The Shape of Things to Come
expectations high and low

In her autobiography *Bad Blood* Lorna Sage recalls the rural primary school she attended in the late 1940s. Basically, she says, the job of the education system in those days was 'to reflect your ready-made place in the scheme of things and put you firmly back where you came from'. She describes how one day the headteacher lined up the senior class and went along the line predicting for each child their future occupation in life: 'You'll be a muck-shoveller, you'll be a muck-shoveller …' He spoke these words, says Sage, with 'gloomy satisfaction'. The reason for his satisfaction was his confidence that the predictions would come true, though they would. His gloom was not because his pupils had unfulfilling and unlived lives ahead of them. Rather, it was because he himself found no fulfilment in his own job, — there was no dignity, since everything was fixed and foreordained, in the work of a teacher.[i]

Twenty-five years later, Lee Jasper was at school in Oldham. Recalling his time there, he wrote:

> Education was typical of the attitudes of the time: the posh kids got all the attention. Those from the poorest sections of the white working class, British-born blacks, those from the Caribbean (particularly the boys) and the Bangladeshis were all in the bottom class ... The teachers were in the main ex-grammar-school unreconstructed racists. That they were forced to teach black and Asian children was an insult to both their professional standing and the notion of Empire. They made their distaste known by the expression of their extreme prejudice. They simply refused to teach us.[ii]

Nowadays, no teacher or headteacher would communicate low expectations of their pupils with such bluntness or cruelty as did Lorna Sage's headteacher. And few if any teachers nowadays could reasonably be described, any way at first sight, as 'ex-grammar-school unreconstructed racists'. It is still the case, however, that society has its hierarchies, pecking orders and notions of what is posh, and that these affect the expectations that the education system has of pupils, and the expectations pupils have of themselves. Also it is still the case that many Asian and black communities are on the lowest rungs of society's various ladders, and that their children will not move higher unless and until they and their teachers have higher expectations than those which currently prevail. Further, it is still the case that high and low expectations are communicated to pupils both directly by what

teachers say and indirectly through the systems and processes through which teachers have to work, and that expectations can be self-fulfilling prophesies. As for understandings of British history, identity and Empire, these too still need to be addressed, to put it mildly. 'The absence from the national curriculum of a rewritten history of Britain,' said the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, 'involving dominance in Ireland as well as in Africa, the Caribbean and Asia, is proving … to be an unmitigated disaster.'[iii]

The Commission argued that mental pictures and models of Britain need to be re-imagined and showed that schools have a key role in the fashioning of new images and understandings. Also, there need to be significant changes in how schools and their teachers imagine concepts of so-called ability, intelligence and attitude. In so far as dominant maps relating to these concepts are not critiqued and replaced, there is institutional racism – and, to be blunt, the teaching profession *does* still contain many 'ex grammar-school unreconstructed racists'. The way ahead, this article claims, involves attention to theories of multiple intelligence. Such attention must not be colour-blind or culture-blind, however, and must not ignore the realities of racism.

Mental maps
The word 'expect' is connected with 'inspect', 'respect', 'circumspect', 'spectacle' and 'spectre'. There are connotations of looking and seeing – to expect is to form a picture in your mind's eye of a future occurrence or situation. You do this in order to be prepared, wise before the event, and your expectations are weapons in your armoury as you go forwards into an uncertain and possibly risky future. For to be forewarned is to be forearmed – expecting rain, you carry an umbrella. The picture of possibilities in the mind's eye has two aspects. First and more obviously, there is an image of something *specific* – rain, say. But also, deeper down, there is an image or map of *general* possibilities – just at the moment one is expecting rain but one knows that sometimes there is hot sunlight, sometimes wind, sometimes snow, and so on. The map of general possibilities in the mind's eye is the basis on which particular expectations are formed. The distinction between mental map and specific predictions can be readily applied in education. On the one hand, there is a sense of what might happen in general terms; on the other, there are expectations of one particular pupil or group of pupils.

The most obvious continuum in the mental maps of the teaching profession is connected with 'ability' or 'intelligence' or 'potential' – some pupils, it is said, are brighter, cleverer, more able than others. A second is to do with attitude and behaviour – apathetic/keen, disruptive/co-operative, trouble-making/compliant, and so on. The latter aspect of teachers' mental maps was well described recently in a newspaper article by the leader of a teachers' union. 'This morning,' he wrote, 'many teachers will go to school dreading the prospect of facing a particular class. It could be a class with which last week's lesson went particularly badly, a class

where almost every lesson goes badly, or a group with one individual who cannot keep still or keep quiet for more than a few minutes at a time.'[iv]

These two continua – 'intelligence' and 'behaviour' – are generally thought of as being independent of each other. So the four corners or quarters of the mental map used by the teaching profession can be shown as in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The four corners in teachers' mental maps

B High ability and negative attitude	A High ability and positive attitude
D Low ability and negative attitude	C Low ability and positive attitude

The 'ideal pupil' (known by researchers as the IP) is in Quadrant A. A class consisting of Quadrant C pupils is easy to teach, but unrewarding. A class of Quadrant D pupils is the kind the union leader was referring to, in teachers' minds the class from hell. But Quadrant B pupils are perhaps the most feared of all – not only challenging and disrespectful but intelligent and insightful as well.

