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# Including 'Dizzie Rascal'

Transforming behaviour, attendance and learning  
through *child-centred practice*

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Published in 'Management in Education', Sept 2004

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## Introduction

As a society we are now very focused on the behaviour and attendance problems we see in young people. Looking in particular newspapers you would sometimes think anarchy reigns in our schools - teachers sent into the front line between 'us and them'.. teenage truants roaming the streets in packs terrorising adults - pupils walking out of schools to protest against the war! I once heard someone in a school say; "if only we had different children it would all be fine here".

Reading some of these press articles one could end up thinking that the young people are the problem, that they are all either sad, mad or bad. The unspoken belief is often that if we could just 'do something to them' the problems would go away. In different ways we have been doing this for years - trying to make young people change to fit into the systems and behaviours that suit adult priorities. This is what we call '*child focused*' practice, and it doesn't seem to work very well.

However, when we try and understand the experience young people are having their behaviour begins to make perfect sense - there is nothing wrong with the vast majority of them. Most people in the field now recognise that the problems young people face are a consequence of how we, as adults, behave, relate to each other, and take our roles. The political shift represented by the Green Paper and the Children's Bill clearly acknowledges that the solution is not in 'changing the child' but transforming the conditions, adult behaviours and systems around young people. It is tempting to see the problem in young people because it takes away our accountability for the way we behave, and avoids the difficult question of why we have behaviour and attendance problems at all. This change of focus, which is about practice based on the evidence from young people's lived experience, is what we call '*child-centred*' practice.

This paper attempts to briefly outline what this looks like through the story of Dizzie Rascal - for in the behaviour of his teacher, Tim Smith, some of the principles of 'child-centredness' are exemplified. The paper then takes this further to argue that 'child-centred' practice, to be sustainable, is about systemic change through understanding schools holistically. This then opens up exciting new questions about how our schools can function and what their purpose really is.

## 1 Inclusion in a store cupboard

Dizzie Rascal, the 19 year old rap star, on receiving the Mercury Music Prize in 2003 said that he couldn't have made it without his secondary school teacher Tim Smith. It wasn't the acceptance speech most of us had anticipated.

Dizzie had had extensive problems with behaviour and faced constant exclusions, indeed whether he could remain in school had been in doubt. This situation transformed when Tim Smith started working with him. Tim said of him;

*"I remember noticing how talented he was when he arrived. I was gob smacked by the quality of his work. Each time he came he seemed to have new ideas and he wanted more and more knowledge from me. Eventually he did get excluded from virtually all his classes and spent most of his time working with me in the music room - in a little store cupboard."*

There is something very important in Dizzie's story because in a way it mirrors every young person's story - indeed in recognition of this Dizzie gave all the £20,000 prize money to youth clubs in East London to buy musical equipment for young people. What did his music teacher do that enabled Dizzie to stay in the school system, change his behaviour and achieve his potential?

### 'Child-centred' inclusion

Dizzie's case is a concrete example of new thinking on *inclusion*. What do we really mean by inclusion and what are we referring to when we make judgments about it? Many of the arguments about inclusion are really based on adult ideas about it rather than young people's actual needs -- Dizzie's is a case in point.

The only 'evidence-based' way we can talk about inclusion in education is to center the question on the needs of the child. Then the question about inclusion becomes *whether the full capacity of a child is being included in the life of their school*. Does this school enable children to explore and discover their own wholeness - their full human nature? Does this school make a place for, and harness, the whole child or just the wanted parts of the child? Does this school think 'if only we had other children' or does it believe in, value and work with the realities of the children it has? Dizzie's problems transformed when his teacher made a place for him (even if it was only a store cupboard) and thus *included* him in the life of the school as a whole - not just the Dizzie the school wanted, but *the whole Dizzie*.

Before Tim, no one had worked with the part of Dizzie that was important to him - his music. Not having the parts of ourselves that we value acknowledged in an institution we spend over 30 hours a week in would be difficult for any of us. Problems with behaviour and attendance are often symptoms of the full capacity of a child not being included, and worked with, in the life of their school. Young people experience those parts of them that are not worked with as 'split off' from themselves in the school system. That experience of feeling torn becomes 'acted out' in behaviour.

