Robin Eardly Whitburn

Institute of Education, University of London

A thesis submitted for examination for the Ed.D. Degree 2007

Action Pedagogy

- an Action Research study in Successful Pedagogy for African-Caribbean male students in a U.K. secondary school

An abstract of the thesis:

The achievement of African-Caribbean boys in UK schools has been a cause for concern for decades, and there is still considerable evidence that they are not achieving as well as their contemporaries. This study seeks to listen to the voices of students themselves in order to fathom pedagogical approaches that engender educational success for Black male students. The study has been inspired by American literature that focused on successful pedagogy with African-American students. Recent trends within the UK have moved schools closer towards proscribed practices within classrooms, and the 'behavioural objectives' approach has assumed hegemonic authority. This study uses a philosophical typology from Hannah Arendt to critically examine the nature of pedagogy in secondary schools, and suggests an approach in 'action' pedagogy that would bring greater success to Black male students.

My students' discussions produced three key factors for such success: caring teacher-student relationships, going beyond the curriculum; feedback and 'push'; and teacher expectations; they also produced characteristics of a prototype of a successful teacher for such young men. These ideas were combined with Arendt's to produce two types of pedagogy: *labour* and *action*. The latter is suggested as most helpful to Black male students, with its emphasis on agency for students and teachers; dialogue and co-construction of knowledge; and creativity and diversity in the curriculum that values students' cultures, by both ethnicity and age. The conformity and accommodation demanded by a *labour* pedagogy, typified by the current technicist agenda, is unlikely to see many Black male students thrive.

The importance placed on student-teacher relationships, at the heart of *action* pedagogy, will need teachers to pay as much attention to the values and attitudes that they convey towards young Black males as they might to the competences of their lesson plans and behaviour management strategies. Professional dialogue will be needed to help teachers handle the ambiguities of 'cool' adolescent behaviour and the call for care and encouragement in learning, but teachers and young Black male students can find creative paths to academic success and personal development through *action* pedagogy in UK secondary schools, where they have so often stumbled and failed along the way.

Contents

The thesis is dedicated to Amari,
that he might always enjoy the 'action'.

Chapter 1

<u>Introduction</u>

Pedagogy

As a professional educator and academic, I have often been frustrated by my colleagues' preference for a particularly non-intellectual and technical approach to our work as teachers. Moreover, the firmly established framework of accountability and performativity that schools now work within seems to confirm the superiority of a compliant practical mode for teachers, with no room for intellectual discourse and debate (Ball, 1999). In this context, the use of a term like 'pedagogy' can be met with mild teasing, if not ridicule, by a teacher's colleagues, as I have often experienced. It appears to intellectualise a professional practice for which teachers are held to account in very non-intellectual modes: "Does the school give good 'value for money'?" is a key question of school inspection; "Have you met your target in examination performances, or not?", an essential question of teacher's performance management, allows no room for debate. Teachers may be afraid that reflecting on 'pedagogy' may draw them unnecessarily away from attention to technical details that could fine-tune performance and secure higher 'scores', both of their students and of themselves. I think we should resist these technicist pressures, and hold fast to the notion that as we are seeking to lead young people into realms of intellectual discovery, we should be modelling that in our approach to our own work; teachers must be demonstrably avid learners and critical thinkers.

Therefore, I have chosen 'pedagogy' rather than 'teaching and learning' as the focus of my research, because I feel, like Lingard, et al (2003), that it helps to emphasise the inextricable connections between 'teaching and learning', or in the current fashion 'learning and teaching'. No matter which way round the two words are placed, the single noun can encapsulate so much better the holistic nature of what occurs in classrooms, and indeed within any educational context. It does also suggest that a teacher is presenting himself, or herself, as an intellectual, rather than as a mere technician, which may run counter to the prevalent trends in educational policy (Ball, 1997, 1999) but is surely essential for the task of

educational action research. This accords with Lingard et al's championing of the idea of the teacher as 'public intellectual' (2003, p. 405).

This short study does isolate pedagogy from the context of social issues and structural inequalities, which so clearly make a decisive impact on the lives of the African-Caribbean male students who are the focus of my professional concerns. This is not to deny the importance of these systemic effects, but the scope of this contribution to the field has been narrowed to what actually happens within classrooms. My action research considers aspects of the circumstances of these generally underachieving students that I can directly influence as a professional educator. It is, furthermore, my own pedagogical practice as a teacher that will be the forum for the research, and the subject of much of the personal knowledge created through the study. I can thus aim to fulfil O'Hanlon's call that

> ... the purpose of action research is to generate personal knowledge about changing ourselves as professionals through the redefinition of the situation in the examination of the evidence. (O'Hanlon, 1995, p.259)

Pedagogy is the metier of my profession and I am undertaking action research into it in order to give myself a 'voice' in the realm of educational change and development, but also to enable my African-Caribbean students to have a voice as well. My attempt to find a voice is going to be done with others, and I have chosen my companions to be students rather than teachers. This is because I think African-Caribbean students will have an essential insight into their cultural experience that cannot be grasped by professional observation:

> Because if thinking is crucially a matter of finding an individual voice it is also about understanding oneself in relation to the cultural traditions within which one finds oneself; it involves, therefore, thinking in dialogue with others. Other people's thinking, based on their experience, is a key resource in enabling us to think creatively about our own...
> (Winter, 1998, p.67)

I share Winter's conception of educational action research as a collaborative venture that will produce what Ball calls "edifying conversations, rather than truth-generating epistemological efforts" (1997, p.249). Teachers who can unselfconsciously embrace an exploration of 'pedagogy' can hopefully learn more, with me, of how African-Caribbean male students can flourish in British secondary schools.

Ethnicity

Not all my students are the focus of this study. I have spent almost all my career working in mixed multicultural secondary schools in a major metropolitan area of the United Kingdom. I have taken the step of isolating a particular group, the African-Caribbean boys, because their experience has been found to be inequitable in both British and American high schools (Majors, 2001, London Development Agency, 2004), and I believe that teachers can make a difference to the dismal general pattern. Whereas 'pedagogy' offends the anti-intellectual approach to schooling, this focus on one ethnic group offends the 'colour-blind' view of multiculturalism. Most schools with numbers of Black[1] boys have been prompted to consider their needs, but intervention is typically generated from *outside* of the school's personnel, with mentoring schemes or specific Black male support groups (Majors et al, 2001, Warren, 2005). Many schools seem to prefer to take a deficit-approach and provide some form of compensatory programme that could overcome the perceived disadvantages they face. There may or may not be any attempt to connect what happens in these support sessions with what takes place in the students' classrooms. Indeed, in some cases (Warren, 2005) they are seen as counter-hegemonic projects, helping Black boys *cope* with schools rather than enabling them to *flourish*.

I think this isolation of the support for Black students from classroom pedagogy appeals to the sensitivities of teachers who do not want to consider the possibility that some teachers might work better with Black boys than others. This would compromise the 'colour-blind' notion that 'all students are treated the same' which lies at the heart of many simplistic equal opportunities school policies. Acknowledging the success of a teacher with a particular ethnic group might imply that less successful colleagues were 'racist'. This is understandably threatening, but it does not have to be construed in that way. A much fuller consideration of affirmative action ideas and exploration of equal opportunities issues in teachers' professional development could help to give teachers more confidence to look to themselves and their colleagues for pedagogical answers to the needs of their

---

[1] I have usually referred to African-Caribbean male students as 'Black', following the students' own regularly used terminology, as have other writers on these issues (Youdell, 2004).

Black male students. My own view of equality can easily embrace affirmative action, since it accepts the difference between 'generalised' and 'particular' respect (Endres, 2002). This important distinction can help us to see how equality and diversity can become facets of a complex approach to social justice and fairness within society, and it is discussed further in Chapter 3 of the study[2]. The aspects of successful pedagogy that are identified through this study may not apply peculiarly to Black male students. It is most likely that, as in Ladson-Billings' work of a similar nature, educators will say, "that's just good teaching" (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and so it might be. The issue would be to ensure that more of it is made available to African-Caribbean male students in our secondary schools, and with a greater sense of urgency, since the problems of underachievement have been pronounced for several decades. This would focus our attention on the resources available within the school itself, and prioritise working with the people in our classrooms, rather than relying on a remedial 'fix' from outside.

The focus of this study always arouses some interest from educators, and I am often asked, "Have you found anything surprising?" I wonder if they are looking for some hitherto unnoticed quirk of Black students that could quickly ease a long-standing problematic situation for the school system and for society generally? It is hardly likely to be so simple. In focusing on pedagogy with African-Caribbean male students I have staked a claim that it is possible and necessary for teachers to be more successful with Black boys, and we can challenge stereotypes and assumptions of failure. We embark on what Raymond Williams calls "a journey of hope":

> It is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begins to alter. Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope. If there are no easy answers, there are still available and discoverable hard answers, and it is these that we can learn to make and share. (Williams, quoted in Halpin, 2003, p.127)

'Hard' answers are likely to be difficult, and quite possibly painful.

My own induction into issues of race, equality, and education came in the 1980s in the London Borough of Brent, and the assertive, sometimes aggressive, stance of those in charge of the agenda sometimes brought pain

---

[2] See page 32.

and anguish. This was decried as unfair and even unprofessional, with some justification at times, yet there remained the likelihood that for the privileged professionals in a society that had systematically oppressed particular social groups, in this case identified by ethnicity, remedying injustice might have to cause some distress. I hope that professional educators can learn about improving the lives and learning of African-Caribbean male students without much pain, but change most certainly has to occur, and that is likely to be, at best, uncomfortable for many involved.

<center>Chapter 2</center>

Literature on Pedagogy and Black Students, and a Philosophical perspective

Introduction

Although there is an increasing body of literature in the UK on pedagogy in secondary schools (Mortimore, 1999; Moore, 2000), and a long-standing tradition of research into issues surrounding the school experience of Britain's black student population (Coard, 1971; Stone, 1981; Brandt, 1986; Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Blair, 2001; Gillborn, 2002; Rhamie & Hallam, 2002), rarely has there been any attempt to link these issues and consider the operation of teaching and learning in classroom practice with Black students in particular. Mortimore's collection of articles on pedagogy in different stages of UK education (Mortimore, 1999) concludes by acknowledging the paucity of such work and the need for much more research in this area. However, there is no mention of ethnic minority education in their list of key pedagogical questions for the future. Godfrey Brandt's much earlier work on 'The Realisation of Anti-Racist Teaching' takes a radical approach to curriculum and pedagogy (Brandt, 1986), but the strategies he suggests say nothing about relationships between teachers and students in individual classrooms; what Brandt is concerned with is principally curriculum structures, resources, and teaching materials. The book contains examples, but these are illustrative of curricula, not of the pedagogical voice of teachers and students.

Blair and Bourne's (1998) practical research approach to the question of successful pedagogy in multicultural schools does show a commitment to incorporating the voices of all the different parties involved in success: teachers, students, parents, and the local community. However, the perspective is that of the whole school, rather than individual classrooms. Their study is clearly positioned within the School Effectiveness paradigm, with a 'checklist' of several pages in the initial summary that outlines the successful practices of five *effective schools*. Blair and Bourne do not consider the individual classroom level in their

analysis, and there is no investigation of the particular learning experiences of Black students and their teachers.

Nonetheless, there is a wealth of literature in the Unites States that explores the classroom experiences of African-American students, and sometimes males in particular, and so it is to this American literature that I have turned for insight and inspiration for my own research into Black British students. The first half of this chapter explores a range of pieces from this work, whilst the second half moves into the field of philosophy to give some insight into the processes of pedagogy in UK secondary schools in recent times. The particular philosophical focus is Hannah Arendt's work on human activity, which will be used to provide a typology of pedagogical approaches. In later chapters there will be reference to further literature that can shed light on pedagogy and Black students; this will be introduced alongside issues that arise in the analysis of the data.

American Literature on Successful Pedagogy with Black Students.

There have been a good many attempts by American scholars to consider the educational experiences at school of African-American students (Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1990; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Hilliard, 1992; Polite, 1993; Noguera, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1998; Murrell, 1994). The underlying issue for these scholars has been seen as the failure of the American education system to promote equally successful school experiences for its Black youngsters as it has for many of their white contemporaries. These commentators' studies have been based on a clear acceptance of the need to consider African-American students as a particular group, defined in terms of their ethnicity, with further dimensions of the issue stemming from their gender and social class (Garibaldi, 1992). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) have considered the clash that frequently occurs between the culture of the African-American students and the education system, whereby aspects of the paths to academic success are seen by many African-American males in terms of 'whiteness', belonging to the dominant social groups of European descent. Ogbu has recently reconsidered his earlier thesis (Ogbu, 2004). He found this to have been misunderstood by many, but, nonetheless, still powerful as a way of explaining current realities for African-American male students at high

schools. He makes a particular point about the distinction between the ambition for academic success, which is often shared by both Black and white male students, and the behaviours often expected of students who seek that success, which Black males often reject:

> I have generally found that there are relatively few students who reject good grades because it is "White."… What the students reject that hurt their academic performance are "White" attitudes and behaviors conducive to making good grades… In Oakland, they include talking proper, studying a lot or doing homework everyday, having mostly White friends, taking hard/advanced placement courses, acting like a nerd, taking mathematics and science classes, spending a lot of time in the library and reading a lot. (2004, pp.28-29)

This indicates the struggle that may face African-American male students who consider serious academic endeavour at high school. The idea that Black people as a minority group should subdue their own culture and mores in favour of the host, or majority, culture and hence *accommodate* with the latter, has been prominent in approaches to race relations in both the UK and the USA (see below).

Accommodation and African-American students

Accommodation within the American cultural clash is often a very one-sided affair, whereby the African-Americans are expected to sacrifice their cultural identities for the sake of securing success within the 'system'. This process could amount to 'assimilation', as far as 'people of colour' *can* assimilate into *white*-dominated echelons, whereby the former would lose their unique identities in favour of assuming the culture of the latter. Furthermore, schools can demand this level of accommodation when their curriculum and pedagogy are rigid and unresponsive to cultural interchange[3]. A number of studies have shown that such inflexible accommodationism is unlikely to bring about success for the majority of Black males, and a more responsive relationship between students and their teachers is needed (Price, 1998; Majors & Billson, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Murrell, 1994; Treisman, 1992; Hilliard, 1992).

Price (1998) looks into the experience of six young African American men who decided to stay in high school and complete their graduation: the

---

[3] This experience has occurred in many multicultural societies around the world; Bishop and Glynn (1999)discuss the harmful effects of such assimilationist processes on Maori children in New Zealand.

more educationally successful members of the community. Price finds that, while these young men were accepting of the dominant forms of success that their schools presented to them, they were not uncritical of the processes they were being put through as members of their African-American community. As Price observes:

> .. while the young men might have accommodated aspects of schooling, they simultaneously critiqued the process they accommodated.
>
> (Price, 1998, p.445)

They all followed elements of conforming to the requirements that a school system and teachers imposed on them, yet they also saw their future academic success as a way of defeating any negative stereotypical views that society might have of them as African American young men. A simple accommodationist approach could not meet the needs of these and other Black male students, since they were acutely aware of the negative, racist, elements of the power relations and social position in which Black people find themselves in the USA, and insisted on attempting to overcome them:

> Not everything in school, however, was meaningful to them; they often seemed alienated from others and encountered seemingly insurmountable challenges along the way... Their voices of critique and discontent became a strand of their identities in relation to their teachers, peers, friends, and families. This discontent with and critique of power relations and social position counters the idea that school passively socializes students into their roles.   (ibid, p.468)

What they all seemed to seek within their school experience was an active, positive, relationship with their teachers. However, not all of the six young men could find this in their schools:

> Marcus, Dwayne, and Zakeev sought caring and nurturing connections with their teachers, but didn't seem to experience them. Their experiences seemed to contrast with those of Jeff, Shawn, and Rashaud.
>
> (ibid, p.465)

Price's work indicates that pedagogy plays a significant part in the success that African-American males achieve in high school, and that teacher-student relationships play a key part in the contestable experiences that they face within the education system. He certainly confirms the need to consider Black male students as a group with particular needs.

'Cool Pose' – an alternative to accommodation

In a wider investigation, psychologist Richard Majors looks at the particular realities of life in urban America for young African-American males

(Majors & Billson, 1992) and how the characteristics of Black male identity and culture might impact on their experiences in school. He considers ways in which Black males try to cope with life in a society that has habitually considered them in negative ways, and has often oppressed them. One of these survival mechanisms is the 'cool pose':

> Developing the cool pose is one way that the disenfranchised black male struggles to survive in the face of diminished rights and blemished self-esteem... the purpose of posing and posturing being cool is to enhance social competence, pride, dignity, self-esteem, and respect. Cool enhances masculinity. Being cool also expresses bitterness, anger, and distrust toward the dominant society for many years of hostile mistreatment and discrimination. Cool pose helps keep the dominant society off balance and puzzled and accentuates the expressive self. It is in this context that we define cool pose as a creative strategy devised by African-American males to counter the negative forces in their lives.
> (Majors & Billson, 1992, pp.7; 105)

Accommodationism, Majors suggests, is rejected by many African-American young men in favour of an *oppositional* stance that presents them as strong and independent characters in society. This suggests that Black male students are less likely to submit routinely to school cultures that emphasise conformity and submission to authority. Importantly, Majors makes it clear that he does not want his notions to become the basis for a deficit model of Black male adolescents. He is concerned to develop positive responses to these aspects of Black male identity, conduct and behaviour, and to avoid negative notions that position Black males as pathologised underachievers and deviants. In his own rejection of an imposed accommodationist approach, Majors urges responses that can acknowledge the self-expression of Black males at the same time as successfully including them in society:

> Helping professionals understand how and why some black males use cool behaviors and helping blacks see where contrasting definitions of behavior may occur could enhance race relations. Educators... should have an in-depth knowledge of how the black male is likely to define his masculinity; cool pose is an integral part of that masculine identity.
> (*ibid*, 1992, pp. 115-116)

Majors' initial work focuses on the conduct of young black males, but does not explore the *teacher* responses that might encourage *success* rather than perpetuate tension and struggle for these youths. If, as Majors suggests, understanding the 'cool pose' is essential for these young people's advancement, we still need to know more about how the pedagogical relationship should develop in school so that young Black males can establish

themselves within a culture of success. In this regard, another African-American researcher, Gloria Ladson-Billings, has provided useful perspectives through research that focuses on successful teachers of African-American children (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1998).

Culturally-Responsive Pedagogy as an alternative to accommodation

Ladson-Billings' approach echoes my own concern, that so little attention has been paid to *successful* work with generally underachieving, disadvantaged, students, and her work is also avowedly motivated by a concern for social justice. Rather than starting with a particular theoretical framework, her three-year study of eight successful elementary school teachers in Oakland, California, empowered the teachers themselves to help to develop theories about their own success. As Ladson-Billings says:

> ... my work required a paradigmatic shift toward looking in the classrooms of excellent teachers, *through the reality of those teachers.*
> (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.208, *emphasis added*)

In her final composite theory, which she calls 'culturally-relevant pedagogy', Ladson-Billings has produced generalisable features of successful classroom practice that are rooted in the micro-level work of the individual classrooms she studied. The theory focuses on three core areas, two of which concern the *conceptions* of these successful teachers, of self and others, and of knowledge. The third is 'the manner in which social relations are structured by culturally relevant teachers' (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.215).

One of her four features of successful 'social relations' is that "teachers demonstrate a connectedness with all of the students" (ibid., p.216). This idea of *connectedness* is linked strongly to the idea of 'community', and Ladson-Billings stresses the importance in their successful school experience of the students' home community with its particular cultural values and experiences. Underlying Ladson-Billings' theory there is, again, a clear denial of the efficacy of assimilation and accommodation as the means of promoting success for African-American students. Indeed, three of the eight teachers she studied were white Americans, whose pedagogy had to be made relevant to the contrasting culture of their students; *i.e.* the *teachers* underwent the accommodating, rather than the students.

Interestingly, two of the three had clear cultural links with African-Americans, with many close friends in the African-American community (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp.28-29), which would clearly make the task of connecting with their students much easier. The challenge of whereabouts a teacher can acquire a culturally diverse understanding and connectedness with students outside of her own community is an important one, and even more important when the dimension of youth culture is added to diversity.

While Ladson-Billings has much to say about the particular connectedness of her successful teachers to *African-American* culture and community, she says little about the particular connectedness with the African-American *youth* culture. Her elementary school teachers would not encounter as complex a set of identities and issues within their classes as teachers working in *high* schools with Black adolescents. The younger children share much of their parents' culture, and the examples of communal sharing in these elementary classrooms, often around food and family celebration, would not fare as well for teachers working with more independent-minded adolescents. Maud Blair's work in the UK (Blair, 2001) confirms the importance of considering both aspects of Black secondary schools' students' lives if schools are to succeed with them. In discussing the work of one such successful school, Blair says:

> There was thus an understanding that black students were not only adolescents with all the problems of adolescents, but that they were adolescents who were situated differently from their white peers both within the culture of the school and of the wider society... it was necessary to see and appreciate the complexity of their experiences as young-black-males/females. (Blair, 2001, p.36)

Although elements of Majors' *Cool Pose* may be evident even in Ladson-Billings' elementary-school youth, the challenges of accommodation *versus* self-expression and Black identity are, one would suspect, more likely to be critical in the lives of older students. Ladson-Billings does stress the importance of mutual respect in her culturally-relevant pedagogy, and the idea of a partnership between the students and the teachers, and this is likely to be of increasing importance in high school classrooms, as students' independence and self-identity develop.

**Responsive teaching that accommodates African-American learning styles –
two Mathematics classrooms**

Researchers have also considered the needs of African-American
students in the learning of particular aspects of their curriculum, and some
have found that changes in pedagogy can make a difference to learning and
achievement. In a micro-level study of just one African-American secondary
school classroom[4], P.C.Murrell concludes that there are particular approaches
to Mathematics teaching that are more likely to promote higher achievement
by Black male students (Murrell, 1994). The students in his study had a poor
record of achievement in Mathematics, yet Murrell found that they were
learning well in particular contexts. He suggests that African-American males
have distinctive approaches to learning, particularly in terms of the *discourse*
of classroom 'maths talk', which are different from the intended outcomes of
their teachers in terms of the kind of learning process that would ensue from
the classroom experience. Teachers, he suggests, should develop *responsive*
approaches in their pedagogy that take account of those particular traits
within their African-American male students, so that the latter are enabled to
learn the new ways of learning and talking. It should be the teachers that
accommodate the particular preferences and needs of the Black students,
rather than the latter being required to conform to a traditional pedagogy.
'Responsive teachers', Murrell argues:

> ... recognize and capitalize on the frames of discourse within which
> African American male students routinely operate. These include:
> (1) a question-posing, teacher-challenging approach,
> (2) a preference for request-for-information teacher inquiries,
> (3) an eagerness to show off the information they possess,
> (4) a penchant for extended explanations, and
> (5) a preference for "getting over" rather than admitting ignorance.
>
> (1994, pp.566-567)

These factors seem to emphasise a form of independence and authority
on the part of these students within their class, with the successful teachers
accommodating this, rather than emphasising the need for the Black students
to do the accommodating within the often teacher-directed pedagogy of the
Mathematics classroom. The pedagogical approaches identified by Murrell
place the African-American male students in a focal position within the
teaching and learning processes, and give an importance to *dialogue* within a

---

[4] The focus of Murrell's study was designated a 'middle school' classroom, but the age of the
students would place them within the UK's secondary school population.

particular subject discipline that often seems to give scant regard to talk as a pedagogical imperative.

Murrell's study focuses on the *underachieving*, so-called 'low-ability', Maths students. But what of 'more able' African American males who *are* achieving in Mathematics? Are the latter more capable of accommodating to the requirements of the teachers' preferred discourse, or do they still pursue their own style, but more successfully? An earlier study of more academically successful African-American mathematics students suggests that their particular pedagogical needs continue even into undergraduate years (Treisman, 1992). Treisman conducted research at the University of California, Berkeley, into the learning experiences of Black and Hispanic Mathematics students in College Calculus courses. These were clearly successful high school Maths students, but their record of achievement at college was dismal. Treisman organised pedagogical interventions that responded to what he and his fellow researchers had identified as particular learning approaches that the Black students needed for success:

> In response to the debilitating patterns of isolation that we had observed among the Black students we studied, we emphasized group learning and a community life focused on a shared interest in mathematics. We offered an intensive "workshop" course as an adjunct to the regular course. (1992, p. 368)

As in Murrell's study, part of the key to success for the African-American students is establishing the right kind of dialogue in the learning process. In the college calculus case, this is dialogue amongst the students themselves; however, it is dialogue that still depends upon the initiative and impetus of their teachers. Treisman's work confirms the idea that accommodation with traditional pedagogical modes is not likely to bring success for African-American students, but that an appropriately responsive pedagogy reaps the reward of academic achievement.

Teachers' responsiveness or students' accommodation?

Murrell's study suggests that when their teachers pay particular attention to a pedagogy that responds to African-American learning preferences, many African-American students see significant improvement in learning and achievement. The idea that African-American students have

particular learning preferences that ought to be taken into consideration by their teachers has also been emphasised by Asa Hilliard (1992). He is pessimistic, however, about the usual way in which teachers handle these pedagogical challenges:

> Unfortunately, educationalists tend to treat the stylistic mismatch between some students and schools as a student deficiency, that is, as a problem that requires students to change. As a result, we fail to see the potential for enriching the school experience for all children. Moreover, we fail to see that the traditional school style has severe limitations.
> (1992, p.373)

Hilliard argues that although students are capable of accommodating to a variety of educational practices in schools, teachers should seek to reform their work to bring greater success for their African-American students in particular. He stresses that behavioural and learning styles are particularly crucial in building pedagogical relationships:

> ... the ability of a teacher to establish rapport, and the desired teacher/learner bond may be affected by the way in which incongruent behavioral styles are managed. (ibid, 1992, p.375)

My own research into successful pedagogy in multicultural high school classrooms in the UK (Whitburn, 2002) also suggested that teacher-student connectedness, or rapport, is vital. Achieving such rapport will be very difficult, if not impossible, for teachers without an understanding of the cultural and behavioural styles of Black students, so that the latter becomes critical for successful pedagogy.

