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Urban education: confronting the contradictions: an analysis with special reference to London

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This paper attempts to provide some answers to two questions: What are the distinctive challenges of urban education (especially in London) and how can schools help to meet them? Using theoretical frameworks derived from the writings of two leading scholars of the urban, Manuel Castells and David Harvey, this paper argues that the challenges *in* urban education are especially manifest in inner-city communities and in inner-city schools and colleges. The challenges *for* urban education consist in trying to find effective, and above all, sustained ways of responding to those contradictions.

What does 'the urban' signify?

In his classic study, *The urban question* (1977), Manuel Castells answers the question in this way:

> When one speaks of 'urban society' what is at issue is never the mere observation of a spatial form. Urban society is defined, above all, by 'urban culture'… a certain system of values, norms and social relations … with its own logic of organization and transformation. (Castells, 1977, p.75)

Another major urban analyst, David Harvey, in *Social justice and the city* (1973) sees 'the urban' as: 'a vantage point from which to capture some salient features operating in society as a whole—it becomes as it were a mirror in which other aspects of society can be reflected' (p. 16). Metropolitan cities, in Harvey's view, are: 'The locus of the accumulated contradictions of a society' (p. 203). My own reflections upon the nature of the urban and of the urban education problematic began during my investigations of 'the urban education crisis' of the 1970s in London which I have reported in a forthcoming chapter in the *International handbook of urban education*:

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> What struck me at the time was the structural urban contradiction that major cultural, financial, social and political institutions were located in the inner-city but were not, in any relational sense, of the inner-city. The absence of developed partnerships between these institutions and, for instance, the schools of the inner-city seemed to me to be part of what was then being described as the 'urban education crisis'. … The inner-city was at one and the same time, the location of great cultural, financial, social and political resource while the working class schools adjacent to these resources were said to be in a situation of crisis in cultural, educational and social terms. How was this possible? (Grace, in press, p. 1)

From my perspective the challenges *in* urban education were expressed in a series of contradictions made manifest especially in inner-city schools and the challenges *for* urban education consisted in trying to find effective ways of responding to those contradictions.[1]

Urban challenges in education: contradictions of power

For contemporary urban educators in Britain and elsewhere it is necessary to reflect upon Castells' (1977) central observation of urban phenomena (including urban education) that 'it is politics[2] which structures the totality of the field and determines how it is transformed' (p. 243). An understanding of the politics of urban education is as crucial as an understanding of the pedagogies of urban education. There is no simple concept of 'learning'—it is always learning in a given political context.

In 1974 Merson and Campbell argued that the defining characteristic of inner-city residents is their relative powerlessness. Thus the urban context demonstrates one of its major contradictions, i.e., the juxtaposition of power centres and power holders in the political realm, with inner-city communities lacking in political clout and leverage upon policy. In Britain a disillusionment with the formal political process has resulted in growing levels of voter 'apathy' or abstention from that process. Many inner-city residents do not believe that political parties have any sustained programmes for the improvement of their communities and, as a consequence, they do not participate in elections. This compounds the problem, as Galbraith (1992) has noted. If the urban poor are not an active voting constituency, political parties will adjust their programmes in the interest of those who are active. Galbraith also argues, in his important book, *The culture of contentment,* that there is a growing influence of 'the political economy of contentment' (p. 11). This means that the comfortable and contented majority of active voters ('Middle England'?) are increasingly embracing a culture of relative private interest. The result of this is that action for the improvement of the inner-city and its schools is subject only to *short-term interventions rather that to sustained programmes for transformation*. As I expressed it in an earlier paper, Grace (1994):

> In a political culture of relative public good, a significant sector of citizens accept the legitimacy of political action taken in support of disadvantaged citizens as a practical expression of commitment to ideas of social justice, equality of opportunity and equity in society. In a political culture of relative private interest a growing number of citizens reject the legitimacy of action in support of the disadvantaged (who are seen to be responsible for their own problems) and support policies designed to enhance their own interests. (Grace, 1994, p. 53)

Galbraith (1992) argues that this changed political culture is now very visible in the US and, it can be argued, it is emergent in Britain also. The social consequences of these developments will be a sharper polarization between the comfortable suburbs and the impoverished inner-cities. Urban schools are necessarily caught up in these contradictions of power and locality.

How can schools respond?

