Chapter 18
From Exclusion to Connection

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Abstract There is much concern worldwide about the widening gap in terms of wealth and its relationship to educational outcomes for children, especially the vulnerable, for it is the marginalised who are not having access to education or success in education. There have been many radical changes in ideology and policy in education in the last two decades. This chapter examines who the vulnerable children are in our societies and schools and how their position has changed. The role of education and its contribution to the development and thriving of vulnerable young people is explored, and this includes the implications for classrooms. The general points are illustrated with two case studies of particular groups in two different settings in the final part of the chapter, i.e. the excluded in the UK and children living in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. Many researchers in this field argue for a new way of thinking and a new focus of schooling based on relationships and connectedness. This argument is supported and examined in the final part of the paper. The research and scholarship drawn on is largely from the global north and so cannot claim to be representing all societies, although international literature is referred to.

Keywords Exclusion • Vulnerable young people • Relational

Introduction

There is much concern worldwide about the widening gap in terms of wealth and its relationship to educational outcomes for children, especially the vulnerable. There have been many radical changes in ideology and policy in education in the last two decades. This chapter examines who the vulnerable children are in our societies and schools and how their position has changed. I am drawing largely on research and scholarship in the global north and so cannot claim to be representing all societies

A person is, among all else, a material thing, easily torn and not easily mended. Ian McEwan, Atonement

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at all, although I have drawn on international literature. I explore the role of education and its contribution to the development and thriving of vulnerable young people, including the implications for classrooms. I illustrate the issues with two case studies of particular groups in two different settings in the final part of the chapter, i.e. the excluded in the UK and children living in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. Many researchers in this field argue for a new way of thinking and a new paradigm of schooling based on relationships and connectedness. I support this argument in the final part of the paper. I begin by examining what we mean by vulnerable.

Who Are the Vulnerable Children?

Vulnerable children are those who cannot access education in various ways. In the many countries in the global north, they are often seen as those who need extra support or additional resources, as this definition by the Department for Education in England attests to. The Department defines vulnerable groups as 'disadvantaged groups', and they refer to vulnerable children as those 'whose needs, dispositions, aptitudes or circumstances require particularly perceptive and expert teaching and, in some cases, additional support' (Ofsted 2012). In the global south, it is often children who have no, or highly limited, access to any education (UNESCO 2013). Children who are so described are often those who are different from the majority: different in terms of their ability to achieve within schooling systems, different in terms of their behaviour, different in terms of their capacity to integrate into or identify with schools, different in terms of their ethnic group or culture and different in terms of material wealth. Within policy statements they are often labelled as children with special needs and/or disability, which include children with learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties, children from 'minority groups' or children who are seen to be disadvantaged or socially troublesome in some way, e.g. those who are highly sexually active or get pregnant very young. They are the marginalised.

Research studies in England which have focused on the vulnerable pupils and on 'narrowing the gap' have consistently identified certain characteristics and groups, and these have remained stable over the last 20 years at least (Kendall et al. 2008; Office of the Children's Commissioner 2012). The groups of vulnerable are likely to be boys, pupils receiving free school meals (from low-income families), pupils with special educational needs and/or disability (SEND), pupils from certain ethnic groups, looked-after children (particularly those experiencing mental health difficulties) and previously excluded pupils. These pupils are significantly more likely than others to be excluded from school in all senses of the word (DfE 2012): they are the vulnerable in the education system. They are vulnerable in different ways, and this will be examined later in this chapter. There is a clear trend that globally if you are poor you are vulnerable in educational terms (UNESCO 2013). If you are in the global south, it will affect your access to participation and access to education. However, there is also a big debate about how we view the vulnerable, and

there have been big policy moves to engage with this. How the vulnerable are viewed is intimately connected to the view of an appropriate intervention, so the debates in this area are now discussed.

What Is 'Vulnerable' and Who Decides?

Vulnerability in schools is mainly defined in relation to attainment, engagement and risk. In current discourses within England, the focus is on narrowing the attainment gap, and the vulnerable are those who are not able to achieve within the system. There are those who are excluded through not meeting the behavioural standards, and there are those who exclude themselves. There are many children who absent themselves from school because they are bullied or because they feel that they do not have a valued place in school. Some use the phrase 'invisible children' to imply that they are children who are invisible to society's concerns or priorities; they are in 'Nomansland' (Pye 1988). Vulnerability is also used to identify children at risk. In England it is often children in care.

