

The Spirit of the School

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Inspiring Boys, Inspiring Schools: IBSC Conference, July 2011

1. Introduction

It is the most obvious questions that are the hardest to answer. All the research I've been doing for almost twenty years has been about how schools work as learning communities. Now, you may think that it is obvious that schools are learning communities, and that there must be any number of books on how schools work in this way. But that is not quite true. One of the best and most influential books on learning communities, by Lave and Wenger, says that thinking about learning happening in classrooms 'is not an adequate substitute for a theory about what schooling as an activity has to do with learning' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p 54). In other words, it is not all that clear what schooling does for learning. Most of what we learn, you see, is learnt in homes and families, in the first years of our lives and well before we go to school. Much of the rest of what we learn, we learn as adults long after we leave school – again, with families and friends and at work. What is so special about schools, then? We know that learning is important, but are schools important, as learning communities?

Gradually over the years I realised that schools have simply been taken for granted. There is plenty of educational psychology, educational philosophy, educational sociology, and the rest, but little on schools. So I have spent almost twenty years, and hope to spend another few years, researching schools as learning communities.

I think that schools are and should be learning communities. Schools are communities of particular kinds, in which learning of particular kinds takes place. This, I describe as the *spirit of the school* (as in the title of Stern 2009). For a particular school, or a particular group of schools, this can be described as the *spirit of [name of school]*, or, after this conference, perhaps the *spirit of boys' schools*. That is not because I want to say the same thing of every school, making a boilerplate description of each school's spirit. Quite the reverse. It is because it makes no sense to talk of spirituality, or the spirit of the school, in the abstract – we can only refer to real schools, set in their own particular historical, social, and geographical contexts. There is no such thing as a single 'spirit' of all schools, just a way of describing spirituality that can be used to capture the spirit of particular schools. Capture, if you can – not 'predetermine'.

What sort of learning, and what sort of community, make up the spirit of the school? That is what I want to describe today, and I will gradually circle in on the answer to the questions. I will start from people who have taught me, and go on to discuss dualism, the spirit of the school, what promotes children's spiritual development, and how we know about this. Later, I will check in on boys' schools, and ask where we go from here.

2. My Teachers

I'll mention here some of the most important teachers I've had, a kind of who's who of my research, or, if you like, a kind of Oscar speech. I'll mention the first four in the order they had most influence on my current work. You may notice that many of them are long dead: it is their writings that were influential.

1. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a Greek philosopher who tried to work out how to be a good person and how to have a good society – with his 'societies' being rather small-scale, personal, if vigorously political, organisations. Justice and friendship dominated his understanding of good societies; thoughtfulness and virtue dominated his understanding of good people.



2. John Macmurray (1891-1976) was a Scottish Christian philosopher who wrote about communities and how they work (e.g. in Macmurray 1996). It is no good talking about communities if you do not know what a community is. There are lots of different views, but Macmurray's position seemed the most sensible. A community is a group of people who act together, and who treat each other as whole people – as ends in themselves, not as means to other ends. There are many good social groups that have external purposes, but they are not communities. Communities are where people are acting together, for themselves. Families are typical small communities. Friendship groups and religious communities (monasteries and communes) are typical larger communities. And schools are communities.



3. Phillida Salmon (1933-2005) was an English psychologist who wrote about how people 'constructed' themselves, which was her way of describing how they learned (e.g. in Salmon 1985). There is no fixing people, there is no-one to be 'discovered' in some attempt to 'discover yourself'. We make ourselves, in time, and I guess we unmake ourselves too.



4. Martin Buber (1878-1965) was a Viennese-born Jewish philosopher who wrote about dialogue. There is real dialogue, there is technical dialogue (which involves an exchange of information), and there is 'monologue disguised as dialogue' (Buber 2002, p 22). It is dialogue that is the means by which people can become more real, in communities.



Let me put those four all together, before mentioning some others. Salmon taught me how people learn, with Buber giving me the way of communicating and what happens between people. Macmurray added a sense of what a community was, with Aristotle being honest enough to describe the hierarchies in communities even amongst the friends. That just about made up a school, including what a lot of people refer to as the school 'ethos'. But it didn't explain the rest of the world. The rest of the world includes those who pay for schools to be set up. And the rest of the world is what schools throw people out into – at the end of the day (for day schools) and at the end of their learning or their careers. Aristotle and Macmurray both helped teach me what schools might be for, beyond the school, and it was Buber who taught me how to think of this going beyond in terms of spirit.

Aristotle taught me the variations amongst both communities and societies, so that it mattered where you were. The Swiss architect Peter Zumthor (1943-) taught me more about places (from Zumthor 2006). My English teacher, Nan Grewe, taught me about the English poet Philip Larkin (1922-1985) – and Larkin taught me more about loneliness and alienation than anyone else (albeit closely followed by the artist Lowry), though he forgot to find a way out of it. It was Marie Stern who taught me that.



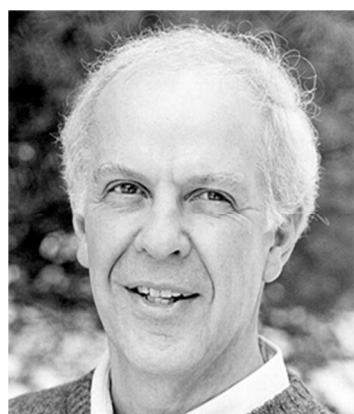
So now you know. Another set of people who have taught me are the people who participated in my research. For three years, I worked on a project that tried to bring all this together, and it is called the *Spirit of the School* project. What I wanted to do was to talk to pupils, teachers and headteachers about their schooling, and what was important in their schools. It was an attempt to understand and to promote the spirit of the school, the spirit of particular schools. It was a response to long-standing questions about what makes a ‘good’ school, a good particular school in a particular place – just as Aristotle asked about good societies. Parents and carers ask what school to choose for their children, and teachers and other professionals ask how to improve their schools. Answers are not, I believe, generated by league tables of examination results, or by how well-dressed the pupils are, or whether the school buildings are ivy-clad or ultra-modern. However, it is easier to dismiss these kinds of answers than it is to say something helpful.

It is always useful, when finding out about a school, to look around the school, listen carefully to what is being said, and talk with people in the school, during a normal school day. But that technique still raises the question, what should you look for and listen to? The answer is personal. Rumi (1207-1273), the Persian Muslim poet born in what is now Afghanistan, says ‘If anyone wants to know what “spirit” is, ... lean your head toward him or her. Keep your face there close. *Like this*’ (Rumi 1995, p 136). So I kept my face as close as I could, and listened. As well as listening, I wanted to say something helpful. It would have been easy enough to say something wonderfully utopian and gloriously glib about ‘good’ schools, but, with fingers crossed, I decided to ask people in schools, and to base what I said on what they told me. It was a case of investigating real schools, research being a sort of ‘vivisection’, where the research is completed in the ‘living’ schools, and is not completed at a safe distance through an analysis of the dead facts and figures about schools. 144 people later, I thought I was – and I still think I am – in a position to say something helpful.



What I was taught, by the participants in the research, is a cause for celebration. What they taught me was that, despite all the pressures, all the targets, all the controls, schooling was familiar and would be familiar to anyone who has worked with children. School staff are working hard to help children learn and grow, based on deeply-felt principles that have not come pre-packaged from government websites. Children care about the people they are with, adults and children, and are fascinated by learning from those people. It might be thought that there is nothing new in that. It certainly is a message that might have been heard fifty, a hundred, or a thousand years ago. What is new to me is that while reading the transcripts of interviews, all I had previously read about the corruption of young people, and the destruction of professionalism, about commercialisation and target-dominated cultures, seemed like hopeless pessimism. The spirit of the school is alive and well. Best of all, it is familiar. That is to be celebrated. So, what is the spirit of the school? Before I answer, I need to say what I think 'spirituality' is, as so far I've only talked about what a school is. And to talk about spirituality I need to start with dualism and other ideas about what sort of things there are in the world.