Research

Research findings show that pupils perceived by teachers to belong to Quadrant A have much higher achievements than those who are perceived to be in Quadrant D. This is precisely what common sense would predict. For according to common sense, teachers' expectations are formed on the basis of, and as a result of, pupils' attainments. Research, however, shows that expectations of a particular pupil are often *not* rooted in objective evidence about that individual but instead in deep seated beliefs and assumptions, many of them tacit or unconscious rather than articulated, to do with social class, gender, ethnicity, culture and race.[v]

For example, pupils' names may affect what is expected even before a teacher has set eyes on them. In Roman times this phenomenon was known as *nomen omen* – knowing someone's name, you have been warned by that alone. When the pupil is met face to face, the teacher may attend in the first instance to entirely non-verbal

cues – body-language, gesture, facial expression, demeanour and posture, complexion, physique, use of eye-contact, gait and movement, use of physical space, hairstyle and how tidy it is, how the school uniform is worn, and so on. And then as soon as the pupil opens their mouth, the teacher may be influenced by accent, intonation, use of standard or non-standard terms and syntax, tone, loudness or softness, readiness to interrupt or to be interrupted, and appropriacy and register of language when speaking to an authority figure.

All these features are connected with class, gender, culture or sub-culture, ethnicity and race. When a teacher interacts with a pupil, the more similar the pupil is to the teacher in these respects the more likely it is that the teacher will see the pupil as belonging to Quadrant A. The less similar, the more likely that the pupil will be located in Quadrant D. Research shows further that pupils perceived by their teachers to be in Quadrant A receive a substantially different educational experience from pupils imagined to be in Quadrant D. The differences include:

> **A climate of respect**. Quadrant A pupils feel that they are respected and liked by their teachers. But Quadrant D pupils feel that they are unvalued. Communication of respect and liking, or of lack of recognition and respect, takes place not only explicitly but also through a range of non-verbal processes.
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> **Feedback.** Quadrant A pupils receive more frequent feedback on how they are progressing, and this feedback is not only more positive but also more focused and detailed.
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> **Stimulus.** Quadrant A pupils are given more engaging and interesting tasks, and receive more attention related to their learning. Quadrant D pupils are bored and it is their behaviour that teachers respond to, not their learning.
>
> **Expression.** Quadrant A pupils have more opportunities to ask questions and to clarify their thinking through talk and discussion. If Quadrant D pupils ask questions, it is assumed that they're challenging, confrontational and troublesome.
>
> **Justice and trust**. Quadrant A pupils feel that the education system, and the world generally, is just and can be trusted. Quadrant D pupils, however, do not easily trust their teachers or their school or authority in the wider world. One consequence is that Quadrant D pupils are much more likely to look for moral support from their peers and from youth culture than from teachers, parents and adults generally.

Multiple intelligences and effective learning

The first and most obvious implication of this discussion of mental maps and self-fulfilling prophesies is that teachers should strive to see *all* pupils as having the characteristics of Quadrant A pupils, and aim to teach them accordingly. Robert Tauber, an American specialist, says: 'Even if a teacher does not truly feel that a particular student is capable of greater achievement or significantly improved behaviour, that teacher can at least *act* as if he or she holds such heightened positive expectations. Who knows, the teacher very well may be convincing to the student and, later, to himself or herself.'[vi] Such acting (Tauber's highly appropriate word) requires rigorous self-criticism and self-examination, particularly with regard to biases relating to class, race, culture and gender. Otherwise there will be only hypocrisy and tokenism.

Further, and even more valuably and idealistically, teachers can reckon to scrap the map altogether – discard all or most traditional notions of intelligence and ability, and revise their understandings of disaffection and acceptable behaviour. If indeed they resolve to operate with a completely new kind of map, one obvious starting place is the work of Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences.[vii] Figure 2 briefly summarises ways in which his theories differ from traditional theories. The latter are sometimes summarised with the single word 'IQism'.[viii]

Figure 2: Alternative views of intelligence

Basic questions	Traditional answers	Alternative answers
Is intelligence of a single kind?	Yes. Academics refer to 'G' – general intelligence which is much the same in all fields and subjects.	No. Academics refer to 'multiple intelligences' – at least eight different kinds of intelligence, largely independent of each other.
Is intelligence innate?	Yes. Each person is born with a fixed level of intelligence	No. Though affected by genetic inheritance, intelligence is essentially developed, not innate.
Can intelligence be reliably measured?	Yes.	Perhaps.
If so, how?	A range of paper and pencil tests.	Activities, not pencil and paper.
Can culture-free tests be designed and administered?	Yes.	Almost certainly no.
Can tests be administered without	Yes.	Definitely not.

regard to power relations in education and wider society?		
Can reliable and therefore fair predictions be made, on the basis of tests, about future achievement?	Yes.	No.
Which academic disciplines are most relevant?	Cognitive psychology.	Various, including sociology, social psychology, philosophy and political theory.