There is also a debate around how we define the causes of vulnerability. Do we locate the 'cause' within the child, do we locate the cause in the social context (Florian 2013) or do we locate the issues in the school context and processes? Cochran–Smith and Dudley–Marling (2012 and 2013) summarise the first two different standpoints well. They see 'fundamental differences' between how different communities in education think about diversity and human difference. They characterise these as 'a divide'. They frame two good questions, which summarise the difference in how school failure is thus attributed. The first question would be 'What is there about this student that explains her or his failure in school?' The second question is:

> What is it about school that manages to transform children who are good at learning … regardless of their economic and cultural differences, into children who not good at learning [especially] if they are poor or member of certain minority groups? (Gee 2004, p. 10 cited in Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling 2012, p. 280)

They view the dominant discourses in the special needs community as underpinned by 'cognitive perspectives on teaching and learning which contract sharply with the sociocultural theories of learning that inform the work of many general teacher educators' (Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling 2012, p. 279). The argument is that special education has relied heavily on the medical model and the ensuing process of diagnosis and treatment (Clark et al. 1998). Some vulnerability is defined by educational professionals on the basis of difference or deviation from the norm.

A third and important critique is of the framework of fixed ability on which our school systems have become so reliant. Hart et al. (2004) and Dweck (1999) depict, and have researched, two different viewpoints on learning. Dweck would call these the *entity* model of learning and ability, in which ability is seen as fixed and

determined, and the *growth* model, where ability is seen as malleable and able to develop through effort and learning. One view emphasises heredity and one education, as Brian Simon argued. The view of vulnerable pupils is clearly linked to these theories of ability and learning. One could argue that over time we have moved from the era of measuring intelligence and IQ to a more nuanced view of and emphasis upon learning, and to some degree this is true. However, the world of policy seems not to have done that. The increased emphasis upon measurement seems more based on an entity view. The world of policy is discussed in a later section.

So one view of the vulnerable, especially those with learning difficulties and disabilities, tends to rely on an emphasis on the individual and their deficit, what Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) characterise as the 'Dis' in Disability.

> … a prefix which, at least in the sense of its dictionary definitions, has a negative connotation, as in 'dis' meaning deprive of (e.g., disqualify), 'dis' meaning to do the opposite of (e.g., disestablish), 'dis' meaning expel from or exclude (e.g., disbar), or 'dis' meaning the absence or opposite of (e.g., displeasure). Focusing on the dis fixes attention on what students cannot do well, at least compared with their peers. (p.239)

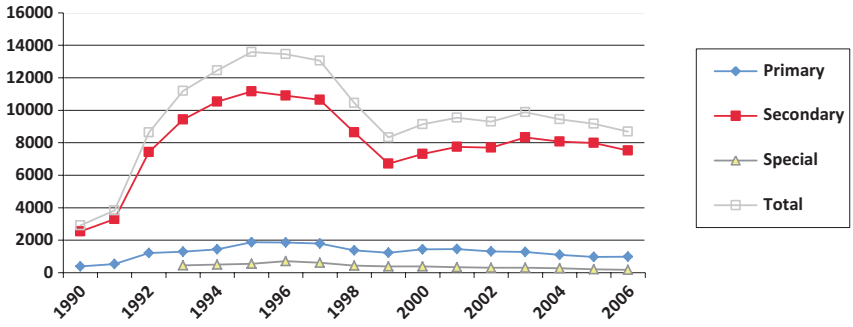
The other standpoint views the problem as a systemic or educational one, and adjustment will need to be made either to the classroom, the school or the surrounding community to improve matters. I now examine the policy, social and educational contexts and how the contexts within which vulnerable pupils are being educated have changed over the last 20 years.

Values and Vulnerability: The Contexts for Vulnerable Children

The Policy Context

There is a complex policy context in most countries. There are competing tensions and policy pulls. The UK is an example of such a country with a complex set of demands. In terms of values, there is an emphasis on learning as opposed to teaching; there is a strong emphasis on increased attainment, accountability and comparison as well as a standards framework. These values have interacted in complex ways.