In his reflections upon the 'Challenges of urban education', Paulo Freire (1993) has argued that schools must make connections between the generation of literacy and the generation of informed democratic political consciousness. As Freire beautifully expresses it: 'literacy involves not just the reading of the word but also the reading of the world' (p. 59). An education for critical democratic consciousness would, he argues, not only help students (including adults) to acquire literacy but also to develop a *political literacy* which would help them to understand why the inner-city is as it is, and what possible forms of democratic action are available for its transformation. It seems likely that the education of most urban students at present is not generative of such political literacy.[3]

All of this suggests that serious political and citizenship education must be a priority in the schools of the inner-city. Inner-city students and residents need socio-political and economic literacy to help them to understand how inner-cities come to be constituted in particular ways. This does not mean the formation of a party political ideology but rather the formation of an educated consciousness of what democracy means and what its potential for transformation can be. Students educated in and for a serious democratic literacy could become 'active citizens'. As such they could become advocates for their communities, active in political processes, formal and informal and effective in forming alliances with other agencies to work for improvements in the inner-city and in urban education.

As David Halpin (1997) argued in his inaugural lecture, 'Utopian ideals, democracy and the politics of education', we have to construct 'new forms of association within which citizen rights in education policy can be reasserted … including mediation groups, standing citizens' panels … and new forms of public meeting' (p. 27).

Urban challenges in education: contradictions of class

For Castells (1977), the contradictions of a class society are expressed concretely in metropolitan cities in the process of formation of residential space and of housing zones:

> By urban segregation, one means the tendency to organize space into zones with a high internal social homogeneity … the distribution of housing produces its social differentiation … since the characteristics of the dwellings and of their residents are at the root of the type and level of amenities and functions that are attached to them. (Castells, 1977, p. 169)

One of the contradictions arising from this in urban schooling is the existence in relative proximity of schools which serve different class and ethnic populations and which have very different 'success' or 'failure' profiles. In other words, in the absence of a citywide authority having power to regulate school admissions, the tendency in a class-marked city is to reproduce class-marked schools.

Reviewing the situation in urban education in 2002, Geoff Whitty pointed out that the emphasis on enhanced parental 'choice', increased school autonomy and the free operation of market forces in education would result in: 'the disproportionate representation of socially advantaged children in the most "successful" schools and of socially disadvantaged children in those schools identified as "failing"' (p. 84).

It is in the schools of the urban working class that these processes of social and cultural polarization inevitably produce the 'sink' or 'failing' school which has become overwhelmed by the concentration of challenges which it faces. These processes were dramatically exemplified in the struggles surrounding the closure of Hackney Downs School in London in 1995 (see O'Connor *et al.*, 1999). Although there are urban schools which, for various reasons, recruit students from different class and ethnic backgrounds and from different housing zones, it is the case that many urban schools have a dominant class character. The outcome of this is that the historically researched relationships between social class and educational achievements continue to exist in the contemporary city. Urban working class schools, primary and secondary, have improved their academic performance in recent decades thanks to the dedicated service of many inner-city teachers and head teachers. These are tremendous achievements against the grain of local circumstances and they demonstrate what a changed pedagogy and a changed culture of expectations can accomplish in the urban environment. Nevertheless, the stark sociological fact remains that while underprivileged schools are improving their academic profiles, the schools of the privileged are also improving theirs. The key question for equity therefore is what is happening to *class differentials* in urban education?

Recent research suggests that this remains a major challenge for urban education. In *International and critical perspectives on education and social class* (2003), Diane Reay in her analysis of the UK situation concludes that:

> Parentocracy, together with the increasing fragmentation of State schooling into a plethora of different specialist schools, all with different selection criteria, is increasing polarization, particularly in urban conurbations. White, middle class parents do not want their children to attend schools where there is a significant number of minority ethnic and White working class children. (Reay, 2003, p.115)

These processes operated at both primary and secondary levels:

> My research into parental involvement in education in primary schools in London revealed … a complex interplay between mothering work and educational markets (Reay 1998a). Educational success becomes a function of social, cultural and material advantages, as middle-class mothers are better able to utilize resources … as effective consumers of education. (Reay, 2003, p.116)

Her overall conclusion demarcates the continuing challenge for urban education in class terms: 'Despite both the rise in credentials of a new generation of students and the increase in access to higher education, the gap between the working classes and the middle classes remains extensive' (p. 118).

