

# Closing the gaps

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*This paper traces the origins of the educational system's widespread inability (despite outstanding exceptions) to achieve its most widely agreed goal – i.e. to nurture and recognise the wide range of talents pupils possess. Among the reasons for this neglect is the absence of a shared framework for thinking about the nature, development, and assessment of high-level competencies. Unfortunately, more basic reasons include (i) the absence of a governance system which would facilitate experimentation, innovation, and learning, and (ii) a network of social forces which lead the system to concentrate on manufacturing and legitimising hierarchy in society. Evolving a new governance system and finding ways of harnessing the forces contributing to hierarchy thus become our top priorities.*

**Keywords:** *Systems roots of gross deficits in educational system; Nature, development, and assessment of competence; Requisite developments in governance; Hegemony of hierarchical thinking; Conceptualising, mapping, measuring, and harnessing social forces.*

**W**HEN THE 'call for proposals' for papers relating to 'closing the attainment gap' landed on my desk my reaction was that, while there were many important 'gaps' which needed to be closed, the attainment gap, as commonly understood, was not, in reality, the most important. In this article I discuss two gaps: First the gap between the most widely endorsed objectives of education and those that actually get attention in most schools; Second the gap between those who have positive and those who have negative experiences within the school system. Both are related to the gap between those who do 'well' and those who do 'badly' in the system. Yet, contrary to what appear to be the most widely endorsed 'solutions' to this last problem, my argument is that the way to handle it is, not to narrow the focus of teaching and prescribe ever more precisely what teachers shall do, not to attempt to motivate pupils via more and more testing, but to broaden the focus of teaching, to harness the diverse motives of pupils, and to create arrangements in which all children succeed by having their hugely diverse talents nurtured and recognised.

## **The gap between the most widely endorsed objectives of education and those that actually get attention in most schools**

Surveys conducted in many parts of the world summarised in Raven (1994: 2017) show that more than 80 per cent of parents, pupils, teachers, and employers agree that the most important goals of education include identifying, nurturing, and recognising each pupil's particular talents and helping them to develop their characters and personalities. They also include nurturing such generic high-level competencies as initiative, self-confidence, problem-solving ability, and ability to understand, and contribute to society. But, while top priorities also include helping pupils to acquire examination certificates which will afford entry to jobs, mastery of the content on which those certificates are based is widely recognised to be of little importance.

The accuracy of these opinions has been confirmed in studies of competence in the workplace and society (see e.g. Mulder, 2017; Schön, 1983; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Yet most schools actually do little to achieve these goals.

But what is most disturbing from my point of view is that achievement of these goals has

been almost entirely neglected by those who have conducted studies (such as the thousands brought together by Hattie, 2009, and others like those conducted by Mortimore & Whitty, 2000) purporting to offer guidance on how to improve the educational system. As I see it, these studies must, as a result, be regarded as, not merely unhelpful, but actively misleading. In point of fact, as I argue in Raven (2017), they are also unscientific. Worse, they are unethical because they have contributed to the perpetuation of what is largely a damaging and destructive system.

As widely observed, through a process increasingly dominated by thoughtways (characterised elsewhere as ‘neo-liberal’) giving pride of place to a single-factor (as distinct from a multiple-talent) notion of ‘ability’, competition, rule-book based (manualised) prescriptive control (e.g. centralised specification of teacher’s daily behaviour), and targets (SATS), the processes going on in schools have become increasingly narrow and divisive rather than all-embracing and developmental – and, if Ofsted (2017) have their way, will become even more so. At the same time, the number of people employed in administrative and inspectorial roles has grown by leaps and bounds.