3. Dualism



The American writer Parker Palmer said, rather sadly, '[w]hat I know about living a divided life starts with my training as an academic' as he 'was taught to keep things in airtight compartments: to keep my ideas apart from my feelings, because ideas were reliable but feelings were not; to keep my theories apart from my actions, because the theory can be pure, but the action is always sullied' (Palmer in Lantieri 2001, p 1). He goes on to ask that we – teachers in particular – 'live divided-no-more' (Palmer in Lantieri 2001, p 1).

Division is all around us. Many philosophical and religious systems talk about there being two or more types of 'stuff'. Some talk about mind and body being the two types of stuff, and Descartes was one of those. Some talk about the world of 'me' (what I know and can see and think) and the world of 'not-me' – or the difference between the subjective and the objective world. Some talk about 'us' and 'them', whether this differentiates some people from others (for example by intelligence, gender, ethnicity, nation), or people from other animals (as is the case of 'humanists'). Some – including most Jews, Christians, Muslims and Sikhs – talk about the world we inhabit (often itself separated into two types of stuff, body and mind, or body and soul) and a transcendent God. Where there are two types of stuff, or two 'worlds', this is usually called 'dualism' – that is, 'two-ness'. (If there are more than two types of stuff, then 'pluralism' is probably the best word to use.)



Anyway, dualists believe that there are two types of stuff, or two worlds. However, the question arises, 'can these worlds connect to each other?' The question is different, depending on what kind of dualism the person believes. If the mind and the body are separate 'stuff', like Descartes said, then how can 'thinking' affect the body? If we have 'free will' (i.e. we can think whatever we like), there doesn't seem any point in that unless we can also affect our bodies. It may be nice for me to think 'I'd like to have a pizza', but if my mind can't make my body walk to the pizza house, or can't even make my fingers telephone the pizza house, what's the good in being able to think freely? If, as in the second and third forms of dualism, the two worlds are the 'me' world and the 'not-me' world, or 'us' and 'them' then how can I know anything else exists or how can different groups have any understanding of each other? And if, as in the fourth type of

dualism, we live on one world, and there is a God that is completely transcendent – apart from this world – then how can we know God? And, for that matter, how can God affect this world? In all of these traditions, most people have tried to say that the dualism is not complete, and that the two worlds are really connected. Saying that the division is not absolute, and can be overcome, suggests that it is a ‘contingent’ dualism – a dualism that may be overcome. Some go further, and say that there is a constant battle – a kind of argument – between the two substances. The Greeks referred to argument of this kind as ‘dialectical’. So most dualists are contingent and/or dialectical dualists.

Descartes is one such contingent dualist, as he said that the mind could affect the body – albeit with a rather unclear explanation of how that worked. (He thought it happened in the pineal gland, which is a rather strange idea.) Other people, instead, said that the mind and body were simply two ways of thinking about the same thing. But Descartes stuck to being a contingent dualist, with a connection between the two types of stuff, and this allowed him to talk meaningfully about people having free will. Amongst those who think the fundamental division is between ‘me’ and ‘not-me’, are most existentialist philosophers. Existentialists often describe the ultimate loneliness or aloneness of human existence, and they, along with others influenced by existentialism if not paid-up members of the club (amongst whom are Macmurray and Buber), are concerned with the attempts to overcome loneliness. (This includes the loneliness of leaders – an important issue for many school leaders.) Buber says that a person only becomes a person in conversation or dialogue with other people – in other words, there isn’t a ‘me’ until I have been in dialogue with others. This is the lesson Sacks takes from the biblical account of Adam and Eve. Adam, seeing Eve for the first time, says



‘This is now bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman [*ishah*] because she was taken from man [*ish*].’ What is lost in translation is that biblical Hebrew has two words for man, *adam* and *ish*. *Adam* (meaning, taken from the earth, *adamah*) signifies man, the biological species. *Ish* means roughly the same as the English word, ‘person’. The subtle point of the biblical text is that this verse is the first in which the word *ish* appears. Adam must pronounce the name of his wife before he can pronounce his own. He must say ‘Thou’ before he can say ‘I’. (Sacks 2003, p 150-151.)



Buber extends this to groups of people – referring to what might today be called intercultural dialogue, and referring to the almost-dialogue that a person might have even with a tree (Buber 1958, p 21). On the ‘God’ question, some people have said that although God is unknowable, we can through revelation and faith have some understanding, and although God is apart from our world, he may through his grace both affect us and when we die bring us to his presence. Others join this argument to the previous ones, as Buber and Macmurray both do, saying that relations between people are related to relations between a person and God, so ‘the extended lines of relations meet in the eternal *Thou*’ (Buber 1958, p 99). And, again, others join the ‘God’ question to the mind-body question, saying that minds were souls that were gods in each of us – so Aristotle says ‘[c]ertain thinkers say that soul is intermingled in the whole universe, and it is perhaps for that reason that Thales came to the opinion that all things are full of gods’ (Aristotle 1984, p 655).

Now, let’s get back to spirituality. Some people say that ‘spirit’ refers to another kind of

'stuff'. Those people might talk about 'the spirit world', or of people being made up of 'mind, body, and spirit'. I disagree. I think that 'spirituality' really means the links between the two worlds. So, for mind-body dualists, if they are 'contingent' dualists, we can talk about having free will – even in a world where our bodies are subject to physical laws. Seeing a person as having a mind and a body, interacting with each other, means that the person is 'spirited' or 'possesses spirit'. It is spirit that 'joins' the two kinds of stuff. For people who are concerned with the dualism of 'me' and 'not-me', 'us' and 'them', I think that we make a leap of the imagination when we are in dialogue with another person. It is an imaginative leap to the reality of the other person, not to a 'fantasy'. The ability to be in real dialogue, to connect to another person whilst remaining on our own side of the relationship, is what I call being 'spirited'. And on the 'God' issue, I think the Christian symbolism of the Holy Spirit as a dove (in a number of works of art) captures the idea of the spirit being that which travels between God and people.



So, that's roughly what I think spirituality could be. I'm not saying I agree with all the 'dualist' theories about the world – philosophical or religious. (My own special interest is in the 'me' and 'not-me' and 'us' and 'them' dualisms, and overcoming them – as Rumi said, leaning towards someone, *like this*.) It's just that I think that, wherever someone thinks in a dualist way, they are usually supporting a 'contingent' or 'dialectical' dualism. And, if they do, it makes sense to call the 'joining together' of the two worlds something like 'spirit'. That means that spirituality is defined in terms of overcoming dualism, and it will mean different things, depending on what sort of dualism you support. This neatly provides both a clear definition and no definition at all. Priestley, doyen of spirituality research in the UK, says that when asked whether he can define spirituality, '[t]he only honest answer to ... [the] question must be a categorical, "No"' (Priestley 2008). He says this because '[t]he spiritual is describable but not definable for to define is to set limitations, to draw boundaries' (Priestley 2008). He quotes the Bible, from John 3:8 where Jesus says 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit'. 'In other words', Priestley continues, 'it is a concept of constant motion or at least of potential motion which can on rare occasions be stilled'. This echoes Aristotle's claim that all theories of the soul 'characterize the soul by three marks, Movement, Sensation, Incorporeality' (Aristotle 1984, p 646), with 'corporeality' rejected simply because earth, unlike water, air or fire, does not have such movement. (Even earth is possible, if theorists are included 'who have declared soul to be, or to be compounded of, *all* the elements', Aristotle 1984, p 646.)



4. What Is The Spirit of the School?

Having tried to work out what spirituality was, I listened carefully to the 144 participants in the *Spirit of the School* project. By the end of the research, I thought I knew something about the spirit of the school as well as spirituality. Here is a definition I came up with, after all the research was complete:

The spirited school is an inclusive community with magnanimous leadership that enables friendship through dialogue in order to create and evaluate valuable or beautiful meanings, valuable or beautiful things, and good people. (Stern 2009, p 161.)

