Appreciative Inquiry in Education

Guest editorial Robin Shohet

Robin Shohet interviews Neil Berry, headteacher of Brampton Manor

Appreciative Inquiry in the Secondary School Lesley Bond

Reflections on Brampton Manor School’s Appreciative Inquiry Residential Workshop Paul Howard

Two students’ reflections on the residential School & Children’s Values Assessment.

Giving Children an opportunity to express an understand their values in a meaningful way. Phil Clothier

Values Assessment and Appreciative Inquiry in a Challenging Secondary School Nicola Williams

Changing the Culture of 9M Michelle Pitt

Non Violent Communication in Education - two accounts Lesley Bond and Robin Shohet

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Brampton Manor is a large multicultural inner city comprehensive school located in East London. 50% of students are entitled to free school meals and a third of the intake arrives with levels of attainment far below the expected level. 55 languages are spoken by members of the school community.

This special edition features Brampton Manor, a secondary school in East London. Five years ago it had failed an Ofsted inspection. This edition records some of the ways they have responded to the challenge of the inspection, and actively pursued creating a school culture that is successful, vibrant and supportive of teachers, students and parents.

My interest in the school arose from my research for a book on supporting teachers sponsored by Teacher Support Network. Interviewing teachers from all over the country, I found that amongst the passion, the enthusiasm and the dedication, there were feelings of despair and powerlessness, feelings that are inevitably transmitted to the young people they teach. There is, in England, a 40% drop out rate of newly qualified teachers after only three years. How can that trend be reversed? Brampton Manor have found answers that have worked for them.

I came across it almost by chance when the school counsellor, Lesley Bond, attended one of my workshops on Spirituality at Work. I asked her if I could visit her school as part of my research and since then I have visited the school over twenty times, facilitated staff and student residentials and have seen for myself what can happen with good leadership and a committed staff.

Most people in the school would acknowledge the role the head teacher, Neil Berry, has played in this turnaround. I had an informative, inspiring interview with him which I have written up as the first article. He shares his ideas about leadership and building on strengths that have contributed to the change in the school culture. By focussing on what could be celebrated, his ideas were very similar to those of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Lesley Bond details some of the early steps that eventually led to AI becoming more explicitly part of the school culture, and the benefits that resulted. Even when she knew little about it (she is now very skilled and knowledgeable in it) she had the intuition about its potential, and I am grateful to her for hosting early meetings and for her support.

An important milestone in contributing to a change of culture was the decision to take away staff and students together on a residential using Appreciative Inquiry as a way forward. This was ground breaking and not without risk. Paul Howard, a parent governor,
and two of the students describe their experiences and how much trust could develop in this setting.

Another approach that was used very effectively was a Values Assessment, devised by Cultural Transformation Tools. This involves people choosing from about a hundred values that have been specially tailored for the client group. They are in three categories – values that are important to me, values I see in my organisation currently, and values that I would like to see in my organisation’s culture. Phil Clothier, one of the directors of Cultural Transformation Tools trained some of the staff of Brampton Manor and a parent governor in using Values Assessment, and he describes some of his work and the theory behind it. Because it can be done on line, it is possible to get a feel of an organisation’s culture very quickly.

Nicola Williams, a member of the Senior Management Team at Brampton describes how a combination of AI and a Values Assessment helped to land some of the changes. Her enthusiasm, dedication and perseverance have been crucial to the changes.

The Values Assessment was used very effectively by a class teacher, Michelle Pitt, and she describes how she introduced it to her class.

The last articles by Lesley Bond and myself are on non-violent communication. We have both found it very useful in our personal lives and wonder about its use in schools. I have interviewed someone whose staff team have adopted it even though they found it very challenging not to resort to more usual authoritarian ways of communicating.

I know how important education is in the lives of young people, not just from theory. I have watched my four sons either flourish or languish according to the interest their teachers have shown in them. I am sure a more democratic, supportive school culture can give teachers the space to do this, as well as helping to reduce their stress. On a so-called practical level I believe that happier schools will achieve better results. It is not a question of paying attention to needs at the expense of standards, but a belief that by paying attention to needs and a positive school culture, the standards improve. A win/win.

Thanks are due to Patrick Nash and Teacher Support Network (www.teachersupport.info), who have sponsored my research; to Richard Barrett, Joan Shafer and Phil Clothier of Corporate Transformation Tools (www.corptools.com) who all enabled Brampton to participate in a Values Assessment by giving time and resources. And finally to Brampton itself - the head, and all the staff and students I worked with whose passion to help to realise the potential in each one of us has been inspiring.

Robin Shohet is a freelance management consultant. He is currently researching for a book on using Appreciative Inquiry in education. He can be contacted through his e.mail shohet@findhorn.org

Robin will be organising a conference on ‘Looking at Schools with an Appreciative Eye’ in Findhorn, October 5-8th.
RS Thank you for agreeing to this interview. As you know I have been researching for a book on supporting teachers, financed by Teacher Support Network, and your school has been very generous in allowing me to come and do some research with your staff and students. I have found this extremely useful and relevant for my project. I want to do this special edition of *Self & Society* so some of the work can be recorded. I think it is an example of what can be done in changing a school culture.

Can I start with some background questions. How long have you been at the school and can you say how you found it when you arrived?

NB I came in June 2000. The school had failed an OFSTED inspection in 1999 and was labelled as having serious weaknesses. This was unexpected and a huge blow to the staff who were unprepared for this. In fact the LEA believed that the school was lucky not to be in the category of special measures.
RS And you have turned the school round. What were the first steps you took?

NB I and others. I did not do this on my own. I wanted to promote a new management culture which could lead to a whole school cultural change. I made an assessment of the Senior Management Team’s strengths and weaknesses and told them what I expected of them. I had a very clear focussed recovery plan which everyone signed up to which we monitored carefully and regularly. I then had to focus on the very disruptive behaviour of the students. I patrolled the corridors for five hours a day and did every lunch and break duty, supporting staff, supporting kids, telling kids off. I also met with parents every day. It took about three years to have an effect. I came to every parents meeting, every staff event, ran a whole series of residential. We celebrated and communicated success within and outside the school. I took the view that nothing bad happens at Brampton. Some things are better than others and everything we do is capable of being improved. And if things do go wrong, look for a positive. We embraced the notion of a praise culture with lots of competitions, prizes, assemblies, letters home.

RS So appreciative inquiry was natural for you?

NB Yes. When you offered it you were pushing on an open door. But you gave us the language and structures to build on what we were already doing. The kids love it.

RS Yes we are teaching it to about fifty prefects at the end of the month who will take it into the citizenship lessons. We are well on the way to getting the whole school involved, but, as you say, the soil was very fertile. What else did you do?

NB I believed in being highly proactive on the public relations front. The aim was to be in the local paper regularly and to cultivate good relationships with the reporters. Now we feature in the Newham Recorder, the local newspaper, every week. We involve the students in decision making. We give them a real voice and a modest budget. We find our prefects really useful here. They select themselves and if they do their job well anyone can stay a prefect. We create opportunities for parents to be as involved as possible.

RS So you saw the potential resources inside and outside the school for building community. What about the staff - how do you support them?

NB You support your staff by helping to make them feel happy and valued. By helping to create an environment that makes them want to be here. We give them opportunities to grow and develop, ensuring that the school provides a robust and professional staff development policy in house and externally. We use our own excellent practitioners and video their lessons to show what can be done. The Department of Education and Skills filmed our teachers working and the video was distributed to all schools in the country. We volunteer the school staff for LEA initiatives, both as a professional opportunity and a reward for their hard work. We have six staff doing higher degrees which we pay for and support fully. In terms of recruitment we became a Training School which means that we are on the cutting edge around pedagogy. This has helped us round recruitment, as we can recruit the teachers we want from teaching practice. And we then help people rise up through the ranks, supporting them in their first years and then preparing them for middle management, for here or somewhere else. We have three members of the senior management who used to be heads of department. And we work in partnership with other institutions – local primary schools, schools in other parts of the country,
National College for School Leadership, schools involved in the Afro Caribbean Project and the Royal Ballet School.

On another level we make the staff room comfortable. We have a shower for those who ride in. The staff can get food at cheap prices. We have plenty of network computers. We’ve put loads and loads of our forms and procedures on line so people can put reports, attendance on line. We try and reduce workload. For example we encourage people to phone parents which is more cost effective than writing letters, so we provide lots of phones round the school.

I think it is also an attitude, being considerate. It’s important for me to exercise discretion. Around funerals, for example. There’s no question about attendance on full pay. It’s about being sympathetic, but above all it’s about being fair to everyone. Sometimes that means being perceived as not being very flexible.

RS Why have you collectively been able to do change a culture whilst other schools may not be as successful?

NB This is the second time I have done it which helps. It’s important to be confident. Tim Brighouse talks about courage and conviction. You have to lead from front and lead by example. You have to demonstrate credibility. Once you have done that, it doesn’t matter if you can’t do everything. A Head can’t do everything.

I also actively celebrate and promote school well to LEA and the press as we talked about earlier. I ask people what’s been good today. Because teachers get so caught up with the children they often can’t step outside and see what has been good.

I am always looking for a positive outcome. To use a cliché, it’s about the power of positive thinking. Nothing is bad. Just some things better than others, or as my dad would say, ‘There’s no such thing as a bad pint of beer. Just some that are better than others.’

RS You sound as if you have a great ability to reframe everything positively which I am sure has contributed to the very supportive school culture. Sometimes even with this, teachers can still feel undermined. Are there other ways in which you can offer support?

NB There are many different kinds of support. It’s quite a general term. If you want people to feel good, then you have to support be in ways they want. If you are talking about supporting them around the emotional bashing they get, then I think offering case studies is useful. Something practical. Teachers are often insecure, even at senior level. They need a template. We aim to be consistent with challenging students and to have a robust but fair and transparent disciplinary policy. We continually remind staff and students of our core purpose and values.

RS How do you see the school going? What’s your real ambition for the school?

NB We’ve arrested the decline in behaviour and performance. We’ve improved exam results, but I’m not happy with the way students relate to each other when not directly supervised by a teacher. They emotionally hurt each other, perhaps how they feel they have been hurt at home. We can’t cure all ills of society. We can be professional, and do what we do well, but it’s frustrating we can’t do it for everyone. I want caring for each other. This is proving tough. They come with so much baggage. You should read some of the case studies.

RS You mentioned Tim Brighouse earlier. I know he has written a paper to which you contributed on School Leadership in Challenging Urban Environments. Can you say more about your leadership?
**NB** I think the way I work is mostly innate. Either you work in this way or you don’t. It’s important to be open, honest, fair, transparent; to cherish people, value them, motivate them, play to their strengths; to embrace the notion of working as a team; to put yourself in the position of other; to treat people as you wish to be treated but also not curry popularity by being soft. Never be less than honest about any situation otherwise it will come back and haunt you.

You have to do what you consider the right thing. The staff will respect you for acting appropriately. It’s about having integrity; being sure; having a strong belief in yourself; backing your judgement; remembering why we are here. It’s not for teachers to get on, but for children to achieve their potential, and of course to do that, it is highly desirable teachers get on.

You need to be prepared to put yourself on the line. When we had an Ofsted inspection in 2001 I told the staff that the only person who could get the sack is me. They wanted to do well not only for themselves but for me. And part of my job is helping them to feel secure in their practice and pedagogy. The teachers are doing a good job and I tell them. The best security blanket is in students achieving well, which they are.

**RS** That puts a lot of emphasis on results. My son is swotting for his exams at the moment and he feels this great pressure to succeed which has dampened his love of learning which he had in his first two years at secondary school.

