THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING CONFERENCE

MELBOURNE

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Taking the Tide at the Flood:
Transforming Education in the Middle Years

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> "There is a tide which begins to rise in the veins of youth at the age of eleven or twelve. It is called by the name of adolescence. If that tide can be taken at the flood, and a new voyage begun in the strength and along the flow of the current, we think that it will move on to fortune'".
>
> The Hadow Report, 1926

INTRODUCTION

In his first words as Prime Minister, Tony Blair gave us - I mean everyone involved in the education service back home - a mission. Our goal, he said, is the creation of a world class education service. With a huge sense of energy and purpose, that is what we've been trying to do in the two years since New Labour was elected. No-one can be sure we will succeed - it is certainly a project for ten years - but everyone can be sure we will be tireless in the attempt. The commitment of our Prime Minister and our Secretary of State, David Blunkett, is total.

I was delighted to be able to accept the invitation to speak at this important conference for two reasons. Firstly, in our efforts to become world class it is essential that we learn systematically from reform in other countries. And nowhere is more interesting from that point of view than the State of Victoria in Australia. We in England have been following closely the reform agenda here and the debate over "Schools of the Third Millennium". We are almost as keen to know how Australia does school reform as we are to know how it produces cricketers.

Secondly, the theme of the conference - the middle years of schooling - is, I believe, the key emerging question in the education revolution. For much of the 1980s we focused on the end of schooling; leaving qualifications, school-to-work, access to higher education. Then we focused on structural reform; devolution of budgets, school governance and management, the provision of support services and of course both of these remain live issues.

But increasingly in the 1990s school reform has become more strategic, it has - as Michael Fullan puts it - begun to "scale up" from school to city or state, and from city or state to nation. Moreover, prompted in part by research and in part by a longer-term perspective, reformers world-wide in the mid-1990s have begun to re-engineer systems from the bottom up. They have realised the importance of laying firm foundations or - to use the business phrase - of getting it right first time, so the early years of schooling have been firmly in the spotlight. Now in the late 1990s we are about to take the next step. We are beginning to think we know

how to do primary education. The Bob Slavin evidence points the way. So does the increasing consensus on how to teach literacy. The literacy programme here in Victoria is showing the way. Our National Literacy Strategy in England is an ambitious advance on what has gone before, an unprecedented attempt to promote literacy across an entire national education system. As Peter Hill puts it, succinctly as ever, "Illiteracy is a soluble problem".

We may turn out to be wrong of course. But the mists are beginning to clear. We've seen glimpses of what is possible and the issue in England, as in Victoria, is implementation, implementation, implementation.

Restless souls that we are, though, our minds have leapt ahead. Supposing we are right about primary education and supposing we implement steadily and consistently over the next five years or so, what then? Supposing almost all nine and ten year olds can read well; supposing Australian and English eleven year olds can by then match the Swiss in mental arithmetic? In asking ourselves these questions, we inevitably find ourselves thinking about the middle years of schooling and in settling on this theme at this time the State of Victoria has been little short of visionary.

In England at any rate, we have certainly had furious debate fuelled by published performance data about the education of 15 and 16 year olds. And we're only beginning to emerge from years of conflict about primary education but about those in between - those in the middle years which we call Key Stage 3 - scarcely a whisper. Neither curriculum, nor assessment, nor pedagogy, has been a matter for controversy for this age group. One of our teacher unions - the National Union of Teachers - dubbed it recently "the forgotten key stage". Now Key Stage 3 finds itself at the centre of a pincer movement. The government's literacy and numeracy strategies are transforming primary age education with profound implications for the years that follow. At the same time secondary schools, seeking to improve their performance in public examinations, have done all they can with 14 - 16 year olds (KS4) and are seeking room for improvement in the first three years of secondary schooling.

The opportunity to discuss with you the middle years of schooling could not, therefore, be more timely from my point of view. I expect to learn a lot.

I intend to divide the thoughts I want to share with you into two sections.

First, I want to attempt a compelling diagnosis of what is wrong in the middle years, drawing on recent research in England, much of it commissioned by the government. Second, I want to discuss the solutions, as I see them, to the problems I will have described in the first section. In places, I want to speculate about the longer term future, speaking less as a representative of government and more as a professor who seeks to predict the future and who believed that this year finally England would win back the Ashes.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

Many years ago Jack Charlton, World Cup winner with England in 1966 and later a successful manager of the Irish national soccer team, took over as manager of a struggling club side and was immediately asked by a journalist what he thought the problems were. "We've only got two," he said, "we don't score enough goals and we let in too many".

My analysis of the problems with the middle years of schooling is similar though I have three problems: the foundations of learning are not provided properly for pupils before they embark on the middle years; the transfer from primary to secondary school is little short of disastrous; and the curriculum, pedagogy and organisation of the middle years themselves are

inadequate. Put more bluntly, too many pupils become disaffected too fast during the middle years of schooling and many of the rest are bored most of the time. [These three problems aside, the middle years of education are fine]. I want to spend some time on each of them.

THE PROBLEM 1: A HOUSE BUILT ON SAND

One problem for schools educating pupils in their middle years - in England the most common age of transfer is 11 - is that they inherit from the primary sector, pupils with a very wide range of standards in the basics. In England this variation occurs between schools - even after controlling for intake - and within schools.

Evidence from our benchmarking data shows the range of performance among schools to be dramatic.

National relationship between KS2 Maths Test Results and pupil FSM

(REFER POWERPOINT ATTACHMENT FOR THIS SLIDE)

National relationship between KS2 English Test Results and pupil FSM

The evidence of range among pupils is similarly stark. A clear gap in maths and English has been established by age 7 and widens, rather than narrows, over the remaining four years of primary education. An NFER study (Brooks, Pugh and Schager, 1996) points to the "long tail" of pupils who achieve well below average in reading at age 9. The evidence of standardised reading tests shows a range of six years in reading age at age 11 and National Curriculum tests show around 8 per cent of pupils falling four years behind the level expected for their age.

