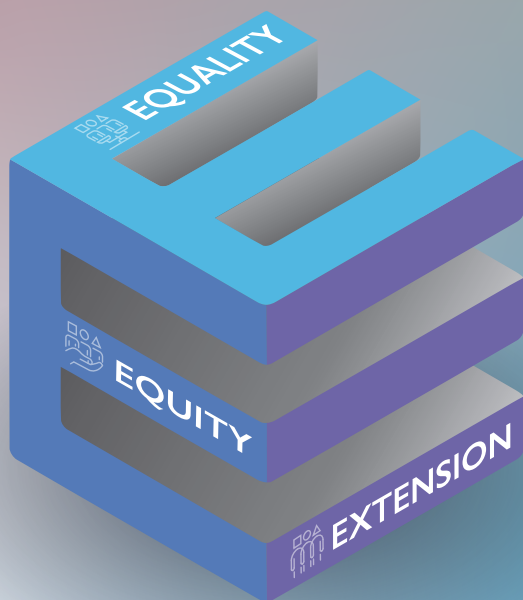


THE WORKING CLASSROOM

How to make school work
for working-class students



Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith

First published by

Crown House Publishing
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK
www.crownhouse.co.uk

and

Crown House Publishing Company LLC
PO Box 2223, Williston, VT 05495, USA
www.crownhousepublishing.com

© Matt Bromley, Andy Griffith and Crown House Publishing, 2023

The rights of Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith to be identified as the authors of this work have been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2023.

Images page 199 © Elena – stock.adobe.com

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under current legislation no part of this work may be photocopied, stored in a retrieval system, published, performed in public, adapted, broadcast, transmitted, recorded or reproduced in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the copyright owners. Enquiries should be addressed to Crown House Publishing.

Quotes from Danny Dorling, the Social Mobility Commission and the Institute for Fiscal Studies – included throughout the book – have been used with kind permission.

Pages 4–5: extracts from J. Monroe, Poverty Leaves Scars for Life – I'm Still Scared of Strangers at the Door and Bills Through the Letterbox, *The Guardian* (16 June 2022). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/16/poverty-scars-life-impact-cost-of-living-crisis-felt-for-years>. © Guardian News and Media, 2023.

Some material in this book is adapted from previous work by the authors, including:
Bromley, M. (2017). Every Teacher Is a Teacher of Literacy: Boosting Reading Skills, *SecEd* (28 June). Available at: <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/every-teacher-is-a-teacher-of-literacy-boosting-reading-skills/>.
Bromley, M. (2017). Every Teacher Is a Teacher of Literacy: Boosting Writing Skills, *SecEd* (5 July). Available at: <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/every-teacher-is-a-teacher-of-literacy-boosting-writing-skills>.
Bromley, M. (2018). Curriculum Design and Delivery: Part 1, *SecEd* (6 September). Available at: <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/curriculum-design-and-delivery-part-1>.
Bromley, M. (2019). *School and College Curriculum Design 1: Intent* (Hinckley: Spark Education Books).

Crown House Publishing has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Quotes from Government documents used in this publication have been approved under an Open Government Licence. Please visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue entry for this book is available
from the British Library.

Print ISBN 978-178583698-5
Mobi ISBN 978-178583702-9
ePub ISBN 978-178583703-6
ePDF ISBN 978-178583704-3

LCCN 2023939999

Printed and bound in the UK by
CPI, Antony Rowe, Chippenham, Wiltshire

FOREWORD

It has been more than a decade since I appeared on Channel 4's fly-on-the-wall documentary *Educating Essex*, but its legacy means I am privileged to be asked to appear on TV news reports and to review colleagues' books. Being a busy school principal means I usually say no to such offers, but when Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith asked me to contribute the foreword to this book, I read an early draft and simply couldn't refuse. It was too important. As you will soon discover for yourselves, Matt and Andy's backgrounds, which are not dissimilar to my own, have been a driving force in its conception. Their passion for improving the lives of young people springs from the page.

The class system in the UK is a trigger for much anger and frustration. I know that I am not unusual in being a teacher from a working-class background. But when I started teaching thirty years ago, I was convinced that I was going to be a lone voice – the maverick teacher who alone believed in what working-class students could achieve. My armour and white horse were both at the ready.

