

*“dumbing down” was based on a diary I wrote in 2003 which became “Fail Better”, extracts from which were published in The Times Educational Supplement. The preface and the final section are reproduced here to show the source of some of the ideas in the play.*

## Preface

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Have a glance at the corner of a Secondary School staffroom at break time. You are likely to see a group of strangers swapping anecdotes about the school and comparing it to others they know. These are the supply teachers. The new unofficial inspectorate. If they don't like your institution, they may not come again. And they have that choice, because in this educational market place, they are increasingly in demand. Not all are ex-teachers. One I met last year combined supply work with being a bailiff. Prior to freelancing, he had been a Merchant Banker. Another had been an actor and magician. Another an African farmer. Another, an Irish folk singer and author. Many are Australians or South Africans. To get all of them in one room to discuss their experiences of our schools would produce some fascinating insights.

A new role has arisen in the last couple of years. That of the Continuous Supply Teacher. This freelancer is paid each day he comes in and he has no contract, no obligation to prepare lessons or mark books or fill in reports or attend meetings. If he has a bit of a conscience, he will do some of these things out of the goodness of his heart. The price for his freedom is insecurity. His services could be terminated at any time. These days, though, you can be fairly confident of having a pretty long run of Continuous Supply.

Six years ago I gave up full time English teaching to pursue other interests and, in order to pay the mortgage, did some exam marking and supply teaching. To my astonishment, there were numerous opportunities for both. The phone hardly ever stopped ringing. So many teachers were leaving and so many exams were starting up that one could select the most favourable options. I was even contacted to examine Drama, for which I have no qualification. I also, through a friend, became involved in Higher Education as a Learning Support tutor. Work with dyslexic students broadened my skill base and is still doing so. My experience in various comprehensive and private schools in the next few years gave me a unique perception of the way the Secondary School system is working.

The following diary is a record of two terms of Continuous Supply. It combines my experiences in two different schools. All the events happened, but not necessarily in the order or location described. The characters, too, are real, but the names are changed. I am influenced in this

regard by the teaching reminiscences of Edward Blishen who prefaced his accounts by saying, "I have re-cycled my memories in pursuit of truth to experience." He wrote in the days of 11plus selection and of the educational underclass which that system created in the 1950s and '60s. I tell an insider's story of the consequences of a return to that educational apartheid. The imposition of business ethics on our schools in the 1990s killed off much lively and sophisticated teaching especially in English and English Literature. The new underclass of schoolchildren are illiterate thanks mainly to the current "raising" of "standards". The diary explores this paradox.

What follows is an intensely subjective account of a year of teaching and yet it is very close to the truth that I know others have experienced. I am writing because I am angry. Angry about what is happening to our children and to the teaching of English. I do not blame the teachers. Far from it. It is the abuse of these dedicated and talented people that the descriptions in the diary record. The abuse is the outcome of a crippling assortment of targets, testing, clumsy inspection and league tables.

Two professors of education, Tony Edwards and James Tooley, - each on opposite sides of the political spectrum - have said in a joint article for the Times Educational Supplement:

*"...the current system of bureaucratic scrutiny, excessive testing and control by targets is nothing short of educational lunacy".*

I discovered this lunacy at first hand during 2002-3 and felt free to write about it whereas the full-timers, ground down by workload, had no spirit for revolt. A whole range of modern authors, including Philip Pullman, children's laureate Michael Morpurgo, Anne Fine and Michael Rosen, have raged at what is happening to English in our schools. They are ignored by the people who make policy. The damage resulting from successive government initiatives affects the able pupils and those with learning difficulties most of all. A co-operative middle range of students copes with more or less anything, but the clever individualist and the troubled slow-learner are jointly harassed to the point of despair. Whether you are a learning support tutor or a university professor, you will be noticing a worrying development in student behaviour and attainment that does not correspond to the ever-improving results that the national tests and exams persistently throw up. These extracts from a diary written in 2003 reflect attitudes to learning, perceptions of intelligence and the damage an assessment culture can do.

## Friday 28<sup>th</sup> March

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### Get to know the kids

Concentration on the Dyslexic students has made me focus on the learning process.