In mathematics the picture is similar. As long ago as 1982 The Cockcroft Report identified a seven year range among 11 year olds and David Reynolds, Chair of the Numeracy Task Force, shows clearly that little or no progress has been made since then.

Over and above this range among schools and individuals is the growing evidence of variation in literacy (but not numeracy) between girls and boys. The following table shows the extent of the gap in England as of 1998.

% achieving Level 4 in English

	Reading	***Writing***	***Total***
Girls	79	61	73
Boys	64	45	57

This massive variation in performance in England, results both from a philosophical attachment to the notion of differentiation among teachers and their rejection of the notion of proven best practice which leaves each teacher to invent her/his own method. In both Europe and the Pacific Rim an emphasis on high expectations and ensuring all pupils keep up has been shown to result in higher average standards, especially in mathematics, and a narrower range. But the fundamental problem is systemic. Our approach to education for much of the last fifty years has been the diametric opposite of what is necessary for success. As I wrote in *The Learning Game*, exaggerating only a little:

> "Our education system is upside down. We expect primary schools to fire the imagination and secondary schools to get down to the serious business of education when the reverse would be preferable".

Or as Eric Morecambe, the great British comedian, put it when asked why his version *of The Emperor concerto* didn't sound like Beethoven's "We're playing the right notes. It's just that they're in the wrong order".

The challenge for schooling in the middle years in England of this huge variation should not be underestimated. In fact it makes the teacher's task impossible. As a consequence, many teachers in the first three years of secondary decide to assume that every child can read and write well, even though this is not the case, simply to enable them to get through the day. As a result a significant minority of pupils become disaffected and fall even further behind. Over-represented among this group are the "lost boys" who failed to learn to read and write well by age 11 and never recover educationally. Schooling in the middle years is a house built on sand.

THE PROBLEM 2: THE JORDAN RIVER IS MUDDY AND WIDE

The famous spiritual tells us that the river is muddy and wide: crossing it is difficult and some never make it. All the evidence suggests that transfer from primary to secondary school in England - and similar transfers in other countries - is almost as challenging. The evidence from a series of studies including one we have recently commissioned in England (Galton, Gray and Rudduck, 1999 in press) shows pupils regressing between the last year of primary school and the end of the first year of secondary school. Our evaluation of 1997 summer literacy schools showed that pupils - whether or not they attended summer school - fell back in literacy performance between May, in their last term at primary school, and September, in their first term at secondary school. A review of 39 US studies of transition (Cooper et al, 1996) showed similar findings. Our Qualifications and Curriculum Authority looking at literacy standards across years four to ten noted that the biggest drop was between years 6 and 7, the year of transfer to secondary schools.

Percentage of Pupils in a transfer cohort
who did less well on the same test one year later

(REFER POWERPOINT ATTACHMENT FOR THIS SLIDE)

One might attribute these disturbing findings to the stress of change, including changes in friendship patterns for pupils. But it would be wrong to assume that this should necessarily lead to a decline in standards. Indeed, the evidence suggests that most pupils begin secondary education on a wave of enthusiasm. In England at any rate, we must look elsewhere. The problem is better attributed to misunderstandings between primary and secondary teachers and low expectations of what pupils in the first years of secondary school can achieve.

When our National Curriculum was introduced a decade ago it was widely assumed - fondly hoped - that one major benefit would be that there would be clear records of what each child had achieved, which could pass from teacher to teacher and - at points of transfer - from school to school. In fact, this had happened only patchily, even within schools, and the data that does transfer is not trusted, in part because the National Curriculum tests remain controversial among teachers. In any case, records are a minor part of the issue. The problems are compounded by a lack of respect among secondary teachers for what primary schools have achieved. One representative secondary teacher in the ongoing Rudduck study said of the pupils who arrive from primary school: “They don’t even know how to sit still”. Another said: “Pupils in the primary schools spend all their time drawing pictures”. Primary teachers not surprisingly are unimpressed by such attitudes. They feel, with some justification, that their careful records are ignored by secondary schools and that their achievements are patronised.

Worst of all, are the low expectations that too many secondary teachers have of pupils at the point of transfer and beyond. Partly because of the failure to consult records, and partly because of the impossibility of the task, given the variation among pupils and schools I described earlier, secondary teachers often set out to establish a new baseline. They talk of the need for a “clean slate” or to start again. Often they test pupils for themselves in the first term of secondary school. Because the pupils have had a break and find themselves in a

new, uncertain environment they tend to score worse. Secondary teachers then assume that the primary school records were wrong and aim their teaching at this new, low baseline established by their tests. Thus low expectations are built in from the start.

Inevitably, therefore, many pupils are either held back or just tread water. As one pupil told Jean Rudduck: “Year 7 work is not too difficult because it’s more or less the same as year 6”. Another - with a little more precocity - said: “My friend Harriet doesn’t feel she is intellectually stimulated this year”. For pupils such as these, once the novelty of secondary school wears off, boredom all too often follows. This is perhaps most striking in science where pupils are excited by bright experiments in the first few weeks, only to be turned off by the drudge that follows. It begins - in other words - with a bang but soon becomes a whimper. Once you’ve seen one “perfectly smooth slope” you’ve seen them all. And, to make matters worse, secondary schools have not caught up with one of the great successes of the last decade in England: primary science. They often fail to take account of just how much pupils know. Thus we find a girl in the Rudduck study making the devastating remark: “I have been asked to draw round six leaves [yet] I have done photosynthesis in my last school and I’m interested in what effect different light might have on its rate”.

The extent of the problem is shown in the following table from David Hargreaves, Maurice Galton and others.