A longer version of that definition, with some added explanation, is this:

The spirited school is an inclusive (bringing in from past times and local and distant places) community (people treating each other as ends in themselves) with magnanimous leadership (aiming for the good of the led) that enables (but does not insist on) friendship (by overcoming fear and loneliness and allowing for solitude) through dialogue (not monologue) in order to create and evaluate valuable or beautiful meanings, valuable or beautiful things (including the environment), and good (real) people. (Stern 2009, p 160-1.)

I was not trying to be original in this definition. Just *right*. And there are very few other definitions of the spirit of the school – or definitions of schooling – which is why I’ve spent almost twenty years trying to find out myself how schools work as learning communities. Perhaps I can go through each element of that definition, explaining some more:

The spirited school ...

Early in the project, I visited old friends. I had last seen them almost 20 years before, when they had four small children. I remember with horror being told that one of the children had squashed a pear in the piano. 20 years later, the children were grown up, and were delightful. I reminded my friends of the pear in the piano, whilst also telling them about my project on spirituality. The two strands of conversation were brought together and concluded by the mother. ‘Well I like my children to be spirited’, she said. Yes. The spirited school is spirited in the way that we like our children to be spirited. Without the pear in the piano though, I hope.

It is worth asking professionals in education what sort of school they would like to work in. What adjectives would you like to use of the school you would like to work in? Roland Barth does a similar job, saying:

I would want to return to work in a school that could be described as a *community of learners*, ... And I would readily work in a school that could be described as a *community of leaders*, where students, teachers, parents, and administrators share the opportunities and responsibilities for making decisions that affect all the occupants of the schoolhouse. ... I would like to go each day to a school to be with other adults who genuinely wanted to be there, who really chose to be there because of the importance of their work to others and to themselves. I would not want to leave a school characterized by a profound respect for and encouragement of diversity, where important differences among children and adults were celebrated rather than seen as problems to remedy. For 190 days each year, I would like to attend an institution that accorded a special place to philosophers who constantly examine and question and frequently replace embedded practices by asking “why” questions. (Barth 1990, p 9-10.)

... is an inclusive ...	To help us think about what an inclusive school may be, we should ask ourselves, and ask other people, when they feel most included in the school. It is a startlingly simple and powerful question. Or, rather, it elicits startlingly simple and powerful answers. Try it.
... (bringing in from past times and local and distant places) ...	Making 'us' feel included is important. Inclusion is about bringing us into the school. It is about bringing all kinds of people and objects and ideas into the school. What and who is brought in to the school from outside the school? Are people brought in to the school from all around the world? Are all kinds of people brought in? Are people brought in from past times, through their literature and art? Who is brought in in this way? Keep asking, keep answering.
... community ...	There are two traditions of community theory. One is based on the idea of community as a group of people who agree or who hold beliefs in common. This idea is well expressed in social contract theories such as that of John Rawls. Rawls (1972) looked for the possibility of agreement, abstracted from activity and from knowledge of one's own position in society, as the form of legitimation of any social system. Another tradition of community is based on the idea of a community as a group of people doing things together. John Macmurray uses the biblical account of the Good Samaritan to support his sense of the Christian nature of community as activity not belief. That account is given by Jesus in response to the question 'who is my neighbour?'. As Macmurray says, 'the Samaritan shared his material possessions with the Jew in his need, while the priest and the Levite made their natural community as members of the same nation and the same faith an ideal matter which did not express itself in action' (Macmurray 1996, p 111). That is, community cannot be assumed, as a result of common beliefs or any nominal membership: it can only be the result of particular activities.
... (people treating each other as ends in themselves) ...	John Macmurray distinguished what he called 'communities' from what he called 'societies'. Macmurray suggests that schools are forms of community like families, friendship groups, and religious communities, in which people are treated as ends in themselves and not as means to further ends. Communities are unlike other social groups that are, typically, driven by external aims. Whereas a society 'is an organization of functions', a community 'is a unity of persons as persons' (Macmurray 1996, p 166).
... with magnanimous leadership ...	Leadership is about hierarchy. However much we may want to think about democratic principles in organisations (and I do indeed want to think about democratic principles), the whole point of leadership is that it implies followership. All too few contemporary writers on leadership write about the morality of leadership as leadership, as being 'higher' in a hierarchy. Richard Sennett recently broke the spell of

democracy by investigating 'respect in a world of inequality' (Sennett 2003, title). In Aristotle's time, inequality was not taboo, and he wrote eloquently about the virtues of leadership. The 'crown' of those virtues, the virtue that could be exhibited if and only if a leader had all the other virtues, was magnanimity.

... (aiming for the good of the led) ...

Magnanimity, or being 'great-souled' (Aristotle 1976, p 154), means working for the led. Leaders who worked for themselves, said Aristotle, were tyrants, and suffered from arrogance; leaders who thought themselves as equal in every way to those who are led, suffered from pusillanimity, or petty-mindedness. Incidentally, because all leaders are themselves also followers (i.e. there is always someone with more power), it is possible and appropriate to combine magnanimity with humility.

... that enables (but does not insist on) friendship ...

Friendship is linked to freedom as friendship is and must be by its nature voluntary or a matter of free choice: you can choose your friends, but not your family. This is why friendship can be so important to young people, as it is one of their first conscious expressions of free choice. As Epstein says, 'young people may form themselves in 'conditions not of their own choosing', but they are highly agentic in their making and breaking of relationships, and the ways they use these to distinguish between self and Other' (Epstein 2002, p 149, and see also Epstein et al 1998 on the schooling of boys). That is, young people 'do' friendship in 'becoming' themselves. Hey, in an article in the same collection as that of Epstein, describes this relationship well, as friendship is 'one of the few social and interpersonal relations in which young children can exercise any form of social control' (Hey 2002, p 227).

The possibility of friendship is reduced by fear. And if fear works against friendship, so too do tyranny and injustice. The psychoanalysts Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich write about the possibility of post-war Germany working through its earlier, pathological, experience of authoritarian politics. Their purpose, they say, 'is to improve the prospects for the "friendly German"' (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 1975, p xxvii-xxviii). It is the association of authoritarianism with 'unfriendly behavior – in the widest sense of the term' (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 1975, p xxviii) that links this work with the contemporary writing of Macmurray, and with the long-distant writing of Aristotle. For Aristotle, 'in a tyranny there is little or no friendship ... just as there is no justice', indeed, in a tyranny the relationship of leader to led 'is like that ... of master to slave' (Aristotle 1976, p 278). Mitscherlich's work on authority (Mitscherlich 1993, first published in 1963) beautifully describes the 'fatherless society' of post-war Germany, in which people no longer had 'father figures', and this has been influential in the North American 'men's movement' (as in Robert Bly's foreword,

describing the 'sibling society' in contemporary North America.)

... (by overcoming fear and loneliness and allowing for solitude) ...

Overcoming fear is a prerequisite for the possibility of friendship, and so the widespread presence of friendship is an indicator of the lack of fearfulness. However, it is possible in any community to be a loner, to be someone without friends. How do loners fit in with this theory? Well, most loners would recognise the difference between being alone in a friendly community, and alone in an unfriendly community, and would prefer the former to the latter. Loners may value solitude (as may everyone), but that does not mean that they value loneliness. It takes two to be lonely. People can be alone, but loneliness is not the same as aloneness. To be lonely requires a sense of rejection by other people.

... through dialogue (not monologue) ...

Buber distinguishes three kinds of dialogue: technical dialogue (roughly, exchanging information), real or genuine dialogue (which for Buber has existential and religious significance), and 'monologue disguised as dialogue'. Technical dialogue 'is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding ... [and] belongs to the inalienable sterling quality of "modern existence"' (Buber 2002, p 22). Genuine dialogue happens 'where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself [*sic*] and them ... [and is] continually hidden in all kinds of odd corners and, occasionally in an unseemly way, breaks surface surprisingly and inopportunistically' (Buber 2002, p 22). Monologue disguised as dialogue happens when 'two or more men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources' (Buber 2002, p 22). The life of real dialogue involves a 'strengthening sense of reciprocity', whilst one of only monologue 'will not, even in the tenderest intimacy, grope out over the outlines of the self' (Buber 2002, p 24).