The experience of leading a school during COVID-19 demonstrated the massive class divide that still exists in our society – and the complete lack of insight of many of our political leaders who are blinded by their privilege. Politicians expected schools to move seamlessly to online learning almost overnight. Lord Adonis, for example, was vociferous in telling schools that hadn't moved online that they were failing their communities. The fact that over 600 students at my school, Passmore, didn't have a suitable device or access to Wi-Fi, and that many lived in accommodation where finding a quiet place to learn was difficult, didn't cross his mind. When I explained to my local MP that staff were creating packs with a month's worth of work, which we were posting home with all the resources required to complete it, along with a stamped addressed envelope, you could see the error 404 message flashing across his face.

Class privilege is so ingrained that we are somehow comforted by the fact that most of our MPs sound more like Jacob Rees-Mogg than Angela Rayner. However, our governments would be so much better if they were populated by people who saw their £86,000 annual salary as sufficient motivation to do a good job and not simply as a stepping stone to the higher paid corporate gig that follows.

When you read *The Working Classroom*, you may feel angry, perhaps even powerless. Wanting to make a difference isn't the same as making a difference. Despite millions of pounds and millions of hours being thrown at the attainment gap, it has barely narrowed.

Matt and Andy argue that our 'education system is rigged in favour of the privileged', so you might be forgiven for thinking there is no point in reading a book like this one if inequality is systemic. This is logical only if you ignore the huge societal changes that have taken place over the last three or four decades regarding same-sex marriage and gender identity. Society and its norms can change, but it requires a collective effort.

In September 2023, the National Centre for Social Research published its fortieth annual British Social Attitudes survey, exploring people's social, political and moral attitudes.¹ What was clear from the results was that the concept of social class has far from disappeared. In fact, the report's authors argue that the propensity to identify as middle class or working class is much the same now as forty years ago. What's more, people who identify as working class are more inclined than ever to accept the view that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to move between classes.

The inequality of opportunity that is inherent in our class system remains a driving force for my work as a teacher. The research highlighted by Matt and Andy in this book shows that 50% of people would be defined as working class, so until half of our MPs and business leaders come from working-class backgrounds, there is much work to be done.

The Working Classroom is in three parts. Part I is full of evidence that classism is real, which left me feeling incredibly frustrated. If you find it hard to read too, be reassured that the remainder of the text motivated and reinvigorated me to keep doing what I can. As Matt and Andy explain, their advice is focused on the aspects of our world that we do have influence and control over as educators.

If you are convinced that classism remains an issue in our society and in our schools, then you will also be convinced that we must continue to do all we can to lessen the damage it causes. This book is a good place to start. Take the ideas in it today and start making a real difference tomorrow.

Vic Goddard
Principal, Passmores Academy

1 See <https://natcen.ac.uk/british-social-attitudes>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MATT

The book you are reading carries two names on its cover: those of the authors. But you would not be holding this text were it not for the countless other people who have helped to inspire us and shape our thinking, and who have supported us along the way, including by providing a soft landing for my head as it hurtled towards the wall in frustration! This list is by no means exhaustive, but I would like to think that all the people in my life – whether in a personal or professional capacity – already know what they mean to me and know that I am grateful for all they do.

Firstly, I would like to thank my co-author, Andy Griffith, without whom this book would not exist. We met several years ago in South London at the end of a long day's training and, over a pint (which Andy still reminds me I owe him), discovered a shared history and a shared passion. It was Andy who approached me to write a book with him and, being a control freak, I was not without reservations. But his generosity throughout the process – not to mention his forbearance with my ruthless editing of his words – have made the journey both enjoyable and enlightening. Thanks too to the team at Crown House Publishing – David, Karen, Beverley, Emma and Tom, to name but a few – for their endless encouragement and excellent editing.

Secondly, I would like to thank all the people whose ideas have influenced my thinking in this book – I cite them throughout the text so won't do so again here. We have sought to wear our learning lightly but be in no doubt that we have read a lot of books, spoken to countless colleagues and bent the ear of many a big thinker! I would also like to thank all the people I work with in schools and colleges up and down the land every week. They inspire me and, more importantly, humour me when I test new ideas and strategies in their institutions. You are superheroes, every one.

