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Foreword

This is an account of four programs in which undergraduates from three universities elected to work with three different groups of young, bright, perceptive, but disadvantaged ethnic minority children, with the intention both of engaging them in academic work, and interesting them in one day attending university.

It is usual in a book like this one to inscribe in the forward the names of those who have advanced the project described, but I have throughout named those whose contributions, many of them far greater than my own, effectively constituted our project. For reasons of privacy I have avoided naming individual students or describing their several accomplishments, which grew and developed during the fifteen years described here. But during that time, as our practices shifted and usually advanced, it was the undergraduate students who undertook to reach our objectives, and it was their work that made the difference. These, as I will show, include both the very many Georgetown students who have taken part in the program I direct at my home university, and those in Oxford and Cambridge, whose programs are the main business of this account, but only some of whom I have known at all well. Otherwise, I record here my indebtedness to colleagues who helped to bring this book about, Charlotte and Mossman Roueché of London, who first suggested it, Carole Sargent, Director of the Office of Scholarly and Literary Publication at Georgetown, and Anna Lawton, founder and Editor of New Academia Press, who nudged it into being. But in deference to their contribution I turn now to Wadham, without which nothing.

During that program's fifteen years, but during the first ten in particular, it was students from Wadham who, working with their lively and perceptive Chaplain, Reverend Doctor Harriet Harris, shaped it, moving away from assisting in what in America would be called the homeroom, to developing, in a mix of freedom and direction, hybrid methods and practices, culminating in the proto-seminars that have proved the most effective for our work. These developments did not come quickly, nor was what developed either predictable or inevitable. The Wadham program grew gradually, with steps backward as well as forward, but even when expectations were frustrated or progress deferred, it was the warmth, heart, and good energy of the Wadham students that taught lessons of acceptance, exchange, and difference that were not in any book. Working together with the children, both sides confronted old assumptions and different cultural values face-to-face, effecting changes and practices not in general use.

All such programs resist perfection, and writing this preface I was reminded of a story concerning the great explorer and scholar Sir Henry Rawlinson, who had once offered a fellow scholar the use, gratis, of some texts he had procured and produced, for use in the man's own work. "I can't possibly use them," the man replied. "There are too many mistakes in them." "I understand," Sir Henry answered. "For you are a scholar, and I am only a pioneer." The Wadham students and their Chaplains were our pioneers, and already, as new programs take shape, others have benefitted from what they set out to do. Sadly, the Wadham program now has ended, but it was among the first to address seriously both educational issues and cultural boundaries, all the while drawing upon both friendly interaction and considered intention. So to the excellent students, children and chaplains whose work is here recorded, thank you and congratulations.

Thanks too to the equally fine students of Clare College, Cambridge, also pioneers, who both ventured to a more remote location for their work, and, though starting somewhat later, both led and followed their progressive college towards involvement with the very young, at least for a time. Clare was among the first colleges seriously to embrace Outreach, years earlier, initially tilting toward older children, whose attention it still much invites. And thanks as

well to the bright, new students of Magdalene College, Cambridge, who have already improved what they received, and promise well for whatever is to come. All of these, I need hardly add, have both learned and taught.

Throughout this account, short as it is, I have tried to write for both a British and an American audience. Political and cultural challenges in Britain and America differ in many ways, but there are too similarities, some of which may be addressed, as indicated here, by the commitment, energy and enthusiasm of the young. I myself, over the years, have drawn strength, inspiration and ideas from many of them, as I have support from many colleagues, and a certain number of sympathetic administrators. What has connected many of these good people, it seems to me, is that they have thought our work both useful and possibly important, and have understood that it can speak, however imperfectly, both to those who resolve to take part in it, and also, when we do it right, to those whom we mean to serve.