... in order to create and evaluate ...

Creativity is a concept that helps distinguish routine transferring of information from meaning-making and, more broadly, from 'generative' work in schools. This is set in policy contexts of creativity in education (e.g. DfEE 1999 and Roberts 2006), and religious and philosophical issues related to creation, creativity, and human nature. The relation between creativity in its everyday sense, and creation in its religious usage, is well described by Buber's account of how '[c]reation happens to us, burns itself into us, recasts us in burning – we tremble and are faint, we submit' (Buber 1958, p 108). He continues that '[w]e take part in creation, meet the Creator, reach out to Him, helpers and companions' (Buber 1958, p 108). Creativity is, understandably, less poetically described in government

documents. The UK's curriculum authority says that creativity 'involves the use of imagination and intellect to generate ideas, insights and solutions to problems and challenges', and that, '[c]oupled with critical thinking, which involves evaluative reasoning, creative activity can produce outcomes that can be original, expressive and have value' (QCA 2008). That is, there is reference to the agency of the person being creative (imagination, thinking, reasoning), the originality of the processes or products (generate, original, expressive), and the value of that generated (solutions, evaluative, value) (see also Stern 2007a, p 124-126). Evaluation is distinguished by the group doing the evaluation, which is itself determined in part by the 'horizon' of the creator. Something may be seen as more valuable, if the evaluating group is larger, if the horizon is wider.

... valuable or beautiful meanings ...

Schools are places where people make sense, they are engaged in meaning-making. A curriculum made up of 'answers' is not one in which learning takes place. And the meanings may be valuable, beautiful, or both. It takes imagination to reach out and connect to other people. According to Buber, dialogue is the means by which this connection takes place. This dialogue, the dialogue of Buber and also of the literary theorist Bakhtin, requires imagination. It is not restricted to the imagining of fantastical things or, in Rosegren's chilling description of magic and religion 'imagining the impossible' (Rosengren *et al.* 2000). It is the dialogue described by Friedman as 'experiencing the other side' of the relationship, 'or, as Buber later calls it, "*imagining the real*," [which] goes hand in hand with remaining on one's own side of the relationship' (Friedman in Buber 2002, p xiii-xiv). As schools are places where such imaginative acts are necessary, places rich with meanings and meaning-making, one might refer to the *fictive* school.

... valuable or beautiful things ...

Daniels describes the 'framing' by teachers in an art lesson. In the school with stronger framing,

the teacher read a story called 'Where the Wild Things Live' [*sic*]. She then told the children that they were going to 'make pictures of the wild things'. The teacher had prepared a number of different pieces of sugar paper and proceeded to assign children to these pieces of paper. Each piece of sugar paper had an outline of a 'Wild Thing' on it and most of them had sections/areas of the paper marked off. Each section contained a code number and thus could be translated by a key at the bottom of the piece of paper. The children followed the key which dictated the material to be used to 'fill in' the sections/areas marked on the paper. The 'Wild Things' were thus constructed. The department head said of art lessons, 'We are interested in the results of art, of good productions rather than "experiencing" the materials. (Daniels 2001, p 162-163.)

In the school with weaker framing,

the children were given different grades of paper, powder paint and a piece of foam rubber or sponge. The teacher then told the children to wet the paper and flick paint at it with the sponge. The children were encouraged to use different kinds of paper with different degrees of dampness. They were told to experiment with ways of applying the powder paint. (Daniels 2001, p 163)

In this way, Daniels contrasts classrooms where 'you paint what you see' and those where 'you paint what the teacher sees' (Daniels 2001, p 170).

... (including the environment) ...

The spirit of the school is also particular and emerges from the place and the time in which the school exists. As the architect Zumthor says,

When I come across a building that has developed a special presence in connection with the place it stands in, I sometimes feel that it is imbued with an inner tension that refers to something over and above the place itself.

It seems to be part of the essence of its place, and at the same time it speaks of the world as a whole.

When an architectural design draws solely from tradition and only repeats the dictates of its site, I sense a lack of a genuine concern with the world and the emanations of contemporary life. If a work of architecture speaks only of contemporary trends and sophisticated visions without triggering vibrations in its place, this work is not anchored in its site, and I miss the specific gravity of the ground it stands on. (Zumthor 2006, p 41-2.)

The environment, the place, of the school will always matter, as will going beyond that place. Each of us is particular, and not an abstraction.

... and good (real) people

Macmurray says

We are all more or less unreal. Our business is to make ourselves a little more real than we are. (Macmurray 1992, p 143)

Communities must be places where people learn to make community: they are places of 'immanence' (or 'emergence' for Hoyle and Wallace 2005), places where self and community emerge. More 'real' communities could be contrasted with more 'unreal' communities, according to the nature of the relationships within the community. The unity is not a transcendent unity, an 'aggregation', but an intentional immanent unity, from different positions, that not

only allows but requires objection to that unity at the same time as membership. The poet Larkin, famous for his misanthropy, illuminates some of the challenges of communities. In the poem *Dockery and Son*, Larkin writes of the difference between himself and a friend from university who had a child at nineteen, saying

... how
Convinced he was he should be added to!
Why did he think adding meant increase?
To me it was dilution

(Larkin 1988).

The answer is, families, like other forms of community, can indeed mean 'increase'.

5. What Promotes Children's Spiritual Development?

We all do

The simple answer to the question 'what promotes children's spiritual development?' is that we all do. 'We' being education professionals, children, families, and communities associated with schools. It is not a matter of physical environment or curriculum structures, although these may of course be important ways in which 'we' do what we do. Promoting spiritual development is an intensely personal activity, a human activity. It is not just a matter of feelings or 'emotional literacy'; it is not just a matter of examinations and academic achievement; it is about learning together, in dialogue, in community.

All we do

And, in response to the question 'what do we do to support the spirit of the school?', the simple answer is, all we do. There is nothing we do that will not affect the spirit of the school, for good or ill. One of my favourite quotations of all is from educational psychologists who say '[u]nhappy, stressed workaholics are not good role-models for young people' (Newton and Tarrant 1992, p 194).

Circles and spirals: vicious and virtuous

I sometimes think that I'm going round in circles. We all do at times. The art is not to stop going round and round, but to change the circle into a spiral. We can spiral upwards: this is what a 'virtuous circle' is, I think. Sadly, we can also spiral downwards: that is what a vicious circle is, presumably.

6. How Do We Know?

Three ways in which the school made you feel good about yourself

The first question asked of participants in the *Spirit of the School* research was this one: Could you describe the three most recent or memorable times that the school made you feel good about yourself? It is a question that always elicits interesting answers. Students at a young age have a tendency to respond in different ways depending on their academic achievements, with higher-achieving students more likely to describe

learning-related circumstances, and lower-achieving students more likely to describe social circumstances (Hatfield 2004, working with students from 6 to 11). One student interviewed by Hatfield said, after having been in the school for three years, that the only circumstance in which school had helped to make her feel positive about herself was when 'I was ... when I was starting to learn when I first came ... I thought I could learn' (Hatfield 2004).

Salmon Line

This exercise is adapted from Salmon 1994 (and used in Stern 2007a, p 7 and 76), which is in the tradition of personal construct psychology founded by George Kelly (Kelly 1955). The Salmon Line

seeks to draw forth something lively from below the waterline. Being essentially a line – no more than a line – it is infinitely flexible.

The simple principle of this technique is that a line is used to represent some kind of psychological progression. The progression can be anything at all: a course of learning, a scale of competence, a dimension of preference, steps towards a goal – anything. And just as in the [repertory] grid [of Kelly], it is the subject who fleshes out what this line actually means psychologically. People do this by marking in points along the line which represent meaningful transitions. It is important, I think, that they mark in these points first, and only then begin to define what they are. As Kelly insisted, some of our most important constructs are not instantly available to verbalisation, but they may become so through realising them in use. (Salmon 1994, p 2.)