Little Adam reading his fantasy book moans with impatience over words with more than two syllables. He guesses (wrongly) moves on, does not understand the sentence and turns to the pictures. There seems no way to break the routine. Then he writes his own fantasy story. He enjoys creating names for places and characters. With encouragement, the names get longer. We then look at multisyllabled names in "Lord of the Rings". He is thus motivated to practise syllable segmentation and blending.

Nina's writing is simple. Too simple. How do we get her to use complex sentences and so-called "POWERFUL" adjectives? She talks well and I tape what she says and we listen to it. Her talk uses subtle and complex constructions. Listening to her talk makes her think about its reproduction on paper; on the use of commas to convey inflections and parentheses; on the sound effect of certain words, etc. All of us know much more about language than we can ever make academically explicit. The extent of the present EXPLICIT use of linguistic terms in teaching is now hindering Nina's progress in class. The teaching moves in the wrong direction: from abstract to concrete. She moves naturally from (concrete) practice to (semi-abstract) analysis, or re-drafting.

Brian, in the middle of a story about his dad, cannot spell "unfortunately". I write it on the board and ask him to divide the word into no more than three chunks. He does so like this: "unfor tuna tely"

Now he is told to think of a picture association for each chunk. The first, he says, is like "uniform" and he draws a jacket. He draws a fish for the second and a TV screen for the third. He is tested on the spelling three times during the session and he gets it right each time. So it is in short term memory. He just needs to practise a bit to over-learn it. The point is, the associations all had to come out of his brain NOT from me or out of a book. This is what made them memorable. He found a "hook" for the new knowledge and employing right-brained pictures (his strength) to assist left-brained language and sequencing (his weakness) meant that he had a real chance of success. So much of what he has to do in school is linear and he just cannot access it. Yet he is reasonably bright.

Each of these examples of teaching is “child-centred”. It centres the learning on the capacities, interests and knowledge base of the student. The luxury of one-to-one tuition allows for this quality of learning. We should be trying to transfer as much of this efficiency into the classroom as we can.

Back in 1960 John Holt was writing:

*“What we need to learn about our students is what they are and the way to do this not to read...long fancy lists of what is wrong with them, but to give them some freedom of thought, speech and action, as much as the school will allow, and then see what they do. They have to teach me before I can begin to teach them.”*

Instead

*“these children see school almost entirely in terms of the day-to-day and hour-to-hour tasks we impose on them.”*

It is tragic that we are back to that state today.

Early in the last century, Montessori wrote:

*“The adult has not understood the child or the adolescent and is therefore in continual strife with him. ...The adult must find in himself the error that prevents him from seeing the child as he is.”*

## Friday 4<sup>th</sup> April

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This week I covered a Year 10 class who had an essay on “Macbeth” imposed on them for their G.C.S.E coursework. Since this was a low ability class they were given a SCAFFOLD in the form of a cloze exercise. Here is the start of it.

Macbeth is .....of Scotland. He decides to kill .....and his son because .....and orders two.....to carry out the job. However, the .....escapes.

And so on. The kids copy and fill in. It will get them through.

Compare this with an exercise planned by Rex Gibson in his 1998 book "Teaching Shakespeare". It is demonstrating the opposition of words or phrases against each other - antithesis.

*"Through physical activity, students can discover the see-sawing, conflicting movement of the language. Individually they can weigh out each antithesis as if their hands were a pair of scales. Working with a partner, students can link hands and gently arm-wrestle back and forth as they speak the lines to each other to discover how the antitheses give the language a physical, to and fro, opposing movement."*

How insultingly mundane the first exercise is! What a sophisticated aspect of language is being explored in Gibson's lesson. The cloze "scaffold" is a form of cheating. Nearly all of the work on the "essay" is done by the teacher. Gibson's lesson is accessible to all students because it employs a kinaesthetic method to train the ear and instil a sense of the emotional/intellectual argument. The written exercise is a boring waste of time; the physical one a profound learning experience.

