

Chapter 10

Social justice - or a discourse of deficit?

What excellence is this that manages to coexist with more than a billion inhabitants of the developing world who live in poverty, not to say misery? Not to mention the all but indifference with which it coexists with 'pockets of poverty' and misery in its own, developed body. (Paulo Freire 1994)

It is a deep mistake to regard the dimension of social justice as an optional extra. Social divisions affect every aspect of school life and achievement, and do not disappear when we try to ignore them.

In Britain and elsewhere, an earlier emphasis on Equal Opportunities has suffered a partial eclipse through a new emphasis on Standards and Improvement. In the era of neo-liberalism, an understanding of the connections between underachievement and inequalities (gender, race, class, disability etc.) has been reframed into the vaguely moral demand to 'raise expectations'.

Accountability has been articulated in terms of raising average levels of attainment, rather than working for the broadest possible achievement and development of each individual. As a consequence, those to whom it is more difficult to 'add value' are construed as the problem, and superficial attempts made to accelerate progress.

Much of this book can be read as a response to that scenario. In fact, the concern for social justice runs through every chapter:

- 1) an awareness of how the Effectiveness discourse focuses blame on individual schools for the consequences of poverty
- 2) an exploration of the antidemocratic consequences of a dominant model of Improvement

- 3) a surveillance regime which limits teachers' ability to respond personally to pupils, and acts as a career deterrent against teaching in inner-city schools
- 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) alternatives to a centrally controlled curriculum which does little to motivate young people and hinders them from understanding poverty and racism
- 7) the need to replace teaching methods which silence and disempower the young
- 8) the possibility of developing modes of learning which respect and promote human rights
- 9) the need to establish rich partnerships between schools and communities, and to build learning communities on a human scale.

This present chapter complements the preceding analyses by focusing in turn on different aspects of inequality (poverty; special educational needs; school exclusions; bilingualism; gender; racism and refugees). It seeks to reconnect them to a desire for school improvement, through a critique of the limitations of poorly theorised instrumentalist fixes and by suggesting more sustainable responses. The chapter is inevitably limited in its choice of sources and examples, and cannot hope to do justice to a rich professional literature in each of these areas.

While recognising the importance of specificity in analysis and response, there is an attempt to develop a more general theory by challenging discourses of deficit. Though some children inevitably seem harder to teach than others, the difficulty can either be located in the individual or in the intersection between learners and the school environment. The latter approach prefers to speak of 'barriers to learning' rather than individual disabilities and needs. It searches for solutions in terms of transforming the school environment and curriculum rather than in the forced assimilation of the child.

Within a discourse of deficit, many students are labelled as problems or even failures. The learning difficulties are essentialised and located within individuals. Those who cannot be assimilated or disciplined into 'normality' are segregated and excluded.

On a wider scale, however, there has been a strange twist to this pattern. In the English education system, entire schools with large numbers of ‘problem children’ have been officially declared failing, and their teachers scapegoated for the consequences of inexcusable levels of poverty. A discourse of deficit for pupils has been compounded by a discourse of derision for their teachers (see Ball 1990).

School Improvement has to move beyond a generalised and apolitical stance on high expectations, and get to grips with the research literature dealing with specific forms of inequality. It is crucial for school leaders to build alliances within and beyond the school, and to transform the structures and cultures which are obstacles to higher achievement for large numbers of pupils.

Facing up to poverty

Within a global trend of increasing poverty and social division, poverty in Britain (as in the USA) has dramatically increased in the last quarter century:

- 12,000,000 people (nearly a quarter of the population) are living in poverty in the UK – three times as many as in 1979
- From 1979 to 1993, the proportion of children living in households with incomes less than half the national average rose from 8% to 32%
- Over three-quarters of the 3,000,000 children living with only one parent are growing up in poverty. (National Children’s Home factfile 2000)

The links between poverty and low achievement are well established. In Britain, seven-year-olds from social class V (unskilled manual workers) are five times as likely to have reading difficulties as those from social class I (higher professions). By the age of eleven, children with fathers in non-manual occupations are three years ahead in maths and reading, compared with children in social class V. Half the pupils entitled to free school meals have GCSE scores below 15 points, compared with one-sixth of those not on free school meals (National Child Development Study – summary in Mittler 2000:52).

The Dearing Inquiry concluded that the doubling of university student numbers over a 20 year period had little impact on the proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Recent data shows that nearly four out of five university places go to teenagers from non-manual backgrounds, and under 2% from social class V (Plummer

2000:38-9). The difficulties for students from lower-income families have been exacerbated by the abolition of grants and the levying of tuition fees, leading to high dropout rates.

Official data shows clearly that the attainment gap grows as children proceed through school. At 11, there is a substantial overlap (around 50%) between higher attaining schools in the poorest areas and lower attaining schools in more affluent ones. By age 16, there is virtually none. (DfES *Autumn Package*) A recent Inspectorate report *Improving City Schools* (OfSTED 2000), shows that, of the secondary schools with over 35% of children on free meals, only 2% even reach the national average.