[T]he Salmon Line stays close to the subject and does not at any stage remove his or her material for a different kind of processing. It allows, not just for the elicitation of meaning, but also for its development. (Salmon 1994, p 3.)

For the first stage of the exercise, participants should, on their own, make two marks on a 'Salmon Line', a straight line with contrasting words or phrases at either end of the line:

Mark *Present* or *P* on the line where you think your school is at the moment.

Mark *Future* or *F* on the line where you would like your school to be in one year from now.

The school is a community _____ The school is not a community

There is no precise 'scale' on this line – it simply involves making two marks, for the present and the future.

For the second and more important stage of the exercise, participants should discuss with each other how the school can get from the 'present' to where they would like it to be in the 'future'. This discussion can take place between pairs, or in groups of four or five. If discussion is difficult, the participant could write about how the school might get from one point to the other. The discussion should include what might be needed – including what the participant might need to do, but also what help might be needed, and what other things would need to change.

What is typically said?

What is typically said in science, in religious education, in English, in the playground? This exercise is derived from the work of Daniels, who asked ‘what would your teacher like to hear you say?’ (Daniels 2001, p 159). It was further developed in the current form in Stern 2006, p 71-3, Stern 2007a, p 100, and Stern 2010.

It is an exercise that asks what might typically be said in a classroom, in a number of subjects and situations in schools. In a school, it might be that a group of students could complete the activity for a number of subjects, a single subject might be researched in different age groups or gender groups, or the research might be used to compare classroom conversations to conversations in playgrounds or lunch halls.

In analysing responses, researchers will bear in mind the indications of ‘classification’ and ‘framing’. Daniels (2001, and in Stern 2007a, p 100) investigated the social constructivist approaches to schooling of Vygotsky. Stronger and weaker classification and framing refer to the divisions between subjects (‘classification’) and the degree to which pedagogy is teacher-centred rather than student-centred (‘framing’). Stronger classification and framing are more likely in schools using more behaviourist approaches.

What is typically said in Science

We are in a Science lesson in a school. What do you think the teacher is saying, and what do you think the student is saying, in this picture?




A large, empty, rounded rectangular speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the teacher, intended for writing the teacher's dialogue.

A large, empty, rounded rectangular speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the students, intended for writing the student's dialogue.

An example of one of these, filled out by what I assume to be a somewhat depressed teacher of religious education:

What is typically said in Religious Education

We are in a Science lesson in a school. What do you think the teacher is saying, and what do you think the student is saying, in this picture?



Don't shout out

I didn't

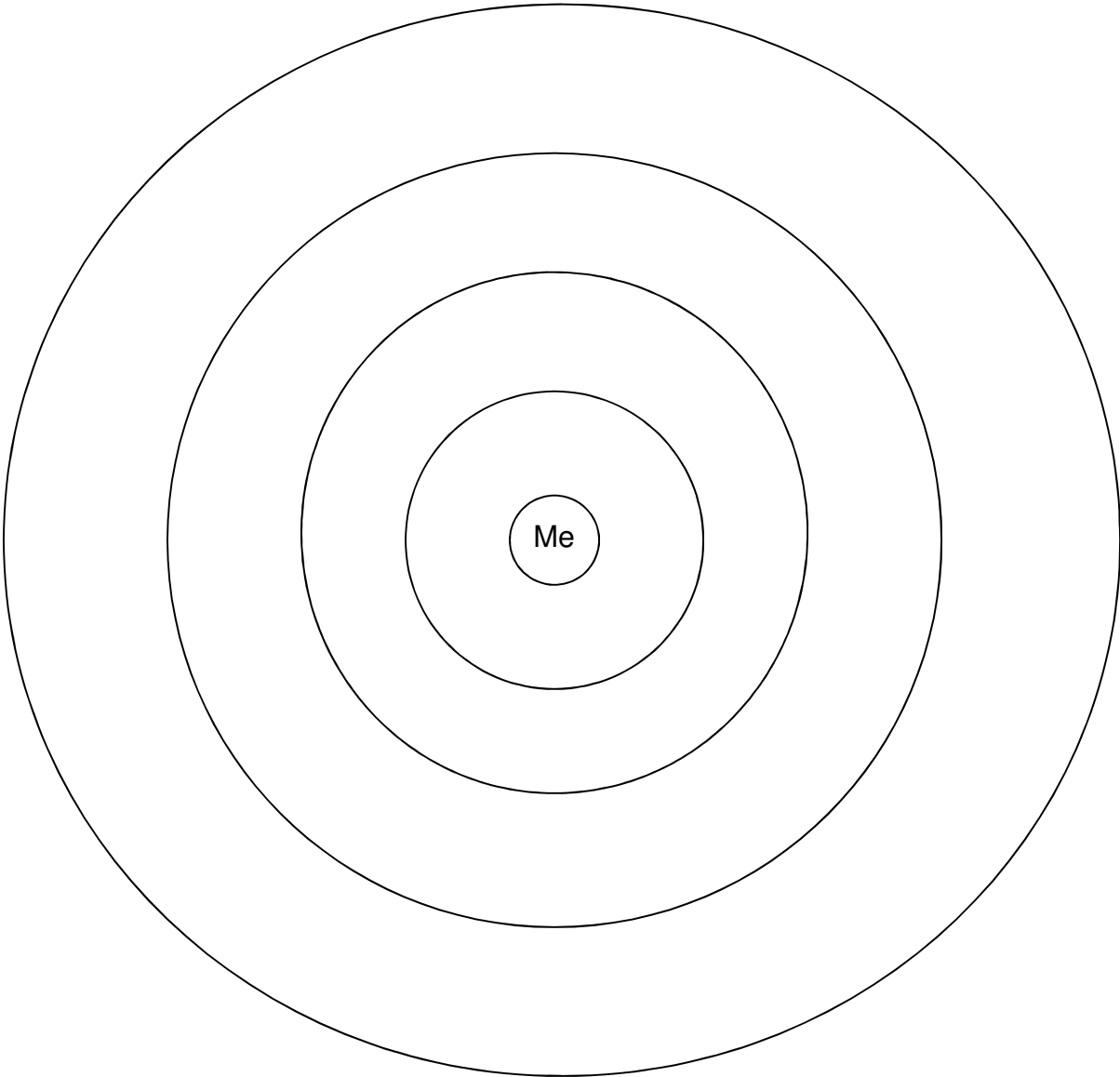
The research in Stern 2010 indicated that this research tool could be used to understand – and to transform – the relationship of pupils, students, teachers, and academics to research. Research could be seen as the most appropriate form of pedagogy in school, and not just a way of finding out about pedagogy. This also helps meet one of Jarvis's recommendation that, in addressing boys' spirituality, 'we must stop giving [boys] baby food and start offering them a substantial meal' (Jarvis 2009, p 5).