R. H. Tawney remarked in 1931 that social class was 'the hereditary curse of English education' and, notwithstanding recent improvements, it clearly remains the hereditary curse of contemporary urban education. The recent research of Buck *et al.* (2002) on schooling in London concluded, 'Class is still the major differentiating factor' (p. 196).

How can schools respond?

Given that the major challenges in this area are social structural, political and economic, the idea that schools can 'do' anything in relation to these challenges seems naive. In the American context Anyon (1995) has argued: 'The structural basis for failure in inner-city schools … is political, economic and cultural … the only solution to educational resignation and failure in the inner-city is the ultimate elimination of poverty and racial degradation' (p. 8).

What makes a recent analysis of Martin Thrupp's so valuable is that it accepts the validity of these social structural analyses while at the same time pointing out that we cannot simply wait for major social transformations. We can construct strategies for change albeit ones that can only be long-term solutions.

In his research-based book, *Schools making a difference: let's be realistic!* (1999), Thrupp argues that *school mix* defined as, 'the social class composition of a school's student intake', has major consequences for school effectiveness, From this perspective the differing academic profiles of urban schools are largely a function of their differing student intakes[4] rather than related to significant differences in their internal educational cultures.

In Thrupp's view, 'the key solution to the effects of school mix will be to reduce between-school social class segregation' (p. 185). A range of possible long-term solutions to this problem are presented (pp. 185–196) but the ones which concern us today are those which may be described as school-based. Insofar as the contexts of urban education have become the contexts for 'the politics of polarization and blame', then, it is argued, urban educators must be prepared to challenge such politics. A persuasive case is made that teachers and school leaders in disadvantaged communities and 'failing' urban schools should become *advocates* for the residents and the students and that they should 'publicly reject the politics of polarization and blame' (p. 194) in urban education.

From my own experience of researching Catholic secondary schools in the inner-cities of London, Liverpool and Birmingham (Grace, 2002), I know that the leaders of such 'failing' schools have a very good understanding of the complex of social forces working against the schools and intelligent suggestions for policy and action to assist such schools. However while these school leaders are articulate in discussions with a visiting researcher, they are often inhibited from engaging in public advocacy

for their schools and communities for a variety of reasons. These include potential charges of 'special pleading', 'vested interest' and 'being political'. The irony of the situation is that those who know most about particular challenges in urban schooling are inhibited from expressing these publicly, while those who know least, i.e., Government ministers and the national and local media, achieve maximum publicity for their accounts. Here is another of the many contradictions of urban education. To protect school leaders in these situations and to do justice to the complexity of 'the failing urban school', what is required is the formation of *research partnerships* between the school leaders and education researchers at local universities and colleges. Such partnerships could produce evidence-based accounts of a school's situation which could be used (subject to the findings) as a form of public advocacy for the school.[5] School leaders alone cannot be expected to do this, but school leaders, with research support, could become powerful advocates for necessary reforms.

Urban challenges in education: contradictions of gender

As a number of feminist writers such as Madeleine Arnot, Miriam David and Diane Reay have argued, one of the contradictions of gender in urban schooling is the widespread belief that girls are now achieving educational 'success' while at the same time evidence exists to show that this is not the case for many girls in the urban context.

Diane Reay (2003) points out that 'despite the noisy babble of educational innovation and "the gender revolution in education", social class relations … are still characterized as much by continuity as by change' (p. 105) and she reviews the research which shows that 'the resounding educational success of girls spoken of in recent years is primarily about middle class girls' (p. 118).

In this way she warns against the use of gender analysis in education which is not cross-referenced to issues of class and race. Her general thesis is that while middle class girls (especially those attending single-sex urban schools) have made considerable progress in academic achievement and in entry to higher education, this is still not the case for many urban working class girls.

The causes of this continuing class–gender differential in urban education are complex and include the effects of family and peer-group culture, the continued presence, even in school cultures, of ideas about the 'natural destiny' for working class girls (secretarial/service work, early marriage and motherhood etc) and the girls' own perceptions of the 'reality' of staying on for A levels and going on to higher education.