It is clear that any effort to improve schools without dramatically reducing child poverty is like running up a downward escalator. A professional struggle to raise achievement necessarily also requires a political struggle for a more equal society.

Stephen Ball (1990) put a finger on the 'discourse of derision' by which policy makers seek to blame inferior working-class achievement on poor teaching and school leadership. The politicians rightly claim that 'the poor deserve better', but by stigmatising inner-city schools as failures, they generate a feeling that the communities themselves are failing. Conversely, successful school improvement serves to uplift a community, especially when the school is seen to be genuinely concerned about economic and social regeneration. An important step in 'turning round' a struggling school is to help the staff turn round to face up to poverty and engage with the life of the local community. (See also Hargreaves and Fullan 1998, although their expression 'move toward the danger' is altogether too negative.)

Establishing a positive image for a school, including changing its appearance and generating good publicity, is often thought of as a simple marketing exercise. In deprived working-class areas it may be more than this: people who have lost faith in their own abilities and self-worth may project their low expectations and lack of self-esteem onto the local school. A change of image helps to restore their hopes. School leaders need to develop a political understanding of their role, not only in the sense of relating to people and agencies locally, but also in terms of better understanding their place within the wider economic and political framework.

A typical curricular response to poverty is a reduction to 'the basics', a watered-down gruel of decontextualised literacy and numeracy exercises. The mainstream Effectiveness literature, based on an extremely narrow

database, insists that this is the way to raise attainment. In the United States, federal funding for the poorest areas has diverted learners into a curriculum designed as remedial but which actually undermines motivation and becomes a trap. By contrast, the Accelerated Schools movement seeks to provide a meaningful challenge (see website). One of the few large-scale studies of curriculum enrichment in disadvantaged areas shows the importance of a challenging and meaningful curriculum which connects to students' experiences. (Knapp 1995)

In the United States as in Britain, high-stakes testing is restricting learning opportunities by hindering teachers' attempts to develop meaningful curricula which will motivate disadvantaged young people.

Teachers' creativity is diminished when they have to 'teach to the test' and are discouraged from implementing more engaging pedagogical practices. Darling-Hammond (1991) found a decline in the use of teaching and learning methods such as student-centered discussions, essay writing, research projects and laboratory work when standardized tests were required. (Nieto 1998:422)

Skills remediation can best work when conducted on an intensive basis over short periods of time, and never as a long-term substitute for breadth, challenge and relevance.

Children whose different talents are developing at different speeds need experiences which will boost their confidence and give them a taste of success – rather than seeing themselves labelled as comparative failures in the 'three R's'. (Tim Brighouse 2002)

Despite the recent emphasis on school cultures, School Improvement literature has paid too little attention to the symbolic enactments of wealth and poverty. Many years ago in *Uses of Literacy*, Richard Hoggart (1957) articulated the cultural conflict suffered by working-class boys entering grammar schools. In many subtle ways today, vulnerable adolescents are given signals that their cultural world is alien and inferior and has no value in school. We still hear some teachers blame poor achievement on one-parent families – a category which does not seem to include their brave lone parent colleagues in the staffroom. One of my teaching students describes a teacher in his placement school, who by wearing lavish jewellery and speeding away in her shiny red car at the end of day, gives unwitting signals of her alienation from the students' lives and her impatience to get back into her own world. Fortunately, there are many excellent teachers and heads in more successful inner-city schools whose

habits, relationships and conversations connect them symbolically to the lives of the community.

‘Raising expectations’ requires a situated understanding of the complex social dynamics of ambition and self-esteem. Teachers cannot skate over problems, but need to help youngsters to articulate their responses. Resilience is built up through a political understanding of the difficulties and opportunities. Young people growing up in poverty need to appreciate the determined hard work they will need in order to succeed. Jenny Dunn, headteacher of Seymour Park School, told me how her teachers motivated a disaffected ten-year-old to understand that his football idols required real dedication and sustained effort to succeed.

His teacher went to watch him play on Saturdays and to talk with his coach. They worked together to motivate him. We helped him understand that you’ve got to have clear goals. There’s a lot of glamour in football, but it’s also very disciplined. They’re fanatical – what you can have for your breakfast, how much sleep, lots of training. It’s not like zapping a button to switch the television on. (Wrigley 2000:40)

Cultural leadership in many schools involves a judicious balance - keeping out the worst features of antisocial or macho street behaviour while doing everything possible to make the students feel welcome, along with their neighbourhood and youth sub-cultures, complex experiences and shifting identities. Schools which force vulnerable teenagers to choose between educational success and rootedness in a community, inevitably stimulate a resistance to school which Kohl (1994) has called ‘creative maladjustment’.