Finally, though in truth my first *and* final thought, my family. I owe it all to my mum and dad. As you will discover in these pages, my family were not materially rich, but I was raised in a home rich in what really matters: love. Talking of love, I could not do what I do without the daily love and support of my soulmate, Kimberley, and our children, Matilda, Amelia and Harriet. As Sophocles said, 'One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life: that word is love.'

ANDY

I'd like to acknowledge and thank the following people who have supported me with ideas, resources and suggestions:

Mark Ayres, Chris Bayes, Craig Billington, Brian Bradley, Carel Buxton, David Buxton, Paul Dearing, Alex Dunedin, Dr Maureen Farrell, Anna Griffith, Clair Griffith, Joe Griffith, Victoria Hewitt, Duncan Jacques, Laura Johnson, Sarah Lamb, Claire Lamontagne, Francis Lawell, Dr Lucy Maynard, Tony McGuinness, Dr Sandra Mornington-Abrathat, Chris Nolan, Christina Owen, Paul Quinn, Tim Roe, Andy Ryan, Richard Seymour, Dr Peter Shukie, Julian Stevens, Dr Kaz Stuart, Ant Sutcliffe, Dan Sutcliffe, Jayne Sweeney, Joe Toko, Gina Tonic, Gaynor Walker, Professor John West-Burnham, David Williams, Hannah Williams and Matt Wood.

Matt, you've been brilliant to work with and I appreciate all of your support.

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
Why should you read this book?	1
Why have we written this book?	2
Matt's story	3
Andy's story	9
Other stories	13
How have we written this book?	14
Equality, equity and extension	15
1. Equality through the core curriculum and extra-curricular activities	16
2. Equity through curriculum adaptations and interventions	16
3. Extension through curriculum extras and enhancements	17
Icons used throughout the book	17
Part I: Why isn't secondary school working for working-class students?	19
Chapter 1. Who are the working class and why do they underachieve?	21
Who are the working class?	21
Why isn't secondary school working?	24
What are the causes of working-class inequality?	28
Reflective questions	29
Why are the working class undervalued?	29
What is classism?	31
Reflective questions	32
Where is the evidence of classism in education?	33
Why is it in all our best interests to challenge classism?	35
Chapter 2. How is the 'game' rigged?	37
Some context	38
Three reasons why the classroom doesn't work for working-class students	40
Part II: What can we do to make secondary school work better for working-class students?	47
Chapter 3. What can we do about classism?	49
Secret knowledge	50
Four knowledge domains	51
Why these knowledge domains, and why only four?	55

Equality, equity and extension	57
Chapter 4. Equality through the core curriculum	59
A six-step process of curriculum design	60
Building disciplinary knowledge	64
Reflective questions	75
Further questions	75
Building personal knowledge	76
Other stories: Richard	80
Reflective questions	81
Further questions	81
Building social knowledge	82
Reflective questions	89
Further questions	89
Building cultural knowledge	90
Reflective questions	94
Further questions	94
Chapter 5. Equality through extra-curricular activities	95
The benefits	98
The challenges	99
The process – plan, do, review	102
Reflective questions	103
Other stories: Havelock Academy	104
Sparking	106
Chapter 6. Equity through adaptive teaching approaches and curriculum interventions	111
Adaptive teaching approaches: do more for those who start with less	112
Other stories: John	113
Reflective questions	118
Curriculum intervention strategies	119
Other stories: Georgia	127
Reflective questions	128
Planning template: Curriculum interventions	129
The alternative curriculum	130
Other stories: Ellie	132
Other stories: James	133
Planning template: Alternative curriculum	135
Chapter 7. Extension through curriculum enhancements	137
Why do we need curriculum enhancements?	138
Planning curriculum enhancements	138