**NB** There’s no getting away from that. The government focus on results – the product. It’s how we are judged which is why I say that getting good results is one way of helping the teachers feel secure. However, we don’t consider our job finished when students reach sixteen. If you like we can see ourselves as gardeners, planting seeds. The government is beginning to change on this, seeing education as a continuum from three upwards. They still think they have to quantify to achieve this, rather than embracing it in a holistic way which sees it as a journey.

**RS** League tables and such like.

**NB** Yes. I am a pragmatist. I can only run the school in the way I want if I get the outcomes the government wants. I have to attract funding. When I applied for funding for specialist school status as an arts college, the first question I was asked was on outcomes. They didn’t ask about our drama, our public performances, our connections with the Royal Ballet School.

It’s a question of hanging on to your liferaft using your conviction as a paddle; and not drifting through the channelled water the government is pushing you down. This way you get there quicker, and have quality time at the end because you got there quicker.

**RS** Yes, your conviction comes through, and my experience at the school is of having quality time with you. I hope that will come through in the rest of the articles. Thank you.
AI group meetings

As facilitator, Robin outlined some of the theory. AI was a strategy for change which identified the best of ‘what is’ to be able to pursue dreams and possibilities of ‘what could be’; and that it was a way of ‘seeing’ which affirmed the best qualities in an organisation, situation or another human being. He outlined the four stage AI process and in pairs, we interviewed each other about our ‘best experience’ of school. We told this as a story, in as much detail as possible and as if it were happening now. The effect of this was instant as we felt excited about our colleagues’ successes and experienced a sense of connection with them.

We looked at each others’ values regarding ourselves, work and school, and once again a great deal of positive energy was released. Finally we shared our future wishes for the school, and the emphasis on the positive made these ideas seem not only desirable but achievable. We each agreed to interview several other people before our next meeting, which would include present...
members and any interviewees who wanted to join us. Teachers were encouraged to interview students and vice versa.

Eight people turned up for the second meeting and when I expressed my disappointment that more people had not been able to attend, Robin gently challenged me to express the positive side of my statement. So I said that I really wanted the project to work in my school and that I care passionately about the quality of the relationships in the school. In response, Robin said that he was feeling energised and inspired by my commitment and that, in turn, made me feel good! Already a positive atmosphere was established, but more importantly, by making conscious how our words, tone, and body language impact on others, Robin was showing how we can raise each other’s self-esteem and make each other feel good in small ways all the time.

In this meeting, we identified common themes from the stories that were told and saw how AI is not a quick fix, but an approach capable, over time, of making a huge impact on the culture of the school. It is the opposite of leaping into action, which is what we usually do when we see a problem that needs rectifying.

Most interviewers had found the process a positive experience. The teachers had enjoyed having the opportunity to sit down and really listen to students - often the teaching situation doesn’t give enough time for this. One member of staff related how the interviewing process had completely transformed her relationship with a particularly challenging student. He had overheard her being interviewed by a child in the AI group and had become curious. This led to her interviewing him, leading to a deepened relationship which involved her lending him a number of books on black history which validated his personal experience. I had enjoyed talking to people I never normally encounter, and afterwards felt much more a part of a community as I greeted them in school. For me, change was already taking place. A group member said that people had been pleased to talk about what they value about themselves and their work as they don’t often have time to stop and think about it.

‘Respect’ emerged as an important value for many in the group. One teacher told how she had once given her form a leaflet to take home and had later found half of them scattered over the stairs. She had spoken to the class the next day, explaining that when she had to spend time clearing these up, she was missing out on being with her family – and this applied to the cleaners as well. It never happened again. From this, the value of empathy was highlighted and this story showed how it could be encouraged by teachers helping students, within the context of a caring relationship, to understand the implications of their actions.

By the end of this meeting, a number of ideas had emerged, amongst which was the group’s great desire for more respect in the school – for people to treat others the way they would like to be treated. Another concern was raised about the Year 11 students’ leaving day. A student group member was upset that because of anti-social behaviour in the past, Year 11’s were not informed of the date of their leaving day. The group felt that this conveyed to students about to embark on careers in the outside world, the message that they are not to be trusted. We thought that the Year 11’s should be given the opportunity to say their goodbyes properly, both to each other and to their teachers. Another idea that emerged from the students was that of presenting to the school an assembly on AI.

By the end of this meeting there was an air of excitement and enthusiasm even though
it was nearly the end of term and everyone was tired. The steps that were being suggested were small, but at the same time, had profound implications. Throughout, Robin modelled the values we were saying we wanted: he listened, gave us time, and valued everyone’s contributions equally. We sensed a tremendous potential in this way of working and felt that with the focus on feelings rather than policy, and by building meaningful relationships and valuing one another through listening, that there was real hope for a transformation of relationships in the school.

After this the process seemed to stall. The assembly idea, which had seemed so promising, came to nothing as the teachers who were facilitating it were already overstretched and could not give the planning process the time it needed. Our group was not expanding in the way we had anticipated and there was some anxiety about where we were going to go with it next. At the final meeting, Robin announced that he had spoken to the headteacher, who had agreed to the AI group going on a residential to further the work we had begun.

**AI group residential**

The residential was attended by some of the students from the original group, plus others invited by staff, as well as the senior leadership team, several middle leaders and a parent governor – 18 altogether. I was looking forward to the weekend because it was an exciting project to be involved in, but at the same time I was feeling exhausted and wondering if I would have the stamina to see it through. Sitting in the circle on the Friday evening, I felt slightly awed to think that this was taking place as a result of the faith the core group had had in what they wanted to achieve. I felt some responsibility for the event and found myself hoping that these teachers who were sacrificing time with family and friends to be here, would enjoy it and be inspired by it. But I also felt quietly confident that everything would be alright.

As usual we began by interviewing each other. One of the positive stories to emerge from this was how happy the staff had felt about the success of the Year 11’s leaving day. The students had been told the date on which it would take place, had behaved well, and altogether the day had been a resounding success. Members of the original AI group were thrilled to hear that their discussions had borne fruit. What had happened was that a senior teacher in the group had gone back to the leadership team with the concerns that had been raised and as the team had previously held discussions on this subject, the AI input had been the catalyst to bring about the desired change.

During one exercise when small groups were sharing their findings in the form of drawings, I was delighted when a rather retiring student agreed to present our group’s ideas. It was wonderful to see one staff member in action as she gave him her support in creating the image, also encouraging a rather shy girl to give a presentation of her group’s findings. The safe and accepting atmosphere of the group seemed to make it possible for some of these students to find the courage to stand up and speak in public.

I found it validating to be in the company of so many people who were taking the AI approach seriously, and it was helpful to pool resources with others who could suggest fresh and creative solutions whenever we seemed to get stuck. For me, the residential provided the sense of support I had been needing to enable me to move forward with projects I had previously been interested in. After the weekend, and largely as a result of conversations with various people, I was
inspired to attend a Marshall Rosenberg talk on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) in education. Finally, I could see its potential as a tool to help create positive relationships at school. But this was only part of a broader theme that had emerged during our group-work – that of ‘emotional literacy’. Subsumed under this heading were other topics such as: circle time, assemblies, staff training, an emotional literacy group, assertiveness, the AI approach and relationship building. Other subjects of interest were: catering, the environment, and cross-curricular projects.

I was aware of how strange it must have seemed to the students to be calling their teachers by their first names, but what particularly stood out was the mutual respect between teachers and students. This was borne out at the end of the residential when people were writing down their comments and both teachers and students recorded their appreciation of each other. The students were impressed by the quality of relationships between themselves and the teachers on the residential. They enjoyed the atmosphere of democracy and respect that prevailed and some of them saw members of staff in a much more positive light afterwards.

Middle leaders’ residential

At around this time we had carried out a Values Assessment in the school. This is an online method in which people pick out from a list of about 100 values, the ten that are most important to them as individuals, the ten that they see manifested in the school and the ten that they would ideally like to see the school exemplify. Some of these values are positive and some are less so, or ‘potentially limiting’, and one of the potentially limiting values that showed up on the middle leaders’ chart was that of ‘anti-social behaviour’. The appearance in the personal and desired columns of the value of ‘caring’ pointed to a strong desire for greater care and respect so we drew up a questionnaire that addressed this as follows:

‘Some people might say respect is an important part of a healthy relationship. It is naturally there with people with whom we feel comfortable. Sometimes, perhaps when some students are there against their will, we may have to earn it.

1. Best experience. Tell me about the best experience of respect you have had at Brampton. What made it good for you? How did you feel? What was the setting? Who
was involved? Picture the event as if it were happening now. Describe the event in detail.

2. Values. What are the things you value deeply; specifically, the things you value about yourself, your work and your school:

a) Yourself. Without being too humble, what do you value most about yourself as a human being, a friend, a parent, a colleague, a citizen and so on? With relation to respect what qualities do you respect in yourself?

b) Your work. What qualities do you value and respect in your colleagues and your students? What do you imagine they might respect in you?

c) Your school. What about Brampton’s practices do you value and respect? In relation to respect what is the single most important thing that you have learnt at Brampton?

3. Core life-giving factor. How do you imagine respect contributes to the life blood of Brampton?

4. Imagine it is 2005 and everything you want to have happen around respect has been put in place. What changes have been made and how have you contributed?

We now embarked on a process of discovery during another residential attended by 22 senior and middle leaders.

On the Friday afternoon I was anxious because I was unsure how the staff would react to this new approach. During the planning meeting prior to the initial session, core group members explained to Robin the importance to them of completing the ‘design’ phase before the end of the weekend. Robin was clearly uncomfortable with the speed at which they wanted to move, and outlined his own need for a slower pace, pointing up a tension between these two approaches.

During the initial interviewing process I was working with the headteacher. He spoke first as I made notes. After giving his answer to the first question, he was moving on to the second, when I told him how I had felt about the incident he had related. This encouraged him to elaborate and we ended up going deeply into his story. I was amazed by the personal and professional journey he had made and, full of admiration, experienced a sense of real connection. When we reached the last question which was about our vision for the future of the school, I was thrilled to hear him say that AI would be our modus operandi from now on. He saw it as being integral to the way we do everything at school and said that in fact we were already working along those principles because now in senior leadership team meetings when the conversation begins to take a negative turn, someone realises this and they turn it around to focus on the positive. I was amazed and delighted to hear how thoroughly they had taken this approach to heart.

The next morning, while debriefing the answers to the first question in small groups, some people experienced problems as the conversation became derailed and negative and they struggled to get it back onto a positive note. Fortunately they were able to come up with some life-enhancing themes to take back to the plenary, the three most important being: listening, appreciation and trust. Other groups had come up with the same or similar words and it was good to discover a sense of unity.

When it came to going through question two in small groups, Robin asked the original pairs to join with another pair. This meant that when our partner told the others of the positive qualities we had mentioned to them, we were present to hear this and to experience others’ reactions. I found it quite difficult to hear my partner comment positively on me, especially as he added his
own appreciations, and I was overwhelmed when the other two added their comments. It was much easier to praise my partner and I wished we had had longer for this part of the exercise because telling each other what we appreciated about them was a wonderfully enjoyable and affirming experience.

During the small group debriefing of question three, some people seemed to be treating the task rather flippantly. I felt concerned about this but at the same time it was clear that they had absorbed a lot from what had taken place so far, so maybe this was their way of dealing with potentially threatening ideas and feelings. The feedback from this session was very enjoyable and lively. Some kind of alchemy seemed to have taken place because the atmosphere in the large group was extraordinary. There was a sense of great safety and I found myself reacting with spontaneity and a total lack of self-consciousness. People burst into applause after each presentation and there was laughter, engagement and a tremendous appreciation of each other.

Our small group engaged with question four in a lively manner. It was clear they had needs that they wanted the school to meet. This was echoed in the larger group and after everyone had fed back, it emerged that two common themes were: ‘Staff Care’ and ‘Common Areas’. The large group split exactly in half to address these topics and the brief was to come up with concrete and specific proposals to take back to school on Monday. I chose the first topic and the group decided to address the subject of meetings. This was clearly important to them as they discussed it animatedly, and concentrated on details.