## Friday 11<sup>th</sup> April

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Went to fetch Brian from his drama lesson to have his learning support session with me. He is performing in a group mime set by Andrea. She had told them to select music to move to and then find inspiration from pictures or stories in newspapers, magazines or their own lives. Brian is big and clumsy. So are most of his mates. They are ready to perform and I sit and watch. Eerie ambient music fades up as they slide into a spot-lit area like hunted animals, their furtive movements graceful, co-ordinated and well-rehearsed. They dive and turn, transforming themselves and the space in which they work into a story told by dance. And work it is, for they are focused, disciplined, co-operative, inventive, unaccustomedly "neat in everything".

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

Andrea concludes the session by sitting down on the floor with them and saying:

*"I'm meant to evaluate these presentations, but I'm not going to. To evaluate them*

*would be to devalue them. They were all good in their different ways and you all worked hard. That's the point. So, well done everybody!"*

Drama has been a safe haven in the educational war zone. Untroubled by Strategies or interfering inspectors of Foundation subjects, it has flourished under the inspired leadership of people like Andrea. She has brought out the best in these awkward, moody adolescents and their reward is the self-esteem they acquire from executing a project like this over which they have so much choice and control.

## July 2003

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During the Summer Term, I visited the school to tutor the dyslexic pupils and take the odd lesson. As the exam pressure fell away along with the OFSTED panic, I noticed everyone easing up and becoming more effective. We became more attuned to the incomprehensible bustle or randomness of life, to a chaos that somehow worked. One could perceive how damagingly reductionist the written work schemes or rules had been. Brian is in trouble with the police, but boosted by his success in drama and his growing confidence with reading. School, in his case, is a nurturing, non-judgemental place. We are his friends and can therefore counteract some of the negative influences in his life outside school.

The Year 9s, freed from the S.A.T.s, followed an activity the department had been organising for many years. They visited Primary schools and wrote stories for 8 - 10 year olds. And waddya know? These kids who had jeered in assemblies and scorned their work for S.A.T.s were transformed into decent human beings: literate, amiable and exploring style with some subtlety. One young teacher developed her reading project. The 12 year olds worked in mixed ability groups to read and present reports on books of their own choosing. A variety of formats could be used for the presentations. As with the drama exercise of Andrea's the results were so different in kind, though NOT in quality, that assessment proved difficult. Class behaviour improved no end, though. Motivation soared and no merits were needed to bribe them into sustaining their efforts. Good readers helped slower ones and those with poor organisation skills copied and acquired some good practices from their tidy peers. Unfortunately, few of the Criteria for Assessment set from above could be made to fit the results of this triumphant activity. So it will not happen again.

We have become so dominated by assessment now that it is actually destroying possibilities for real learning.

## August 2003

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### Fail Better. The Exams.

Here are some extracts from essays in this year's English Literature G.C.S.E. exam:

1. *"...the poem consists of three stanzas and each stanza is a quatrain which is traditionally the most popular. The writer wants to give you the immediate impact of the language he is using. ...The first few lines give you the impression that the poem is very descriptive because of the language used. It deals with a lot of imagery and enjambment which gives you the impression that the language is very striking at the start of each line or stanza. The poet conveys enjambment well at the start of the poem."*

2. *"...it describes the oncoming battle and then finally the battle itself. It has 10 caesures in it. That is quite a lot for such a short poem, but they help to emphasize the sharp start to proceedings of war. It is not a slow poem. It has lots of onshament, as though the writer were writing it as it was happening..."*

3. *"The very descriptive parts start from the very beginning. This helped create a picture in my mind. This picture was of what was happening in the story. The picture tells me that the words used in this extract are powerful just by the way these images are created."*

4. *"Overall Owen's poem doesn't create any images, but is quite catchy mainly because it rhymes. The poem contains no similes, no onomatopoeia and at first glance I could not spot any personification either."*

One would like to think that comment on this nebulous drivel is superfluous, but these examples are only slightly more embarrassing than the majority of responses in this exam. What is happening?