An example enhancement: The Malit Scholars' Programme	139
Curriculum enhancement design considerations	140
Clarity on the desired KASH destination	141
Lessons from KASH	142
Reflective questions	146
Curriculum enhancement models	146
Reflective questions	151
The launch	151
Reflective questions	152
Learning from evaluation	152
Other stories: Jamie	153
Reflective questions	154
Planning template: Curriculum enhancements	155
Chapter 8. How can we engage parents and carers as partners in the process?	157
Other stories	158
Jane (parent of a Year 11 student)	158
Ged (parent of a Year 10 student)	158
Barbara (parent of a Year 9 student)	158
Why parental engagement matters	159
Four starting principles for better parental engagement	160
What better parental engagement looks like in practice	161
Engaging hard-to-reach parents	166
Other stories: Peter	167
Reflective questions	168
Part III: Seven lessons to teach working-class students	169
Lesson 1. What is classism?	173
Why teach about class and classism?	173
What is the class dimension to this topic?	174
How does this lesson work?	174
To start the lesson	175
Resources	177
Class statistics quiz and discussion	179
Finally	181
Final thoughts	181
Suggested further reading for this lesson	181
Lesson 2. Class shaming	183
Why teach about class shaming?	183
What is the class dimension to this topic?	183
How does this lesson work?	185

To start the lesson	185
Finally	194
Final thoughts	194
Suggested further reading for this lesson	195
Lesson 3. The power of story	197
Why teach about story?	197
What is the class dimension to this topic?	198
How does this lesson work?	198
To start the lesson	199
Finally	203
Final thoughts	204
Suggested further reading for this lesson	204
Lesson 4. Motivation	205
Why teach about motivation?	205
What is the class dimension to this topic?	205
How does this lesson work?	206
To start the lesson	207
Finally	214
Final thoughts	214
Suggested further reading for this lesson	215
Lesson 5. Emotional regulation	217
Why teach about emotional regulation?	217
What is the class dimension to this topic?	217
How does this lesson work?	218
To start the lesson	218
Finally	226
Final thoughts	227
Suggested further reading for this lesson	227
Lesson 6. Memory and revision	229
Why teach about memory and revision?	229
What is the class dimension to this topic?	229
How does this lesson work?	230
To start the lesson	230
Finally	238
Final thoughts	239
Suggested further reading for this chapter	239
Lesson 7. Time management	241
Why teach about time management?	241
What is the class dimension to this topic?	241
How does this lesson work?	242

CONTENTS

To start the lesson	242
Finally	250
Final thoughts	250
Suggested further reading for this lesson	250
Conclusion	253
<i>References</i>	257

INTRODUCTION

WHY SHOULD YOU READ THIS BOOK?

To answer this question, let's pose another: why do you work in education? And don't say it is for the money. Sure, we all need to earn a crust to cover the mortgage and feed the children, but let's be honest: there are easier ways of paying the bills than working in a school. So, why don't you do one of those easier things? Why did you decide to go into teaching? What is your purpose? Your *raison d'être*?

If, like us, you decided to enter the teaching profession – or work in another role in the education sector – to 'make a difference', then what difference did you hope to make, and why was that important to you? More pointedly, perhaps, do you feel you *have* made a difference?

We will share our personal stories with you shortly and explain our *raisons d'être*, but, for now, let's assume that all of us went into teaching to help change lives. For some, that might have been by equipping students with a love of your subject as well as good qualification outcomes. For others, it might have been to help the least fortunate in society – the most disadvantaged and vulnerable – to have a fair chance and to ensure that a child's birth doesn't become their destiny.

In whatever way you intended to change lives, has it worked? Do you feel a sense of achievement? There can be no greater feeling, professionally speaking, than knowing you have helped a young person to fulfil their potential and leave school more able to compete and succeed in life than when they started school.

We have experienced this feeling several times in our careers, and it is what continues to drive us now. We both come from working-class backgrounds and were economically disadvantaged as children. That is why our purpose in writing this book has a very personal resonance. It is also why, predominantly, we support schools in deprived areas and help disadvantaged students.

But we also feel certain that we could have done more to help working-class students like us to succeed in school and then in life. Furthermore, we feel that more action is needed now than was the case when we were at school because disadvantage and the causes of disadvantage have got much worse since 'our day'. Far from 'levelling up', successive UK governments since 2010 have made the gaps between rich and poor,

privileged and disadvantaged, wider and therefore social mobility more difficult.