J. C. H.

Introduction

The East End of London, as it is still sometimes called, remains one of the liveliest and most international parts of the city, albeit without the rich variety of cinemas, clubs, museums, office buildings, parks, and through-fares of the more affluent West End, not a handful of city blocks away. King Charles I may have killed a deer here, but it was not among the transformed warehouses, the pubs, restaurants, newsstands, housing projects, the export-import businesses, Toynbee Hall, Spitalfields Market, the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the Bell Foundry, the churches, sidewalk markets, the Royal London Hospital, once the home of the Elephant Man, and the powerful East London Mosque, all of which run along Whitechapel High Street, or stand not far away, in an area formerly associated with Jack the Ripper and the notorious Krays brothers, now known as Tower Hamlets. Over the centuries the East End has evolved its own rich identity born of those on the margins, Huguenots in the seventeenth century, Irish in the eighteenth, Russian Jews in the nineteenth, Bangladeshi in the twentieth, many of whom, in each century, entered with little, made their mark bravely, and left in triumph. It now belongs to a Bangladeshi community that stands in complex and demanding dialogue with a new Britain.

There are of course other Bangladeshi communities in Britain, but none quite like Tower Hamlets. Some years ago, a Head Teacher whom I was asking for permission to extend to her school a program like one we had already begun in Wapping, warned me, as she said yes, that things in Whitechapel were not necessarily as they were seen from outside of it. It is as though a small town from Bangladesh has been picked up and set down here, she said.

Things are changing, she added, but at least for now it is possible to be born here, to go to school, get a job, get married, and not feel the need to read and write English. Still, it is a wonderful place. The people understand where they are, and its advantages. You'll be welcome here. And we were.

What follows is an account of how, over fifteen years and not without interruption, first one Oxford college, than two Cambridge colleges, organized and operated two programs in Tower Hamlets, London, in which undergraduate students first taught, then came into seminar-like dialogue with, Bangladeshi and other school children, usually in years five and six – the two years before they leave primary school for secondary. It also notes an interest we took in the early years of secondary, and describes the conversations that took place among persons concerned to bring the programs into being, to consider what effects they were having, and how they might be developed.

A small program, as all the ones recorded here are, can prove a useful testing ground for students and children alike, and although circumstances alter practices, English and American programs can reveal the strengths and limitations of practices brought to bare on mutual challenges, differently resolved. Thus, although lessons learned in one place can indeed inform practices in another, I have written these pages not so much to identify solutions as to suggest what those challenges may be, and to say how, under the different circumstances described here, we sought to address them. As will soon appear, the purpose of the programs changed during the period described. The work of the Oxford and Cambridge students was less to instruct, and not at all to measure, than to reveal, encourage and engage. Their overall mission was to encourage their very young fellow students to understand what a university actually was (not what the word meant), and to do so in such a way that, when the time came, many of them would decide to apply, some, hopefully, to Oxford and Cambridge, but to university in any case.

In educational theory, the word "schema" (*pl.* schemata) designates the way a child constructs his or her world – and many of the children had only a vague idea what a university was, and what went on there. I understand that some will wonder if what the students taught will last. But these children are bright, percep-

tive and alert. Time will tell, but to many children and in different ways, I have no doubt at all that it will. And what of the students who taught them? Will their schemata be changed as well? And if so how?

The book has five chapters. The first describes generally both the two programs with which it is concerned, and also the program that Georgetown, the university at which I am employed, sponsors at a community known as Sursum Corda, that I have directed for almost thirty years, and that accounts for my interest in urban literacy generally. It also touches upon the academic work, particularly that concerned with whole language teaching strategies that I undertook at Berkeley, and that, together with an interest I took in the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, informed both my thinking in Berkeley, and my subsequent work in Washington. The circumstances surrounding the Georgetown program involved, among other things, aspects of the Washington drug trade, some of them violent, that affected the Sursum Corda community we served, and that contrasted sharply with the world known to most of the Georgetown students who took part in it.

This contrast, together with the events that occurred as our program was taking shape, brought about a degree of cross-cultural communication that sometimes led to understanding and exchange, and that reappeared again in London, as our programs took shape, albeit in very different circumstances. In each case, however, our concern was for introducing the children whom we served to the university, and suggesting what advantages it might have for them in time to come. But this was an understanding that explicitly crossed cultural boundaries, a circumstance that was not lost on some of our left-of-center critics, who assumed, quite mistakenly I believe, that intentionally or not, we regularly privileged "white culture," and, at best, invited our young charges aboard.