Understanding ‘special needs’

A uniform curriculum policed by high-stakes testing inevitably constructs many individuals as inadequate. The hegemony of measurement stigmatises those who *cannot measure up*. Consequently, the school effectiveness and standards discourse undermines the struggle for greater inclusion, and, paradoxically, for higher achievement.

A complex debate is currently taking place regarding inclusion and special educational needs. We have come a long way from the days in which many children were regarded as ineducable.

The Warnock Report, using the term ‘children with special educational needs’ (often a temporary designation), led to the integration into mainstream schools of children who had previously been educated separately. This was a great step forward, since it helped to change the emphasis

The Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 was the result of eugenicist agitation and it led to the incarceration of ‘idiots’, ‘imbeciles’, ‘the feeble minded’ and ‘moral imbeciles’, the last category usually referring to young people who had illegitimate children. Many were incarcerated for life in sex-segregated institutions to prevent them from reproducing. At first it was argued that units or extra classes attached to ordinary schools were best, but soon the eugenicist view prevailed and the early part of the century saw large numbers of segregated schools for ‘crippled children, epileptics, educable morons and feeble minded children’. (Copeland 1997, in Rieser 2000:132)

from defects to an identification of specific needs for support. However, even the term *needs* can send out signals of ‘dependency, inadequacy and unworthiness’ (Corbett 1996).

Recent theorists argue for the replacement of *medical* (or psychological) models by *social* (or environmental) ones.

The ‘medical model’ sees the disabled person as the problem. We are to be adapted to fit into the world as it is... The emphasis is on dependence, backed up by the stereotypes of disability that call forth pity, fear and patronizing attitudes. Rather than on the needs of the person, the focus is usually on the impairment... ‘Medical model’ thinking about us predominates in schools where special educational needs are thought of as emanating from the individual who is seen as different, faulty and needing to be assessed and made as normal as possible. (Rieser 2000:119)

The social model, on the other hand:

views the barriers that prevent disabled people from participating in any situation as being what disables them. The social model makes a fundamental distinction between impairment and disability. *Impairment* is defined as ‘the loss or limitation of physical, mental or sensory function on a long-term, or permanent basis’, whereas *disability* is ‘the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers’. (Rieser 2000:119, citing Disabled People’s International 1981)

Thus, for people with restricted mobility, a social model highlights the disabling effect of entrances without ramps and of discriminatory social attitudes. This does not mean that medical needs can be neglected: that would be like stopping a child’s classmates from calling him names while failing to test his eyes or offer him glasses. The social model is becoming theoretically dominant, though there is still debate about its scope and implications. Some writers, for example, seek to make a distinction

between ends and means, arguing that the provision of separate schooling is sometimes needed to prevent greater difficulties later in life.

The social model demands a reorientation of School Improvement towards the creative adaptation of schools. The *Index for Inclusion* (Booth et al 2000) helps set an agenda for school self-evaluation. It covers a wide range of barriers to learning, and includes material, organisational and attitudinal factors.

Index for Inclusion : sample questions for school review

- Are students able to participate fully in the curriculum, in clothes appropriate to their religious beliefs, for example in science and physical education?
- Do staff recognise the physical effort required to complete tasks for some learners with impairments or chronic illnesses and the tiredness that can result?
- Do staff recognise the mental effort expended by some students, for example using lip reading and vision aids?
- Do staff recognise the additional time required by some students with impairments to use equipment in practical work?
- Do staff provide alternative ways of giving experience or understanding for students who cannot engage in particular activities, for example using equipment in science, some forms of exercise in physical education, or optical science for blind students?

This requires a transformation of schools to make them more inclusive, rather than physically incorporating learners into schools which remain largely as they were. This raises the question of how much adaptation is possible within a one-size-fits-all national curriculum and given the pressures of accountability. A system which pressures teachers to ensure that the maximum number of pupils meet pre-specified objectives inevitably gives rise to a discourse of *deficit* for those who don't make it. This is not to argue for a minimalist curriculum for these pupils, but for greater flexibility.

Satirically, Crockett describes a cartoon drawing of a very small concert pianist who has to play a particular piece of music:

As I looked at the picture, I wondered, 'what is he going to play, and how is he going to play it?' To me, the illustration epitomises the challenges of high-stakes accountability. These questions came to my mind: When can

Frederick Chopin's Opus 64, Number 1: 'The Minute Waltz', be played in 90 seconds? Who decides whether the pianist will play from an enlarged print version of the original score or from the big note 'easy piano' version? Which alterations accommodate the player and which ones modify the music? When it comes to playing this standard from the classical repertoire, just what are we asking this particular performer to do and what do we expect of him? What were the instructional goals for his performance: keyboard speed and romantic interpretation? (in O'Brien 2001:81)

And why this piece of music at all? When the National Curriculum was introduced in England and Wales, many special needs teachers were glad that it promised a common entitlement to all learners. It has since become clear that it has many disadvantages, including denying space for a developmental curriculum in life and social skills. Inclusion and entitlement should not mean assimilation into a uniform curriculum of fixed objectives. Universal objectives invariably position many learners as defective, however careful the differentiation. The learner has little say in either the basic task or its differentiation.