The nature of the urban labour market is also another key factor to be considered. While manufacturing work has declined in many contemporary cities (causing problems for urban working class boys), service occupations have expanded providing increased employment prospects for girls (albeit on relatively low pay). The possibility of obtaining 'good' secretarial work in the city offices or 'acceptable' work in city service agencies may seem more realizable destinations than 'going to college'. This is not to deny that more urban working class girls are making a decision to 'go to

college', but this pattern is far from typical of the class–gender group. As Reay (2003) expresses it:

> Regardless of what individual working-class males and females are able to negotiate and achieve for themselves within the educational field, the collective patterns of working-class trajectories within education remain sharply different from those of the middle classes. (Reay, 2003, p. 109)

Urban schools still face the challenge of encouraging working class girls to realize their potential and to raise their career aspirations to the extent that their middle class peers have demonstrated in recent decades.[6]

This challenge also applies to working class boys. National figures show that at the end of the 1990s, 10% of young people, i.e., 28,500 boys and 21,500 girls, completed their secondary education without any qualifications and nearly all of these students were working class.[7]

Urban schools are still facing the challenge of those boys who in an earlier period, Paul Willis (1977) characterised as 'The Lads'. The Lads represent a hardcore resistance by urban working class boys to the educational mission of the school. This is not, as many commentators believe, a phenomenon of modern urban schooling. It has existed throughout the whole history of urban education (see Grace, 1978) and therefore it represents an enduring challenge. It can be seen as a contradiction of urban education because at the formal level the school holds out to these working class boys, opportunities for personal and social fulfillment, improved life chances and career prospects and yet 'The Lads' refuse these opportunities. Not only do they refuse these opportunities but they engage in overt resistance designed to subvert school discipline, undermine the teachers and disrupt the learning environments of classrooms.

The contemporary urban school faces the challenge of 'how to reach, the hard to teach', and this 'hard' group is largely male. What has changed over time in urban schooling is the destinations of 'The Lads' after school leaving age. In the past, many were destined for unskilled manual labour (and they knew this), whereas in a changed labour market their successors are destined for unemployment or recruitment into a growing urban crime and drug-dealing economy (and perhaps they know this). Whereas the contradictions of class in urban education have a long and well documented history, the contradictions of gender have been in focus for a much shorter time. As the research studies show, they generate a distinctive set of challenges for contemporary urban schools.

How can schools respond?

Trying to change a historically embedded culture that the 'natural' destiny of many working class girls is secretarial/service employment and early marriage (or living together) and the raising of children, will not be easy. Historically embedded cultures are not responsive to rapid transformations. What compounds this difficulty in current conditions is that staying on for A level and 'going on to college' has now become associated with 'getting into debt'. In these circumstances what urban

schools must try to do is to build confidence, to provide reliable and up-to-date knowledge about 'staying on' and 'going on', and to present to urban working class girls positive role models which might inform their decisions. As Arnot *et al.* (1999) argue: 'Providing equal opportunities in school, of itself, cannot change occupational choice patterns' (p. 121).

They point out that 'The curious contradiction emerges of young women, no longer unaware of sex segregation … still choosing to work as adults within, rather than outside, the realm of "women's work"' (p. 121).

The current and understandable preoccupation of urban schools with the maximization of GCSE and A level academic results may lead to a foreshortening of the school's sense of purpose and to a belief that 'the job is done' if more girls are succeeding at these levels. Urban working class schools need to form a longer educational vision which extends to serious advice, guidance and encouragement about longer term life and vocational decisions.[8]

This vision must apply also to 'The Lads', who are unlikely to be 'winners' in the school's academic culture (and who know this). 'The Lads' are not without intelligence but they are at war with the school's culture, organization and pedagogy as it currently exists. As the work of Willis (1977) and others has demonstrated, the concentration of 'The Lads' as a group tends to produce a theatre of resistance and public display in which they feel bound to 'show off' their macho values and their contempt for learning and for teachers. One possible response for urban schools is to try to provide opportunities for learning which are more individualized (including also the principle of 'divide and rule'), more adult in their contextual settings, and involving pedagogical approaches which are more visibly related to the adult world. It is here, provoked by the challenge of 'The Lads' in the first place, that urban working class schools must seek to make educationally valid *pedagogical partnerships* with public service agencies and corporate organizations in the city. In other words, we need to extend the wisdom expressed in rural and primary societies, that 'it takes a village to educate the child' and to apply this in the settings of urban education, i.e., 'it takes a city to educate a young person'. The challenge is how to organize and focus the learning potential of great cities and to place these at the disposal of the most disadvantaged learners.