Trans-Atlantic lessons in pedagogy for Black students

All the works discussed in this chapter (Price, Majors, Ladson-Billings, Murrell, Treisman, and Hilliard) explicitly focus on Black students and their perceived needs; there is no embarrassment about such exclusiveness, and there is no 'colour-blindness' that would prefer to see all students as the same. The latter is seen by Blair, et al, as a serious weakness of recent government approaches in the UK:

> (The government is) continuing to champion a simplistic and crude 'standards' agenda that is mostly colour-blind and likely to do little or nothing to lessen existing 'race' inequalities. (Blair, et al, 1999, p.13)

Since there are so many more Black people in the USA, and they form a much higher proportion of the total population than in the UK, there may have been a more urgent need to focus on the educational achievement of African-American students. Moreover, in the inherently mixed society of the American

'Melting Pot', the notion of accommodation is more easily challenged[5]. The hyphenated-identities of Italian-, Irish-, Native-, Hispanic-, and African-Americans *et al.*, emphasise the particularities of these groups, whereas British responses to ethnic differences have not always been as affirming, and prefer a homogeneity, albeit an increasingly 'multicultural' one. The literature on African-American students discussed here points emphatically to the development of pedagogical approaches with a particular focus on Black students, and it may be that UK teachers need to consider similar responses if the achievement of our African-Caribbean males is to improve dramatically.

African-Caribbean males in the United Kingdom will not share all aspects of African-American manhood, but there are many aspects of Major's 'cool pose' identity that are evident in the lives of young British Black men. The globalisation of much of African-American culture will have contributed to this, but it is also possible that there are shared aspects of the lineage of peoples of the African Diaspora that are connected with African culture and development (Hale-Benson, 1986). Majors has been working recently in Britain and researched the education of Black British youngsters (Majors, 2001). His book is entitled "Educating *our* Black Children" (emphasis added) and includes contributions from a number of British and American scholars. The introduction contains references to both American and British works that Majors uses to support his comments on Black British male students' experiences. Unfortunately, few of the articles in the book have a specifically trans-Atlantic perspective. An exception is written by three Americans who look at Rites of Passage programmes (Alford, McKenry & Gavazzi, 2001), and they do attempt to discuss the Black British male experience alongside their main focus on African-Americans. However, there are very few explicit links made between the British and the American experiences, although there is an implicit assumption that programmes that have worked in the USA will also meet the needs of Black British males.

I share the assumed embrace of Majors' title, and consider that the studies on pedagogy and African-American students discussed in this chapter give some insight into teaching and learning approaches that would succeed in

---

[5] Indeed, there is a new metaphor used by a number of Americans to emphasise a rejection of simple accommodationism: the 'Salad Bowl'.

English secondary school classrooms. Their rejection of accommodationist notions, and their emphasis on dialogue, respect for culture and difference, and the centrality of teacher-student relationships, point clearly in the direction of a responsive pedagogy that may conflict with some of the recent developments in English secondary schools that I refer to in the next section. Further reading and research into a possible philosophical model of pedagogy have made this clearer and my own research model draws particularly on the work of Hannah Arendt, incorporating a critique of recent trends within English state education. It is to Arendt's ideas that I shall now turn.

An analysis of Pedagogy based on the work of Hannah Arendt, and recent trends in English Secondary schools.

Towards a technicist pedagogy in English secondary schools

There have been critical developments within English schooling in the last few years that have brought pedagogy under the same kind of centralised bureaucratic control that took hold of the curriculum and assessment in schools after the 1988 Education Reform Act (Barber, 2001). Whereas the National Curriculum started out with an avowed commitment to shun any prescriptions for teaching and learning approaches in individual classrooms (DES, 1989), the accountability agenda which accompanied it, and which has come to dominate public life in general, has clearly favoured the hegemony of the behavioural objectives model for pedagogy (Davies & Edwards, 2001). The latter is seen as more easily monitored and can accommodate a bureaucratic concern for the achievement of specified ends by the cheapest and most 'efficient' means possible (Dunne, 1997).

The use of 'target-setting' for student and teacher achievement, not only in terms of annual or termly reviews, but on a lesson-by-lesson basis for the purposes of observations under school self-review or OFSTED frameworks, has, arguably, encouraged a technicist and managerial approach to pedagogy (Fielding, 2001). Authority is lodged in these supposedly objective targets, which might seem to be mutually beneficial to both teacher and student but which promote a rigid conformity to narrowly defined, measurable, aspects of

learning (Ross, 2000). Furthermore, this approach limits the opportunities for freedom and expression within pedagogical relationships in the classroom (Moore, 2000).

Joseph Dunne has produced a critique of such developments (Dunne, 1997) and has used the work of Aristotle, supported by modern philosophers, to make clear the paucity of technicist approaches to education. He highlights the distinction that Aristotle made between 'phronesis' and 'techne' as types of human knowledge supporting practical roles in society corresponding to the Aristotelian notions of 'praxis' and 'poeisis' respectively. *Poeisis* is a productive activity that seeks practical means to achieve predetermined ends, and *techne* encompasses the skills that would be required to carry out the planned activity. Pedagogy can be reduced to the standard of *poeisis* when it emulates Paulo Freire's account of the 'banking' approach to education:

> In which students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor...
> in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far
> as receiving, filing and storing the deposits. (Freire, 1996, p.53)

The didactic approach of objectives-led lessons can all too easily see the teacher becoming a technician who selects appropriate means to effect predetermined ends. Dunne would like to see a rejection of the purely technical approach of the behavioural objectives model, and seeks an alternative in *praxis*. *Praxis* is much more flexible, responsive and creative, with a continual interplay between ends and means. Its essence is a creative dialogue between human beings, which will incorporate reflection, whilst maintaining a clear commitment to certain values, including respect for others and the search for truth in community. The people involved in *praxis* are so much more than producers or technicians, and their knowledge, *phronesis,* is similarly not a set of notions or skills to be used in a process, but intimately a part of the process itself. People take on *agency* in bringing about the actions of *praxis*.

Hannah Arendt and her typology of human activity

One of the philosophers Dunne draws on in his thesis is Hannah Arendt (1906 - 1975) who provides him with an analysis of human activity that subordinates behavioural types to a higher concept of 'action'. I believe that

Arendt's classification can be usefully applied to understandings of pedagogy and classroom practice, and that this will provide an understanding of students' school experiences that will illuminate ideas of successful work with young African-Caribbean males. Arendt produced a three-part typology of human activity in her political philosophy, linked closely to the Aristotelian ideas discussed above (Arendt, 1998): labour, work, and action - only the latter of which, she argues, can fulfil the requirements of political activity. If Arendt's notion of 'action' is to be applied to pedagogy, as opposed to her less emancipatory or non-empowering notions of 'labour' and 'work', this will demand a conscious critique and transformation of some of the current trends in teaching and learning to which schools are under increasing pressure to conform.

Teaching as 'Labour'

Applied to pedagogy, Arendt's idea of 'labour' (1998, pp.7), as a description of activity that is geared to survival and the meeting of basic needs, would seem to describe quite aptly the notion of 'delivering the curriculum' in standard lesson format, within the context of a 'colour-blind' society that sees no difference between individuals, and treats all 'the same'. The need to guarantee a certain level of minimum acceptable standards for classroom practice and learning, in a context of increasing teacher shortages, has encouraged the formulation of 'teacher-proof' lessons that are set out in terms of clearly defined learning objectives and lesson activities that can be 'delivered' by relatively inexperienced, and even less qualified, staff.

The role of the students in such lessons would be passive and subordinate, if not actually supine. The direction of the lesson would be determined in advance, leaving no room for serendipitous excursions into areas that the teacher and students might want to explore. If students were to attempt to find their own 'voice' within the lesson, their behaviour would be deemed disruptive, loud, and deviant; behaviour management would then be the issue for the teacher, rather than pedagogical and curricular development. Accommodation within the predetermined learning framework would be essential if students, and indeed teachers, were to see success within this pedagogical approach.

Teaching as 'Work'

Less gloomy, for the teacher, might be Arendt's notion of 'work' (1998, pp.7, 136), which introduces an element of creativity in terms of the production of an artefact that would be left behind after the human activity finishes. This could be applied to the idea of teachers themselves producing the model lessons that are then shared between colleagues, through physical contact within schools or 'online' through virtual networks on the Internet. This can give opportunities for acknowledging and celebrating diversity with artefacts from different cultural backgrounds, even using the blending of cultures in a new integrated product. Nevertheless, the use of predetermined formats, even where they come from inside the particular school, places a considerable degree of authority in the learning process beyond the reach of the individual teacher and students alike. Following the predetermined lesson plan can become the essence of the task for teacher and students; there is little sense in which the teachers and students would participate actively and freely within their own classroom to decide their own learning models and milieus.

Even when the lesson plan is designated as a 'working document', it can very easily become an inflexible artefact. This can be most welcome to teachers who are increasingly required to set pre-determined 'targets' for their students, even for specific lessons, and then assess how far such targets have been met, again even during the course of one lesson. If someone has previously organised a lesson into clearly outlined 'objectives' in a rigorous plan, the teacher is not only relieved of much lengthy work, but can also be much more certain about the likely scenarios in any given lesson, and might find time for all the required assessment. Nevertheless, there is no certainty regarding the students' learning in this set approach.

The role of the students in the pedagogy of 'work' is hardly less subordinate than that of 'labour', although the teachers could involve the ideas of students in the initial creation of the scheme and lesson plans. To be successful, the students still need to accommodate to the teacher's predetermined plans for learning. The much quoted nostrum that "we don't have to re-invent the wheel", which can justify, for teachers, the use of

predetermined schemes and lesson plans, can often be a common-sense pragmatic justification for the removal of student and teacher freedom to pursue Arendt's 'action' of plurality and natality within the classroom.

Teaching as 'Action'

Arendt's 'action' flows from the uniqueness of human beings, whom she sees as essentially equal, but also quite distinct:

> Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men (sic) were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct... they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. (Arendt, 1998, pp. 175-6)

These distinct humans get their uniqueness from birth, making natality and plurality key twinned concepts in her analysis of human action. Natality emphasises beginnings and a creative process, as well as a uniqueness about events, and plurality affirms the diversity of the outcomes. *Action* is distinguished from the behavioural approaches of 'labour' and 'work' by its unpredictability and the promise of new diverse ideas, which emerge from natality and plurality:

> It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before... The fact that man (sic) is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable.(ibid, pp.177-8)

A key feature of 'action', as Arendt defines it, is *speech*, which she sees as essential for revealing the unique ideas of each individual within their action. A person's talk communicates much more than information about what is being done at the time; our speech reveals our own individuality in terms of our personality and character, not our function within a human system:

> This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is.. is implicit in everything somebody says and does... Without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character and becomes one form of achievement among others. (ibid, pp. 179-80)

The pedagogical importance of speech in revealing identity was emphasised in a previous study of mine by one of my research group teachers:

> Bevel: Key characters are those whose voices are being suppressed in many lessons, whereas certain teachers will welcome their voice... *They can be talking about a mathematical problem, but they're still talking about themselves.* (my emphasis) (Whitburn, 2002, p.46.)

A pedagogy that corresponded to the Arendtian concept of 'action' would look upon the uniqueness of a class of students and their particular teacher, and see learning as a process of discovering and creating new things, particularly through spoken participation of all those involved. Accommodation would not be the dominant mode for the students; they would be actively involved in the creative pedagogy, and learning would be the result of the *integration* of the ideas of both students and their teacher. Of course, this makes the processes of learning far less predictable and less susceptible to external control.

A pedagogy that sees the teacher and her/his students as partners within the learning process, with opinions and views about that process that can be equally valid in progressing it, would be very different from notions such as 'curriculum delivery' or indeed 'model lessons'. This *democratised* classroom would be unpredictable, interactive, dialogic, and flexible, rather than didactic, regimented and dominated by the teacher. Authority in the learning process is not considered the preserve of the teacher. Nevertheless, the knowledge and wisdom of the teacher have to be respected and acknowledged by the student, giving her a special position within the relationships between the learners in the room. In accepting the voice, however authoritative, of her students, the teacher cannot abrogate the responsibility that she has to further their academic progress, and must be able to make and execute judgements about the ultimate suitability of the pedagogy being pursued. Nieto confirms this within her call for both teachers and students to be learners in the successful multicultural classroom:

> The assertion that teachers can and should become learners is in no way meant to lessen their duty to teach. Nor is it to imply that there are equal power relations between teachers and students in the classroom, or that students' and teachers' knowledge have equal status in society. These are romantic notions that, taken to extreme, relieve educators of their responsibility to teach... (Nieto (1999), p. 142)

Nonetheless, the teacher recognises a parity of esteem and some sharing of authority within the teacher-student relationship, particularly in terms of the knowledge about the learning processes that are, or are not, taking place.

An 'action pedagogy' would be dependent on the teacher-student relationships within the class and their communication, and not principally

determined by the teacher's prior planning of activities and preparation of resources. As Nieto again confirms:

> Although teaching is often approached as a technical activity – writing lesson plans, learning effective methods, for teaching algebra, selecting appropriate texts, developing tests to assess student learning – anybody who has spent any time in a classroom knows that teaching and learning are primarily about relationships.   (Nieto (1999), p.130)

This would call upon a much wider range of skills and abilities from the teachers, embracing wider approaches to notions like intelligence, perhaps considering Howard Gardner's theories of Multiple Intelligence (Gardner, 1993), and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1996). However, the preparation of teachers outlined in the Teacher Training Agency's 'standards' approach seems to privilege conventional notions of intelligence in its emphasis on subject-knowledge and a technical skills-based approach to pedagogy (Ball, 2001). The indisputable need for 'curricular' preparation for the classroom has unfortunately eclipsed any thought of the more nuanced 'pastoral preparation', which would focus the teacher's attention on building the teacher-student relationships, both inside and outside of the classroom itself, that would be essential for successful teaching and learning in Arendt's 'action' mode (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Buskist & Saville, 2001; Whitburn, 2002).

It was my intention that my research into successful pedagogy would actually be a part of a pedagogic process itself, and that it would be 'action' in this Arendtian sense. My students would work with me as a research team, conversing for more than a year about the issues, and our dialogue forms the core data of this thesis. The overall approach is phenomenological; I am taking the students' perceptions as versions of reality, and I will then marry their insights with this Arendtian model of pedagogy to prepare my conclusions. In this thesis the Arendtian ideas have appeared before the research data, but in the unfolding of the research process I encountered Arendt's work during the course of our research dialogues. Arendt brought illumination and inspiration to thinking that was already underway, and had not supplied an initial model to be 'tested' on the students. The methodology and epistemology of my work are fully discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Epistemology:
The Action Research approach in this study

As has already been indicated, the research behind my own thesis is an exploration of pedagogy within the complex world of multi-ethnic urban education in Britain. It has a strongly politicised context, which was evident to the students themselves through their encounter with a newspaper piece on the failure of white teachers to meet the needs of Black boys, described below, and in their attendance at a subsequent conference on Black children in London schools (Abbott, 2002). There are major contentious issues surrounding the focus of the study that could not possibly be considered in depth through one research piece. This work will not provide the 'Holy Grail' of a universally applicable solution to the needs of African-Caribbean male students in high schools. It is a case-study (Stake, 1998) that attempts to investigate the perspectives of a group of young men and women on the question: "What are the features of successful pedagogy with African-Caribbean male students in a UK secondary school?" and then apply the outcomes to the future pedagogical practice of their teachers. The data are exclusively qualitative, and consist of the record of discussions within the research group. Furthermore, the case is a personal one for me as a researcher, since the research group are my own students, and their discussions are most likely to include my own pedagogy, implicitly or explicitly. This was an opportunity for me to not only make a contribution to the field by working with the views of students themselves, but also to discover more about my own success as a teacher of Black male students.

Nevertheless, the vision for this research takes it beyond the confines of my own teaching and professional development; I do want to see this as a contribution to social change and the improvement of schooling for African-Caribbean males in other school contexts. As such it can be properly placed within the emancipatory research paradigm, according to the key features outlined by Robson (2002):

- The focus is on the lives and experiences of a traditionally marginalized group – Black males.
- The asymmetrical power relationships between teachers and Black male students are analysed.
- The links between the research and action for change in schools are considered in their political and social contexts.
- The research makes use of an emancipatory theory based on the work of Hannah Arendt.

(based on Robson, 2002, p.28)

The partnership that I attempt with my students in this research is also a feature of emancipatory action research, as emphasised by Meerkotter (Davidoff, et al., 1993):

> ... an emancipatory approach to action research would also be about the democratisation of social situations and... the purpose thereof ... would be to bring about change in a wider social context as well. (1993, p.1)

There were certainly limits to the democratic possibilities of the research situation, since the group were still my students in the context of a timetabled lesson, as discussed below; however, there was unquestionably an emancipatory intention behind the process. The outcomes of the process may not usher in fully the ideals of equality and empowerment, but that does not bar the work from admission to the paradigm.

Arendt's 'Action' and Action Research

As an 'action research' project (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990), this work seeks to improve practical situations in the classrooms of practising teachers. It is rooted in a belief that teachers can improve the achievement of African-Caribbean male students in secondary school by approaching their pedagogy in particular ways. It sought the means to a desirable end, but I chose to develop my understanding of pedagogy *through* pedagogical encounters, rather than through scientific observation of such encounters. In this, Hannah Arendt's notion of 'action' (Chapter 2) was not only relevant to the development of my understanding of pedagogy, but also highly significant in the evolution of my research methodology.

As Coulter(2002) has noted, it is difficult to place much 'action' research in the realms of Arendt's *action*. The 'ends' of much educational action research are predetermined, albeit desirable, goals and the research

process is merely the means to those ends; this would place the research in the category of educational *labour* or *work* research, as opposed to *action*. It would be possible for the research to be genuinely within the realm of action, however, if the notions of *plurality* and *natality* were central to the process. African-Caribbean students should not be the *objects* of my research, but rather such an integral part of the process that they have an agency akin to *natality*: the analysis of the data and the theories generated would be mine, but I attempted to preserve the agency of the students within the process. It was also important that recognition was made of the diversity of views and identities within our communities - *plurality* - and that the knowledge that emerged from this research was created through interactive dialogue between students and teachers. For Arendt, *action* is the process that can bring freedom, and so her processes of natality and plurality should become highly significant in this research; they would enable the African-Caribbean male students to not merely affirm the outcomes, but be agents of them. Coulter puts it like this:

> Only when ends and means are enmeshed in one another, when action is an expression of natality and plurality, can humans be free...
> Conceptualising human action outside the usual ends-means relationship by aiming at the expression of human freedom and responsibility dramatically affects the research-action relationship...
> Arendtian action research instead aims at better understanding experience, creating consistency (however limited), generating knowledge and understanding (which will always be in some ways inadequate)...
> (Coulter, 2002, pp. 200, 203)

The research I would undertake was to be a part of pedagogical activity with African-Caribbean male students, as well as an investigation into such pedagogy. Students and teacher would become the researching and the researched, since my own professional work with these students was implicitly, and later explicitly, included in the idea of 'successful teaching and learning with African-Caribbean males'. This removes the possibility of a dichotomy between ends and means, and unites the pedagogic practice with research and with theory.

It might be difficult to engender the freedom and equality within the research since the students would be used to my authoritative position with them as teacher over many years, but I was optimistic that I could avoid the bind of Bourdieu's 'pedagogic authority' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) because

of my own pedagogic style with the students. Bourdieu saw Pedagogic Action as inseparable from Pedagogic Authority, and would suggest that, as a teacher, I am tied to the 'system' that ensures that young people are controlled and inducted into the social status quo. However, I did not believe that my position would necessarily stop my students from being able to talk honestly about their pedagogic experiences. Creating a discussion group format for the research, as opposed to specially constructed interview or focus group scenarios, was designed to help promote a genuine participatory partnership, and, as discussed below, reflected my own dialogic approach to pedagogy in my classroom. Tayko and Tassoni (1997) comment on the greater openness of dialogic teaching:

> ... with a dialogic pedagogy, teachers often find themselves more honest than they usually are with their students, more vulnerable than they need to be in classrooms where lecture notes and multiple-choice exams prescribe a class's discourse. (Tayko & Tassoni, 1997, p.3)

The student-centred focus and greater honesty of my pedagogy would help me to engage in action research with my own students. The research discussions were to confirm that the students saw their classroom experiences with me as offering them positive and hopeful pedagogic relationships.

The Context of the Research and the Research Group

1. The Multicultural School and issues of Equality

Bishop's High School is a seven-form-entry mixed multi-ethnic Church of England comprehensive school for students aged 11-18 years of age, situated in a major metropolitan area. Bishop's draws its students from a large area of the metropolis, and has links with some forty to fifty feeder primary schools. It serves a wide range of ethnic communities, with the school population being divided between the three broad ethnic groups quite evenly, with approximately 25% Asian, 35% Black, 30% Caucasian students, and 10% of Mixed heritage. This type of micro-level school diversity is of course quite different from the tendency in the American context to have culturally diverse schools made up of a large majority of students from one or two ethnic minority communities, usually Black and/or Latino; in the USA, the legacy of *de facto* segregation remains. There have even been positive moves to create specialist schools for ethnic minority groups as a means of achieving

school improvement for African-American students. However, that approach has received little favour in the UK, and although there may be some community schools that serve a fairly homogeneous ethnic minority constituency, within a clearly *multi*-ethnic school it could be problematic for teachers to focus uniquely on the needs of *one* of its ethnic groups. Such a focus could be construed as unfair special treatment that would not square with the school's, and British society's, declared commitment to equality. This was evident very recently in the debate provoked by a television programme from Trevor Phillips, the head of the Commission for Racial Equality, in which he considered the merits of separate teaching experiences for Black male students. As Mansell and Lepkowska (2005) have noted, there was little public support for the idea.

Simplistic notions of equality seem to underpin many teachers' understandings of 'equal opportunities' in schools. There would be many who would still begin with the nostrum that "I treat everyone the same", and would consider this 'colour blind' approach as a sound basis for multi-ethnic harmony; reconciling equality and diversity is assumed unproblematic: the former subsumes the latter. However, this has been shown to be a weak and naïve response to the complexities of multicultural education (Delpit, 1995; Endres, 2002). Endres makes clear the distinction between *generalised* respect that underpins human equality and *particularised* respect that can refer to differences within specific ethnic communities that warrant attention. He declares that:

> ... aspiring to treat students equally is an insufficient ideal for an educator, given the need to respond to students both interpersonally and educationally in ways that acknowledge their differences. Attention to difference is especially important if we take for granted the central idea of multiculturalism that cultural differences should be respected, cultivated and, in some cases, celebrated. (Endres, 2002, p. 175)

A specific research focus on African-Caribbean male students and their achievement is a mark of particularised respect for an ethnic minority group that is still showing special needs in terms of equality of access and outcomes within the English education system (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; London Development Agency, 2004).

Nonetheless, within the school community at Bishop's, focusing attention on only one of its broad ethnic sections, particularly in a research study that would involve the direct participation and perspectives of its students, would need to be broached carefully; to engender a sense of bias and discrimination could create ill-feeling that could mitigate against the very successes I wanted to explore and celebrate. I decided that I would therefore have to work with older students within the school, who would be more able to understand the nuances of both generalised and particular respect, and with students who knew me well and might have fewer doubts about my integrity as a teacher who espoused equality and yet was focusing attention on just one group.

2. The Research Group

The research group was to be a class of post-16 students in my own secondary school, where I was Deputy Headteacher at the time, and where I had been teaching for ten years. The students constituted a timetabled tutorial group and were scheduled to meet once a week for an hour's lesson on Friday mornings. Academic tutoring and preparation for University applications were the key part of the group's functions. Over the course of the two-year 6th form programme, it was the personal and social educational aspects of the group's work that dominated our meetings. The research work took place intermittently over a period of a year, interspersed with all the other academic and personal issues that arose, such as exams, part-time jobs, individual student difficulties, and careers/higher education preparation. The latter discussions were important and always paramount; if something of personal urgency arose amongst the group I would always give it preference over the research discussions. I felt this was not only the right priority for my role as their tutor, but also in the best interests of the research, so that the students never saw it as something I regarded as more important than my attention to them as individuals. During the course of the year we had eleven meetings that focused uniquely on the research, although we had other moments of discussion around the themes. The full lesson meetings were about one hour long, and were concentrated in four clusters: in March, May, and October, and then the following February/March.

The group was made up of twelve students: ten males and two females. Six males and one female were African-Caribbean; one female and two males were Asian, and there was one white male. The majority of the group had been at the school throughout their secondary school career, so they knew each other well. Many of them had been students in one or more of my classes, in History or Mathematics at G.C.S.E., and all but one were in one of my Advanced level groups in the two subjects. The two young women, Hina and Amma, were particularly strong characters, good friends, and, unlike many of their fellow female students, shared a strong interest in sports with the young men in their year group. I think this gave them added acceptance with the males and more insight into the male perspective. Moreover, both Hina and Amma had older brothers who had been at Bishop's, and Amma's brother was my research assistant for the study. These two young women would give a valuable female perspective on Black male schooling as well as helping to ensure that the research was not seen as an exclusive male project, a notion which might have compromised that balance between generalised and particular respect in a mixed secondary school context.