These two processes seem to most people to grow horrifyingly, exponentially, and mysteriously. Yet they are driven by two basic laws from the systems sciences. The first is that, counterintuitively, the setting of targets *always*, and necessarily, results in the deflection of systems from their goals (Campbell, 1979; Deming, 1980a & 1980b). This comes about, not only because people come to focus on achieving the specified targets with the least effort (e.g. by cheating – in this case by teachers and politicians as well as pupils), but also because single factor intervention in complex systems *always*, and necessarily, has counterintuitive – and usually counterproductive – effects (Forrester, 1971, 1971/1995). The second, which I will term ‘Bookchin’s law’ is an extension of Parkinson’s law – which asserts that work expands to fill the time allotted to it. Bookchin’s law,

which I will discuss more fully later, asserts that, in a situation of surplus labour, a network of social processes result in the creation of huge amounts of hierarchically-organised work which delivers few benefits other than those delivered directly through participating in it.

The net result is that teachers teach, and pupils work, toward the goals that are assessed. Yet, as Spearman (1927), Raven (1991), and Kazdin (2006) among others have emphasised, the tests used lack both construct validity (in that they do not merit the generalised trait names, such as ‘reading ability’ or ‘scientific ability’, attached to them) and predictive validity outside the educational system (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Schmidt et al., 2016). And, of course, they make no pretence to assess wider aspects of competence.

The result is that, although, as I argue in Raven (2017), most pupils are damaged by the system and society deprived of vital talents, studies summarised by Andersson and Strander (2004) show that about one third of pupils are so seriously damaged that their plight calls out for criminal investigation. They are damaged first by being subjected to demeaning and degrading processes whilst at school and then by having their subsequent life chances destroyed through the certification and labelling process (see for example, Flanagan, 1978; Johnston & Bachman, 1976; Raven, 2017).

The feelings of outrage evoked by these data are reinforced when one reflects that those who make and administer the rules governing the system have little experience of what it is like to be a member of this group.

But there is another observation that it is important to highlight here: This denigrated and harassed group is *not* mainly composed of pupils *from* low Socio-Economic-Status (SES) backgrounds but mainly of those *bound for* such positions which – surprisingly to many – includes many who are downwardly mobile from high status backgrounds. The fact that such pupils exist may come as a surprise to many people. But, contrary to

widely held beliefs, there is a great deal of social mobility in our society...witness the fact that the status variability between brothers as adults amounts to 83 per cent of total status variability.

Much of this article will be devoted to a discussion of the reasons why most schools and researchers neglect the main goals of education. But first let me summarise some research which shows that things do not need to be this way.

### **Effective multiple-talent oriented education**

The research to be summarised comes from a study of some mixed age (8–11), mixed ability, primary school classes (Raven et al., 1985; but see also Raven, 1994). To simplify presentation, the work of several teachers has been merged to form a composite picture. The pupils were engaged in what was mostly an out-of-school, environmentally-based, educational process. At the time we studied them, one of their projects involved trying to do something about the pollution in the local river. Some of the pupils had taken on the role of scientists and were trying to measure the levels of pollution. In the process they were developing the competencies of the scientist as distinct from a knowledge of tiny snippets of largely out of date ‘scientific’ knowledge. Others took the line that everyone already knew the river was polluted and that the problem was to get something done about it. They set about making poster-sized drawings of the dead fish and plants with a view to evoking emotions and action as distinct from the competencies traditionally focused upon in lessons on ‘art’. Others set about generating captions to accompany the posters – again writing in such a way as to evoke emotions which would generate action rather than to meet teacher- or government-generated criteria of ‘good writing’. Another got engaged in devious strategies to motivate politicians to put pressure on the local environmental standards officer. Others specialised in soothing the conflicts which developed between the scientist types and artist types. And so on.

Here we have the development of a wide variety of high-level competencies the ‘existence’ of each of which depended on tapping each individual’s motives and creating situations in which they were able to develop and display their idiosyncratic talents and patterns of competence. But that is not the only thing we need to note. Without the context of others engaged in related tasks they *could not* have developed these competencies. Indeed many of those talents could only *exist* in those contexts. Outwith that context those concerned could not even be said to possess them. They were *emergent* competencies.