Learning styles

Criticisms and revisions of traditional views of intelligence, as summarised in Figure 2, are often accompanied with an emphasis on differences of learning style, and on notions of accelerated learning and mind-friendly teaching.[ix] A pupil perceived by teachers to have low intelligence or ability, it is argued, probably has a learning style that the education system fails to recognise and appeal to. The theory is initially attractive, for it directs attention to what teachers do and do not do, and away from assumed deficits in pupils.

There are serious dangers, however. The basic problem is that the vast majority of discourse about accelerated learning, multiple intelligences and learning styles is colour-blind and culture-blind – it fails to take into account concepts and experiences of ethnic and cultural diversity, and fails to recognise that schools and classrooms, and the teachers and learners within them, are affected by colour and cultural racism. Time and again, when new ideas are implemented in colour-blind ways, Asian and black people are disadvantaged. For this reason alone it is important that theories of multiple intelligences and diverse learning styles should be examined critically. There are other reasons too, however. For the theories do appear, at first sight, to be highly relevant to issues of race equality and cultural diversity in education. If used critically and appropriately – i.e. *not* in colour-blind ways – they appear to have great potential for raising attainment of Asian, black and other 'minority' pupils. There are several implications of this for staff training, and for the further development of theory, and six of these are outlined below.

First, it is sometimes claimed that each person's learning style is as distinctive as their fingerprint. This is a valuable metaphor if it directs attention to each pupil as an individual, and encourages teachers not to treat 'all children the same'. It is a wrong and dangerous generalisation, however, if it implies that learning style is unrelated to the immediate subject-matter being studied; to the pattern of

relationships in a classroom between teacher and pupils and between pupils; to issues of institutional and cultural racism; and to a pupil's sense of personal, cultural and ethnic identity.

Second, when teachers become more sensitive to differences of learning style amongst their pupils, they may also become more sensitive in relation to differences of culture, language, narrative and community; to differing senses of personal and cultural identity and Britishness; and to differing experiences of racism. However, these latter kinds of sensitivity do not follow inevitably from an interest in diverse learning styles and modes of intelligence. They must be explicitly focused on.

Third, theories of accelerated learning valuably place emphasis on the creation of secure learning environments – places where all pupils feel safe and affirmed. All should be enabled, it is said, to feel 'IALACAS' – 'I am Likeable and Capable and Significant'. The B-A-S-I-S of a good classroom is to do with Belonging, Aspirations, Safety, Identity and Success. So far so good. But 'belonging' has to be conceptualised with awareness that not all British people are permitted or encouraged to feel that they belong to the nation; aspirations can be limited by discrimination on grounds of race, religion or culture; safety can be threatened by racist behaviour and language on the streets and in the school playground; identity is embedded in a range of different communities, and within each person's sense of identity there are often tensions and contradictions; success in society at large is rarer for members of certain communities than for others, because of patterns of inequality and unfairness. All these points must be borne in mind.

Fourth, learning style theory has the potential to help teachers have high expectations of a wider range of pupils than if they operate with traditional views of intelligence. Also, it can provide valuable reminders that disruption and disaffection amongst pupils can be caused or reinforced by inappropriate and insensitive styles of teaching. But learning style theory does not inherently require teachers to review their own biases and expectations relating to issues of class, gender, ethnicity and national identity; it does not necessarily require them to learn and use skills of cross-cultural literacy; it does not inevitably enforce recognition that certain pupils, their families and communities are targets of overt racism. There is still a need, therefore, to consider such issues explicitly if learning style theory is to be as valuable as it could be.

