Addendum, Appendix, Addi-on bit

WARNING: If you are interested in teaching PE don’t read this

“Rose tinted torture and the tale of Wayne Lacey: Physical Education, a force for good at Bash Street School”

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Prologue:
The chapter in the introduction, Essex boys can’t write presents a potted biographical history written in a stylised fashion, from which many avenues of deeper investigation may be possible. In the vein of personal reflection and story telling, what follows is the journey down one such avenue. The chapter Essex boys can’t write briefly sketched episodes from my early school-life through to military service and eventually into Higher Education where the tale stops for convenience. Along this dimly lit path, many of these off-shoots of my experience may have been worthy of closer inspection; I decided to ‘shine my torch’ upon some experiences in Physical Education whilst at school in Essex during the 1970s-80s. My intention is to reveal in much deeper and richer detail, some formative memories of my education which might have some resonance with others at some level which was not appropriate in the Introduction section. By framing these chapters as reflective writing which are progressively linked and delving in greater detail they become auto-ethnographic in nature; a form of research writing which in turn may permit greater opportunities to explore and comprehend human experience (Sparkes and Silvennoinen, 1999; Sparkes, 2009). The research standpoint seemingly begs that the narrative is questioned to recognise its limitations, which, once identified may be turned advantageous into potential areas of new investigation. Consequently, the Epilogue to this chapter attempts to outline some limitations and opportunities for further research stemming from this personal account.
The Head of Physical Education at Bash Street School ran a tight ship. It is probably better for all that he remains nameless, not only to protect him, even the guilty need protection however ignorant they may have been, but to protect my sanity in recollecting this story. A generous soul, he shared his attention equally amongst most of the boys during their time in school – as any good teacher might do? For the purposes of this tale I shall call him Mr. Williams. A pirate captain from another world with a parrot on his shoulder called “chip”, he always let the boys ‘choose’ what they wanted to do in his lessons.

“D’you wanna do PE boys, or get whacked with the Whacking Stick?” he’d ask.

It was a foregone conclusion what the immediate future held in store if someone had a note from parents to excuse them from PE, or had even forgotten a bit of kit, let alone have no kit with them at all. The whacking stick was the usual means of persuasion to help pupils remember their things or to participate next time, notwithstanding plaster casts. WHACK. He was very proud of his whacking device, which was a cross between a cricket bat and something that a baker might use to retrieve pizzas from a hot oven. It was just flexible enough to whip and heavy enough to smack huge red squares on the backs of legs and other soft target areas.

“It has good whacking momentum” he used to explain as he swished the implement around in the air striding towards the fleshy back-sides lined up in the PE corridor. The victims knew the routine,

“Where’s yer kit son?”

“No kit Sir.”

“Where’s yer note son?”

“No note Sir…”

WHACK,

“Go and put these on, ready to go in two minutes”

“Yes Sir, thank you Sir”.

Piles of rugby shirts still damp from the rain and sweat from the previous classes gave a stale and musty backdrop to the noises of impact and whimper, as Mr. Williams expertly wielded his weapon of choice, accurately
finding its target with every swipe. WHACK. A line of folded boys waited to learn their lessons. WHACK. He was a good shot I will give him that, and this end of business in PE was always swift. WHACK.

“Stay there lad you are owed another from last week, bend over”, WHACK.

Technique is everything and practice makes perfect. WHACK. The torque generated through his muscular forearm on the wind-up was impressive and the power was transferred to the stick through a wrist action that was too fast for the naked eye to appreciate. WHACK. Like a tennis player striking their ace, a firm but flexible grip seemed to be the key of his professional delivery. WHACK. Having benefitted from this warming sensation on many occasions I can vouch for its effectiveness and over-use for no apparent good reason. Because my brother and I are twins and were in the same class we were often whacked in case he got confused about who he was talking to. He seemed to fear that his public confusion over our names might make him look silly – other pupils might laugh at his mistake which could translate as them laughing at him. The potential for the loss of control in his class to two fourteen year olds was considerable, as if we might have ‘one over’ on him which could dilute the sense of power which he held over all things PE. All he had to do was ask who we were - if he was confused, if he really cared which I doubt. My brother and I were often whacked as a preventative measure to warn off any twinny-mischievousness that we might be plotting. We often did “plot” of course but our swapping missions were much too subtle and well executed for him to actually notice. A waste of time really. It mattered little because we got whacked anyway; it was our way of scoring something back I suppose.