Appropriately, the majority of the participants in this research would be African-Caribbean male students, since they were the majority of the tutorial group itself. This was partly a result of students' timetabling arrangements, but it was also the result of preserving continuity of tutoring from their Key Stage 4 years (14-16). A number of the Black male students had been in my 'academic tutoring' group through those earlier years, which met each half term to consider students' general issues around academic work and progress. This was therefore a group of students with whom I had worked closely for a number of years and they could be in no way merely *objects* of my research. One of these black male students left the school during year 12, to pursue courses at college, and two other Black male students joined in year 13.

Having qualified for Advanced level courses and embarked on them at school, these young men were understood to have become themselves successful African-Caribbean male students; so they had been, and were still, participants in the phenomenon that I wanted to understand. They were not

students from privileged backgrounds, and they had direct experience of challenging circumstances and inner-city life. Like Price's African-American young men (Price, 1998), these students would have accommodated to the work of the school system, but they were also strong characters, who had maintained their identities *qua* Black urban males. In some sense, they might be considered to come under Sewell's category of 'conformists' (Sewell, 2004)[6], and they were definitely not 'rebels'. However, they had not abandoned interest in Black urban culture and styles (*ibid*, p.104); my knowledge of them and their popular position with peers, and younger students, confirmed to me that they were certainly seen as 'cool' (Majors, 1992) by other students in the school. Nor would they fit Sewell's notion of 'innovator':

> (Innovators) accepted the goals of schooling, but rejected the means... At the heart of 'innovation' is a conflict; you are positive about the wider values of education but you cannot cope with the schooling process.
>
> (Sewell, 1997, p.7.)

These Black male students had clearly coped with the schooling process, without having to lose their culture and collective identity. They were therefore well placed to consider the possibilities of positive pedagogy within the school system. They would not be able to present a blueprint for success with *all* African-Caribbean male students, but they could show that generalised pictures of disaffection and underachievement could be challenged from within schools themselves.

Furthermore, as students who had succeeded in my own classes, it was implicit that they would be asked to reflect on my teaching as well as that of my colleagues. My research was not to be a scientifically objective investigation of teachers' classroom practice, but rather an exploration of pedagogy that included my own professional work. They were responsible and mature students who could cope well with the necessary ethical protocols of such discussions, and they were scrupulous in maintaining the anonymity of my teaching colleagues. The discussions were of teaching situations, not of particular persons, and although they would sometimes discuss the relationships with particular teachers, their names were not revealed,

---

[6] Tony Sewell (1997, 2004) attempted to categorise the Black male students at a London secondary school, using 4 groups: conformists, innovators, retreatists, and rebels.

although their subject area would often be mentioned as relevant. Nonetheless, this protocol was not applied to my own work with the students as a classroom teacher and tutor; it seemed unnecessary, and indeed unhelpful to do so.

Since this research is concerned specifically with Black males and their achievement in school, it might be argued that the group should comprise exclusively of Black male students. This would privilege the voice of the generally disadvantaged group, and hence provide a greater chance of 'empowering' them, despite the limits to such empowerment (discussed below). This might be appropriate if the Black male students were taught in their own classes, or the school itself consisted predominately of Black students. However, these Black male students experienced teaching and learning in mixed settings, by both gender and ethnicity, and the understandings of their experiences are better created in the same context, so the research group reflected that. Nonetheless, the Black male voice was always prominent. The dialogues were generally dominated by six students: Hina and Amma; and four of the African-Caribbean young men – Clinton, Wayne, Marvin and Mahmoud, the former three being of Caribbean heritage, and the latter African. The others played an important part in creating the sense of community and support within the group, and contributed to the written exercises described below. They were naturally quieter in their manner and I didn't take their reserve as signifying a lack of co-operation or interest; their conduct was no different in my academic classes.

The Students in the Research Group - summary

Gender & Ethnicity	Names
African-Caribbean Female	Amma
Asian Female	Hina
African-Caribbean Male	Clinton, Mahmoud, Marvin, Wayne Jerome (left at end of year 12) Mark & Melvin (joined in year 13)
Asian male	Eric, Suresh
White male	Rees

The venue for the lesson should be mentioned here, because it was not in fact a conventional classroom, and this contributed to the greater freedom of expression that the students enjoyed. The lessons took place in my rather large office, with students seated in armchairs or padded stack chairs, usually used for teacher meetings. This gave our gatherings more of the feel of university tutorials than secondary school lessons, and I think this helped to enhance the authority of the students compared to their ordinary teacher-student encounters. Moreover, the group and I organised some form of refreshment every week, which also gave a certain ease and comfort to our working relationship. All of this helped to enhance the status of the group and confirm the respect I held for them.

3. External stimulus materials for the research group

Although it was clear to the students that this was my doctoral research work and that I was interested in their perspectives on Black male achievement through their experience at school, the initial focus of the work was external to Bishop's High School. We considered some of the current media representations of issues affecting Black male students at schools in the UK. A particularly stimulating activity was the use of a television documentary at the start of the project, which we used to begin the focus on the experiences of African-Caribbean males in London schools (BBC, 2002). This was a programme that looked at Pierre, a boy who lived in our region and was failing to achieve at school. He was then taken out of his local environment and placed out in a more rural environment with a middle-class Black family, and attended an independent school. Some of my students actually knew the young man. We used him as a way of beginning a special focus on Black male experiences, rather than having to look directly at our own school from the start. This created a useful distance for the group that helped establish their perspectives. It also made the initial focus an external problem to be 'solved', viz. the right environment for Pierre, rather than directly looking at the students' own experiences. This could more easily avoid the danger that the students would think they had to endorse the classroom work that I had done with them over the years. When they brought that into the discussion, it would be because they wanted to use it as an illustration of what was relevant to the problem to be solved, not because I

had asked them initially to reflect on their own classsroom experience at Bishop's High School.

Another useful external prompt was the discussion in the media with Diane Abbott, M.P., who had made emphatic statements about 'schools failing Black boys' (Abbott, 2002). Her negative descriptions of teachers prompted strong reactions from the students. Although their initial reaction was to object strongly to her ideas, on reflection they could think of instances to support her position. This was again a good tool to help the group position themselves in the overall debate on Black male achievement, before considering their own experiences. Three of the Black male students accompanied me to a conference that Ms Abbott hosted in Westminster, called 'London Schools and the Black Child'. Abbott's uncompromising style brought issues of racist teachers into the discussion, so that the students themselves could choose to echo those, or qualify them, rather than have to initiate a possibly controversial position. From these discussions around external evidence, we started to discuss the experiences of schooling for Black males at Bishop's High.

Further Methodological and Epistemological issues: Empowerment and Dialogue

Students' Voice, Empowerment and Anti-Racism

This research partnership between a teacher and his, or her, students might be seen as 'empowering', but there are always, of course, significant limits to the potential of such research for promoting 'freedom and emancipation' for the students. As Troyna, and others, have pointed out, it is all too easy for researchers to conflate the notions of 'voice' and 'empowerment', and assume that 'giving a voice' is necessarily empowering (Troyna, 1994). The study examines in what ways the students consider the role of the teacher to be important in the achievement of Black males in secondary school, and they were given an 'authoritative' voice (Hadfield and Haw, 2001) in developing an understanding of successful classroom practice. However, there was no assumption that the power and authority of teachers would be relinquished as a result of the research, nor that decisions about

teaching and learning would be placed directly in the hands of the Black male students themselves. Teachers will be encouraged to consider the results of the research, respect the views of the students, and implement changes to respond to their ideas, but the former will not lose their prerogative in their classrooms.

Nevertheless, students were being presented in this research work with a marked alternative to the accommodationist notion of 'complying with what the teachers expect of you and accepting the system' (Warren, 2005). They were invited to share in the development of an ideal pedagogy for Black male students, and their 'voice' was given primacy over that of teachers. That process would have a sense of empowerment, but it would be limited; as Woods says of his notion of 'empowerment' within critical events in school life, they "...will not remove alienation, transform structures, or empower in any grand sense." (Woods, 1994, p.142). The research was acknowledging the need to overcome the disadvantages and challenges that have impaired the progress of Black male students in general, and to remedy powerlessness of a minority group. Although the students were asked to reflect on the *positive* classroom experiences that promote achievement for Black male students, they also offered a critique, implicitly or explicitly, of approaches that they had found difficult or indeed oppressive. The acknowledgment of their critique and the possibility of its acceptance took the students beyond the position of accommodation. Hadfield and Haw (2001) confirm that the student 'voice' can provide profound insights into the realities of their situation, and it can be taken "to be authoritative because it is an honest, loud, clear and inclusive 'voice'" (p.489), although it is not always accepted:

> The bigger issue in practice was not the lack of expertise of the young people but the unwillingness of professionals to listen to them, particularly when they were being critical.   (ibid, 2001, p. 498)

By making the ideas of the students the central focus of this research, I gave them a degree of empowerment by taking them out of an accommodationist framework although not actually giving them control.

In terms of the students', and society's, struggles with racism, there were also limits to the emancipatory nature of the research. Although I see

my research as contributing in a small way to the struggles against racism within the education system in the UK, which I believe have plagued Black students for decades, I would not locate this research within an anti-racist paradigm. I have been concerned with highlighting what can be done *within* the current system and its administrative and curricular arrangements, rather than directly challenging both the overtly and the more subtly formulated racist practices within schools. This is not to deny the efficacy of racism as a force that has determined so many of the experiences of African-Caribbean young people in this country.

My own experiences, in three education authorities since 1980, have taken me through many stages in the development of anti-racist policies and practices, often repeating the early stages as I moved from a more radical authority to one that was only beginning the path that had been well advanced in its neighbour while I was serving there. My commitment to the idea of combatting racism has not diminished in those twenty-five years of professional service in multi-ethnic schools, and I do not believe that solely emphasising positive multicultural experiences can bring about all the necessary educational, or indeed social, advances for disadvantaged groups. The struggle against the forces of racism must be explored, understood, and engaged in at every level. Nonetheless, I felt that my own contribution to the field should build on the positive pedagogical experiences that I had seen happening with African-Caribbean male students within my own classroom and those of some of my colleagues.

Dialogue and Research

Establishing insights into pedagogy through dialogue lay at the heart of my earlier doctoral research work (Whitburn, 2002), and I would agree with Burbules' definition of dialogue as a *'pedagogical communicative relation'* (Burbules, 1993). He further outlines the value of dialogue in both pedagogy and research:

> Dialogue is an activity directed toward discovery and new understanding, which stands to improve the knowledge, insight, or sensitivity of its participants... Dialogue represents a continuous, developmental communicative interchange through which we stand to gain a fuller apprehension of the world, ourselves, and one another.
>
> (Burbules, 1993, p. 8.)

It is not merely a verbal interchange that would be recorded and analysed for research purposes, but a process of communication that would work through the relationships within the group of discussants to explore pedagogy through their experiences. The students in this study would be participating in a series of discussions over a period of a year, and would be told that it would be their views, as expressed in dialogue, that would be the basis for establishing greater clarity about what pedagogical forms work well with African-Caribbean male students.

Questions would be an important prompt for the dialogical process. As Burbules suggests:

> Dialogue is guided by a spirit of discovery, so that the typical tone of a dialogue is exploratory and interrogative.   (*ibid*, p.8.)

The research process is similarly geared towards answering questions, and my role as leading researcher made it likely that I would be asking many, if not most, of the questions. This unfortunately suggests a dominant role, which might have inhibited the freedom of the group to develop a dialogue. However, my dominant role as their teacher was there from the start, and my interrogations were unlikely to alter any pre-existing tendency to dominance in our relationship, if it existed. Moreover, my own pedagogical preference has always been to encourage discussion and dialogue within my classes, and the students would be expecting me to engage *them* in exploring knowledge and truths.

Although our conventional classroom dialogue had always been 'teleological', as Burbules puts it (*ibid*, p.4.), as I have a clear idea of the knowledge that the students should be discovering through our dialogues, I have always worked to avoid the 'banking' notion of teaching that Freire criticises so strongly for attempting to 'deposit knowledge' in students' minds (Freire, 1996). My teaching has always been in the mode of "scaffolding" - that is to say:

> ... working with students to build up levels of understanding appropriate to their state of readiness, and helping to draw their attention to the explicit processes by which ideas are related to one another as new information is provided.   (Burbules, 1993, p.10.)

When I ask my students a question in a lesson, they know that I am interested in them developing their own ideas, and therefore as I asked them questions

within the context of the research, I felt they would be confident to express their own ideas, rather than merely seeking to 'give me the correct answer'. To quote Burbules again:

> The scaffolding model of teaching shows that there is no necessary incompatibility between a significant role for the teacher in dialogue and an active and respectful conception of the learner. (*ibid*, p.10.)

The research work of the students' group would work in a similar way to that classroom pedagogy, but it would be far less teleological. In ordinary lessons, there is some form of predetermined knowledge or range of skills that forms the basis of the learning, but in this research, the students brought the knowledge in their experiences and constructed the meanings through dialogue. Nonetheless we would be assuming that there were forms of pedagogical practice that help African-Caribbean male students to succeed, so there was an end in mind, albeit unspecified by the teacher/researcher.

Another crucial aspect of this notion of dialogue is the relationships between those engaged in it. It is important that the participants not only care about what it is that they are talking about, but that they also come to care for each other in the dialogic encounter:

> What sustains a dialogue over time is not only lively interchange about the topic at hand, but a certain commitment to one's partner... (*ibid*, p.15.)

As explained above, the group of students engaged in the research included a range of ethnic groups, and both males and females, and it was important that those who were not African-Caribbean male students, and therefore not the direct focus of attention, would still care about the latter's education. The group was therefore chosen not as a random sample, or a necessarily fully representative sample, but one that would enable its participants to engage in relational dialogue.

Data-collection and analysis

The Research group discussions were recorded, and most of them were then transcribed by Stephen, my research assistant, who had been a student at Bishop's a few years before. An African-Caribbean male student at University by then, he joined in some of the discussions, particularly towards the end of the year, when the students had established their own voice and authority in the project. He had made invaluable contributions to my

previous doctoral research in the Institution-focused study (Whitburn, 2002) and he was able to make good use of research skills gained in that work to help in leading some discussions, and in transcribing what could occasionally prove to be somewhat indistinct dialogue. His transcripts were sometimes available shortly after the discussions, which gave me the opportunity to review the ideas before further sessions. The transcript of one of these discussions is included as an Appendix (see pp. 102-107, below). From the first four sessions, I highlighted three important categories concerning: expectations and assumptions; feedback; relationships and respect. These ideas were presented to the students as a framework for further discussion, and each idea explored in more depth.

After the summer holiday, which came half-way through the project, we were joined by two new students, and this was an opportunity to consider a review of the ideas considered so far. After a few weeks, I introduced an alternative mode of data gathering to help confirm what the students were saying about successful teachers for Black boys, and to secure an element of triangulation with the general discussions. We had been engaged in other tutorial work on interview preparation, particularly for their university applications, so I used the idea of recruiting and selecting a teacher for a school, to specifically work with African-Caribbean male students. The group drew up criteria for a person-specification, both as individuals and in two sub-groups. This material was then added to the research transcripts.

When the data were analysed I produced codings that were suggested by the data, in the manner of grounded theory approaches (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These initial codes were:

Assumptions	Dialogue	Discipline	Distractions	Encouragement	Expectations
Feedback	Laziness	Mentoring	Physical Education	Arts	Push
Relationships	Respect	Setting	Talking	Trouble	

These codes seemed to fall into two major categories: Students' Challenges, and Teachers' Successes. Along with the previously identified key words about their teachers: assumptions and expectations, feedback, and relationship, there were some key ideas that seemed to emerge about the Black male students themselves, particularly focused on the problems of

distractions and a 'push' that was needed in their work as learners. The focus of the study was concerned with the nature of the teachers' successes, but the students' context seemed very important to help understand those successes. So, rather than simply focus exclusively on the features of successful pedagogy, and the descriptions of the person-specification for the ideal teacher of Black male students, I decided to preface that with a section on the challenges that the students thought the Black boys faced in school. Two sets of categories emerged: key ideas about Black male students themselves and their challenges in secondary school, and then, features of the teachers who work successfully with them. These categories are summarised here:

Challenges facing the Black male students.	(a) Distractions from learning (b) Teachers' assumptions and stereotyping (c) The need for a 'push' in learning

Features of Successful teachers of Black male students.	(d) Caring teacher-student Relationships, going beyond the curriculum (e) Feedback and 'push' (f) Teacher expectations

The young men appeared to be critical of aspects of themselves as Black male students, and this was difficult to analyse; there was a clear danger that both my students and I were operating within the negative stereotypes that racist thought had imposed on society, and that we might be essentialising negative traits into Black male behaviour. At one point in the analysis, I had considered the word 'complacency' as an interpretation of their term 'push', suggesting a failure within the motivation of the Black male students in their studies that required remediation. On reflection, I saw this judgment as unwarranted and dropped it. Nonetheless, there was an overwhelming message coming from the discussions that the Black boys did want teachers to counter a deficiency that they saw in their own working practice. The study was designed to focus on the *positive* contribution that teachers could make to Black male achievement through their pedagogy, but that would necessitate handling *negative* aspects of Black male students' context, as they perceive them. The idea of 'push' had to stay, without the

pejorative 'complacency', albeit with 'health warnings' about the way in which that notion might have been created. I had to do more than simply accept the notions that were presented within the students' dialogue, and I had to think critically about where they may have come from, but at the same time, I had to avoid dismissing their ideas and asserting a superior authority on them.

During the months in which the research group met to discuss these ideas, I was undertaking some reading into the work of the philosopher Hannah Arendt, as explained in Chapter 2. I developed my own typology of pedagogy that was derived from her analysis of the 'Human Condition' (Arendt, 1998), and began to think about the relationship between what the students were discussing and this philosophical analysis. Towards the end of the group project, I had to consider whether to involve the students with the Arendtian theoretical model. Walker discusses this problem in her discussion of emancipatory action research with teachers in South Africa (Walker, 1993). She talks about 'second-order action research' when the actors from the realm of action move from mere 'involvement' in the research to a genuine 'participation' in the research analysis. Walker quotes McTaggart's paper at the Third World Encounter on Participatory Research in Managua in September 1989:

> Authentic participation in research means sharing in the way research is conceptualised, practised and brought to bear on the life-world... Mere involvement implies none of this; and creates the risk of co-option and exploitation of people in the realisation of the plans of others.
> (MacTaggart, quoted in Walker, 1993, p.110.)

I decided to share the Arendtian analysis with the group in one of the final meetings, and they were asked to reflect on the typology and see how far they felt it matched with the work that we had been doing. The results of that discussion form a key part of Chapter 5 and the development of my final theories. The bulk of the discussions are analysed in Chapter 4, which now follows.

Chapter 4

The Research Group data - Presentation and Analysis

Black Males in Secondary School: context and challenges

The Research group began by considering the case of Pierre, a young man from the inner-city who had been selected by a media company to transfer to a rural private school and live with a Black family that had migrated from his local area to the countryside. His initial situation was one of alienation from school and poor achievement, and this gave the group the opportunity to reflect on the position of underachievement of Black male students, and whether that could be transformed by their classroom experience. Our initial discussions about Diane Abbott's article (2002) (referred to above) had covered the charges of racism amongst school teachers and the idea that white women teachers in particular faced problems coping with Black boys: "...it seems a black boy doesn't have to be long out of disposal (*sic*) nappies for some teachers to see him as a miniature gangster rapper" (Abbott, 2002). Although the group found Abbott's rhetoric quite abrasive to begin with, it became clear that the students did think that some teachers clearly had problems with Black students, and Black males in particular.

The video programme of Pierre gave the group a chance to consider other possible influences on Black male achievement, particularly in terms of the influence of environment and parental nurturing. A range of opinions were given, and then towards the end of the first meeting, the group began to focus specifically on classroom level experiences of Black males, beginning with Pierre and ending by focusing on themselves. The students in the group were asked to consider how Pierre might have fared if he had attended Bishop's High School, with *them* in their earlier years at the school. This led to reflection on their own experience and the challenges that they faced with their studies and their teachers.

Their discussions suggested three main aspects of Black males' experience of schooling:

    (a) Distractions from learning

    (b) Teachers' assumptions and stereotyping

    (c) The need for a 'push' in learning

There was a mixture of external and internal factors affecting Black male students, which seems to indicate a strong sense of honest self-reflection on their part. The discussions suggested that both students and teachers had weaknesses that would need to be overcome by our successful teachers of Black male students. In discussing their weaknesses, the Black male students, and their peers, were prepared to be quite critical of aspects of their approach to studying. This could be seen as honest and revealing, but it also raises questions about the source of their thinking, and how it relates to their identities as African-Caribbean males. Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' seems to be particularly relevant here (Moore, 2000). What the students could be revealing are not innate features of Black boys, but rather some of the facets of their world view (*habitus*) that they have subconsciously absorbed from the stereotypical perceptions that schools (the *field*), and society in general, have of them. The way in which society and schools have portrayed and approached them could have given Black boys' negative views of *themselves* as students. My argument here is that, notwithstanding this caveat, the expressed opinions of these students remain important for teachers to address if they are to work successfully with these young men.

One *encouraging* aspect of our discussions was that the Black males asserted that there were teachers who could overcome these weaknesses through their pedagogy, something which may be seen to counter Bourdieu's pessimism about the possibility of teachers as agents of change for the disadvantaged (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Moore describes the latter view:

> Once you are working as an active agent within the system, it seems - as one supporting the system through one's social position - you can do nothing to change that system from within.   (Moore, 2000 p.100)

The honest revelations of negative aspects of the school experience of the Black male students were important as a preface to the idea of teacher success. The latter would not emanate from an exceptional situation that had been protected from the reality of the negative experiences and stereotypes

of Black males that we know exist in contemporary society, but rather come from within the *field* that had produced the negative *habitus*.

Distractions from learning

Even though the Black male students in the research group were clearly academically successful, they declared that they faced many distractions that kept them from focusing on their studies, and they felt that this was a particular feature of the Black male experience. They had all had significant positive encouragement from their parents, and had developed good relationships with some of their teachers, but academic work was still described as a real challenge. Marvin, one of the key Black male students in the group, hesitantly expressed this in terms of the Black male psyche:

> I will admit it, I don't really, even though (my parents) push me, I don't sit there for like two hours and do homework and all that. I think it's like, I don't know if I should say this, in a Black boy's mentality, sort of, to, like, understand distractions in a way... You can say you wanna do the work, but then when it comes down to it, there is a lot of distractions.
>
> (Marvin)

Jerome, the student who went to college after year 12, confirmed this element of personal struggle:

> There is definitely a lot of distractions, like when I go home, I either wanna be out, or I wanna watch TV or something. There is always something getting in the way of my work. It's hard, but I wanna achieve though, that's the thing.   (Jerome)

Marvin's hesitancy in declaring the Black male's challenge with distractions did not seem to convey doubts about the veracity of what he was saying, but rather a possible reluctance to condemn his fellow Black males, particularly since this was in one of the first meetings of the group. On the other hand, he might have felt that it could be seen as some kind of special pleading to excuse his own weaknesses in academic pursuits, which he had openly admitted to. Whatever his motive, the revelation appears genuine and incisive; to *understand* distractions indicated not just a profound knowledge of alternatives but an active accommodation with that way of life, which he nonetheless saw as a hindrance to academic success.

Of course, it may be the case that these young men have not discerned a particular feature of *Black* males, but rather a feature of male students in

general. It may also be possible that they are responding, albeit subconsciously, to the stereotyping of others, perhaps both teachers and students, rather than recognising a trait within the Black male character. This could certainly be the *habitus* talking, and it could be that Marvin has a subconscious grasp of that: hence his hesitancy about the statement. The next elements of the group dialogue show that the students clearly believed that many *teachers* made negative assumptions about Black male students and incidences of distraction, and that could have contributed to their perceptions. Even if the Black males have internalised a stereotype, it still stands as a block to learning and progress in studying, and hence a feature that the potentially successful teacher must overcome within their pedagogy.

Social talk appeared to the students to be the distraction that presented the major challenge to success in the classroom. Although this was understood to be a weakness of all young people in groups, the perception was that Black boys might be especially prone to this distraction, and would most certainly be seen by many teachers as at the core of the problem. Mahmoud and Marvin, two of the Black male students, stated that:

> If there is a Black guy and white guy, they have the same communication while the class is going on... They're teenagers in general. But at the same time, Black students do need the teacher to be in control of the class kind of thing. If he lets the class loose then everyone will get loose but mostly the Black students. Because they are into chatting and into like Mcing, rapping and all that in the class; they wouldn't mind, they will do it in the class. (Mahmoud)

> I think it's just environment and atmosphere. I think with anybody, any Black boy will know if you're in your group you're gonna get distracted more easily. You're gonna be wanting to talk more, because it's just a social thing, that's just what you do in a group. (Marvin)

Mahmoud highlighted strong verbal aspects of Black youth culture, and the other students in a class may make assumptions about Black boys' role as noise-makers in a lesson; Black male students who remain quiet and studious may be questioned after a lesson: "Why were you so quiet today? What's wrong?" It may be easier to live up to expectations than face the interrogation.