Not only that, the class as a whole displayed an emergent property which might be described as ‘collective intelligence’ or ‘a climate of enterprise’. Note that this emergent competence of the group, *qua* group, did not exist in anyone’s head. Indeed it did not ‘exist’ anywhere. It was a *systems* property. Yet it was a real emergent property just as the properties of copper sulphate are distinct from the properties of copper, sulphur, and oxygen. Nevertheless, it was produced by, and reciprocally affected, the emergent individual competencies of the pupils in the group.

So our question is why, if this *can* be done – and there are other examples in the ‘progressive education’ literature and in the widely-cited works of Robinson and Aronica (2015) and Sahlberg (2015) – why are the main goals of education so widely neglected?

### **Why are multiple-talented-oriented educational programmes so rare?**

In the current context it is easy to blame the National Curriculum, the activities of Ofsted, and the hegemony of ‘neo-liberal’ thought-ways. But this has not always been the case and such prescriptions are far from universal.

Other reasons include the fact that work like that briefly summarised above was orchestrated by outstanding teachers who engaged in a wide range of activities – which are discussed in Raven (2017) – going well beyond their job descriptions. But the main

reasons for their neglect, discussed more fully in Raven (1994) include:

1. *There is no generally accepted framework for thinking about the nature, development and assessment of competence.* More specifically, *there is little formal understanding of the kind of processes (illustrated above) that are required to nurture high-level competencies*, let alone how to nurture multiple, alternative, and sometimes incompatible, competencies in a 'school' setting (brief summaries of work relating to these themes will be found in Raven, 1994 and 2017).
2. *There are no agreed means of assessing high-level competencies.* As a result, neither teachers nor pupils can monitor progress toward the development of high-level competencies. Yet, if one cannot get feedback concerning progress toward a goal, one tends rapidly to abandon it. Furthermore pupils cannot get credit for having developed these competencies in the certification process. And, if pupils cannot get credit for possessing them, neither teachers nor schools can get credit for having nurtured them.
3. *High-level competencies are heavily value-laden.* Just as not everyone values 'academic' success, so not everyone values independence of thought let alone skepticism. Not everyone values toughness and strength and the ability to stick up for oneself in physical combat. Such goals are often incompatible in the same 'classroom'. Even in the kind of environmentally-based project work discussed earlier, there can be serious tensions between those who value 'academic' scientific study of the problem and those who are more concerned to get something done about it by orchestrating community action. In the context of the current 'neo-liberal' thoughtways concerned with motivating people via continuous assessment, let there be no mistake about it, there can be very serious conflicts between those who value academic certificates and those who disparage them and want to develop the

competencies required to do such things as handle blast furnaces, drive bulldozers, or dig holes in the road.

In reality, it is not going too far to suggest that the *main* problems faced by the educational system since the second world war stem from failure to think through this set of issues.

4. There are deep-seated problems involved in catering for diversity.

It is difficult to see how the problems just mentioned can be overcome without developing a range of very different educational programmes, documenting their desired and desirable and undesired and undesirable, short and long-term (what is good in the short-term may be bad in the long-term) consequences for the individuals concerned and society (what is good for the individual may be bad for society) and feeding that information to the public so that they can make informed choices between them.

Not only does the task of conducting such comprehensive evaluations pose enormous problems for researchers... indeed for common understanding of the nature of science and evaluation itself (once again, for a fuller discussion see Raven, 2017) ...the notion of a solution along the lines of creating a range of programmes having different consequences and offering parents and pupils a choice between them in itself poses problems. In the first place, the very notion of recognising diverse high-level talents conflicts with many people's beliefs about 'equality'...even with the version of 'equality' that focuses on equal opportunity to compete in a scramble for high status jobs. But perhaps of even greater importance, it raises the question of who is to generate a range of distinctive programmes, document their short and long-term consequences, and feed that information to the public so that they can make informed choices between them. And how are people performing this role to be held accountable to the public?