As an aside, Mr. Williams did share his pedagogical wisdom for preventative public torture and humiliation with a few selected staff who he felt he could trust. It worked for him, why not others? Now, the third year (Year 9 in National Curriculum speak) may be a difficult year for pupils and staff at any secondary school. I appreciate that now and did at the time. Being stuck in the middle of a five year ‘sea’ of schooling can be very distressing for all parties when the deckhands are out of sight of land. Once land is sighted though, perhaps a Sixth Form College or a hint of employment they seem to get on better at school with more focus in their lives. And yes, perhaps some of Mr. Williams’ crew had a duty to keep us focused while we drifted. But not by flogging. Mr. Williams appeared to have informed the metalwork teacher about the preventative whacking metered out to the twinny-boys in case they digressed and may have urged
the metalwork teacher to give it a try if he got the chance. As luck would have it we were on our options year and enjoying a term in the engineering department. Six weeks of woodwork followed by six weeks of metalwork and so the rotation went on throughout the year testing a range of vocational subjects. It was our first ever time in these industrial environments and it was all very exciting. There were big lathes and milling machines and hot casting facilities, it all looked great. Based upon the experience in these introductory classes we were supposed to select what we would like to study at GCE/O Level (GCSEs in current parlance). These were important career decisions, or so it seemed at the time and I was looking forward to being taught how to use this stuff. On our very first lesson the metalwork teacher was giving the class an introduction. Health and safety was obviously very high on the agenda if we were all to have an enjoyable time in his class - we had better listen. No problems there, I was with him all the way... until. The twinny’s were ordered to stand just outside the workshop in an open area but where all the class could see us through the glass doors. With a swagger the metalwork teacher skipped like Charlie Chaplin holding the metre rule that he’d been swishing about throughout his introduction spiel for the previous 30 minutes.

“Hold your hands out boys,” we did as we were told,

WHACK,

WHACK.

“That’s just in case,” he said, “just to let you know where we stand, ok”.

I stared at him in silence.

He was trying to nod and give us the eye as if we might understand each other. He wished to impress upon us what he considered to be an acceptable code of conduct in his classes. He didn’t impress me and I detected that he knew he’d screwed up as soon as he’d done it.

“Back to class” he ordered. We obeyed. The options decision was made instantly. We both chose to do woodwork. I never spoke to the metalwork teacher again whilst at school. There seemed little point. I had no respect for him.

Like a good wine the Whacking stick had matured with time. It had been repaired on numerous occasions with the white grip-tape used on the pole vaulting poles. The tape, constructed with woven cloth and backed with
glue was wound with overlaps to create ridges for extra strength. When the tape dried out it gave the additional benefit of rasping the skin as the Whacker made contact with soft flesh. It all added to the hot stinging sensation. Nice. Produced by craftsmen it was perfectly weighted and even had the words **WHACKING STICK** printed on it in red - with an exclamation mark. Impressive, indeed, it took many people’s breath away. As long as no blood was drawn and there were no visible bruises Mr. Williams could carry on with his ‘discipline regime’ unhindered. In hindsight it could have been a form of control which he administered stemming from his interpretation of “reasonable force” and being in *loco parentis*, perhaps, or was it just something I had done wrong? (I wondered what might drive such an angry man in the school environment to play-out these acts of punishment on children. Might there have been deeper, silent, more taboo aspects to his psyche that was the real beast within? What was his emotional make-up that motivated his actions in school? Was it a façade? Just like make-up, an aggressive cosmetic to mask deeper imperfections. Was he really in control?)

In fact, his unique approach to keeping things ‘ship-shape’ appeared to be sanctioned by the school, as for the Headmaster, there were never any behaviour problems from the PE department. In this regard Mr. Williams was quite the envy of other departments around the school as I now understand things.