Our intention, then, is to help you make more of a difference more of the time. To achieve this, we will draw on the research evidence, although we don't want the text to be a heavy read. Rather, we want it to be practical and easy to dip into when help and advice are needed most. We will also draw on our own experiences of working in and supporting schools in challenging circumstances, including working directly with working-class students and their parents.

Our main argument is this: working-class students are disadvantaged by the education system, not by accident but by design. As such, those of us who work in the education sector must do something – and urgently – to address the situation. We simply cannot stand by and let the class and wealth divide continue to grow. We cannot continue to live in a society and work in schools where wealth and social status, rather than ability and effort, dictate educational attainment and success in later life. It is immoral and indefensible. It angers us *and* inspires us to do more.

We need to be deliberate in how we design our core curriculum, how we plan and target curriculum interventions, how we design curriculum enhancements, and how we train staff and interact with parents and other stakeholders.

We also argue that, while classism exists in society at large, not just in schools, the UK education system is rigged to fail a third of students. We don't think our society can afford for this to continue; it is a waste of resources, and it perpetuates poverty and social exclusion.

While all of this is somewhat depressing, we firmly believe that education can be a powerful tool for change and that schools can help to create a more equitable society. We can and must do something.

The Working Classroom explores some practical ways that schools can mitigate some of the effects of classism and help working-class students to get a better start in life, so that ability and effort, not where you are born and how much money you inherit, dictate success in school and in later life.

WHY HAVE WE WRITTEN THIS BOOK?

We both have very personal reasons for wanting to write this book. Our stories are what drive us, and our histories are what brought us together with a common purpose, not just to say something but to do something.

We would like to start by sharing those stories with you, not as some self-indulgent act of naval gazing, but as a way to explain why the subject matters so much to us, and as a means of exploring some of the issues we intend to address. We discuss the power of story in Lesson 3, so it seems apt to start by telling our own.



MATT'S STORY

I was born and brought up in a depressed northern town in the shadow of dark satanic mills and disappointment. My family and I lived in a terraced house in a row which stuck out from the valley side like needles on a hedgehog's back. And life was just as spiky.

My childhood, although happy, was one of hand-me-downs and making do. And my primary school – in the days before 'serious weaknesses' and 'special measures' had become the de facto vocabulary of educational failure – was what we used to call 'shit'.

When I wasn't pretending to paint while surreptitiously sneaking a peak at the page 3 model on the newsprint laid out to protect the tables, I sat cross-legged on a threadbare carpet while the teacher strummed his guitar and sang 1960s songs. (And yes, dear reader, he closed his eyes when he hit the chorus.)

As a result, when I transferred schools aged 9, I was unable to construct a sentence. It was only thanks to a determined and dedicated Year 5 teacher who inspired a love of reading that I caught up with my peers.

This story, like all good stories, I suppose, was repeated years later when my Year 9 teacher – an inspirational writer and poet who had lived in Peru and taught me how to bet on horses – recognised and nurtured my talent for writing.

This tale was told once more when my A level English literature teacher – a fierce and frightening man, hump-backed like Richard III, but one of extraordinary talent who ignited my love of Shakespeare – set me on a path to university.

You know how the story goes: I was the first in my family to get to university and lucky enough to be awarded a full grant at a time when the state recognised its duty to educate all, not just those born to privilege. But my grant didn't go far, barely covering course fees and accommodation, so I worked round the clock – stuffing envelopes for a bank and being sworn

at on a complaints line – to pay for books and stationery and food and drink. Mainly drink.

On the last day of my first year, I was badly injured playing football and had my right foot set in plaster. I was instructed by A&E to keep my leg elevated and rest for three weeks. Had I followed these instructions, I would be able to walk without pain today, nearly thirty years later. But I had no option: I simply had to work if I was going to afford to return to my studies. Consequently, I walked on crutches to and from the bus stop every day that summer. I took as much overtime as I could get, working seven days a week. And I have lived with the consequences every day since; my foot never healed and it causes constant pain, which is slowly getting worse as arthritis sets in.