The questions raised in the last paragraph raise still more basic questions about the role of public servants and, indeed the nature of democratic accountability. The very idea of running society by enabling the public to make informed choices between options is in conflict with notions of democracy in which public opinion is filtered and fed upward through a bureaucratic hierarchy to elected representatives whose decisions are binding on all.

5. Although there is not space to demonstrate it here, *the assessment of high-level competencies depends, in the first instance, on surfacing people's motivational predispositions – their values.*

The thought of assessment activities bordering on assessing people's values is, indeed, alarming given the possibility of its leading to totalitarian brainwashing. Nevertheless, a moment's reflection reveals that *all* assessments are value laden – so the only question is, in reality, whether the level at which those judgments are made is visible, transparent. This is particularly important given that current brainwashing into hierarchical and neo-liberal thinking is so pervasive as to be virtually invisible – being best described as hegemonic; having a capacity to render other ways of thinking unexpressable.

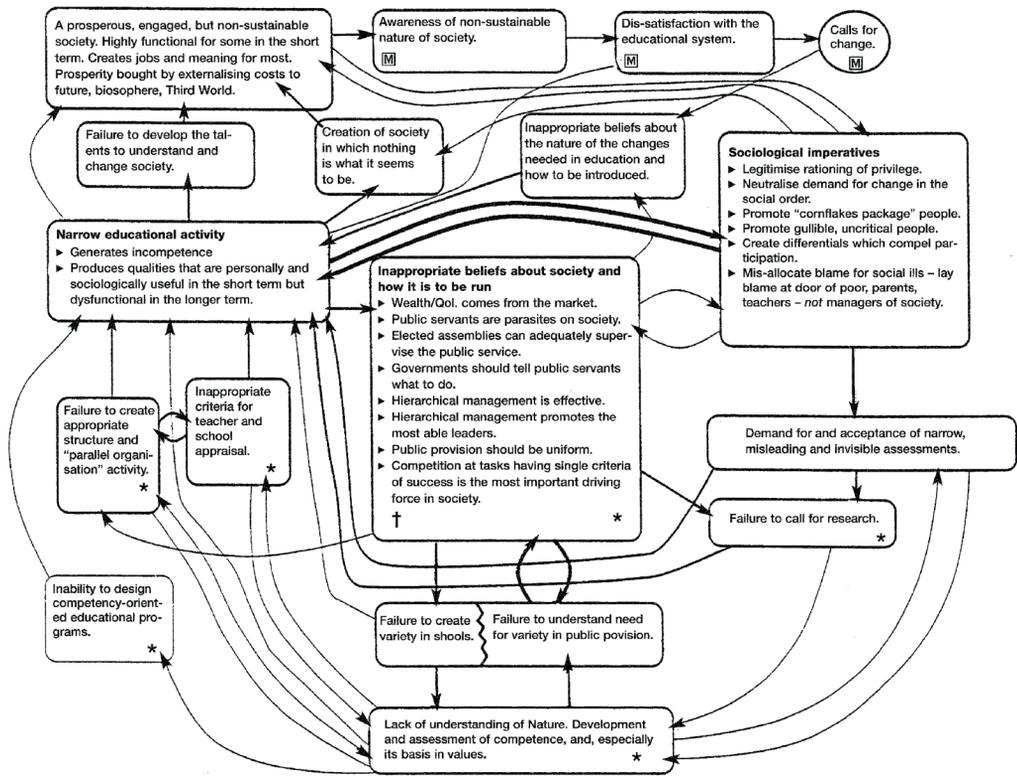
6. As we have seen, *high-level competencies can only be nurtured and observed if the 'classroom' elicits them. Otherwise they remain invisible* (Raven, 2008b). Yet observers' perceptions are strongly influenced by their own values and competencies. Many teachers and managers lack confidence in their ability to manage independent, thoughtful, people.
7. *The nurturance of high-level competencies is often transformational.* People become *different* from what they were before. They do not simply get higher or lower scores on some 'dimension'. And different people develop and decline in different ways. This poses enormous problems

not only for evaluation studies but also for obtaining funding: It is extremely difficult to get funding for activities the outcomes of which cannot be specified beforehand.

