**Dave’s Story...**

**Dave Morrison interviewed by Matt Jas on 20th October, 2012.**

**Summary:** In this interview Dave talks about his experiences of teaching evening classes at Brixton Prison and at Scott Lidgett School, becoming Head of Year and to eventually Head Teacher. He talks about teaching wood and metalwork from making wooden boats to the children learning how to make their own coffee tables to take home with them. He reflects upon the importance of ‘people skills’ and the satisfaction of seeing children ‘making progress’. Dave also tells us about being part of a choir, a football coach and member of the union, N.U.T.

**This is Jas, I’m here on the 20th October 2012 at Dave’s house. I’m not sure where that is? I’m here with Claire (*London Bubble’s projects coordinator*) and Dave.**

**What’s your surname please? Could you spell that please?**

**Dave:** Morrison. M-O-R-R-I-S-O-N.

**Where and when were you born?**

**Dave:** I was born in Norbury, that’s SW16 on the 15th March 1943.

**Where abouts did you work around here?**

**Dave:** I worked at a Scott Lidgett School, which has since become Southwark College.

**Okay and what did you do?**

**Dave:** I taught woodwork- metalwork. When I first went there I was Head of the Year, Senior Master, Deputy Head and, for the final part, I was the Head Teacher.

**You did pretty much everything. How was being a metalwork- woodwork teacher? Because they don’t do that anymore, do they?**

**Dave:** No, it was good, it was good, it was interesting. Adding a little bit on here, not only did I do that there, for a while I used to go to Brixton prison and take a woodwork class in the evening. Which was quite interesting.

**I can imagine. And what was that like? Was that good?**

**Dave:** It was fine- I mean the people that came to it were very keen to get on. I think the officers there had quite a negative attitude to be quite honest.

**And that helped the community I can imagine. What sort of people did you teach at the school?**

**Dave:** It was a secondary school. So you taught all years 1 to 6.

**Was it a mixed school?**

**Dave:** Yeah.

**For the local kids?**

**Dave:** Mainly local. Yes, yes.

**Are there any memorable days or things that stands out?**

**Dave:**  I’m trying to think what memorable day. I can’t really think of any day that stood out to me... No, I mean obviously one that sticks in my memory was when we were first told that the school was closing. It seemed to me more than just a coincidence that they closed our school when they were looking for somewhere else for Southwark College. And numbers were rising but they still said they wanted to close it.

**What was your daily routine as first wood workshop teacher?**

**Dave:** Basically, I used to get there early. I’m one of those people who believe that it’s better to get there early than late. And you simply go in and make sure you got the stuff ready for the day.

**What sort of stuff did you do in the class?**

**Dave:** It depends on the year. What sort of woodwork you’d do. In lower years it was something fairly basic.

**Like what sort of stuff?**

**Dave:** You’re testing my memory now. I think perhaps, early on, perhaps simply to practice using a saw and a chisel, you might make a little wooden boat, solid, drill a hole, put a post in it, a mast in it.

**And what did the older kids do?**

**Dave:** The older ones were obviously those in year 5 who had been doing their GCSEs, so they had to do things that involved making joints, little boxes maybe, some of them made coffee tables, which was quite popular, I think very sort of popular with mom when they took the coffee table home provided it stood up of course. And also there were lathes for turning bowls.

**So it was kind of pottery as well?**

**Dave:** No, wooden, block of wood, chisel fed in.

**And then, what was it, O-levels back then?**

**Dave:** No, it got changed to GCSEs by then. So I mean obviously those doing GCSEs, it wasn’t just the practical side, they also had to learn the theoretical side of things.

**And you taught that as well?**

**Dave:** Yes.

**Did you say you were Deputy Head as well. What was your duties as a Deputy Head?**

**Dave:** Obviously you had to keep an eye on things generally. Although you had Head of Years, if they had a problem that they thought was more serious they would bring it, bring it to you, particularly if it involved the need to suspend somebody. Because as the Deputy Head you had the authority to do that. Or if there was a need to talk to the parents.