Obviously, we have the naming of parts. At no point is the totality of the poem grasped. To refer to anything in a war poem by Wilfred Owen as "catchy" is to be completely out of touch

with its content and mood. Another essay I have seen dealing with the same writer says this:

*“The main aspect to notice in his poem is that it is a sonnet...”*

No, no, no! The main aspect to notice is the “pity of war” as Owen himself said.

These candidates (all from different schools) have been drilled in technique to the point where they have missed the point of literature altogether. Candidate 2’s descent into a Jabberwockyesque collection of half-understood literary terms is particularly sad because there is an indication that he/she has something to say. “Sharp staccato proceedings” sounds rote learnt, but the candidate can obviously feel the moment by moment energy in the poem. Use of the subjunctive in the last line hints at more potential literacy than he/she can muster here, too.

Candidates 1 and 3 deploy the ubiquitous phrase “very descriptive”. Ingratiating students often compliment Great Authors for being “very descriptive”. What a hollow term it is! The first sign of a candidate’s lack of engagement.

Neither of these candidates can break out of a tornado of language. “Descriptive” words and the terms Imagery or Enjambment spin round and round obscuring the subject matter they are supposed to reveal.

And Candidate 4’s series of negatives succeeds in making the poem itself disappear altogether.

In each case, the rote learning of figures of speech has stifled the candidate and betrayed the poem.

What are the teachers doing?

Let’s see.

J.B. Priestley’s “An Inspector Calls” is a popular text at G.C.S.E. It has a good mystery to “hook” the reader/audience and its sledgehammer dramatic ironies are easily accessible for 15 year olds. The moral/social content is also very straightforward.

Here is an essay worksheet a teacher devised for Year 10:

**EXPLORE THE DRAMATIC IMPACT OF THE FINAL  
SEQUENCE OF "AN INSPECTOR CALLS".**

**TASK: to write a close analysis, using quotes, of the play following the  
Inspector's exit that demonstrates the following:**

- 1. The impact of the "inspector's" visit on the characters and how their various reactions develop following his departure**
- 2. The way that J.B. Priestley uses language and dramatic technique to gradually reveal ambiguity about the nature of the "inspector" and the fate of "Eva Smith/Daisy Renton" and the implied symbolism of these characters.**
- 3. The comment that J.B. Priestley is making about the society in his times (The 1940s) and the time the play was set (1912)**
- 4. The dramatic effect of Mr. Birling's final speech.**

I had to cover the lesson set here. The kids were totally at sea. Clearly, the teacher had focussed on targets and not at all on the pupils. The target boxes on language, dramatic technique and social/historical context had all been ticked and the pupils left to pay hurried lip service to each.

And they had to be fed the answers because in their confusion, fear and anger they closed their minds. The results were similar to the exam answer extracts.

The essay title is quite a stimulating one. Kids mind-mapping that would come up with some interesting ideas, I've no doubt. But they don't get a chance here. Not only are all the ideas provided by the teacher, they are so random that they make us forget the title, which asks only for a close analysis of the scene. The instructions cover two social contexts, metaphorical speculations and personal response. In other words, three separate essays are required to do justice to them. Bewildering abstractions ("ambiguity", "symbolism") interrupt the reading of the question and confuse us further. As one boy said to me,

*"I've got so many things going around in my mind, I've forgotten everything."*

An essay should be coherent, not fragmented. I'm not sure I could get started on this one.

The teacher is frightened. Frightened he/she is not fulfilling the requirements of the course. Fear has made him/her stupid. Look at the piling up of abstractions in the second bullet point. It screams panic. The same panic that fuelled to proliferation of “activities” in the Geography and History classes. The desperation and stupidity are passed on to the pupils who then dumb down, lose initiative and become resentful.

Look again at the inane parroting of abstract terms. This moving from the abstract to the particular is quite common now. I covered a history lesson for 12 year olds which set the following task for studying the Spanish Armada:

**Describe the reasons why Philip II sent the Armada. Consider:**

- **Religious reasons**
- **Economic reasons**
- **Political reasons.**

I had to explain each. The “economic” were simply Drake's pirate raids on the treasure-carrying Spanish galleons. The politics were so confused with the religious issues that one did not know how to separate them. One boy said quite seriously, “I didn't know they had politics in them days.”