Other people's (usually non-disabled professionals') assessments of us are used to determine where we go to school; what support we get; what type of education. (Rieser 2000:119)

A very different and more enabling approach to differentiation is to be found in education systems which are less dominated by fixed objectives. In Denmark teachers are recommended to embark upon a broad topic with a class, but with considerable choice for the students in which aspects most interest them and in how they are going to pursue them. The learner is given more control over how to learn, while developing greater self-awareness and skills of self-evaluation.

The setting of goals and evaluation holds a work process together, both for you and for your pupils. Just as you must formulate a goal for your teaching, so must each pupil formulate a goal which will become a leading thread in the pupil's work.

It will often happen that the learners' goals are inspired by the framework which your planning provides, and often many pupils will formulate similar objectives. However, the essential point is that each pupil or group of pupils will have ownership of the learning process and will know what they want to teach themselves, so that they can find ways of doing it more effectively. (Krogh-Jespersen et al, 1998: 17)

School exclusions

The most difficult tensions for teachers, within a generalised policy of inclusion, surround the management of disruptive behaviour. It is here that a broad definition of inclusion confronts a literal definition of *exclusion*, and in which highly charged interpersonal situations involving disorderly and even unintelligible behaviour can make even the most confident and benign teacher feel nervous, antagonistic and desperate. This is a traumatic situation: so much personal energy and professional identity is invested by teachers in maintaining the norms of schooling that it seems only natural to regard the child's behaviour as deviant and deficient rather than questioning the environment to which they fail to adapt. There is no space here to discuss specific tactics – the literature for that is extensive – but it is important to articulate the question in ways which may lead to more positive resolution. It is crucial to understand that we are dealing with structural and cultural problems rather than purely individual ones.

The introduction of market competition between schools in England led to a 450% increase in the number of permanent exclusions between 1990 and 1995.

This... reflects the pressures on schools to put a premium on academic success, to secure a favourable position in league tables and to ensure that the local media report on their successes and achievement. Since their funding depends on parents opting into the school, it is hard for even the most caring school to retain pupils who appear to flout its values and priorities and who may prevent other pupils from reaching targets set by the government. This is the price we are paying as a society for allowing our schools to be put into the market place and forced to tout for custom in order to survive. (Mittler 2000: 63-4)

The dramatic rise in the number of excluded children does not reflect a sudden increase of disruptive behaviour in young people: the evidence from one major study suggests that the incidence of emotional and behavioural disorders has changed very little in 20 years (Croll and Moses 2000). What has changed is the tolerance level of the schools to pupils with disruptive behaviour. (ibid: 63)

It is important to counter the impression generated by the press and by one particular teacher union that exclusions are always used as a last resort, and that their main use is to protect teachers from violence. Only 1% are for physical abuse and assaults on staff, while 30% are for bullying, fighting and assaults on peers. Two thirds of permanent exclusions are for the more uncertain categories of 'disruption,

misconduct and unacceptable behaviour', 'verbal abuse to staff', 'verbal abuse to peers' and 'defiance and disobedience'. (National Children's Home 2000) This would suggest that we ought to be looking proactively at school ethos, not simply reacting to individual behaviour.

A quarter of schools account for two thirds of all exclusions. A pupil's chance of being excluded is not purely random and depends upon the circumstances in which he [normally male] is growing up and being educated. It is sensible to infer that high-excluding schools may have more alternatives than they believe.

There are massive inequalities in exclusions. Despite some recent improvement, official data in Britain shows that children of African Caribbean origin are still over three times as likely to be excluded from primary school as others, and over four times as likely to be excluded from secondary schools. The pattern of stereotyping, cultural misunderstandings and blatant discrimination are clearly described by Tony Sewell (1997), Maud Blair (2001) and Chris Searle (2001). Exclusions are rising among some other ethnic groups. There is also a strong correlation between exclusion and poor reading ability and other special needs (National Children's Home 2000).

The term 'ethos' is frequently used in school improvement texts, but the impact of school ethos on behaviour needs to be better understood. Whereas a medical / psychological model looks to the individual, a social model examines the interplay between learners and environment. The case of children labelled hyperactive is telling. Researchers within a medical paradigm examine links between poor school behaviour ('attention deficits' and 'hyperactivity') and chemical abnormalities, and pharmaceutical companies promote drugs such as ritalin as a direct 'cure'. The extent of prescription is not yet as high in Britain as in the USA, but there are startling differences by area. A recent Scottish survey gives a range from 1 in 300 children prescribed in some education authorities, to 1 in 30 in others, and no apparent correlation with likely contributory factors such as poverty or poor housing. In some areas, three or more children might be taking ritalin in a single class. We also need to take account of the impact of food additives on children's behaviour (see Hyperactive Children's Support Group website).