During the afternoon coffee break I had had an interesting conversation with two middle leaders about yoga and meditation for workers. We talked about how some of our teachers burn oil or incense and how students can find it helpful to be given time just to reflect. These sorts of ideas came to form another strand of the ‘Staff Care’ agenda. It would be interesting to see what would happen next.

Whole school AI

What did happen next was rather unexpected. On the first day of the new term there was a staff training day on ‘Ethos and Culture’, during which the results of the Values Assessment were conveyed to everyone and staff were invited to use AI ‘respect’ questionnaires as an aid to telling their stories. This highlighted some very painful feelings for the large group of teaching assistants who were present and I
facilitated a separate meeting where they gave voice to their unhappiness. Using NVC principles, I recognised this as the expression of numerous unmet needs, and translated it into their deep desire to be consulted, appreciated, have their work recognised, be valued, respected and included. They wanted missing staff to be replaced, more resources, information, and discussions with senior leaders. A deputy headteacher came over to hear what they had to say and affirmed the value of the concerns being raised. Two further meetings were held at which the group refined their ideas, making them more specific before presenting them to senior leaders.

The two groups which had emerged from the middle leaders’ residential, ‘Staff Care’ and ‘Common Areas’, became working groups which continue to meet to address issues of interest. The latter has been allocated a budget of £10,000 to bring about environmental improvement, whilst the former is coming up with plans to help staff relax and enhance their well-being through such measures as shorter, more productive meetings, on-site beauty treatments and leisure facilities, an ironing shop and a creche. Two local NVC trainers will be giving a presentation to senior leaders with a view to introducing this way of relating into the school. Prefects will be trained in AI and the Values Assessment results will continue to tackled in this way.

One of the interesting aspects of AI is its unpredictability. Projects that seemed to be popular at one time were dropped whilst others continued. Seeds that were sown at an early stage bore fruit unexpectedly at a later date. Important themes kept recurring until they were addressed.

AI as a learning experience

Introducing AI into the school has been a tremendous learning experience for me. At first I had hoped that it could work through convening a group of interested people, and although this bore fruit, its influence was limited. This was because, with teachers working at full stretch, their AI tasks became relegated to the bottom of the pile if other demands were coming from their line managers. What did make a difference was when we asked for and received the backing of senior leaders. Then, time and funds were made available for the work, notably the two residential, in-service training time and ongoing working parties.

One of the interesting aspects of AI is its unpredictability. Projects that seemed to be popular at one time were dropped whilst others continued. Seeds that were sown at an early stage bore fruit unexpectedly at a later date. Important themes kept recurring until they were addressed. This unpredictability often led to feelings of insecurity and anxiety in people who were used to the problem solving approach and liked to feel in control of what was going on. There was a reluctance to allow the AI process to unfold in its own time and way. It tended to become rushed along at the
school’s frenetic pace and I often feared that all the goodness in it would get squeezed out. There was a curious ambiguity in the school’s attitude to AI. On the one hand AI was valued and adopted it as the modus operandi, but on the other hand, there seemed to be an unwillingness to credit it for the changes that took place. Maybe that is to be expected - after all, AI does not aim to bring in something completely new; it deliberately builds on what is already working well. So when it acts as a catalyst to bring about change, people tend to claim that they were planning to make those changes anyway.

Another of my discoveries was the seeming indestructibility of the process. The school’s initial tentative embracing of it may have limited its power to some extent, but good always emerged. Some people were alarmed by the reaction of the teaching assistants because they were unused to the way that AI uncovers the truth of a situation. Others, though, could see that it was healthy for these long-standing grievances to come to light as they could now be dealt with. Asking people about their feelings and values can lead to all kinds of unexpected results.

As a result of the AI, I see physical changes around the school, with brighter, more attractive corridors and classrooms. Teachers’ time is saved as meetings have become more productive, and support services have been introduced to make their lives more pleasant and stress-free. On a personal level, I have changed too. I now feel more a part of a community where before I was fairly isolated, not belonging to any particular department. The shared AI experience has connected me to people throughout the whole school community and I feel more relaxed, valued, and authentic than before.

It can take time in an organisation for the realisation to take root that the most effective and innovative change comes about through trusting the energy and creativity that comes from a values based approach. AI has much to offer - above all, a positive atmosphere established through the coming together of people who share their best experiences, deepest values and greatest wishes for the future.
In the contemporary context for schooling, with the emphasis on narrow definitions of achievement, on the tendency to value only what can be measured in certain ways and on an endless stream of mandated targets, there is often precious little room for sensitivity to the emotional aspects of learning. Indeed, the drive for hard-nosed results and for above-average performances, there can be a tendency to write-off the affective domain of education or, at least, view it pejoratively, as ‘touchy-feely’, ‘wissy-washy’ or worse. If anyone attending the Brampton Manor residential workshop had any doubt that such views are misplaced, their doubts would certainly have been dispelled by the end of the workshop.

As one of the school’s parent governors, my own interest in Appreciative Inquiry (AI) had been stimulated from two, very different sources. Firstly, my own professional background, formerly as the headteacher of a behaviour support service, and more recently, as an education consultant and trainer, included a continuing search for constructive and empowering responses to children and young people. Secondly, and much more significantly, my son had for some time been active in a small group of students and teachers that was exploring possible applications for AI within the school.

Without detracting at all from the efforts of the group, its effectiveness at moving forward the Appreciative Inquiry agenda was limited in the early stages. This was due to a number of factors beyond the group’s control and which were largely addressed prior to and during the residential workshop:

· the limited amount of access to the consultant who facilitated the group;
· pressures on the school’s senior management team that limited their take-up and encouragement of AI at a whole-school level;
· pressures on other staff which limited their availability to carry out development work with students between meetings of the group.

The combined effect of these factors was that, for some time, Appreciative Inquiry lacked sufficiently fertile ground in which to flourish.

The turning point in the prospects of growth of AI at Brampton Manor School came once it was ‘re-potted’ within a broader development context. As part of the ongoing commitment to improvement, senior and middle managers identified the need for a refreshment of the school’s values and mission. Serendipitously, the AI consultant, Robin Shohet, held an offer from the US-based organisation, Cultural Transformation, to deliver training in values assessment and to analyse a set of value assessment data. Not only was the offer taken up by the school, but it also served as a stimulus for
renewed AI activity, with the school’s Senior Management Team (SMT) committing time and resources to the residential workshop. While the sustained involvement of staff and students in the AI group had ensured that there was a source of energy for the development, without the commitment of the SMT the means for the fire to take hold would have been in doubt. Indeed, as with other developments, the support of the SMT can be regarded as a prerequisite of successful introduction of AI approaches to the school.

If the SMT’s basic support for the workshop and the associated development was important, their acceptance of a diverse workshop group was all the more so. For, whereas the SMT and middle managers were used to residential sessions on school development, the inclusion of other staff, a governor and, especially, students was a new and significant departure. This highlights the second prerequisite for the successful development of Appreciative Inquiry, namely, that most, if not all, the school’s constituencies need to be engaged in the process.

I do not think I was alone in not knowing quite what to expect of the workshop. Although all participants had had some prior exposure to principles of the AI approach, at the outset of the event there was a genuine sense of uncertainty about how things would pan out. Far from being problematic, the uncertainty was another essential ingredient of the workshop, for it meant that participants were open to each other’s ideas and to their own learning. This was apparent from the earliest stage of the workshop, when participants conducted Appreciative Inquiry interviews with a partner and the fact that the pairings cut across ‘party lines’ added to the potency of the process. Exposure to the reflections and ideas of different constituencies within the school had an empowering effect for all participants and in so doing highlighted that empowerment is a central tenet of AI.

From interactions at an individual level, the workshop evolved to include group work on a number of themes and priorities identified by participants. Again, the appreciative openness of participants to each other’s contributions was a central feature. Here it is worth noting that the conditions created for this exercise encouraged what in transactional terms can be described as Adult/Adult transactions. This reflected the equality that is inherent within Appreciative Inquiry, which enables traditional divisions and differential power to be suspended and replaced by a process of mutual and unconditional regard.

Furthermore, by focusing on ‘live’ issues within school, e.g. the quality of meals, opportunities for integrated study projects, etc., the small group element of the workshop had a creative characteristic. As defined in the government publication, All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture & Education, ‘creativity involves doing something. People are not creative in the abstract; they are creative in something – in mathematics, in engineering, in writing, in music, in business, in whatever’. In the context of the AI workshop, the groups’ creativity was linked to the challenge to have an impact on real aspects of school life.

By itself, the Brampton Manor Appreciative Inquiry residential cannot be credited with a transformation of the institution; however, it serves to illustrate the transformational qualities of AI and made a tangible contribution to the development process. While the overt focus of the collaborative group work was on the development of practical responses to a number of key issues, it is arguable that the greater and longer lasting impacts were below the surface and concerned the quality of the relationships that were facilitated through the workshop.
The most positive thing was the interactive relationships between the students and the teachers, and being able to talk to people on a first name basis, and to other students who might normally be on other sides of the building. Also, how you sometimes hear negative things about a person and when you actually get to know them nobody will now have a bad thing to say about them. An experience like that brought teachers and students closer together even though we can't do it in school. I remember Ms Ellis saying how in a couple of years' time she'd like to be able to go out for a drink with the students as she could imagine having them as friends.

At school it's as if the barriers are up - teachers talk to teachers and students talk to students. Here the teachers weren't treating us like children. Even though Ms Williams was checking on us it wasn't in a bossy way. Robin annoyed people because he talked really slowly. It's just people wanted to hear what he was talking about but people's brains switched off because it was too slow. But after a while you got used to it.

I was really surprised about M's dad because he was not that bad. I loved his CHIPS idea and KOALA. We really got to know the teachers a bit more and I loved the pub idea some of the teachers came up with the next day. I’d really love to do something like that again. We’d like to raise some money, for example car washes and jobs around the school, and any money made from that would go towards going back there again.

The things that are important to me were respected by the teachers there. The evening activity was great too - we were all just one big group - not teachers and students. When I had my hand up and there were lots of people talking, Mr Roberts said, ‘Lauren wants to say something’. I think that all the people who went to Harlow should make a great big banner and walk around the school with it saying we want to go back. Before, I didn’t think some of the teachers were so nice - they always seemed strict to me. When a teacher said something to me at Harlow it really stuck in my mind although I'd heard it before and it didn’t stick at first.

I was in the 'Food and Environment' group and one of the ideas we came up with was of having water fountains in the classrooms. The school is trying to get these now. Also we are asking for an alternative space for students bringing packed lunches.
A Student’s Reflections on the Appreciative Inquiry Residential

I got closer to teachers and appreciated them more and I saw a different side to them and firstly I thought, ‘What’s this man talking about?’ because it wasn’t what I expected; I thought it would be talking about the negative things about school but it was good - it was positive. Now when I see a negative thing I try to put it into a positive side. If I’m arguing, I see the positive side and I leave it.

I liked Carol as well because it’s hard for teachers to see their students’ point of view and Carol said what we were thinking because we were black people. Because it made the teachers see Afro-Caribbeans are underachieving.

I liked that the teachers actually listened to what we said and when Robin came in and put it into a positive thing – we’d thought we’d talk about negative things and tell the teachers what to do. It’s helped the teachers too to get closer to us and has made them see another side to students and see what’s positive and not exclude them straight away.

I liked the way Robin and Joan worked together. Their teamwork was nice – the way they took it in turns. I thought at first when he was talking slowly he thought we were stupid but then I saw the positive side. Mr Whittle was right – we did get more work done in a day than in six weeks. There was a bond between the students and it was good talking to L and M and his dad was nice.