Circles of importance: me and the people closest to me; to what do I belong (when do I feel most included in school); what beliefs are important to me

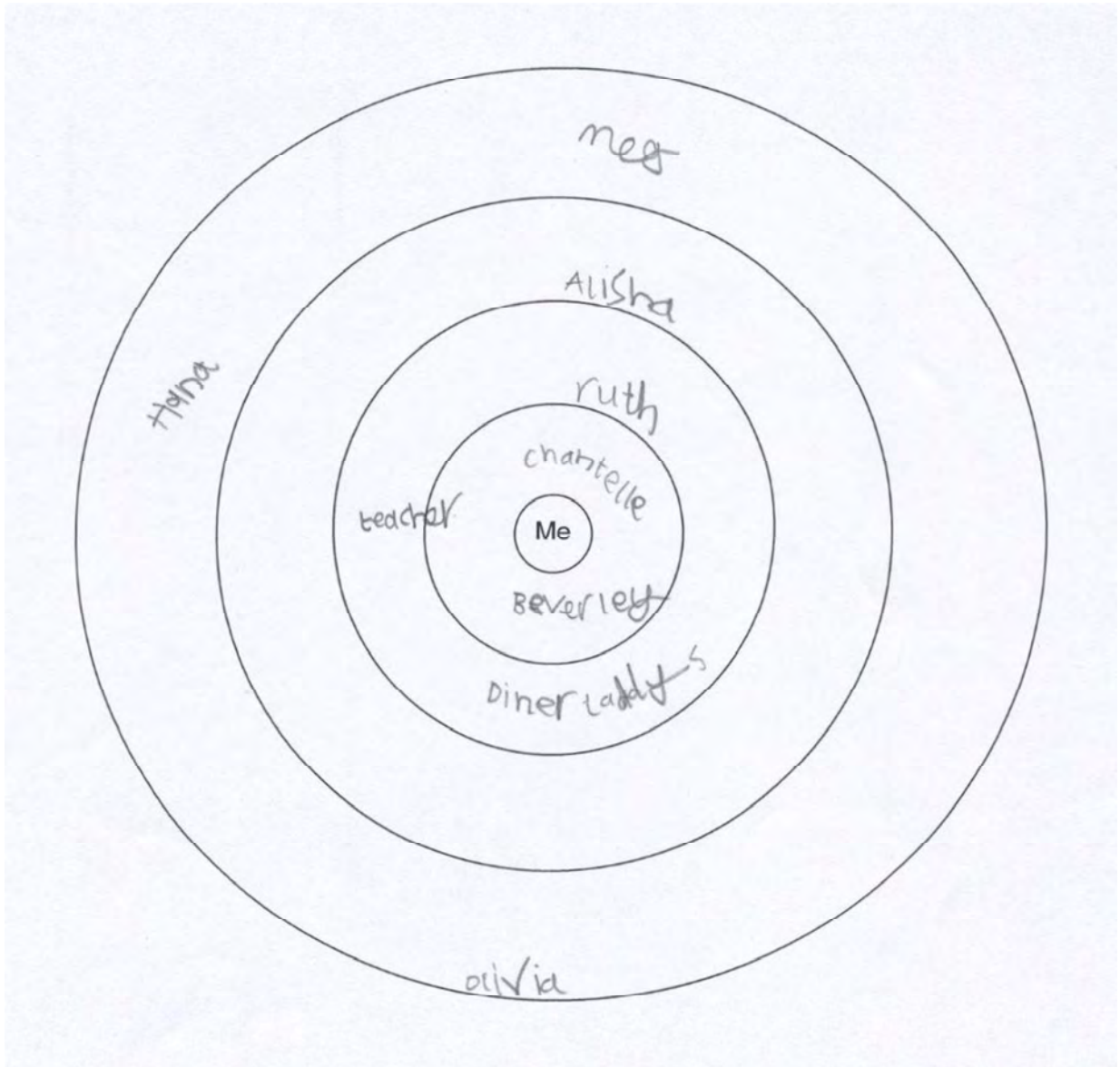
This activity involves filling in 'mattering' concentric circles, with respect to friendship (though not described as friendship), membership and thought. The choice of membership and thought as themes comes from Davie 1994 and others who have written about 'believing and belonging'. The choice of friendship comes from a concern with the nature of self and friendship, as described by Macmurray 1992 (see also Stern 2002). The concentric circles exercise has previously been used as a research tool in a number of studies such as Roseneil 2004 and Smith 2005, and is described in this form in Stern 2006, p 38-39, and in Stern 2007b. Who is closest to you in school? To what do you belong, in school? What beliefs and ideas are most important to you?

For each of these ways of presenting yourself, a 'circles of importance' activity can be completed. This activity involves using a set of five concentric circles, putting 'me' in the middle, and the things closest to the 'self' in the inner circle, the next most important

in the ring created by the next circle, and so on to the outer circles.

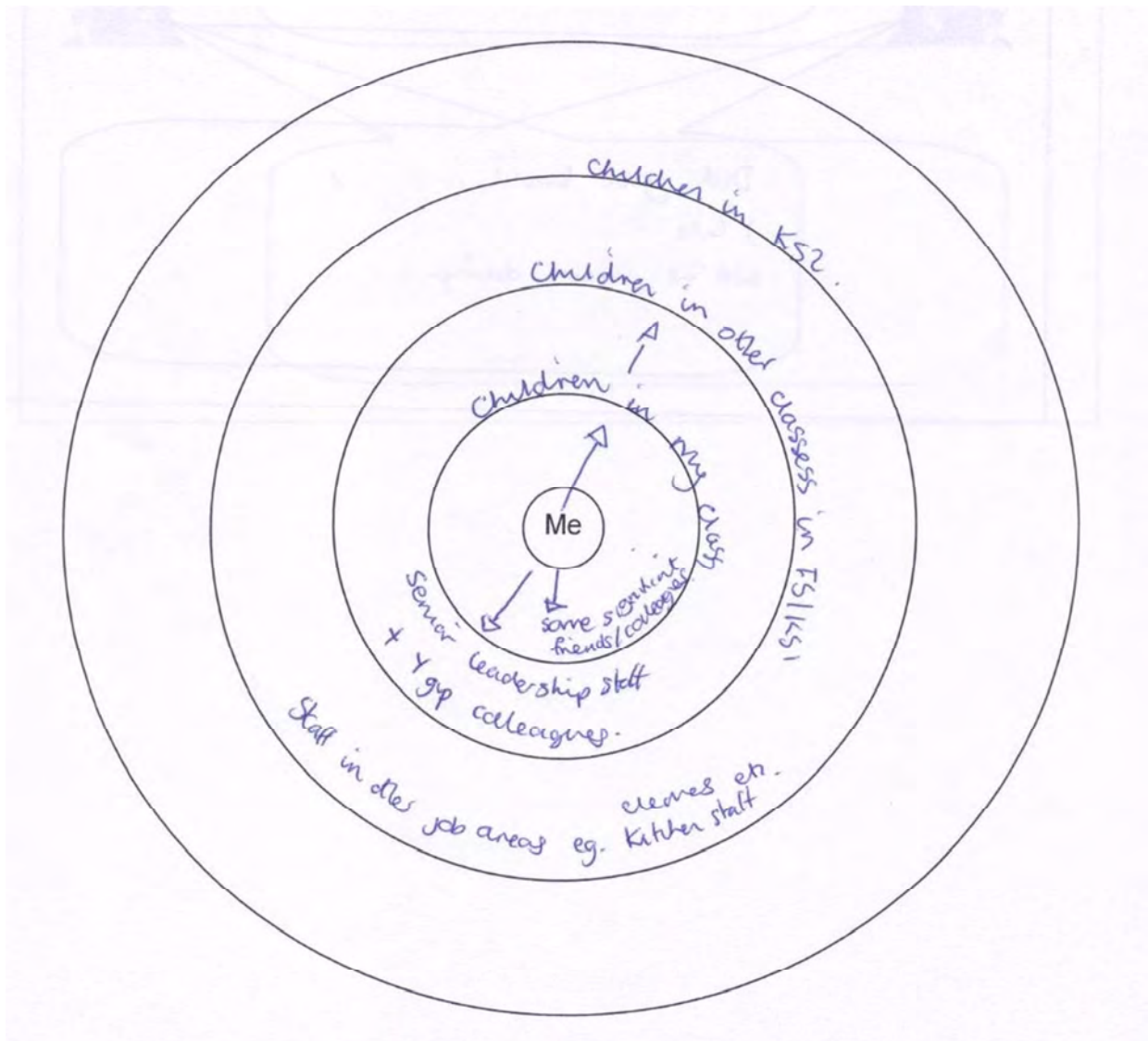


It is helpful seeing some completed examples. Here is the response of a seven year-old pupil:



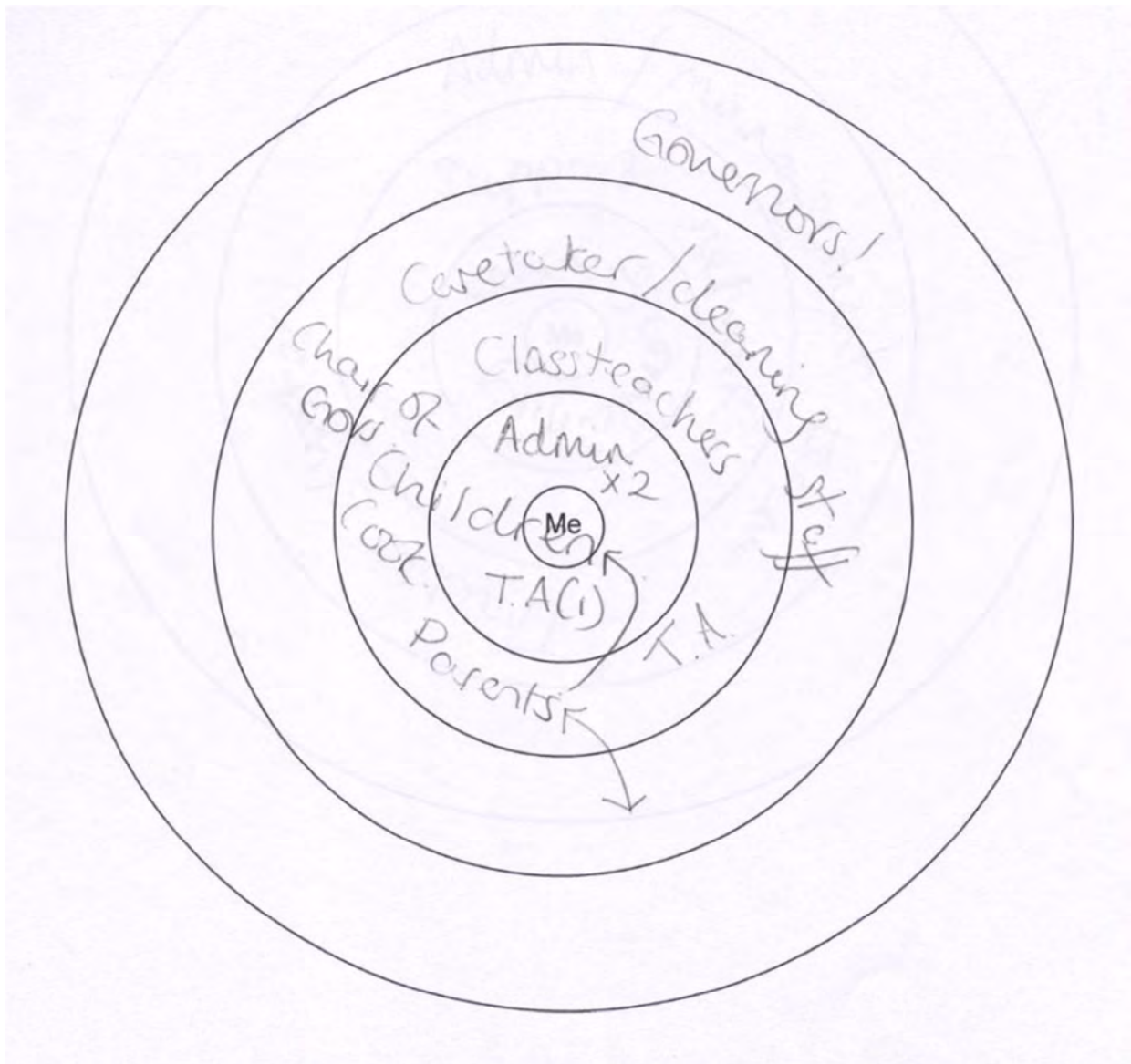
It can be seen that other children (Beverley, Chantelle, Ruth, Alisha, Meg, Hannah, and Olivia) are mixed in with 'teacher' and 'dinner laddys'. This is typical of the vast majority of pupils in nearly all the schools.

A similarly typical response from a teacher is this one:



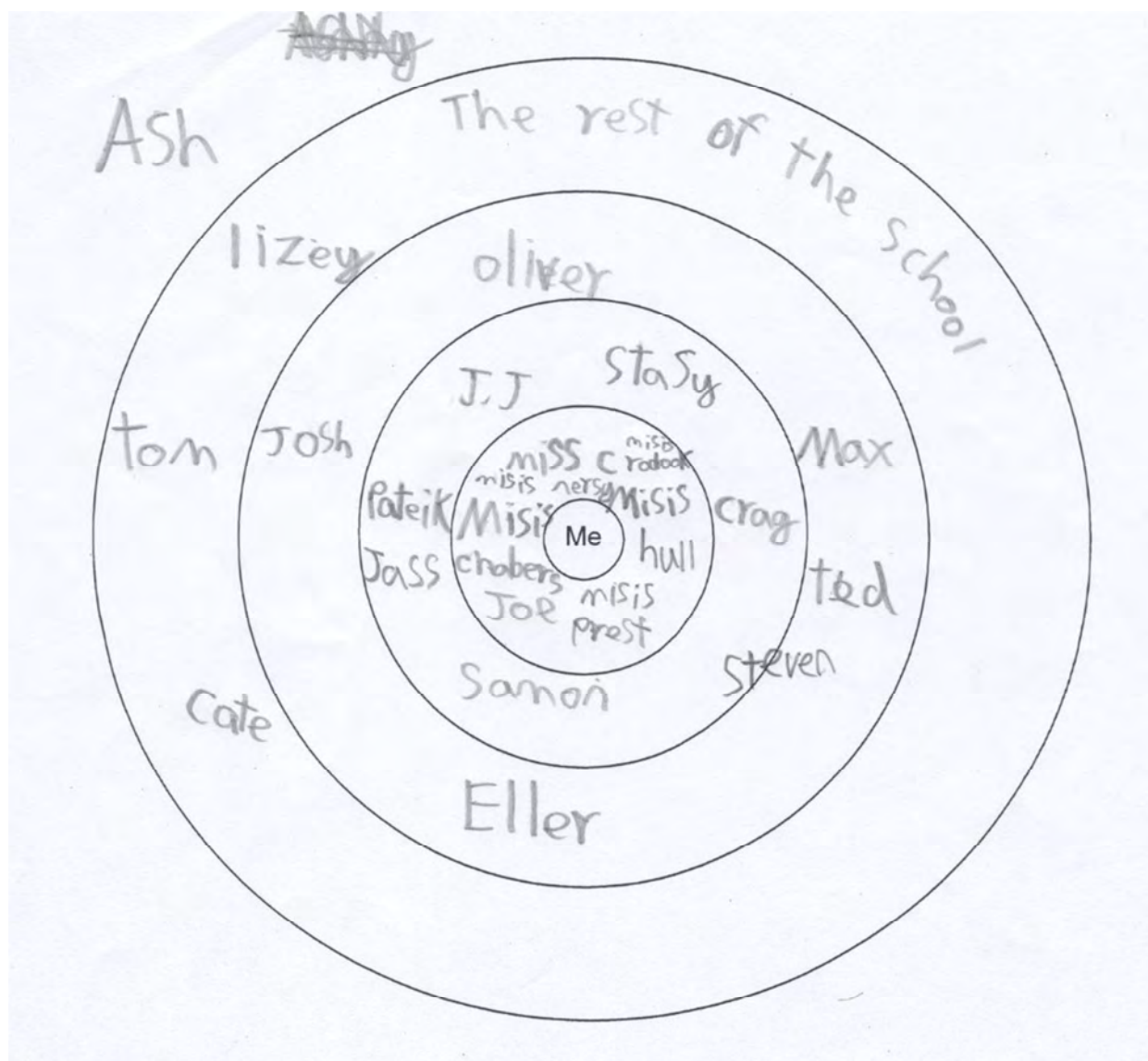
This teacher has 'some significant friends/colleagues' in the centre, with 'children in my class' and 'senior leadership staff + Y gp colleagues' together in the next circle, and so on. Teachers, like pupils, mix children and adults.