Effects of Transfer on Pupil’s Attitudes and motivations

	November 1996 (change since June 1996)	**June 1997 (change since June 1996)**
Year 7 transfer		
Social adjustment	-0.49	+0.61
Enjoyment	+0.03	-1.82
Motivation	+0.20	-0.56

Towards the end of their first year in secondary school, pupils feel socially better adjusted than they did after two months but their enjoyment and motivation have fallen away markedly. For some this fall becomes terminal.

The river really is muddy and wide, it seems. The messages from one side of the river never make it to the other, except the occasional shouted insult. It’s time we built some bridges. Until we do, education in the middle years is likely to continue to fail large numbers of pupils. Rowing the occasional boat ashore is no longer enough.

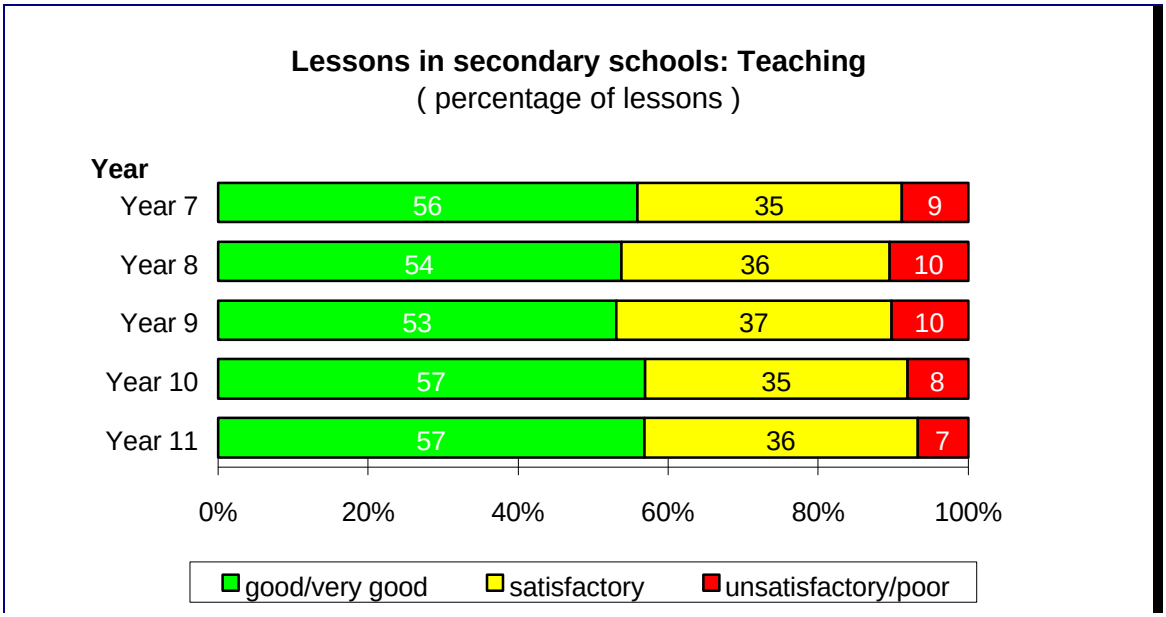
THE PROBLEM 3: THE EBBING TIDE

In England the most important report on education in the inter-war years was the Hadow Report on "*The Education of the Adolescent*". Published in 1926, it concluded that:

> "There is a tide which begins to rise in the veins of youth at the age of eleven or twelve. It is called by the name of adolescence. If that tide can be taken at the flood, and a new voyage begun in the strength and along the flow of the current, we think that it will "move on to fortune"".

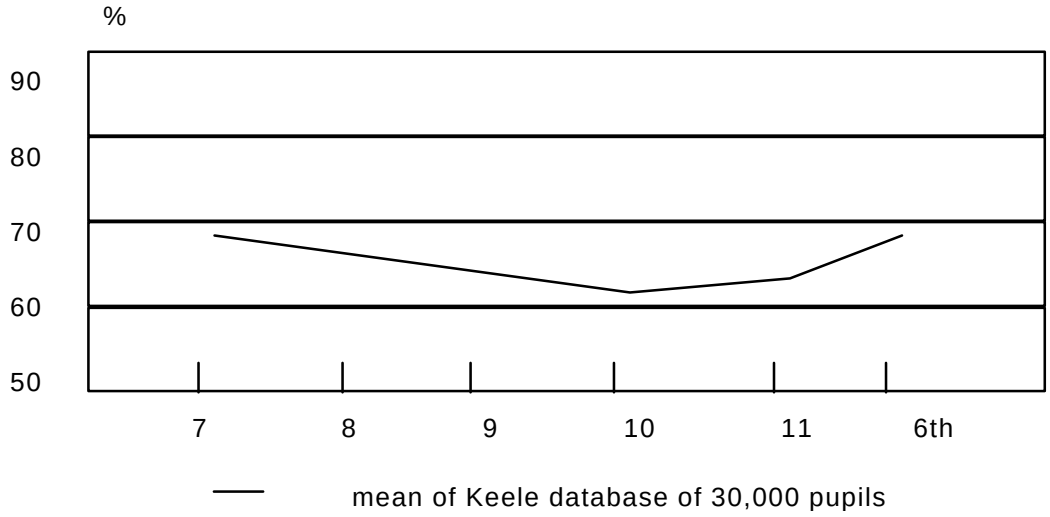
Seventy-three years have passed since then but still we have not succeeded in taking that tide of adolescence at the flood. On the contrary, the evidence suggests we compound the problems of primary-secondary transfer by teaching young adolescents poorly and expecting too little of them.

Perhaps because of the pressures of public examinations secondary schools tend to deploy their best teachers with their older pupils. Moreover, all teachers prioritise their examination classes over their others. When unexpected disruption occurs, it is the education of 11-14 year olds that suffers. They are more likely to be allocated the substitute teacher when the pressure is on. Pupils notice the lack of priority they are accorded. These factors may explain why the recently published report of HMCI in England shows that the percentage of poor lessons is higher in Key Stage 3 (11-14) than any other phase of education.