The students also felt that teachers made cultural assumptions about the propensity of Black youngsters to engage in social talk. Clinton, another of the leading Black males said this:

> If they see a group of Black students in the class and they like hear talking but they don't see, they automatically like pick on them, because they just assume they are the sort of people that would talk a lot. It's only some teachers what would do that, though. They assume that they talk a lot and want to disrupt the class. (Clinton)

Marvin added:

> The Black group will get more concentrated on because, I think it's like a regular thing that they know that Black people will be making the most noise and they are louder. (Marvin)

The issue of talk and Black students is something that African-American educators have been a little readier to consider than their British counterparts. There has been some discussion of a propensity for people of African descent to be louder in their communication than white people (Wiley, 1991; Thompson, 2004). Although this will not apply to *all* Black people, there are various explanations, principally cultural-specific, as to why many Black people engage in loud communication. Of course, strong oracy does not have to be a problem for pedagogy; indeed, it could be a positive asset in the classroom. However, problems arise when it is automatically linked with poor interest in learning and a lack of seriousness. The impact on teacher expectations is most pertinent here. Thompson (2004) discusses her husband's theory about what the consequences are for many ethnically mixed classrooms:

> Rufus has developed a theory about why African American students are disproportionately punished for talking in class. He stated:
>
> My theory is that when students are in a class and the class is told to be quiet, the rest of the class is still talking, but it's just that the African American students are often talking louder or they appear to be doing so, because they stand out more than the other kids. It's called "figure ground discrimination"... When teachers look up, they see Black kids and they see their mouths moving. So the Black kids get into trouble first, because the teacher can hear them over the rest of the class.
> (Thompson, p. 217)

This echoes Marvin and Clinton's testimony almost verbatim. A sense of injustice quickly develops around the way that teachers handle the classroom talk issue if they exercise this "figure ground discrimination". The

assumptions of the teachers act unequivocally as powerful forces in directing the Black male experience in the classroom, whether or not there was any inherent tendency for Black males to become more involved in distractions.

Teachers' assumptions and stereotyping

Clinton's statements about teachers' assumptions and stereotypical responses to Black male students were echoed by Rees, the white male in the group, and Hina, the Asian female student:

> I agree with Clinton that the Black boys get the blame, I agree with that
> *R.Whitburn*: Have you seen it?
> I would say so, yeah. Lower down the school, yeah.   (Hina)

> I think what Clinton said was true. When I used to sit with Jerome, he used to get in more trouble than me, but we were just as bad, but he would get into more trouble most of the time. Not all teachers, but some teachers.   (Rees)

The situations where teachers avoided negative assumptions about Black male students will be discussed in detail in the second part of this chapter, but the group had a clear perception that many 'academic' subjects were still led by teachers with negative expectations. There was a strong sense that Physical Education was still one of the few areas in which Black male students could usually enjoy more expectations that are favourable:

> The P.E teacher would give you more, I wouldn't say equality, but more of the time of day than say Head of Maths or Head of History.   (Marvin)

The significance of subject areas is discussed further below[7].

The students felt that teachers' assumptions were also connected with the process of 'setting' students, ostensibly by ability in the particular subjects. Only the upper sets were regarded as unproblematic, and by the time you reached set 3 (out of 7 sets within a year group) there appeared to be problems:

> You know we were put into sets, first 1/2/3; I think the assumption comes from there as well. That set 3 is where all the bad students are and stuff like that...   (Wayne)

> To me I felt set 3 and 4 they didn't really learn anything, they would be put in that class because the staff did not want them to disrupt the people in the higher sets.   (Marvin)

---

[7] See pages 55-57

These assumptions were felt to set up a vicious circle that encouraged disruptive behaviour and distracted activity:

> You put people in sets and you automatically put them into classes of how they are going to behave. You automatically think that set 3 are going to be disruptive. (Amma)

The students in the group had generally been in upper sets in their final GCSE year at Bishops', and they would not have been in a position to know the ethnic composition of sets in the school with any accuracy. These arrangements would of course vary from year to year, and the school has not kept any data over the years on the ethnic breakdown of sets in subjects. Nonetheless, my own knowledge of these arrangements suggests that Black students are often over-represented in the lower and middle groups - sets 3 and 4 as described by the students here. Donelan et al (1994) attest to the detrimental impact of setting on the progress of African-American students. They see the introduction of academic tracking and ability grouping as a means by which the equal opportunities that should have been opened up to Black students after the integration of schools were systematically denied them. They explain:

> ... even as *Brown* helped remove legally sanctioned barriers to equal educational opportunities and resources, subtler policy used academic tracking and ability grouping to maintain boundaries that still keep African Americans from realizing their full potential in American society... Academic tracking and ability grouping have served to lock disproportionate numbers of African American students into dead-end educational agendas. (Donelan, et al, pp. 381-2)

They also describe how the processes of ability groupings end up determining both teachers' and students' expectations, and in the USA many Black students succumb to the inferior curricula and achievements associated with lower ability groups. They describe the effect of such groups:

> They dampen and frequently eliminate student and teacher expectations, thereby producing students who perform at lower level than they are capable of. This insidious cycle amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy. (ibid. p.383)

Interestingly, the students at Bishop's themselves seemed also to succumb to assumptions of setting:

> ... when you are in the higher sets, most of the time you do the work, not to look stupid, because if you don't do the work and everyone else has, it makes you feel like basically stupid, so you try to keep up with the class as well. (Wayne)

Although membership of 'higher sets' would work in favour of achievement, according to Wayne's testimony, the corollary was probably more significant and worrying: placement in a 'low set' would spell disaster. It would be up to teachers to resist negative stereotypes, and to work to counter any negative assumptions on the part of students about their prospects for learning. The significance of the external factor of setting as a motivating factor for Wayne as a Black male student became possibly more significant as the group discussed the idea of the particular need for Black male students to be 'pushed' in their pursuit of learning. It would be particularly difficult for Black male students to push themselves if they were consigned to 'bottom' groups.

The need for a 'push' in learning

The students were clear that there were a significant number of teachers who held negative assumptions about Black male students, and this was in keeping with the thoughts that Diane Abbott and others had expressed in public on a number of occasions (Abbott, 2002). However, the group was not placing all the responsibility for Black males' lack of success in school on their teachers. By the fourth meeting of the group, the Black male students started to consider their own response to education in school, and they suggested weaknesses in their application to their studies that they saw as possibly prevalent amongst Black male students in general. They talked about a 'lack of push' in studying on their part:

> I believe, yeah, that Black boys don't push themselves. Really, we don't push ourselves. We go to a certain point and if we cant go no further, we are not going to do it, we're not going to try it, because if we are writing a statement or something, and you have to write 100-300 words, we're going to write 100 words, because we can't be bothered to write 101, or something like that. (Marvin)

Even when they were doing well in a particular subject, the students felt that Black males needed clear direction and encouragement to do better:

> Art now, I was good at it, but... actually I did need a push like to do better. I don't know I was just being lazy in that subject. With me at times I find that when I am good at something I don't find that I need to work any harder than I can do already. (Wayne)

There seemed to be a difference between ambition on the part of Black male students and the commitment to the work itself:

> I would not say I didn't want to achieve, but I never gave it much effort. I just like done enough to get through basically, so that was like a lazy attitude.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Wayne)

This could be simply an analysis of these particular individuals, but Marvin clearly felt that this was a more general characteristic of Black males. It is quite likely to be connected with the kind of stereotyping already discussed, and the existence of poor assumptions of Black males by teachers, and indeed other adults. These things could have contributed to a problem of low *academic* self-esteem, as distinct from general social self-esteem, for these young Black men. However, they were fully aware of the focus of this research, and our search for the fundamental issues that needed to be addressed to secure better progress for Black males. They were aware of the issues of stereotyping and assumptions, and, although they could simply be victims themselves of those very problems, I think their insights should not be dismissed as mere conditioning, and attention diverted to systemic problems. This is a genuine issue that needs to be addressed and remedied with individual students, albeit alongside an assault on general racist stereotyping in society. Moreover, they were clear that pedagogy could overcome weaknesses, and had done so in their own experience.

There is, moreover, evidence from the Unites States that the need for a 'push' in studying is not an uncommon feature of Black males (Polite, 1993; Hawkins, 1999). Polite researched the approach to school of African American males in a suburban high school, and much of the evidence of his students confirms the importance of the 'push' that only certain teachers had given them:

> She (Mrs Jackson) *pushed me to do better*. The majority of the other teachers did next to nothing.
>
> To me, they (teachers in general) could have been a little more pushy, if I had something to say about it. I mean, if they were better and *pushed us back* then, you know, half of the people that didn't graduate might have graduated.　　　　　　　　　　(Italics added)(Polite, 1993, pp.116-117)

Hawkins' recent study of higher ability African-American males in Montgomery County, Maryland (Hawkins, 1999), found that they failed to 'push themselves' in terms of progression to college from high school:

> Are Black boys willing to become better students? Are they willing to go beyond the limited expectations most of us hold for them? Sadly, perhaps, not enough are!
>
> ... the behaviors of this limited group of Black males didn't match their beliefs. When I asked how many planned to attend college, every hand in the room went up. When I asked the seniors how many had actually applied to a college, just 6 hands went up (out of 15). (1999, pp.116-117)

Both Polite and Hawkins confirm the significance of what my students were saying. Indeed some of my research group went further, and accused some Black males of a certain arrogance that contributed to their complacency:

> When we was talking about we need to get pushed, I agree to an extent, if not more, I think that Black people get pushed as much as everyone else, especially by their parents, but it's just ignorance because Black males, teenage males think they know everything.   (Clinton)
>
> It's a sort of ego that they have that they think, I don't need to listen, I know this, they (teachers) don't know me.   (Amma)

All this would suggest that teachers face particular challenges in furthering the success of their Black male students. The latter face all the distractions that young people encounter, with a strong propensity to succumb to those distractions, and a need for a 'push' in the work that is required to turn ambitions into success. The students see that there is a definite need for teachers to supply the 'push' that the Black males do not provide for themselves:

> They think that, 'cos I'm black', sort of, it's different for them and it is different. A lot of teachers, they don't take it into consideration that this person acts like this in a certain way and they don't make special attempts to try and push them and they don't give them that extra help and so they think that everyone is against them sort of. But that attitude doesn't help.   (Amma)

The nature of the 'push' will be explored in the next sections. It is most certainly not coercive, but, rather, supportive and informed - as Amma explains - by the particular needs of the students, howsoever those have come about. How teachers will handle that 'push' will be a major determinant of their success with Black male students, as became clear as the group considered such successes.

Successful Teachers of Black Males in Secondary School

Having established that Black male students faced particular challenges at inner-city secondary schools, like Bishop's, the group went on to consider if individual teachers could make a difference to a Black male's success. As before, they began by considering whether a teacher could make a difference with Pierre, the boy in the programme, and that led them into reflection on their own experiences at school. In discussing their successes with particular teachers, the students in the group started to discuss their experiences with me as a teacher, some of them from the moment they started at Bishop's. Discussion of any other teacher was always done anonymously, but it seemed unnecessary for them to refer to me as 'my History (or Mathematics) teacher'. So, they did make specific references to aspects of my pedagogic practices and to my relationships with them over the years. Nevertheless, I tried to react to their comments about me as research data about a teacher's approach, and avoided any personal responses or self-effacing comments. Since we were not seeking a balanced view of individual teachers, but rather particular successful approaches that an individual might evince, their positive evaluations of my own practice did not have to be matched by my weaknesses. The students would probably not refer to the latter, but that was not so significant in research that was focused on successful practice rather than balanced evaluation.

The discussions highlighted three main areas of pedagogy that were thought to build success for Black male students, effectively meeting the challenges outlined in the previous section:

(i)   Teacher-student Relationships: a role beyond the curriculum

(ii)   Feedback and 'push'

(iii)   Teacher expectations

The students discussed a range of classroom situations in which they had experienced these positive features with teachers, but there was a strong feeling that particular curriculum areas had consistently given them more of such experiences: these were Physical Education and the Arts subjects. It seems that the expectations of teachers in these areas were more likely to be positive and enable the first two features to flourish more often. However, it

was clear that Black male students could experience success in other curriculum areas, if the teacher's pedagogy was right; my own subjects were indeed conventional academic areas: History and Mathematics.

Teacher-student Relationships: a role beyond the curriculum

The students placed great importance on the relationship that Black male students have with their teachers, and saw this as something that took the teacher beyond the curriculum that they were assigned to 'teach'. This would necessarily take them outside the realms of their classroom. In reflecting on Black male students, like Pierre, who might succumb to distractions in class, Clinton declared:

> What, I think, some teachers should realise is that to be a teacher, it's not always just in the classroom environment. It's like, sometimes if you see a disruptive child in your class, just don't give them a detention or something, just take them aside and just talk to them in a way. Try and share your knowledge, just make them see you in a different way, if you know what I mean. Some teachers just think 'Ah, just get through my lesson plan, and that's it', but I reckon they should like teach him, but it doesn't mean just going through a curriculum, you're there to like show, to like build up from, show them how to get through like different situations, like at the home as well. (Clinton)

Clinton envisages a role for teachers here that takes them far beyond the closely bounded technicist function of 'curriculum delivery'. The 'knowledge' that Clinton refers to is not limited to a National Curriculum programme of study, or even a National Strategy for secondary pedagogy, it is rooted in the life experience as well as the training of the teacher. He gives the teacher a very important position of influence in these young men's lives; the work of his teacher could be life-changing, not simply getting the young Black male to learn a subject or skill.

Marvin also criticised the limitations that some teachers placed on their role, and he commented on teachers whom he had heard refer to 'baby-sitting students' rather than being able to 'deliver their lesson' when they faced challenging behaviours and attitudes from a group of students:

> I think that, in a way, I know you're not there to 'baby-sit', but it's not really baby-sitting, I think that a teacher should always in a way encourage, not just go say 'I got what I want to go through this lesson and anyone who disturbs me is in detention.' (Marvin)

The teacher is not necessarily referring to Black male students in this criticism, although the students clearly felt that the latter were often the focus of this kind of teacher reaction, albeit unfairly at times. Marvin's critique here is of the teacher's sense of priority; he interprets the 'baby-sitting' remark as a lack of proper concern for the students' disposition. The relationship that these Black male students seem to be seeking would involve the teacher seeing beyond the disruptive behaviour that might be exhibited in the class, perhaps because of the 'distractions' referred to earlier. The teacher-student relationship would be about much more than behaviour; it would embrace values and mutual concerns.

The initiative in building this relationship seems to be with the teacher, and the group confirmed later that it would rarely be the Black male student himself who takes the first step in talking to the teacher. Having established the positive relationship, however, it seemed possible that the student would engage with the teacher independently. As Wayne said:

> I know a teacher is there to teach and help you to understand your work, but it's good to have a mentor at the same time. If you got someone who you can go to and talk to about certain things, they are able to help you through certain things. (Wayne)

The idea of mentors for Black male students is quite popular in many inner-city schools (Majors, Wilkinson & Gulam, 2001; Warren, 2005), but they are usually recruited from outside of the school; the research group are looking for the *teacher* to provide that caring and supportive role. This suggests a level of commitment from the teacher to his/her students that will go beyond any technicist approach to 'curriculum delivery'. Clinton articulated a certain devotion that he felt was needed for a teacher to break out of negative assumptions of Black males and give them the push they need:

> When you make a bad assumption about someone you probably wouldn't *give your all to that person*, because you couldn't do what they expected. But if you have like good assumptions about them, then you can like push them more, to do what you think they can do, so assumptions play a big part in the outcome. (Clinton, with my emphasis added)

Giving your all calls for much more than the competences within any teaching strategy, and in Clinton's description it seems linked to that need to 'push' students that had already been identified. There is also an echo here of Price's 'caring and nurturing connections' that were so important from the

perspective of his African-American young men (Price, 1998). It is much more than encouraging, or pressing, a young man to meet his examination targets; this seems to encompass a supportive relationship that considers the student as a whole person, and the teacher as an individual who has the capacity for personal commitment to his or her students.

Dialogue and feedback are vital parts of this relationship, in terms of both students' learning and behaviour, as discussed below, but it is the values and attitudes of the teacher that are paramount in laying the basis of the relationship; it is not something that teachers can simply be trained to undertake, they have to establish mutual respect with their students which must come out of integrity and a belief in their worth and potential. Wayne stressed this in his discussion of my work with him:

> I think we have got a lot of respect for you as well, and you have got respect for us, it's like a two-way thing... you will actually work *with* us and, like, you see us achieve certain things.   (Wayne)

Marvin explained that mutual understanding also encourages the Black male students to focus on transforming the classroom experience to improve everyone's learning:

> We relate to you more, and we can understand you in class, and we know like when it's time to joke and when it's time to work. We know, like, how you like all your lessons, and when's the right time to do something in a way.   (Marvin)

In these circumstances, the students appear to be managing the distractions that they had referred to before, prompted by the positive relationship with the teacher, rather than by any disciplinary code of conduct imposed on the class.   There is an accommodation by the Black male student with the preferences of the teacher, but it has come out of a mutual relationship, rather than an imposition from 'above'. These students do, however, clearly articulate a need for a definite 'push' to succeed in their work, and that was a clear feature of the pedagogy that emerged from the positive teacher-student relationship that the group described.

Feedback, dialogue, and the 'push' for Black male students

The dialogue and feedback that come out of successful relationships between teachers and Black male students appear to focus on the two major internal challenges that the group saw as facing the latter: distractions that

lead to disruptive actions in class, and the somewhat weaker involvement with academic work that requires a 'push' for success. The feedback is focused on the individual, and is nearly always given privately, often outside of the lesson. This kind of successful feedback begins with individual attention and is always focused on improving a person's behaviour or learning, rather than meting out some kind of penalty on the student; getting the Black male students to *understand* the consequences of their distractions or their weak involvement is often the purpose of the dialogue. The individualistic nature of this feedback is paramount, and it has to develop out of an understanding of the particular student, rather than being a predictable response that comes from the script of a positive discipline manual, or a 'SMART' target culled from suggestions for student 'review days'[8].

Faced with a distracted and disruptive Black male student, the students seemed to feel that the teacher should initiate a sequence of attention to the individual, followed by a talk with that student, which would result in positive realisation on his part. Marvin and Clinton put this in very similar ways:

> I think that, if there was a disruptive student, if they (*teachers*) were to just take him to the side and just help him to see what's wrong with him, why is he doing this? Talk to him outside the lesson, as well; it will probably improve your lesson and your relationship. (Marvin)

Clinton reflected on his own experiences with me as his teacher in the junior years of secondary school:

> So when I first came to the classroom I had an assumption that you were stricter, in a way I was trying to like play you up, I don't know if you saw it. But when something happened the same week and you took me aside and started to talk to me then I started to realise (the importance of what you were saying). (Clinton)

It was not enough to just focus attention on the individual and 'tell them off'. The feedback had to be constructive and presented in the context of the values of respect discussed earlier, so that Black male students could respond to what was not initially a welcome message:

> You would give them feedback, even though it's not what they want to hear. It would be in such a way that you would put it that you would realise what you are saying and take it into note what you're saying. (Clinton)

---

[8] Bishop's High recently introduced this 'review' process, which focuses on administering targets to individual students in response to a set of grades and predictions. Personal knowledge and regular contact between teacher and a student is not paramount in this process.

Where the relationship with the teacher had not been well established, dialogue was not likely to be productive. This was equally applicable to feedback about learning.

The 'push' that the Black male students needed in their learning and studying was seen as a vital part of the teachers' feedback, but that pushing could go badly wrong:

> I think it's also the style of pushing the person, because I have been in some lessons when the teacher and the way he pushes you to get the good marks, is just so bad to the level when you give up with the subject. I have been to some exams when I have got some bad results, and the next thing I know the teacher is like, "Ah! If you do this kind of thing again, you're going to move down (*in sets*)". Some teachers will come over and say "Yeah OK, that's not bad, but I know you can do better", and the different style of pushing will help. (Mahmoud)

This student is seeking a more sensitive approach to critical feedback, rather than the more threatening and belligerent stance of the teacher who simply issues the warning about set transfer. The negative consequence of being 'moved down in sets' was also cited by Amma as the wrong approach to feedback that aims to push someone forward in their studies:

> I think through relationships you can give people positive feedback but... if you're trying to push someone but you don't do it the right way; if you say "If you do this again your going to be put down", it will really put somebody off. It's really negative... But if you have good relationships with students you can give them positive feedback to encourage them to do better. (Amma)

The teachers' success in giving feedback is considered here to flow out of the relationship between teacher and student, rather than following a script that suggests the form of communication necessary in this pedagogical activity. Feedback becomes much more than a technical competence in which the teacher must become proficient; the values and integrity that could help establish 'good relationships' would become very significant.

The same sequence of individual attention, dialogue and realisation that Clinton and Marvin had discussed with behavioural issues, was seen by Wayne to operate positively with feedback for learning, and he also saw the importance of confidentiality within the communication:

> If people are struggling with the subject I always found that you would take us aside and actually speak to us and you would then have the confidence that it's not going to go no further. (Wayne)

Wayne was probably the least confident out of the Black male students in the research group, and somewhat reticent in classroom dialogue. He would probably value the quieter attention that individual feedback could offer, and was dependent on the push that could come from a positive relationship with a teacher. He went on to explain how this had been particularly evident in his experience of Physical Education:

> The same way that Clinton was saying that they will push you to learn, with P.E teachers...some teachers will tell me to do this and do that in a certain way, but I didn't hear nothing from other teachers in other subjects. I didn't know feedback before PE.
>
> *R.Whitburn*: So you're saying that you personally got feedback from, what type of feedback did you get from P.E.?
>
> After football trials, he was just basically like 'bigging me up' sort of thing: encouraging me to do better, and that made me feel good; and it gave me hope actually to keep doing what I was doing, and think that made me better at the sport itself. (Wayne)

Other teachers might well have been giving Wayne feedback, perhaps of a negative kind, about his learning, but he 'didn't hear nothing' because of their failure to engage him in the communication. The P.E. teacher has combined any critique of Wayne's performance with a warmth and encouragement that has kept Wayne hopeful of the learning experience. Of course, the teacher's approach may be connected with stereotypical views of Black males and sporting talent (see below), but it is nonetheless an example of the positive approach that the group felt these boys needed.

Teachers' Expectations of Black male students, including the P.E. example

The research group were suggesting that positive feedback within caring relationships would work to encourage the need for greater involvement with learning identified with Black male students, and counter their tendency to be distracted in class. Despite the plethora of attention given to the way in which UK schools have been failing Black male students, those in the research group were not cynical about the prospects of establishing positive and warm relationships with teachers. However, the teachers who want to be successful with Black males must counteract the

negative assumptions that appear to frame a good deal of the latter's experience in school. In their consideration of my work with them, Clinton and Wayne highlighted the absence of negative assumptions:

> The trust that you built up within the years with everyone that built up through time and the way you treat students like. I don't think you make them assumptions yourself, you give them a clean slate and what you see is what you get and you don't go on what other people say, from what I've seen. (Clinton)

> Mr Whitburn (*me, therefore not anonomised*), I remember never experiencing assumptions or stereotypes in any sort of way. Everyone's given the same chance, the same teaching style. (Wayne)

The absence of negative assumptions about Black male students is not to be confused with the idea of a 'colour blind' approach. The group were not saying that successful teachers deny the identity of Black male students *qua* Black students, but only that they avoid negative stereotyping and expect them to do well in their studies. Given that the successful teachers are likely to be operating within a school environment where negative stereotyping of Black males still exists, and in which there are aspects of institutionalised racism at work (Gillborn, 1990, 2002), they would need to make a specific focus on Black male students to counter those pressures.

The group gave a lot of attention to the experience of Physical Education and Black male students. This seemed to show a disappointing prevalence of the longstanding association of Black males with sport and entertainment as perhaps the only providers of a means to success (Ogbu, 1997). Although this is often seen as a hindrance to Black men's overall progress in society, there could be no denying the efficacy of the approach of many P.E. teachers within the positive areas already identified. If P.E. teachers expected Black males to do well in sport, this was seen as evidence of high expectations, and it led to positive feedback and the experience of the 'push' Black male students needed. The group suggested that the teachers assumed that Black males would be good at P.E., and indeed the students seemed to share those assumptions:

> Teachers assume what we have just said, that the majority of Black people will want to be more PE orientated and interested and they give them the chance. (Hina)

> Most of the Black boys will be more successful at like P.E and like physical activities than like Maths and stuff like that...
> I am talking about assumptions in behaviour, they (PE teachers) don't look at your past behaviour and because you have been disruptive in class.
> (Clinton)

> ... Black boys typically are good at P.E., so, even though they are bad students, in P.E teachers don't see them like that, they see them as people who are going to be captain of the team and people who are going to be the top P.E students and its different. (Amma)

> ... it's like there is no assumptions made, so even if you are one of the baddest students in the whole school, the P.E teacher would give you more, I wouldn't say equality, but more of the time of day than say head of Maths... (Marvin)

It is difficult to distinguish between an *absence* of assumptions, as suggested by Marvin, and the *positive* assumption about Black males and P.E. that others described. In either case, however, the outcome still appears to be a positive school experience for Black male students. In some schools, it has been noted that teachers will focus Black male students' attention onto sport so that the school can be successful in competitions, to the detriment of the students' academic work. However, at that time Bishop's was not a school that gave much attention to 'trophy-hunting' in sports, and had a much more inclusive approach to Physical Education. Although the P.E. teachers may have been influenced by stereotypes of Black males and sport (Harrison, et al, 2004), it is the quality of the learning environment that they provided for the students that seemed to be the key to success, not the acquisition of sporting glory.

Wayne thought that the positive feedback he had described above, that came from his P.E. teachers, was connected to their assumptions about him as a Black male:

> *R.Whitburn:* Do you think that the fact that you are getting more feedback in a P.E situation was to do with the assumptions that were made with you being a Black male student? And the fact that you didn't get feedback in other subjects is because of assumptions?