It is easy to assume that the individual child is to blame for behavioural difficulties, but if we reverse our angle of vision for a moment, we might begin to question whether schools currently provide a healthy social and educational environment for many of today's children. Perhaps we need to defer the label 'hyperactive' until we have examined whether the

school is hyperpassive. Research in the United States (Flynn and Rapoport 1976) and Germany (Goetze 1992) indicates that symptoms of hyperactivity diminish with more open and active learning. More active participation helps such pupils towards more stable emotions and behaviour.

The teachers perceive behavioural disturbances differently, and are not so negatively influenced by particular disturbances. At the same time, more open arrangements for learning offer better possibilities of direct pedagogical intervention. (Goetze 1992:269, in Jürgens 1994)

Official responses to school exclusions have recognised their serious consequences in terms of unemployment or criminality, but have turned the pressure back onto schools. League tables for exclusions are set up to counter the impact of league tables for attainment. While trying to maintain a rigid educational environment, individuals who cannot be assimilated are inevitably at risk of exclusion, and conversely, teachers develop a negative and limited understanding of 'inclusion' as physical *containment*. A democratic orientation to school improvement must examine the impact of school climate on individual behaviour, as well as the converse.

Bilingualism – a cultural asset

Despite all the evidence across the rest of the world, monolingualism is still regarded as the norm and bilingualism as an aberration in Britain and the USA. This xenophobic perspective is profoundly damaging not only for linguistic minorities but for our whole society.

Speaking more than one language is absurdly regarded not as a bonus but as a deficit:

Bilingualism shuts doors. It nourishes self-ghettoization, and ghettoization nourishes racial antagonism... Using some language other than English dooms people to second-class citizenship in American society... Monolingual education opens doors to the larger world... institutionalized bilingualism remains another source of the fragmentation of America, another threat to the dream of 'one people' (Arthur Schlesinger Jr, 1991:108-9, quoted by Cummins 2000).

This strange logic identifies linguistic minorities as the problem, rather than the hegemony of an anglophone power elite. Schlesinger regards the silencing of other tongues as 'nation building'; in truth, the desire to extinguish alternative cultures and world views underwrites the ignorance of the USA's political leadership whose imperial arrogance now threatens the entire world.

Here in Britain, senior government ministers talk of schools being ‘swamped’ by asylum seekers, helping to stir up racial hatred against asylum seekers. Meanwhile, they are advising South Asian parents to stop using Urdu or Punjabi at home. Thus, while setting up barriers to migration – even to those fleeing from persecution – they attempt to homogenise our richly diverse population.

The use of schools to consolidate a monolingual nation at the heart of Empire has a long history. In Britain, Celtic languages were banned from schools and public life, and speakers of regional dialects were made to feel inferior.

In the early days of mass immigration from the Indian sub-continent, Asian children were isolated into special language centres, denying them immersion among first language English speakers while doing nothing to recognise the value of their mother tongue. There has been considerable progress since those days. Segregated language centres have been closed, and the terminology has changed from a discourse about ‘children who can’t speak English’ to English as an Additional Language (EAL) and ‘bilingual pupils’. It is now accepted good practice to integrate newcomers as quickly as possible into mainstream classes with specialist in-class support.

A challenge to the inspection system as a result of the Stephen Lawrence enquiry has led to greater awareness. Recent inspection guidance warns against blurring EAL into SEN (special educational needs), by advising inspectors against writing such sentences as ‘All pupils, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, achieve appropriately for their potential.’ The guidelines assert that bilingualism is a valued skill (OfSTED 2002), praising lessons in which children are able to use ‘short bursts of the home language’. Even this degree of recognition, however, marginalises the home language – it is implied that the major educational goal is to make it unnecessary.

Despite some recent state legislation to suppress them, the USA boasts many bilingual schools, including several hundred based on a premise of two-way immersion, i.e. where first language English speakers learn Spanish and first language Hispanics learn English. There are also many other late-exit transitional programmes. Research clearly shows the higher success of those programmes which give most support to bilingualism compared with transitional programmes which encourage the minority language only as a temporary expedient.

(Summarised and referenced in Nieto 1998: 432; Cummins 2000) In Britain, there are still

very few multiethnic schools where the recognition of languages other than English is other than tokenistic.

A bridge provides access to a different shore without closing off the possibility of returning home... The best thing about bridges is that they do not need to be burned once they are used; on the contrary, they become more valuable with use because they help visitors from both sides become adjusted to different contexts.

Unfortunately, however, this is a far cry from how diverse languages and cultures tend to be viewed in schools: the conventional wisdom is that if native languages and cultures are used at all, it should be only until one learns the important language and culture, and then they should be discarded or burned. It is definitely a one-way street with no turning back.