Everyone spoke from their heart. They didn’t have to make things up. They could be honest. I said about Nicola that she helped me see the light – to help me get back into the positive part of life. The Appreciative Inquiry was the most positive thing that had happened to me. When Robin changed the negative and put it into the positive, maybe the positive will be good – I’m still testing that.

And the teachers thought they could trust us – to smoke in front of us – and I liked it that we all were talking on the same level. We didn’t argue. It was like there was no arguing. And Joan was contributing to the positive part of things as well. She spoke slowly too and it annoyed me at first but then I kept remembering the positive.

It was good getting to talk to Ms Aubrey and Mr Whittle over meals so I thought I was looking for the positive side of Ms Aubrey. And I thought she’s alright. And I remember Robin saying, ‘Put the negative into the positive’ when we were talking and he jumped in. I liked the book he read. When I listened I thought it was really nice. He was trying to relate the book to us.

And I got closer to Ms Williams as well because at first I thought I wouldn’t get close to her. They call them SMT and I thought, ‘No-one can be good friends with SMT’. I had respect for her as a teacher and I had respect for her as a nice lady like that mother I never had. I liked the way she cared about me – the way she’d come and check on me and see if I was alright. I hope the Appreciative Inquiry showed that I appreciated her and other teachers as well. Ms Ellis as well – when Kate said, ‘These students would be people I’d like to go to the pub with’, that meant a lot, especially to L. I liked it when me and Fiona were playing about and we had a laugh.

They respect us more in school now. I didn’t expect them to treat me differently when we got back, but they treat me with respect. Now we have greater responsibilities. Now whenever they need something, they always call me and the others. The Appreciative Inquiry turned out better than we expected. And now me and my friends are living in the positive and not the negative.
School and Children’s Values Assessment.

Giving Children an opportunity to express an understand their values in a meaningful way.

Phil Clothier

Purpose and Aims

The purpose of the Classroom Values Education Program is to provide children with a framework for learning about values that will prepare them for their eventual integration into the local community and the organizations where they will work.

The classroom is ideal for this purpose because it is the first opportunity children have of being in community with a group of peers on a daily basis. The rest of their lives will be spent in communities and organizational settings of one form or another.

The classroom is a community of individuals that come together on a daily basis for a common purpose. The beliefs and behaviours that form the classroom culture are a reflection of the beliefs and behaviours of the whole school modified to by the beliefs and behaviours of the teacher and the children themselves.

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‘Happiness is the extent to which we live in love, as opposed to living in fear’ Phil Clothier
Prior to attending school, children usually have only been exposed to the beliefs and behaviours of their parents, siblings and close relatives. The classroom is the first place children encounter beliefs and behaviours of adults and children who are not part of their family. To survive the classroom experience they must learn what appropriate and acceptable behaviour for community life is.

The aims of The Classroom Values Education Program are:

♦ To give children a framework for understanding the relationship between values, beliefs and behaviours.
♦ To help children understand their own values, and how to express them.
♦ To help children understand other children’s values and how to discuss them.
♦ To help children understand what is a classroom and school culture and how they can work together to change or modify it.
♦ To give children the skills they need to be social entrepreneurs.

The Classroom Values Education Program will have different modules for different age groups. This is a program that can grow and develop with students. The first stage of the program, for younger children, focuses on understanding values and learning simple conversational skills to talk about them. The classroom values assessment provides a basis for this conversation.

The assessment is internet based and takes about 10 minutes for each child. Once they have accessed the web site they answer 3 questions. 1) Which of the following values and behaviours best describe you? 2) Which of the following values and behaviours do you see around you in your class? 3) Which of the following values and behaviours best describe how you would like your class to be? Under each of these question is a list of values that can be either positive or limiting.

Examples of positive values

* acting responsibly
* balancing school work with play
* being happy
* being true to yourself
* playing fairly

Examples of Limiting Values

* aggressive/violent behaviour
* bullying
* impressing others
* cheating

Once the assessment is complete, we process the results and write a report to show what is most important to the children, the health of the school or classroom and what opportunities for transformation show up in the results.

In my experience, I find that children understand the concept and reality of what values are and how they work in life and community. In fact they ‘get it’ very fast and sometimes faster than managers in the board room. In working with primary school aged children as young as six and seven they can very quickly give examples about where they
see values and can talk about their beliefs and behaviours that emanate from these values.

One example was when I asked a group of children about the value of environmental awareness. Hands shot up all over the classroom. One child said that this meant being kind to animals and looking after the countryside and towns. When asked about the behaviours that supported this value, another child said that they would not drop an empty crisp bag in a field because a cow might eat it and die.

The second stage, for mid-school children, focuses on the relationship between values, beliefs and behaviours and the seven levels of values (Richard Barrett’s extension of Abraham Maslow’s Model). Again the classroom values assessment provides a basis for this conversation.

Once again I have found that children understand this type of thinking as easily as adults. We have made changes to the values words to facilitate meaningful conversation with children. For example the Level 4 transformational value of ‘tolerance’ has been expressed as ‘accepting people the way they are’ on the children’s values template to make the language more accessible. A few adults who have see this new children’s values template asked if they could use that one too!

Having a framework of values helps the children to understand how different values based priorities arise based on what is going on in their lives and that promotes flexibility in their thinking. There is often more than one right answer.

The third stage, for senior children, builds on the second stage by discussing the role of values in community and nation building and learning social engineering skills such as how to create vision and mission statements.

At this stage we facilitate a simple process of choosing new core values for the group or classroom. Children very quickly find out that the process of becoming conscious about values is not always a painless one. When you state what you want, the elements that you don’t want then come into much sharper focus and it takes courage and patience to work this through.

I tried this with my family a year ago and we jointly decide on our new core values. The first of which is ‘Teamwork and Cooperation’. My 9 year old son and I had two weeks of disruption and
severe disharmony while we worked through the shadows of this new family value. I also learnt how quick children are at finding inconsistencies between the values and the behaviours. My 11 year old daughter called me to account (and still does) regularly.

Seven Levels of Classroom and School Consciousness

Schools and classes have seven basic needs that reflect the seven levels of personal and group consciousness. Schools and classes grow and develop to the extent that they are able to master and integrate into their functioning the values and behaviours associated with each level of consciousness.

Each level focuses on a different need. Levels 1 through 3 reflect the basic needs of any group of individuals – personal security and basic material needs (level 1), harmonious relationships (level 2), and self esteem (level 3). Level 4 addresses the specific needs of the group with regard to adaptation to the changing external environment and the democratization of the internal environment. The key word is transformation. Level 5 focuses on group cohesion through shared values. At level 6 the group becomes aware of community issues and the group as a whole participates and interacts at local, national or societal level to make a difference. For classes, societal involvement would include the local community or specific groups of less privileged or handicapped children in other parts of the world.

Brampton Manor School

In the School Culture Assessment we did for Brampton, the most common personal values were caring, achievement and honesty. The most common values thought to be currently in the school culture were achievement, challenge and learning, and the main ones that people would most like to see in their ideal culture were achievement, caring and respect. The most common potentially limiting values were anti-social behaviour, long hours and inconsistency which I am sure would not be unique to Brampton. Looking at the results, the staff chose to see if they could reframe the limiting value of anti-social behaviour and focus on the positive side which would be respect - a value many people wanted to see more of in the school culture. Respect became the theme for an appreciative inquiry on their second residential. Presenting the findings of the Values Assessment brought many people on board who might otherwise have been sceptical. No-one could deny the figures. It was a good example of how a Values Assessment, which makes a diagnosis, could be combined with Appreciative Inquiry which offers the means to make the change.
Anyone who works in education knows we are in a constant cycle of change; we never quite catch up with ourselves and are always absorbing new research or new government initiatives and targets. All this makes for an exhausting working environment and as a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) it is hard to ensure that all you are doing has impact, is followed through and has everyone on board.

It is really the getting everyone on board that is the biggest challenge of Senior Leadership because by everyone you are talking about all teaching staff, non-teaching staff, students, parents, governors and the local community. In a time-pressured environment and with a list as long and diverse as that, how do you guarantee that all have a voice and feel an ownership of the school’s vision and development al plans for the future? The answer lies in using an Appreciative Inquiry approach to get all groups talking and using a Culture Values Assessment to measure where you are and guide the moves forward.

What follows is a personal account of my involvement as senior leader, in the school’s moves towards AI and our use of the Corptools Values Assessment.

Nicola Williams has taught for 11 years in London. She was formally a Head of English and is now a Deputy Headteacher at Brampton Manor School.
How I Became Engaged

I became involved in Appreciative Enquiry while on the way to a Primary school to give an assembly. I was in a mini cab with two African drums and two students. A Year 8 boy asked ‘fill this in please mi ss’. When I read the AI interview that he had given me it was obvious that I could not fill this quickly and needed to give the questions some thought.

I came back to the questionnaire during a cover lesson for Science. I was trying to ignore the behaviour of a particularly difficult Year 10 student who, in an attempt to get my attention, always misbehaved when I went anywhere near him. I was attempting to answer the questions when this student approached me. My heart sank but at least it was a chance for some positive interaction! I had never had such an interesting discussion with him; we really talked about the answers and how we responded. I had to go along to find out more about Appreciative Inquiry.

A New Language for Schools

My first AI meeting was a different experience to any I had previously had in school. I’m used to operating at a fast pace in order to get all the aspects of my job done – I think I’m what Robin Shohet referred to in the meeting, as an ‘adrenalin junkie’. The students at the meeting talked eloquently about respect and their role in the school. It seemed clear to me though that the teachers involved were already over stretched in all that they had taken on and although their commitment was strong they would be hard pushed to find the time and push through the ideas. The meeting interested me but it struck me as being something quite hard to grasp and have impact on, in a school of our size, without involvement from a greater range of teachers.

At this stage the possibilities of AI were still not clear to me but I was acutely aware that we needed to examine our culture and ethos outside the classroom. So much work on ethos in schools can seem ‘wishy-washy’ and a bolt on extra rather than integral to the life of the community on a day-to-day basis. It was the discovery of the Values Assessment tool that really began to move my thinking forward.

We had our first briefing on Values Assessment in February 2003, I approached it knowing nothing about Values Assessment and feeling wary of taking on too much as a school. The briefing on the Values Assessment was quite difficult to grasp, without examples it felt ‘wishy-washy’ and again I didn’t come away with an idea of how we could use it as a school. One thing that was clear to me was that this was a way of engaging in the spirituality within a school and then building on it. It was this that got my interest. Although at this stage I was unsure about exactly how useful the AI approach and the Values Assessment would be, I found the language a breath of fresh air in a school context and wanted to hear more.

Measuring Culture

In order to show my commitment I gave up a weekend to go on a training course run by Phil Clothier from Cultural Transformation Tools. For me the weekend was an invaluable experience; one I wouldn’t have missed for anything. As a member of the Leadership
Team of Brampton I am aware of my role in having the vision and implementing it. Yet there are times when one realises that other groups within our community see the school very differently. How to turn this into something beyond anecdote and how to move a school’s culture forward are difficult issues and the Values Assessment gave us way in.

An approach like the Values Assessment gives a school community a measure of where they are as a culture – at last here was an approach which could give us a concrete measure of our school culture and move us into being able to examine the views of different sectors of the community in a practical way.

The power of AI in taking the data from the Values Assessment forward became clear. Nonetheless, in the long term I saw this as the beginning of a change in attitudes and expectation of all staff of students; a way for the Leadership team to think of staff as whole human beings; a chance to remember that our role is to create independent, balanced human beings who are able to flourish in the world as citizens.

**Residential**

Neil Berry, our headteacher, had already committed to paying for a residential to support AI and he left the planning to Lesley Bond and myself. After the Values Assessment weekend we were passionate about the need to bring diverse groups within the school together in a way that had not previously happened.

