



NEU Redbridge Retired Teachers' Newsletter Spring 2020

Where have all the Older Teachers Gone?

Reflections of a young teacher



Children were driving buses and policing the streets - I'll never forget the day I realised this. People, who closely resembled my year 11s, were taking over important roles in society. How was it possible?

Bringing the news to my older friends and family, they were less horrified. It seems the phenomenon has been in existence for years. In fact, it is better known as the 'aging process' and it will befall everyone.

Being thirty-one and approaching the eighth year of my life in the teaching profession, I am learning to be accepting of tech savvy NQTs fresh out of teacher training with a multitude of 'fun lessons'. In the eyes of a retired teacher, I'm not that different to them I'm sure. However, there is a difference between their experience and mine which really does stand out.

I trained as teacher in Ireland, where it was never difficult to find someone with 20 or even 30 years' experience still happily marking notebooks and laminating displays as a classroom teacher. Working in a bilingual school in the Czech Republic, it was a similar situation, although older Czech teachers had the added experience of having worked under both Communist and democratic governments; as a result, their insights into the purpose and value of education were profound to say the least.

Disappearing from the Classroom

Now in my third year of teaching in England, I am struck by how rarely older experienced teachers seem to remain on as full time classroom teachers. They are still about but seem to gravitate towards the ranks of senior management and other less teaching-intense roles. Leadership is necessary but I sometimes wonder what is being lost when the age division maps so closely to levels of authority. Older management retreat more into their individual offices and talk together in hushed tones in corridors, leaving us younger and less experienced teachers to teach, plan and often socialise together as if they were the first teachers in history to do this. Much is lost because of this I think.

Perhaps this is all a bit overly pessimistic but I would like to point out that when I teach about the Cold War in history, I myself have absolutely no experience of that time period. Contrastingly, when I asked an older American colleague in Prague if he remembered the Cold War he tartly stated 'yes' and gave a detailed account of 'duck and cover' - a Cold War experience only beaten by a Czech colleague's laconic summary of the 1968 Soviet Invasion: 'All those Russian tanks about made it very difficult to get to work on time that morning'.

Anon.

THE BIG INTERVIEW

Henry Tiller talks with Kash Malik, Redbridge NUT/NEU Secretary from 1995 to 2019



Kash has given long and invaluable service to the Union and, during his tenure as Secretary, provided enormous assistance to many of our members. His no-nonsense approach to case work rightly gained him the reputation amongst school managements across the Borough as a most formidable foe. No wonder that he was often seen by local members as 'Mr Redbridge NUT'!

I had the pleasure to meet up with Kash at the Beehive Pub and I put the following questions to him.

Kash, what led you to take on the role back in 1995? When Margaret Saunders, the previous divisional secretary, retired, she absolutely insisted that I take on the job, as I now had a law degree.

Could you briefly describe what the job involved for you? The main thing was to have someone to turn to who would help, most of the time over the phone. The role involved negotiating policies and ensuring teachers were not dismissed unfairly. There was always the relentless task of fighting the academisation programme and cuts to education budgets.

What are the main changes that you witnessed in teachers' conditions of service over the years?

When I first started, there was just the odd capability and disciplinary to deal with. And then along came OFSTED, with its performance management targets, appraisals, observations etc. Things just spiralled out of control. The introduction of performance-related pay had an enormous impact on our members in terms of stress and ill-health, and there was even one suicide.

Of the many head teachers that you had to deal with, which was the worst type in your opinion? The very worst are those who have the idea that the only way to manage staff is to get rid of union reps. This has a negative effect on staff as then there is no conduit between SMT and the teachers.

And the best? The one who stands out in my mind was a head of a primary school who knew every child's name, knew all the staff well and, when it came to union matters, approached the Union before things got out of hand – in other words, she would fight the fires before they started.

If you could wave a magic wand, what changes in teachers' conditions would you immediately implement? I'd remove performance-related pay. When this was implemented in 2014, I said that the Union should not have let it go through as it's by far the biggest problem – because of this, it's no longer about colleagues, but about me, myself and I. The idea that once you qualified you were a teacher for the next 30 years has gone. 40% of NQTs come in to teaching and leave within five years.

And, finally, how do you think the merger between the NUT and ATL into the new NEU will work? I'm disappointed in the way it's been done. I think that if we eventually want the NASUWT to join with us, some provision should have been made to protect ATL representation in the new union - as 75% of the members will be ex NUT and they will favour NUT candidates in any elections, it's likely that ATL representation will be wiped out. This is likely to deter the NASUWT from merging.

With the interview completed, I thanked Kash for answering my questions in such an open and frank manner, as well as for his outstanding contribution to our union.

Retirement has not been that Retiring



Working at Constance Bridgeman Centre, the KS4 PRU, was always busy and often exciting. Each day brought its unique challenges and during term-time, left very little time or energy for anything else. But in 2011 my son emigrated to marry an Australian, who soon became pregnant. I knew that I was going to be wanting to visit them as often as possible and needed to be flexible about travel times to get bargain flights. This, combined with continually moving goalposts and bureaucratic hoops to jump through at work, made me decide to retire at 61. That was eight years ago and it's time to review what's happened since I abandoned my regular 6.45am alarm call.

One hip replacement, two rescue dogs, four new grandchildren (to add to the three I already had), two bathrooms to retille, a house to redecorate, five solo trips to Oz, (OK not my most carbon neutral activity but essential nevertheless), five elections to canvas and leaflet for, numerous campaigns, protests and demos, volunteering in schools with the Unite, 'Unions in Schools' programme, bargain theatre tickets and frequent use of my 'freedom-pass' and then my real passions of Morris dancing and breastfeeding supporter. Not sure how I fit in the TV download binge-watching, the latest being 'The Split' and 'Line of Duty'.

