school's capacity for linking with the community. It would be difficult to pigeonhole this in any of the models of school leadership to be found in the specialist literature – and circumstances required judicious and original forms of intervention – but essentially there was a fusion of personal symbolic leadership and collegiality, always driven and directed by an informed commitment to social justice. Collegiality included cooperative engagement in lesson design, with EAL specialists playing a leading role. This last point illustrates the importance of schools drawing on cultural and social knowledge which goes beyond the management- and process-orientation of orthodox School Improvement; in order to succeed, these schools have to draw upon direct understanding of communities, as well as a wide range of knowledge in diverse specialisms (bilingualism, 'race' and equality theory, community education, and so on).

### Culture

The concept of culture is a defining term in much contemporary writing on School Improvement, and it has enabled us to move beyond SE's lists of 'key characteristics' to take a more holistic view, but the way it has been deployed has often been limiting. One early influence was Sarason (1971), who used the concept to raise questions about the norms of schooling – the persistence of uses of space and time, regimes of language use and voice (who speaks to whom and when), and so on – thus radically questioning normative organizational features. This dimension, surprisingly, is often lost when Sarason is cited within the Improvement paradigm (see for example, Hopkins, 2001; Stoll and Fink, 1995). Indeed, these two books exemplify the overwhelming interest of School Improvement in the staff culture or organizational culture, as something to be managed. 'Culture' has become virtually synonymous with 'capacity' or the readiness of an organization to undergo change (e.g. A. Hargreaves, 1994; Stoll and Myers, 1998; and giving a somewhat wider perspective, D. Hargreaves, 1995).

This is unnecessarily limiting, and does not reflect the rich potential of the word and its diverse use elsewhere. The emphasis on culture as (managed) cohesion contrasts with

the analysis of contradictions and conflicts in organizational cultures found in Alvesson (2002), in the context of business organizations. A sense of interaction between different cultures, and particularly between the school and the local community, is central to understanding schools struggling to serve areas of poverty or strong ethnic mix. The concept of 'cultural capital' as exchange and validation (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) enables us to reflect on ways in which schools succeed or fail in giving a positive validation of family and neighbourhood culture, whilst excluding negative features of street culture:

We don't tolerate a macho street culture. We've established a pride in the school ... That hasn't meant cutting ourselves off from the real world. In fact, our school values are very close to the values of the home, and particularly the Asian communities. We draw on that kinship-based value system: 'You've upset someone in my family'. Our set of values is really very simple: respect, family and achievement. (Wrigley, 2000a: 88)

There has been a failure to draw upon a wealth of ethnographic literature relating schooling to the wider society, and their intersection in the lives of young people (e.g. Willis, 1977; McLaren, 1987). Similarly, a whole body of texts relating class, culture and curriculum have dropped from memory. I am thinking of the tradition initiated by Williams and Hoggart, and continued, with varying emphases and conclusions, by writers such as Britton, Rosen, Keddie, Midwinter, Entwistle and Lawton. This literature has in common a concern at the ways in which the cultural world of working-class students is marginalized or misinterpreted within schools, though it differs in terms of how to overcome this problem. For example, Entwistle (1978) argues that Midwinter's class- and place-based curriculum places limits on the cultural development of working-class students, and that a socialist educational tradition dating back to Chartism seeks constantly to extend and open up to wider cultural riches, rather than closing down.

Currently, there is substantial debate in North America around this question. Cummins, in terms of bilingual pupils, has argued for an additive rather than subtractive policy: in other words, that students can best achieve command of the language of school learning if their family languages are respected, supported and developed. Valenzuela (2005) applies this to the culture of Mexican settlers in the USA, arguing that these young people possess considerable cultural and social resources which schools commonly seek to eliminate, rather than validating them (in Bourdieu's terms) as cultural and social capital. Similar work has been done in terms of pedagogy by Moll and Greenberg (1990) and others.

Culture has enormous conceptual power for examining the way phenomena and practices articulate meanings in a school – culture as the outward signs of norms and values. We need to explore the concept not only in terms of staff (collegiality as capacity) but in terms of pupils' lives and those of the wider community. This immediately raises the possibility that different participants, with different backgrounds, might have contradictory interpretations of objective phenomena, and potentially connects with all the critical pedagogical questions of achievement in challenging environments:

- examining the cultural messages of classrooms which are dominated by the teacher's voice, closed questions and rituals of transmission of superior wisdom;
- understanding how assumptions about ability and intelligence are worked out in classroom interactions;
- discovering how assumptions about single parents, ethnic minorities and 'dysfunctional' working-class families operate symbolically in classroom interactions. (Wrigley, 2003: 36–7)

### Challenging the Improvement paradigm

Kuhn has argued that, once scientists step into a new paradigm, they find it almost impossible to communicate with anyone adhering to an older one; that they are 'incommensurable'. This seems correct to an extent, in that a paradigm shift entails fundamental changes in what are seen as the basic entities, the forces that link them (causal relationships), perspectives, models, the scope of legitimate enquiry within a field, methods of enquiry, and so on.