Studies consistently show pupil motivation and satisfaction with school falling away steadily between the ages of 11 and 14. The database we developed at Keele while I was there continues to show this vividly.

Figure 3: Pupil commitment to learning (percentage of maximum)



Jean Rudduck's research, which goes into greater depth with fewer pupils than the Keele data, confirms these trends. She shows that failure in the first year of secondary school to build on the work of primary schools is compounded in the following school year - Year 8. She describes this as the secondary "dip". Pupils are no longer new to the school. Teachers talk of consolidation rather than challenge. Pupils do not see it as important. They tend to become bored and uninspired by their school work, some become wholly pre-occupied with their friendships. Others develop negative images of themselves as learners. An anti-work peer group culture quickly develops. No-one explains to them that working hard now will make a real difference to achievement later. Demands from pupils for greater responsibility in managing themselves and their school go unheard (Rudduck et al, 1996).

Of course, I exaggerate but many teachers would recognise this caricature. Pupils certainly would. Listen to what they say:

> "Basically we are patronised and treated as little kids.
> The teachers don't even try to understand you."

> "Sometimes school can be boring, like I really like Mondays but when it comes
> to Thursdays I feel like pretending to be sick".

Time and again, pupils in the Keele study make comments like these. It would be wrong to exaggerate the problems in Key Stage 3 but equally it is time their seriousness was recognised. The picture is one of growing frustration among large numbers of pupils and growing disaffection among a significant minority. A substantial negative minority can have a huge impact on peer group culture. My analysis of the Keele data led me to conclude that while 60 per cent or so of pupils at this age were making reasonable progress, the rest split into three groups: 20 - 30 per cent who were bored - the disappointed; 10 - 15 per cent who were beginning to truant regularly and behave badly - the disaffected; and 2 - 5 per cent who had given up a school altogether - the disappeared (Barber, 1997). The picture shows little sign of changing and evidence from other studies confirms it (e.g. National Commission on Education, 1993).

Jean Rudduck points out that those who, by age 13, have become known (to themselves and others) as “dossers” find it hard to redefine themselves as “workers”. It is often easier for them to give up than catch up. She points out: “Teachers don’t necessarily have the time, the skills or the deep reservoirs of patience it requires to help them make this vital transition”. Thus many dossers slip from among the ranks of the disappointed into those of the disaffected and disappeared.

Talking to a group of passionately committed heads who accepted that the picture was not pretty, I once ventured to suggest that perhaps all this was inevitable - adolescence is adolescence, after all. Young people that age are just a pain in the neck. Perhaps Hadow was wrong. But they would not accept this. They pointed to the tremendous energy, creativity, idealism and passion that characterises adolescent young people: our job they said, to their great credit, is to take advantage of all that. And of course the evidence shows they are right. The variation between schools in the Keele data proves their point. In some successful schools pupils become more motivated as they move into adolescence. The fact that they are right is both our opportunity and our problem: our opportunity because if we get the foundations, transitions, curriculum and pedagogy right there is room for a great leap forward; our problem because at the present we are wasting talent on a colossal scale and far from taking the tide at the flood, all too often we stand on the beach watching it ebb away.

SECTION 2: SOLUTIONS

I don’t know enough to be sure that the state of affairs I have described in England is comparable to that in Australia, but I hope the picture is sufficiently familiar for you to bear with me now that I turn to solutions.

I am confident that, if we choose to, we could make the middle years of school the best years of schooling. It does not have to be the way it is now. Before I describe how that might be done I need to put forward solutions to the first two problems, for unless we build the house on rock, not sand, and find better ways to cross the river, no amount of imaginative policy for the middle years will bring success.

SOLUTIONS 1: FOUNDATIONS OF ROCK

The highest priority in the Blair government in its first term is to lay strong foundations for a world class education system by improving education in the early years. A joint education and health programme - Sure Start - is strengthening support to parents of children aged naught to three. Nursery education is now available for all four year olds and an increasing proportion of three year olds. We are establishing new early learning goals for children aged 3 to 5. Class sizes for 5, 6 and 7 year olds are being reduced. These investments, combined with our primary literacy and numeracy strategies, amount to nothing less than revolution and offer the opportunity for us to bring about a golden age of primary education early in the new century.

The keys to achieving this are the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, which are currently being implemented in England, and which we hope, within the next year, will become embedded. The government has set ambitious targets for the percentage of 11 year olds who should achieve Level 4 in English and Maths tests by 2002: 80 per cent in English, 75 per cent in maths. Level 4 was defined in 1988 as the level expected of 50 per cent of 11 year olds. The world is becoming a more demanding place in which to live: that is why we want 80 per cent and 75 per cent of 11 year olds to achieve in 2002 what was average for their age in 1988. By the time of the 1997 election 57 per cent had achieved this level in English and 54 per cent in maths. Level 4, incidentally, is not about basic literacy and numeracy: it is about reading and writing well, about handling numbers well. This is important because it

distinguishes our strategies from those in other countries. For example, Level 4 in English demands that pupils can recognise "how arguments are constructed to be effective" and can "read and understand examples of official language". It involves "investigating the use of conditionals in the past and the future".

