Raising Levels of Achievement in Boys

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RAISING LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT IN BOYS

I've a pretty large experience of boys, and you're a bad set of fellows. Now mind...you behave yourself

Charles Dickens: Great Expectations

INTRODUCTION

This study has a close affinity with The Improvement of Schools through Partnership: School, LEA, and University(1) published by EMIE in October 1995. The issues and initiatives discussed in that report all have a bearing on the subject of this one. The raising of achievement by boys is an essential element in the improvement of schools, not a free-standing problem. To that extent, the strategies examined and proposed in the report on bringing about school improvement are a necessary background to a discussion of the special problems besetting the education of boys. As the report remarked: 'The process by which improvement is effected is far from straightforward. No-one could sensibly suppose that it can be achieved simply by identifying a school's weaknesses, making them explicit to the school, and expecting them to be picked off, with the remedies then set in stone. Quite the contrary; the process is a dynamic one, and the quest for improvement is never-ending.'

THE EXTENT OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT BY BOYS

Every local education authority which responded to a request for information reported that boys' standards of achievement fell below those of girls. Percentage differences varied from one authority to another, and there were variations in the degree of difference at particular points of testing, that is to say in GCSE and at the ends of each of the key stages, but all confirmed the phenomenon. The fact of persisting differences is now everywhere acknowledged and needs no proving here. For example, recorded national GCSE results show that in 1995, 48 per cent of girls achieved five or more A-C grades, but only 39 per cent of boys. Conversely, 2.3 per cent more boys than girls obtained no grades, a figure which has not changed, other than by slight shifts of the decimal point, since 1992. The National Consortium for Examination Results reports that in 1996, 52 per cent of girls achieved A-C grades, as compared with 42.3 per cent of boys.

It would be tedious to reproduce in detail all the statistical data received from LEAs in response to the enquiry, but a number of individual examples may be useful to illustrate important points for discussion.

In Nottinghamshire, the achievement of GCSE grades by girls rose by 7.6 per cent in the period 1989 to 1995. The corresponding figure for boys was 5.8 per cent, and the superiority of girls over boys still stands at 8.4 per cent. In Solihull, an analysis of the 1995 GCSE results showed that girls gained 11 per cent more A-C grades. In Staffordshire, the corresponding figure was 8.7 per cent, and in Camden 6 per cent. Bradford gave figures showing the differential in performance to be 7.4 per cent in
As Ofsted and the Equal Opportunities Commission expressed it in The Gender Divide:

Girls are more successful than boys (in terms of achieving GCSE grades A* to C), or broadly as successful, in almost all major subjects. They are even achieving success in subjects traditionally considered ‘Boys’ subjects’ (design and technology, computer studies, mathematics, chemistry, and combined science), though their performance is usually relatively less good in these subjects than others.

The only major subject in which girls perform less well than boys is GCSE physics. Similarly, their performance was relatively weak in the physical processes element of National Curriculum science when assessed at age 14 in 1992.(2)

At Hinchingbrooke School, in Cambridgeshire, the headteacher has been tracking the scores of Year 11 pupils in GCE/GCSE for the last 11 years. He has compared the outcomes at 16+ with the inputs at 11+, as measured by NFER verbal and non-verbal tests. From the resulting graphs he has been able to conclude that:

... girls perform more closely to their measured ability, i.e. there is a higher correlation between input and output.

... more able boys appear to be performing ‘more broadly’ according to expectation, but with a few wider fluctuations than is the case with the more able girls.

... the average and particularly the below average boys are underperforming in comparison to their own ability on entry to the school.(3)

After a detailed study of the pattern of achievement in her school, the principal of Beacon Community College, East Sussex, reported to staff, parents, and governors that the boys who were very able achieved almost as well as the most able girls. ‘But in the middle ability group there are vast differences and it seems that average girls are overachieving, while average boys are underachieving.’(4)

The advantage of boys over girls, particularly in language skills, is manifest from a very early age. In applying baseline assessment measures to 2,000 children just starting school, Wandsworth found that in reading-related, mathematical and scientific skills 24 per cent of girls were in the top performance band compared with 17 per cent of boys. Furthermore, 26 per cent of boys were in the lowest band, against 19 per cent of girls. Since 1993, Surrey has been screening all its children in the term in which they are five and producing an individual profile for each child. From the outset they found that girls significantly outperformed boys on all assessments except the gross motor assessment. This difference was reflected in the Year 3 reading results, where girls were again found to outperform the boys. The differences in the screening process were, and continue to be, greatest in the areas of social skills, letter identification, writing, and the task of drawing a boy or a girl.
The argument appears to have been clinched by the results of the 1996 A-level examinations, in which girls gained 3 per cent more A-C grades than did boys.