However, that behaviour can be a message to us about their frustration and needs. Behaviour and attendance problems will never disappear, but the energy and expression that children put into misbehaving and not attending *can be harnessed* through the life of a school. What Dizzie's teacher did was enable that energy to be harnessed by making a place for Dizzie to work through his developmental needs. Starting from that point the teacher enabled him to see how his *aspiration* for himself and the world around him could actually be expressed through the *purpose* of this school. Dizzie began to take a role in the music class, and with the sense of belonging that gave him, engage with the whole school.

Dizzie's story, then, is a good metaphor for every child's struggle<sup>1</sup> - the struggle with the question:

*How can I give life to my aspirations for myself, and the world around me, through the systems I am a part of?*

The whole of a child's education could be summed up as the experience of learning how to engage with human systems. The place where most children learn, or don't learn how to do so, *is school*. What children learn from their experience of engaging with the school system impacts on how, as adults, they engage in the future with systems like their workplace, their communities and the state. How well they do that determines not only their own wellbeing but the wellbeing of our whole society.

For us in education this comes down to whether the systems we have created for children really include them, not only in the sense of including every child, but more importantly *including the whole nature of each child*.

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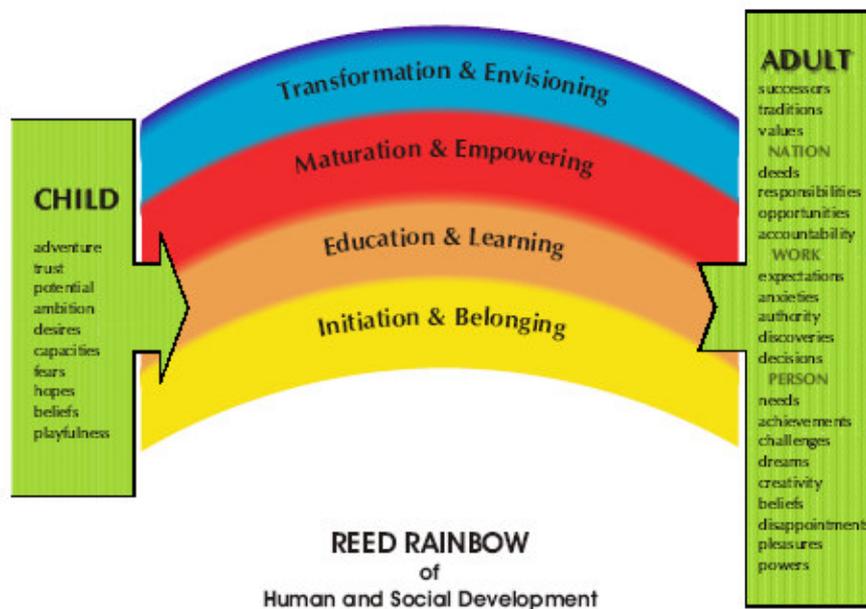
<sup>1</sup> ...and every adult's struggle.

## 2 The *WHOLE* child

How then can we frame the nature of the whole child and their needs? This may be best done by looking at the processes every child is going through holistically and asking whether we are making a place for children to work through those processes.

The REED RAINBOW is a tool which attempts to capture the whole of the child's developmental process, *ie* all the natural processes that occur in the interaction between children and adults in enabling a child to develop. These are the processes that are occurring in schools, families and communities at every moment, in every child, whether we acknowledge it or not.

On either side of the diagram, under Child and Adult are listed examples of characteristic qualities and experiences of children and adults. As any child relates to any adult there is a dynamic interaction between some of these qualities. The nature of those interactions results in a process of growth and development in the child which may be fostered or inhibited, functionally or dysfunctionally.



This Rainbow helps us frame two sides of the same coin:

- I. The processes that are necessary *together* in enabling the whole child to develop.
  
- II. The processes that occur in the encounter between a child and an adult.

The Rainbow is not just about a child's developmental needs, more importantly it is about what happens in the encounter between a child and an adult and whether that encounter fosters or inhibits the child's development.

If we imagine that the child and the adult on the sides of the diagram are an actual child and adult facing each other, then we can see a RAINBOW between them. For example, in the encounter between Dizzie Rascal and his teacher we can imagine all the colours of the RAINBOW being fostered - learning, belonging, maturation and envisioning. His teacher recognised that until Dizzie experienced *belonging* in the school he would struggle with *learning* there. Once Dizzie felt he belonged and began to find the pupil role, he would have been *envisioning* the possibilities of what kind of adult he could become, and how he needed to *transform* to become that adult. Struggling with the transformation process would have involved the processes of *maturation and empowerment* as he reflected on how to self discipline his behaviour to achieve his vision for himself through the systems he was a part of.