The literacy and numeracy strategies share similar characteristics. The literacy programme is a year ahead of numeracy in implementation. In addition to an ambitious target, each has a series of common features:

- a nationally-prepared project plan, setting out actions, responsibilities and deadlines through to 2002
- a substantial investment sustained over at least four years and skewed towards those schools which need most help
- a project infrastructure involving national direction from the Standards and Effectiveness Unit, 14 regional directors and over 300 expert consultants at local level for each of the two strategies
- a detailed teaching programme covering every school year from age 5 to 11
- an emphasis on early intervention and catch up for pupils who fall behind
- a professional development programme designed to enable every primary teacher to learn to understand and use proven best practice in both curriculum areas
- the appointment, in numeracy, of 1760 leading maths teachers
- the provision of "intensive support" to around half of all schools where the most progress is required
- the removal of barriers to implementation (especially a huge reduction in prescribed curriculum content outside the core subjects)
- regular monitoring and extensive evaluation both by our national inspection agency, Ofsted, and by an independent evaluation team from Canada led by Professor Michael Fullan
- a problem-solving philosophy involving early identification of difficulties as they emerge and the provision of rapid solutions.

Set out like this it sounds neat, clear-cut and straightforward. In fact it is, like any huge cultural shift, messy and controversial involving as it does 20,000 schools and 200,000 teachers. But it is being implemented and it is beginning to work. Like all good politicians our Prime Minister is pleased to hear that it is working but what he really wants to know is when it will deliver; when it will impact on pupil outcomes. This is hard to predict: but what is certain is the commitment of the entire government to doing all it can to meet the 2002 targets. And that is only the beginning. We shall want to go further in the years that follow.

In the meantime there will, of course, be a substantial minority of pupils entering the middle years without the required literacy and numeracy skills but as the minority shrinks, the problem should become soluble instead of intractable. Above all, secondary schools will be able to focus on ensuring that every pupil who arrives there without having achieved Level 4, will get the intensive help necessary to catch up, wherever this is possible.

These strategies are the top educational priority of the government and, since I'm responsible for their implementation, my obsession. My focus on achieving the targets was intense already but intensified further when our Secretary of State, David Blunkett, promised to resign if they were not met. More importantly, the message we want to convey, the culture we seek to create, is that this is a shared task and a shared responsibility. In our commitment to achieving them, we will not relent. If we succeed, the foundations for the middle years will, for the first time, bebuilt firmly on rock.

SOLUTIONS 2: CROSSING THE RIVER

I have described - as graphically as I can - the problem of transfer from primary to secondary school. For too long we have fatalistically assumed this is inevitable. It is time we rejected this counsel of despair, looked at the cutting edge and used our imaginations. Maurice Galton, John Gray and Jean Rudduck, in a study for the DfEE, describe five bridges schools can build across the river.

They are:

- the bureaucratic bridge
- the social bridge
- the curriculum bridge
- the pedagogic bridge
- the management-of-learning bridge.

They found that the bureaucratic bridge was in place in the vast majority of schools. Senior staff from the secondary and primary schools were in dialogue, at least at head-of-year and headteacher level. Administrative information on the whole, passed smoothly from primary schools to secondary schools and got filed appropriately.

The social bridge was generally in place too. Pupils were invited to induction days at the school to which they were to transfer. Most secondary schools laid on pupil guides for the transferring of pupils and some offered special visits, related to drama or sport for example. These activities were generally successful and positively received.

Only a relatively small proportion of schools were building the other three bridges. The curriculum bridge was more or less in place in only about a third of schools. This meant that the schools exchanged information about the curriculum, how they organised it and sometimes schools co-ordinated what they taught. The pedagogic bridge was only to be found in one school in twenty, and a bridge which focused on how pupils should manage their learning in just one school in fifty. In other words, hardly any schools were engaged in serious dialogue about their core business.

No wonder then that not enough pupils cross the river successfully. We need to think how we can put all five bridges in place - confident, modern bridges spanning the currents below. A number of the policies the government is putting in place will move us in the right direction.

Building on work done in the last year or so, improvements are being made to the process of transferring records from school to school. Increasingly, major initiatives are explained to parents as well as teachers, a development which will be especially powerful at the point of transfer. Through our literacy strategy, for example, parents have received a leaflet explaining what their children are expected to learn in the literacy hour and how they can help. Television has promoted the idea of parents reading with their children and over three million copies of a booklet “A little reading goes a long way” have been distributed. From September Home-School Agreements in every school will extend the notion of partnership.

As the ICT network is extended, it too will play a powerful part in ensuring that information is shared between parents and teachers and between school and school. To give one example, a small apparently bureaucratic reform in 2000-2001 will have profound implications for the future. We will introduce a unique pupil number for each pupil. This will enable the tracking of the performance of pupils as they move between schools and make possible higher quality data for the system as a whole. Value-added analyses based on individual pupil data will become possible throughout the system. These changes will strengthen all the bridges but will not do enough to improve communication on pedagogic and management-of-learning issues.

The government is, however, beginning to address these vital issues too. This summer, there will be training for three teachers from each secondary school in the implications of the literacy strategy so that they can take it into account in their curriculum and pedagogic planning. Furthermore, this year three aspects of the strategy, with direct impact on pupils, will come

together for the first time. First, from March this year to the tests in May all primary schools have additional money to provide booster classes for year six pupils, especially aimed at those who need extra help to get Level 4. Secondly, after the summer term ends, over 1000 secondary schools will provide summer literacy and/or numeracy programmes for pupils who are due to join them in September. These summer school programmes have been piloted over the last two years. We were told no-one would want to attend. In fact, pupils have been turned away. We were told they wouldn't stay when they got there. In fact attendance rates match those in term time. Both teachers and pupils believe summer schools result in pupils being better prepared educationally and socially for their new school.

Thirdly, secondary schools will show how their summer school is integrated into their 11-14 curriculum; they will be able to continue the drive to help pupils catch up, where necessary, in the first year of secondary school. In addition, from September 2000 Schemes of Work in every subject at KS3 will be made available. They will be based on the best practice in successful schools and be designed to show how teachers of 11 - 14 year olds can build on the achievements of primary schools and give them a fast start, rather than starting with that "clean slate".