THE REASONS FOR UNDERACHIEVEMENT BY BOYS

There has been a great deal of speculation on the causes of the disparity between boys' and girls' achievement. This can be gathered under four main headings:

- inborn differences between the sexes
- acquired stereotypes and self-perception, and the social and economic influences
- the influence of the school and of teachers' attitudes.
- the effects of the assessment process.

They are worth examining in turn, if only to allow us to judge how far, and in what ways, their influences can be countered.

- Medical evidence has been adduced to suggest that boys are more vulnerable prenatally and during the process of birth, where they are more likely to suffer anoxia (oxygen starvation) and other complications. It has, indeed, been suggested that their mothers' greater need for medication at this time might well have an effect on the boys on their encounter with schooling. It has also been suggested that boys are less well endowed than girls with verbal reasoning and analytical skills. Girls have been said to be more sensitive to sound and to be able to detect intonation patterns at an earlier stage, to the obvious advantage of the growth of their language skills. Another theory is that there may be differences in the development of the functions of brain hemispheres, and that language development follows a biological maturation 'timetable', where girls have a faster rate of progress than boys. There is said to be a greater proportion of boys among hyperactive children and among those with language difficulties. Boys who show behaviour problems in the pre-school years have been observed to persist in them to a greater extent than is the case with girls.

In a paper produced for Surrey, Connor reviewed the literature on this subject and sensibly remarked: 'One could argue that findings of this kind demonstrate the dangers of generalisation or using "gross" variables rather than examining performance at a more individual level.' Making much the same point, Bassey referred to a review of 1,400 studies which identified only four statements the reviewers considered to be 'fairly well established', three of them relating to boys and girls in their adolescent years. These were that:

- teenage girls have greater verbal ability
- adolescent boys excel in visual-spatial ability
towards the eradication of stereotypical thinking might be expedited if these indirect approaches were supplemented by a more direct one.\textsuperscript{(14)}

A similar point was made by Serbin:

Children have already learned that different characteristics, activities and behaviours are expected of males and females. They will conform to these sex roles in the classroom unless the teacher makes an active effort to communicate different expectations and values. If children are to be freed from stereotyping, they must be treated as individuals, rather than as members of a classified group.\textsuperscript{(15)}

Certainly, these modes of thinking are well established by the time the pupils reach secondary school, where they are reinforced. The literature is full of references to boys’ display of attitudes and behaviour which they believe are in keeping with their particular gender roles. Tabberer\textsuperscript{(16)} refers to research in progress at NFER which shows girls as more likely than boys to have positive feelings about school and about teachers. They also view themselves as working hard, well-behaved, and less likely to be bored in lessons.

As Downes\textsuperscript{(17)} put it,

The prevailing ‘macho’ image, to which middle and lower ability boys seem to be particularly vulnerable, is that it is simply not expected that heroes do well in the classroom. The powerful role models from the world of sport, television, popular music, etc., are rarely projected as having academic gifts. If anything, they have got on in life in spite of ‘being dim at school’.

A similar observation is made by Warrington and Younger,\textsuperscript{(18)} who had interviewed pupils, teachers, and parents about study habits and attitudes. Boys appeared to be concerned with preserving an image of reluctant involvement or of disengagement. For many, it was not acceptable to be seen to be interested in academic work or stimulated by it. They were ‘in direct conflict with the ethos and aspirations of the school, an antagonist against whom their own masculinity was frequently tested’. At Cheney School, Oxfordshire, the deputy head sounded out the attitudes of a number of boys who, though capable of getting eight B grades in GCSE, were achieving five Cs or less. The response he received was that it was unmasculine to work. ‘There were two acceptable ways of being. If you didn’t want to compete on the aggressive front - macho, physical, and trading on superior strength - then you had to cultivate an image that was cool, detached and laid back. Neither included applying yourself in the classroom.’\textsuperscript{(19)}