The notion of 'incommensurability' can be contested, however, if it means a total breakdown of communication or the impossibility of debate and learning between adherents of two paradigms. For example, a pre- and post-Copernican astronomer watching the dawn would both experience the phenomenon of the sun changing its position relative to the horizon, even though their interpretations of the event would differ radically. Science also offers some examples of older models working pragmatically within certain limits, for example Newtonian physics. Indeed, on an everyday basis, most of us continue to speak of the sun rising, feeding plants, or objects burning away.

Does a paradigm shift in the field of educational change necessarily involve abandoning the current School Improvement paradigm. I would argue that it does, but that this doesn't mean discarding all that has been learnt, and continues to be learnt, about change processes, group dynamics, leadership, and so on. At the same time, we should recognize the extent to which many of its key proponents have compromised their tradition by assimilating uncritically into regimes of centralized top-down control.<sup>12</sup> The public stigmatization<sup>13</sup> of many schools serving poorer neighbourhoods undermines the kind of teamwork and capacity building which successful improvement requires; if critical friends and consultants wish to help teachers to become agents or subjects in the narrative of change, they have to be prepared to speak out against a government regime which positions them as objects – or rather subjects only to the extent of being regarded as culpable.

Beyond this, I have been arguing that School Improvement is too limited in its scope, in its exclusion of curriculum and pedagogy, and in having too instrumental a view of ethos and the wider community. Its neglect of large bodies of pedagogical and sociological literature have led to a theoretical impoverishment, and restricted its ability to think clearly enough about schools in the most challenging contexts. These limitations of the paradigm, I would argue, apply to an extent in all schools, but they have become particularly critical where there are high levels of poverty and associated forms of deprivation and educational challenge. There is a parallel here to nature confronting established scientific models with data which at first appears anomalous, but ultimately leads some scientists to imagine new models rather than simply attempting to assimilate the anomalies to the established ones: similarly, schools in 'challenging circumstances' (a totally inadequate and reductionist euphemism) lead some writers to think beyond the frame (see, for example, Clarke, 2000, 2005). This is partly because the problems which can be contained in more affluent schools by restraining the reactions of a minority of students become central in poorer urban environments because they are critical for large numbers of their students; if not attended to, these schools are confronted with a critical mass of alienated young people.

It remains possible for example, in quieter suburban environments, to simply tell students 'You're learning this because it's in the National Curriculum/the GCSE



syllabus because I tell you to' and the majority will generally fall into line. In the inner city, teachers have to work harder to adapt and develop a curriculum which is convincingly important and interesting, and they have to negotiate this with learners. In more amenable contexts, a sufficient number of students will find ways of engaging actively with the subject content at home, perhaps in cooperation with their friends, despite the limitations of a transmission pedagogy which positions learners as passive; by contrast, in inner city schools, classroom pedagogies have to be adopted which engage learners collaboratively in problem solving, actively processing new information, and connecting it with what they already know.<sup>14</sup>

I have variously articulated this rethinking of: 1) curriculum and 2) pedagogies in terms of 'power' to learn (2000a), 'hope' (2003), and 'voice and agency' (2006) – they apply equally to an emphasis on relationships and ethos in 'three related spheres': 3) internal structures and relationships within the school; 4) parents and the surrounding community; and 5) school development and leadership. In all of these aspects, successful school transformation involves creating a more active subject position, and a greater sense of democratic involvement. In a sense, what is needed is to take the democratic intent of School Improvement really seriously, extending it to all aspects of schooling. This political task is a crucial challenge in environments where patterns of traditional schooling, reinforced by a policy regime driven by accountability-as-blame, position many working-class and minority students, their parents and their teachers, quite negatively. Traditional modes of schooling often serve to replicate the symbolic domination which some pupils and their families already experience beyond the gate, in order to help these young people to succeed, the school's central cultural task is to help them to overcome a habitus of failure and hopelessness. This is not to suggest, of course, that all the children of manual workers or minorities have this negative experience of life or education, and some communities and many families have a much more positive sense of educational potential. Nor is it to suggest that all or even most schools provide a demoralizing experience. At the same time, we have to recognize and respond to the deep cultural scars of poverty and racism in an intensely divided society, and the concentration of suffering and deprivation in some schools within a marketized system of education. We also have to be aware of the probability that pupils from different backgrounds might experience the same school culture quite differently from one another.

