Voices from the Front Line
Perspectives of Headteachers, teachers and students

Central to the work of the Centre and our partners is the belief that those who teach and learn in schools have remarkable insights and experiences to share, which can inform and enrich educational policy and practices. These three presentations offer the essence of students' voices, and those of their teachers and headteachers, as we have captured them in three projects in different parts of the Commonwealth.

1. **Gender and Education in East Africa: what keeps girls in school against the odds?**

   Molly Warrington

   Both the Kenyan and Ugandan governments recognise gender equality as central to the attainment of the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals, and both governments have put in place various initiatives to support this aim. Indeed, considerable improvements have been shown in both countries with respect to gender parity in enrolment in primary schools. Yet boys' enrolment in secondary education still outstrips that of girls, with girls' enrolment relative to that of boys continuing to fall throughout secondary schooling.

   The reasons why girls drop out of school across many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa are well-known. There is, however, little understanding over why some girls, despite coming from poor backgrounds, or from families or communities where schooling is under-valued for cultural reasons, nevertheless do strive to stay in school and continue their education. Hence the key question: 'what keeps girls in school against the odds?'

   In seeking an answer to this question, evidence has been gathered from girls and boys in primary schools, from teachers, headteachers and district education officers, and from adult women who themselves struggled against the odds to continue their education and become successful career women. Groups of girls are being tracked through the last three years of their primary education and their educational histories explored within the context of their family, community and school, to try and identify the reasons accounting for their retention.
   This paper therefore reports on an ongoing project, with partners from NGOs, Ministries and locally-based Universities in Kenya and in Uganda. Drawing on evidence from four areas within each country (16 schools) the paper highlights those factors which explain why some girls from disadvantaged communities do stay in school. It discusses in particular the role of the school in determining whether children are retained, and also the part played by role models from the home, school and wider community in affecting students' decision-making.

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Molly Warrington is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography at Cambridge. Her main research interests are in the field of social geography, with the focus of her work coalescing around social inequalities, particularly in relation to gender, and having a strong policy orientation. She has undertaken research into homelessness and the geographies of domestic violence in Britain, and on the gender gap in education (as co-Director, with Mike Younger, of Raising Boys' Achievement, a four-year research project funded by the then Department for Education and Skills in the UK). In her current research within the Centre for Commonwealth Education, she is engaged in projects exploring aspects of gender and education in East Africa, and in work with the government of Antigua and Barbuda on gender in schools.

2. The ASKAIDS project

Colleen McLaughlin

Located in six countries in Africa [initially in Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania, and subsequently in Botswana, Ghana and Swaziland], the African Sexual Knowledges about AIDS (ASKAIDS) project explored questions concerning how young people acquired sexual knowledges, and how these knowledges interacted with AIDS education received in the classroom.

Interviews with primary school children, their teachers and community leaders suggested that young people had wide-ranging and fairly sophisticated knowledge of adults' sexual practices and sexual worlds, that they were well aware of the dangers of HIV / AIDS and keen to avoid them, and that children would welcome much more information and dialogue with adults on sexual matters and HIV/AIDS in particular. The children were aware that they could not easily share their own knowledge with adults, and that adults were ambivalent and avoided talking to young people honestly and openly about sexual matters and HIV/AIDS. Students' responses suggested that there is a difference between what girls and boys experience, but that there are also common cross gender concerns.

Talking to students revealed that the young people wanted a more interactive and active pedagogy that allowed them to engage with their knowledge and talk about their lack of knowledge, and that they were concerned that the information they get from teachers was unrealistic and did not reflect the world they lived in. Teachers wanted to help but not many were confident or felt well resourced, and some were more frightened of engaging in discussions about HIV/AIDS than others. The school or the practices in school were influenced

by the wider community and the dominant attitudes (e.g. religion, cultural practices), and sometimes this was perceived by teachers a restricting their freedom to teach; in each country case study, however, adults and community leaders were surprised at and interested in the extent and nature of the young people's knowledge, were willing to engage with the idea of non naive young people and this fact offered a different possibility in terms of sex and HIV/AIDS education, and seemed open to the potential for dialogue about HIV/AIDS education for their young people.

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Colleen McLaughlin is Deputy Head and Director of International Relations at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, and a Fellow of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Her current research focuses on HIV education in Africa; bullying and pupils with special educational needs and disabilities; counselling in schools; and aspects of personal, social and emotional development in schools. She edited the journal Pastoral Care in Education for ten years and is now an editor of the Educational Action Research Journal. As Director of the SUPER project (School-University partnerships in Educational Research), she is interested in how universities can work in partnership with schools to generate relevant and appropriate educational knowledge.

3. Raising (boys') achievement within an inclusive context in Antigua and Barbuda

Mike Younger

In some circles, academic underachievement in many countries of the Caribbean is synonymous with under-performing boys and considerable energy and resource has been devoted to 'keeping boys out of risk'. But local knowledge and experience of educators, academics and teachers suggests that class is also a determinant, that boys in some schools do better than girls, and that there are 'invisible girls' who also underachieve. This project was established, then, in partnership with the government of Antigua and Barbuda, to explore the nature and dimensions of academic underachievement of both boys and girls in the country, and to develop intervention

strategies which have the potential to impact positively upon levels of achievement of boys and girls in primary schools.