Urban challenges in education, contradictions of 'race'

Metropolitan cities are generally characterized by considerable ethnic and racial diversity, as various groups of people (for various reasons) are drawn to the opportunities which the city appears to offer to them and to their families. Each of these 'new arrivals' to the city bring with them their particular cultural riches, religious and social practices, economic intelligence, and generally speaking, a strong desire (or need) to be 'successful' in their new environment. These characteristics have applied to successive waves of new arrivals in the city including the Jews, the Irish, the Italians, the Chinese, the Afro-Caribbeans ('West Indians'), Africans, Indians, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Greek Cypriot, Turkish and many others.

The constant renewing of the city by the entry of these various ethnics groups has the potential to enrich and enhance urban culture, to stimulate its economy and to add new dimensions to its entrepreneurial activity, not to mention providing new recruits for the maintenance of its public services.

The historically evident urban contradiction which works against the realization of many of these benefits is the existence, at the same time, of many forms of racism in the city. Thus the potential of the 'new arrivals' to enhance the city is constantly undermined by the presence of racisms which impede their contribution and which may provoke overt conflict.

These contradictions of 'race' are manifest in urban schooling in differing degrees according to complex circumstances. There has been a particular analytical focus in Urban Education studies upon the educational achievements of Black students, defined in the US as Afro-Americans and in Britain as Afro-Caribbeans (previously 'West Indian'). Such was the concern in Britain with the relative educational under-achievement of 'children of West Indian origin' in urban schools that two reports were commissioned to examine the issue, the Rampton Report (1981) and the Swann Report (1985).

As influential research in the US produced by Arthur Jensen (1969) and supported by Hans Eysenck (1971) in Britain had suggested that Black students had genetically-determined lower kinds of intelligence as measured by IQ tests, the Swann Committee commissioned Neil Mackintosh, Professor of Psychology at Cambridge University, to provide them with an authoritative scholarly report on the question. Mackintosh reported in 1985 in these terms:

> The question we set out to answer was whether differences in school performance between indigenous children and those from any ethnic minority should be attributed in whole or in part to differences in their natural intelligence. Although children from ethnic minorities certainly obtain, on average, lower scores on standard IQ tests than do indigenous children, we have found little reason to believe that this reflects genetic differences for intelligence. On the contrary, such differences in IQ scores are clearly related to the same sort of differences in social circumstances that are associated with difference in IQ among the indigenous majority. (Mackintosh, 1985, p. 143)

In other words, if Black children were underachieving in urban schools it was more a function of their 'social circumstances' (which would include various forms of racism), than anything to do with innate limitations of their intelligence.

The Swann Committee subsequently made a strong statement on racism in its final report:

> We believe that racism is an insidious evil which, for the sake of the future unity and stability of our society, must be countered. … Racism, in all its forms, needs to be tackled, in the interests of the community as a whole, since it damages not only the groups seen and treated as inferior but also the more powerful groups, in that it feeds them with a totally false sense of superiority … all members of a racist society suffer from feelings of fear and insecurity. … We believe that for schools to allow racist attitudes to persist unchecked constitutes a fundamental mis-education for their pupils… We are convinced that the policies we put forward in this report will, if put into practice, mark a

> major change in the way in which ethnic minorities are perceived and perceive themselves in relation to the educational system. (Swann Report, 1985, pp. 36–37)

That was in 1985—and yet in 2003, the DFES document, *The London challenge: transforming London secondary schools*, reported that 'pupils from African Caribbean and some Asian background achieve significantly poorer results than average' (p. 27), and accepted that 'only when … Black Caribbean pupils achieve well, can the London Challenge be said to have succeeded' (p. 26).

Despite the hopes, aspirations and advice of the Swann Committee, this particular contradiction in urban education has not been resolved.

Why has progress in this area been so limited?

Important answers to this question were given by David Gillborn in his inaugural lecture, 'Education and institutional racism' (2002). Gillborn argued that 'racism (in its numerous, changing and sometimes hidden forms) pervades the very assumptions that shape our educational system. It is present in our forms of assessment, in Whitehall, in the staffroom and in the classroom' (p. 1).

In other words, institutional racism, understood to be how the interests and attitudes of a dominant race saturate the cultures and procedures of key institutions, is remarkably tenacious. This means that the impact of Government reports and of research studies, 'do not lessen the power of the deeply ingrained White stereotypes of Black deficit which find coded expression in many everyday comments and beliefs in school' (Gillborn, 2002, p. 9).