We booked 16 rooms at a hotel in Essex and arranged for six Year 10 students, six members of SLT, one Learning Mentor, one Parent governor, two AI consultants and one African-Caribbean Project consultant (her involvement was important in my determination to link together other ethos and culture initiatives) to come together over a weekend to follow through an AI.

I was excited about the residential for two reasons: To work with the students in this way was completely new to my experience as a teacher (and to any other teacher I know) and it would give me the chance to really understand what AI was all about.

The difference in relationships for the weekend was clear when we all introduced ourselves with first names – I could feel the excitement from the students – it hit me then what an unusual situation they were in and I wondered how they would cope. I was quickly reassured when Robin Shohet posed one of his first questions and the adults all
froze or remained slightly comatose, while the students leapt straight in. A student commented to me afterwards that he found it amusing that the teachers who were so confident at school all seemed shy all of a sudden!

One of our first activities was to interview each other in pairs. I was with a student and enjoyed her company enormously – outside where we were talking the atmosphere was relaxed and jovial between all people there. I got an insight into her perfectionism and her ambition both for herself and the school – something I hadn’t been aware of before.

The evening meal was also wonderful – probably one of the first times the students had ordered from a menu like that and we all laughed and joked our way through the evening – barriers came down and people opened up and shared details about themselves.

The next day the group work really emphasised that we were sharing experiences, not having to knock down suggestions or control responses – we were all sharing our hopes and dreams for Brampton.

The most memorable moment for me came when we were responding to DFES consultant’s session and were asked to think about positive relationships with teachers/students. A student shared about her relationship with me with the group. She said that I had never given up on her and seen her spark. I had given her the chance to prove herself by giving her responsibility and I had shone a light into her life. That’s why I work as hard as I do and why I feel as passionate as I do – you don’t often hear a student say something like that – it gave me the strength to keep going and continue striving to make our school better. I will never forget the weekend and it’s one of my career highlights.

Following Through

In a busy school environment exciting initiatives like AI and the projects that came from the weekend can so easily slip down the priority list and end up being wasted. As the SLT member most closely linked to this, I was not prepared to see this happen and kept it at the top of my priorities.

The Values Assessment was completed in June. I was nervous about the results – particularly the possible levels of entropy, a term used to define negative values like bullying. One of the consultants for Cultural Transformation Tools, Joan Shafer, was over from America, and her feedback was really focused. I was delighted to see the whole school and student results – it showed what we had achieved over the past five years as a school. However, the results from the middle leaders were worrying in that there was a gap between the values they that were important to them personally and those they saw operating in the school.

We decided to take the chance to feedback on the Values Assessment and follow up on AI at a Saturday session involving the original participants from the residential and to get the participants to do some focused work on the values.

It was a mixed group to feed back to - ideal when looking at whole school – SLT, students and one governor. The discussion we had was extremely positive and very revealing. Lesley Bond, the school counsellor and I asked people to look at the words Caring, Achievement and Commitment and discuss how they see those in our current culture. We then looked at Respect and how we would want to see that reflected in our culture. For me the discussion that stands out is from one of our students, who commented on the fact that teachers sometimes show a lack of respect to other teachers in the way they refer to them in
I know that I’ve been guilty of saying things along the lines of ‘I don’t care what Miss/Mr So and So does, in my class we do things my way.’ Certainly gave me food for thought – you think you have thought of all of the dimensions but then someone else’s experience reveals something completely new.

The feedback continued when I gave the SLT a debrief on the headlines from our Values Assessment.

Working group

Peter Whittle, another Deputy Head and I met shortly after this debrief to brainstorm how to incorporate the initial feedback to staff and continue with the work from the AI Saturday. We began to look at the timeline – we didn’t get it finished as each point opened up a lengthy discussion. Time is always an issue in schools. Once again we had to keep AI and Values Assessment top of our list of priorities if we were to ensure it got the time it needed to progress it. At this stage I think we had grasped the data more than the underlying principles of the Values Assessment and AI – we began to decide how we wanted to steer staff – and how this would then be incorporated into the Development Plan.

Understanding AI

We continued our SLT debrief with Lesley Bond present. Peter and I fed back our ideas for the beginning of term. Lesley quickly pointed out that we were losing the democratic approach that makes the Values Assessment and AI so valuable, by telling...
staff that we were focusing on respect in a benevolent ‘we know what’s best for you’ way. Other members of SLT also gave feedback about how to involve other members of the school community without frightening them – bearing in mind we have never done anything like this before and had not had the chance to do the work we had done on the residential.

We agreed to meet with Lesley to re-examine plans. It made me remember to keep reflecting and consulting – something that can be hard when time is so pressured and you want to keep driving something forward.

**Democratic Feedback**

We now had to consider how best to feed back to staff, middle leaders, non-teaching staff and students in a democratic manner following logical time frame. We are still in the middle of this process but so far this academic year we have done the following:

**September - Middle Leaders’ Residential**

We knew feeding back to our middle leaders would be a potentially difficult session. I believe that their job is the hardest in the school and we needed to be sensitive to the
demands of their day-to-day jobs. Our main aims were to give them time as a group to overcome divisions between the curriculum and pastoral leadership and to get them to feel a sense of ownership of the work we did as a school over the next academic year.

It was clear that we needed to use the Appreciative Inquiry approach as we were in danger of opening up purely negative comments and not achieving a sense of moving on. We discussed the fact that both Peter and I were associated with one particular group and could taint the process. So we had to call in a more neutral facilitator – Robin Shohet.

Luckily, Robin Shohet and his partner, Joan were able to come on the weekend. However, our next concern was the reaction of our middle leaders to the AI approach. We were keen that the process got to the design stage as quickly as possible or they would feel a sense of frustration after giving up their weekend for work. Again a clash of cultures, but in view of the audience, I still believe it was a necessary demand.

We had already agreed that we needed to base the AI around respect, a wish to put a positive value on the negative value of anti-social behaviour that had been shown up in the values assessment. In retrospect this was a mistake and again showed a lack of understanding of the principles of the Values Assessment and, to an extent, AI as we were ignoring what they had told us and setting our own agenda. The weekend had some ups and some downs but there has been a positive impact in creating an atmosphere where middle leaders take on ownership of their own whole school projects, to improve the day-to-day life of the school.

October - Whole School Feedback

When planning for whole school feedback we were again concerned that the staff didn’t have the opportunity to simply complain about behaviour and students. As a result we decided to use the Appreciative Inquiry interview to get people talking to each other in a positive way. This went well and created a vibrant atmosphere among our 140 staff.

After lunch the middle leaders fed back on the two projects that had come out of their weekend.

Unfortunately, one of the middle leaders not involved in the residential had been involved in the planning and they ended up asking people to discuss all the problems with common areas and suggest solutions. Of course this was against the entire approach we had focused on all day, and people immediately came up with reactive solutions and didn’t focus on what was working well. The power of the weekend became obvious when you saw so clearly the different approach of someone not yet exposed to AI.

Next Steps

We are planning to feedback to students over two Citizenship lessons – using prefects as facilitators. We are inviting fifty prefects to go through an AI themselves on a Saturday in school, so that they can work with the younger students. I’m looking forward to this as my journey so far has shown how open students are to this approach and I know that if we are to move our ethos forward we have to harness the enormous energy of our students. We’ve undoubtedly made mistakes on our AI journey but I’m changed by my experience on AI and the Values Assessment – I will take the approach to any future school and use the strategies to lead a school which strives to hear and value the voices of all in its community.
9M are a class of 13-14 year olds. I took over the form in January 2004, after their previous form tutor left the school. They were identified as a difficult form and, because of this, we thought it would be good to conduct a Values Assessment with them.

I went through the findings of the assessment with Nicola Williams and Lesley Bond, and there was one area that stood out, which was the students’ feelings towards the current culture of the form. I was most concerned by the fact that they viewed the culture as violent and aggressive.

We decided that it would be a good idea to use Citizenship lessons to try and change the culture of the form. Below are the first three lessons that I conducted with the class:

**Lesson 1**

The lesson objective was: Understand how the group feel about the current and desired culture of the form. The lesson took the following form:

Circle time – during the first part of the lesson I told them about the values assessment, and we discussed what violent and aggressive behaviour was. Students then wrote examples of violent and aggressive behaviour on Post-It notes and these were then read out.

We then discussed ways we could behave which would counteract this behaviour. These again were written on Post-It notes and read out by the class. The behaviour that was recommended was things such as helping each other, accepting each other, no fighting, talking to ‘new’ people, listening to each other and so on.

Students then drew a picture to represent the positive behaviour that they had identified and these were put on the wall.

In this lesson, I decided not to focus on the violent and aggressive behaviour, but rather focus on the positive behaviour that could be displayed instead of acting violently and aggressively.

Michelle Pitt is in her second year of teaching and is Head of Media Studies and Second in Charge of English. Before working in teaching, she worked in recruitment for 5 years.
Lesson 2

The lesson objective was: To be able to produce a Mission Statement that reflects the positive values of the form. The lesson was as follows:

We recapped on the positive values that the form would like as part of their desired culture.

We discussed Mission Statements, and how companies use them. We then looked at Mission Statements from companies like Microsoft, and other smaller institutions.

As a group, we then brainstormed things that we might like to include in our Mission Statement.

Students each wrote their own Mission Statement, which included a class motto and logo.

The class acted as a board of Directors. Then each student read their Mission Statement to the rest of the class, and as a group, a class Mission Statement was chosen.

All of the students produced excellent statements that reflected on the positive values of the form. Even low-ability students were able to think reflectively about the culture they wanted for the form. The winning Statement has been adopted as the class Mission Statement, and is displayed on the wall along with the pictures that were produced in the first lesson.

Lesson 3

The objective for this lesson was: To be able to draw steps to the desired culture. My ideas for this lesson were based on a training session I attended while working in Sales, which discussed the steps to closing a sale.

Students were shown OHTs of ‘Steps to a Positive Culture’ taken by different companies. This included the steps outlined on the Microsoft Small Business Software.

Students divided a piece of paper into four, and put the headings of Fun, Relationships, Attitudes and Success on the four corners. Under each heading, students wrote down what they would like under each of these headings, or what these things meant in relation to school. For example, under Fun, many wrote 'more trips'. And under Attitudes, students wrote 'listen to each other' and so forth.

Students then designed ten steps for achieving a positive environment within the form. For most students, at the top was 'more trips', and the idea was that each step needs to depend on the next. For example, students couldn't start accepting each other if they didn't listen to each other.

Again, this lesson produced excellent work from all of the students.

Plans for the future

I feel that the groundwork that we have done so far has been successful, but we need to do a lot more before we can change the culture of the form. I feel that the next stage will be dramatising the types of negative behaviour that are currently being displayed, and then using techniques such as Forum Theatre, giving the students the opportunity to say what positive behaviour could be employed instead.

Findings

I believe that the Values Assessment has provided an invaluable insight into the thoughts and feelings of 9M towards their classroom culture. It is also a tool that can be used to enforce positive behaviour within the group.
I first encountered elements of Non Violent Communication (NVC) through the Newham Conflict and Change Project which was coming into our school to train students as peer mediators. Some time later, the same organisation was involved in hosting a Marshall Rosenberg workshop at Newham Town Hall, which was well attended by people from all over London. I was very impressed by what I heard that day and by the reactions of workshop participants, some of whom were moved to tears by their introduction to compassionate communication. However, it wasn’t until I experienced its power for myself that I really became committed to this approach.

