Enjoyment and Excellence

Monday 8 September 2003

University of East Anglia

This report provides a summary of the contributions made by the conference speakers. A copy will be sent to every school in the county and the report is also on the Esinet website: *www.norfolkesinet.org.uk*

Introduction

Dr Bryan Slater, Director of Education

In welcoming colleagues to the conference, Dr Bryan Slater took the opportunity to reflect upon the events of the previous year. One of the dominating issues had undoubtedly been the funding crisis and he thanked colleagues for their support and trust over such a difficult period, as well as their fortitude in dealing with the financial shortfalls. He assured conference that no effort would be spared to secure the best possible funding outcome for 2004-5. The prospects were not promising, however, which would pose challenges in the year ahead, not least for the Advisory Service whose levels of buyback had been adversely affected by schools' lack of money. On a more positive note, he welcomed the way in which the Government's primary phase strategy document, 'Excellence and Enjoyment' had delivered more control over the curriculum to teachers. He also commended the Government's Green Paper on preventative services for vulnerable children as a major step forward. He reminded colleagues that because schools played the vital role for these children they had to strive to be inclusive, whatever the difficulties faced. He sincerely hoped that funding problems would not undermine all the good work that had gone on in Norfolk to build strong platforms of support.

'We must look beyond money. We must look forward to all the positive things that can happen for our children'

There were many reasons to be hopeful about the year ahead including:

- the growth in collaboration between schools in Norfolk
- the opportunities provided by the Government's programme, 'Building Schools for the Future' to create a network of extended schools
- the growth in early years provision within the county
- the reforms that are taking place within the curriculum for 14-19 year olds
- the £150 million of investment that PFI is bringing in to Norfolk schools

The Norfolk Headteacher Conference 2003–'04

Norfolk County Council at your service

- the reputation Norfolk is establishing for itself for curriculum innovation
- the pilot that is underway within Norfolk to formulate new measures of school success
- the continued improvement in pupil performance in Norfolk.

In conclusion, he suggested that whilst the year ahead would be challenging it would also also provide scope for achievement and enjoyment.

Alec Byrne has been the County Council's Cabinet Member for Education since the present administration took office in 2001. He moved to Norfolk at the age of six. In 1975, after a period working in the Merchant Navy and then for Beaver Machine Tools, he started his own machine tools business, which he still runs today. He has represented Attleborough on the County Council since he was first elected in 1997. He also spent six years on Breckland District Council where he was Chair of the Recreation and Tourism Committee. He instigated the building of Waterworld in Thetford and was instrumental in the regeneration of the railway line from County School Station to Wymondham. Alec, who is married with three children and four grandchildren, is deeply interested in country life and passionate about horses.

Alec Byrne

Cabinet Member for Education

Alec Byrne told conference that he wanted to relay two key messages from the political administration at County Hall. Firstly, their appreciation for the skill and dedication of Norfolk's headteachers, which was helping to deliver improvement in pupil performance across the county, as well as a rapid improvement in judgements made by Ofsted.

'As a business man, I know that quality is produced by quality people. You can't do it without them '

Secondly, that this administration cared deeply about the education of children in Norfolk and that the extra £500,000 that had been found to support school budgets this year demonstrated their political commitment.

'Whatever we can afford to invest in our children, is always money well spent because it is an investment in future economic and social well-being.'

Richard Dunne

Independent Educational Consultant

Richard Dunne taught in schools for twenty years and at the University of Exeter, before working independently as an author and consultant. His entire career has been devoted to the development of pedagogical practice and he is well known both nationally and internationally for his work across the age range (from Nursery to University). His most recent publication is 'I See Maths' (Letts Education, 2003) and he has made contributions to conferences on 'thinking skills', 'the gifted and talented' and 'special needs'.

According to Richard Dunne, enjoyment in the learning process is a direct result of excellent teaching and that is why it should underpin all our efforts to create a meaningful curriculum within schools. At the moment, he feared the curriculum was in danger of being over preoccupied with producing children who were good at passing tests rather than producing good learners. The difference between good and poor learners was that whilst poor learners relied on their memories to store up a succession of facts, good learners were able to grasp a 'big learning idea' and then apply it to other situations. Good learners could organise their ideas, make connections, and were, therefore, equipped with skills that could be used in any learning situation.

In a sense, the best learners actually knew least because they only needed to carry a few big organising principles in their heads. Poor learners, faced with learning an unending stream of disconnected facts often gave up.