> I think it is, and I think it's to do with the relationships that I have with the teachers as well, because with some teachers I don't feel that I can talk to them, whether there is people there or not. I wouldn't say that I don't trust them, but part of what it is, I don't feel confident when I speak to them. (Wayne)

The approach of the P.E. teachers is seen as important in these situations, particularly in communication. The relationship of trust and confidence that Wayne emphasised here with his P.E. teacher is exactly what the

group had been talking about with successful teachers in general, so it could be that P.E. is simply an arena in which good relationships can develop, rather than a realm in which Black male students are naturally more likely to succeed.

However, there were other features of P.E. as a curriculum subject, along with the Arts subjects, that the group felt were attractive to Black male students:

> I think that really Black males, I cant really speak for everybody but they get the chance to express themselves... When it comes to Art, PE and Drama its like how you feel and you are making your own decisions and stuff.   (Wayne)

It is important to note that Wayne is not basing his views on P.E. and the Arts on any racial stereotype of Black males being fit for those activities, but rather on a perception of the pedagogy associated with them.   The opportunity for independent expression and decision-making could be an important part of Black males' engagement with these subjects, although Wayne still expressed his need for a 'push' in Art in an earlier quote in this chapter (p.53).   Marvin also considered the Arts to be favoured by Black males:

> Black students are more, like, arty. They are more like into P.E and Drama and Art and Music and all that. I don't know if they don't see it as lessons like algebra and things like that. Its like when they go into an art class, it's just like drawing or act or stuff like that. I think Black boys they find it more fun.   (Marvin)

Majors & Billson (1992) emphasise the importance of the arts and sports as part of the 'expressive life-style' that is a key component of the 'Cool Pose' of African-American males. They argue:

> The expressive, artistic life-style is spontaneous and individualistic in nature. Creative interpretation marks the Black male's uniqueness as a human being... Music and sports become stages for the expressive style...
> (Majors & Billson, pp. 69, 71)

This would suggest that a pedagogy that encouraged expressive responses and behaviour in class would provide an encouragement to Black male students. This may play a part in promoting the engagement with learning of the Black male students, but I think it is secondary to the importance of the positive aspects of a strong teacher-student relationship, in terms of mutual respect

and understanding, and positive feedback that can 'push' the Black male student. This seems evident in the difference between Wayne's experience of Art and P.E., which would both come under Marvin's category of 'arty' and expressive. In Art, his teacher lacked rapport with Wayne, and other students, and the subject alone was not enough to impel him to high achievement. Moreover, it is important to emphasise that the students were not restricting pedagogical success with African-Caribbean students to Arts and P.E. lessons; my own subjects are History and Mathematics, and the students had emphasised their particular successes in my classes. The former curriculum areas were merely strongly represented in their successful experiences, rather than helping to define a particular type of learning at which Black males would excel.

The Features of the students' prototype of successful teachers of Black males – who can do the job?

Having developed clear ideas about the challenges facing Black male students in inner-city secondary schools, and about the characteristics of successful pedagogy that teachers should use to overcome the challenges, I decided to approach the issue from a slightly different angle. This was partly to vary the approach for the students, since it had been more than six months since we had started to have these discussions, and partly to provide some form of triangulation to confirm the ideas that I thought were emerging from the dialogue. The students in the group were asked to devise a set of criteria that could be used for the selection of teachers who would work successfully with Black male secondary school students, based on the work that we had been doing over the previous months. They undertook this both as a group activity and as an individual task. Rather than focusing on the dynamic processes that they and other Black male students had been through at secondary school, this activity got them to take a more static view of the ideal teacher-type. Over the course of two meetings, we had group discussions that came up with different aspects of

      (a) teachers' characters and

      (b) teachers' knowledge

that would work best with Black male students. Hopefully, this would give us further insight into the meanings of those pedagogical processes that had

already been described in terms of relationships and feedback. They were again encouraged to firstly think in terms of someone who could work successfully with Pierre, and then also to look at the teachers that they think have worked well with the Black males in the group itself, and use their example to frame the requirements. There were nine individual responses, and the key common responses from those have been presented in Tables 1 and 2 below, firstly in terms of the teacher's character and relationships with students, and then in terms of the teacher's knowledge and pedagogy.

The Character of the Teacher and his/her relationships with students

The character of the teacher would provide the basis for the relationship that the teacher would be able to establish with the Black male students, and thereby provide the 'push' that the latter need. There was to be a friendly confidence in the way he/she interacts with the students, but there would be a strong side as well, in terms of the more traditional 'strict and firm' approach. The combination of strictness and understanding would presumably be necessary if the 'push' for the Black male students was to be taken seriously. Nonetheless the importance of the teacher's respect for the students was emphasised by the majority of the group; without respect the 'push' would not be seen as supportive.

The teacher-student relationship was frequently described as 'friendly', but alongside the notions of respect and strictness, this would not be an over-familiar or 'matey' relationship. The teacher had to be able to talk to the students, both inside and outside the classroom, presumably covering more than simply the curricular programmes of study. Respect and strictness would be seen as part of regular pedagogical practice in any classroom context, and would be necessary for good classroom, or 'behaviour', management in a technicist approach. However, this level of relationship that the students were demanding must take the aspiring teacher beyond competences and techniques; the teacher is valued as a *person* here, not a technician, and his, or her, character, values and attitudes will determine the ability to fulfil the pedagogic role.

A new feature of our potentially successful teacher emerged in these prototypes: humour. This was not a surprise; although not a significant

element of this group's early discussions, it had been a prominent feature of the research I had conducted earlier on successful pedagogy at Bishop's High (Whitburn, 2002). However, the requirement seems to go beyond the mere sharing of jokes in a warm relationship with the students. Our successful teacher needs to be able to use humour in conjunction with the 'push' that the Black male students need; he/she needs to *'lighten a situation'* as several students phrased it. The push for greater learning and studying needs to be balanced with lighter moments, otherwise the lessons themselves might be too intense for the students. There was also an indication of what *good* humour actually means in practice: it *doesn't victimise the students*; there is no room here for sarcasm as the teacher's preferred mode.

Table 1: the Character of the Teacher

- **Respectful of students**
  Respectful
  Must respect students
  Respect students
  Respect for students
  Respectful

- **Firm approach**
  Firm, but also equitable in their approach to students
  Strict and understanding
  Able to deal with difficult situations in a classroom
  Understanding and firm

- **Relationship with the students**
  Can interact with children/teenagers
  Friendly with students. Easy to talk to.
  Able to interact with students confidently, without an aggressive tone.
  Friendly. Easy to talk to.
  Have an 'older brother' style persona
  Be able to build a relationship outside of the classroom, will need to be friendly and understanding

- **Sense of humour - 'lightening the lesson'**
  Humour which doesn't victimise the students
  Good sense of humour
  Knowing when and how to lighten a situation
  Funny character with good personality
  Good humour
  Sense of humour
  Able to relieve the situation
  Lighten the situation. Bring some informality to a lesson when needed
  Good sense of humour. Can take a joke

Note: each different font and style represents a different student's response.

The principal purpose of these discussions was to elicit further thinking about pedagogy and the processes and relationships between successful teachers and Black male students, but there was inevitably some discussion about the actual person of the teacher. I was not involved in setting questions or intervening in any way in the discussion, and left the students to talk things through on their own. However I could catch some of the louder sections of debate, and there was a good deal of animated discussion about the preferred gender of a successful teacher of Black male students, and the ethnicity. Although it was decided not to make it *essential* that the teacher be male, all the Black males in the group thought that it was *desirable*. Two of them specified that a *Black* male was desirable. When it came to the group discussions, both sub-groups decided that a male teacher was needed, and one group decided they would want a 'positive role-model' who would certainly mean a male teacher, and possibly that he should be Black. This does not impact significantly on my conclusions about pedagogical practice, since there was no suggestion that the gender and ethnicity of the teacher would clinch the issue of success in the classroom: there were too many examples evident in Bishop's, and in other secondary schools, of Black male teachers who were unsuccessful with Black boys, and others, in their classes. The specifications that the students produced were full of important pedagogical features that could be present in teachers of any gender or ethnicity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that in the *ideal* type the Black male students wanted to see Black professional male figures, and that should perhaps not be overlooked in school recruiting approaches.

The Knowledge of the Teacher and his/her pedagogy

As table 2 indicates, there was even more consensus on the kinds of knowledge that our successful teacher of Black students would need in order to be effective. There were two aspects to this knowledge: one related to knowledge of the students, but the other connected the students and the curriculum. The essential knowledge of students' 'street' culture was often termed 'streetwise' by the group members. This would be important in the establishment of relationships and in giving the teacher an understanding of some aspects of the *distractions* that were felt to face Black males so

strongly. However, the students went beyond the idea of mere familiarity with the Black males' world for the establishment of relationships; they were asking the teacher to be able to accommodate the Black male students' world in the curriculum.

Table 2: the Knowledge of the Teacher

● **Knowledge of students' youth culture: 'streetwise'**
Should be streetwise / Aware of students' everyday occurrences
Culturally knowledgeable - streetwise
Streetwise
Aware of student issues
Aware of student issues ("streetwise")
Streetwise, has a youthful side

● **Connecting the subject of the lesson with the students: 'bringing something new to the class'**
Able to bring something new to the subject
Relating the subject to the cultural background of the students
Relate cultural reality to the subject
Has to bring out everything he knows about the subject in a way the students understand
Relate culture to the subject
Bring something new to the class
Able to bring something new into the classroom, i.e. try to target disruptive students with positive input
Cultural awareness
Relating the subject to different cultural experiences
Being able to use different methods of teaching to appeal to the different pace of students
Trying to relate curriculum to students

● **Dialogue and feedback**
Should be able to answer a lot of questions within their subject
Can learn from other teachers and students (open-minded)
Recognise people's difficulties, uses positive feedback
Knows how to understand students' needs
Fair, recognises student difficulties

Connectedness between the teacher and the Black male students in a pedagogical relationship would involve the former in making the curriculum more relevant and engaging for the students. The *cultural experiences* that the teacher must relate his subject to, would not be formed solely by the student's ethnicity, they would also be a part of their youth culture. Ladson-Billings had talked about this curricular, as well as community, connectedness

in her work (Ladson-Billings, 1998), although her elementary teachers focused more on the Black family culture than that of the youths *qua* Black *youths*. A stronger engagement with the curriculum could help the Black male students to combat the distractions and lack of involvement that impede them. Some of the group members seemed to recognise that this would be a particular challenge to the teacher, and realised that it would mean 'bringing something *new* to the classroom'. This curricular interaction between the world of the Black male students and the academic curriculum understood by the teacher seems to relate to Arendt's dual notions of *natality* and *plurality*. It would indeed be the emergence of something new, as in natality, and it would come out of different, plural, perspectives and cultures. The process itself would surely be akin to Arendt's notion of 'action', and so it was to a possible Arendtian model for pedagogy that I then turned to shed more light on the research group's prototype.

Chapter 5

'Action Pedagogy' and Black Male Students

Hannah Arendt and Education

The Research group's prototype suggested to me strong links with the Arendtian model of pedagogy that I had been developing. An 'action' pedagogy, with its emphasis on natality and plurality (see above, Ch.2, p.19) seemed to match what the students were describing when they talked about the importance of communication and relationship, and "bringing something new to the classroom". On the other hand, the pedagogy of labour, or indeed of work, would be more didactic and tightly controlled, requiring students to accommodate to plans laid down by the teacher, focused on predetermined learning objectives. Arendt herself wrote little on education, but the principal ideas that she did put forward about education and politics might seem to oppose the notions I have developed here. Her thoughts on education have been the focus of a recent collection of essays (Gordon, 2001), which I have used to understand her position on conservatism, authority, and pedagogy, alongside two short essays she wrote, one on the Little Rock High School crisis of 1957 (Arendt, 2003, pp.193-213), and the other on 'The Crisis in Education', which first appeared in 1961 (Arendt, 1993, pp.173-196).

The political realm of 'action' seems excluded from Arendt's purpose for education, and she keeps a clear separation between education and politics (Arendt, 1993). The teacher's task is depicted by Arendt as an essentially conservative one, based on the communication of established knowledge. However, she does want education to be a vital preparation for the political 'action' that young people will undertake as adults. Arendt sees the transformational activities of the new generation as potentially revolutionary and essential for a democratic politics, which would mark a dichotomy between her and most conservatives:

> In Arendt's view, therefore, education is aimed at preparing the young for taking responsibility for the world. Yet this responsibility for the world does not mean clinging to traditional morals or returning to a "golden past," as many conservatives advocate. It means, rather... preparing our students for action – that is, for intervening in the world and creating a more human society.   (Gordon (2001), pp. 54)

Nonetheless, Arendt does emphasise that *conservation* is essential, in terms of the connection with tradition and the past, which will form the basis of the transformation to come. The educators must faithfully share the tradition as it currently stands, in order for the changes to follow:

> The essence of Arendt's argument concerning the need for a divorce between education and politics lies, then, in the contention that the child-newcomer must be carefully introduced to the world to which she has been summoned. Because it is a constantly changing world, the child's appearance in it marks an "already been" and a "not yet"; and it is this "already been" world about which adults know... Ultimately, the educator's aim is to enable the young to create their own relation to the world, thereby renewing it as a place fit for human habitation.
>
> (Curtis (2001), p.134-135)

Arendt seems to favour a didactic approach to pedagogy, which would seem at odds with the idea of *action*. For her, the students' present role seems limited to an accommodation with the world of the teacher, who must be responsible for knowing the entire world as needs to be known.

Arendt was highly critical of the adults who had put forward the nine African-American children for integration into the Little Rock Central High School in 1957 (Arendt, 2003). Although she claimed to be committed to improving the circumstances of African-Americans, and, as a Jew, could lay claim to first-hand understanding of discrimination and prejudice, she saw political interference in education as wrong. Arendt used her distinction between three realms of human life – the political, the social, and the private, in the rationale for her condemnation of the integrationsists. To her, schooling was inherently a part of the private world of the family and of the social world of a community, which was the school, and should therefore be governed by individual choices, rather than legislation and edict. She argued that forced integration set up a very serious conflict between home and school for children, and the latter should not be made to handle such conflict. Parents and teachers, as authorities in the lives of the children, needed to be working together, rather than presenting conflicting notions:

> The conflict between a segregated home and a desegregated school, between family prejudice and school demands, abolished at one stroke both the teachers' and the parents' authority, replacing it with the rule of public opinion among children who have neither the ability nor the right to establish a public opinion of their own.
>
> (Arendt (2003), pp.212-213)

This might be a valid concern for pro-segregationist white American families in the Southern USA, but how can it justify consigning African-American young people to a segregated fate? Arendt fails to recognise the duality that already existed in the lives of Black children, and is still present for our students in the UK. At home, they were consistently told how they were people of value, equal to any other person, and that they should 'hold their head high', yet American society consigned them to inferior schools, with less resources, overcrowded classrooms, and underpaid teachers. This is not a tension that one would want for Black children, but the answer could not be to accept subservience, and so the school would become a focus of struggle to resolve the conflict. The 'Civil Rights' generation of young people in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s were less prepared to accommodate with inferiority, and would challenge Arendt's conservatism with respect to education. Furthermore, Black students in UK secondary schools still face a duality about their value and opportunity in their society, and the school and its classrooms is an important site for handling such a conflict. This emphasises the importance of the teacher's pedagogy, and the need for it to be responsive and interactive, rather than didactic.

There is also a curricular challenge to teachers in the multicultural world of the twenty-first century, if they are to fulfil Arendt's commission to communicate the 'world as known'. The breadth of the world that is relevant to the young people in a class is considerable, and rapidly expanding. Our mainly white, middle-class, teachers in the United Kingdom, will need to learn more about the traditions and culture of African-Caribbean families, as well as many other cultures, to embrace all the tradition available. Moreover, any teacher, as a grown adult, will face the challenge of keeping pace with the technological changes that shape the present, which her students are more likely to understand than she will. The classrooms will be places where teachers can do that learning, if students are seen as knowledgeable as well as in need of knowledge. This must require a more open and dialogic pedagogy than described by the processes of *labour* or *work,* and prescribed in the current technicist agenda. Sonia Nieto discusses this in her work on multicultural learning and teaching:

> Learning from one's students means that teachers predictably become more multicultural in their outlook and world view. As such, it implies a profound shift in attitudes and values toward students and what they have to offer. In the final analysis, it means not just talking about multicultural education as an educational program or strategy, but putting into practice a multicultural view of the world.
>
> (Nieto (1999), p. 154)

Teachers need to be constantly learning, and their pedagogy needs to be a part of that. The teacher can still maintain an authoritative position within the classroom, making the judgements about the appropriate range of knowledge and tradition to be explored, and the 'action pedagogy' that I propose would not deny that.

There is an essential distinction to be made here between 'authoritative' and 'authoritarian'; the former confirms the importance of the teacher's responsibility for knowledge of tradition and world-view, without requiring the domination that the latter implies. Nieto makes this clear:

> Teachers have a grave responsibility to prepare students to become effective and critical participants in the world, and this is particularly true for their bicultural students, who consistently have been denied this access. Teachers need to be authoritative – that is, knowledgeable, clear, and direct – rather than authoritarian in their interactions with students. They need to teach students the kinds of skills they must have in order to make a difference in the world. This means, among other things, that students need to learn the language of power.
>
> (Nieto, 1999. p.143)

This affirms Arendt's concerns for teachers to fulfil the responsibility for curricular preparation and knowledge, but Nieto also wants her students to participate politically, since the language of power she refers to is not a sterile vocabulary list, but a transformative skill to be practised. This will surely make pedagogy a political activity. Moreover, if Arendt's teaching and learning in school is conducted as preparation for future, possibly imminent, change, it has surely also taken on a political context. Nieto denies Arendt's idea of a separation of education from politics, but still maintains the responsibility of the teacher in the pedagogic relationship:

> Try as we might to separate it from the political sphere, education is always political because it focuses in a central way on questions of power, privilege, and access. As such, education is also about a political commitment and social responsibility... In spite of how teachers' actions are constricted by others, teachers still have enormous power to create enriching and empowering relationships with students... (*ibid*, p. 131)

An 'action pedagogy', using Arendt's notion of *action,* would prepare students for participation in political life, as Arendt herself desired, but it would function in a political, and potentially more radical, form, which she was not prepared to allow. Arendt's pronouncements about education talked in terms of the dichotomy between 'childhood' and 'adulthood' (Arendt, 1993), without any attention to the notion of 'adolescence'. Our young Black male students in secondary schools are clearly not yet adults, but they are no longer part of a more confined world called 'childhood'. Indeed, pedagogy is most likely to change as children move through the school system, and the degree of *action* would increase, perhaps only fully emerging later in secondary school, where this research is focused. Arendt's views were rooted in her concerns about an erosion of authority within education, but the pedagogy of *action* could strengthen that authority when it is renewed and transformed through creative relationships with students.

Our Black male students are more likely to be able to work with authoritative teachers when the latter avoid the crudely authoritarian approach of a pedagogy of *labour*. Both teachers and students can "bring something new to the classroom" in an 'action pedagogy', the latter in terms of their own cultural perspectives and knowledge of rapidly changing technology, and the former in forging meaningful connections for the students with the already established traditions of the world teachers know. If there are still tensions between the self-concept that these young Black males have of themselves, which they bring from their affirming home culture, and negative concepts which society still presents of the 'problems' of Black males, then the *action* teacher can support the young men in their struggle. The interactive dialogue that action pedagogy promotes would be a key means through which the latter could make sense of the tensions they confront. This *action* would seem to me to be the way that our teachers can develop into the successful prototype that the research students described. They certainly cannot learn 'connectedness' with their Black male students in isolation, by either reading literature or attending courses. Pedagogy needs to move forward beyond the realms of mere conservation that Arendt

discussed, yet I kept her terms *action* and *labour*[9] to construct a simple typology of pedagogy that might help to understand the needs of African-Caribbean male students in our secondary schools. The notions of *natality* and *plurality* were also retained, as they help to develop an understanding of the processes of *action* pedagogy. The model was presented to the research group as a development that made use of Arendt's thinking, but thereafter the label 'Arendtian' would not be used. The key ideas are as follows:

Labour pedagogy	*Action* pedagogy
● Standard lesson format ● Predictable learning outcomes ● 'Delivering the curriculum' ● Authoritative and authoritarian teacher ● Behaviour management and control ● All students 'treated the same' ● Values conformity and accommodationism ● Built on curriculum and objectives	● Flexible lesson plans ● Predictable and unpredictable learning outcomes ● Enacting the curriculum ● Authoritative teacher and student agency ● Understanding behaviour and improvement ● Values diversity and difference ● Democratised and dialogic interaction ● Built on relationships and curriculum

The Research Group and the Arendtian model

The students were presented with my outline of this Arendtian model in one of the last meetings of the group.[10] This began with a much more didactic presentation than usual, as I had to try and convey a lot of thinking and specialist knowledge to them about Arendt, philosophy and pedagogy, which had not happened in any previous discussions. They dealt well with the theorising, and could see how the two distinct types of pedagogy (we tended to elide the labour and work types) matched their experiences with teachers:

> Mahmoud: It is in a way helpful but it is just complicated. Its not exactly a simple easy thing that you can say 'it's not this, it's that, or it could be those two.'

---

[9] *Labour* and *Work* have been elided, since their general approach, particularly to accommodation, is similar.

[10] Some of the Black male students were absent on this occasion because of a coursework session, so Stephen, my research assistant took a more prominent part in the discussions than usual.

> Hina: I would say that all of them come into it regardless. At the root of the teaching they are going to be doing it for survival as in that they get paid for it at the end of the day, they wouldn't be doing it just for the enjoyment of the work they do, or the action kinda thing. I think it's like a hierarchy. Labour will be at the base and then you work your way up to reach the action to make the ideal teacher.

They recognised the superiority of the *action* pedagogy, and it was identified as the ideal. Some students thought that elements of *labour* would be present alongside action, but the latter had to be dominant in the ideal type, whilst others thought *labour* could not be present at all:

> Mahmoud: There is a big difference but we are chatting about the ideal teacher, we are chatting about the ideal lesson and the ideal teacher. In the ideal one it shouldn't be happening, so Labour is not a choice.

I had introduced the model by focusing on the teachers, and had talked to the group about the idea of an *action teacher* or a *labour teacher*. However, they very quickly responded with the idea that there were also *action students* and, indeed, *labour students*. This was an important affirmation of the dual roles in pedagogy, of both teacher and student, and opened up a discussion on the possible affinity between like-minded parties in classes, and of the characteristics of Black male students. There was a clear opinion that Black male students tended to favour an *action* approach, not necessarily in terms of a kinaesthetic learning experience, but in terms of an active engagement in the lesson, particularly through dialogue. This was best summed up by Stephen, our research assistant, a Black male student himself:

> Stephen: I think that's umm, within the people that we've looked at, they can't be, they haven't tended to be, successful by just getting by. They've tended to be successful by taking part and being involved in it, not just doing labour; moving into action...
> It's that appreciation that Black male students work well once they are totally engaged within a subject and engaged within the whole lesson. So, that's what I think action is. It's an appreciation of getting engagement through dialogue, through talking, so if they are constantly being able to talk for the lesson, and use their ideas and stuff like that, I think that aids what's happening.

This engagement with the lesson is dialogic, values the students' own contributions, and is therefore an expression of the relationship with the teacher that was identified as so important. The encouragement in engagement and dialogue may well help to fulfil aspects of the *push* that was identified as necessary for Black male students (see Chapter 4), although it may take the form of a 'pull' rather than a 'push'. Nonetheless, the lesson itself is only part of the whole learning process, and Black male students will

need encouragement and pressure to follow up the work of the lesson with learning outside of school, particularly in the later years of secondary school.

Within the best professional practice to be found in a pedagogy of labour or work, the importance of engaging the students will be acknowledged, and planned for, but the students' engagement is still with predetermined materials, or processes. Indeed some of that engagement may be contrived and somewhat trivial. Hansen (2001) discusses the shallowness of some teachers' attempts at 'engagement', using the work of Zahorik who:

> ... shows that many of the methods (teachers) turn to are not rooted in the subjects they teach, but constitute gimmicks, tricks, or games... However, teachers need not regard students as fixed or frozen selves with fixed or frozen "interests" that they must somehow engage.
>
> (Hansen (2001), p.84)

Even in the best practice, engagement in such a context might be seen as a means to ownership of the learning, but it is not an opening to pedagogic *agency*, since the latter lies firmly with the teacher. If Black male students are engaged through 'using their ideas', as Stephen said, this suggests the natality of Arendtian action, rather than an appreciation of the teacher's prepared performance in a *labour* pedagogy. That is not to say that the *action* teacher has no need to plan, but her planning will consist not only of acquiring and applying knowledge for curricular tasks, but also of planning for relationships with the students.

It was again considered that some subjects, particularly P.E. and the Arts, would have advantages here for Black male students. This was nothing to do with any stereotypical views of the latter's innate abilities, but rather an appreciation of the nature of engagement in those lessons as customarily organised:

> Stephen: And I was thinking what happens in a P.E. Lesson is that you have a sport and 99 % of the time you are totally engaged within that sport... The whole notion of engagement, and if a student is engaged within a lesson, then I think that's when Black students are more likely to succeed. In P.E. that happens because they are always playing a sport or whatever. We talked about the arts: you are either acting or playing an instrument or you're drawing; you are always doing something. Within the other types of lessons where we talked about having class discussion and stuff like that and that's because you are engaged within it.