Fifth, if teachers do eschew colour-blind approaches there are grave dangers of stereotyping – 'minority pupils tend to have kinaesthetic learning styles', for example. It may indeed be the case, however, that the culture of some communities is connected with, and reinforces, certain learning styles. Some cultures put high emphasis on co-operation and collaboration, for example, and are suspicious of competition as a motivating factor in learning. Some place high value

on indirect expression, for example story-telling, metaphor and symbol, and on oracy and articulacy as distinct from writing. Some like to use visual and pictorial expression as well as texts and prefer engagement, interaction and challenge rather than passive and docile listening. Teachers need to be sensitive to such cultural differences, and indeed this is one of the senses in which they should not be colour-blind or culture-blind. But they must at the same time guard against the dangers of stereotyping and of failing to recognise the distinctive needs, at any one time, of individual pupils

Sixth, it is relevant to recall the concept of *triage*.[x] On occasions of great catastrophe, for example a major train crash or an earthquake, medical staff divide the injured into three categories. Those whose injuries are slight do not receive immediate treatment, nor do those whose situation is hopeless. Resources are devoted in the first instance to 'suitable cases for treatment'. A number of researchers and commentators have suggested that this is an accurate metaphor for British education, particularly since the advent of league tables – resources are allegedly allocated according to a *triage* system. Certain pupils – those in Quadrant A (see Figure 1) – are expected to do well enough so far as league tables are concerned and significant resources are therefore not allocated to them. Pupils in Quadrant D are seen as no-hopers, and precious resources are not wasted on them. Pupils in the other two quadrants are seen as suitable cases for treatment – potentially able to improve their school's place in league tables if special attention is paid to them. Within this overall picture, pupils of AfricanCaribbean and Pakistani are disproportionately perceived by the education system to be in Quadrant D, so unworthy of precious resources. Tackling the *triage* system in British education involves much more than sensitivity to different learning styles, crucially important though such sensitivity is.

It is essential, to summarise, to complement learning style theory with antiracism. The theory will not be adequately successful if it is colour-blind or culture-blind. That is to say, more accurately, schools and teachers must not blinker themselves from the realities of colour and cultural racism and of street and institutional racism. In his book *Invisible Man*, the African-American writer Ralph Ellison famously used imagery of seeing and not-seeing to describe the mental map with which white people view black people. He said:

> When they [white people] approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed everything and anything except me … That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality.[xi]

The distinction between physical eyes and inner eyes can be applied to teaching

and education. If white teachers are to have higher expectations of black and Asian children and young people, they have to examine – and be prepared to change – their inner eyes. This involves re-considering not only issues of race, racism and identity but also the mental maps with which they think about learning styles and about multiple intelligence.

Concluding note: the shape of things to come
This article began, and it now ends, with a reference to *Bad Blood* by Lorna Sage. Her book is about, amongst other things, two young people who 'broke the rules' – she and her boyfriend Vic had a baby whilst they were both still sixth formers in the late 1950s. On the last full page of the book there is a photograph of the two of them on graduation day at Durham University a few years later. Both had got Firsts in English. Also in the picture is their daughter Sharon, by now four years old. The shape of things to come, says Lorna Sage, is determined by those who break rules. Of little Sharon in the photograph she says:

> She looks very large and very distrustful. This picture stands instead of a wedding photograph in our story. Sharon is the one looking beyond the ending. Nobody seems to know yet that it's the 1960s, except perhaps for her. She's the real future, she tells the world that we broke the rules and got away with it. For better and for worse, we're part of the shape of things to come.

Notes

This article is based on *Equality Stories: recognition, respect and raising achievem*ent by Berenice Miles and Robin Richardson,, published by Trentham

Books in January 2002. The book contains case studies of good practice, writings and stories from teachers, and a wide range of exercises and activities for inservice training.

[i] The quotation is from page 21 of Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood* (Fourth Estate, 2000).

[ii] Lee Jasper, Brickbats for Oldham, *The Guardian*, 29 May 2001.

[iii] *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, Profile Books for the Runnymede Trust, 2000, page 25.

[iv] John Dunford (Secondary Heads Association), *The Guardian*, 12 February 2001.

[v] Robert Tauber, *A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: a practical guide to its use in education*, New York: Praeger Press, 1997.

[vi] 'Good or Bad, What Teachers Expect from Students They Generally Get!', *ERIC Digest ED426985*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, Washington DC, 2000.

[vii] Howard Gardner's ground-breaking book was *Frames of Mind* (1983). More recently he has published *Intelligence Reframed: multiple intelligences for the 21st century* (1999). Eva Hoffman's *Introducing Children to their Intelligences*, 2001, is a useful and simple introduction. Details at www.learntolearn.org.uk. The relevance of Gardner's work to race equality issues in education is stimulatingly discussed by Reva Klein in her *Defying Disaffection: how schools are winning the hearts and minds of reluctant students*, Trentham 1999.

[viii] There is substantial discussion of IQism and of its links with institutional racism in *Rationing Education: policy, reform and equity* discussed by David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell, Open University Press, 2000.

[ix] For example, *Accelerated Learning in Practice* by Alistair Smith, Network Education Press 1997.

[x] The concept of *triage* in education is brilliantly discussed by Gillborn and Youdell (see note 8).

[xi] Quoted by Maud Blair in *Why Pick on Me? – school exclusion and black youth*, Trentham 2001.