8. *The conflict between the processes required to nurture high-level competencies (which depend on sensitive monitoring and facilitation of growth) and 'teaching as telling.'*
9. *The absence of tools to help teachers administer individualised, competency-based educational programmes.* Yet it is too much to expect most teachers to administer 30-odd such programmes without such aids.
10. *There is a dramatic conflict between the behaviours in which teachers need to engage if they are to nurture high-level talents and beliefs about how public servants should behave.* Nurturing high-level competencies requires teachers to attend to pupils' needs and invent ways of meeting them. It requires teachers and pupils to be doing things they do not know how to do and the outcomes of which they cannot specify in advance. Yet, in general, public servants are not expected to be innovators and adventurers: They are expected to follow rules and do the bidding of elected representatives.
11. Perhaps most important of all, *while teachers' behaviour is, as we have seen, overwhelmingly constrained by the need to perform the sociological function of allocating social position and status, there has been little discussion of ways in which these sociological forces might be harnessed to lead the system to operate in the way in which almost everyone would like it to function instead of away from those goals.*

#### **Systemic causes**

But the most important lesson we learned as we traced the roots of the educational system's failure to achieve its main goals were not at this level at all. The many causes just listed do not operate independently but form a network, or system, in which they interact with, and support, each other. Single-factor attempts at reform are not only negated by the reactions of the rest of the system but



\* Intervention in these cells would help change the nature of the qualities nurtured and rewarded in the system. Motives which could be harnessed to do this are marked M.

† These need to be replaced by acceptance of the need to make managed economies work – to find way of giving effect to information concerning the public long-term interest, the need to explicitly create variety and information on the personal and social consequences of the options, and to find ways of holding public servants accountable for, and getting them to at it, the long-term public interest. This means systematic, broadly based, evaluation and participative democracy.

Figure 1: Feedback loops driving down quality of education

always result in unanticipated, counterintuitive, and often unwanted, changes elsewhere (Forrester, 1971/1995). What is more, the network seems to have a capacity to perpetuate, even extend and elaborate, itself.

This network of interacting feedback loops is sketched in Figure 1, first published in Raven (1994).

This systemogram actually illustrates very many important things discussed in Raven (1994) and elsewhere. Although most of them cannot be discussed here it is worth following round the triangle of feedback loops in the top left hand corner. The activities that dominate schools today, while helping a few pupils to acquire certificates which contribute to their personal advancement, fail to nurture the talents of most

pupils; indeed they generate ‘trained incapacity’. These processes collectively result in a societal competence deficit in which a few accumulate material wealth whilst destroying the habitat of all and creating a society which is characterised by deep divisions between the rich and the poor. Awareness of the non-sustainable nature of these arrangements leads to widespread dissatisfaction with the way society is working and the educational system in particular. This leads people to call on politicians to improve things. Unfortunately current beliefs about how society should be run (summarised in the central box) lead those politicians and their associated bureaucrats to do such things as generate prescriptions for what every teacher must be doing during every ten minutes of

the day and impose regular standardised testing to monitor their performance. Unfortunately, as we have seen, these tests are unable to recognise important competence-based outcomes which some variants of the system achieve or the serious disbenefits conferred by the current system. These processes then help to perpetuate both the destructive nature of schooling and acceptance of the senseless work into which people are pushed by forces beyond their control.

Another loop to which it is important to draw attention is the recursive, self-reinforcing, loop drawn right across the centre of the Figure between the roles schools play in generating, and reinforcing belief in, hierarchy and the sociological imperative that they do exactly that.