POVERTY REMOVES AGENCY

You see, poverty forces people to make tough choices. Actually, that isn't true: poverty removes choice; it denies people agency and opportunity.

Writing in *The Guardian* in June 2022, the food writer and poverty campaigner, Jack Monroe, powerfully describes the consequences of poverty:

Poverty is exhausting. It requires time, effort, energy, organisation, impetus, an internal calculator, and steely mental fortitude. And should it not kill you, in the end, from starvation or cold or mental ill health, should you scabble somehow to the sunlit uplands of 'just about managing', I'm sorry to tell you that although your bank balance may be in the black one day, so too will your head.¹

Monroe goes on to explain how 'years of therapy has alleviated some of [the worst effects of living in poverty, such as panic attacks], some of the time, but [their] physical and mental health will probably never make a full recovery'.

Monroe now suffers from 'complex post-traumatic stress disorder, arthritis exacerbated by living in cold homes, respiratory difficulties from the damp, complex trauma, an array of mental health issues, a hoarding problem, and a slow burning addiction brought to an almost fatal head

1 J. Monroe, Poverty Leaves Scars for Life – I'm Still Scared of Strangers at the Door and Bills Through the Letterbox, *The Guardian* (16 June 2022). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/16/poverty-scars-life-impact-cost-of-living-crisis-felt-for-years>.

last year'. However, they argue that their story is by no means unique or exceptional because 'short-term exposure to and experience of poverty – whether fuel poverty, food poverty, period poverty, or the root cause of all of them, the insufficient resources with which to meet your most fundamental human needs – has long-term and disproportionate effects for years to come'.

Childhood exposure to poverty falls under the umbrella of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which, according to Monroe, are 'on a par with domestic abuse, childhood sexual assault, [the] loss of a parent, parental incarceration, violence and neglect' and increase the risk of trauma later in life, both mentally and physically.

In fact, exposure to ACEs leads to less favourable health outcomes, a negative impact on general well-being, increased likelihood of risky or criminal behaviours, poor educational and academic outcomes and financial difficulties. We know that children who experience food insecurity, even short term, are more likely to fall ill and need hospital admission and have a slower recovery rate.

ACCESS DENIED

Poverty led to me making tough choices that I live with even now. But I know I was lucky; as well as state-funded support that enabled me to go to university, I had good teachers and loving, supportive parents who provided me with a safe and happy home. But it could easily have been so different. As I mentioned, I was the first in my family to go to university – and that was not uncommon in the mid-1990s because access to higher education had begun to widen. I was, as I say, lucky.

Danny Dorling, professor of human geography at the University of Sheffield, says the fact that the majority of additional places at universities were taken up by children living in the poorer half of British neighbourhoods 'may well be seen ... as the greatest positive social achievement of the 1997–2010 government' and that it was achieved 'not at the expense of upper- and middle-class children [but because] the education system as a whole expanded [and there were] massive increases in funding per child in state secondary schools'.²

Dorling says the lessons of the pre-2010 era are clear: 'Spend more per child and they will gain better GCSE results, they will then go on to attend university in greater numbers.' There are two other factors: firstly, the introduction of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) 'which

2 D. Dorling, *Fair Play: A Daniel Dorling Reader on Social Justice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2012), p. 180.

enabled many young people from poorer areas to be able to afford to stay on at school' and, secondly, government funding of university places, which is 'the ultimate determinant of what young people's chances are'.³

Sadly, these improvements in access to higher education for working-class children have not been sustained. Writing in 2012, Dorling said progress would likely be 'reversed following the Comprehensive Spending Review of October 2010'. He was right: EMA was scrapped in 2010 and the spending review cut up to 75% of government funding in higher education. Even before these cuts – made under the auspices of 'austerity' – 'access to good schools, universities and jobs remained far more socially determined by class and place of birth in Britain, than in almost any other affluent nation'.⁴

THE FEAR OF BEING DIFFERENT

When I went to university, for the first time in my life, I found myself living and socialising with people from vastly different social circles. And – despite the fact that my fellow freshers' higher social status, wealth and expensive education had led them to the same university and that I went on to gain a better degree than many of them – they looked down on and ridiculed my hometown, my accent, and my lack of what we might now call 'cultural capital'. They travelled to lectures in cars bought for them by their parents; I walked or cycled on a second-hand bike I had repaired and repainted. They never had to worry about where their next meal was coming from and never had to say no to a night out or stay in halls while those around them partied, because to go out would have meant being unable to afford the books that were essential reading for their courses.