Teachers of sport and the arts are necessarily focused on students' active participation, but class discussions in conventional 'academic' courses are

clearly an important and available form of active engagement. As in the practical activities of P.E., drama, and music, individual students can make a personal contribution to discussion, rather than simply absorbing material given to them by the authoritative teacher. Hansen explains it like this:

> Teachers who employ discussion, rather than solely lecture or adopt some other method, can discover why participation does not necessarily threaten individuality. Participation can *substantiate* individuality. It can literally generate human substance in the form of deepened insight, enhanced sensitivity, wider knowledge, greater breadth of understanding, and more. (Hansen (2001), pp.111)

However, it would be possible for such discussion methods to fail to constitute the *action* that is sought, if they are pursued without any genuine welcoming of the ideas of the students. Indeed, any pedagogical method is dependent on the context of the teacher-student relationships within the classroom and the values and attitudes of the participants. Crucially, the teacher's attitude can wreck the impact of discussion if she maintains an authoritarian stance and gives no value to students' contributions. Where the discussion is part of a mutually respectful relationship, that acknowledges the value of students' contributions, and the possibility of their generating new understandings and knowledge, then a form of emancipatory learning takes place. Nieto describes this:

> Encouraging these kinds of conversations is a message to students that the classrooms belong to them also because they are places where meaningful dialogue can occur around issues that are central to students' lives. And when students feel that the classrooms belong to them as well as to their teachers, they are free to learn. (Nieto (1999), p.121)

Without abandoning either their responsibility for the learning process, or a certain acknowledged privileged position in respect of the level and quantity of knowledge they hold, teachers can pursue a pedagogy that gives both ownership and agency to their students. This *action* pedagogy would be good for any *action* student who flourishes in this learning environment. Furthermore, the research group students, and their teacher, felt that Black male students are more often *action* students, and will find greater success with *action* teachers:

> Marvin: Saying that Black students are action in the first place, I think that's in a way saying we will work better with more action teachers.

The action teacher is not to be the exclusive preserve of the Black male students, but it is clearly important for the latter's success that this approach to pedagogy is available.

This pedagogy is very demanding of teachers, and was acknowledged by the group as an ideal, rather than the expected norm. It certainly takes time for the teacher to develop the maturity and confidence to share her lessons with students whilst maintaining an authoritative position. Interestingly, there was certainly no expectation in the students' prototype of a successful teacher that they be 'young'! As teachers are developing the best approach to pedagogy, there will be classrooms where *action* is only beginning to emerge out of *labour* and *work*. What was important, the group felt, was that students had at least one *action* teacher in their school experience:

> Hina: We were saying that throughout everyone's school life they must have had at least one action teacher. We were saying that the action teacher is like, not the perfect teacher, but an ideal teacher. I think you need one, at least.

Black male students were thought to be more in need of action teachers, since they were likely to be action students. Encounters between teachers who were either unwilling, or as yet unable, to move out of a safe, predictable, *labour* mode of pedagogy, and action students who respond best to interactive dialogic teaching, could prove difficult:

> R.Whitburn: What will happen when action students meet a labour teacher?
> Mahmoud: The teacher will think that the students are, well, basically, the lesson will fail. And the teacher will think that the students are very destructive.

This might characterise one of the situations where Black male students are prone to distractions and hence become seen as disruptive.

It was not considered impossible for Black male students to accommodate to the demands of a *labour* pedagogy, if the authority in knowledge and discipline of the teacher managed to elicit the required learning:

> Stephen: I think you can have a teacher who is not action, however, be very good at doing what they are doing, and I think that has happened. That has happened to me definitely. There was a lesson where there wasn't much dialogue and it was a very old fashioned kind of lesson, but 90% of the class managed to get away with the grade that they needed. It becomes a lesson that you wouldn't identify as a particularly enjoyable lesson, however it's like, 'oh we learn but I don't like it.'

Stephen's use of the phrase 'get away with the grade' suggests a successful escape from a situation, rather than the result of being positively involved in rewarding learning. This kind of accommodation might succeed for part of the students' curriculum, but it could not be the sole approach, if most Black male students are to achieve academic success at secondary school. However, active engagement in learning activities must not be seen as distinct from the relationships within the *action* pedagogy, and it is above all the engagement of the Black male student with the *teacher* that is essential. This can be further understood by reference to the work of educational philosopher David Hansen, as discussed below.

'Conduct', the Person, and Moral Sensibility in Pedagogy

The students had been very clear that the ability to establish good, friendly, relationships with students was essential for a teacher's success with Black male students. This may seem paradoxical when placed alongside their requirement for 'firmness', but it confirms that the idea of 'friendly'[11] is different to becoming a 'friend' or 'mate'. I think one of the best ways I can attempt to understand this better is to explore my own success with the Black students. There were a number of references to my pedagogy in the research discussions, and I have put some of them together here; the reciprocal nature of the pedagogical relationship is clear, and the students explain how my character and values form the basis of this:

> I think we have got a lot of respect for you as well, and you have got respect for us, it's like a two-way thing... (Wayne)

> We relate to you more, and we can understand you in class, and we know like when it's time to joke and when it's time to work. We know, like, how you like all your lessons, and when's the right time to do something in a way. (Marvin)

> The trust that you built up within the years with everyone that built up through time and the way you treat students like. (Clinton)

This reminded me of a discussion that I had some ten years ago with a sixteen-year old Black female student; we were talking about teachers' work with Black students, and the difficulties that the latter faced with many of my colleagues. I asked her what was different about the way she, and others,

---

[11] See Table 1 on p.68

could respond to me, and why she felt able to have this kind of conversation with me. Her answer was somewhat vague, but nonetheless emphatic: "It's just the way you *hold yourself*". I could grasp the sense of what she was saying at the time, but waited some years to find a clearer articulation of 'holding yourself'. I think that what that young woman and I had in mind is described most clearly by what Hansen (2001) refers to as 'conduct', as opposed to 'behaviour':

> Conduct comprises the characteristic doings of a person. In other words, it reveals and expresses his or her character. Character has to do with how the person regards and treats others... Conduct differs from mere behavior, which can be thoughtless and mechanistic. Conduct instantiates the person's intentions, will, thought, feeling and hope.

How a teacher 'holds' himself encapsulates a whole range of aspects of his personhood, and this will include the thoughts and aspirations he has for particular groups of students.

This 'conduct' is about who the teacher is, rather than an aspect of the competences she can acquire; it cannot be reduced to graded levels for ease of evaluation, but it is certainly clear to students when it is functioning well. Hansen links person and conduct with 'moral sensibility', and if the former encompass the characteristics of the teacher, the latter describes how he, or she, responds to the students, and this would determine the success of the *action* pedagogy:

> A moral sensibility brings person and conduct together under a unifying outlook or orientation. The teacher's acts begin to carry significance. They *mean* something positive, which would not necessarily be the case if the acts were undertaken casually and thoughtlessly, uninformed by a sense of purpose and value. Through time and experience, teachers can learn to build connections between what they say and do, such that focusing on any single act they undertake can shed light on the persons they are and on the student learning and growth they promote.
>
> (Hansen (2001), p.39)

In talking about the way I 'held myself', my student was talking about this moral sensibility; it was the significance of multiple acts that students observed over months, and years, that conveyed the sense of respect and value for Black students, and laid the basis for a different, much more positive, teacher-student relationship. Consistency of conduct is therefore as important, if not more so, than the avowed consistency in behaviour, emphasised in standard school behaviour management policies. It is the

inconsistency of *conduct* that betrays the inequalities of teachers' approaches, although they strive to pursue consistent *behaviour*. Teachers can claim to deal consistently with any particular form of deviant behaviour that they notice, whether perpetrated by Black students or others, and this may well happen as they say: behaviour is consistent. However, the poor assumptions that the teachers have of Black male students can lead to the 'figure grounding' of those boys, described earlier (see Chapter 4 p.43), so that they notice occasions of Black male misbehaviour far more often than any others: the moral sensibility is at fault, and inconsistency of conduct is manifested.

In the model of successful pedagogy I am presenting, moral sensibility and conduct make the *action* pedagogy fruitful in the building of positive relationships and the empowerment of students and teacher alike. This is not achieved quickly or even directly:

> ... a moral sensibility... does not come prepackaged at birth... A person cultivates, deepens, and refines it over the course of a lifetime... Most of the time, it is not a direct object of the person's attention or perception. Rather, it is funded, indirectly, by attending to people and to the situations in which they dwell.   (Hansen (2001), pp.38-39)

This certainly confirms that there is no quick solution to the needs of Black male students in school. The 'way you hold yourself' did not refer to a few singular public moments when I was trying to relate to students in a positive, friendly manner; it referred to all the pedagogical encounters, in my classroom in regular lessons, in corridors and the lunchroom, in both formal and casual encounters. Hansen describes this:

> ... teachers might ponder the impact on the *classroom* environment of individual meetings they hold with students in hallways, offices, homes, over electronic mail, or on the telephone. All such meetings can be perceived as parts of a whole rather than as unrelated to the formation of a classroom environment supportive of teaching and learning. (*ibid*, p.75)

This echoes Clinton's statement in the research dialogues: "What, I think, some teachers should realise is that to be a teacher, *it's not always just in the classroom environment*" (chapter 4, p. 51). A teacher's conduct is manifested in relationships throughout the hours in school, and his, or her, moral sensibility is developed in practice in that school community, rather than in isolation.

Moreover, conduct can, unwittingly, reveal more than the sum of carefully practised behaviours. There are many negative assumptions, based on ill-considered stereotypes, which abound in relation to Black students in our society and schools. Although teachers may exhibit the appropriate 'behaviours' in respect of their routine approaches to teaching in their classrooms, being careful to 'treat all students the same', their 'conduct' can often betray the assumptions they hold about their Black students (Youdell, 2004). This was clearly a feature of the research students' thoughts about their experience of Black male students in school. Successful teachers of Black male students will have dealt with many of these negative assumptions, and will be able to show in their conduct that they care about their progress and achievement. Nieto emphasises the importance of teachers' attitudes in forging successful pedagogical relationships:

> The role of teachers and schools is crucial in reversing this situation (in which black students are undervalued in school and society). Primary among them is the need for teachers to forge deep and meaningful relationships with their students... In order to develop meaningful relationships with their students, teachers first need to transform their own attitudes and beliefs about the value and worthiness of nonmajority-group students. (Nieto (1999), p.97)

In the way teachers 'hold themselves' Black students can sense the value that is being placed upon them, and whether they are merely called upon to accommodate to a teacher's cultural position, or whether a mutual appreciation and understanding is being encouraged. The latter is the basis for the 'friendly' relation that the students called for in their successful teacher.

Hansen goes on in his account to depict what I would say was something akin to my ideal of *action* pedagogy. He sees the teacher-student relationship as being further developed through an active pedagogy, which both brings the teacher closer to his, or her, students, but also develops their uniqueness, in a form of *natality*:

> ... teacher and students are, in a manner of speaking, moving closer to one another because they are learning about one another's ways of thinking and acting. But they move closer and closer "apart", in a crucial moral and intellectual sense, precisely because they discern each other's distinctiveness and individuality. And yet, at the same time, they move farther and farther "together" into a subject, into a realm of questions, ideas, issues, ways of reading, speaking, seeing, writing, thinking, feeling and more. (Hansen (2001), p.156)

Connectedness with students' culture, both in terms of their ethnic community and their youth culture, or 'street sense', will enable the teacher to make the curriculum, with its traditions and knowledge, more accessible to the Black male students as they move 'farther and farther "together" into a subject', as outlined by the research group. This is what I think the group meant by 'bringing something new to the classroom'. Furthermore, it will be the teacher's connectedness with the students themselves, as people, and the moral sensibility with which the teacher enacts his, or her, conduct with them, that will secure the Black male students' success.

As the teacher-student relationship strengthens and deepens, the quality of the conduct and moral sensibility that Hansen describes will develop into a genuine 'love' between teacher and students. Nieto expresses this well:

> The climate for learning, that is, cannot be separated from a climate in which care, concern and love are central. By "love" I do not mean a mawkish or sentimental demonstration of concern for students. Rather, I am suggesting that love is at the core of good teaching because it is predicated on high standards, rigorous demands, and respect for students, their identities, and their families.   (Nieto (1999), p.100)

In the volume of essays on Arendt and Education, there is a dialogue conducted in the form of letters between two Arendt scholars, Young-Bruehl and Kohn (2001), and in one of the letters, the former uses the term 'love' to express the best of pedagogy, with an interesting aside about the German writer Goethe:

> Educators... have to love well, give the student a relationship to be in, a connection to the world... (Recently, I read an article that contained a statement of Goethe's to the effect that it was not the most brilliant teachers who had the greatest influence on him, but those who loved him the most.)   (Young-Bruehl & Kohn (2001), p.247)

Our research group would have probably avoided the use of a term such as 'love' with its predominately romantic and sexual connotations for contemporary society, but I think that's what they were sometimes describing. In its sense of care and commitment, love can perhaps best sum up the call that Clinton had made earlier, for a teacher to *"give your all to that person (student)"*. As he explained at the time, this is impossible if you have poor assumptions about a person. Teachers need to think positively about Black male students, and seek to establish and develop strong loving

relationships with them, through an active dialogic pedagogy that will enable them to understand and respect each other. This is unlikely to occur if both teachers and students have to accommodate to a technicist pedagogy that privileges objectives and behaviours above natality and conduct.

Chapter 6

<u>Conclusions</u>

Pedagogy & African-Caribbean male students – an alternative to accommodation

The Research group for this study consisted of young men and women who knew well many of the realities of education and society for young African-Caribbean males in metropolitan Britain. Although generally educationally successful themselves, in terms of school achievement up to the age of 16 and of continued commitment to education beyond that, they were familiar with the experiences of other Black male students who were much less successful. Moreover, their own successes had been in the context of challenges and difficulties within the school system. Their discussions had taken place over a period of a year, giving them time for considered thinking and reflection on the issues. Although not suggesting that these dialogues define the entire reality of educational experience for African-Caribbean males, I have used the students' ideas to propound a pedagogical approach that I believe can bring achievement that is more successful for Black male students in UK secondary schools. In these concluding reflections on the research, the model of 'action' pedagogy is compared to the work of Dr Tony Sewell (1997, 2004) who also researched Black male students' experiences in a UK secondary school.

My research students had affirmed that pedagogy could make a difference in the success and achievement of Black male students in secondary school. Starting from the example of Pierre and then exploring their own experience, they developed a model of teacher-student interaction that Black male students would respond well to and that would prosper their learning and academic achievement. Despite their acknowledgement of the poor stereotypical assumptions that some teachers make about Black males, they were not cynical about the possibilities of successful pedagogy. Indeed, they presented notions of commitment and devotion within the pedagogical relationship that might seem to contrast strongly with the 'cool' detached image that Black, and many non-Black, adolescent males choose to adopt and promote (Majors, 1992). Without jettisoning all the elements of 'cool', the

Black males within the research group argued for meaningful relationships between students and their teacher that extended beyond the classroom itself, and took the teacher beyond the confines of the lesson plan.

Moreover, the student himself would be taken beyond the boundaries of simply 'getting through what you have to do' at school. Although not the initiator of the teacher-student relationship, the young Black male would be actively responding to the teacher's efforts. There was no sense that the Black male student would shrink back from the commitment and devotion that his teacher was evincing. Although the student would be venturing beyond the world of his own culture, the accord established between Black male student and teacher would suggest much more than a simple accommodation on the part of the student. The accommodation is mutual, if indeed the term is applicable at all; the *action* pedagogy is not based essentially on compromise, or denial, since both parties have common goals and mutual respect and interest in their cultures and values. The resulting learning experiences bring forth freedom for both students and teachers, for expression of ideas and exploration of learning. This is less constricting than the didactic classroom, and places an importance on the student's contribution that is affirming and less stressful than accommodation.

There were a number of references in the students' dialogues to weaker aspects of Black male students' schoolwork and achievements, with a propensity to be distracted from learning and possibly even sometimes complacent about studying. These are quite likely to have been influenced by the many negative racist stereotypes and images of Black males in Western societies, and indicated a 'habitus' that would be a hindrance to academic success. The successful teacher would have to see beyond the limits of this habitus and engage with the Black male students' desire to learn and achieve, however submerged. It is also possible that the Black male student may buckle under the weight of striving to achieve, in a society that frequently reminds him that he is a potential underachiever. Family and community may caution him that it will be a lot harder for him to achieve than his white peers, and this pressure may need lightening by the teacher, whilst still maintaining a 'push' for success. Handling these dual pressures successfully

depends on the strength of the teacher-student relationship, rather than the competences of pedagogical technique.

Teachers would need to focus positive attention on Black male students, in the face of the negative attention that seems all too commonplace. Without pleading for unreasonable special treatment, the students were making it clear that teachers would need to make a particular effort to reject common poor assumptions about Black male students if their pedagogy was to succeed. This would not be approached in a 'colour blind' sense where no recognition would be made of the young men's particular cultural identities as Black students. The group's prototype of the successful teacher included many references to knowledge of students' cultures and the linking of curriculum with those cultures:

The Key features of the Research Group's Prototype of Successful Teachers
• Respectful of students
• Firm approach
• Positive, friendly, relationship with the students
• Sense of humour – 'lightening the lesson'
• Knowledge of students' youth culture: 'streetwise'
• Connecting the subject of the lesson with the students: 'bringing something new to the class'
• Dialogue and feedback

Culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1998) could be a vehicle for the establishment of good positive teacher-student relationships with Black male students, but I think that something more than cultural relevance is needed.

Successful *action* pedagogy is a complex blend of curriculum and relationships, such that there would be a rapport between the teacher and the Black male students, and a connectedness through the curriculum and learning processes. The engagement of the students would be with the teacher as a person, as well as with the curriculum. The research students often talked of the dynamic of this engagement as a 'push', although it also seemed like a 'pull', particularly when they talked about the building of links between student culture and curriculum. Black male students could certainly be brought into an active pedagogy, particularly where the teacher shows an

awareness, and appreciation, of their cultural identities, in both ethnicity and age. The model of an *action* pedagogy also highlights the importance of agency within that engagement. The student is welcomed into the 'action' classroom as someone with ideas that are valuable and knowledge that can be incorporated into the learning project. The student does not have to merely accommodate with a prepared agenda that the teacher delivers through a planned series of activities; he comes ready to make a creative contribution, through dialogue and other active participation, that the teacher will embrace and help channel into further learning. The Black male student becomes more positively involved in school pedagogy, yet does so without denying his own culture and sense of identity; the latter are welcomed as significant and different by the teacher, and seen as making a vital contribution to the learning of all.

In his study of boys in a South London secondary school, Sewell discussed three key groups of Black male students: conformists, innovators, and rebels[12] (Sewell, 1997, 2004). Black males were seen as having to choose between accommodation or rejection of the means and ends of schooling, but I think Black male students have an alternative in *action* pedagogy: influencing, and helping to create, the means of learning in the classroom. This suggests different types to Sewell: I have called them *labourers* and *activists*. In contrast to the *labourers* of the didactic and technicist classroom, Black male students could become *activists* of the dialogic and interactive classroom. Labourers, who accommodate to the dictates of the pedagogy of *labour* or *work*, do match Sewell's 'conformists': "they accept both the means and goals of schooling" (Sewell, 2004, p. 104). Pedagogy in Sewell's 'Township school' seemed to be strongly didactic; the teachers demanded a high level of conformity from all students, and generally had low expectations of the African-Caribbean males, even if they were conformists. Sewell uses the work of Keddie to clarify this Conformist idea further:

> According to Keddie (1973), what marks out the Conformist is 'an ability to move into an alternative system of thought from that of his everyday knowledge.'   (Sewell, 1997, p.81)

---

[12] His fourth group, retreatists, had very few members.

However, such a desertion of the student's culture is not necessary for successful learning. One of the key points of the *action* pedagogy, and the ideal teacher that the Research group described, is the incorporation of the students' 'everyday knowledge' into the learning and teaching in the classroom.

In 'action' pedagogy, Sewell's second major group, the 'innovators', who "accepted the goals of schooling but rejected the means" (*ibid.*, p. 101) can be offered an alternative to the accommodationist 'means' of the didactic classroom, and thereby find greater success in their pursuit of the goals of education. Their innovative instincts are welcomed by their teacher as a positive contribution to the activities of the classroom. They are invited to work within *action* pedagogy to create new pedagogic relationships with the teacher, and to learn in a situation that respects students' cultures and ideas, and gives them a voice in dialogue. Moreover, this dialogic approach is not only pedagogical, but also epistemological; students have the opportunity to build the knowledge and understanding of the curriculum through their participation. An 'innovator' can thereby become an *activist* and join his teacher in 'bringing something new to the classroom'. Of course, Conformists could also flourish with *action* pedagogy, and that would only leave Sewell's 'Rebels' outside of the realms of educational success. Sewell estimated that less than a quarter of the Black male students in his case-study school came into that category, and that it was generally true that the vast majority of Black males wanted to achieve educational success. This research study has only focused on that majority, and I would not claim that changes in pedagogy could convert the 'rebels'. However, I am suggesting that pedagogical approaches could contribute to the success of the majority of Black male students in secondary schools, and that an *action* pedagogy has the potential to do that.

An example of this process in my own classroom is now presented, to help demonstrate the idea of *action* pedagogy. The instance came in my year 10 History GCSE History class very recently, when we were discussing the idea of the New Deal in the U.S.A. in the 1930s. I was exploring the overall idea of 'new deal', and trying to use the students' cultural knowledge to do that; I

had in mind the card-game metaphor, which had in fact been used in some political cartoons, to signify new opportunities for prosperity. However, Karl, one of my Black male students, put forward an alternative idea, explaining the more colloquial notion of 'deal' meaning relationship between two parties, and suggested that Roosevelt was proposing a new connection between government and people. This advanced the class's learning immensely, even suggesting the concept of the 'Broker state', an advanced idea that I would not have put forward myself; this epitomised *action* pedagogy. Karl's contribution was not a clever piece of knowledge that he had acquired from either a previous lesson or his own research; he was using his own cultural knowledge to explore the meaning of an historical idea. This dialogic approach is not merely a pedagogical device that can be added to a teacher's portfolio of classroom strategies. Karl was able to participate in this way because of the relationship between teacher and student in my classroom. The mutual respect that the Research group had described and the moral sensibility in 'the way I hold myself' are essential foundations for this epistemological moment.

Such moments are not going to occur all the time, and, as the Research group students had explained in their response to the Arendtian model, there would be some *labour* involved in even the most successful classes. It is the teacher-student relationship that then makes all the difference to the *labour,* and the teacher's *conduct* assures the students that the mutual respect and personal value has not disappeared, although the they may be *labouring* rather than participating as *activists* for the time being. Nor is there any suggestion here that only Black male students should be given the opportunities of *action* pedagogy. The latter is potentially good for all students, and there will be other students who favour an *activist* response to schooling. Nonetheless, the Research group were considering the specific needs of Black male students, and the development of *action* pedagogy needs to be prioritised in their interests.

Activist Pedagogy and Teacher Development

Current technicist approaches to pedagogy are unlikely to encourage the kind of activist pedagogy that I am recommending for successful work with African-Caribbean male students. The latest official publication offering guidance on pedagogy certainly does have a 'study guide' on student engagement in the classroom, but its title is telling: 'Active Engagement Techniques' (DfES, 2004). There is a discussion of constructivist learning theories within the guide, and a short section on important principles for creating engagement, which could portend an approach to pedagogy that would move into our idea of 'action'. However, the bulk of the booklet is concerned with techniques, principally directed activities related to text (DARTs), drama activities, and thinking skills techniques. There is no discussion of students' ownership of the learning processes, and no mention of students' cultures, although the need for the students to make connections with the curriculum is discussed. The emphasis on techniques, rather than relationships, accords with the pedagogy of labour and work, and keeps the role of the student to a largely accommodationist one, albeit with an emphasis on active participation. Activity does not amount to *activism* unless the student shares in the ownership of the learning agenda.

In her discussion of Critical multicultural education, Nieto says that it 'complicates pedagogy' (Nieto, 2004), and this is certainly true of the proposed 'action' pedagogy. Changing aspects of curricula and giving students a more active role in classroom work cannot be successful without the right 'conduct' and moral sensibility from the teacher. As Nieto states:

> (Multicultural education) is not meant to discourage new and innovative pedagogical strategies; on the contrary, pedagogy, to be effective, needs to become more humanizing. But there is no set 'bag of tricks' that will accomplish this awesome task. What matters are the intentions and goals behind the pedagogy.   (Nieto, 2004, p.194)

The intentions behind the pedagogy for Black male students have to be about more than advancing test scores and examination grades. An unsophisticated push from teachers to achieve better results, based on the simple notion that, despite the 'cool' image, Black males do want to achieve, is unlikely to succeed, and could even provoke confrontation. The encouragement that the research students were describing as a 'push' was rooted in the teacher's

depth of understanding of their situation as Black males in a challenging society. I think that the 'way you hold yourself' as teachers is as much about the teachers' appreciation of the pressures and concerns of the Black male students, as about the values and concerns of the teachers themselves. The 'push' needs to be an *empathetic* response of high expectations without poor assumptions, and must offer support as well as drive, so that as Black male students come under more pressure to achieve, they do not buckle and remain behind other groups.

Further indication that a technicist approach does not promote an action pedagogy, and that this fails to do the best for our African-Caribbean male students, came from a set of interviews that a Local Education Authority consultant conducted recently with some of my Black male students in year 10. In describing his misgivings about current trends in pedagogy, a fifteen-year old Black male, called Olu, said:

> It's like, when the teacher is just come, it's like the government just gave them a sheet with what to do in class or something... My English teacher, she's read some of the books, yeah, so she'll put her opinion across, yeah, she'll tell you, but when you want to tell her 'Ah, I think this', she'll be like 'Ah, yeah, no talking please, let's go back to the class' or something. It's like it's just proper planned; like the teachers are robots or something.