On the basis of his own research work and others, David Gillborn finally concluded that:

> The current system of secondary education manifestly fails to deliver equality of opportunity to many minority ethnic groups: differential levels of attainment and rates of exclusion are the most visible part of an iceberg of institutional practices and beliefs which systematically disadvantage minority ethnic groups. (Gillborn, 2002, p. 24)

This particular challenge in urban schooling was largely responsible for the generation of urban education studies in the US in the 1960s. It is still a major issue both for the academic study of urban education and for the professional and applied strategies of urban schools in the US and Britain.[9]

How can schools respond?

Institutional racism as currently constituted in urban schools will not be easily changed, for, as David Gillborn has argued, 'the deeply ingrained White stereotypes of Black deficit' will continue to manifest themselves in various coded ways and in these ways will continue to be impediments to the full realization of the educational potential of Black students. As the amount of time assigned to the programmes of multicultural and anti-racist education in teacher preparation courses appears to have declined since the 1980s, this places an increased responsibility upon schools to try to find ways of countering racism. For London, it has to be recognized that the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority in 1988 dealt a major blow to

the cause of multicultural and anti-racist education in urban schooling. The ILEA took these issues seriously, gave them a high profile, assigned resources and support systems to their development and required all London teachers, head teachers and school governors to participate in staff development courses designed to counter 'deeply ingrained stereotypes'. In present circumstances many urban schools have to be their own staff development agency on matters having to do with relationships between racism and learning and racism and social justice. A number of strategies appear to be necessary to improve the learning cultures of urban schools in this area. The first would be that head teachers (or deputies) in all schools should take on the responsibility for leading and resourcing multicultural and anti-racist educational initiatives in the schools' programme. In other words, serious attention to anti-racism in schooling needs to be empowered by an explicit association with educational leadership—in this case, head teachers or deputies. This would mean that the NPQH and other leadership courses ought to contain a significant number of modules related to these issues.[10]

A second strategy would be for schools to draw upon the ethnic and racial resources of the city by bringing into classrooms representatives of various groups who could speak, from personal experience, of their encounters with racism in school and society. The presentation of Black citizens who, despite these experiences, had achieved 'success' in the professions, business, politics and sport, could be balanced by the presentation of those citizens who keep the city's public services going in health, transport, etc. The presentation of role models (especially from a particular school) may be the most powerful counter to the 'ingrained stereotypes' and, in itself, the most influential form of anti-racist education that any school can provide.[11]

Urban challenges in education: contradictions of literacy

Metropolitan cities tend to act as magnets for the literacy resources of a society—its writers and poets, publishers and journalists, debaters, orators and public speakers, academics, lawyers and preachers. The city concentrates the literate culture of the 'chattering classes', the 'writing classes' and the 'public speaking classes' into a powerful and richly varied network. It is characteristically the location of national and international media agencies. Yet this great literate resource co-exists with urban working class and minority ethnic schools where literacy (understood as the ability to read and write and use language effectively) is still a significant challenge—despite recent literacy programmes.

Here is one of the major, and historically longlasting contradictions of the urban education context. The literacy challenges in London's schools have complex and deeply rooted causes. They include the enduring effects of a class strategy in English schooling which always limited the extent of literacy development for the working class majority, while allowing 'sponsored literacy' for the scholarship elect. Literacy development, the Victorians as well as Paulo Freire realized, had potentially serious implications for social control in a class society. The enduring consequences of this strategy have resulted in generations of working class adults who have never

achieved levels of competence and confidence (or enjoyment) in literate culture (in reading, writing and public speaking). These adults have in turn established home environments in which what Roy Nash (2003) calls 'the cognitive habitus' is relatively undeveloped. Many children and young people from these homes have attended inner-city schools where attempts to assist their progress in literacy have been impeded by class sizes, problems of teacher retention and inadequate programmes of teaching and learning, sometimes resulting from inadequate teacher preparation courses. These challenges have been compounded by the fact that such schools receive successive waves of refugee children who place heavy demands upon the literacy resources available. This situation represents what may be called the contradiction of *classic literacy* (the differential command of reading, writing and public speaking). The importance of such classic literacy had long been recognized by elite public and private schools for the empowerment which it provides for their students. Such schools have always understood that confidence and fluency in public speaking is an essential and not an optional part of literacy development. Urban working class schools can learn from this historical tradition.