We needed a curriculum that was geared to teaching these 'big, powerful, organisational ideas' and a theory of teaching that would support this. As it was, we were in danger of perceiving best practice in teaching as merely the efficient delivery of prefabricated packages rather than a complex, intellectual activity. Good teaching practice enabled pupils to grasp guiding principles. This was as true for teaching juggling as it was for teaching mathematics. Complex ideas could be represented to novices if one began with an emphasis on speech, actions, and physical objects. In a lively demonstration, involving numerous paper cups, he illustrated how the principle of division (one of the 12 'big ideas' in mathematics) could rapidly be learned in such a way. By getting the learner to understand the connection between these actions and outcomes and the symbols, or technical language, the teacher enabled the child to progress to a visualisation of the problem and the solution. Thus, a learning concept was acquired that could be progressively applied to a wider and wider range of mathematical problems.

This principle could be applied to the teaching of any of the curriculum subjects but he feared that we were in danger of creating a curriculum that was too heavily weighted towards experiential learning.

'Schools are there in order to teach things which are the result of hundreds at least, probably thousands of years of cultural development.'

Over thousands of years, human beings had acquired and distilled a body of theoretical knowledge and through the development of language had

been able to pass on these big ideas. He argued that it should be the purpose of schools to concentrate on teaching this theoretical knowledge because the whole point of theoretical knowledge was that it organised and made sense of experiential knowledge.

'We have got to give people experience but we have got to make sure that they organise it in the culturally determined ways which we know to be powerful.'

We needed to take this into consideration when we thought about how our schools operated. Teaching theoretical rules was a highly skilled process but it was a formalised one that could be done within very large groups. Making connections between different types of knowledge comprised thinking that needed to take place within smaller groups. It was true that students also needed to apply what they had learned and to discover things for themselves but this was a personal process that could be left to the individual. He feared that if we spent too much time within our schools allowing children to 'find out for themselves' through experimentation, there was a danger that theoretical knowledge would be neglected to the point where children were deprived of the humanising influence of shared rules and values.

'Compulsory schooling must be aimed at least at 'humanising' our pupils.'

Richard Dunne believes centralised control of the curriculum is increasingly wedded to faulty dogma. It is locked into the cult of the 'good idea' rather than principled analysis.

Maggie Farrar

National College of School Leadership

'Every child in a well-led school. Every leader a learner'

(National College of School Leadership Mission Statement)

Maggie Farrar began with the assertion that this was a very exciting and important time to be a school leader, when schools were being seen as the agents and agencies of moral and social change. A new collaborative and distributive style of school leadership was emerging and schools were looking outward towards other schools and the wider community in their endeavours to not just build up intellectual capital but also to build up a social capital. It was by encouraging this mutualism between schools and communities that every child would be assured the best possible start in life and we would address the social inequalities that existed in our country where factors of birth still determined so many life chances.

She then introduced the colleges 10 propositions of school leadership which were

- be purposeful, inclusive and values driven
- be attuned to our school's distinctive context
- be strategically focussed on the future whilst simultaneously operating in the present
- be learning centred
- be distributed through the school community
- involve developing and sustaining possible relations with others
- connect and network with the wider community
- co-exist with management but go beyond the focus on systems and structures
- leaders take responsibility for their own learning and development
- be critically concerned with capacity building.

In the discussion that followed, she suggested that if, as leaders, we were going to change our behaviours and our actions then we were going to have to change how we thought. We should be aware that we had different thinking tools at our disposal such as strategic thinking, visual thinking and incremental thinking. Cognitive leadership was about choosing the right sort of thinking.

Setting up dialogue was also a priority for today's school leaders.

Maggie Farrar started her teaching career in West Africa and then moved to London where she worked in Newham and Greenwich before moving to Hackney as the Deputy Head of Haggerston School. A family move in 1996 led her to Birmingham, where she worked with Tim Brighouse to set up the University of the First Age, first in Birmingham and then as the founder Director of the UFA National Programme which now works with 36 Local Authorities.

'For some time I have felt the ever urgent need for a national conversation to seek a more effective interaction between our schools and families, governments and local communities, between our institutions and our local sources of moral energy.'

Jonathan Sachs, The Politics of Hope

She urged us to go back and think about where our 'local sources of moral energy' were and to find ways of reaching out to them. The quality of schooling only accounted for 25% of a child's life chances so it was important that we did not ignore the other influences, which were their families, their neighbourhood and their peers. We had to take on the responsibility of community leadership. There were three strands to community leadership; firstly, building a community within the school; secondly, building a community between schools and other education organisations and thirdly, building community between school and their local and wider communities. To achieve the third, we would have to find a way of moving from bonding to bridging because bonding was very good at building up a sense of shared purpose and identity within one establishment but it did not foster collaboration. Bridging would require us to take on board the views and agendas of other people and organisations and value what could be created together. The key to achieving this would be the youngsters because they were the only ones who moved between the home, the school and the community.