Why use the abstract terms in the first place? The three point list fragments a response to the question which ought to be simple to comprehend. It also falsifies the subject matter. The three reasons are not separate but interconnected. 12 year olds can easy cope with the facts involved in this categorical complexity, but breaking it down in this way actually confuses and inhibits them. Wouldn't it be daring and good to change the title from “Describe the reasons...” to “Tell the story of why Philip sent the Armada”. All the different “reasons” would come into play, weaving in and out of each other in the way that a story allows.

In an English lesson I covered, 11 year olds had to worry over the “Opening, Development, Conflict and Resolution” of a story without even thinking about its content. Once again, the teaching started with concepts instead of concrete or emotional details with which the children could identify. The story itself was good. The children were bored, but set about retrieving the information required to fit under the headings. Once again, they needed a lot of help. Since

when did force-feeding concepts lead to higher standards in education?

Children see life in close up. They assemble detail. They don't abstract or look for an overview until much later on when they have acquired a ground-base of knowledge. All the above exercises are inviting them to conceptualise before they are qualified to do so. They are inviting them to practise the kind of fakery or "bullshit", as the American's say, that we saw in the exam extracts.

Which is why when I was in the middle of marking 400 exam answers that were no better than pallid regurgitations of teachers' notes, I cheered when I came to the front page of this answer booklet:

CANDIDATE: Jonathan ..... ENGLISH LITERATURE G.C.S.E.

*"Why do you have to study books? Why not music lyrics or videos or good plays?"*

*"I'm worst at what I do best and for this gift I feel blessed. A little child I've always been and always will until the end. God save the Queen and her fascist rayesem that made you a mourone. I do not agree with the capisits system which has to have stupid exams to decide my future. Anarcky in the UK!"*

In the box for the examiner's initials he had written one word: "USELESS".

He wrote no more and got 0 for the exam.

He was, of course, in the wrong. He was a naughty boy. He should have taken his work and the exams more seriously.

But I would really like to meet him, shake his hand and say,

*"JONATHAN, YOU FAILED BRILLIANTLY!"*

**October 2003**

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## Negative Capability

I love teaching poetry. It is the shortcut to developing language sensitivity, punctuation and the greedy use of the thesaurus. After music, poetry is our purest expression of feeling, which is why Jonathan's appeal for song lyrics is natural and right.

I teach poetry. I don't teach Poetry. The latter is self-conscious Literature, which the kids see as difficult, dead and boring. But poetry is different.

John Keats wrote that an achiever is one who,

*“ is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”*

Actually, children do this rather well, because they are naturally creative. They delight in what is quirky and revel in the mysterious or fantastic. These enthusiasms often thrive in poetry. Teacherly Frameworks and Scaffolding, on the other hand, often look like “irritable reaching after fact and reason”. I believe also that the abstractions used in current teaching obliterate the sensitivity to beauty that Keats considered paramount.

We discuss poetry too much. Instead of assessing the poems as the exams require, we should be describing our experience of them. A bit like Jack was taking about in the pub back at Easter. We should read lots and keep the technical jargon to a minimum.

I had the opportunity to do this last month when, as a supply teacher, I visited another school and took over a class of 14 yr. olds (Year 9) for several weeks. For this second bout of Continuous Supply, I decided to risk going my own way even more than before.

They were a cynical, disruptive lot. I wasn't going to repeat the nightmare of the previous Year 9s and force an essay out of them. I collected dozens of poetry books, old and new. Inspired by Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney's “The Rattle Bag”, I produced no categories, themes or time frames for the poems, only a random collection. The kids were to create their own individual anthologies and justify their choices. I also asked them to bring in any poetry or song lyrics they liked.

Initially, there was both chaos and resentment, with comments like, “Why do we HAVE TO DO

poetry, anyway?" The chaos was understandable. Let off the leash after prolonged tethering, they would inevitably abuse freedom. One has to wait for this to play itself out. It will do, but one must have the nerve to hope, to leave kids alone to find their own way into the task, even when they ask you to do this for them. They are taking on some responsibility for their own learning. So they must "live in uncertainty" and solve their own problems. By all means show them "stuff" (Mike Rosen's excellent word for Poetry), but with diffidence, not as a recommendation. Above all, hide the process from the authorities. Eventually, surprising things happen.