Thankfully, after a bout of zealous, red-lined, frenzied whacking the damn thing broke to everyone’s relief. This practice had gone on for at least three years to the best of my memory. Mr. Williams used to mourn for his whacking stick and searched in vain for a suitable replacement. He never found one in the rest of my time there. The whacking ceased but I am confident that new forms of punishment would have been devised for the younger pupils below me. Why should they miss out? Either way, we were press-ganged into the PE experience on pain of death, or at least on pain of pain which was guaranteed on a weekly basis.

So we have a measure of the pedagogical attitude and management approach of Mr. William’s running of the PE department. However, he was not alone, he had an obedient little crew. There were two rather hapless shipmates helping to keep order on the decks. I think I am confident now, in judging that these two PE staff might have been capable of thinking for themselves when they weren’t around Mr. Williams, such may have been the strange spell he had over them. However, upon the threat of mutiny they seemed to stick together as thick as thieves lest the truth about ‘preferential’ treatment for pupils, via the stick, was made public. The
personal, social and professional consequences of breaking the PE teacher’s vow of silence was too much for the pirate-sidekicks and in my view they became complicit in the ‘torture’. Enjoy the riches of sporting success or walk the plank of shame seemed to be the deal for them. At risk of being melodramatic there seemed to be a sort of gang-member allegiance between the male PE staff. Whilst they may not have wanted to rock the boat for themselves, upset the status quo as it were, they did seem to play along with things and even at times seemed to find it quite entertaining. I am ‘glad’ this aspect of the education they were charged to provide for me was so amusing for them. Unfortunately I was not ‘in’ on the joke, only on the receiving end of it and could at times see through their hollow laughs as the corporal punishment was metered out by the Captain. With a wagging finger and a knowing stare he could well be imagined to have said to these pair, “and remember you two, you’ll never work in a school in Essex again if you double-cross me”.

Before turning to the Wayne Lacey situation, a brief note on the social background of Mr. Williams, from what we as pupils could glean at the time, may help us to understand his style of educating. Indeed, his social genetics may have rendered him pre-programmed to behave in no other way. Perhaps his PE teacher was cruel to him at school? We’ll never know. He may have just been doing his best as he saw it. Mr. Williams was a proud South Walian, probably a Valley’s man I would say now. He moved from that region with many other teachers who at the time seemed to find gainful employment in sunny Essex. A political irony was a sign of the times. As the then Prime Minister James Callaghan (Labour) MP for Cardiff South East, gave way in 1979 to Maggie Thatcher (Conservative) MP for Finchley in London, the employment prospects in “The Valleys” may not have been quite as ‘warm’ as they were in Essex. However, an unfortunate challenge (for me) of welcoming these educated people in Essex was trying to understand their Welsh accent. Their strange lingo was confusing for the teenage born-and-bred Essex types at Bash Street School. However, they had moved here to teach us and I think we appreciated that in our own little way.

“I mean like, where’d you come from mate, I mean Sir?” Like we’d understand the answer, we were just making conversation. Mr. Williams may have well come from Timbuktu for all we knew. When he spoke, or even worse when he shouted instructions you were likely to get showered in dribble and spit if you were in range. He spoke so quickly there was little time for him to draw the saliva back into his mouth and he must have had
repetitive strain injury from wiping his face in one slurring action with the back of his wrist. Mr. Williams was rugby mad and would become very excitable about that sport in particular. He also had a limp which made him look like a Peg Leg running for the bus when he was in a hurry. He regularly sported black eyes which were probably from his own rugby playing antics and had a girlfriend in the job/unemployment centre which was located over the road to the school. A better example of community networking to cater for the special talents housed in Bash Street School one could not imagine. All in all Mr. Williams was a passionate and determined man who seemed to know what he wanted in life.

It has to be said that Wayne Lacey was not blessed with a name that conjures up an image of strength and resilience in a young man. Not in terms of coping with our PE experiences at the hands of Mr. Williams anyway. This was not his fault. Wayne was in my class having joined us at the school in the second or third year after a family move to the area. He was quiet, good looking, of slim build with longish black hair and long black eyelashes. He smiled a lot, got bullied a lot and wouldn’t say boo to a goose. Forever having his dinner money stolen from known thugs in the school may have accounted partly for his weak disposition when in a crowd. After all, a bully has to eat as well you know, they have interests to protect and all that. Wayne was a loner and represented easy pickings. And I, and many others regrettably, failed to protect him. It was just like the “Private Santiago” situation in the film A Few Good Men (1992).