She believed we could learn a lot from the research that had been done on extended schools and acknowledged the huge contribution Norfolk schools had made to this research. It was evident from the findings that although we had achieved the co-location of services on one site, we were still some way from establishing a truly integrated provision. She welcomed the fact that both organisations and local authorities felt they were having a positive impact but in assessing the effect upon parents, we had not yet considered parents as both contributors and consumers. She acknowledged resources were and always would be an issue but the biggest challenge was going to be devising a model for extended schools that would be genuinely grounded in the community it served. To do this we had to build authentic dialogue with all the stakeholders.

Suggestions for building an authentic dialogue included:

- collect data, including tape and film, on what you actually say and do and then analyse it

From 1st May2003, Maggie Farrar has been an Assistant Director of the National College of School Leadership with responsibility for Community Leadership. Her work is centred on the transformation of learning in schools and communities and future models of schooling that involve home, school and community partnerships.

- allow differing accounts to come to the fore – the official truth can often be different to the ground truth – respect both
- embrace the inconsistency that always exists between desire and reality and be compassionate towards imperfections.

Questions that could help promote an authentic dialogue were;

- What has become clear in your mind since we last met?
- What is the area you are hoping we won't talk about?
- Are there any conversations you/we are avoiding right now/
- Has anything been left unsaid that needs saying.

In conclusion, she hoped delegates would reconsider their own style of leadership in the light of what had been said today about community leadership and the power of authentic dialogue. She also expressed a desire to return;

'I do believe if, at the College we want to really start to dig up what we mean by community leadership, there is no better place to start than Norfolk.'

Delegates were welcomed back to the afternoon session by Sue Rossiter, Deputy Director of Education.

Professor Laurie Taylor

Sociologist, broadcaster and columnist

Currently, Laurie Taylor is visiting Professor in the Department of Politics and Sociology at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is also a prolific broadcaster, making regular appearances on both radio and television. In particular, he was a leading contributor for thirteen years to the Radio 4 weekly conversation programme, 'Stop the Week' and presenter of 'The Afternoon Shift.' He is the author of numerous books on topics such as motivation, change and communication and is highly sought after for his entertaining keynote speeches. These deal with subjects such as countering cynicism, revolutionising the workplace, rewards and recognition, the impact of new technology on work and the importance of understanding customers.

Although he expressed misgivings about having adequate communication skills to address an audience of expert communicators, Laurie Taylor's address was both witty and wise. He was impressed by the pervading atmosphere of enjoyment and enthusiasm that the day had engendered and hoped that it would not be dispelled by any advice that he, as a sociologist, had to give! However, he was comforted by the knowledge that if his speech was disastrous it would at least serve the purpose of uniting the delegates as

> *'There is nothing that unites so many people together more than sheer and utter calamity… the English love absolute failure!'*

Alongside the jokes, however, were some very insightful observations that he had compiled from spending time over the last six years watching and talking to people in their workplaces. One of the first things he found was that the mission statements, strategic goals and objectives that management put such store by were often greeted by the workforce with. 'out and out, dyed in the wool, intravenous cynicism.'

And this criticism and scepticism would not only be levelled at management but also at any other departments within the organisation. It was as if the only way a group of people could define their success was by condemning others. Often, too, the customers and clients became the subject of this abusive disregard. Whilst he acknowledged that complaining was the British way, he believed this was something far more corrosive and insidious, akin to the 'canteen culture' that had allowed racism and sexism to fester. His first message, therefore, was to suggest that one of the most important tasks for management was to make it quite clear that this cynicism would not be tolerated.

Another key role for managers was to encourage and nurture a truly inclusive approach. It was crucial that all staff, including all part time staff, felt valued. Too many companies were guilty of assuming their part timers were not as committed and not as interested thus inferring that they were not as important. It was remarkable how just a simple thing like knowing the names of the staff could make a huge difference.

He also believed that there was a direct corollary between enjoyment and excellence. People who looked forward to going to work were far more effective workers.

'Mightn't it be that personality actually answers to social circumstances rather than being some inherent trait?'