In this case, two boys got hooked on war poetry. Another brought in a volume of Robert Graves' verse and a girl discovered Eliot's book on cats. A few thought they were cheating when they selected some VERY short poems, but then had to spend time researching Haiku. The enthusiasm was not unlike Dick's class when they did the garden design, or Andrea's drama. One sensed a transformation in ethos. The quality of the general concentration felt deeper and usefully spontaneous. We all got on better, in every sense. It seemed to fulfil some Montessorian principles in which the teacher creates an ordered, stimulating environment in which the children move around making their decisions over what they learn, thus being led to maturity and responsibility through the constant exercise of choice.

I asked them all to do presentations. The first few were disappointing. The kids were so conditioned into describing the form of the poem in tedious detail that actual RESPONSES were missing. It was only when we got onto pop song lyrics that the discourse livened up and they struggled enthusiastically to articulate their reactions to the text. To use an old fashioned term, their sensibilities were awakening. It was then that we started to feel the confidence to live in uncertainties and doubts, to debate responses, to look for words that best fitted our feelings. We did the same with Robert Graves, admitting when we did not understand something and commenting on how the language made us feel, and the effect the WHOLE poem had on us.

Because genuine questions had been asked, MEANINGFUL use of a few technical terms could occur.

Over the weeks, behaviour, attitude and motivation all improved.

Writing their own poems should occur after this immersion in the reading. THIS is the time to explore a range of techniques, NOT during the reading as some directives insist (under the heading Read as Writers). To learn techniques for writing while you are reading will lead to

muddle and frustration. It's boring because it is irrelevant to the reading process. But figures of speech, rhyme schemes, etc can be an important part of the creative process. The pupils rough out first thoughts or random feelings and then look for repetitions or patterns in their own jottings that indicate a focus. Then they decide with the teacher on a form and style appropriate to what they want to say. I've seen sonnets to football teams, powerful odes about the environment and ballads about playground dramas come out of this process in the past.

Unfortunately, I was moved on to cover another class before we could get into the swing of the writing. The regular teacher went back to the text book.

Even so, I would like to remind all English teachers of an aspect of our teaching that has been driven out of our classrooms because of the extensive and disruptive testing regime. To introduce this, I wish to quote from one of the Great Authors and Poets on our Approved List to join the other Great Authors who have been gratifyingly unanimous in supporting my little polemic. This is Ted Hughes from "Poetry in the Making".

*"(When teaching) I assume that the latent talent for self-expression in any child is immeasurable. This is very likely to be false,.....but by showing to a pupil's imagination many opportunities and few restraints, and instilling into him confidence and a natural motive for writing, the odds are that something - maybe not much, but something - of our common genius will begin to put a word in."*

I like the tentative but active faith conveyed by the hesitant, qualifying syntax of the last section. It is a living in uncertainty that reflects real life in a way that Targets and "Standards" do not. This should be our starting point. Hughes says teachers',

*"words should not be "How to write" but "How to try to say what you really mean" which is part of the search for self-knowledge..."*

So, focus not on a target style but on the content within the child's brainstorm. Then a process of drafting, teacher intervention and re-drafting can get going. This is very close to the Formative Assessment process that London University's research by Black and Williams found to be so successful. It is very hard work, but rewarding for everyone and drudgery is kept to a minimum.

It also does not produce the false opposition of success and failure that our present culture encourages. Failure is integral to the creative process, and if we are led to believe that failure and condemnation are the same thing, then we cannot make progress as “independent learners”. Like the school refuser whose persistently unmet targets become a matter for shame and destroy his self-esteem. Or the sensitive teacher who, frozen by the headlights of OFSTED, shuts down her intelligence in the classroom.