Dancing for Retirees

My love of Morris dancing started while I was still working and was my one personal indulgence on a Wednesday evening that I never missed. Now I can also take part in week-day activities such as talks, demonstrations and lessons to social clubs and in residential homes. Dancing, like singing, releases all the 'happy' hormones. It is North-West, ladies Morris and originated with the mill girls in the industrial revolution, part of real working-class culture. Hence, we wear straw hats, ribbons and clogs and the cotton mill theme runs through our dances and props, shuttles, bobbins and ribbon-sticks. It is a very social activity, exercising body and brain. Tiredness and depression disappear when you are dancing as a team. We subtly support each other, no room for wrong steps or moves when we are giving a performance, whether it be at a top international event or entertaining the residents of a local nursing-home. There is real pride in carrying on a traditional activity that enriches all our lives. We are always looking for new dancers and musicians. Anyone play the melodian or squeeze box?

Helping New Mothers

Being a breastfeeding supporter is a relatively new activity for me, which I also love and try never to miss. I attended a six week training course about a year ago and now volunteer every Thursday afternoon at a 'Breastfeeding Café' at a local baby clinic through an organisation called HENRY, which provides infant feeding support in partnership with Waltham Forest. I've always been passionate about the importance of forming good early-years relationships between parents and children. Supporting successful breastfeeding for mothers who want to feed their baby themselves is an important part of this, particularly since the UK has the lowest rate of breastfeeding in Europe. My own three children were all born by Caesarean section, which can make breastfeeding more difficult to establish but really helps mothers to bond with the baby and overcome the feelings of 'failure' that can follow a caesarean birth. Many of the mothers who come for support have had difficult births or their baby has a tongue-tie, which makes it more difficult for them to feed from the breast.

The main role of the volunteer supporter is to listen and give the mother a chance to talk, and, of course, make the tea! We can share useful leaflets and websites with information that may help overcome problems and anxieties but we are not there to tell her what to do or make decisions for her. A health professional is always available to diagnose a tongue-tie and to refer to for further help. It is a chance to spend some time chatting with mothers (and many fathers) and see new born and older babies - always a joy, particularly since you don't have to take them home. Some mothers only come once or twice, others return most weeks just for a chat and reassurance. It's very rewarding to watch them relax and feel supported since they often come in anxious or crying and usually leave a bit happier.

Betty Hales

Campaigning Against Cuts to School Funding

Despite the government's announcement of £14 billion for education during the election, 83% of schools in England will still be worse off in 2020, compared to 2015. This is because the money is being phased over 3 years.

After years of government cuts, 60 of 69 schools in Redbridge are still in crisis, with a predicted shortfall of £9.2M in 2020 and £153 per-pupil loss.

Campaigning

The NEU ran an excellent school cuts campaign, including maintaining a very useful website, which provided up-to-date information about individual school budgets. Using this data, five retired NEU members took part in a leafletting campaign to inform parents and the general public about the importance of voting for 'education' to ensure sufficient funding for schools. Between them, Miriam Scharff, Bob Archer, Maureen McCarthy, Liz Dolan and Jane Evans covered the following areas in Redbridge and Waltham Forest:

- 3 Saturdays in Ilford town centre and Chingford
- 3 schools in the Chingford constituency
- 2 schools in Ilford South
- 1 in school in Ilford North
- 1 in school in Leyton and Wanstead

It was an incredibly positive campaign, which really helped highlight the funding crisis. Surprisingly, many people were unaware of the problem, including many parents, who had not been informed by their child's school. Regardless of the election result, school funding has now been placed high up the political agenda, thanks to the 25,000 NEU members and supporters, who campaigned to make education a priority!

Jane Evans

Write for the Newsletter

All contributions to the NEU RRT Newsletter are welcome. Please send by email to - mikepeters1@ntlworld.com

Report from the District

Recent meetings have featured talks and discussions on significant issues in today's schools. Information about the most recent changes to Ofsted inspections highlighted a worrying trend for "deep" dialogues with subject leaders, which has put unacceptable pressure on primary teachers in particular, and also the questioning of children in order to make judgments about quality of teaching. Other topics included the NEU's continuing opposition to baseline testing and SATs, and a thought-provoking item on the importance of LGBT+ Inclusive education and training - a discussion which underlined the systemic ignorance and prejudice concerning the issues involved. Retired members initiated a debate about the vexed arguments surrounding "Exclusion or Inclusion" as part of strategies for supporting some of our most vulnerable and troubled children while avoiding teacher stress and classroom disruption. We hope this will be followed up later in the year.

Liz Dolan, Retired Members' Officer

NEU RETIRED MEMBERS' CONFERENCE

I was one of six Redbridge members who attended the London Conference in December. The day was strictly orchestrated, with few opportunities for discussion apart from a Q and A session and a 20 minute slot where regions split up to discuss relevant topics. Obviously, the imminent election dominated the initial sessions, with pleas for retired members to help, especially with the School Cuts campaign. A talk on Pensions was provided but, unfortunately, given the make-up of the new union, only provided information for retired teachers. (The teacher- dominance of the day was justifiably questioned by a number of participants in the afternoon Q and A session). For me, the best item was by Linda Jack from the WASPI campaign. The information she provided about the impact of delayed pensions for thousands of women was quite startling. The fact that over 20% of members present in the Hall fell into this category certainly brought the message home. All in all, good to meet with members from other districts, nice lunch (!), but, hopefully, next time there will be more opportunities for members to discuss key issues.

Maureen McCarthy