**Did you ever suspend someone?**

**Dave:** I think only ever once.

**Do you remember why?**

**Dave:** I think it was for bullying. Especially suspending until the parents came up. I mean, when you’re interviewing parents, you’ve got a mixture. Some were very much on the school’s side. And then others were, I know there was one classic was, a teacher had prepared some work for a child they thought was just what the child needed and sent it home and the mom brought it straight back and said: “it’s your job to teach him, not mine”. And you think what chances does that child stand when the parents take such a negative attitude.

**Did that sort of thing happen very often?**

**Dave:** No, thankfully that’s the exception. I mean most parents are keen to support their children and are glad for any help they’re given.

**What sort of system did you have to go by if you wanted to discipline someone?**

**Dave:** We had a detention system whereby... obviously a teacher who wants to keep anyone back after school they can. There was a detention where you had a senior member of staff. Who would be in an appointed room and children had to sort of meet there.

**Did you have to be in the detention room?**

**Dave:** Yeah, Yeah

**What was it like?**

**Dave:** Pretty boring actually, pretty boring. Once they were there and had settled down, those who settled down very quickly went home fairly quickly. You know with a warning not to misbehave again. But, as you can imagine, in tends to be the same people, it’s almost like a club really for some of them. Meet up your friends, come to detention.

**I can imagine. Would you say you were kind of a nice teacher when you were teaching woodwork? Did you give out many detentions?**

**Dave:** No, I don’t think I did. I tried to be pleasant and I think that the children tend to react to you, the majority do, there’s always the exceptions, the way you treat them. If you treat them fairly, which I’m afraid not all teachers do, the majority will respond to them in the same way. There is always one or two who don’t considerate.

**Did you set homework in wood work?**

**Dave:** Not in ...The homework in sort of wood work or metal work would only come approaching exam time simply because they’d be given topics to prepare on. The sort of things they may have questions in the exam about.

**What was the kind of layout of the classes? I know nothing about it. Did they just turn up and did the work?**

**Dave:** With the wood work and metal work it was in workshops.

**Right.**

**Dave:** And then sort of benches, there were two to a bench at opposite corners. If you were doing the technical drawing, there was a drawing room. Obviously there would be drawing boards.

**Did you mark those drawings?**

**Dave:** Did I mark them?

**Yeah. Did you check over them?**

**Dave:** I didn’t do a lot on the drawing side but any homework obviously if there was something and you had to mark it... I think it is ... you can either mark it in a negative way or a positive way. That might sound strange but I mean, I was always try to look for the good in a piece of work. Some people wanted to look for the worst bits and emphasise those. And I would tend to praise the good and say such and say such needs attention.

**Where did you mark? Did you do it at home or at school?**

**Dave:** At school.

**You didn’t take your work home?**

**Dave:** I just stayed longer at school. Or you mean early in the morning you say?

**What times did you work?**

**Dave:** What times?

**Yeah. Did your hours change as you went up the ladder?**

**Dave:** No, no, no, it stayed the same. It was 9 o clock start and I was usually there half 8. And probably finished at 4 and be there till 5.

**What duties did you have when you were a Head Teacher?**

**Dave:** I didn’t become a Head Teacher until they had decided, Southwark Council, to close the school. The then head decided he’d retire straight away. So he left all the sorting out, clearing up, finding new schools for the pupils, new schools for the teachers to me. But it went well. I was pleased. I think all the children got into the schools mostly where they wanted but obviously some couldn’t. Although numbers were lower than they should have been, there were still a lot of children to put into the other local schools. I think most of the staff got, I think most of the staff got places alright. And I can remember the Head of Education at the time called to go and see me. He sai**Dave:**   “How are things?”, so I was telling him. He says: “No, I mean how are things for you? He says, what are you going to do?” I said I hadn’t even thought about it yet. What I ended up doing was I was going to work in education personnel, which was quite interesting to suddenly be working alongside people I used to have to refer to. And it was while I was working there that I had a stroke and obviously I didn’t go back to teaching or any sort of working. I know I’m sort of detracting a bit but just to give you the background.