Robert Graves wasn't demoralised because his “best friend was the waste paper basket”. He knew that in writing we get it wrong far more often than we succeed. We are only defeated if that is allowed to bother us. We certainly stand no chance of becoming one of the “risk-takers” that our country, it seems, so badly needs. James Dyson - inventor of the famous vacuum cleaner - said about inventing anything:

*“You make lots and lots of mistakes until you hit upon the surprise of getting it right.”*

Exactly.

And so with writing.

And so, quite often, with teaching.

And so instead of choking under the pressure of targets, grades, merits and strategies, students and teachers must regain their autonomy to explore, make mistakes and have the chance that freedom offers to perceive options, make choices and act responsibly.

Then we'll all be dancing.

## **Bibliography**

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I would like to recommend the following books.

### **“How Children Fail” - John Holt. (Penquin)**

A brilliant book, but one that should no longer be relevant. Holt perceived schoolchildren in the 1950s as being “bored, angry and confused”. We have returned to those times.

**“Use Your Head” - Tony Buzan. (Ariel Books BBC)**

Using mind maps and other methods to facilitate memory and organisation, Buzan has liberated many students otherwise thought to be unacademic.

**“Teaching Shakespeare” - Rex Gibson. (Cambridge)**

A handbook for Drama and English teachers promoting an active approach to discovering Shakespeare. Not unlike methods used by Cicely Berry at the R.S.C.

**“The School Report” - Nick Davies. (Vintage)**

A powerful exposé of the condition of our schools and the disastrous flow of state initiatives.

**“Does Education Matter?” - Alison Wolf. (Penguin)**

A careful, detailed account of the failure of vocational initiatives in education. Useful for revealing the thinking behind government educational “reforms”.

**“Teaching Through Poetry” - George Marsh. (Hodder & Stoughton)**

A lively and little known book about using poetry in the classroom. Highly recommended.

**“Poetry in the Making” - Ted Hughes. (Faber)**

Still a fine little book on poetry and the creative process.

**“The Schools our Children Deserve” - Alfie Kohn. (First Houghton Mifflin)**

American experiences of how “tougher standards” have lowered real educational performance. A book absolutely relevant to our own experience and yet it is unpublished in this country.

**“Beyond Discipline”, “The Case Against Standardised Testing”, “Punished by Rewards”. Other books by Alfie Kohn.**

Get them!

**“Emotional Intelligence” - Daniel Goleman. (Bloomsbury)**

A famous book and important for understanding the range of intelligence we have and need to develop.

**“How Dyslexics Learn - Grasping the Nettle” - Saunders & White. (Patoss)**

An accessible and useful book about Dyslexia which has implications for all learners.

**“Reading with the Troubled Reader” - Margaret Y. Phinney. (Scholastic Publications)**

Immensely useful book on literacy, published in 1988. The methods detailed in it are being re-discovered now after ten years of neglect. Government directives in the '90s made us forget about studies like these.

**“The Rainbow of Desire” - Augusto Boal. (Routledge)**

An account of the therapeutic and social value of Forum Theatre. A good book for those of us who want to see people liberated, empowered and socially conscious.

**“Did I hear You Write?” - Michael Rosen. (Andre Deutsch)**

A book from the 1980s about teaching poetry and one that takes its cue from Auden's definition of poetry as “Memorable speech” and shows how important it is for writing to start from the oral culture of the child.

**“Schools of Hope” - Terry Wrigley. (Trentham Books)**

A well informed account of what has happened to schools in recent years. It usefully sets it all in a political context and offers real inspiration as its title promises.

**“Another School is Possible” - Terry Wrigley (Bookmarks Publications & Trentham Books)**

More of the above. Excellent!

**“Montessori Today” - Paula Polk Lillard . (Schocken Books)**

A fine introduction to one of the greatest educational practitioners of all time. She was scientific, down-to-earth and successful in dealing with all types of children, including those with learning difficulties. Montessori schools in American inner city areas today have flourished. Her emphasis on observing developmental stages in a child's growth and providing education suitable to each stage should redirect our focus onto the child's capacity to choose intelligently and learn most efficiently at his or her own pace.

It is possible that the youngsters themselves will force us to do this in the end. At the moment, they are, without realising it, creating a powerful disruptive force against the imposed National Curriculum.