In other words, a new framework to improve transition is beginning to emerge. For the first time an active transfer strategy for literacy and numeracy, taking pupils right through from the last months of primary school and into the first year of secondary school, will bridge that divide between the key stages. Once the ICT network is complete we will be able to go further. We will be able to build, for example, on the experience of schools like George Spencer Technology College in Nottingham. Using broadband links with its primary feeder schools, it is enabling pupils still in the last months of primary school to begin on the catch up programme it runs through the Integrated Learning System, *Successmaker*. It also offers parents of pupils about to transfer the opportunity to use its technology. At last we have the policies, the cutting edge practice and the technology to build the missing bridges for curriculum, pedagogy and management of learning. Now - to use a characteristic Blair phrase - it is time to do.

SOLUTIONS 3: TAKING THE TIDE AT THE FLOOD

Supposing then that we build that house on rock and build those bridges across the river. Suppose that we now have most children entering the middle years of schooling truly literate and numerate and that we are actively addressing the problems of those who are not. Suppose teachers in the middle years know what pupils have achieved at primary level and build systematically upon it, by giving them all a fast start or a rigorous catch up programme. The question then arises, what, in this brave new world, would we want to do with the education of pupils in the middle years; what would we do to take the tide at the flood, as Hadow recommended all those years ago?

My answer can be summarised in four words: we should **MAKE THEIR HEADS SPIN**. The middle years of schooling should be so busy, so demanding, so active, so adventurous, so spectacular that young adolescents should barely have time for brooding introspection or watching Australian soap operas. They should learn, in the middle years, not only about the academic curriculum but also about how to relate to and work with others. They should learn that education and learning are not separate from life, but integral to it. As they get older, they should see learning, work and leisure being woven into a single plait, in which the three separate strands are identifiable but also united to give strength, pattern and purpose.

I want to describe eight features which, I believe, should characterise education in the middle years and would, I think, go far towards solving the problems of motivation, boredom and disaffection I described earlier. I hope they will provide a framework for discussion during the

conference. I will also draw attention to what we in England are doing about each of them.

Action 1: Expect the Impossible

The overwhelming evidence suggests that expectations in the middle years, in our country at least, are simply not high enough. Too often in the past teachers have lowered their expectations in order to protect a pupil's self-esteem. Understandable though it is - we've all done it - praising shoddy work in fact makes the teacher complicit in the pupil's self-deceit. This relationship between expectations and self-esteem is a central challenge for teachers. I tried to clarify it in *The Learning Game*.

The challenge is to simultaneously raise expectations and self-esteem. Pupil motivation and self-esteem are undermined, not when too much is expected of them but too little. Create the right circumstances, teachers tell you, and you'd be amazed what pupils can achieve. The problem is that in secondary education we only offer pupils a very limited range of circumstances in which to learn. At the cutting edge there are schools breaking down this traditional model both here in Victoria and back home. They are demanding high standards, pushing responsibility for learning to pupils, agreeing performance targets with them and offering an array of learning circumstances.

Standards in England are set by the National Curriculum. This is currently under review. Recently, we announced our intention to take a bold further step. We want to introduce "world class" tests, starting with maths and problem-solving. They will be available to schools, for pupils to take whenever they, or their teachers, think they are ready. The tests will be benchmarked against the highest performing ten per cent of pupils aged 9, 13 and 16 anywhere on the planet. These will be in addition to our National Curriculum tests and will have two important benefits. Firstly, they will establish goals for the most academically gifted pupils. Secondly, they will ensure that all teachers are aware of what is possible. The tests will be piloted next year and made universally available the following year. We hope they will be of interest to other education systems too.

Action 2: Never give up on the basics

The world of the 21st century will demand ever greater facility in both the written and spoken language and much higher standards in mathematics for the general population than we in Britain have ever achieved. However effective our primary literacy and numeracy strategies are, pupils in the middle years will still need more teaching in the basics. Those who have succeeded by the end of primary school will need reinforcement, extension and enrichment. Watching some mathematics teaching in Zurich recently confirmed for me what the TIMSS data show, that the Swiss are streets ahead in mental arithmetic and broad areas of mathematics, both in the level and depth of the knowledge their 9 and 13 year olds are achieving. Moreover, the Swiss have no long tail of very poor performance.

For that (hopefully dwindling) minority of pupils who have not reached the required levels of literacy and numeracy by age 11, the prescription is simple. We must never, ever give up. Literacy and numeracy are simply too important for that. They have such a major influence on future learning, future job prospects and lifetime earnings . Thus for these pupils we need intensive catch up classes, withdrawal from other classes if necessary and constant reinforcement. We also need to work to remove the barriers to learning, which may be inside the person (low self-esteem), inside the school (bullying or racism), or in the community (social services, family breakdown etc.). We can't afford to leave any of this to chance any longer.

Hence our recently announced proposal to screen every inner city pupil at the end of the first year of secondary school to check their progress, see what inhibitions there are, if any, and offer a learning mentor to every pupil who needs one. This will be piloted in six large conurbations from next year.

Action 3: Guarantee cultural literacy

Some time in the 1970s and 1980s the left in British politics surrendered cultural heritage to the right. It argued against teaching national history and indeed at the extremes against teaching facts at all. In literature, academics such as Stanley Fish argued, absurdly, that the critic [was] "liberated" from the obligation to be right. This intellectual fashion in the universities resulted in schools in hostility to national history, to the western canon and to the idea of teaching children and young people right and wrong. The education system foundered in cultural relativism which provided a convenient, if feeble, means of dealing with the growing cultural diversity of modern western societies.

In the 1990s - though it remains controversial - there has been a shift. The left has begun to realise that it needs to reclaim 2000 years of western history and thought. In relation to schools this means understanding that every young person, whatever their background needs to understand that cultural tradition and to learn the history of the country in which they are growing up. This is essential if they are to grasp the keywords and concepts on which their success in adult life depends. This is not, by the way, an argument for offering a glorified version of any national history or literature. On the contrary, these things should be taught, as Oliver Cromwell urged of his portrait painter, warts and all. The facts - comfortable and uncomfortable - need to be taught and rival interpretations explored. It can be done in parallel with recognising and celebrating cultural diversity. Political correctness needs to be eschewed. Adolescents see through hypocrisy better than anyone. Those who believe that the challenge is merely to set the record straight should think again. It never is. Adolescents are ready to think for themselves.