However as Lankshear and Knobel (2004) point out, in their recent book, *New literacies: changing knowledge and classroom learning*, urban schools have also to respond to the challenges of the new literacies which are: 'literacies associated with new communications and information technologies, or, in more general terms, the digital electronic apparatus' (p. 25). There are, as they argue, new ways of knowing and new ways of learning that will be essential in the urban schools of the twenty first century.

Urban schools are making serious efforts to engage with these new literacies but the scale of the challenge has to be recognized. Castells (2004) in the third volume of *The information age* has warned of the social consequences of a shift from an industrial to an informational economy. In his view, processes of polarization in metropolitan cities will become sharper with differential access to the new *ICT literacy* in urban schooling. Castells' analysis suggests that inner-city schools in the US will be unable to fund an effective ICT curriculum and pedagogy both in terms of initial formation and in terms of the required updating of the technology over time. In this way the gap between inner-city school outcomes and those of suburban schools seems likely to widen in the new information economy.

Some evidence that this is beginning to emerge in Britain was reported in *The Guardian* (28 April 2005) under the heading, 'Working class children fall foul of the digital divide'. Research conducted by the LSE demonstrated the importance of the internet resources and knowledge of middle class homes and underlined the need for urban working class schools to be well resourced and active in ICT literacy.

How can schools respond?

If reading is the foundation stone of classic literacy, then primary schools in the inner-city constitute the strategic sector where innovations in pedagogy are required. It is in this sector that British urban education can learn from New Zealand experience. In

particular, the Reading Recovery Programme, pioneered by Marie Clay in New Zealand has demonstrated its benefits especially for the most disadvantaged learners. As Angela Hobsbaum and Amanda Leon (1999) have argued:

> Reading Recovery offers a primary school a way of reducing the number of children with reading problems. … It is not a classroom programme … but an individual programme with two distinct goals: first, to accelerate the learning of the very weakest children … second, to identify those who fail to achieve the level of the average group at an early age as needing long-term support. (Hobsbaum & Leon, 1999, p. 1)

Reviewing the research which has evaluated Reading Recovery internationally Hobsbaum and Leon conclude that:

> Reading Recovery produced benefits for particular groups of pupils: those from poor homes and those who, at six, had been complete non-readers. These children, who come from families where extreme social disadvantage is compounded with educational hardship, are the ones hardest to teach. (Hobsbaum & Leon, 1999, p. 6)

The research has also shown that having a trained Reading Recovery teacher/tutor in the primary school not only helps those struggling to read but also provides a professional resource for the enhancement of other teachers' work in reading.

With these sorts of benefits for the improvement of the culture of reading in urban education, it would seem obvious that primary schools would adopt Reading Recovery programmes on a large scale. However, a pedagogy of individual tuition (normally available in middle class homes, public schools and Oxbridge) is, as Bernstein (1997) has remarked 'an expensive pedagogy … derived from an expensive class' (p. 69).

It is here that the class patterning of English schooling becomes once again visible in terms of who benefits from expensive pedagogy.[12]

Reading Recovery programmes began in the 1990s in 10 London Local Education Authorities (LEAs) with Grants for education support and training (GEST) funding and were subsequently supported by Education Action Zone (EAZ) money, but as this finance has dwindled, so too have the number of programmes. Today, only three London LEAs are still operating Reading Recovery programmes (the London Boroughs of Brent, Hackney and Hammersmith and Fulham).[13]

This type of 'boom and bust' strategy (so much criticized in the economy) is counter-productive to sustained improvement in the reading competencies of disadvantaged urban pupils, but what can primary schools do in these circumstances? Once possible strategy would be for urban primary schools (head teachers, governors, teachers and parents) to form an urban coalition (interest group) to bring democratic political pressure to bear on the funding of Reading Recovery programmes in all schools with significant numbers of below average readers. As Hobsbaum and Leon (1999) point out: 'The rhetoric that devolved financial management enables schools to make the best choices for their children is hollow when they cannot afford the programme of their choice' (p. 6).

Similar questions of funding face urban schools as they seek to respond to the challenges of ICT literacy and work to reduce the 'digital divide' among children and young people. The scale of funding required here is substantial and it suggests

that public–private partnerships in urban education have to become universal for the adequate resourcing of the new literacies. Such partnerships (suitably regulated by Government) could be formed between corporate enterprise and schools, between private schools (which have to demonstrate their 'common good' contribution to society) and urban working class schools and between faith schools and community schools. If we are educating for what Castells (1998) has described as the 'network society', then we need an urban schooling system that is itself networked.