Extensive press coverage of girls’ superiority over boys in terms of school achievement has made great play of the decline in the significance, prospects, and self-esteem of males in modern society, and of the effects upon boys’ attitudes to education. It has drawn upon conference speeches, research publications, and interviews with pupils and teachers. Statistics from the Equal Opportunities
became a major issue only in secondary schools, since there seemed to be more emphasis there on separation and on different roles. Similar reactions were recorded by Graham in his interviews with pupils in the Hampshire schools. In the discussions the pupils initially said that the teachers naturally favoured the girls, but 'after a very small amount of reflection they all abandoned this position and agreed that the teachers were only responding to pupil behaviour'. One aspect of this behaviour is general attitude to work, and the effort pupils put in to preparing for it. Amongst older primary pupils, girls spend more than an average time on homework projects, and the differences in commitment to homework are particularly marked in secondary schools. Ofsted inspections have confirmed the belief that boys and girls have different approaches to planning and organising their work. It is not unnatural that teachers should respond more warmly to pupils who are co-operative in furthering their own learning and take some responsibility for it. The important thing is for teachers to be explicitly aware of the nature of their responses and how far they are likely to lead to a solution or get in the way of one.

In a paper produced by the Curriculum and Assessment Unit of Merton, which drew upon the work of a group of teachers in primary and secondary schools, the equal opportunities co-ordinator of one of the high schools posed a number of pertinent questions as a background to the school's initiatives to come to grips with the issue:

- To what extent do teachers' expectations reinforce the process of underachievement?

- Is there a labelling process emerging from the continued assertion that boys are disruptive and damaging to the learning process in the classroom?

- Following the extensive research into classroom interaction, is there a growing sense of expecting boys to misbehave, talk down female colleagues and attempt to dominate the social context?

- Have the stereotypical images of boys, freely presented in the analysis of classroom and school behaviour studies, become embedded and now precede the occupants of the classroom?

- What messages do boys receive in the classroom?

He rounded these off by rightly emphasising the importance of looking at gender-specific needs and said that equality resides in recognition of these needs.

As part of this project, which was steered by the LEA’s inspector for science and equal opportunities, a variety of activities was devised to discover boys’ attitudes to a number of aspects of the issue. For instance, the boys were asked to work in groups, classifying cards which carried such statements as:
up with boys in mathematics, and any attempts to attribute that to the increased coursework component were 'misplaced'.\(^{30}\)

As a prelude to examining counter-measures in the next section, it might be useful to sum up briefly what has so far been said to account for the differential in boys' and girls' levels of achievement.

There is certainly evidence to suggest that boys and girls have a number of genetic differences that may have an effect on their early educational development. There is also evidence to show that parents do not have the same expectations of them, in the sense that boys and girls are assumed to have different interests, behave differently, and are marked out for different roles in life. It is, however, important to regard generalisations as indicators and not allow them to encourage discrimination. It is at the level of the individual that advances are made. This also holds true for judgments made within schools about comparative attitudes to work, behaviour, and general co-operativeness. It is useful to recognise the indicators and what has contributed to them, but in a spirit of intent, not of determinism.

**INITIATIVES FOR RAISING BOYS' LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT**

The powerful influences at work on boys' achievement need determined and well-planned measures to counter them. These have not so far been prompted at a national level except as an incidental to the policy of generally raising standards. Nor, on the evidence of responses received, have they been the subject of concentrated action on the part of LEAs to any widespread extent. Some LEAs have specifically identified the issue as a significant one when analysing assessment results, and have advised their schools accordingly. A smaller number have introduced imaginative and well-resourced initiatives, and in many cases schools have initiated their own projects. Examples of each of these courses of action are described below. There have also been suggestions and recommendations from research studies and from discussion at conferences and seminars. The Ofsted/Equal Opportunities Commission document *The Gender Divide* concluded each of its sections with paragraphs on 'What schools can do', and many of the approaches it suggests replicate those which many schools are developing for themselves.\(^{31}\)

The first step, upon which all sources agree, is to identify, within each individual school, the scale and characteristics of the problem, and to do so systematically. It is not simply a matter of recognising that boys achieve less well than girls. It includes pinpointing such variables as the relationship between their capacity and their performance at specific points in their school life, and any perceived differences associated with the gender composition of the sets.