In both the USA and UK, there has been curriculum change, and the changes to the standards and choice agendas have had consequences for vulnerable pupils (Norwich 2010). In 1988 in England and Wales, the government introduced a raft of different and radical educational reforms: a national curriculum; a programme of national testing and assessment, involving all pupils; league tables of schools based on performance; as well as a series of initiatives intended 'to increase competition between schools and facilitate parental choice' (Gray et al. 2011, p. 13). In the USA there was the introduction of 'No Child Left Behind' legislation in 2002. Norwich (2010) shows that writers have noted that 'different students with disabilities can



Source: National Statistics, DCSF 14/2008, 24 June 2008

Fig. 18.1 Number of permanent exclusions in English schools 1990/1991–2006/2007 by school type (Source: National Statistics, DCSF 14/2008, 24 June 2008)

participate to different degrees in the common aspects of the standards oriented reforms' (p.114). There was a charge that the standards agenda was in fact a standardisation of education aimed at the 'norm', partly due to the reduction of attainment measures to test numbering acceptable results. There was an increase in the performance levels in terms of the A*–C grades in GCSE examinations (Croxford et al. 2006), but the hopes of an increased entitlement for vulnerable pupils were not fulfilled and in many cases had unintended consequences. The increased marketisation and competition between schools seemed to produce an 'undesirable product' – the vulnerable child. Since schools were being judged on their examination performances and resources were often dependent on the league place position, the underachieving or difficult child became less than desirable. Figure 18.1, which takes the case of exclusions from school, illustrates this point.

Between 1991 and 1996, the annual rate of pupils being permanently excluded from state schools in England increased by approximately 400% with the 1997–1998 figure standing at 13041 (Parsons 1999). In response to government legislation to curb this rate, it has come down to 5080 in 2010–2011 and 5170 in 2011–2012, but rates have never returned to what they were prior to the Education Reform Act in 1988.

The values of the standards agenda and the marketisation of education have been dominant during the last two decades in the USA and the UK, and the model is being increasingly adopted internationally. In the global south, the focus is on increasing participation in and access to schooling.

> Over 60 million children of primary school age are not in school. Most are in Sub Saharan Africa and South Asia. Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Lack of educational access, and securely acquired knowledge and skill, is both a part of the definition of poverty, and a means for its diminution. Sustained access to meaningful learning that has utility is critical to long term improvements in productivity, the reduction of intergenerational cycles of poverty, demographic transition, preventive health care, the empowerment of women, and reductions in inequality. (Lewin 2011, p. 80)

The latest Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2013) shows that there are still approximately 250 million children without adequate access to basic education, and they are largely the disadvantaged.

There is a recognition in the face of substantial research studies that the needs of the vulnerable have to be addressed in education and that the attainment 'gap' has to be closed. In the UK there has been a raft of initiatives (Pirrie et al. 2011) under various governments designed to address the needs of the vulnerable children and their families in England. In 2007, Ofsted identified that:

> …the biggest challenge continues to be narrowing the gap in opportunities and outcomes between most children and young people and those that are the most vulnerable or underachieving.

In the international context the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals to universalise access to education is part of that push to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. There has been progress in the engagement of girls in education in the global south but varies in parts of the world. The big issue is failure to enrol at secondary level. The gap between the low-enrolment countries and those that are rapidly developing is wide.

> In reality there are far more than 60 million primary age children whose right to basic education is denied. Many fail to attend regularly, and are seriously over age for the grades they attend. Alarming numbers do not achieve basic skills after 6 years or more of schooling. If these 'silently excluded' children are counted then the numbers without meaningful access to primary schooling are well over 250 million. And, if the basic education cycle includes lower secondary, then this number is itself a substantial underestimate of the children whose right to education is compromised. (Lewin 2011, p. 8)

So the dominant policy discourse of competition, performance, standardisation and individualisation has been a problematic one for vulnerable children.