He had listened to many managers complaining about the dyed in the wool worker who had set their face against change but he genuinely believed that if the workplace was bright enough and fun enough then peoples' behaviour could change. Dullards who appeared intractable could actually be won over. There were also far less references to insecurity in workplaces that were inclusive, happy and free of cynicism even when the objective circumstances for job security were the same.

In conclusion, he suggested that the vital ingredient for creating a happy, thriving workplace was good communication. This was not a ground-breaking revelation but it was all too easy to overlook how appallingly difficult good communication could actually be. It was always tempting to avoid the awkward face-to face conversation, to send an e-mail or use the telephone instead because it took real courage to put yourself into a situation where you faced uncertainty and where your whole identity was on the line

'What managers have to do, constantly, is to face the embarrassment of introducing and becoming involved in communications they would rather have nothing to do with whatsoever.'

Laurie Taylor has worked for major sectors of business and industry, from blue-chip companies to major multinationals.

Gyles Brandreth

Writer, raconteur and broadcasting personality

Gyles Brandreth's varied career has ranged from playing Baron Hardup in Cinderella to being Lord Commissioner of the Treasury in John Major's government. He became MP for Chester in 1992 but left politics in 1997 to return to a career in writing and broadcasting. As well as being the author of a very well received political diary, an acclaimed biography of Sir John Gielgud and a successful children's novel, he is also the children's publisher with Andre Deutsch and editorial consultant to Whitaker's Almanack.

Gyles Brandreth set out to entertain conference in great style but wrapped up in the constant stream of witticisms and anecdotes were some very salutary comments on the role and responsibilities of public service as a Member of Parliament.

A newly elected MP receives no contract, no letter of appointment, no conference, no training – in fact there is no system in place to explain to them what they can expect and what will be expected from them. This can make even finding the right entrance to the Houses of Parliament somewhat daunting! And once within the confines of Parliament, there are many long-standing traditions waiting to dismay and confuse the unenlightened. For instance, it is an established custom for MPs not to greet each other with a handshake. A handshake, traditionally a way of proving you were not carrying a weapon, is shunned by MPs who, as men of honour, feel they should not have to prove the absence of their sword. Each named coat hook is adorned with a pink ribbon, symbolically provided for the hanging up of the sword.

'At the House of Commons, sword fighting is not on, sword fighting is taboo, sword fighting is definitely not allowed. Back-stabbing on the other hand is quite a different matter!'

Gyles Brandreth explained that being an MP requires you to lead a double life. From Monday to Friday you are in Westminster whilst the weekend is spent in your constituency. He very quickly learnt that the weekends had to be devoted to getting publicity because it was a sad truth that if you were not seen to be doing what you were doing, people did not believe that you were doing anything at all. This was why the culture of spin was a necessary evil of political life. And when the responsibilities of leadership so often came down to such mundane activities as attending raffles and unveiling plaques, it was not surprising that attracting quality leaders into politics proved difficult.

'The problem with being a Member of Parliament now is that in your constituency you are this curious mixture of raffle drawer, unpaid relate counsellor, housing officer political doormat and photo opportunist.'

Westminster could be equally frustrating. The House of Commons was not always the forum for memorable and enlightened debate that he had hoped it would be.

Nevertheless, along the way he had been privileged to meet some very distinguished people and he shared with conference the most salient lessons he had learned from these encounters:

- firstly, never allow yourself to be rushed. Take a leaf out of the Queen's book and always pace yourself.
- secondly, remember that a key ingredient of success is energy and as Desmond Tutu advised, when you run out of your own, you can always harness that of others.
- thirdly, never underestimate the importance of the charm offensive. Two of the most impressive politicians he had encountered were John Major and Bill Clinton. They both paid great attention to the three 'c's. They were invariably courteous, looked you in the eye and remembered your name; they were committed to what they were saying and they gave you their full concentration.

Finally, he thanked delegates for their laughter and congratulated them on their very evident friendship, quoting from Hilaire Belloc:

'From quiet homes and first beginning, out to the undiscovered ends,

There's nothing worth the wear of winning, but laughter and the love of friends.'

He founded the award-winning Teddy Bear Museum in Stratford-upon-Avon with his wife, is a member of the Trevor McDonald's Better English campaign, the founder of the National Scrabble Championships and holds the Guinness Book record for making the longest after-dinner speech.

A date for your diary

The 2004 Norfolk Education Conference will take place at the University of East Anglia on Friday 17 September

The conference was organised and supported through the Norfolk Education Advisory Services' Governor Support Service

Norfolk County Council