What happened was that I had embarked upon a course of higher education, the director of which I experienced as a bully. She had spoken to me publicly in a way that I found humiliating so I decided I had a choice: I could either ignore it and hope that things would improve, or I could confront her behaviour. Ruling out the former because experience had shown that things would not improve, I was then faced with the frightening prospect of the latter. Gratefully
turning to the four components of NVC: ‘When I hear...I feel...because I need...so would you be willing...’ I worked out what I needed to say and how I was going to express it. I practised this and the structure gave me the confidence to express what I wanted to say at my next meeting with the director. At first her face was like thunder, but as she heard what I had to say, her expression relaxed and she smiled broadly. From that moment on, our relationship was transformed and I felt close to her in a way that would have been unimaginable a short time before.

More recently I have used it successfully in my relationship with my son whose dedication to his art involves playing music very loudly late at night. After I had expressed my unhappiness about this, he explained how frustrating he found it trying to achieve the high quality he wanted, all the time aware that his music was an annoyance to other people in the house. This meant that he cut corners and produced an end result that did not do him justice. Really empathising with this, I used the four components to let him know that I understood how very frustrating this must be for him. We had a fruitful discussion, looking creatively at ways in which we could both get our needs met.

In the secondary school where I work as a counsellor, I have incorporated NVC into assertiveness training courses. I am quite honest about the fact that I am a learner myself and openly share with the students my mistakes in using or failing to use the process. This gives them the confidence to try it out and not to feel bad if they don’t always get it right. I tell them that it takes time to develop the skill and the important thing is to practice and be kind to yourself when you make mistakes. At the beginning of each session we gave examples of when we had used it during the previous week and what the outcome had been. The results were often very positive and empowering for the students who were further encouraged by the group’s spontaneous applause upon hearing of NVC successes.

I believe that this approach has the potential to transform schools by changing the relationships between people. It can do this by providing a safe linguistic container for powerful and difficult feelings. In a recent values assessment carried out in the school, what emerged clearly was that not only did people consistently express a desire to move towards more relationship oriented values, but they specifically pinpointed their longing for greater respect which is something that NVC is perfectly equipped to deliver.

Bullying and ‘cussing’ amongst young people are perennial problems in schools, whilst difficult interchanges between staff and students can also lead to a huge waste of time, energy and goodwill. There are many reasons why bullying and indiscipline are so common in schools but there is one connection that is rarely made between the two: it seems fairly obvious that in a compulsory and hierarchical education system, students will rebel at their lack of autonomy and, when punished, will take out their anger on other young people. Obliged to enforce a statutory education service, teachers often resort to coercion, praise, punishment and reward. These methods can appear to be pretty successful in terms of achieving academic results and enforcing reasonable behaviour, but they fail to take into account the factors that motivate people truly to co-operate, and to grow as human beings.

‘We all pay dearly when people respond to our values and needs, not out of a desire to give from the heart, but out of fear, guilt, or shame. Sooner or later, we will experience the consequences of diminished goodwill on the part of those who comply with our values out of a sense of either external or internal
It is difficult for teachers to move on from well-tried systems that work up to a point, to a process which is relatively untried but potentially transformative.

As mentioned earlier, NVC can be seen as a linguistic container for powerful feelings, but it is much more than that; it is based on respect and compassion for ourselves and others and can be demonstrated both non-verbally and through listening and empathy. These last two skills are key to the whole approach; many of the problems which arise in the lives of young people are to do with their feeling that others are not listening to them. Recently a young man told me how he had been watching television in his father’s room when his dad walked in and told him to put the headphones on. The boy asked why this was necessary and was told, ‘Because that’s the rule.’ He complained that this wasn’t a satisfactory reason, whereupon his father started shouting at him, leading to an altercation which ended with the boy telling his father to ‘Get lost.’ When he told his mother what had happened, she explained that she and her husband wanted headphones to be worn in their room as they wanted a place of peace and quiet in their often quite noisy house. In addition, they did not want the neighbours to be disturbed. When he heard this, the boy said, ‘Well, if he’d just said that, I would have understood.’ In NVC terms, the boy had been feeling puzzled because he needed information, whereas the father had been feeling annoyed because he needed peace. Unhappily, neither of them had had their needs met in this interchange.

This sort of failure to meet on the level of feelings and needs happens all the time in schools and leads to untold amounts of unnecessary suffering. It is difficult for teachers to move on from well-tried systems that work up to a point, to a process which is relatively untried but potentially transformative. There may be an understandable fear that to get into the region of feelings and needs is to make oneself vulnerable and open oneself to being seen as weak. Nothing could be further from the truth; it is widely recognised that some of the best teachers are those who are most genuine with the children. Some people may fear that anarchy will ensue if young people are given choices, but on the whole, they respond to respect with respect. What is vital is that requests are just that – requests – not demands. Two of our deepest needs
are for appreciation and autonomy and when these are valued and lived through the NVC process, mutual understanding, co-operation and trust can be established.

Robin Shohet writes

I first came across NVC three years ago when I met its founder Marshall Rosenberg. I liked him and was impressed with how many conflict situations in the world he had gone into and how, quite quickly, he had been able to have all parties express their needs to each other and end their conflict.

NVC is based on the recognition that human needs are not in conflict with each other; only strategies can be in conflict. Through ensuring that both parties hear and connect fully with each other’s needs, the idea is to find strategies that would meet as many of those needs as possible for all parties involved.

I wondered whether NVC would be a useful tool in schools, whether it could be applied.

I wondered if it could help teachers to listen to the needs of pupils behind their antisocial behaviour, and enable both parties to express their needs rather than simply trying to control each other. I also wanted to explore how this method could be of use in helping to reduce stress.

However, I think it is very challenging. As MIki Kashtan, an NVC trainer, writes:

NVC consciousness shift is at odds with the assumptions on which most of our schools and social institutions are built.....The collective belief that human beings must be controlled and punished leads us to create institutions that constrain, control and manipulate people. It predisposes us to create educational systems like the ones we have at present where control, discipline, reward and punishment are the norm, and where choice, spontaneity, curiosity and inquiry are frowned upon.

Strong words. He goes on to describe reactions of teachers on an introductory workshop. They say,

‘NVC is wonderful and I can see how much it can enhance my personal life, but there’s no way you can possibly apply this in school. My students need structure and discipline. Without it they’ll never make it in a culture they don’t know. If I let go of rules and negotiate with them about every little thing, they won’t be able to function.’

Another teacher said

‘Trying to develop mutual relationships will open up a can of worms for me. The high school students I teach have been told what to do and how to do it for years. If I invite them to talk about their

Once we have been repressed, when we are offered freedom, we will not know easily how to use it, and may well be tempted to exploit it, which reinforces the belief that we should never have been given it in the first place.
feelings and to engage in learning because they want to, not because they have to, they won't learn anything at all.’

And another:

‘My principal will never go for it. He’s very formal and can’t stand any talk of feelings.’

So even though all those quoted liked NVC, it was difficult for them to imagine applying it in schools. We are encountering a real challenge to the way we look at the world - a challenge to such core beliefs as ‘human beings are not self directing and need punishment, control and reward to learn.’ The trouble is that these beliefs become self fulfilling. Once we have been repressed, when we are offered freedom, we will not know easily how to use it, and may well be tempted to exploit it, which reinforces the belief that we should never have been given it in the first place. Once more the status quo reigns, as the experiment is terminated with a reinforcement of the idea that human beings are not to be trusted.

The question Kashtan asks is how do we learn the art of dialogue when we are primed to respond to relationships by imposing our needs or giving up on them as soon as conflict exists or seems to be brewing?

It seems quite hard to be in touch with our needs as it makes us feel vulnerable. We could get laughed at, rejected, refused for having them. So we resort to manipulation, control without even realising that we are trying to protect ourselves. And we back this up with logic. ‘Children will never be able to function otherwise.’ ‘Feelings are an indulgence.’ ‘You have to live in the real world.’ Some of these beliefs and rationalisations are so core to us and institutionally reinforced, that we are considered mad, woolly, flakey, if we don’t adopt them, even though they do not serve us.

On humanitarian grounds alone I believe NVC would be worth doing. However, indications are that pupils achieve more or at least just as much. Somehow we have created an either/or polarity - either we pay attention to students’ needs, or to the curriculum. I think both are possible.

In an earlier article in this edition a teacher who had given out leaflets for the students to take home found them lying on the floor. Rather than blaming the students for their thoughtlessness, she explained that clearing them up meant that she had less time with her family which she really wanted. It never happened again. It was far more effective to express her need than to resort to sanctions.

I looked up NVC on the website and found someone who was using it extensively in her school. In fact this school was founded on NVC principles. I was so impressed that I went to interview Marianne Gothlin in Stockholm. What follows is a combination of an article she has written and our interview.

What concerned her was not to teach the way she was taught. Almost all of us have been through the school system, just as we have all had parents. In spite of our best intentions, it is harder to break the patterns we have inherited. In fact Marianne found this. Rather than teach it to the children, her and her staff had to ‘be it’ themselves first. The teachers had to put NVC into practice rather than teach it as a technique. She had assumed she was just going to teach it.

‘We did not set out formally to teach children NVC, nor did we set out to teach children compassion, because how can you do that? We teachers agreed that what was important was to live the consciousness of NVC.

Along the way they encountered a group of students who used this method as a way of defying the teachers. The teachers set about trying to understand the needs behind the
"no" that the students expressed and saw it as an important step for them. The students were exercising their power of choice to see if they would still be respected.

It is not only the children who have to unlearn. Parents and teachers, and probably most adults, do too. How many of us as parents with just two children have resorted to trying to exercise power? How much more difficult it must be with a group of thirty where the norms are such that ‘power over’ seems the only way. Teachers or parents of bosses - how do we get to the point where we do not protect ourselves but be willing to share and be open?

Perhaps the most important point that Marianne said was NVC was not something you added which took up time. It gives meaning to the time you already have. It is a way of looking at the world. The cry will go up that all this will take more time. Marianne said that there were already meetings - now they had become more alive. The time is now made use of better. I found this working with appreciative inquiry at Brampton where the topics of meetings came up. The school now has a positive observer to watch if they are slipping into negativity who will bring them back to the positive which will be more efficient.

Further Reading

Kashtans, Mikis. ‘Transforming Power Relations - The Invisible Revolution’. Encounter. 2002 Number 3
Hart, Sura and Gothlin, Marianne. ‘Lessons from the Skarpnacks Free School’ by. Encounter 2002 Number 3
Robin Shohet is co-author with Peter Havkins of Supervision in the Helping Professions (OU Press 2nd edition 2000) He teaches supervision through the Centre for Supervision and Team Development (www.cstd.co.uk) and is researching bringing Appreciative Inquiry into schools.

Behind some simple techniques are some basic assumptions that initially might be quite difficult to take on board, such as human beings will naturally want to support each other. She found that people would ask for help or supervision spontaneously when they were able to connect to their needs, and know that these needs would be respected.

She said that part of the process was mourning her own schooling - that she did not have this for herself. Some of her ideas seemed very similar to appreciative inquiry where we focus on the positive as an attitude of mind, and to Circle Time where we build on the idea that children and adults will naturally cooperate given the right circumstances. She said that she was concerned how much we forget to be human when we become goal orientated.

The model of education that seems to run us is one of a machine where efficiency is the aim. League tables seem to be driving this need for a product. As this model is, in fact, very inefficient, we may need to look at why we are so attached to it. Certainly NVC asks a lot of us - a willingness to give up trying to impose our will or blame others and instead be willing to listen, empathise and be vulnerable. I do yet know how it can be introduced into schools in a systematic way. But I think it has tremendous potential.
Your regular columnist is currently roving in North America, based for a month in Portland, Oregon. Oregon is not typical of the USA, being part of the northeast region known as Cascadia. I’ve been surprised by how keen and quick people I meet are to distance themselves from George W. and ask the embarrassing and to me unanswerable question of what our Tony is up to being in the pocket of George. I’ve also been surprised by how respectful motorists are to pedestrians, at a street corner stopping and waiting if they sense a pedestrian is showing an interest in crossing. On more than one occasion this has led me to be decisive and cross quickly when in reality I was in a vague and speculative mindset not yet sure which way I was heading. Another surprise for me is when shopping staff serving seem genuinely interested in me when they ask ‘How are you today?’ though I haven’t yet plucked up courage to tell them about my various aches and pains – I somehow suspect that is not part of the protocol, despite the sense of being a genuine relationship, at least compared to shopping in the UK. Indeed, in a small resort on the Pacific coast I overheard a conversation between a customer and shop assistant who were bemoaning the fact that in the UK they now have chips in credit/debit cards and you have to put in a PIN number rather than hand over the card – and soon we’ll have that ‘over here’!