**Staffordshire** provides a service which supplies all schools with information about themselves in a county-wide context, and in the case of secondary schools this includes data showing differences in achievement between boys and girls in GCSE results. The issue was included in the LEA's recently circulated Development Plan, and a working group of secondary teachers was set up to discuss differential performance and to
Pupils were interviewed and examples of work studied, with the purpose of assembling a gender profile of the school. Over a six-month period, senior staff studied 600 pieces of pupils' work, examining and recording marking by teachers and noting whether they appeared to differentiate between boys and girls. In the course of their 'audit' they held extensive discussions with groups of pupils. They also looked at the setting arrangements and the gender balance within them, and at the extent to which boys and girls participated in extra-curricular activities. All the findings were duly studied for their implications for management and organisation.

At Cheney School, Oxfordshire, the deputy head carried out individual interviews with 10 Year 9 boys and 15 Year 10 boys, and group interviews with boys from Years 9 and 12. He also held interviews with six sets of parents of boys and visited three inner London schools - a girls' school and two boys' schools. From his investigations he recorded that boys do well when there is a clear structure and identifiable goals, a sense of order and discipline, and a view of the subject matter as relevant to their needs. It also emerged that boys believed that girls are treated more personally, and that they themselves would find the notion of achieving more acceptable if they received more frequent praise. Finally, able boys felt that they would be able talk more to other able boys about achieving, but that generally they did not, because no-one suggested or led it. These and other results of the enquiries were passed on to the staff and to the Oxfordshire Working Group on Boys' Achievement, whose activities are described later in this section.

At Tamworth High School, Merton, a close study of examination results generated the questions reproduced in the last section above, and these formed the basis for the staff's discussion of possible solutions. Thornhill High School, Kirklees, worked with an LEA-seconded teacher from another of the authority's schools, beginning with 'a phase of awareness-raising' which encompassed pupils, staff, parents, and colleagues in associated primary schools. The expertise which the seconded teacher was able to gain in this and other initiatives has had important outcomes within Kirklees, described later in this section.

In the Spring term of 1995, Harrow carried out a survey of Years 10 and 11 in a sample of five high schools, in which a team of advisers interviewed key members of staff and groups of pupils, and observed individual pupils in lessons. They also gathered information on good practice in countering boys' underachievement. In one of the schools the headteacher and the assessment coordinator shared the job of analysing results and tracked performance across subject areas. The headteacher then discussed the outcomes with departmental heads. In another school, after an analysis of overall results, the headteacher asked departments to complete a proforma, showing achievement by teaching group and by gender, and then to plan accordingly for improvement of performance.

A particularly ambitious study was carried out at Canon Lee School, York, with the support of North Yorkshire Training and Enterprise Council and the University of York. Two other secondary schools were involved in the study - St John Fisher RC School, Harrogate, and Thirsk School, which are referred to elsewhere in this report - and three primary schools associated with them. A comprehensive survey was carried
Boys are more concerned about variety of tasks. They feel more successful in approaches that do not focus mainly on writing.

Boys are more influenced by external rewards and recognition, which should be frequent and tangible.

Boys prefer a non-abusive atmosphere. Abuse of any kind has a very detrimental effect on boys' self-image and can lead not only to resentment but to disenchantment and disillusionment.

The school made good use of these outcomes, which had carried credibility from having been generated by the pupils themselves and which formed the basis for an action plan. The success of the enquiry led the project organiser to work with a further six schools in 1995–96.\(^{(35)}\)

The EMIE report *The Improvement of Schools through Partnership: School, LEA, and University* examined a wide range of suggestions for how the general improvement of performance can be brought about, and distilled them into a number of essentials. In brief, they were:

- the sharing of visions and goals within the school, the fulfilment of which is pursued through purposeful leadership and the involvement of all teachers in decision-making

- concentration on teaching and learning, which will entail providing the maximum possible time to them, and arriving at a firm understanding of how they can be improved and their outcomes monitored

- purposeful and well organised teaching, supported by clear objectives, appropriately paced, and employing good questioning techniques

- high expectations among teachers, pupils, and parents, leading to self-esteem and stimulating challenge

- effective reinforcement and feedback, involving positive rewards and clear disciplinary rules

- monitoring of progress, to inform teaching and learning and to determine how far the school is meeting its goals

- strengthening home-school partnerships, on the firm understanding that parental support has a significant effect on pupils' achievement

- a view of the school as a learning organisation, where teachers and management, as well as pupils, continue to be learners and improve their practice.\(^{(36)}\)
where the pace varies during the lesson
- work which is clear and in which you are told what to do and how to do it.