The inflexible and didactic approach of the teacher is masked by the Lesson Plan, that here has become a powerful artefact, that the student feels has been used to exclude his voice. This student, like the young people in the Research group, does not support an accommodationist approach to his learning, which would accept the tight control of the teacher over any discussion, perhaps justified by the bulk of the curriculum content that must be covered for public examinations. He values the opportunity to discuss ideas, and to co-construct the pattern of knowledge that might emerge about the literature that he and his teacher are considering. The teacher seems reluctant to share pedagogic power with her student, and this may be the result of the technicist approach that has gained favour with the authorities, or it may stem from a personal lack of confidence. However, Olu talks as if this is not just a problem with the one teacher, and he sees government influence behind the problem.

Perhaps the latest work on 'Personalised Learning', led by David Hargreaves, may be more promising, with its emphasis on 'Student Voice' as one of its nine 'Gateways' to more effective learning (Hargreaves, 2004). Indeed, at a recent conference, Hargreaves talked of Student Voice as the most significant of all the gateways, and Action pedagogy affirms this. However, it is not clear how far this 'Personalised Learning' work will be able to supersede the technicist and managerial approach that has become so dominant in school systems and favoured pedagogical approaches. It may be possible for these ideas of an 'action pedagogy' to flourish under this new Personalised Learning imperative, but for the moment it looks like it will have to fight for survival alongside the alternative, stifling, approaches. However, for greater pedagogical success with African-Caribbean male students, I suggest that accommodating the technicist agenda is unlikely to bring the desired results. As Olu expressed so sharply in his interview, Black male students are acutely aware of their voice being smothered, and are likely to resent it, and many will be deterred from engagement with their learning.

Teachers need to explore the ideas of this 'Action Pedagogy', not just in professional development programmes, but also through listening to the students, particularly their African-Caribbean young men. Replicating this study would be almost certainly too long a process for teachers in school, but there could be shorter activities that would give young Black male students a chance to voice their perspectives. I took many of the key ideas from the Research group dialogues and from my model of 'Action Pedagogy', and created a Diamond-nine activity, in which the participants have to prioritise statements into a diamond shape, and reject some ideas in the process. I also added a couple of ideas from the current 'technicist' agenda, as well as the extreme, but sometimes popular, notion that corporal punishment might secure better behaviour and hence learning. The ideas used were as follows:

Ideas from the Research group and the Action Pedagogy model:
- Teacher's knowledge and understanding of student's 'street' culture.
- The use of humour by the teacher within lessons.
- Dialogue between student and teacher.
- Teacher's Lessons include lots of discussion about issues and problem-solving.
- Teacher pushing the student to do his best in his studies.
- Teacher's Lessons link the curriculum with the student's culture.
- Respect of the teacher for the student.
- Fairness in discipline issues.
- Positive teacher-student relationship.

Two notions from the current technicist agenda:
- Regular testing of the student in lessons.
- Regular marking of the student's work.

A 'wild card' from some populist views of what to do with 'difficult' students:
- Giving the student a good beating every now and then.

This activity was then presented to a group of our final year African-Caribbean Advanced level students. They were asked to consider the needs of Black male students lower down the school, and prioritise the factors that they thought would most help their progress in secondary school.

Both groups of Black male students placed "Teacher pushing the student to do his best in his studies" very high on their list, one placing it first, and the other second. The "Positive teacher-student relationship" was first for the latter group, and equal-third for the former. "Dialogue between student and teacher" was also ranked quite highly by both groups, in either the second or third ranking. This confirmed the importance of the Research Group's ideas, and of the principles of the Action pedagogy model. The 'wild card' of occasional corporal punishment was surprisingly popular, also coming in the second or third rankings; the group was perhaps old enough to be taking a rather detached approach to adolescent secondary students, and incorporating ideas from their home life, rather than the realm of school itself. The two technicist notions did not appear in the top sections of the students' choices, but they were evident in the lower rankings. Both groups rejected the same three ideas, and they were some of the Research Group's more cherished notions, concerning students' culture and teacher's humour. Again, this may have been connected with their age and stage of education;

as final year 'A' level students they had a tight curriculum that they could relate to in a very instrumental way, and were not so focused on relevance to adolescent life.

Overall, the students enjoyed the activity, and there was a full and vigorous debate accompanying the exercise. This could be a way for teachers to engage with their Black male students in an open dialogue about their education. Nevertheless, discussions can only be part of a genuine dialogue if the teachers are prepared to value the voice of their students, and build a pedagogical relationship based on mutual respect and trust. Student Voice cannot become another innovation grafted on to the managerial corps of schooling; Black male students will know if they are engaged in a token activity rather than part of a new activist pedagogy. At the same time, teachers learning to develop new pedagogical approaches will need to do so through genuinely empowering dialogue, rather than didactic training. In a recent in-service course for teachers based on this research, I used this same diamond-nine activity with the participants, and this would be a good preparation for teachers wanting to engage with their Black male students in the process. I think it is important to develop successful pedagogy with African-Caribbean male students, and indeed all students, through the same *activist* processes and caring relationships that we want to characterise our classrooms; if teachers are to be fully learners they must be engaged and empowered as much as their younger charges.

Action Research and Action Pedagogy

The final section of this thesis must return to the challenge of action research that was taken from O'Hanlon (1995) at the start: How has the situation of African-Caribbean males' achievement in UK secondary schools been *redefined* because of this research? How have I *changed* as a professional as a result? Moreover, we should then consider Ball's notion of 'edifying conversations' (1997): How far have we been *edified* by this project?

(a) Redefining a problem   Accommodation or resistance have been two well rehearsed modes of operation for young Black males marginalized and disempowered by the majority society. This study has offered an alternative:

the teachers and students can be involved in pursuing a form of pedagogical relationship and action, through creative dialogue in and out of their classrooms, such that young Black male students can be given a supportive 'push' to achieve. With both generalised respect for all students, and particularised respect for the African-Caribbean males who have been so markedly unsuccessful in UK secondary schools, teachers can approach these young men with appreciation of the latter's particular ethnic and youth culture, and an invitation to bring its insights and diversity into the pedagogy of the classroom. Mutual respect, interest, and support describe this pedagogy better than mutual accommodation. Resistance, however, must certainly occur, but not from the students towards their teachers, but from the teachers towards the hegemonic pedagogical programme that has emerged in the last few years in the UK, under the widespread technicist agenda. Rather than pursuing the pedagogy of *labour*, with its emphasis on compliance and competence, teachers can engage themselves and their students in the pedagogy of *action*, emphasising creativity, diversity, and partnership.

(b) <u>Professional learning and change</u>   A major part of the excitement of this piece of action research for me was the explicit exploration of my own pedagogy with African-Caribbean male students that took place in the research group. Although the research did not reveal any major surprises about my pedagogy, it confirmed many things that I had thought important, and with the hermeneutic device of Hannah Arendt's typology, these could be brought into a model of pedagogy that can be used to help other teachers develop successful work with Black male students. This has built a foundation for me to present a more emphatic voice on pedagogy not only within my own school, but also, potentially, within a wider sphere in the UK secondary sector. The amplification of the idea of "how I hold myself", assisted by the work of David Hansen on conduct and moral sensibility, has also helped to intensify the primacy of teacher-student relationships in my understanding of successful pedagogy, which has been discussed for some time (Rogers, 1980), but seems to have been rather neglected in the technicist climate of today. My commitment to less didactic and more dialogic approaches to teaching and

learning in the classroom is even stronger as a result of this research and the emergence of *action* pedagogy.

Recently I was preparing for a school-based INSET session on approaches to pedagogy and lesson planning, and I was searching for useful metaphors to describe what I saw as the main types that teachers use. I had initially decided on three: the 'battleground'; the empty vessels; and the construction site. However, none of these captured what I think is the essence of *action* pedagogy, although the latter approaches it. I was then struck by a section of dialogue by the African-American jazz musician Wynton Marsalis in a television programme about the history of jazz music:

> The real power of jazz and the innovation of jazz is that a group of people can come together and create art, improvised art and can negotiate their agendas with each other, and that negotiation is the art... Everybody'll just start playing and listening, and you'll never know what they're going to do. So that's our art, the four of us can now have a dialogue, we can have a conversation; we can speak to each other in the language of music.   (Wynton Marsalis, in Burns (2001))

The emphasis on dialogue and partnership, creativity and 'voice', seems to epitomise the natality and plurality of *action* pedagogy, and 'bringing something new to the classroom' as the research group phrased it. The metaphor of 'live jazz' for pedagogy was born, and I used it as the highest aspirant level for a teacher in her classes. This was not particularly in relation to African-Caribbean male students, it was simply a discussion of good pedagogy, but I think it links very well with the conclusions of this research. It is perhaps no coincidence that Jazz is a musical form that owes so much to Black people, so that a pedagogical approach that echoes its form is potentially very important for their success.

(c) Edification   Stephen Ball's 'edifying conversations' (Ball, 1997, p.249) suggest research that will be spiritually uplifting for professional teachers and their students, as opposed to the construction of an *edifice* that is the current public agenda for schools and their servant workers. The hegemony of the behavioural objectives approach to lesson-planning and teaching and learning is being upheld through the school inspection regime and national strategy documentation and training. This research study has not confirmed the importance of consistent behaviour, nor of consistent display of learning

outcomes. Of course, it hasn't suggested that these features are actually detrimental to the work of students; they may be basic features of a minimal satisfactory requirement for the work of teachers in classrooms. These standards may contribute to an overall lifting of students' achievement across the education system, but I suggest that they will do little, or nothing, to address the particular issues of achievement that centre around our African-Caribbean male students in secondary schools. Public awareness of Black male academic underachievement, and the consequent intense concern from the young men's families, can present a burden of achievement that weighs heavily on the Black male psyche. The young men and women of this research team knew that very well, and they called out to their teachers to 'give their all' to those young Black male students, and give them the supportive push that can help them bear the burden and fulfil their potential. Their evidence most certainly challenges some of the current pedagogical practices of teachers in schools, but their optimism and belief in the potential of vibrant and caring teacher-student relationships should indeed be 'edifying' for professional teachers committed to working with African-Caribbean male students. We must lose no time in engaging these young men in a positive dialogic pedagogy that can capitalise on that optimism, before it is extinguished by neglect and disappointment. If that requires a crack in the current edifice of secondary school pedagogy, and a more creative and diverse approach from teachers and students in partnership, I think it would be highly edifying: that's jazz.

WHI (my staff code): How far do you think that black boys are particular, not saying special, but particular in the way that they work and the way that they need to be brought on and brought out in classes. Do you think there is any thing you would say 'they do tend to need this or that.'?

CLINTON: Well from certain examples most of them want to be like their peers. If they're with their friends in a classroom they might need that sort of a strict teacher that keeps hold of them. But if they're separated its just like a kind of (unclear) but if they are in the same peer group, its not good like talking at the and stuff like that, that's what I find mostly.

WHI: You find that for yourself

CLINTON: Yeah.

WHI: Anyone else, anyone who's not a bad boy observes that and can say 'well that's what I have seen'

AMMA: Yeah I have seen that a lot. If they are together then its totally different to when they are on their own, or they are with a teacher that's gonna make sure that the class is properly focused. It matters on the teacher as well. I think you can have them in their peer groups but it depends on the teacher as well if they can get away with it they will.

WHI: At the moment is there something particular about the way they respond?

AMMA: Yeah

WHI: You think there is. Mahmoud?

MAHMOUD: Well I agree with what he said, but its not exactly you can't just take it on with black boy because it happens. If there is a black guy and white guy they have the same communication while the class is going on. The teacher will be explaining the lesson and these children will be chatting, so it's not exactly. They're teenagers in general. But at the same time, black students do need the teacher to be in control of the class kind of thing. If he lets the class loose then everyone will get loose but mostly the black students. Because they are into chatting and into like Mcing, rapping and all that in the class they wouldn't mind they will do it in the class. So that's how I see it.

MARVIN: You see like if you have a group of black boys for example in a class and you don't have a strict teacher, but a strict teacher but a teacher who is there to teach and cant really control the class and then you get some of the teachers.
(interruption) say someone is like talking to you and you get caught for talking back. You get teachers that recognise that it's a group thing and you get teachers that only like pick on certain people. But they don't really know whats going on but they're gonna say your talking but the other person don't get in trouble.

WHI: Are you saying that that's got anything to do with being black students?

MARVIN: From what you have experienced....

WHI: Yeah its what you have observed is what your talking about here its just what you have observed. How would you feel its got anything to do with.

MARVIN: From my experience of school and being in school and lesson you can see that most of the time; for example you have a black group and a white group of boys. The black group will get more concentrated on because, I think its like a regular thing that they know that they know that black people will be making the most noise and they are louder and they are more whatever, I don't know.

WHI: OK, you're just talking about what you have observed and experienced your not confirming anything for sure. Does anyone else echo what Marvin is saying?

CLINTON: Yeah I agree what he is saying, a teacher would make an assumption. If they see a group of black students in the class and they like hear talking but they don't see they automatically like pick on them because they just assume they are the sort of people that would talk a lot. It's only some teachers what would do that though. They assume that they talk a lot and want to disrupt the class

WHI: Anyone else? Hina?

HINA: I agree with Mahmoud, it's not necessarily only black people. it doesn't necessarily have to be a black group of boys it could be a black group of girls that could be just the same, but they cant concentrate on stuff on their own. Or anyone, I don't think necessarily just black people.

WHI: Ok, fair enough. Would you say the same about an Asian group of boys?

HINA: Yeah.

WHI: What about in Bishop's and what you have observed in Bishop's?

HINA: Some of the m can be disruptive and its not necessarily. On their own they can be hard working, but once you get into that whole group thing, they all try and impress each other.

WHI: Have you observed that in your own classrooms lower down the school?

HINA: Yeah, cos at they age your very impressionable so a lot of people just come to school to look for popularity and stuff.

WHI: You haven't noticed any particular difference with black boys as oppose to any other group it didn't stand out that.

HINA: I agree with Clinton that the black boys get the blame, I agree with that

WHI: Have you seen it?

CLINTON: I would say so yeah. Lower down the school yeah.

WHI: Do you think students make that assumption as well as teachers. Do you think other non-black male students, assume that black male students will be the ones?

HNA: I don't think they base it on race, they base it on past. If there is a certain class that is always going to disrupt, I think the students are most open minded than the teachers.

WAYNE: Can I say something?

WHI: Yeah

WAYNE: I think its depends on the group, I used to find that one of my sciences classes, my teacher... there was like four of us that used to hang around with each other all the time. Three of us was black and Rees was on the only one white one out of the four of us. But the white males were the ones that would be making more trouble, every lesson, every lesson so I think it just depends on the group at the time.

WHI: Anyone who hasn't had a chance to speak yet, or anyone who has wanted to say something more?

MAHMOUD: I think the teachers make their assumptions on the first impressions that they get from the group. So basically if the group walks in the first day and sits quietly for the rest of the lesson, the teacher will know this group as not disruptive basically. They will just leave them alone and never pick on them. If the group from the first lesson sit down together ignore the teacher, chatting loud and disrupt the rest, basically the teacher will assume all the time the that's its basically this group that making the noise.

REES: I think what Clinton said was true. When I used to sit with Jerome I used to get in more trouble than me but we were just as bad, but he would get into more trouble most of the time, not all teachers but some teachers.

WAYNE: That thing about assumptions. You know we were put into sets first 1/2/3, I think the assumption comes from there as well. That set 3 is where all the bad students are and stuff like that, and set one is just as a disruptive class.

WHI: You agree with that?

AMMA: Yes, that's very true. You put people in sets and you automatically put them into classes of how they are going to behave. You automatically think that set three are going to be disruptive.

WHI: OK, so what sort of groups were you guys in then?

MARVIN: one star

WHI: One star

MARVIN: Yeah

WHI: ha ha ha

MARVIN: I think what Amma said is true because like, I was in like set 1 for English, and I would think that if I was in set 3 or 4 for English I would feel kind of dumb, not dumb but. To me I felt set 3 and 4 they didn't really learn anything, they would be put in that class because the staff did not want them to disrupt the people in the higher sets. I know it was because of their ability as well I know they learn at a slower pace.

WHI: Was anybody being very successful in different context being more successful in some lessons than in other lessons, but still sticking to the idea that you notice that it was clear that the black boys were different in some lessons to others.

CLINTON: Compare like P.E to something like Maths or something. Most of the black boys will be more successful at like P.E and like physical activities than like Maths and stuff like that.

WHI: That's what you observed?

CLINTON: I don't know if they don't consider P.E as like a working environment or just fun and games, but it's like there is no assumptions made so even if you are one of the baddest students in the whole school, the P.E teacher would give you more, I wouldn't say equality, but more of the time of day than say head of Maths or head of History. Because they see you in more of a different light.

WHI: OK reaction, other people coming in on that

WAYNE: I agree with him totally. I think it's the only time when everybody moves to it on time. You know when the bell goes you know it's the only lesson that people move to on time. No body is late you just go and get changed. What Clinton said about the teachers, and what he said about the PE teacher and the head of Maths is different towards the teacher is true.

WHI: Anybody else

MARVIN: I agree that black students are more like arty. They are more like into P.E and Drama and Art and Music and all that. I don't know if they don't see it as lessons like algebra and things like that. Its like when you they go into a art class it's just like drawing or act or stuff like that. Its not really like don't know what to say. I think black boys they find it more fun.

WHI: How about Amma and Hina?

AMMA: I would agree that the environment that you're in its not like a typical academic environment and like everyone is given the opportunity to excel basically. And black boys typically are good at P.E so even though they are bad students in P.E teachers don't see them like that they see them as people who are going to be captain of the team and people who are going t be the top P.E students and its different.

HINA: I think they are given more opportunity to excel because they recognise your individual ability even if you are in a team. So if you're doing coursework in Maths

WHI: When you say they just clarify that

HINA: The black people got help

WHI: They got from

HINA: PE is where people shone and a lot of P.E teachers recognise that they do stuff like captain the team, and it gives people confidence.

WHI: Go on Wayne

WAYNE: I think that really black males, I cant really speak for everybody but they get the chance to express themselves. When it comes to Art , PE and Drama its like how you feel and you are making your own decisions and stuff.

MAHMOUD: Last yeah and in year 11 people who are doing P.E are doing the same stuff as they are doing in Biology. And some of them git some high grades in P.E but low grades in Biology, the same time they are enjoying the lessons in P.E and learning it but in Biology they are doing terrible at it. I don't see the point behind it, I don't see the point of getting high high marks on the same subject but getting low marks on the same subject. So it's more like the lesson was more enjoyable.

WHI: Just coming back to a point that Clinton made a few minutes ago, you said about the P.E lesson and you said that the teacher wasn't making any assumptions. Do you think that's true? Go on Hina.

HINA: We've had discussions in P.E about Indians playing cricket and black people playing basketball, white people playing football and things like that. I think the teachers assume what we have just said, that the majority of black people will want to be more PE orientated and interested and they give them the chance.

CLINTON: I am talking about assumptions in behaviour, they don't look at your past behaviour and because you have been disruptive in class. They don't make them assumptions. But of course they are going to make some assumptions because its what they see all the time.

WHI: In what sense?

CLINTON: They might see all the time more Asian people playing cricket white people playing football and stuff like that, they say exactly what they see. They might go to the staff room and people are talking about a disruptive boy or girl and they might be thinking, I haven't seen this side of him.

WHI: Do you think they make assumptions about black boys in relation to PE?

CLINTON: yeah

WHI: What do you think those assumptions are

CLINTON: You will find that most of them excel at most sport. In football, basketball, things like that.

WHI: What about anyone else, do you sense that teachers make assumptions abut black boys and P.E? Rees?

REES: I think they do. I think they think they will be better at it? (UNCLEAR)

WHI: Sharon

AMMA: I think that they assume that they are the people that are going to be the top P.E students, because, I don't know why it is but it is just the assumption that black boys are good of P.E that some section of P.E they are going to be really good at.

WHI: Do you think the student think the same thing?

AMMA: Yeah

WHI: How important do you think those assumptions are in possibly causing the result? How string is assumption in actually determining the outcome? Or do you think that the assumption just goes along with the outcome and the outcome doesn't actually get influenced by those assumptions.

HINA: I think its definitely an important figure because its like a stereotype. What people expect you to do you feel that you have to do. So people expect you I would personally feel bad if I did music or Art.

WHI: You would?

HINA: Not bad, but I would feel like everyone would be like 'why isnt she doing medicine?'

WHI: What do other people think, how strong are assumptions in determining outcomes?

AMMA: I think assumptions are very important because you don't really normally change your assumptions that easily of someone, if you think they are going to be good at something, you just believe it sort of thing. If you assume that someone is good and they are good that helps to get a good outcome.

WHI: Clinton, anything?

CLINTON: When you make a bad assumption about someone, you probably wouldn't give your all to that person, because you couldn't do what they expected. But if you have like good assumptions about someone then you can like push them more, to do what you think they can do, so assumptions play a big part in he out come.

WHI: Go on

WAYNE: I was just going to agree with that what Clinton was saying. The same way that Clinton was saying that they will push you to learn, with P.E teachers, some teachers will tell me to do this and do that in a certain way.

WHI: Just focus on that a little bit Wayne, you said you got feed back in P.E what do you mean by that?

WAYNE: I think that its because of a more intellectually teaching, because most of it is about being in a team, you have got to work with others and you have got to take

advice at the same time, that like part of being in a team. Whereas in other subjects its down to the individual, so there is not as much support.

WHI: So you're saying that you personally got feedback from, what type of feedback did you get from P.E.?

WAYNE: After football, he was just basically like bigging me up sort of thing. Encouraging me to do well, and it gave me hope to keep doing what I was doing and think that made me better at sporting subject. Other subjects, can I name the subject?

WHI: Yeah

WAYNE: Art now I was good at it but because there was no, I think I did, actually I did need a push like to do better. I don't know I was just being lazy in that subject. With me at times I find that when I am good at something I don't find that I need to work any harder, than I can do already.

WHI: Do you think that the fact that you are getting more feedback in a P.E situation was to do with the assumptions that were made with you being a black male student. And the fact that you didn't get feedback in other subjects is because of assumptions?

WAYNE: I think it is and I think it's to do with the relationships that I have with the teachers as well. Because with some teachers I don't feel that I can talk to them whether there is people there or not. I wouldn't say that I don't trust them but I don't feel confident when I speak to them now.

WHI: Anyone else want to talk about assumptions and outcomes? As to how important it is?

HINA: In P.E you get more kind of feedback that is positive, so its no so much you've not done that right. I kind of noticed that teachers don't even though I was good at P.E I could not do trampolining. I was like pushed until I could actually do it. I think they like to see you succeed, you get a lot of positive feedback rather than negative feedback which you get in other subjects.

WHI: You were going to say something about teachers and satisfaction.

HINA: Until a teacher saw me do it I don't think she could sleep. (laughter)

WHI: You don't think that's the same in academic subjects?

HINA: I think its more like, if you don't get Maths you don't get Maths kind of thing.

MARVIN: Yeah that's what I think it is. I think to me, I believe yeah that black boys don't push themselves, really we don't push ourselves. We go to a certain point and if we cant go no further we are not going to try it because if we are writing a statement or something and you have to write 100-300 words, were going to write 100 words. So I think that's just like, I cant say that for every black boy, but we need to be like pushed and stuff. In like Maths, English and Science you either know how to, I don't know, understand the formula or you don't. But in PE Art, Drama, Music its more your good at it, its more the talent sort of. It's more like you're good at it there is certain people that's not.

CLINTON: When we was talking about we need to get pushed, if not more I think that black people get pushed as much as everyone else especially by their parents but its just ignorance because black males, teenager think the know everything. So no matter how much they are pushed it's just that they are too ignorant to listen.

AMMA: I sort of agree with him, I think its a sort of ego that they have that they think, I don't need to listen, I know this, they don't know me. That sort of attitude.

WHI: When you say they don't know about me (laughter)

AMMA: They think that, 'cos I'm black' its different for them and it is different. A lot of teachers, and they don't take it into consideration that this person acts like this in a certain way and they don't make special attempts to try and push them and they don't give them that extra help and so they think that everyone is against them sort of. But that attitude doesn't help.

WHI: Assumptions, feedback, relationship, trust and relationship, those 3 things have struck me as being possibly being the most important about why P.E works. Assumptions are different, feedback is positive, relationships there is trust and whatever. Have you ever observed those things making an ordinary classroom

situation work. That is the maths, the chemistry the French and whatever are those things possible to transform at ordinary classroom level for black males or not.

CLINTON: Mr Whitburn, when I first started his class because he came to my primary school he was really strict and stuff. So when I first came to the classroom I had an assumption that he was stricter, in a way I was trying to like playing you up, as most of you saw. But when something happened the same week and you took me aside and started to talk to me then I started to realise that. Even when you took me aside outside of the lesson I still see you do that with other people lessons, you would give them feedback, even though its not what they want to hear. It would be in a such a way that you would put it that you would realise what you are saying and take it into note. The trust that you built up over the year with everyone and the way you treat students like. I don't think you make them assumptions so you give them a clean slate and what you see is what you get and you don't go on what other people say and that's what I would say would make an ordinary class situation work.

WAYNE: if people are struggling with the subject I would find that you would take us aside to speak to us and you would then have the confidence... atmosphere in the classroom also, it was more intense but relaxed at the same time.