There are things that disturb me, particularly how comfortable life is here for most people, and so the homeless begging on the street stand out even more. And with petrol at a quarter of the price in the UK car use is very high, even in Portland which has internationally renowned sustainable development policies. The sense of comfort, underpinned by the privileges that people have in the USA compared with most parts of the world, does bring home the invisible system that is in place to ensure the supply of cheap oil, essential to maintaining that privilege, to the misfortune of those countries and people that could potentially pose a threat to that supply. In my naivety I was deeply shocked when I first saw Fox TV, reporting on the Iraqi elections, and saw vividly how that underbelly is kept hidden and the privilege taken as natural.

Talking of natural, I was walking in the temperate rain forest on the edge of Portland and saw a sign entitled Natural Area Restoration Project which read ‘We are removing invasive plants such as English Holly and English Ivy in an effort to restore this natural area’. Now that did shock at quite a deep place, a vital symbol for me of the natural world being uprooted as out of place!
Change and Growth Requires Intention

In the last issue I referred to the Winter Solstice and new green shoots. Growth and planned change depend on intention within. One major change is that Alexandra will be leaving us in July, after years of hard work as Managing Editor, skilfully putting S&S together and promoting the journal. It’s too soon to say goodbye, but her leaving concentrates our minds on our producing S&S as the main function of AHP. For we aren’t growing, membership is turning over, but is relatively static, and needs to increase if AHP and S&S are to be secure.

So we’ve some far-reaching plans. Firstly, cost saving by employing a layout artist instead of the wider function of Managing Editor, by curtailing several organizational functions and handling others within AHP Administration, plus other economy measures. And in my green shoots analogy, we need to feed the soil to generate growth. That fertilisation has to be by our present members. We’re having a concentrated promotional effort, asking you to distribute S&S flyers as widely as possible and actively seek new members. The Committee will be targeting specific readers and organisations in the humanistic field. We are confident these measures will be successful, and by early 2006 we should be firmly growing and secure. In the unlikely event that more drastic action is needed, we may have to reduce publication to four issues per year, or even relinquish S&S to a commercial publisher. All this will be aired at our AGM on 14th May, see the Notice elsewhere in this Issue.

For you to continue receiving S&S we need your help, we’ve asked before but now it’s really important. If one in four members recruited another then our future would be transformed. But don’t leave it to the other three!

Spare S&S flyers are included with this issue. Don’t discard them! Encourage friends, colleagues, students, supervisees and whoever else to apply for membership. Tell them they can get a complimentary copy from Anton, or can download sample articles and a full copy from the website. Pin flyers on notice boards; leave in Common Rooms, colleges, cafés, health food shops, clinics, libraries, etc. Get more flyers from Anton and distribute them.

And come to the AGM on Saturday 14 May, with ideas and offers of help.
This month I stay with psycho-social revolution and its limitations. Aged 30, Tim Guest has just published a valuable document of personal healing. *My Life in Orange* chronicles a boy growing up in Rajneesh communes, mostly at Medina in Suffolk, where his mother was a top therapist. It’s a story overflowing with freedom but lacking boundaries, at the expense of the children’s belonging needs. Tim’s book is a riveting account of vision gone wrong, and a lesson for those of his parent’s age, busy as we were with freedom to go beyond the security and repression we grew up with.

Tim explains the incredible appeal and inspiration of ‘Bhagwan’, and reminds us what a challenge it was to take orange in the 70’s. Here he plays with what this meant to his mother: ‘The Marxists thought co-opting Eastern philosophy was intellectual imperialism. The Feminists were outraged that her consciousness had fallen so low she was carrying a picture of a man around her neck. Her therapist acquaintances warned she was projecting her primary love-object in an unconscious bonding with an omnipotent fantasy, and that was bound to end in catastrophic negative counter-transference. Her hippie friends thought it was a hassle to have to dye so many clothes. Her own family was barely speaking to her.’

With bittersweet wit, Tim takes us through the enthusiasm of early days to the point where the guru’s trusty lieutenant Sheela’s transforms ‘The Ranch’ from an enlightened Butlins - humming with meditation and self-expression - into a labour camp that might have impressed Stalin. During the final days of madness her deadly control was ubiquitous: even the daily menu was faxed from Oregon to each centre, from Tuffnel Park, to Hamburg, to Tokyo, so that she remained in absolute domination.

Married to an ex-‘Bhaggy’, and with a friend of my son’s one of the principle characters, I was gripped by the tale. Tim clearly uses the opportunity to cathart, and at times his youthful inability to disidentify from the child he was drags the narrative down. Nevertheless, the moral comes through loud and clear, delivering a clear lesson in parenting, ‘from the mouths of babes and sucklings’. The Sannyasins – with Tim’s Mum in the vanguard - freed their inner children and reinvented specialness. As a real child, Tim could do whatever he wanted, but claims all he ever wanted was to be special to someone. ‘I was ashamed of the colossal need I felt. The older girls were our main source of comfort. I was always trying to come up with ways to make them pay attention to me.’

Frequently, this orange Adrian Mole turns his anger into delightful irony: ‘In communes around the world Sannyasins gathered together to abandon weight, to surrender themselves to levity. Or rather that’s what the adults were hoping for. The children of Bhagwan’s communes needed other things. We needed comfort. We needed a place to stash our Lego.’ Yet the final irony is how conventionally English it all seems.
There are plenty of books about the therapeutic relationship: what goes on or needs to go between therapist and client. But there are precious few about the relationship between tutor or trainer and student. This is the first I have come across. And I was greatly impressed by it.

This is such a beautiful book. It breathes the humanistic spirit, even though it is written by an existential–phenomenological therapist and a communicative analytical therapist. As the authors sum up at the end:

‘What we have been proposing, and discussing, throughout the book is a model of learning which emphasizes the ‘personal’ – the interpersonal, the relational, the mode of the individual’s being–together–with–others – over the intellectual.’ (p.166)

This is not an ‘academic’ book, in the sense of being formal and full of references. The bibliography is not extensive, although there are some brilliant quotes scattered through the book. Much of the body of this work takes the form of a dialogue between the two authors, which comes across as spontaneous and unforced. They come out with statements like this:

‘Psychotherapy trainees very often have to dig down deep within themselves to find the means to grow through their own woundedness.’ (p.54)

There is only one place where I felt out of sympathy with the authors, and it hit me hard because it seemed so out of keeping with the general tenor of their argument:

‘When we promote the chimera of “self–development”, when we propose a “profession” of psychotherapy and engage in training psychotherapists, when we hold out the promise of therapy as a non–invasive “cure” for a range of certified disorders, we make unjustified claims for the product. The only psychotherapy worth buying or selling is a limited psychotherapy that eschews a desire to “cure” or to “liberate”, that entails a profound respect for the integrity and worth of the person, a critical psychotherapy that confines itself to “the obstinate attempt to be–together with the Other”, alongside a radical questioning, an examination of
myself, my values, my life, my relationships, my world, and a challenge to the status quo.’ (p.87)

There is much here that I agree with, but it is the pouring of scorn on self–development and liberation that I don’t understand. Even more is this puzzling in view of their later statement:

‘No psychotherapist could take up this occupation without a fundamental attitude of optimism about humanity, of confidence in the human capacity to change, to “self–actualise”, as Abraham Maslow put it.’ (p.154)

There seems to be something funny going on here. One of my aims as a therapist certainly is liberation, and I don’t see this as contradicting a profound respect for the integrity and worth of the person, or the other desirable things the authors mention.

There is a certain narrowness about the otherwise warm and large vision of the authors, in that they only mention a quite restricted range of writers: for example, they have good critical points to make about the exclusiveness of some of the therapy schools, but never quote the stirring work on ‘schoolism’ by Petruska Clarkson, which would have been highly relevant.

Some of their remarks are extremely brief, to the point of being more or less useless. For example, they have sections in their Chapter 5 labelled Listening (20 lines), Attending (15 lines), Hearing (32 lines), Waiting (18 lines), Self–restraint (12 lines), Witnessing (17 lines), Meeting (11 lines), Being–with–the–Other (14 lines), and so on.

But really it has to be said that this is a lovely book, readable, unpretentious, human, likeable, quite deep at times, quite challenging at times, very original, definitely not predictable – a book to cherish and love. And I liked it at the end, when they said: ‘The spiritual dimension in both of us has been stimulated.’ Hats off!

John Rowan

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**Beyond Prozac: Healing mental distress**

Terry Lynch

PCCS, 2004 £13

This uncompromising critique of then mental health system in the British Isles and its dependence on drug therapy should be welcomed by the humanistic community, especially since it’s author is not only a GP, but is also trained to master’s level in humanistic and integrative psychotherapy.
The roots of the humanistic movement, as Eric Whitton reminds us in his account of its history (Reviewed in the last edition of S&S) lie in the challenge of the medical model of mental distress and this accords strongly with Terry Lynch’s stance as set out in this book. It is especially pleasing to come across a critique written by someone who was very much part of the system and therefore can comment from the inside; engaging with psychiatry on its own ground, i.e. that of evidence based research and practice.

It is clear, from reading Beyond Prozac, that Terry Lynch is doing excellent clinical work with patients who are sometimes considered ‘off-limits’ to conventionally trained counsellors and therapists. He is also, as Dorothy Rowe acknowledges in her foreword, something of a brave renegade as far as his colleagues in the medical profession are concerned.

I was therefore very much looking forward to reviewing Beyond Prozac, but, as so often in these columns, I have to say that, although there is very little with which I would disagree in this book both factually and in terms of its sentiments, I can’t help feeling that it is let down by its presentation and structure. This is a pity because the issue of mental health is one which many of us care very deeply about and Terry Lynch’s perspective is one which needs to be aired loud and often.

The first chapter is well written, hard hitting and, frankly, worrying. He reveals that between 10 and 30 per cent of medical research involves plagiarism and the invention of data and that 40 per cent of published psychiatric research contains statistical errors. He challenges the biggest misconception upon which the medical model of mental illness is based, that a correlation demonstrates a one-way causal relationship (e.g. because the brain biochemistry of depressed people is different from that in non-depressed people then the change in the brain biochemistry must have caused the depression.) He points to the ‘sharp practices’ involved in some drug based research, e.g. the screening out of patients who have a high susceptibility to the placebo effect before the actual drug trial starts in order to produce a more significant effect for the treatment cohort as opposed to the control group who are given a placebo. Most significantly, for therapists and counsellors, he exposes the biased definitions of counselling, in one case this was defined as ‘supportive words from the GP’, when counselling and therapy were being compared with drugs in the treatment of mental illness. Most of all he focuses on the role of the drug companies in both funding and benefiting from research into their products. There are no major surprises here, but it is good to hear these issues restated with references and concrete examples.

After a promising first chapter, the book seems to lose its focus. The next lengthy chapter (some sixty odd pages) is entitled ‘Does “mental illness” exist?’ This is a really important question in the context of a book on mental distress, but unfortunately it is never answered. Instead we have a detailed exploration of issues such as the history of the various medical treatments of mental illness, the addictiveness of some of the past and current drugs such as benzodiazepines or SSRI’s. It is all very interesting and engaging, but it doesn’t deal clearly with the distinction on which
the book is based; that mental illness is really mental distress which, not being organic in origin, doesn’t need a physical, i.e. drug based, cure.