The day of the Wayne Lacey incident was strange and memorable for all the wrong reasons. It was raining hard and if we were lucky the PE lesson might be indoors. This was one of those days. I think it saved the pitches from becoming spoiled before the first fifteen got to them. Usually, when we were in the gymnasium for circuit training the task at the start of the session was to set out the equipment. The “circuit” upon which we were “trained”, was more like an army assault course with ladders to scale and ropes to climb, punctuated with sit ups and press ups and shuttle runs. My reasonable sporting prowess meant that I avoided a lot of hassle in this kind of lesson and I looked forward to the rope climb as the most effective means of escape in this regard. My modus operandi was to scale it quickly in the minute or so allocated to each bout of exercise. I would then spend the whole time up at the roof looking down on sweaty, toiling bodies and the fatties flailing around pathetically in tears on the bottom of a rope not being particularly encouraged by Mr. Williams’ own brand of encouragement. On this rainy day the equipment was already set out by the class before us.
Bonus. The class got in to their black shorts and white t-shirts in the adjacent changing room and then hurried out into the gym to sit obediently at the feet of Mr. Williams. The worst thing was to be last out and then to get shouted at for wasting time and holding everyone up. Like they were in a rush to go anywhere! Every changing room experience was a race to avoid ridicule and bullying. Wayne had not got his kit with him. Whether he’d forgotten it or whether it was stolen from him I do not know.

“C’mon Lacey, get out here now” Mr. Williams demanded from the gymnasium. We were all sat in a neat semi-circular fashion with our backs to the changing room entrance.

C’mon Lacey, get out here right now or I’ll…” he was becoming very impatient, there was anger in his voice, and Wayne was on his own in the changing room.

“God help me son if I don’t… if are you refusing me? Are you? Eh? What the hell are you doing in there? get out here right now” he shouted.

Wayne appeared at the changing room door and walked into the gym in his school uniform. We all looked round at him. He was stood absolutely still, in quiescence, petrified like a statue but cast in flesh and blood. There was no expression on his face although we could see a tear running down his cheek. His eyes seeming not to blink as he stared straight at Mr. Williams. A pregnant pause and Mr. Williams was gesturing ‘disgust’ with his hands but speechless at the sight before him; his jaw moving but no sounds coming out. Wayne’s urine was running freely now down the back of his legs which soaked into his cheap, black nylon trousers and filtered through his socks on to the wooden varnished floor. He stood motionless in his warm self made puddle of piss. He continued to stare into space and then began to shake and look very nervous indeed.

“Ah Lacey you useless... what have you done that for you... get out of my sight, you…”

Wayne ran out of the gym to the changing room. I remember walking out to see if he was ok. I saw him put his shoes on, he had his back to me. Then he turned and looked at me with a gentle smile on his face as he walked out. It was the smile he wore for everyone, including foes. It was a flimsy line of defence but it was the only one he had. He was lost, he was harmless, he wouldn’t say boo to goose, he just wanted a friend. I never saw him again.
I learned a lot from Wayne Lacey’s PE experiences that day, as I am sure he did, all for the wrong reasons of course, I hope he is ok.

The End.

**Epilogue: the chaos of teenage years**

This chapter, indeed much of the book, is aimed at Sports and Physical Education students who are on journeys of reading for a degree and training for their careers. This raises two questions; how might this chapter be considered to be studious research writing and, how might it be useful to them? To the former there are a number of limitations within the story to acknowledge and importantly, a raft of new opportunities to be recognised which could constitute a more detailed ethnographic investigation of the lived experience in education. To the latter, that it has been a demanding tale to write; a less than comfortable experience of reflection and recollection which has even been cathartic one might say but it is hoped that the reader might identify with some of these experiences. For aspirant PE teachers and sports coaches, it is hoped that the *Bash Street School* account might inform their pedagogical viewpoint as an example of what not to do.

One limitation of this chapter has been my strategy to be highly selective about the facts for the purposes of telling a “good” story. Notwithstanding that the tactic may have been appropriate in the context of this creative writing book, there may be many more ‘facts’ to be taken into consideration for a full account of the lived experienced as described – if that is possible or desirable to do at all?