MARVIN: With other teachers, they put the class into different groups; they will look at just one person on the table. But you like, you know other people's ability and you take people on that. They see that if there is like two people in a group you can see who is coping and who is not. For example, you turn your back to write something on the board and somebody makes a noise you know who it is that made the noise, I don't know how you do it. (laughter) I just think it's just like the relationship that you have.

MAHMOUD: I think its also the style of pushing the person. I have been in some lessons when he teacher and the way the way he pushes you into get the good marks, s just so bad to the level when you give up with the subject. I have been to some exam when I have got some bad results and the next thing I know the teacher is like, ahh if you do this kind of stink again you're going to move down. Some teachers will come over and say yeah that's not bad but I know you can do better, and the different style of pushing you will help.

WHI: Is that back to the feedback?

MAHMOUD: Yeah that is back to the feedback and the pushing to, if a teacher come up to you and says if you do this again you're going to move down yeah he is telling you have to do better. He is kind of pushing you but at the same time, he is putting you down. It's like oh you're not doing enough you're right he is not doing well but the way he put the student down he just put the student off. But other teachers are like yeah I know you can do better and this time he recognised that he can do better and the student will do think about it and realise that he can do better so why don't I. But in the other situation the student will just forget about it.

WHI: Any other? Amma any thoughts about it?

AMMA: I think through relationships you can give people positive feedback but like he was saying if your trying to push someone but you don't do it the right way. If you say 'if you do this again your going to be put down' it will really put somebody off . But I think that when you don't know students and you don't have that sort of relationship that's the sort of way that the teachers talk to him in terms of what you can do from here, its in terms of this is it. You don't this you're going to do that, there is no sort of between. But if you have good relationships with students you can give them positive feedback to encourage them to do well.

References

Abbott, D. (2002) Teachers are failing black boys, **The Observer**, January 6th 2002

Alford, K., McKenry, P., & Gavazzi, S. (2001)   Enhancing achievement in adolescent black males: the Rites of Passage link in R.Majors (ed.)   **Educating our Black Children** London: Routledge Falmer.

Arendt, H. (1993) **Between Past and Future** New York, et al: Penguin Books

Arendt, H. (1998) **The Human Condition**, Second Edition, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press

Arendt, H. (2003) **Responsibility and Judgment** New York: Schocken Books

BBC (2002) **The real fresh prince - a month in the country**, directed and produced by Fatima Salaria, first broadcast 17 February 2002

Ball, S. J. (1997) Policy Sociology and Critical Social Research: A Personal Review of Recent Education Policy and Policy Research, **British Educational Research Journal** 23 (1), pp. 257-274

Ball, S. J. (1999) Global Trends in Educational Reform and the Struggle for the Soul of the Teacher

Ball, S. J. (2001) Labour, learning and the economy: a 'policy sociology' perspective in M.Fielding (ed.) **Taking Education Really Seriously - Four Years' Hard Labour** London: Routledge Falmer.

Barber M. (2001) High expectations and standards for all, no matter what: creating a world class education service in England in M.Fielding (ed.) **Taking Education Really Seriously - Four Years' Hard Labour** London: Routledge Falmer.

Bishop, R. & Glynn, T. (1999) **Culture Counts: Changing Power Relations in Education** Palmerston North, N.Z.: Dunmore Press.

Blair, M. (2001)   The education of Black children: why do some schools do better than others?, in R.Majors (ed.) **Educating our Black Children** London: Routledge Falmer.

Blair, M. & Bourne, J. (1998) **Making the Difference: Successful Teaching and Learning Strategies in Multiethnic Schools** London: DfEE

Blair,M., Gillborn,D., Kemp,S. & MacDonald (1999)   Institutional racism, education and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. **Education and Social Justice**, 1(3)pp. 6-15.

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J-C (1977)   **Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture**, London and Beverley Hills: Sage

Brandt, G. (1986) **The Realization of Anti-Racist Teaching**, London: Falmer Press.

Burbules, N. **Dialogue in teaching: Theory and Practice** New York: Teachers College Press

Burns, K. (2001) **Jazz: A Film By Ken Burns**, Arlington, Virginia: Pbs Paramount.

Buskist, W. & Saville, B.K. (2001)   Rapport-building: Creating Positive Emotional Contexts for Enhancing Teaching and Learning, American **Psychological Society Observer**, 14(3)
http://www.psychologicalscience.org/newsresearch/tips/0301tips.html

Coard, B. (1971) **How the West Indian child is made educationally subnormal,** London: New Beacon Books

Coulter, D. (2002) What Counts as Action in Educational Action Research **Educational Action Research**, 10 (2) pp 189-206

Curtis, K. (2001) Multicultural Education and Arendtian Conservatism: On Memory, Historical Injury, and Our Sense of the Common in Gordon, M. (ed.)   **Hannah Arendt and Education** Boulder Hill, Colorado & Oxford: Westview Press.

Davidoff, S., Julie, C., Meerkotter, D. & Robinson, M. (1993) (eds.) **Emancipatory Education and Action Research** Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.

Davies, M. & Edwards, G. (2001) Will the curriculum caterpillar ever learn to fly? in M.Fielding (ed.) **Taking Education Really Seriously – Four Years' Hard Labour** London: Routledge Falmer.

Department for Education and Skills (2004) **Pedagogy and Practice: Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools** London: Cambridge University Press

Department of Education and Science (1989) **National Curriculum: From Policy to Practice** Stanmore: HMSO

Delpit, L. (1995) **Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom** New York: the New Press.

Donelan, R.W., Neal, G.A. & Jones, D.L. (1994) The Promise of *Brown* and the Reality of Academic Grouping: The Tracks of my Tears   **Journal of Negro Education** 63 (3) pp 376-387

Dunne, J. (1997) **Back to the Rough Ground - Practical Judgment and the Lure of Technique** Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press

Endres, B. (2002) Transcending and Attending to Difference in the Multicultural Classroom **Journal of Philosophy of Education** 36 (2) pp. 171-185

Fielding, M. (2001) Target setting, policy pathology and student perspectives: learning to labour in new times in M.Fielding (ed.) **Taking Education Really Seriously - Four Years' Hard Labour** London: Routledge Falmer.

Fordham, S. & Ogbu, J.U. (1986) Black Students' school success: Coping with the 'burden of acting White' **Urban Review** 18(3) pp. 176-206

Foster, M. (1997) **Black Teachers on Teaching** New York: the New Press

Freire, P. (1996) **Pedagogy of the Oppressed** London: Penguin

Gardner, H. (1993)   **The Unschooled Mind How children think and how schools should teach** London: Fontana Press

Garibaldi, A.M. (1992) Educating and Motivating African American Males to Succeed **Journal of Negro Education** 61 (1) pp. 4-11.

Goleman, D. (1996)   Emotional Intelligence: why it can matter more than IQ
London: Bloomsbury.

Gillborn, D. (1990)   'Race', Ethnicity and Education: Teaching and Learning in
Multi-Ethnic Schools London: Unwin Hyman

Gillborn, D. (2002)   Education and Institutional Racism, inaugural professorial
lecture at the Institute of Education, London.

Gillborn, D. & Gipps, C. (1996)   Recent Research on the Achievement of Ethnic
Minority Pupils, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Gordon, M. (ed.) (2001)   Hannah Arendt and Education Boulder Hill, Colorado &
Oxford: Westview Press.

Gordon, M.   (2001)   Hannah Arendt on Authority: Conservatism in Education
Reconsidered in Gordon, M. (ed.)   Hannah Arendt and Education   Boulder Hill,
Colorado & Oxford: Westview Press.

Hadfield, M. & Haw, K.   (2001)   'Voice', Young People and Action Research,
Educational Action Research, 9 (3) pp 485-499

Hale-Benson, J.E. (1986)   Black Children: Their roots, culture and learning styles,
Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press

Halpin, D. (2003) Hope and Education New York & London: RoutledgeFalmer

Hansen, D.T..   (2001)   Exploring the Moral Heart of Teaching, New York and
London: Teachers' College Press

Hargreaves, D. (2004) Personalised learning Next steps in working laterally
http://www.schoolsnetwork.org.uk/content/articles/3292/chapt1nextsteps.pdf,
accessed May 2006

Harrison, L. Jr., Azzarito, L., & Burden, J. Jr.   (2004)   Perceptions of athletic
superiority: a view from the other side,   Race, Ethnicity and Education   7(2)
pp.149-165.

Hawkins, J.A. (1999)   An Absence of a Talented Tenth, in V.C.Polite & J.E.Davis
(eds.) African American Males in School and Society, New York and London:
Teachers College Press.

Hilliard, III, A.G.   (1992)   Behavioral Style, Culture, and Teaching and Learning
Journal of Negro Education 61 (3) pp.370-377.

Irvine, J. (1990) Black Students and School Failure, New York: Praeger

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994)   The Dreamkeepers Successful Teachers of African
American Children San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995)   But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally
Relevant Pedagogy Theory into Practice 34(3) pp.159-165

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998)   Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,
in L.Beyer and M.Apple The Curriculum, Problems, Politics and Possibilities,
Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lingard, B., Hayes, D. & Mill, M. (2003) Teachers and Productive Pedagogies; Contextualising, Conceptualising, Utilising **Pedagogy, Culture and Society**, 11(3) pp 399-424

London Development Agency (2004) **The Educational experiences and achievements of Black boys in London schools 2000-2003.** A Report by the Education Commission London: London Development Agency.

Macpherson, Sir William (1999) **The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an inquiry** London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Mansell, W. & Lepkowska, D. (2005) Heads reject black ghetto, article in **Times Educational Supplement**, March 11th 2005

Majors, R. (2001) (ed.) **Educating our Black Children** London: Routledge Falmer.

Majors, R. & Billson, J. (1992) **Cool pose: The dilemmas of Black manhood in America**, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Majors, R., Willkinson, V., & Gulam, W. (2001) Mentoring Black males: responding to the crisis in education and social alienation, in Majors, R. (2001) (ed.) **Educating our Black Children** London: Routledge Falmer.

McCutcheon, G. & Jung, B. (1990) Alternative Perspectives on Action Research **Theory into Practice**, 29 (3) pp 144-151

Moore, A. (2000). **Teaching and Learning: Curriculum, Pedagogy and Culture,** London: Falmer Press.

Mortimore, P. ed. (1999) **Understanding Pedagogy** London: Paul Chapman

Murrell Jr., P.C. (1994) In Search of Responsive Teaching for African American Males: An Investigation of Students' Experiences of Middle School Mathematics Curriculum **Journal of Negro Education** 63 (4) pp 556-569

Nieto, S. (1999) **The Light in their Eyes - Creating Multicultural Learning Communities,** Stoke: Trentham Books.

Nieto, S. (2004) Critical multicultural education and students' perspectives, in Ladson-Billings, G. & Gillborn, D. (eds.) **The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Multicultural Education** London & New york: RoutledgeFalmer.

Noguera, P.A. (1996) Responding to the Crisis Confronting California's Black Male Youth: Providing Support Without Furthering Marginalization, **Journal of Negro Education** 65 (2) pp 219-236

Ogbu, J. (1997) Understanding the School Performance of Urban Blacks: Some Essential Background Knowledge, in Walberg, H.J., Reyes, O. & Weissberg, R.P. (eds.) **Children and Youth - Interdisciplinary Perspectives** Thousand Oaks, London & New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Ogbu, J. (2004) Collective Identity and the Burden of "Acting White" in Black History, Community, and Education, **Urban Review**, 36 (1) pp 1-35

O'Hanlon, C. (1995) Editorial **British Educational Research Journal** 21

Polite, V.C. (1993) If Only We Knew Then What We Know Now: Foiled Opportunities to Learn in Suburbia, **Journal of Negro Education** 62 (3) pp 337-354

Price, J.N. (1998) Accommodation and Critique in the School Lives of Six Young African-American Men, **Curriculum Inquiry**, 28 (4) pp 443-471

Rhamie, J. & Hallam, S. (2002) An Investigation in to African-Caribbean Academic Success in the UK **Race, Ethnicity and Education** 5(2) pp.151-170

Robson, C. (2002) **Real World Research A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers** Oxford and Malden, MA.: Blackwell.

Rogers, C. (1980) The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning in Rogers, C. **A Way of Being** Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Ross, A. (2000) **Curriculum: construction and critique** London: Falmer Press

Sewell, T. (1997) **Black Masculinities and Schooling How Black Boys Survive Modern Schooling** Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Sewell, T. (2004) Loose Canons: Exploding the myth of the 'black macho' lad in Ladson-Billings, G. & Gillborn, D. (eds.) **The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Multicultural Education** London & New york: RoutledgeFalmer.

Stake, R.E. (1998) Case Studies, in Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) **Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry** Thousand Oaks, London & New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Stone, M. (1981) **The Education of the Black Child in Britain** Glasgow: Fontana

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990) **Basics of Qualitative Research, Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques** Newbury Park, London, New Delhi: SAGE publications.

Tayko, G. and Tassoni, J.P. (eds.) (1997) **Sharing Pedagogies Students & Teachers Write about Dialogic Practices**, Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Thompson, G.L. (2004) **Through Ebony Eyes - What Teachers Need to Know But Are Afraid to Ask About African American Students** San Francisco: Jossey Bass

Treisman, U. (1992) Studying Students Studying Calculus: A Look at the Lives of Minority Mathematics Students in College **The College Mathematics Journal** 23 (5) pp.362-372.

Troyna, B. (1994) Blind Faith? Empowerment and Educational Research **International Studies in Sociology of Education**, 4 (1) pp 3-24.

Walker, M. (1993) Pragmatists, skeptics, evangelists, idealists? Towards shaping a critical tradition of action research in the South African context in Davidoff, S., Julie, C., Meerkotter, D. & Robinson, M. (eds.) **Emancipatory Education and Action Research** Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.

Warren, S. (2005) Resilience and Refusal: African-Caribbean young men's agency, school exclusions, and school-based mentoring programmes **Race, Ethnicity and Education** 8(3) pp.243-259

Whitburn, R. (2002) **Successful Teaching and Learning in a UK multicultural urban high school,** unpublished Ed.D. Institution-focused study.

Wiley, R. (1991) **Why Black People Tend to Shout: Cold Facts and Wry Views from a Black Man's World** New York: Penguin Books

Winter, R.(1998) Finding a Voice – Thinking with Others: a conception of action research, **Educational Action Research,** 6(1)

Woods, P.(1994) Critical Students: breakthroughs in learning, **International Studies in Sociology of Education,** 4(2).

Youdell, D. (2004) Identity Traps or How Black Students Fail in Ladson-Billings, G. & Gillborn, D. (eds.) **The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Multicultural Education** London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Young-Bruehl, E. & Kohn, J. (2001) What and How We Learned from Hannah Arendt: An Exchange of Letters, in Gordon, M. (ed.) **Hannah Arendt and Education** Boulder Hill, Colorado & Oxford: Westview Press.

An educational journey through the Doctorate in Education

My first post-graduate studies, a Master's in Curriculum Studies, had taken place at the Institute of Education in 1989-91, during which time the Berlin Wall had come down and the Cold War ended; Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the Apartheid regime began to disintegrate; and Margaret Thatcher resigned from her long 'reign' as British Prime Minister. I had served almost all my professional life under her premiership, and had looked forward to the opportunity of becoming a Headteacher "under the next Labour government". These momentous years had indeed seen me take a significant step towards that goal, with my promotion to a Deputy Headship in a London Church of England High School. Personally, I had also purchased my first property, and the Master's course had gone very well, with a first-class grading in the final assessments; undoubtedly a time of optimism. Nearly a decade later I embarked upon my Education doctorate, clear that Headship was not my ambition, with the long-awaited Labour administration offering the Third Way, rather than the radical alternative I had envisaged, and the realities of educational administration not offering me the stimulus that I wanted as a teacher.

However, the years of the Doctorate course presented less heart-warming landmarks: my mother died; my school was put under the OFSTED critical category of 'Special Measures'; the era of global terrorism was ushered in on 9-11-2001; and I am finishing the course with another eagerly anticipated resignation from Britain's premier leader. In the 'inter-degree' years, a local event in South-East London, the murder of the African-Caribbean student Stephen Lawrence in 1993, had been a stark reminder of the continual struggle that young Black men face in British society, and my professional interest in their situation was re-affirmed by the tragedy. I was also passionately interested in teachers' learning, and how to secure widespread improvements in teacher's classroom practice in school, and my Doctorate studies have involved these twin threads of Black achievement and pedagogy in various assignments, and they provided the theme of my final thesis.

I had moved from the confidence and optimism of the Master's years to uncertainty and anxiety in the Doctorate: my own transition from modern to post-modern experience, perhaps. My progress through the Doctorate certainly reflected the turmoil of the age, not simply because traumas have prolonged my course by some years, but also because the intellectual journey has been a very demanding one. Although something of a polymath within the school context[13], and a firm believer in the value of an interdisciplinary approach to my principal subject, History, I was faced by hitherto unknown demands of Social Scientific methodology, epistemology, and ontology. I had avoided the rigors of researching a dissertation for my Master's course, taking the option of a further taught unit, and an extended 10,000 word report, which I chose to write as a case-study in a largely historical style. The Doctorate therefore represented a considerable intellectual leap, as I had to familiarise myself with alien modes of thinking. Moreover, I chose to venture into the realms of philosophy to find heuristic support for my pedagogic theories, which was a further epistemological adventure.

Professionally these have been decisive years, and I am certain that the rigours and reflections of the Doctorate have been vital in my critique of the current managerial and technicist stranglehold in schools. The title of the first course unit seemed somewhat remote and unnecessary at first glance, but this proved a hasty and unwarranted judgment. Indeed 'Foundations of Professionalism' was a most stimulating and engaging study. Debating performativity and accountability was immediately relevant to my school context, and I am currently revisiting the readings in preparing to train some of our middle management colleagues in school. Professor Barnett's demand that there should be something to 'profess' at the heart of a professional undertaking is, for me, still one of the most important messages of the whole doctorate. There was, nonetheless, a naïveté in my first assignment, and I learned that this level of academic work required much more that a neat, well-constructed polemic, with a splattering of appropriate references. The required depth of thinking and the interrogation of the literature marked a disjuncture in my academic progress, which hitherto had been seamless, through school and university, including the Master's. However, the ideas of

---

[13] I have taught Economics, History and Mathematics to Advanced level in secondary schools.

situated professional learning have been decisive in shaping the work of coaching and mentoring of teachers that I have undertaken in the last few years, since I moved from being a Deputy Headteacher to the post of Advanced Skills Teacher.

The course units in Curriculum policy and practice gave me the opportunity to critique the current technicist 'standards' approach to schools and the professional work of teachers. In each assignment I took the evidence of a policy document, the first being the government's National Curriculum order for Citizenship and the second the Commission for Racial Equality's response to the Macpherson Report into the Stephen Lawrence case, entitled 'Learning for All' – standards for schools to follow in anti-racist education. Both enquiries enabled me to look at how pedagogy in schools might respond to policy initiatives, and I was drawn again to the paucity of a didactic approach to both students' and teachers' learning. Around this time, a fellow doctoral student sent me a copy of an article by Gloria Ladson-Billings on Culturally-Relevant pedagogy with African-American students, and this began my exploration of literature in the United States that explored and endorsed my thinking about pedagogy in the United Kingdom. This would provide much of the literature background for both the Institution-focused study and the thesis.

It was the research methods courses that presented the greatest challenge to me. Not only was the triumvirate of methodology, epistemology, and ontology somewhat intimidating, but also I was not at the point of knowing exactly what my specific research interest would be for the Doctorate, so I worked on three different research ideas for the three units. Each assignment began with an exploration of literature about a new field: the position of Black History in the curriculum; student motivation; and, finally, classroom environment and seating. These had to be explored alongside the methodological issues we were being introduced to in the taught units. They were all important issues for me, and I enjoyed being immersed in each one for the period of the assignment, but the extra reading gave me less time to develop a more confident approach to the research issues at each stage. I found myself only just grasping some of the important research points as the assignment was due for submission. It would have been

much easier if I had been pursuing one line of enquiry through the three assignments, but I needed to explore different ideas as preparation for selecting a final theme for the thesis. The units certainly helped me to settle on my preferred research approach, and it was clear by the end of the taught units that I would pursue qualitative work, and that dialogue would be my principal mode for gathering data.

I became committed to understanding learning and teaching through the lived experiences of students and teachers in schools, and understood this to fit an interpretive paradigm. The theories of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism closely matched the approach that I wanted to take in my major research assignments. A few years prior to the Doctorate, I can remember deciding that the most productive strategy to take with students' verbal responses in lessons was to accept them at face value. So, if a student says "I don't understand" in a lesson, it is best for the teacher to accept that statement and work with it, rather than respond by saying "of course you do, just concentrate more carefully". This pragmatic pedagogical approach helped me to see the value of students' speech in learning and the importance of working with their own meanings, even if they conflict with the teacher's. Moreover, my own pedagogical style was always a dialogic one, and it became even more so over the course of the Doctorate. The concepts of 'voice' and 'agency' had always been implicit in the development of my pedagogy, and through their importance in my new role as researcher, they became an explicit focus of my professionalism. Teachers' and students' dialogues would be the basis for my Institution-focused study and thesis respectively.

The Institution-Focused Study gave me the chance to combine my interests in teacher development, pedagogy, and African-Caribbean students, although the latter were not the principal focus of that particular work. I formed a working group of teachers in school, who undertook the research with me, and produced a wealth of valuable data in discussions. This marked a decisive step forward in my understanding of qualitative research. I was advised to tape-record our preparatory sessions, which I thought would be quite didactic, whereby I would instruct my colleagues in the modes of observational research. The advice was invaluable, since the sessions proved

far from didactic. The discussions I encouraged about the meaning of 'successful pedagogy', which was to be the focus of our classroom observations, produced insightful commentaries on teaching and learning in a multicultural secondary school. These teacher dialogues became the principal basis for my analysis and theorising. Interviews with students, undertaken by teachers and a research assistant, also gave phenomenological knowledge of the experience of lessons in school, and the students shared many of the teachers' perspectives on the necessary connectedness between them in successful lessons.

At one point in the teacher discussions, the idea of particular students who made the greatest impact on an interactive dialogic lesson, called 'key characters', took a central position in their ideas. My colleagues considered the nature of these particular students, and, tentatively at first, they explained that these were very often the Black students in their multiethnic classes. The caution was probably due to the anxiety that many teachers face in making statements about particular ethnic groups, in the face of values and policies that espouse 'equality'. I was able to reconcile this academically at the thesis stage with the help of Endres' discussion of 'particularised' and 'general' respect, but at this point the teachers themselves became comfortable with the discussion without such philosophical assistance. Nonetheless, the ideas were not carried forward into future sessions, and the 'key character' idea did not appear as significant in the overall analysis of data; the main ideas centred around the idea of 'connectedness' between teacher and students in a successful class, with humour seen as playing a decisive part in that. However, by the end of the IFS I had decided to take up the issue of African-Caribbean boys' achievement, which had always been prominent in my professional journey in metropolitan high schools, and make it the focus of the thesis.

'Making the familiar strange' had been a watchword for educational research that my tutors had impressed on me from the start of the Doctorate, and this seemed most appropriate for the climax of this professional postgraduate degree. I embarked on a study involving a small group of my own students, some of whom I had taught for over five years, in an exploration of successful pedagogy with Black male students, that would

almost certainly come to focus on the nature of my own classroom practice. It was essential that this should be revelatory and not self-indulgent, and if it became self-affirming, that that should not be a cause for complacent self-congratulation, but rather the basis for further work to improve the educational experiences of this particular group. Following Ladson-Billings' approach, I decided to explore the nature of *successful* work with Black male students, rather than investigate the causes of their *under*achievement. In researching what I knew to be the ambiguities of school life for Black boys, whereby negative stereotypes and behaviours exist alongside ambitions for improvement and home cultures that emphasise the importance of school, I preferred to emphasise the positive. Assuming that successful pedagogy with Black boys existed in my own school, I chose a group of older students to research it with me.

Our discussions produced a compact, rather than extensive, body of data that I could reflect on, focusing on the meaning of the language that the young Black men in particular used about their successful pedagogical relationships. Through my readings in educational action research, I discovered the work of the philosopher Hannah Arendt. As a German Jew who studied under Heidegger in Inter-War Germany, and indeed had an affair with this philosopher before he went on to work under Nazi rule, she was perhaps an appropriate choice to supply insights that could explain the needs of a minority coping with ambiguities. Her typology of 'labour, work, and action' was used as an heuristic device to produce two types of pedagogy: *labour* and *action*, the latter of which was seen to be most successful with Black male students. Although I did not have space in the thesis to explore fully the reasons why this group would particularly thrive with a dialogic interactive pedagogy that emphasises their agency and importance alongside the teacher's, I think it has a lot to do with the resolution of the tensions they face in their social worlds. Teachers need the freedom and guidance to develop pedagogies that will value these young men and give them freedom to engage in learning experiences that affirm their academic potential and let them resolve those ambiguities. I hope the thesis can be developed into forms that can give teachers that guidance, and that schools will let them have the space to develop their 'action' pedagogy.

Thanks

are due to so many people, particularly the students in the Research group, who remain anonomised, but whose names are nonetheless dear. My tutors, particularly Elizabeth Leo, Val Klenowski, Paddy Walsh, and Alex Moore for such unselfish support and guidance throughout the degree course. My Headteachers, Malcolm Wood and Kate Roskell, for their faith and support in my work, and many other colleagues throughout the years of the course. My friends and family, particularly Jocelyn and Ralph Codrington, for their love and consideration. Finally, my students, particularly Kojo, Anthony, Victor and Stephen, who I *can* name, for being so much a part of the 'action', and for their insightful advice and reflections on the ideas herein.

The work of this thesis is nonetheless entirely mine.

Robin Whitburn. 1st October 2006.