The next chapter, on ‘Depression’, though equally lengthy, is more clearly focussed. I particularly liked Terry Lynch’s debunking of the word ‘clinical’ as in ‘clinical depression’, which, despite the term being obsolete according to DSM, is used frequently by both professionals and lay people in order to indicate the severity and biological origin of the condition.

Thinking about this brings me to something I believe has been left out of this book. The client examples Terry Lynch uses are nearly always of the GP or Psychiatrist labelling the patient as having a biologically derived condition which needs to be treated with drugs or ECT. This certainly does happen and needs to be challenged. However, nowhere in the book does he mention the propensity, which I have certainly observed, of clients and/or their families, to label themselves in order not to feel responsible, or as they might see it, blamed. Of course we, as practitioners, shouldn’t blame clients for doing this, but I can’t believe that Terry Lynch doesn’t come across clients like this in his practice or indeed the clients who ‘just want a pill to make me feel better.’ I would have been interested to hear how he deals with such clients.

The next chapter on ‘Other “mental illness”’ gives useful perspectives, particularly on eating disorders and schizophrenia. I was particularly interested, but not surprised, to read that Clozapine which, in the early 90’s was hailed as the side effect free major tranquiliser of the future, is a problematic, in its own way, as any of it’s predecessors.

The rest of the book focuses on suicide and is sensibly divided into chapters on the medical view, the alternative view, medical approaches to treatment and finally the alternative approach to prevention. And there, with the chapter on the prevention of suicide, the book ends. Granted, much of what is contained in this chapter could well be applied to the treatment of mental distress generally, but it would have been nice to have a chapter which focussed explicitly on the changes Terry Lynch would like to see in the health system, in research, and in the training of doctors which would have a significant effect on the very real problems he outlines.

In the end, I’m left with mixed feelings about this book. I would certainly put it on the reading list for counselling students and medical students and. As I said at the beginning, I’m very glad it has been written. One recommendation I would make, for future work, is to cut down on the clinical examples. Normally I’m a great fan of these as they give a practical insight into the author’s way of working, but I found myself feeling overwhelmed and wanting to say;

‘Alright, alright Terry, I believe you. You’ve made your point. Time to move on!’

On the other hand, maybe I’ve missed something here. Maybe Terry Lynch’s strength is that he is a storyteller, in which case he should make more of a feature of this.

Geoff Lamb
Dear S&S,

I would like to respond to John Rowan’s review of Sue Gerhardt’s book *Why Love Matters* in the last issue of S&S. I have a great deal of respect for John and his extraordinary contribution to the theory and practice of humanistic therapy over decades, and have appreciated many of his very thoughtful book reviews. However, this one sounded rather more dismissive than I feel comfortable with.

He begins his review with: ‘In a way this is a brilliant book, and in a way it is a disappointment.’ Apart from a couple of positive comments in the first and final paragraphs, however, he seems to be writing almost totally about the disappointment and I would like to have heard more about what he considered to be ‘brilliant’.

To state my own bias, I loved this book and have recommended it to various people, including clients, supervisees, colleagues and friends, all of whom have been very positive. Among the things that I (and others) love are Sue Gerhardt’s accessible language, her inclusion of women’s direct experience of being mothers, her quoting from feminist writers, her challenge to some of the developmental theories (mostly from male writers) and to what she calls the ‘demeaning’ diagnostic language of so-called ‘personality disorders’ which seems to be becoming so widely accepted. I enjoy the way she links scientific theory and therapeutic thinking in a way that makes sense to me, even if I don’t agree with all of it.

John says: ‘I don’t quite know who it is aimed at’. I believe it’s ‘aimed’ at all the people he mentions as possible targets – mothers, psychologists, therapists – as well as ordinary every-day people who might be interested in learning more about how and why our brains develop in particular ways. On what does he base his belief that the amount of academic detail ‘would be too much for most mothers’?

I am also curious about John’s statement that attachment theory is ‘quite trivial’ and leads people into ‘rather simplistic cause-and-effect thinking’. That would, of course, be possible – but surely no more so than a simplistic belief in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and theory of self-actualization, for example.

This humane and readable book seems to me to offer a fascinating insight into recent findings in neuroscience and biochemistry in a way which I can understand and relate to. As Sue Gerhardt says in her introduction: ‘As these disciplines (neuroscience, psychology, psychoanalysis, biochemistry) begin to communicate and to influence each other, they are offering a deeper understanding of how human beings become fully human and how they learn to relate emotionally to others.’

*Christine Bell*

Consultancy and Training - Psychotherapy and Counselling
Dear S&S

What a heart-warming piece Jenny Mosley wrote on Forgiveness - always my ‘hot topic,’ sometimes hotter than others, like now. I found myself reading about far more than teachers of school children; I discovered that forgiving is a teaching act in the wider world as well. Forgivers feel their hurt feelings, survive them, then manage to find, and offer, compassion, love, understanding, in effect be ‘bigger than the behaviour that’s just scalded you.’ This I can do as counsellor; this I find hardest in relation to my own mother. Why’s that? Children in school are children; clients, by their very nature, are open-hearted enough to be there, implying a desire to learn. My mother is an adult, (I’m not responsible for her inner child, except perhaps for my part in collective responsibility) and resistant to learning, (if I’m afraid too, I’m also intrigued, and tenaciously explore this subject.)

Jenny calls teachers superhuman. I think teachers of children, and of those open to learning, get pushed to the edge of their humanness. I think persevering teaching, forgiveness of, those refusing to learn is indeed superhuman, and that’s God’s job. I can at least forgive myself, give myself permission, with compassion, for being just human.

Jane Barclay
Counsellor, Exeter

In our last issue (Vol 32 No6 Feb – Mar 05) we printed a letter from David Jones which read in part:

Dear S&S

Psychotherapist as blank screen ...

Your issue Working with Refugees (Vol 32, 5 Dec 2004) deserves wide readership. Aida Alayarian (p42) refers to the ‘blank screen traditionally adopted by psychoanalytic therapy’ and, rightly in my view, rejects it as of little help to ‘people who are … reclaiming their lives after fleeing for safety.’ I would go further and say it is always of little help to clients/patients who have experienced shocking events whether they have then fled geographically or in some other way. The modern client centred or humanistic formulation that I like goes like this (my words):

The therapist should be fully present and engage with the client but without becoming entangled. They should be aware of their own emotional state and inner process throughout a session as well as entering into and following the client’s process and state of mind whilst at the same time holding the time and safety boundaries in place. To be present without becoming entangled requires an ability to feel pain without getting defensive against it. It also requires recognition that conscious interpretation is only one type of response a therapist can make and is often inappropriate.

I am sure this humanistic formulation could be better stated and I wonder what S&S readers think. I will draw this letter to the attention of some of the people who are prominent in the UKCP to see what they say.

David Jones (Psychotherapist, Retired)
Dear S&S

I have interpolated an addition to your formulation which my experience with supervisees working with refugees at the Minster Centre suggests is quite unavoidable.

'It is also sometimes necessary to recognise that when dealing with refugee clients in profoundly difficult legal and socio-economic situations actual alterations of the ordinary psychotherapeutic/counselling frame will sometimes be, at least temporarily, necessary, and that an element of an advocacy role may be part of this.'

Heward Wilkinson - Chair of the Humanistic and Integrative Section (HIPS) of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Dear S&S

David asked me to give a brief comment on his letter. I think his statement (with which I am in total agreement) can be understood as an example of what I call Stage Three when it comes to the question of the role of the therapist in the therapy.

Stage One was the therapist (or, more accurately, the psychoanalyst) as expert. That's where the blank screen came in, to elicit material for authoritative interpretation. Countertransference consisted of the therapist’s neuroses and resistances.

No one owns to working in a Stage One way any more but I have my doubts! Stage Two was a definite advance in that the therapist's subjective responses to the client, and the resultant creative use of self by the therapist, meant that the client's inner world could be accessed via the therapist’s ‘usable countertransference’.

Most therapists I know from all kinds of backgrounds are working in Stage Two ways and there is nothing fundamentally wrong with it. But there may be some unforeseen problems. To give a simple example, the idea that the therapist’s depression is the client’s depression (or an image of the client’s depressed mother) cropping up in the therapist could leave out the therapist’s actual depression (or his/her own depressed mother). The risk is of shoving the problematic material back into the client, thereby cleaning up the therapist. This is unacceptable, ethically and politically. (I tried to write about this in The Political Psyche)

In Stage Three work, as David says, the therapist’s own subject position and affective state is understood as part of the relational field. It is ethically and politically much more satisfying and, I believe, more effective clinically. The best Stage Three work is being done by the relational psychoanalysts in the United States. People like Stephen Mitchell, Jessica Benjamin, Neil Altman, Lew Aron, Adrienne Harris, Muriel Dimen.

However, we have to question whether Stage Three is not, in fact, also where some schools of therapists started from. I am thinking of the Jungians and some humanistic practitioners. As far as the Jungians are concerned, there's Jung’s famous one-liner that the analyst is ‘in’ the therapy just as much as the patient is.
Anyway, this brief communication is not intended to be more than an addition to David’s letter and let’s have a discussion about it.

Andrew Samuels – Jungian Analytical Psychologist

(*The Political Psyche (1993) by Andrew Samuels is published by Routledge and is available from Amazon Books – Ed)

Dear S&S

One of my comments is that this statement makes no reference at all to any non-verbal communication, body awareness, body language, etc. It is purely a ‘therapeutic relationship’ statement and whilst body awareness and non-verbal communication might be implicately inferred, since it often occupies as much as 95% of all communicative signals, I would prefer something more explicit to be stated. How about:

‘The therapist should be fully present and engage with the client. They should be aware of all channels of communication, verbal, non-verbal, and body-oriented. They should observe and respond appropriately, but without becoming entangled. They should be aware of their own emotional state, their body and their inner process throughout a session as well as entering into and following the client’s process, state of mind and body language. They should be assisting the client to explore their own forms of inner process, communication, and interaction, whilst at the same time holding the time, psychic space, and safety boundaries in place.

To be aware of the multi-level aspects of both self and other involves levels of meta-attention, without involvement.

To be present without becoming entangled requires an ability to feel pain without getting defensive against it. These also require professional recognition that unconscious signals, body language, energy and attention levels and so forth comprise the majority of communication signals between people: verbal communication is just a minimal part of these and is often over-rated and inappropriate.’

Yours

Courtenay Young – Psychotherapist and Treasurer UK Association for Humanistic Psychology Practitioners (UKAHPP a founder organisation of UKCP)

Over to you to continue the discussion.
Deadline for the next issue is April 28. Eds.
Association for Humanistic Psychology in Britain

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For an informal discussion contact
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The Association for Humanistic Psychology in Britain - AHP(B)

Humanistic psychology explores and promotes a holistic understanding of people as individuals, and in communities and organisations, within society and culture. It values people as whole beings, though comprising many interacting parts, body, feelings, thoughts, senses, imagination and spirit. Such exploring offers a deeper knowledge of what it is to be human, where difference is an opportunity for learning, growth and expansion. This understanding of human potential is both positive & facilitative. The humanistic movement sees us as organically trying to become more integrated and more whole. It encourages authenticity, spontaneity, personal responsibility, creativity, love, good will and personal power. This enables people, communities and organisations to create and control their lives with integrity and with sensitivity to others and to the world.

AHP(B) started in Britain in the 1960s as part of an international grouping of associations interested humanistic psychology. AHP(B) seeks to act as a forum for ordinary people hoping for a more conscious and humane society, and for those striving to be human in a rapidly changing world. Membership includes a subscription to S&S and occasional activities include workshops, festivals and conferences.

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