An example of a headteacher's response is this:



This again mixes 'children' (spread across the inner circles) with 'Admin x2', 'T.A (1)', 'Cook', 'Parents', 'Class teachers', and so on.

There is so much inter-generational mixing in the responses, that where a respondent does not mix the generations, this may indicate 'problems' of one kind or another. Here is a response from an 8 year-old boy:



The circle closest to the centre has seven names, six of which were of adults (indicated by the titles 'Miss' or 'Mises' [sic]), and only one of which was of a pupil. Other pupil names were in the intermediate and outer circles, but this preponderance of adult names suggested that Jonathan might have been separated from potential friends through the close attention of adults. Informal discussion with his class teacher confirmed that this pupil did indeed have a lot of attention from staff, in order to help meet his special educational needs. The encouragement of educational inclusion has meant pupils being more likely to be taught together in mainstream schools. Yet the very attempt to include can itself isolate the pupil from other pupils and potential friends of the same age. This seems to have happened to here. Although in one sense, the response might be described as an extreme example of inter-generational closeness, it is perhaps closer to being an example of the adult generation managing to block closeness to other children. It should be noted, however, that the child does have children in the outer circles, and himself includes 'the rest of the school' in the outermost circle. (The naming of 'Ash', outside the circles, probably indicates an enemy – as a small number of children explicitly excluded certain people in this way.)

Six questions

Based on the definition of the spirit of the school, variations on six linked questions can be asked of any aspect of a school or other learning community. These are, who do you bring in, how do you treat people as ends in themselves, in what ways are you magnanimous, how do you enable friendship to thrive, are you in dialogue, and how do you take part in creating meanings, things, and people? The six questions can be varied, and have been varied – by me – to investigate the use of ICT in schools ('when using ICT, who do you bring in?', and so on), to investigate written assessment feedback (perhaps the most interesting theme, of the work I have done in recent months), to investigate a particular subject or a theme or aspect of the school.

7. Have I Forgotten Boys?

This is a short section, as the short answer to the question is 'no'. A boys' school, and boys in all schools, can be understood using these various research tools. None of the schools in my first set of 'spirit of the school' research were boys' schools – although my doctoral research on schools as learning communities, completed several years earlier, had a boys' school as one of its three case-study schools. There were thirteen schools participating in the spirit of the school research: nine were in the UK (six primary schools, three secondary schools, five with Church of England foundations, one with a Roman Catholic foundation, and three with no religious foundation), and four were schools in Hong Kong in China (two primary schools, two secondary schools, two with Protestant church foundations, one with a Roman Catholic foundation, and one with no religious foundation). Altogether there were 144 participants: 16 pupils, 13 teachers and 4 principals were involved in Hong Kong, and 65 pupils, 37 teachers and 2 non-teaching staff, and seven headteachers (one of whom was head of one school and 'executive head' of another) were involved in the UK. The chance, now, is to see what the spirit is of boys' schools – or, rather, particular boys' schools. That is also the approach of Cleveland (2011), who refers to the need for considering boys themselves, rather than relying on explanatory theories that, at best, provide general accounts rather than specific guides the *these* boys in *these* schools. As Jarvis says, '[y]ou cannot be inclusive, unless you have something to include people in' (Jarvis 2009, p 9), and as Macmurray says of the Good Samaritan, a community is as it *does*. Whatever the rhetoric says, we can only know about a school by asking about it. The rhetoric comes second. At least, if it is lucky, it comes second. All too often, the rhetoric is running a quite different race.

8. What Next?

Keep the dialogue going

I would be delighted to work with you in the future, both in the UK and elsewhere in the world. My email address is j.stern@yorks.ac.uk, and other contact details are at the start of this paper. I travel widely around the UK, Europe, and at times North America (for example, New York in the first half of June 2012, and Seattle in September 2012).

Offer to complete the full research in individual schools

If you would like to take part in the Spirit of the School research, we can discuss this. If you would like a report based on research on your school, then we can discuss how that could be done. If you would like to ask some of the questions we have been through today, then you are welcome – on condition that you let me know how people responded. I really am curious!

Link with schools and universities globally

By linking with schools and universities, we can combine forces, especially in developing specific understandings of boys' schools.

And ... surprise me!

Surprise is good. As Buber says, 'a real lesson ... is ... neither a routine repetition nor a lesson whose findings the teacher knows before he starts, but one which develops in mutual surprises' (Buber 2002, p 241).

Now I will end my talking, and start listening for your questions, listening, as Rumi says, *like this*.

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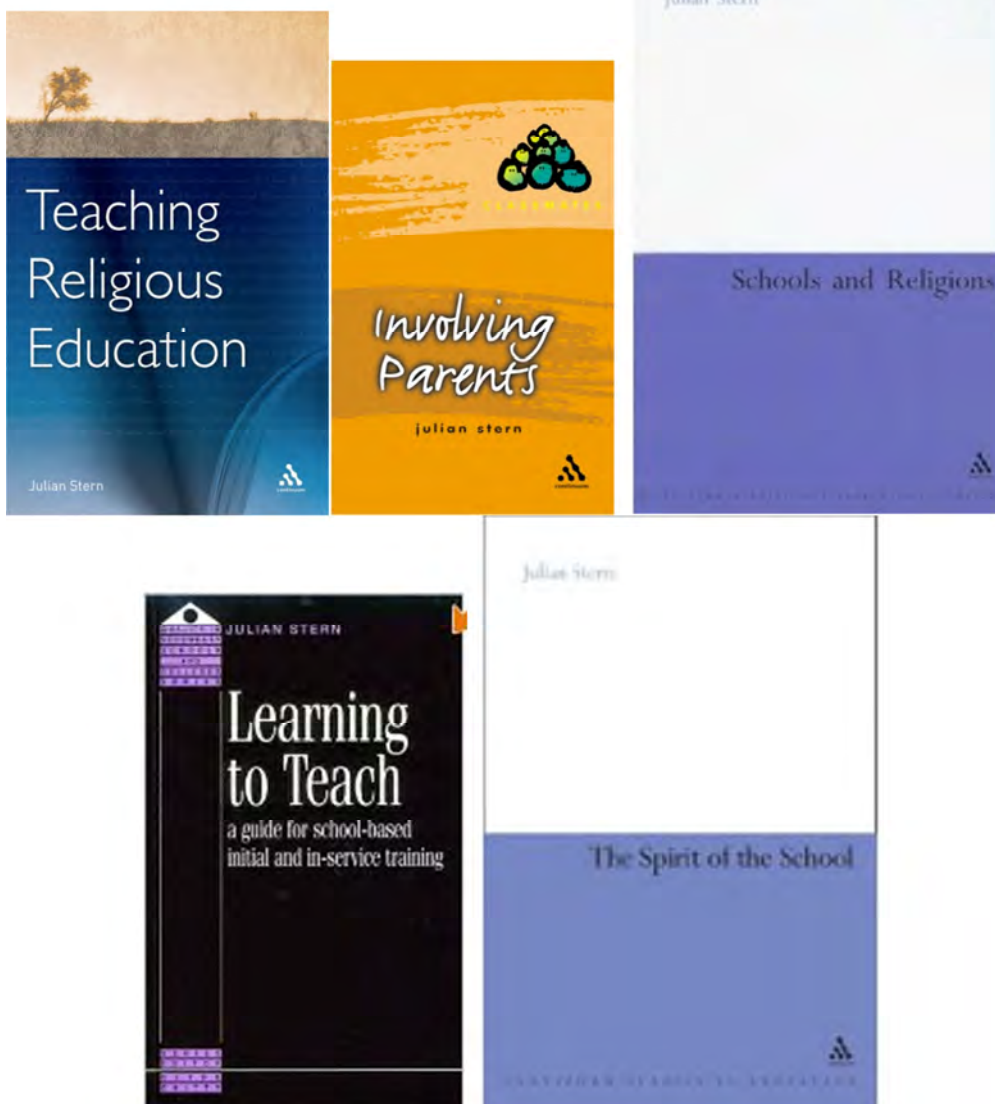
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