The second chapter indicates how I came to be attached to Hermitage School in Tower Hamlets, a state school in Wapping, where I worked among children teaching in what is called the language arts, then understood as reading, writing, listening and talking, and began to explore such social but also cultural difference as I could observe anecdotally, between London and Washington. The comparison brought home to me how powerful such differences

can be, and while it is not impossible to address them, they cannot be wished away, nor will good will alone suffice. But it also became possible to consider that the challenges they posed were not insurmountable, and that, as long as advice is taken widely enough, it is possible for something to emerge.

In the third chapter something did emerge, a project in which undergraduates from Wadham College, Oxford, and later on from Clare College, Cambridge, travelled to Tower Hamlets to work in two schools there, with the intention of encouraging children in their work, and no less importantly, in seeing to it that they understood, in some depth, what a university was, and how they could engage it, now and in time to come. The beginnings of the project may have seemed a little uncertain, but was supported (if indirectly) both by circumstances outside of the university, and by persons within it. Oliver Cromwell insisted that a man never rises so high as when he knows not where he is going, but at least we thought we did, and the students in those early days both helped teach the children their lessons and encouraged the idea that, with a little effort perhaps, universities can be breasted by one and all.

Chapter four may indeed represent our program's apogee, which it owed largely to the Head teachers at the schools in which we worked, and also to the Reverend Doctor Harriet Harris, who, together with the Heads, changed its direction in important ways. Even in the early years it became clear it was the idea of a university, not of Oxford in particular, that most needed selling, a circumstance that obtained in programs and projects in other colleges too, notably Pembroke College's excellent program, where to do so was a central commitment. But it became clear too that to have the student act as an assistant teacher hardly emphasized that objective, nor could the Oxford student come regularly or often – though as time went on it appeared that there was something to be said for a degree of irregularity, since when the students appeared they brought with them a change from the ordinary, but one that sprang from more usual occupations. That understanding led to a system of proto-seminars, in which students engaged children in the topics of the hour that they had already taken in hand – Aztecs or Normans, for example – and these proto-seminars could take place either in school or during the return visits the children made to the college, which Harriet Harris had instituted and the children loved.

More recently, Magdalene College, Cambridge, has incorporated a system of question and answer into a program they have begun, which draws upon both the curiosity children have as to what a university is, and also upon the experience of the visiting students themselves. It was during this period as well that a small group of us tried to understand what could be done not only to develop but also to preserve an interest in the university among ethnic minority and disadvantaged children generally, and in the course of things, thanks largely to an experiment that took place at Clare, and was sponsored by Stepney Green Secondary School, we arrived at a three-fold hypothesis concerning the way urban, ethnic minority children may best be introduced to an understanding of the university, one that involved intervention in year 2; year 5 or 6; and years 8 or 9, all of which pointed toward years 11 and 12, which we reserved largely for individual guidance. It was not a conclusion, to be sure, but only the beginning of one, with much left to be proved.

All good things must come to an end, and for that there is chapter five. A new Wadham chaplain had trained as a primary school teacher, and had friends in the profession. Her promise to continue at Hermitage she deferred, and Wadham's students were dispatched instead to help in local schools. But by this time the close connection between the program and the college, and between the program and the SCR, had begun to fade. She kept the dissolution quiet. And no one noticed.

But apart from what was happening in Wadham, the interaction among those who supported the programs, and who actively discussed their role and usefulness had reached a watershed. The experiment begun at Clare needed to continue, but Clare was about to change its Master (though its new one is said to have a like interest in ethnic minority education), and its chaplain, who had done so much to make our discussion and experiment possible, was going to return to Australia. Still, all was not lost. After a brief period in which the connection between Clare and Bigland Green became strained, it resumed again, and now promises very well. If Wadham College really means to terminate its program that would be a pity, but already another Cambridge college, Magdalene College, has become invested in Hermitage, and thanks to a particularly

resourceful student, the program has begun. In their first meeting, children and students interacted and worked together with enthusiasm, warmth and evident curiosity, pioneering a practice of Question-and-Answer that promises well for the future. Only that day dawns to which we are awake, Thoreau said. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.