The metaphor of the bridge suggests a different stance: You can have two homes, and the bridge can help you cross the difficult and conflict-laden spaces between them.

(Nieto 1999: 115)

Jim Cummins' comprehensive survey of research demonstrates the importance of theories of language for the School Improvement project. He is able to refute the common sense notion that success in English depends upon time on task, used by those who want to eliminate time 'wasted' in using the home language. He draws upon copious evidence to back up an *interdependence* hypothesis, showing that increased fluency in the home language correlates with the greatest gains in learning English.

The results of virtually all evaluations of bilingual and second language immersion programs are consistent with predictions derived from the interdependence hypothesis ... Transfer across languages of conceptual knowledge and academic skills (such as learning and reading strategies) compensates for the reduced instructional time through the majority language (Cummins 2000: 186).

The study entitled School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students carried out by Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier (1997) is undoubtedly one of the largest investigations of educational effectiveness ever conducted. It involved analysis of more than 700,000 student records compiled from five large school systems during the years 1982-1996... They report that the amount of formal schooling in L1 that students have received is the strongest predictor of how rapidly they will catch up academically in L2. This factor is a stronger predictor than socioeconomic

status or the extent to which parents may or may not speak English (Cummins 2000:223).

Cummins highlights the success of language programmes which are content-rich, i.e. where language development is integrated into academic learning of other subjects; the other major factors are students' self-esteem, a positive recognition of cultures and communities, and greater opportunities for parental involvement.

Research results on an international scale are almost unanimous in their conclusion: children from language minority backgrounds benefit from bilingual programs when their native language plays a major role in their instruction. This is the case in countries such as Mexico, Sweden and Canada (Moorfield 1987); the Netherlands (Vallen and Stijnen 1987), the United States (Ramirez 1991; Thomas and Collier 1995) and other countries in Europe and Africa (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988).

Using students' linguistic, cultural and experiential backgrounds as resources has proven to be effective in their learning... treating their native language ability as an advantage, encouraging them to continue their study of Spanish and staff members to learn it, and promoting in-depth approaches to affirming cultural diversity rather than superficial 'one-shot' professional development workshops or decontextualized diversity programs.' (Nieto 1998: 426)

In Britain much progress has been made in supporting bilingual pupils, including multilingual displays and the employment of bilingual classroom assistants. However, we still have a long way to go in recognising and supporting languages other than English in our schools. Despite a gradual improvement, there are too few teachers from language minorities even in cities such as Bradford and Birmingham. Even though Asian languages are fully recognised as foreign languages within the National Curriculum and for examinations, there is little coherent support or encouragement for children's home language development in primary schools or across the curriculum in secondary schools.

The School Improvement project needs the breadth of vision to promote linguistic diversity as a desirable national asset. It needs to incorporate into its examination of shared leadership a positive understanding of the role of bilingual assistants and teachers; they form part of the distributed intelligence of the learning organisation, with their intimate knowledge of local communities and their ability to mediate cultural differences. In a two-way relationship based on respect, they have the potential to bring

the cultural riches of the community into the curriculum, as well as to help families support school learning.

‘The trouble with boys’

Boys’ underachievement has become the great moral panic of recent years, though the phenomenon itself is nothing new. Douglas (1964) showed that girls were outperforming boys in primary schools, but simply assumed that they would catch up. In most education authorities, the examinations for entry into selective secondary schools ensured that this would occur by requiring a higher pass mark for girls.

The recent data is by no means as straightforward as the headlines suggest. There is negligible difference in mathematics and science results at age 16 –two subjects which count heavily in terms of future employment prospects. The gender gap at 16 disappears by age 18, and in spite of legislation, men still tend to secure higher incomes and better promotions at work. The proportion of women pursuing IT degrees at university is small and declining (Ali 2001).

The moral panic about gender difference has served to deflect attention from social class and race. The gender gap is tiny in comparison with class differences, and between some ethnic groups (Gillborn and Mirza 2000). Girls’ comparative advantage does not extend to the daughters of unskilled manual workers. In 1998, girls from social class V occupied only 1.6% of university places and boys only 2% (Plummer 2000:39). While boys from professional families are surfing and their sisters swimming vigorously through the waves, the sons and daughters of unskilled manual workers still scrape along the bottom.

There is clearly an issue about raising boys’ achievement, but the way in which it is framed may be counterproductive. Problems include:

- a failure to celebrate the rising achievement of both boys and girls in recent decades
- a negative stereotyping of boys in general as reluctant learners, resulting in demoralisation and defeatism rather than challenge
- the assumption that women, and particularly teachers, are to blame for boys’ achievement levels
- a search for quick-fix solutions which may exacerbate the academic problem
- a refusal to address serious questions concerning norms of masculinity in our society.