The Social Context for Vulnerable Young People

The third area in which there has been a big change is in the social position of young people in many societies. Social inequalities have remained constant and in recent times have gotten worse (Raffe et al. 2006; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). There has been a growth in the divide between the rich and the poor in most countries in the world, and the position and opportunities of young people have changed as the rising rates of unemployment among young people show. This is an international pattern as the evidence below demonstrates:

> The labour market outlook for young people worsened in nearly every region of the world. The global youth unemployment rate rose to 13.1 per cent in 2013, from 12.9 per cent in 2012 and 11.6 per cent in 2007. The largest increase occurred in the Middle East region… Central and South- Eastern Europe and CIS, East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific and North Africa all saw a substantial increase in youth unemployment rates … In the Developed Economies and European Union, the region that registered the largest increase in youth unemployment rates over the period 2007–12, unemployment among young people rose

> further to 18.3 per cent of the youth labour force. In total, 74.5 million young people aged 15–24 were unemployed in 2013, an increase of more than 700,000 over the previous year. There were 37.1 million fewer young people in employment in 2013 than in 2007, while the global youth population declined by only 8.1 million over the same period. (International Labour Organisation 2014, p. 21)

We know that there is a strong relationship between educational attainment and being not in education, employment or training (NEET). The most vulnerable groups feature most prominently in the NEET category:

> There are big differences in the main activity at age 18 between young people with different Year 11 qualification levels, where 62% of the highest qualified (eight or more GCSEs at Grades A* to C) were in full-time education at age 18. This proportion decreases with lower attainment to just 18% of those who achieved between one and four GCSEs at Grades D to G. The latter group, and those with no qualifications at Year 11, were the most likely to be NEET at age 18 (42% and 51% respectively) as well as those that had been permanently excluded from school by Year 11 (47%). (DfE 2010, p. 5)

Other groups identified as being overrepresented in the NEET category in England are those not in the White ethnic group. Young people in the Bangladeshi and other groups were the most likely to be NEET, those who had been excluded from school and those who lived with neither a mother nor father. The Nuffield Review of *Changing Adolescence* (Hagell 2012) confirmed this as a key issue for youth in the UK. Other key social trends were how young people spent their time, education, shifts in substance use and changes in family life.

We know that there is a need for a clear structure from education to work, for managed transitions, and that this is not a straightforward pathway in the UK society. Transitions can be a time of vulnerability for young people and especially for those who are most vulnerable, and in this case that is those who are in the NEET category.

The Educational Context for Vulnerable Young People

The nature of school experience has also changed over the last 20 years. In the global north, there has been growing emphasis on testing and attainment, more participation in examinations and young people staying on at school longer. There are different implications for different groups, some of which I have explored. Much attention has been given to researching the effectiveness of schools in relation to attainment. Less attention has been given to studying other aspects. For example, young people in the UK today have higher levels of emotional and behavioural problems than in the past. The increase has begun to level off, but it is still significantly higher than in the 1970s and 1980s, and the UK is rated 16th out of the world's 29 richest countries in terms of well-being (Collishaw 2012; UNICEF 2013). About 10% of young people will experience serious emotional or behavioural difficulties (and we know this group will struggle more in school than their peers), but even more of them (between 20% and 30%) express worries about their

school experiences which can affect their well-being and achievement. ‘Trends in child and adolescent mental health can be seen as a barometer of the success of society’s efforts to improve children’s well-being and life chances’ (Collishaw 2012, p. 9).

If one considers access for vulnerable children, then some pupils have become less acceptable than others, and within the vulnerable groups there have been different trends. There has been an increase in the number of young people with a physical disability gaining access to education in mainstream settings, but there has been an increase in young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties being educated outside mainstream settings. There have been attempts to reallocate resources in different ways to try to address the most vulnerable group, those living in poverty. In England there has been the introduction of the pupil premium.

Many researchers are now arguing that the rather narrow and widespread model of education which is prevalent, what Sahlberg (2012) calls the GERM (Global Educational Reform Movement), is not fit for purpose for the changed social and global scenario in which young people find themselves and in particular for the vulnerable groups of young people. There are many arguments for a new vision of education and schooling.

From the Disconnected to the Connected School

Hagell (2012) argues that there needs to be attention to the well-being of young people in this changing social scenario, and this suggests a view of education which goes beyond the narrow view of education as being about testing and knowledge transmission alone. The world and the social trends for young people previously described show a world of increased time in education for the majority of young people in the global north. The world in which we live is more demanding, and managing and negotiating that world requires more complex decision-making and a well-developed ability to acquire and analyse new information and to adapt to changing circumstances. In such a society, the educationally disadvantaged are likely to be much more disadvantaged than in the past. They are also likely to find it even more difficult to benefit from and contribute of the complex societies in which we now live (UNICEF 2010; UNESCO 2013).