Interviews with headteachers and senior staff in five higher achieving government primary schools in the country identified the essence of good pedagogic practice in these schools, and identified how and why the achievement profile in these schools had changed positively through time.

The main research and intervention project then focused on government primary schools in Zone 1 of Antigua, where the lowest performing schools were located. Four strands were identified for implementation and evaluation:

- Shared reading and shared listening
- Interactive Pedagogies in Classrooms
- Listening to Children's Voices
- Developing Communities of Practice amongst teachers

This presentation looks at the impact of some of these strategies on both boys and girls, particularly focusing on *Listening to Children's Voices,* which involved developing situations and opportunities whereby teachers could listen to the voices of children about their own schooling and learning, and identifying through them the factors which (de)motivate, (dis)engage and challenge them as learners. The children offered lucid insights on how their own learning might improve or be improved, and it was clear that they were able and willing to take considerable responsibility for their own learning. None of the students mentioned the gender of the teacher as an important characteristic, but it was teachers' competence, their ability to teach and maintain an ordered classroom environment for learning, and their willingness to listen to students, which were the crucial factors in making a good teacher. Equally, the children had a clear view of how teachers and principals might improve the quality of the education offered by the school.

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Mike Younger is Director of the University of Cambridge Centre for Commonwealth Education, having previously been Dean of Education and Head of the Faculty of Education (2005-2011). His main research and teaching interests are located in teacher education and professional development, in gender studies and in school leadership and curriculum development. He is currently involved in gender-based projects in East Africa and in the Caribbean, working with local partners to develop research and

intervention projects exploring gender processes and patterns in upper primary and secondary schools.

4. Creoles, Education and Identity: Myths and Realities in language education

Edith Esch

Creoles, and creole cultures generally, are popular, whether one talks about music, food, or poetry but only until one talks about introducing them in schools. If one does, the discourse immediately turns to 'problems' but it is never really clear why.

This talk will address some of the myths which continue to plague serious educational research on the use of Creoles as medium of education in multilingual societies.

I shall first look at the myth that 'Creoles are not real languages' from a linguistic angle (McMahon, 1994, Mühlhäusler, 1986, Todd, 1990, Trudgill, 2001) and discuss whether they are different from other languages or can be distinguished from them in particular ways or not. It is an important area for education because beyond the theoretical debates, there is a dearth of empirical research on language use in schools and evidence-based debates on local situations with exceptions such as Baker, 1982, Todd, 1990, Harrow and Mpoche, 2008, Schneider, 2007, Salehmohamed, 2012, Yakoumetti, 2012. There is a lot more we need to know about specific creoles and the way they evolve in particular contexts.

This leads me to the second myth which is that 'Creoles are OK as long as they are not taught or used in schools' and I review the evidence from a number of projects and experiments carried out using different approaches (Siegel, 2012) and show that overwhelmingly, they lead to positive results and do not necessarily cause interference in learning. We will analyse the common characteristics of these schemes, as well as the teaching practices and 'the pedagogical principles which govern a successful multilingual classroom and are different in essence from those that work in a disciplined homogeneous setting' (Todd, 2008).

The third myth is that 'Creole-speaking children must learn the standard language to gain access to knowledge'. Apart from the fact that using international languages in schools as medium of education does not run counter to the use or study of other languages in bilingual education programmes, several empirical studies have shown conclusively that such programmes result in the significant improvement of pupils' command of the standard language.

The question then remains where the so-called 'problems' lie. Here comes the need to recognise the reality: society's inability to accept that education is 'a key site for the construction of social identities and of unequal relations to power' (Martin-Jones and Heller, 1996). One needs to add 'access to education' where the symbolic domination of powerful languages translates into the hierarchies and values given to languages 'naturally' with the result that the old social order is reproduced. Creoles tend to be rejected altogether or to be only grudgingly accepted as a temporary bridge to introduce other languages more easily later. Instead, they should be celebrated as a

mirror of the complexities of the multilingual fabric of a society as well as a collective act of linguistic identity and creativity. Such realisation is essential to the recognition of identities in a globalised society. It is a critical educational issue world-wide and it requires critical approaches, political will, and longer term views (Todd, 2008).

As educators we need to respond responsibly and defend a number of principles and values which will give a chance to our educational communities to become the agents of change in the approaches to the use of creoles in multilingual classrooms. Languages in schools are not simply 'media for the transmission of knowledge'. They ensure that individuals and communities are given a voice in the construction of knowledge at classroom level. This assumes that our schools operate democratically and inclusively and allow all to have a voice in the school, while we pursue the aim of functioning as an ethical community where all are not only given a voice but heard and respected.

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Edith Esch is Senior Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education of the University of Cambridge, and a member of the Conseil Scientifique de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme–Lorraine, Her main current research is in second language education with a special interest in the influence of the British and French pedagogical cultures in post-colonial contexts and more particularly in multilingual societies in Africa where both are in contact. These sociolinguistic and sociocultural themes in education result from her life-long interest in bilingualism, cross-linguistic communication in non-educational contexts, and factors of language change.