The available intellectual resources to support a rethinking of educational change are extensive and readily available, but it is necessary to overcome the artificial boundaries of established School Improvement. In addition to some large North American reforms (Essential Schools; Accelerated Schools; the movement for smaller secondary schools), this includes developing a sense of other paradigms and perspectives beyond an Anglo-American political sphere dominated by neoliberalism (for example, Dalin's various international surveys [1993, 1994, 1998], or the Spanish re-interpretation of the Improvement paradigm [Murillo et al., 2002]).

A paradigm shift necessarily involves transcending the parameters of managerialism; by this, I do not mean we should ignore processes of leadership and management, only that we stop marginalizing everything else. I have attempted to do this practically through case studies (2000a), and theoretically (2003, 2006) by drawing on diverse bodies of educational literature which have much to offer to schools struggling 'against the odds'. There is no space to repeat that here.

A new paradigm of educational change which truly responds to the challenges of poverty and disadvantage would need to rethink the currently hegemonic models at all the levels identified in the early parts of this article:

- what are the basic *entities* and *forces or relationships* which act within/upon them;
- what kind of *models or theories* help us to understand them;
- what is the range of problems and acceptable solutions (a question of *field*);
- what *methods* do we use to study them;
- how do we relate to the *wider environment* of educational policies and governance, and of social change as a whole;
- what are the *ethical and political* implications of our paradigm of educational change.

Some answers to these points have been sketched above, but this might involve inter alia:

- looking at schools as communities within wider communities, and the transition of young people who move daily between these different cultures;
- drawing on sociological thinking which casts light on this experience, for example, Bourdieu's theories of exchange and invalidation (cultural and social capital);
- taking account of a much wider range of pedagogical and sociological literature in order to overcome a restrictive managerialism;
- engaging in more sophisticated and critical forms of qualitative enquiry, drawing for example on traditions of ethnography and social phenomenology;
- developing a stronger understanding of the implications of economic, social and cultural change for schooling;
- giving prominence to the ethical and political implications of different forms of school organization and conflicting models of change, and engaging in debate about curricular aims, hopefully rooted in a commitment to democracy and social justice.

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## Notes

- 1 Guba (1990) contains interesting debates about this issue, and particularly the systematic exclusion and discounting of moral issues in positivist research which imitates the natural sciences. It is arguable, of course, that this is not always the case.
- 2 There is, one must concede, a danger of relativism in Flyvbjerg's argument, which it is important to avoid. I would wish to argue that an ethically grounded paradigm of educational change also needs to satisfy epistemic truth criteria.
- 3 For example, why Jane Austen speaks of her characters visiting 'neighbours' at a distance of several miles, as if no one lived nearer, and why, for all their empathy with the poor, were Gaskell and Dickens filled with panic as soon as they began to engage in collective struggle.
- 4 The section that follows is necessarily limited in scope. A more focused and comprehensive critique of School Effectiveness can be found in Wrigley (2003, 2004).
- 5 Among the proponents, Teddlie and Reynolds (2001), for example, tend to annex school improvement to school effectiveness as a means of avoiding some criticisms of the latter. Conversely, some contributors to Slice and Wehner's (1998) critique of school effectiveness do not make a strong enough distinction between Effectiveness and Improvement.
- 6 We need to recognize, however, the extent to which this sense of complexity can be undermined by a more 'technological' emphasis on change management (Russo, 2002).
- 7 See, for example, Barth (1990), Dalin (1998), Hopkins et al. (1994) and McLaughlin (1990).
- 8 These are various referred to as Research, Development, Dissemination or RDD (Guba and Clark, 1965); innovation, distribution and adoption (Miles, 1992), or simply as a failed 'curriculum reform movement'.

(Hopkins, 1984: 11). This account of the origins of the movement is ironic given the extent to which leading School Improvement writers have become compromised by their association with the English policy regime. Peter Mortimore has been almost alone, among effectiveness researchers, to speak out strongly about this. 10 Brief reports are to be found in Wrigley (1997, 2000).

11 It should be noted that there were no plays available at that time such as the substitution of a GNVQ for four GCSEs.

12 A welcome exception is the newly published collection edited by Ainscow and West (2006).

13 This is not inevitable, even in Britain: it is particularly strong in England, but weak in Scotland.

14 Some schools are of course making their own way in doing these things, but ironically this is often against the current of government interventions and policy, and is poorly supported by mainstream School Improvement texts which marginalize aspects of school life other than leadership and change management. This is unfortunately still a major limitation of some recently published books about urban schools from well established Improvement researchers operating within the established paradigm, for example, Ainscow and West (2006) and Harris et al. (2006). Both these books introduce a diversity of interesting ideas, but in finally they are directed towards discovering a solution in new modes and structures of leadership.

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