Having studied young people and their transition from school for 25 years, Wyn (2012, 2013) argues that there has been a failure in the recent model of education to deliver its promise and that the model of education and transition for young people as a linear process, i.e. from school completion to further study to secure work, is no longer tenable. It had been only disadvantaged and vulnerable young people who in the last 25 years had struggled to make this transition, but now it is more widespread. Therefore, she argues, we need a new metaphor and a new conception of education. She argues for a relational metaphor and one that helps young people and adults to build relationships of trust and connection, for there is a need for meaning and connection and control in young people’s lives.

In a recent study focused on establishing the school's role or contribution to the well-being of young people, which I was involved in with Maurice Galton and John Gray for the Nuffield Foundation (Gray et al. 2011), we came to a similar conclusion. We concluded that relationships were key in many ways. First, relationships between people are central to the well-being in schooling, and second, the relationship between different elements of school experience matters greatly. Our review of the research evidence on school experience and well-being found that connectedness was key. By this we mean the connections between groups and activities and experiences, including relationships between peers and teacher, levels of pupil satisfaction with school experience, feeling of membership and belonging to the community of the school and classroom. Pupils who feel valued and connected have higher levels of educational well-being, and these experiences are also protective. School connectedness is related to later reduced violence, less risky sexual behaviour, less drug use, less dropping out and less antisocial behaviour. It is a protective factor for vulnerable young people.[1] This has been confirmed by a recent study of interventions that impacted positively upon excluded pupils or the process of exclusion (Gazeley et al. 2013). Central to these processes of connection are relationships with peers and between teachers and pupils. Some studies have suggested that attachment is the most significant factor. Young people who feel connected to their schools and classrooms and who have a sense of voice, agency and belonging are building a solid developmental basis and model for present and future well-being. This also connects to academic achievement.

The relationships that mattered had particular characteristics: that they were seen as supportive and fair, that they engendered feelings of competence, that they were respectful and included being listened to and that they involved young people in decision-making. The perception of support was the most important.

The second aspect of relationships was the way in which the different parts of school life and experience are connected. In the disconnected school, the various parts of teaching, learning and living were viewed separately and largely through the prism of attainment. The research evidence was that they were highly connected. For example, a high testing and performance environment impacted upon attainment and motivation, not always positively. The elements that seem most profitable to merit examination in terms of their connection and influence upon each other are assessment and testing; individual failure and how it is handled; extra support for learning and inclusive practice in the classroom; transitions from primary to secondary school, as well as from secondary to higher education, further education or vocational routes; and the impact of organisational and classroom structures.

The following section presents two examples of voices of the researched to illustrate connectedness and the relational approach.

[1] See Gray et al. (2011) *The Supportive School* and in particular chapters four, seven and nine for the detailed research.

Voices 1: The Move from Exclusion to Inclusion

Here are some of the voices of the young people in two case studies of practice in the field of exclusion and inclusion. The two studies are by Gazeley et al. (2013), which was a study of the effective measures being taken in schools, and by Cooper et al. (2000), which aimed also to examine inclusive practices. In both studies young people talk movingly about the importance of personal connection and being seen as a person and not 'a case'.

Neil who has had a troubled past and ended up being excluded from school and leaving his family home in this short extract talks about his experience of a fresh start at a new school.

> Before I got accepted here, I was out of school for about two and a half months. With my record I thought I might not get accepted by another school. And I wondered what would it be like if I don't get accepted anywhere. I like quite a lot of things in this [his new] school. I know a lot of people. I get on all right with the work and the teachers. It's all right. Here the teachers' sort of let you go at your own pace, but sort of push you as well. They help you a lot. At my grammar school it was a lot of pushing. Teacher were really hard on you. When I said: 'I don't know whether I'm capable of doing the work that you've set me because it's too hard', the teachers took it as a bad attitude towards them … Here they are more understanding. (Cooper et al. 2000, p. 1–2)

The students talk about the importance of being listened to and the teachers attempt to empathise with the position of the student:

> She like understands how I feel…and she'll say something, like that'll mean something. (Student interview – Cooper et al. 2000, p. 187)

> The teachers believing me is the most important sort of help I could have. (Student interview, ibid)

> I think he actually understands to a certain extent why he behaves the way he does. We actually said, 'Why do you do the things you do?'…and he said he thought it went back to the time when was very small [explanation continues]…and it I think it is absolutely true. (Teacher interview. Cooper et al. 2000, p. 187)

It is a process aimed at helping the young person to improve but also one in which both parties are endeavouring to try to understand each other; it is a relational process. The complexity is best summarised thus. In asking what matters in an analysis of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, the team of researchers (Cooper et al. 2000) decided that '*everything* makes a difference. Every act of meaning making as student and staff process their school experience contributes in some to how they respond' (p.186). In the inclusive school, there is a serious attempt to understand the perspective of the marginal and disadvantaged, to commit to their inclusion and to develop practices that are helpful and also to challenge the young people to accept their responsibility.