Conclusion

What the literature of urban education demonstrates, both in the US and in the UK, is that governments inaugurate urban community renewal programmes and urban schooling improvement projects from time to time, but there is rarely a sustained commitment to long-term investment in such interventions.[14] As both Castells (1977) and Galbraith (1992) have argued, it is politics which determines the constant 'stop-go' in urban policy. Contemporary political culture in both societies appears to be moving towards a culture of calculative private interest and away from a morally based culture of commitment to common or public good principles. The contradictions of power discussed in the beginning of this paper continue to manifest themselves in a discernable gap between a rhetoric of moral concern and a practice of calculative political interest. All politicians and all citizens need to understand that while urban intervention programmes are switched on and off according to political calculation, the contradictions to which they are directed stubbornly endure and threaten to become sharper.

The educational achievements which are being created by dedicated urban school leaders and teachers, against the grain of circumstances, need the support of a sustained political and moral commitment to the transformation of the inner-city not its temporary amelioration.

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Notes

1. In an earlier publication (Grace, 1984) I defined contradictions as 'structurally determined incompatibilities within a social and economic formation (generally identified with capitalism)' (p. 103). In a more general sense, contradictions refer to the opposition of factors inherent in a social system or organization.
2. Castells uses 'politics' to refer to power struggles in the urban context involving both the political processes within communities and the expression or intervention of state power at the local level.

3. As the NFER *Research report on citizenship education* (2005) noted: 'students' development of citizenship … is neither even nor consistent. The findings reveal lower levels of citizenship knowledge … active student participation … trust … and belief in the benefit of participation … among the Year 10 students (when compared with Year 8 students)' (p. iv). The *TES* (29 April 2005) summed this up as 'Citizenship students still lack political nous'.
4. Professor Harvey Goldstein has long argued that differences in the prior achievements of pupils on entry to secondary schools account for much of the difference found in later GCSE results in urban and other schools.
5. The writer has been involved in the role of advocate for an inner-city Catholic school threatened with closure in Liverpool. Research partnerships for school improvement seem to be a more desirable strategy that 'naming and shaming' policies designed for school closures.
6. In 2000, middle class students constituted 73% of university places, while working class students constituted 27% (Universities and Colleges Admission Service, 2001; quoted in Reay, 2003, p. 110).
7. See Reay (2003, p. 112).
8. Urban middle class homes are in themselves a rich resource of cultural capital about access to careers and higher education opportunities. For many urban working class students the school has to provide this resourcing, advice and mentoring. It is not enough simply to 'get the qualifications'. The critical question is what to use them for in life and career decisions.
9. For recent research on this issue in London, see Buck *et al.* (2002, pp. 190–194).
10. At present the NPQH Programme (2005) Access Stage has four study modules, each consisting of four units. One unit out of the 16 is devoted to equal opportunities (Unit 2.3). The Unit 2.3 consists of 60 pages divided as follows: introduction (4 pp.), creating the right conditions (2 pp.), urban disadvantage (11 pp.), gender (5 pp.), minority ethnic pupils (6 pp.), special needs (23 pp.), the role of the head teacher (3 pp.), optional activities (2 pp.), references (4 pp.). Quite apart from the fact that very little space is devoted to major issues in urban education in the modules as a whole, the language of Unit 2.3 may be described as 'neutered discourse', i.e., there is no reference to class, no reference to institutional racism and limited references to gender. There seems to be scope for NPQH to engage more comprehensively with the challenges in urban education. (I am grateful to Yvonne Beecham for supplying the NPQH modules for 2005.)
11. I have been involved in multicultural and anti-racist teaching programmes in London (King's College), the University of Cambridge, The University of Wellington, New Zealand and the University of Durham. In all of these institutions I have found that inviting citizens from a variety of ethnic groups to speak about their experiences of racism in society has proved to be an effective pedagogical approach.
12. Hobsbaum and Leon (1999) note that 'Reading Recovery is frequently described as expensive, as though price were more important than value or effectiveness' (p. 6). They go on to argue that early interventions such as Reading Recovery can prevent even larger expenditures at a later stage of special educational provision.
13. I am grateful to Angela Hobsbaum for providing this information.
14. See Barry Franklin's (2005) analysis for some evidence of this in relation to the Education Action Zone initiative in Britain.

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