When I left university, having worked on the student newspaper as a sports and features writer – a post I had to fight hard to get because I didn't have the right school tie – I pursued my chosen career in journalism on my hometown paper. Or, rather, I tried to. Internships were awarded to those whose father knew the editor or proprietor. Although, through sheer tenacity and – more crucially – offering my services for free, I was able to get freelance gigs, there was no hope of a salaried job without a postgraduate qualification in journalism – a requirement of joining the National Union of Journalists.

With student debts from my undergraduate course and no possibility of working for free forever, I had no choice but to find paid alternative employment. For months, I tried to balance the two: working nine to five

3 Dorling, *Fair Play*, p. 180.

4 Dorling, *Fair Play*, p. 72.

for a telecoms company and then walking to the newsroom to work evenings for free. But, eventually, paid work had to take precedence and the prospect of overtime and paying off my debts won the day. And, thus, my dreams of a career in journalism slowly died. Not because I lacked the talent, but because I didn't have the money and 'secret knowledge' needed to get a foot in the door.

Telecoms wasn't so class driven, thankfully, and I was lucky to get in at the time that mobile phones were becoming mainstream. I quickly proved my worth and climbed the corporate ladder to senior management. The pay was good, as was the lifestyle; I was in my mid-twenties, working hard and playing harder. All seemed right with the world. But it wasn't. Cue existential crisis.

One day, at the dawn of the millennium, I woke up and realised I needed a greater purpose in life. So, it was a brand-new millennium and a new-brand me – I was going to be a teacher and help build the future. Sadly, my epiphany was short-lived. Soon after starting my self-funded PGCE, my dreams of 'O Captain! My Captain!' fell apart at the seams.

It didn't help that I went from earning a decent salary to paying for the privilege of teaching. I had saved enough money in the years prior to scrape through the course, but it was tough living like a student again. Nor did it help that I was several years older than most of my fellow trainees. But the worst of it was my first school placement, and therefore my first foray into the classroom. To be fair, I was warned. My course tutor told me the university had considered taking the school off its books because it was in special measures and they'd had complaints, but because I was older and had leadership experience, they thought I would be able to cope.

The school had been in special measures for a while by the time I arrived, and staff turnover was high. As a result, many post-16 classes were cancelled and other classes were combined, with students often left to watch television in the canteen. Hence, at the end of my first week, my school-based mentor and head of department (who also quit before the end of my placement), said she thought I was ready to go solo rather than waste my time observing her or team-teaching with more seasoned colleagues. And so I found myself, two weeks into my 'training' and after just one week in a school, teaching a full timetable without any help or support.

Student behaviour was 'challenging'. The canteen was like a scene from *Fight Club*. Staff cars were routinely vandalised, and the fire alarm sounded fifteen times a day – not because some cheeky young scamp had smashed the glass to get out of class but because some cheeky young arsonist had set fire to the building. You might say my early teaching experience was a baptism of fire.

It didn't help my mood when winter set in and the nights grew long and dark. Snow fell early and deep that year, meaning weeks of indoor play. All of which made me think of quitting teaching every single day. Pathetic fallacy or just pathetic, I am still not sure.

I remember struggling out of bed at the call of my bedside alarm feeling sick to my stomach, and the lonely commutes home, feeling lost and alone, out of my depth, utterly exhausted. Although I told no one, I deeply regretted my risky change of career and yearned for a return to my cushy corner office and generous expenses account. But I was scared to admit to anyone else that I had got it wrong. And I was still driven by a desire to do what my teachers had done for me: to give disadvantaged students a fair start in life, to reverse society's ills, to mitigate – albeit in some small way – the consequences of poverty and of living in an unequal, unfair society that privileges the privileged and rewards wealth with wealth.