Standing further back from the figure what we see is that:

- a. Pervasive, *systems-oriented*, changes are required to move forward. But these changes, although collectively system-wide, cannot be centrally mandated because there are too many new things to be done;
- b. Since what happens is not determined by the wishes of any particular group of people but *by the operation of the system itself*, the widespread tendency to single out and *blame* parents, pupils, teachers, public servants, or politicians is entirely inappropriate. *Their* behaviour is mainly determined by the system. One needs to take these systemic forces seriously and ask how they can be harnessed in an analogous way to that in which the designers of sailing boats harness the potentially destructive forces of the wind: They will not go away!
- c. It is vital to generalise the observation made at *a*: We need to fundamentally re-frame the way we think about the causation of behaviour in a way which parallels one of the transformations Newton introduced into physics. Before Newton, if objects moved or changed direction, it was because of their *internal* properties: they were *animated*. After Newton it was

mainly because they were acted upon by a network of invisible *external* forces which could nevertheless be mapped, measured, and harnessed. Observation (a) implies that we need a similar transformation in the way we think about the causes of human behaviour;

- d. The *causes* of the symptoms (and thus the appropriate place to start reform) are far removed from those symptoms;
- e. The system not only reproduces and extends itself – it generates ever more elaborate versions of itself; it is self-elaborating; autopoietic.

### Implications for bureaucracy and democracy

Focusing attention now on the governance box in the centre of the systemogram, we may recall that handling the values conflicts involved in multiple-competence-oriented education involves the creation of a variety of distinctively different educational programmes which nurture different talents, documenting the differential consequences of these *in a comprehensive* way, and feeding that information to the public so that they can make informed choices between them. More than that it involves the creation of a learning society in which everyone is encouraged to experiment in their own areas and to support those trying to do so in related areas. All of this stands in stark contrast to the notion that one should have specialised R&D units to promote innovation and that governance involves a process in which (very limited) information is fed upward in a bureaucratic hierarchy to small groups of over-worked politicians to take decisions binding on all.

Such developments would require nothing less than the evolution of new concepts of science on the one hand and bureaucracy and democracy as components in a learning society on the other. The latter involve the evolution of new arrangements for holding our public servants accountable for performing their newly defined roles. These vital developments are fully discussed in Raven (1995).

### **The manufacture, maintenance, and pervasive implications of, hierarchy**

In the work which followed the preparation of Figure 1 we focused mainly on the governance issues arising from the inappropriateness of the perceptions listed in the central box. More recently we have come to focus more on the right hand box which deals with the manufacture, maintenance, and role of hierarchy in society and the educational system in particular.

We have seen that one of the major functions of the 'educational' system is to contribute to the manufacture and legitimization of hierarchy and that the need to perform that role drives the nurturance of diversity out of schools. We are therefore forced to confront the question of why it is so difficult to change this. Although we are still a long way from having an adequate answer to this question, it seems important to summarise where we have got to and explore the implications for further work.

Bookchin (2005, 1971, 1991; summarised in Raven, 2008a) noted that many people, over endless millennia, had observed that hierarchical organisations are both inefficient and unnecessarily destructive of both the lives of those who live and work in them and their habitats. Many of these people had also proposed, and in many cases introduced, alternative arrangements and shown them to be viable. Bookchin noted that a common feature of all these alternative arrangements was, and is, that they are more 'organic' in the sense that, like those that control the operation of the human body, they have multiple, interacting, non-hierarchically organised, feedback loops. In the context of the whole, very little is organised via any kind of central organ such as a brain. And even the brain-nervous-system-system is dependent on millions of interacting experimenting and learning loops. What is more, these organic cybernetic (governance) systems are *an integral part of the organism*, not something external to it in the sense in which modern societal governance systems are, in some sense, added on to an already functioning

system which has evolved or emerged 'on its own'.