The above is a polarised snapshot of events, interpreted and stylised to give flavour and richness to a story about a handful of characters at *Bash Street School*. To imbue with a sense of drama and conflict the story leaves out many important details about PE and the broader educational experience on offer at school such as my having really quite a happy and enjoyable time there filled with challenges and friendship. This could even be similar for Wayne but in truth is probably less so. A happy tale could be a very dull story to tell! The reader may judge for themselves when I might have used devises in writing such as overplay and caricature to divert attention, mask identities or make light of serious issues for dramatic effect. I have also
used descriptive writing and repetition to bring ‘texture’ to actual events, to relive them in a way that is faithful to my experiences.

A further limitation to acknowledge is that these are the reflections of a 14-year-old pupil from thirty years ago. The mists of time and the hormone swamp of adolescence may have swayed things in my memory during the chaos of the teenage years. I have also learned a great deal since then about what might qualify as “good”, “valuable” and “worthwhile” in a physical education experience which could be the motivation for writing the passage in the first place, but could also effect my interpretation of events. The reader is requested to permit some leeway here. However, it raises the challenge of how any personal account might be interpreted for research purposes. Reflective accounts may manifest themselves in a variety of ways including feedback forms, diaries, interviews, questionnaires and stories passed down through the generations. A limitation of this tale as research into my education at Bash Street School is that I was only ever offered a pupil’s-eye view of events. By definition that was my role there, a pupil, and it was from that perspective that I wrote this account. I know no other. (This perceived limitation may be a field research opportunity in a researcher’s quest for clarity and knowledge about a situation). Naturally, I was not privy to any details concerning Wayne’s learning and teaching needs although I am confident that he had some. So, what counts as data? And what might the researcher need to acknowledge about the data itself, the data source and the context of collecting that information in their search for authenticity and understanding about a social situation? These may be useful questions to address to inform a qualitative investigation.

The PE staff at Bash Street School were dedicated people, all of whom, particularly Mr. Williams went way beyond the call of duty for a teacher to “do good” for us as he saw it at the time. Of this I am sure and for this I am extremely grateful. I benefitted hugely in my life from him and the PE staff’s efforts to do something well. Where might I be now if they had not bothered or cared about sport? – or me? If they had done nothing or been insignificant in my life there may be no story tell for us to learn from.

Whilst the story may be a brief, selective and extremely biased view of mine, I feel it is my duty now to make sense of the experiences they created for me at school. However if this account were part of a wider research project Mr. Williams’ memories of these events might, or would, rightly be sought. In this case they are not. Further opportunities for data collection towards a more balanced and comprehensive picture might include investigating;
what were the views and opinions of other pupils at the time, and perhaps those of other staff at the school? Other’s views about me as a pupil, of Wayne, and of the Whacking Stick? How was Mr Williams regarded by other members of staff? Was PE really just a chance for school thugs to excel and stay out of trouble? Did my success in PE erode other teacher’s views of me as pupil who was serious about his non-PE subjects? How was the status of PE as a subject regarded by other subject teachers? All these may be worthy topics for further research as a matter of personal history – but they also begin to have much closer relevance to topics under discussion in contemporary Physical Education.

My interpretation of Mr Williams’ and his staff’s style of education has logically affected what I know now and has been affected by what I have learned since school. In my current career as a teacher I have learned more about education; in particular Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy, and have developed my own views on how to go about things in the classroom setting. However, just because I would try to avoid repeating what I now regard as their mistakes, does not mean that what they did at the time was regarded as wrong, on the contrary it seemed to be exactly the right thing to be doing as far as the school hierarchy judged things then. These considerations may also be pathways of further investigation.

In closing, however, there is rarely “smoke without fire” and the reader is invited to judge whether the twists and turns of this story could fabricated from “thin air”. Is it purely a fictitious account for the purposes of entertainment? Probably not. Whilst it has been enjoyable to reminisce about my experiences in PE; the Whacking Stick and Wayne Lacey, it has not been an entirely comfortable writing exercise. If the PE experience at Bash Street School was this memorable then maybe it was a profound and even worthwhile learning experience for me.

Thank you for reading.

References