Action 4: Individualise

For generations the debate in education has pitted those who want to focus on the group - the collective - against those who want to focus on the individual. In the new century we shall have to do both. Much of what we are doing in England is about the collective, ensuring, for example, high quality, whole class teaching. Now, in that context we want to emphasise the individual too, Both the world class tests and the learning mentors are part of a new policy drive - *"Excellence in Cities"* - which emphasises individual needs and aspirations. Educators have talked about meeting individual needs for years but, if the proper foundations are put in place in the way I have described, we will be able to do more than talk about it - we can make it happen. And I emphasise, it's about aspirations as well as needs. Those who find barriers in their way should have them removed. Those who can fly higher than their peers, whether academically or in any other field, should be enabled to do so. Those whose educational aspirations cannot be met from within the school they happen to attend should have them met from elsewhere. Educational institutions should free individuals, not imprison them.

This means teachers thinking imaginatively about their pedagogy. Howard Gardener's "seven intelligences" are well known. Less well known (because you have to read to page 245 of *The Unschooled Mind* to discover them) are his five doors to learning. These are: the narrational or story-telling approach; the logical-quantitative approach, the foundational or philosophical approach, the aesthetic approach, and the experiential approach. Different people enter learning by different doors. Teachers need to be able to open them all. There is a major professional development challenge here.

At the very least, all individuals should feel that they are well-known by the school, that they belong, that someone minds how well they do and that they have clear achievable targets to work towards at any given stage of their career. Only this way can we avoid the syndrome of the average child, conveyed so vividly in Michael Buscemi's poem.

The Average Child
I don't cause teachers trouble
My grades have been OK
I listen to my classes
and I'm in school every day
My parents think I'm average
My teachers think so too
I wish I didn't know that
cause there's lots I'd like to do.
I'd like to build a rocket
I've a book that shows you how
Or start a stamp collection
Well no use starting now
Cause since I've found I'm average
I'm just smart enough you see
To know there's nothing special
that I should expect of me
I'm part of that majority
That hump part of the bell
Who spends his life unnoticed
In an average kind of hell.

No-one should ever to feel like that again. Institutions can be networked educationally and technologically. Secondary schools can specialise without becoming narrow. They can provide for their own students and for those from elsewhere who can benefit. Through the huge expansion of out-of-school learning, in which we are investing, and through the growing opportunities to learn at home, learning is increasingly being freed from the constraints of the school day too.

What matters as this explosion of opportunity occurs is that each individual has a secure base; a school and some teachers determined to provide not just continued progress in the basics, and not just the removal of any barriers, but inspiration and advice. In short a good school should provide a young person with a fixed point in a changing world. A growing number of schools are showing the way.

Action 5: Offer hope

Passionate sports fans do it when the new season begins. The bitter disappointments of the previous season are forgotten - the follies, the failures, the squandered opportunities: all are swept away. We go to that first match of the season confident that this really will be "our year". I have said this about my county - Lancashire - winning the cricket championship every year since I can remember. They've never won it in my lifetime but each year hope triumphs over experience and this year, 1999, really could be our year - we've got Muralitharan.

We should have the same faith in every pupil in their early teenage years, however unrealistic it might seem at times. The burden of accumulated misdemeanours can drive them out of school. Listen to Nick Davies' account of Daniel's expulsion:

> "He knew he was sometimes out-of-order but he thought he was doing okay really and he was planning to work hard on his exams. He felt like

they had just been waiting for an excuse to get rid of him".

Perhaps what he needed was a new hope, a new challenge. Perhaps that was why he would have worked when his exams came round. With a teacher committed to his future, or one of the learning mentors we intend to introduce in urban secondary schools, perhaps he would have moved on to fortune in that or another school. Instead his position became hopeless. He ended up, like so many others, out of school and tangled up in the criminal justice system.

Along with a constant drive to ensure everyone learns the basics, the capacity to offer new hope, a fresh start, is the key to reducing social exclusion. We intend to introduce for each pupil who is expelled from school a full time educational programme designed to get them back into school as quickly as possible. This is expensive - but much cheaper that letting pupils like Daniel drift into crime. Perhaps Lancashire really will win the county championship this year, for the first time since 1934. Hope, they say, springs eternal. It needs to.

Action 6: Teach Thinking

The conversation I had with a boy in my class when I was a teacher in Watford went like this.

- What are you doing?
- I'm thinking.
- Well stop it and get on with your work!

Yet ,as John Edwards of James Cook University says, the worldwide evidence on the teaching of thinking shows that it really works. The downside of the evidence, he says, is that government never take any notice. Maybe in England we are about to prove him wrong.

Last year we commissioned a review of the research on the teaching of thinking skills by Carol McGuinness from the University of Belfast. Her excellent report will be published shortly. It's main messages are clear. John Edwards is right. Teaching thinking works. The common features of successful programmes are:

- the quality of thinking is given high priority;
- a vocabulary is developed, shared by pupils and teachers which enables thinking to be discussed;
- the thought processes behind an activity or piece of work are made explicit;
- teachers coach students in, and provide feedback on, approaches to thinking;
- emphasis is given to the transferability of thinking skills from one domain to another.

For programmes to deliver results, McGuinness suggests, they need to be sustained for at least two years and accompanied by a substantial investment in teacher development. ICT is a potentially powerful tool for enhancing learning about thinking.