The four processes of the Rainbow suggest what needs to be taken into account in order to enable children to find their place - in school, the family or elsewhere. If a child can use the most natural places (the school and the family) to deal with all their issues of maturation, belonging and transformation, they will not need to turn to the street or elsewhere to deal with them. Most importantly, the processes are natural - they happen regardless of whether the school fosters or inhibits them - young people will seek out the place where they will be best able to work through these processes, be it school, the family or the street.

### **3 The Reed Rainbow in context**

The RAINBOW does not just tell us about inclusion in the classroom, it opens up issues about how the whole educational system fosters inclusion. For example;

*On Initiation and Belonging:*

'Training for Life', an organisation in East London which works with 18 to 24 year olds who have dropped out of the system, claims that the major issue the people they encounter are struggling with is *how to belong* to groups and organisations. Because they never learnt how to belong to the school as a system, they now have difficulty belonging to the systems of their workplace or other training institutions.

Dizzie's problems with behaviour and attendance changed once he had found a place and could belong. Before, he had not been able to engage his whole self in the life of the school - his frustration with this had expressed itself as bad behaviour and non attendance. His teacher, Tim Smith, helped him engage his aspirations with the school system and this was the stepping stone to Dizzie's engagement with larger systems and ultimately to his success. His desire to make real urban music and his desire for the world around him (expressed in giving away the prize money) were realised through his engagement with the human systems around him.

### ***On Education and Learning:***

A Recent OFSTED Report on Key Stage 3 identified that, though the quality of teaching had apparently improved, learning had not. What can be going on when 'teaching' improves and 'learning' does not? It suggests there are other factors at work disabling the children from learning. The RAINBOW suggests that no matter how 'excellent' teaching is, it cannot become learning (*ie* have meaning) unless it takes account of all the developmental learning experiences a child is going through.

Children have complex developmental needs - this reality is not in conflict with teaching, learning and testing - rather, all our evidence suggests that teaching and learning takes place best when those developmental needs are being met. Indeed, highly effective schools with good behaviour and attendance are often ones which use children's developmental needs as a resource for teaching and learning. The current behaviour, attendance and learning problems in schools are often a consequence of our desire as adults to focus narrowly on the measurable acquisition of knowledge so we pay less attention to the deeper developmental processes that inevitably take place in schools but which are harder to assess. Yet they affect what each child can achieve.

### ***On Maturation and Empowerment:***

Evidence suggests that schools which involve pupils in how they are run and offer them leadership opportunities are more effective because pupils take ownership of the school. This case study from a school in London outlines this very well:

*A 15 year old boy, of Ghanaian origin, has been appointed head boy of his school. The school has been through great difficulties having been recently out of special measures, labeled as having serious weakness, and facing another Ofsted inspection . His father, talking to the governors, expressed himself as well pleased with what was happening to his son. The boy had been discussing with him his vision of what the school could be like, a vision which he felt sanctioned to discuss with the headteacher with a realistic chance of what he thought about being able to be realised. He and his fellow prefects felt they had a contribution to make to the school's transformation by offering leadership to other, younger, students. The father was also excited at the way having to face up to pressures of leading the student body was enabling the boy to grow up, discovering strengths he did not know he had, and a capacity to take others with him that he had never used before. He commented how his son now felt that he could say 'my school' in a way that meant both that he belonged to the school, but also that the school belonged to him.*

The result of these different kinds of social development were showing up in a steady improvement in the quality of his work at school subjects: the teachers were now seen as colleagues with whom he was collaborating in a joint venture, the outcomes of which would yield dividends for the boy in terms of his future and for the school in terms of a new reputation.

### ***On Transformation and Envisioning:***

In all these interactions with adults, children are envisioning what kind of adults they can become, as well as what kind of society they are joining. It is more simple to see the process of envisioning as something that happens within the individual child, however it is really a process that happens in the interaction between children and adults.

A good example is a project we studied that was designed to encourage young people into higher education. In order to do this, the project had been bringing them to universities, giving them information and helping them meet undergraduates - but all this had begged a question for the young people. When we talked to them they said that, for them, the meaning of higher education related to the question about what kind of adults they could become. It was only when the project enabled them to meet professionals, question them and begin to envision their own futures in society that they began to see higher education as meaningful for them (or not), and began to transform their behaviour.