Despite the evidence in favour of organic organisations, Bookchin observed that, at every choice point in history, societies had 'chosen' to implement ever more destructive hierarchical arrangements. Currently, most people can see that the course on which our 'civilization' has embarked is going to lead to our extinction as a species and, probably, the destruction of the planet as we know it... yet we collectively continuously embark on ever more destructive arrangements. How does this come about? An obvious explanation has to do with the need to obtain work which will afford an income which will grant access to what are most often deemed to be the good things in life such as material possessions. This is justified by all sorts of widely accepted guiding assumptions such as 'those who do not labour shall not eat' although, in reality, most of the disbenefits which drive people to work have, as in the 'benefits' system (see e.g. Webster, 2014, 2016), been deliberately manufactured.

The work itself is senseless. It consists in mining the materials required to manufacture, and thereafter manufacturing, distributing, and disposing of, material goods and services which, as such people as Graeber (2013), Inkeles and Diamond (1980), Jackson (2017), Lane (1979, 1991), and Marks et al. (2006) have shown, contribute little to quality of life.

But the work is not only senseless; it is also unethical because, as we have seen, it is destroying our habitat... which will in turn destroy us as a species... at an exponentially increasing rate.

So our social system has somehow created arrangements which operate to compel people to participate in that system even against their own better judgment. Thus those driven off the land by the enclosure of common land still did not choose to work in factories. On the contrary, it was necessary to create a further network of workhouses and legislation to compel the homeless to live and work in them.

This trend was well established many generations ago, and can be seen in the hierarchical organisations required to build pyramids. But, in fact, these arrangements existed long before the pyramids. A few had somehow acquired the right to command the few. This was generally justified on the basis of the fraudulent claim that they had special powers to intervene with the gods. The senseless work is required to justify the claim that a structure of authority is required to organise it. Thus, as Bookchin noted, senseless work and hierarchy recursively co-create each other. That authority then commands the development of arrangements to compel people to undertake the menial tasks required in the system... and so on recursively.

Most common-sense ‘explanations’ of this recursive self-perpetuating cycle involving the creation of hierarchically organised work and authority are in terms of ‘human nature’. Human nature is implicitly taken to include a tendency to trust and eulogise ‘authorities’...which turns out to mean those who have already asserted their authority in one way or another and exerted claims to be able to intervene with the gods and other natural processes.

But consider this: It is not so long ago that the fact that sailing boats crashed against the rocks was also attributed to the gods and people believed that the remedy was to be found by making sacrifices to those gods in ways ordained by priests. This changed when Newton articulated the concept ‘force’ and showed that it could be mapped, measured, and harnessed. Moving objects were no longer seen to be self-motivated (‘animated’) but pushed along by external forces. The forces acting on sailing boats could be identified, mapped, and harnessed to avoid the rocks and tack *against* the wind to get the ships to their destinations more quickly than waiting for a favourable wind.

My claim is that the feedback loops... that is to say the social forces... portrayed in Figure 1 could be conceptualised, mapped, measured and harnessed in an analogous

way. Nodes at which one could most profitably intervene could be identified.

Generalising, the network of forces which collectively comprise those operating within the box labelled ‘Sociological imperatives’ (which we have now designated as having to do with hierarchy) in Figure 1 could be mapped, measured, and harnessed. Yet, simply saying that they ‘*could be*’ mapped, measured, and harnessed is altogether too weak. As I see it, it is vital to our survival as a species and the planet as we know it to do so.

In this context, it is vital to note that we have, in this very article, offered several powerful illustrations of the operation of ‘Bookchin’s law’ which was mentioned earlier and encapsulates several observations made in the course of the article. This may be formulated as follows:

*In any situation of surplus labour, society is somehow compelled to generate huge systems, or networks, of hierarchically-organised senseless work. This both stigmatises and punishes (renders destitute) those at the bottom of the hierarchy (thereby compelling them to undertake the most degrading and menial tasks on which the system depends) and confers enormous benefits on those at the top. These systems are legitimised by a network of mythologies which support the high-sounding (moral) claim that they are specifically designed to improve the quality of life of the poor.*

Lest the idea of mapping, measuring, and harnessing these forces sound preposterous, let me add that the preparation of systemograms like those discussed earlier... and their more developed brothers ‘dynamic systems models’ ...has already led to the demonstration, for example, that 94 per cent of the variance in performance of individuals operating in designated roles in organisations stems, not from variance in the psychological characteristics of those concerned, but from variance in the systems context (Seddon, 2008, 2014).