We intend to learn these lessons. As a crucial first step, as part of the current National Curriculum Review, we have asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to build thinking skills into the curriculum, particularly in the middle years. We hope that an emphasis on thinking will help pupils achieve better results in their examinations and also provide them with mental strategies to deal with the challenges of work and life. Maybe conversations like the one I had with the boy in Watford will become a thing of the past.

Action 7: Encourage Citizenship

Young people in early adolescence care passionately about the world in which they are growing up. This is hardly surprising since they will inherit it.

We have recently run a national competition among 11 year olds to participate in a children's parliament. In May the winners will hold a debate under the stern eye of the Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons. They will quiz the Secretaries of State for Education and for the Environment on what they are doing to preserve the planet. They will deliver an environmental action plan - their action plan - to the Prime Minister. In the local and regional competitions, apart from the quality of debate, the most striking fact is just how green 11 year olds are and how full they are of practical ideas for change.

Yet so often, as the evidence I quoted earlier shows, pupils find that in early teenage years they are denied opportunities to take responsibility. Their passions are too often driven outside school, rather than exploited inside it. This, in part, is the case for introducing citizenship into the secondary curriculum. The issue is not just political literacy, important though that is. It is about active citizenship; the opportunity for pupils to play a part in shaping the school and community of which they are a part. What pupils in adolescence want more than anything else is to be a year older. We should treat them as though they are.

Martha Nussbaum, the American philosopher, describes in her new book *"Cultivating Humanity*", three aspects of good citizenship: first ,the ability to reason critically (another argument incidentally for teaching thinking skills); second, the capacity to be - as the Ancient Greeks termed it - a citizen of the world, showing respect for human beings whatever their background; and third, what she calls the narrative imagination, the ability, in her words, "to imagine what it might be like to be in the situation of a person differently placed". Thus, while we shall introduce citizenship as a defined curriculum subject it is important to recognise that, by this definition, it can also be taught through many curriculum subjects including history, literature and the arts.

There are those who criticise the notion of citizenship in education on the grounds that this is the state taking one step too far. I was described by one headteacher, quoted on the front page of a national newspaper, as "a Nazi" for proposing the teaching of citizenship last year. In fact, the concept I have in mind is the polar opposite of Nazism. At its heart is the belief that young people should learn, individually and collectively, to take responsibility for shaping the world around them, rather than leaving it to others. This will improve their education and enable them to live more fulfilled lives. Given the challenges we know lie ahead for all humanity in the next few years, giving the highest possible priority to enabling young people to shape the future is in everyone's interests.

Action 8: Create Teams

When I was working at Keele University the then Vice-Chancellor, Brian Fender, commented once on the gap between higher education and work. Why in universities don't we assess students on their capacity to address a serious problem in a small team under extreme time pressure? Give a group of four students from different disciplines a problem on Friday to solve by Monday, for example: he has a point. Work in the real world is often like that. I have seen precisely this approach to learning used excellently in secondary schools: set a challenge, provide information, ideas, access to expertise and a range of problem-solving strategies and let teams of pupils get on with it. Recently, for example, I saw an entire class, broken up into small groups, putting together a school newspaper. They were set the task at 8.00am and had to complete it by 3.30pm. The pressure and the scale of the task helped forge the teams, provided the adrenaline flow on which motivation depends and resulted in a superb product. It is not that hard. It required the school to be flexible enough to suspend the timetable and the investment to ensure access to good quality technology. Problem-based learning in North America has a strong positive evidence-base behind it, yet schools rarely exploit it. The sense

of power and motivation, as well as the deep learning, that come from working in collaboration with people with a variety of knowledge and skills can be impressive. It involves not just academic learning, but personal, social and emotional learning.

We do this kind of thing, almost without thinking, in sport and drama - both of which are important in this respect. Now it is time surely to unleash it in the academic sphere. Before anyone dismisses this as being too progressive or as ditching tried and tested methods, let us remember the First Law of Educational Debate which is that **the fiercest arguments take place over the falsest dichotomies**. I am not saying drop traditional methods. I know they work well. I am saying we can do both and some more besides.

SECTION 3: CONCLUSION

Throughout the last section I have tended to focus on the pupils - what they might learn and how they might learn it. I have mentioned in places the steps the government in England is taking to address the issues I have raised. Now I want to make some concluding remarks specifically on the role of government.

Two major programmes of reform which are currently being debated in England are absolutely essential to the modernisation of education in the middle years. One is the creation of the National Grid for Learning - the ICT networking of every school - alongside the training programme for every teacher in the use of ICT. Schools at the cutting edge have already shown the transformation this can bring. The second is the government's Green Paper, currently out for consultation, on the future of the teaching profession. If both go ahead they will open up all manner of new possibilities: teachers in one school providing lessons to pupils in several others; super teachers who design and deliver courses to pupils but also play a part in training their colleagues; greater flexibility in the pupil's learning day as new combinations of teachers, paraprofessionals and technology bring a host of new opportunities. In innovative schools and our education action zones all of these, and many other developments which anticipate the future, are already happening. Indeed, the second law of policy-making says that the most radical idea anyone in Whitehall can conceivably imagine, has already been done (and evaluated) by someone, somewhere in a school at the cutting edge.

The final point I want to make is that speaking here, far from home, it is tempting to suggest that our radical education reform programme, carefully planned and implemented as it is, is being welcomed at every level, as it successfully raises standards of pupil performance. In your dreams, as they say. The reality is that it is demanding, messy, controversial and that sometimes we in government make mistakes. Cultural transformation is difficult, a constant challenge. At any given moment there is more than one option available and the choices are hard. But we have a vision and it informs the decisions we make. We are making progress. I don't know whether it is a vision shared here in Victoria. I sense that it is: undoubtedly we share many challenges. Certainly we can share a sense of adventure. In creating education for pupils in the middle years now and in the future we can learn a lot from each other. I look forward to learning from you in the next few days and seeing the education systems here, and back home, becoming capable of taking the tide at the flood.

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