By failing to question the social construction of masculinity, a deficit discourse is being created about boys which essentialises them as academic failures at the same time as accepting aggressive behaviour as ‘natural’ (Mahony and Smedley 1998). As with other types of deficit discourse examined in this chapter, the underachieving male student is locked into a fixed identity of academic failure, with no attempt to challenge features of the environment which actively construct that identity – in this case, social assumptions about appropriate male behaviour. Boys and girls both suffer when macho attitudes go unchallenged within a school system which cares only about examinations.

In a period of anti-feminist backlash, women are now being blamed for the ‘failure’ of boys. The opposite is true, according to Victoria Foster and colleagues (Australia):

It is not the school experience that ‘feminizes’ boys, but rather the ideology of traditional masculinity that keeps boys from wanting to succeed. ‘The work you do here is girls’ work’, one school boy recently commented to a researcher. ‘It’s not real work.’ ... Boys eschew school work for the anti-intellectual rough and tumble; girls’ achievement is inhibited by the incessant teasing and harassment of those rough and tumble boys. (Foster et al 2001:14)

Whereas the women’s struggle of the 70s and 80s contributed positively to girls’ greater success, it is a residual culture of macho masculinity which is holding boys back. Boys compete on the street and in school for each other’s approval, since ‘manly acts of living on the edge can’t just be done in isolation’ (Salisbury and Jackson 1996:219). They suffer from the stress of constantly hiding their emotions, and from the ‘chronic anxiety of having to prove your manhood every second’ (Foster et al 2001:15).

When we theorise boys’ underachievement in this way, it is easier to see the inadequacy of some of the short-term solutions proposed, including boys-only classes and a diet of war and adventure stories. We may agree that ‘boys are uneasy speaking about their emotions, or reading books which express emotions’, but we surely cannot concur with this state of affairs. Boys may benefit from working in pairs with girls, but we need to monitor and guide the process to ensure that they do not dominate. Attempts to raise boys’ self-esteem as learners need to be modulated by an awareness of the dangers of sexist dominance.

Many recently developed ideas in response to boys’ underachievement are sensible and enlightened, and will benefit girls too. For example, when teachers ask pupils to spend two minutes talking over their

response with a neighbour before giving an answer to the class, this encourages many boys to think more carefully and gives less confident girls a chance to rehearse. While Bleach (1998), Frater (2000) and Hannan (1999) present some useful tactics, there are also contradictions and dangers within instrumental approaches which try to tackle lower academic achievement in isolation and do nothing to challenge the underlying ideologies of male superiority.

It is crucial for the boys to see the folly of believing there is only one form of masculinity which is narrow, rigid and inflexible. As Lingard and Douglas (1999) claim, there is a need for the boys to be valued and affirmed as boys, but in concert with this it is also necessary to broaden the acceptable range of masculine expression available to boys. This needs to be underlined because it means teaching boys about gender in general and masculinities in particular, which requires an understanding of gender as a social construction. After Gould (1985), teaching about and to boys and young men means engaging them in the same way girls and young women have been engaged in studying women...

This includes adolescent society and schoolboy customs like acting manly, conforming to a group identity, needing to belong, pressuring peers, putting down boys who are different, scapegoating, denigrating girls and anything regarded as feminine, and deriding any form of intellectualism and academic achievement. (Beckett 2001:76)

Questions to explore in English and health education:

- What do you understand 'masculinity' to mean? What does it mean to be a man? In what ways do boys have to prove that they are men?
- How are boys expected to behave? What stereotypes are you aware of? Where do these expectations come from? Who imposes these stereotypes?
- What happens to boys if they do not behave in stereotypical ways, according to the expectations of others?
- What is homophobia and what role do you think it plays in boys' lives?
- What do you think life might be like for a member of the opposite sex?

(Wayne Martino, 2001:92)

Virginia Foster and colleagues (2001:17) point out that feminism has offered 'a blueprint for a new boyhood and masculinity based on a passion for justice, a love of equality, and expression of a fuller emotional palette.'

Martin Mills suggests a deconstruction or ‘emasculatation’ of current constructions of risk taking.

This might involve explorations of women’s engagement in high-risk activities such as the suffragette movement; the anti-slave movement in the US; the women’s peace movement in Australia (Pine Gap) and in the UK (Greenham Common); and also of course less sensationalized forms of risk taking such as childbirth. (Mills 2001:62)

It is also important to be aware that homophobic taunts are part of the process by which boys police their own masculinity – a process which creates inhibitions about showing emotions, narrows the range of acceptable behaviours, and is intensely destructive of less macho boys, whether or not they identify as gay. An Ontario teachers’ union reminds us of the extent of this problem, arguing that approximately one person in ten is gay or lesbian; that 30% of gay youth attempt suicide at least once; and that 30% of completed suicides among all youth can be attributed to issues surrounding sexual orientation (Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario website, which gives clear and helpful advice on helping to eliminate homophobia.)