## 4 Leading child-centred practice

Possibly the most important aspect of the REED RAINBOW is how it expresses the mutuality between adults and children - as children are working through those processes *so are we as adults*. For example, it is not unusual to have the experience of feeling threatened when faced with a large group of adolescents - a lot of RAINBOWS have to be dealt with! The adolescents are testing what kind of adults we are in order to make decisions about what kind of adult they can become.

Deep down we may be sometimes faced with the question of whether we are willing to include them in our adult world and change our own behaviour to allow them to do so. This willingness to change our own behaviour, and be changed by them, is what decides whether the RAINBOW is inhibited or fostered. Dizzie's teacher was courageous in that he was willing to take the risks to himself, both internally and externally, that would include Dizzie in the adult world. This is key for the leadership offered by anyone working in schools or children's services, particularly headteachers.

### Leading the pupils

We often think of headteachers leading their staff but it is *the leadership they give pupils* that really comes first. In a piece of research carried out by the Grubb Institute into failing Church schools that had transformed<sup>2</sup>, the new heads all agreed that they had set out to create 'inclusive schools' - they understood this as *places where the experience of everyone, staff and pupils, is that they can be 'fully human' within it*.

On visiting one of the schools one of the researchers set up a work-group of pupils who would conduct a survey in the school. This group of pupils went to find out what everyone in the school thought the head's motivation was - why the head had stuck it out. The response from the pupils was overwhelmingly 'us' - one of the pupils said;

*The head's motivation is us! He cares about us, about trying to improve things and he provides new facilities. He asks our opinions.*

They experienced *themselves* as being the head's motivation - they experienced that the whole organisation and ethos of the school developed from an acknowledgment and belief in the reality of them, the good parts and the bad parts. The research affirmed that schools are

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2 See *Becoming Fit for Purpose: Leading Transformation in Church Schools: Reed B D et al , The Grubb Institute 2002.*

transformed when they become holistic, child-centred environments that acknowledge the reality of human nature. A teacher added;

*Even from an early stage, pupils were better motivated because they had more respect from the head. The pupils stopped making personal criticism of the head. He listens to them and they believe that he is doing things for **their** good. .... there is a sense of loyalty pervading the school, and pride. I think the pupils feel included because they are consulted and they have seen the improvements happen which benefited them.*

In these schools there were huge transformations in behaviour and attendance and the pupils experienced themselves as having the 'whole' of themselves included, both the 'good parts' and the 'bad parts'. These Heads agreed that the RAINBOW framed the picture they had been working with in their minds.

The question they asked was: *How do all the activities and staff of the school, work with children, to create the conditions for them to engage their full capacity - their whole person - in its life?* In answering this they set out to view their schools holistically, *ie* seeing how all the constituent parts of the school in its context could be led so as to work together in ensuring that children were at the heart of practice.

## **5 Practising systemic change**

Long term behaviour and attendance problems are rarely about children not wanting to learn or be at school - the vast majority of children want to be at school, and want to be well there. Rather, their behaviour or non attendance is often an 'acting out' of their distress at feeling that they *cannot fully be* there, do not feel wholly *acknowledged*, or cannot see themselves *mirrored* in the school's purpose.

Sometimes when faced with seemingly intractable behaviour or attendance problems it is tempting to locate the problem in the children themselves, that there is something wrong with them, that they are sad, mad or bad. Some do have real problems but the majority do not. When we can't locate it in the children the blame often flies around until it finds some other unlucky person, group or agency to attach itself to. Transforming a blame culture is about everyone trying to understand the function particular bad behaviour may be playing for the whole school and the wider community, both adults and children.

Every teacher can tell us that the bad behaviour of one child in a classroom can be harnessed by all the other children - that the problem can't simply be located in that child, rather it involves

all the children and all the adults. This explains why removing children from their school situation to change their behaviour rarely works - most people's experience is that, while they are away, behaviour can improve, but once you put them back in the school it goes back to how it was. *Their behaviour is a function of the whole context* - for example, it often suits the children in the classroom to have one pupil who disrupts everything, because then they can express the disruptive parts of themselves through that child and be free to get on with their own learning.

This is also seen in the recurring exclusion process we experience in schools. Sometimes no matter how much work one puts into one set of excluded pupils another set appears after them, year after year - this suggests that this process is playing a function for the school. Transforming these recurring situations is about exploring them in terms of the whole school, and looking at what the part is telling us about the whole, and vice versa.