### Summary and conclusions

The basic thesis of this article has been that both the formulation of most of the problems which occupy the minds of many who are concerned about the state of education and the 'solutions' which appear to follow from such formulations are inappropriate.

In one sense, the basic problem is not to 'close gaps' but to nurture, recognise, and utilise the wide range of talents that are available in the population. To do this it would be necessary to generate a paradigm shift in the way we think about the nature, development, and assessment of competence.

But, in another sense, this is *not* the most basic problem. If we wish to significantly ameliorate some of the disparities, discriminations, and degrading treatments so many people are concerned about we need to begin somewhere else. While it would be possible to ameliorate many of these gaps a little by changing regulations (many of the problems were, after all, created or exacerbated by regulations e.g. national curricula and examinations) such changes would, by and large, fail to address the pervasive and inter-related nature of the problems we have discussed in any significant way.

To generate the necessary network of changes it would be necessary to create a pervasive climate of innovation – i.e. to establish a 'learning society' in which people would innovate and learn without central direction. To do this we would need to evolve new forms of governance... new forms of democracy and bureaucracy.

But this still would not engage with the most basic set of issues that have emerged in this article. *The most important point that has emerged has been that what happens in the educational system is determined by a relatively invisible network of social forces which are primarily concerned with generating hierarchically-organised senseless work.* In other words, what happens is mainly determined by sociological, as distinct from man-made, laws. Indeed, the laws that 'men' make are largely determined by these deeper laws. Unless we map, measure, and harness the social forces involved we are doomed. They will not go away... any more than the physical forces of nature – e.g. the wind – will go away. Our only hope is to harness them.

Thus it is even more important to develop new thinking in this (sociocybernetic) area than it is to evolve new forms of governance, let alone new thinking about the nature, development and assessment of competence. To do this we need to create institutional arrangements which will facilitate the work of heretics and mavericks.

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## The British Psychological Society

Promoting excellence in psychology

# Your structural review

We need to change. And we need to change quite significantly in many areas. This starts with what we are here for.

### **What is the Society's vision?**

People, organisations and communities are equipped with the everyday psychological knowledge to navigate a complex world. Everyone can access evidence-based psychology to enhance their lives, communities and wider society.

To achieve this we need to be better at focusing on our aims, and have a structure that supports activities which are designed to achieve those aims.

### **How will the structural review help achieve this?**

The review will provide a simplified structure that better facilitates impact, is clear and transparent in terms of accountability, speeds up decision making and is better resourced.

### **What has been proposed?**

The Structural Review Group has been instrumental in devising and driving the current proposals. Recommendations have been made for changes to the whole BPS structure, including its governance (Trustees, Representative Council and its Boards) and its member networks (Divisions, Special Groups, Sections, Branches and Faculties).

### **Why is this happening now?**

Over time the number of networks has grown and in many ways this is welcomed as it's a sign of a healthy and growing discipline. However, the current number of networks means that resources can be spread too thin for us to make the kind of co-ordinated and sustained impact our members want to see.

### **How can I get involved?**

Our members' input in this ongoing process is vital and more consultations are in the pipeline. We are still looking for feedback so please add your voice and ask any questions you may have ([structuralreview@bps.org.uk](mailto:structuralreview@bps.org.uk)).

Further information about the review and the recommendations can be found at: <https://beta.bps.org.uk/about-us/our-structural-review>.

[www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)



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