When you hear adults making ugly or malicious comments or jokes. It’s important to respond. Depending on the situation, privately or publicly tell the person how such comments make you feel.

Never laugh along with people making such jokes or comments.

Don’t assume everybody is heterosexual. The constant assumption of heterosexuality renders gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people invisible. Use examples of famous gay and lesbian people in history.

www.etfo.on.ca (links to Equity: Homophobia)

Such considerations have been sidelined into the margins of consciousness by the School Effectiveness literature. School Improvement needs to pay greater attention to the construction of gender and its intersection with social class as a crucial factor in students’ self-perception as learners.

Racism and refugees

The connections between racism and educational failure are not accidental, nor are they the result of inferior intelligence or bad attitudes on the part of black children. Institutional racism, embedded structurally and culturally within our schools, actively produces the failure of Black pupils within a school system which claims to be open and inclusive. (It is

salutory to recall the title of Bernard Coard's historic text 'How the West Indian Child is *Made* Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System', 1971. The processes of segregation, exclusion and failure have been described in numerous reports since.)

Patterns of unfair treatment including a disproportionate frequency of reprimands and criticisms and unwarranted reactions to cultural difference have been well documented (see for example Gillborn 1990, Searle 2001, Blair 2001).

Perhaps even more significant than the frequency of criticism and controlling statements which Afro-Caribbean students received was the fact that they were often singled out for criticism even though several students of different ethnic origins were engaged in the same behaviour... In sum, Afro-Caribbean students were not only criticised more often than their white peers, but the same behaviour in a white pupil might not bring about criticism at all. (Gillborn 1990:30, in Blair and Cole 2000)

Not surprisingly, this generates antagonism:

Students were inevitably forced into highly significant face-winning, face-retaining and face-losing contests between themselves and the teachers. (Wright 1987:111, in Blair and Cole 2000)

The situation has been exacerbated by the educational market, high-stakes assessment and accountability. The dramatic rise in school exclusions involved an extraordinary proportion of African Caribbean boys.

Some teachers construct a more positive but educationally limiting stereotype for black students as 'natural athletes but too restless to sit and learn'. Others set about celebrating Caribbean food and rhythms in a multicultural response, though this stops short of addressing the question of racism. Assumptions of parental neglect and indifference towards schooling are still widespread, as part of a deficit discourse which blames the victim.

The statistics tell a different story. Gillborn and Mirza (2000) provide evidence from one large education authority that African Caribbean enter school more advanced but leave with the lowest levels of achievement.

Despite the alarm about failing city schools, there has been very little British research into school success for this population. Maud Blair and Jill Bourne's report (1998) has a set of key characteristics which is quite distinct from the bland and ambiguous lists to be found in most mainstream 'school effectiveness' studies. Like my own parallel study of

school success for bilingual Asian students (Wrigley 2000), it has been widely read by specialists in multiethnic education but is rarely cited in the mainstream study of School Improvement in Britain, even in books which claim to illuminate the intractable problems of inner city achievement.

The education of refugees is a particularly critical issue at the present time. Our governments mainly regard refugees as an unnecessary burden. Those who profit from arms sales, and the warmongering politicians who support them, deny responsibility for the tide of human misery they have caused. The skills and diverse experience of refugees, and their desire to contribute to the development of their country of refuge, are squandered by asylum laws which keep them marginalised and forbid them employment. The longer term benefits of immigration are overlooked in a deficit discourse reinforced by the rampant xenophobia promoted after 11 September 2001.

In the aftermath, we see leading New Labour politicians in Britain riding the bandwagon of resurgent racism. Leading government ministers incite racial hatred by feeding the media soundbites that refugees are *swamping* our schools, then pass new laws to incarcerate the children in detention centres. Courageous teachers in schools which have positively welcomed refugees know the problem lies elsewhere: the market system of accountability positions the victims of poverty and discrimination as an obstacle to its ruthless drive to raise standards. The pursuit of higher and higher targets clearly has no place for human suffering, and no time for children whose needs weigh upon the cost side of the balance sheet of efficiency. Children have become units of value addedness for the statisticians, rather than schools adapting to meet their needs.

Asylum seekers are a major stumbling block for a narrowminded accountability discourse. The sophisticated statistics of School Effectiveness cannot begin to calculate their complex needs or measure their schools' efficiency in 'adding value'; the process theories of mainstream School Improvement are far too general to deal with the creation of welcoming educational environments for the traumatised children of war.

There has been rapid development of theory and practical understanding by writers such as Jill Rutter (2000), adding a valuable new dimension to the literatures of equality, race and bilingualism. School Improvement is failing in its moral responsibility, as well as in its narrower aims of raising achievement, if it pretends that this is none of its business. We need to ask, insistently: Is there a connection between school improvement and social justice? Where is the vision we have heard so much about?