### **Evidence-based practice**

So, how do we marry particular cases like Dizzie's with a whole school approach? In a sense cases like Dizzie's are the *evidence* we can use to decide what kind of *practice* needs to happen on a whole school level. What Dizzie's case suggests is how leaders working in education or children's services (*using the REED RAINBOW*) could integrate in schools and agencies processes which;

Explore holistically why children are misbehaving, not attending or disengaged.

Engage pupils in a dialogue about;

- their aspiration for themselves and the world around them;
- how they feel their full capacity/whole nature is being included in the school, or not.

Look at ways of engaging their aspirations and enabling them to live them out through the *purpose* of the school - so that the 'whole' of themselves is included, *eg* through involving them in the running of the school, extra-curricular activities, assemblies *etc*

Focus on how the 'whole school' needs to change (how adult behaviour and adult systems will need to be supported and challenged so that the school can work with the whole child).

## 6 Conclusion - towards sustainable change

This kind of practice is our only hope of bringing long term sustainable change to children's experience in schools. What is clear is that, if we keep doing what we've always been doing, we'll keep getting what we've always got. The more anxious we get about behaviour and attendance, the more schools are put under pressure to control pupils, and the government put under pressure to prove everything's okay through targets. A wish to see results gets us results, but in the process it turns education into something so narrow and mechanistic that children struggle to be a part of it. A wish to see perfect behaviour and attendance leads to the problem being seen as the children themselves, leading to children feeling like problems, and a vicious circle.

Children are going through the same developmental process they have always gone through - what has changed is how we as adults, through the systems and institutions we've created, work with those developmental processes. Recurring behaviour and attendance problems are often children saying "I am struggling to belong here" or "I don't feel the whole of me is acknowledged here" or "this place is not *for* me". In our working experience<sup>3</sup> most cases where a child's behaviour has truly transformed have been when someone worked at changing the conditions around the child, rather than trying to change the child themselves. On a strategic level this demands that we look again at what the purpose of school is.

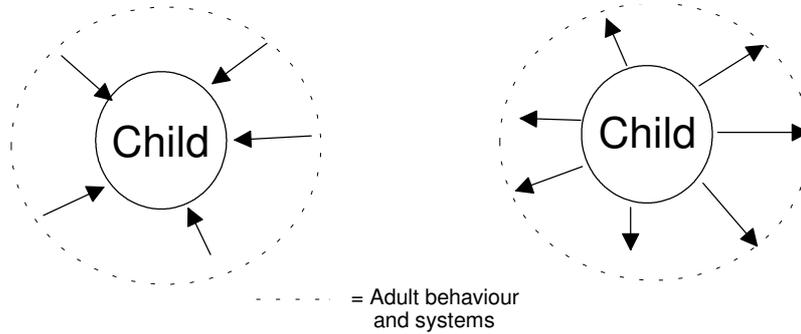
All of this is about moving from 'child-focused' practice to '**child-centred' practice**<sup>4</sup>, which has been the underlying theme of this paper. The belief is in inclusion, and how lives can be changed when we include - exemplified by Dizzie Rascal's story.

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3 *The evidence for this paper has been drawn from the Institute's extensive consultancy and research in education and children's services over 35 years, including; BIP, BESTs, EAZ's, Schools and Youth Projects. It also draws specifically on work done with NCSL, the Church of England Board of Education, and on The Green Paper - Every Child Matters. The technical thinking is based on psychodynamic, systemic and theological frameworks as well as current thinking on Multi-Agency work, Child-Centred Practice, and Child and Adolescent Development.*

4 *For a basic model differentiating 'child-centred' practice from 'child-focused' practice, see the Annex.*

**Child-Focused**                      *to*                      **Child-Centred**



'Child-focused' starts with adult priorities	4	'Child-centred' starts with children's priorities
Listening to children	4	Listening to children and acting on it
Working with parts of the child	4	Working with the 'whole child'
Education focused on teaching	4	Education centred on children's whole social, emotional and academic development
Impetus for change is on children	4	Impetus for change is on the adult behaviour and systems around children
Locating problems in children	4	Problems understood systemically and holistically
Tendency towards controlling children	4	Thinking systems that free children by acting as containers for them
Thinking "children's participation"	4	Thinking "children's leadership"
Looking for someone to blame for problems <i>etc</i>	4	Developing mutual responsibility as adults and children

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