The results of these enquiries ‘gave teachers the opportunity to examine some of the assumptions underlined and judgments, and to set out more clearly what for them were the key indicators of attitude and progress that they often pick up in a more subliminal fashion in day-to-day teaching’. They also emphasised the value of keeping the focus on teaching and learning. ‘Teachers, including heads, relished the opportunity to give prolonged attention to pedagogy.’(40)

In her review of the literature on teaching method as related to gender, Bradford(41) quoted from a study by Holden, who found that girls improve the quantity and quality of their work when organised into small groups, while the performance of boys deteriorates. ‘The implications… for teachers are that group work is to be encouraged and that boys need to have their collaborative skills enhanced.’(42)

Connor lists a number of strategies which have been advocated in Surrey as a result of consultation and discussion with schools. These are gathered under the headings of Groupings, Roles, Speaking and Listening Behaviour, Affective Aspects, and Material, and the following are examples:

- Even if sets are usually imbalanced in terms of boy/girl numbers, seek opportunities for occasional or short-term remixing.
- Recognise those opportunities when single-sex grouping may be desirable (e.g. when working on computer-based activities).
- Within sets, and to avoid the operation of stereotypical expectations about roles, ensure that, in group work, particular tasks are distributed in such a way that everyone experiences a range of roles, leading discussion, secretarial responsibility, etc.
- Provide the opportunity (and model if necessary) for everyone in a group to respond to, affirm and reflect upon the contribution of other members of the group.
- Encourage boys’ contributions to discussions about relationships, etc., which may involve hypotheses, tentativeness, etc., rather than specifics or ‘certainties’. (43)

In her report to staff, parents, and governors, the principal of Beacon Community College, East Sussex, sets out what the school can do and what the parents can do. Among the targets for the former are these examples:

- Set challenges.
- Vary groupings: pairs, fours, mixed sexes, mixed abilities.
- Reward, praise, encourage. Be generous with merits, stickers, letters home, so that it is the norm rather than an embarrassing rarity.
- Work to create a climate where boys do not see intellectual pursuits as second best to the other parts of their life, such as sport.

- Each time grades are awarded to a student, look carefully at the way he performs across the subjects. If he is doing fine in seven and badly in two, target these specific subjects through counselling - either by form tutor or subject tutor. Help the student to set small short-term targets for improvements in specific subject areas.

- Do not assume that students know how to listen, how to discuss, how to work together, how to make notes, how to ‘add more detail’. Address these issues overtly.

- Develop in-school mentoring. Use students in Years 10 and 11, particularly recent improvers, to offer peer counselling to those in Year 8 and identified as ‘slipping’ in terms of work and motivation.

These are only a few examples from a rich list of suggestions for action.(45)(46)

The teacher seconded by Kirklees to develop this enterprise worked with Thornhill High School to evolve practical strategies within the school for improving the motivation and performance of boys. The project began with the issue to all Year 7 pupils of a questionnaire entitled How’s it Going?, to establish pupils’ perceptions of their performance. This was matched by the interviewing of a sample of the pupils in mixed-gender groups of four or five, selected in such a way as to provide a ‘test’ and a ‘control’ group. The other elements of the project were designed to promote mixed-gender grouping and peer tutoring. Staff discussion focused on such questions as:

Do you think that the present arrangements for pupil grouping in your subject work well for both boys and girls?

Do you think that boys respond particularly well to any particular teaching and learning styles?

In an attempt to raise expectations and standards of achievement for boys, what positive advice would you offer to: a parent, a newly qualified teacher, an experienced teacher, a head of department, a member of the senior management team?

Seating was arranged in such a way as to enable boys and girls to work together in pairs and small groups. The peer tutoring within the classroom involved both same-gender and mixed-gender pairs. Moreover, leadership roles were rotated when the pupils were working in small groups, in such a way as to allow all of them to take responsibility for ‘shaping the learning process’ for themselves and at least one other pupil for a period of time.(47)
This does not in itself invalidate flexibility of grouping arrangements within schools, especially where it is introduced after the extensive consultation and surveys described earlier. An example occurred at St. John Fisher School, Harrogate, where the staff looked into grouping arrangements and found that by Year 9 the lower ability groups were heavily populated by boys and that by Year 11 this tendency had become even more emphatic. They experimented with all-boys classes, and with positive discrimination to reduce the numbers of boys in lower groups, arrangements which proved particularly successful in English. Another experiment in flexibility took place at Alderman Callow School, Coventry, where single-gender grouping was introduced in mathematics in Key Stage 4. Whether it will have any lasting effect on GCSE performance remains to be seen, but the headteacher is confident that, in combination with different teaching strategies within the separate gender groups, there has been significant improvement in pupils' behaviour, motivation and commitment. (52)