Against all odds, I persevered and survived to the end of my placement and then to the end of my course. My university tutor wrote a glowing report based not, I suspect, on my teaching ability but on the simple fact that I was not dead. The school even offered me a job. Unsurprisingly, I turned them down.

Having passed my initial teacher training year, I got a job in a school in a deprived area of a northern town, and I stayed there for eight happy years, rising from newly qualified teacher to assistant head teacher. I saw in those 'sink estate kids' (not my phrase but one used liberally and insultingly to describe the students I taught) an earlier me reflected back; I saw students set on a path to failure in need of a teacher who could turn disadvantage into advantage. I had found my vocation – and I have never looked back.

I have never considered leaving the profession. Yes, I have changed course – I have moved from teaching to leadership and from leadership to consultancy – but each move I made has been an attempt to do more for disadvantaged children, to increase the size of my classroom and thus the impact of my actions.

This commitment has driven me for over two decades, as a teacher, middle leader, senior leader, head teacher, multi-academy trust director and now school improvement advisor. And this commitment has brought me here to write *The Working Classroom*. I have authored several other books of which I am proud but, to quote the movies, this time it's personal.

And I have found a like-minded co-author in Andy Griffith. To prove it, here is his story.

OFFERS PRACTICAL STRATEGIES AND TOOLS TO HELP SECONDARY SCHOOLS ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF WORKING-CLASS STUDENTS

Working-class students are disadvantaged by a flawed education system in which wealth and social status, rather than ability and effort, dictate educational attainment and success in later life.

Schools do amazing work to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds, but this book will enable them to do more. Disadvantage comes in many forms, but cultural poverty, where some students have relative knowledge gaps compared with their more affluent peers, can be addressed successfully by schools. *The Working Classroom* details practical ways in which schools can close these knowledge gaps and, in so doing, create a socially just education system – one that builds on the rich heritage of the working class, rather than seeing their background as a weakness. It offers practical ways for students and families to build on the best of working-class culture, whilst also empowering teachers, students and parents to change the system.

SUITABLE FOR BOTH TEACHERS AND LEADERS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL OR SIXTH FORM COLLEGE SETTING WHO SEEK TO SUPPORT SOCIAL CHANGE IN EDUCATION

It is inspiring to read Matt Bromley's and Andy Griffith's contemporary, compelling narrative about changing children's lives.

Roy Blatchford, Chair of ASCL's The Forgotten Third and author of *The A – Z of Great Classrooms*

Read the book. Then be angry. Then, well, then, let's change the world.

Ant Sutcliffe, Associate Director, Higher Horizons, Keele University

Bromley and Griffith present bold and innovative plans that recognise and address the long neglected need for affirmative action if we are to tackle the extensive class discrimination in education.

Professor Diane Reay, University of Cambridge

A must for every staffroom and teachers who really care.

Mick Waters, educationalist and author

Essential reading for anyone concerned about the disadvantage gap in schools.

Mary Myatt, education writer, speaker and curator of Myatt & Co

A thought-provoking and challenging read.

Duncan Jacques CBE, CEO, Exceed Academies Trust

This book is well researched, comprehensive, readable and well-timed. A must-read!

Rachel Macfarlane, Lead Adviser for Underserved Learners, HFL Education and author

Matt Bromley is an education writer and advisor with over twenty years' experience in teaching and leadership including as a secondary school headteacher, FE college vice principal, and multi-academy trust director. Matt is a journalist, public speaker, ITT lecturer, and school improvement advisor. He also remains a practising teacher, working in secondary, FE and HE settings. Matt writes for various magazines, is the author of numerous best-selling books on education, and co-hosts the award-winning SecEd podcast. [@mj_bromley](#)

Andy Griffith has a proven track record for creating high impact training courses and interventions with students, teachers and leaders. His major career motivation is for education to be an engine for social justice. In the past seven years, alongside his school development work, Andy has developed programmes for students that have had a positive impact on their academic results as well as building their cultural capital. [@Oteaching](#)

theworkingclassroom.co.uk

 www.crownhouse.co.uk

ISBN-13: 978-178583698-5



9 781785 836985

Education Educational strategies & policy
Organization & management of education