Voices 2: Developing a Sexuality Curriculum

The second extract is from work done in sub-Saharan Africa on the development of a sexuality curriculum over a period of 4 years. The development of curricula to educate around the problem of HIV/AIDS and related sexuality is a highly contentious issue and is a hard-to-handle topic. The traditional approach in many sub-Saharan countries, where the rates of HIV infection are very high indeed, is to provide a largely factual approach to the education of young people. The approach in this project was to argue that this was a sociocultural issue and could only be tackled by trying to find a process to negotiate the personal and social issues in order to educate young people. Young people were asked about where they gained their sexual knowledge from both in and out of school, how they were being educated and how would they like to be educated. This was done through the young people taking photographs, making videos and discussing them with the researchers. What emerged was that the primary school pupils lived in a highly sexualised world and one that was often hard to negotiate and even threatening to them. They longed for constructive and open discussions with adults. The adults felt the children should be treated as innocent and struggled with the social, religious and cultural restraints on talking openly with children on sexual matters.

Naledi:The teachers are careful with us because they think we are still young.
Buyelwa:I think we can be able to process these things in grade 7 or grade 8.
Sisa:[Last year] they said we were going to learn more in grade 6, but they have not taught us as much.
Pinky:They think we are too young to know.
(Focus group discussion. McLaughlin et al. 2012*)*

We used dialogue as a way through this complex terrain. The adults were shown the pictures and data collected from the pupils, and then the community stakeholders, the teachers and the pupils sat together to see if there was a way forward. In the following extract, a hard-to-talk-about topic has been opened up for discussion, and the elders in the community are talking with each other and arguing that they need to change their perspective and approach. They are also talking about difficult educational problems and working towards some agreement:

Grandmother:When a child says that he or she is used to having sex, this is as a result of mistakes we parents have made where our children are concerned. For example, a parent chooses to sleep in the same room with their 12-year-old son or daughter. Therefore the activities that take place between you and the man, our children are seeing far and wide whatever you are doing. That child is not sleeping. The child watches and sees 'what is my mother doing'. Such a child starts practising the same thing he or she has been watching. The duty of us parents is to protect our children even though we are poor. We should not wait when a child is 12 years to give them a room of their own, because at times when a child is just three years old, you find that such a child can be watching what takes place between the father and mother and starts practising that subject. Therefore

we parents should take that responsibility, placing our children in other rooms so that they do not see that activity.

Thank you.

Female chief: It has already been agreed that we should start teaching our children …

Many: Yes!

Ms.Kerubo: What do I do? Or do I use the language we use like when we were being taught science, in standard 7 or in standard 8 or do we use jongo instead of telling them mtotoanaletwanandege [children are brought by aeroplanes]. May I know that one?

Many: [Group express surprise and laughter]

This dialogue prompts a young boy to ask a question that he has been wanting to ask for a long time:

Ms.Kerubo: … And also when we are in school, during our discussions with our pupils – let us bring them close to us so that they are free to ask any questions they want.

Kustantu (boy): If a lady is a virgin or another can no longer have children, and they have sex with someone who has AIDS, will these two ladies get AIDS?

[Laughter then silence and murmurs in the audience].

The adults then go on to answer honestly the question.

I use this example, which is an unusual one, to show how adults and young people can come together to work towards mutual understanding and establishing relationships of trust, which are focused on the difficult educational tasks. In this setting education is literally crucial to survival. Education is now central to survival for all young people in the new knowledge-driven world. It is the vulnerable and the marginalised who are being shut out and partly due to the model of education we have operated on. If we are to address the needs of the vulnerable, then our classrooms need to be characterised by educational relationships of trust, dialogue-wide educational goals and a focus on the relational. We can address the needs of the vulnerable; we will raise the achievement of all.

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