Flexibility of grouping also allows the formation of single-sex groups for purposes other than teaching. At Bartholomew School, Oxfordshire, there are group sessions for single-gender groups from age 11 upwards to explore and resolve such social difficulties as bullying, victimisation, or hostility between factions. These sessions involve, among other activities, role play, games, and psychodrama. The boys' groups are 'structured to move participants from denial of problems and statements of differences, towards recognition of common experiences. The aim is to encourage a culture of support, rather than one in which anxieties are hidden or projected.' Bartholomew School was one of 15 Oxfordshire secondary schools which participated in a Working Group on Boys' Achievement, co-ordinated by the county's advisory teacher for equal opportunities. (53) The members of the group included deputy heads, senior teachers, heads of year, and heads of mathematics, English, science, modern languages, and special needs. Strategies explored by the group included mentoring, organisation and management, nurturing values and attitudes, and rewarding achievement. Under these headings, member schools had developed the following practices:

**Mentoring.** At one school, John Mason School, Abingdon, pupils predicted as likely to achieve 'D' grades at GCSE were linked to a member of staff who met them at lunch time for half an hour a week to discuss progress, deadlines, etc. It was considered important that the mentor should not be one of their usual teachers. The school reported a significant improvement in the grades achieved. Another of the schools, Matthew Arnold School, Oxford, chose as mentors for Year 11 pupils the student 'interns' on extended teaching practice from Oxford University department of educational studies. In the words of the school, they had the marked advantage that they were 'the young talking to the young'. Peers Upper School, Oxford, recruited mentors from the community and the world of work, who not only encouraged and supported pupils in their school work but related achievement to the world of employment.

**Organisation and management.** The schools reviewed criteria for grouping pupils, recognising that sets are usually based on attainment rather than ability and that underachievers (including able pupils) may be placed in low sets. Since boys appear to predominate in lower sets, the schools looked into the effect upon their motivation. Another organisational aspect they discussed was the seating and
THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN RAISING BOYS' LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Finally, a special point must be made about performance in English, and not simply the subject English. Probably the most important ability that schooling demands is the ability to use language to acquire learning throughout the curriculum, and to express what one has learned. Much of the informed comment on boys’ underachievement has pressed the importance of reading and writing ability as a key to improvement. This goes much further than reducing the conspicuous gender gap in the English results in GCSE and National Curriculum tests. It has to do with recognising that better facility in the use of language opens up access to the curriculum at large.

Referring to this crucial interaction of language and learning, Arnold cites such studies as the Bullock Report and the HMI publication *Aspects of Secondary Education*, published in 1975 and 1979 respectively, and remarks:

> With all this powerful advocacy, stretching back across the years, why has there been so little real change, particularly in secondary schools? There have been many courageous initiatives, and even more good intentions, but in most schools the relationship of language and learning appears to be much the same as it was at the time of the national secondary survey. Whatever has been achieved by individual teachers, or by subject departments, schools as institutions rarely consider the operations of language in all areas of the school curriculum.

In most schools there is

> ...no overarching knowledge of the pupil’s performance as a language user across a wide range of subjects. Generally, there is no means of studying, for example, a pupil’s writing performance across several subjects, the kinds of tasks he is being set, or for that matter the sheer volume of what is required of him. Nor is there a means of looking at the range of reading demands being made upon the pupil, the levels of density of the texts, and the purposes to which reading is being put. Above all, there is generally no means of knowing how much a chance a pupil has to talk, as distinct from listen, in the course of a school day. (55)

Knowledge on this scale is critically important if teaching and learning are to be at their most productive. We need to know whether the boys’ experience of language throughout a number of subjects is developing certain linguistic competencies or restricting them. We need to know whether the language transactions through which learning is being acquired are so narrow, so unvaried from one subject to another, that the learning is inefficient.

In addition to what is required of English in the National Curriculum Orders, other subject sections are now prefaced with the words: ‘Pupils should be taught to express themselves in both speech and writing and develop their reading skills.’ The fact that this responsibility should be seen as one shared by everyone in the school makes obvious
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