I went to three different hospitals for about a year. Came out of there, went to Southwark Park Nursing Home, which has closed recently. And I was still stuck in a wheelchair. While I was there I was referred to physio to St Thomas’. I met a couple, Ken and Helen, who did a job share, taken by ambulance three times a week. It was very, very painful, stretching my legs and all that sort of thing but they got me walking, bless them. I keep in touch with them. But I think probably I was so useless and they had such limited time that they thought we won’t bother with that one. Anyway that sort of got me mobile. Once I could get around I thought I’d like to do something again in education. So I applied to Southwalk Council to become a governor of a school. They said we only have got one available, at the moment. So I thought well, I have grandchildren, why not? So for the last whatever years I am governor, Vice-Chair Governor now. I go in every Thursday morning help children with their reading, and I’m so pleased there on a Thursday morning, because it is a full assembly, a full singing assembly and it is so lovely hearing the children sing. But I do go on, don’t I...?

**That’s fine, that’s exactly what we want.**

**How is being a governor different from being a head teacher?**

**Dave:** I mean obviously as a governor, you have certain meetings. Your overall responsibility is to make sure the school is providing the education for the children. To make sure they’ve got the things they need. And obviously any appointments that are made, the governors have to make the appointments. And you’re expected to keep an eye on things because otherwise OFSTED will sort of be saying you’re not doing the job. I mean, the teachers are doing the business. The governors just make sure they are.

**Which do you prefer?**

**Dave:** That’s a good question that. Well I think while I was teaching I preferred that but you do in fact, you have a teacher governor on the governing body. But I mean since I haven’t been teaching I do enjoy being a governor probably. All the while I was able to teach it would be the teaching but after that I find the job of being a governor very satisfying.

**What do you enjoy about that?**

**Dave:** I think seeing the children succeed. Not just in the subject you’re teaching but... [*phone ringing*]

**What you enjoy about being a teacher?**

**Dave:** Yeah, it is the satisfaction of seeing children making progress. Because obviously, you didn’t see just it in your subject area. You’re talking to other staff. You heard how they’re getting on. Seeing them making progress. It’s satisfying.

**When the school closed, how did that affect the local community?**

**Dave:** I think the local community was very disappointed, because a local school had been taken away. I mean, some of the children had to start going long distance to get to school because the nearby schools couldn’t cope with it. I think initially the school didn’t have a very good name. But I think as things progressed there were improvements and the community in the end was very sorry that it went.

**How did you feel when you found out they were going to close the school?**

**Dave:** Very disappointed because I had been working there... It was only the second school I had ever taught in. Because strangely enough, when I finished my college course, the first school I went to teach in was the one I had been to as a pupil, which was quite a strange experience. And then I moved to Scott Lidgett School. So most of my working life I’d been there, I thought we had raised the standards from what they were. We were now meeting all the required standards that Ofsted had set. And I was just disappointed for many aspects, I was disappointed both well from the children’s point of view. I was disappointed because you work up a relationship with your colleagues and all of a sudden they’re being scattered here and there and everywhere. I mean I still keep up with the number of them, I just felt that the community were losing a good asset.

**You said it didn’t have a very good name. When you told people you worked there how did that make you feel? Did you feel anything?**

**Dave:** No, I don’t think people sort of reacted in that sort of way. I think it was basically that the standards weren’t being met and obviously because the authority publishes all the results so that when parents looking for a school for their child to go to from primary school to secondary school obviously look at it and, quite rightly base their judgements on that.

**To do your job as a teacher what do you think you have to be good at, sort of what skills?**

**Dave:** Person skills, I think your subject is a secondary thing. I know some absolutely brilliant people, they just can’t communicate with children. They probably got much better qualifications in their subject than I would ever have got. But, classical thing, there is one of the maths teachers there and he just couldn’t come down to their level, because his maths knowledge was so good, he couldn’t understand the very basics and I think it’s so important to be able to see the level that children are at and to realise that, all right, you may be brilliant at your subject but you got to come down to the children’s level and you have got to use your skills to make it as interesting as you can and to encourage them to improve.

**And do you reckon you need to have the same skills to be a Deputy Head or Head Teacher?**

**Dave:** Person skills are important because I mean you occasionally get complaints from parents about members of staff and you somehow have got to balance it. And I mean there are times when the parents had complained about the teacher and I had thought yes I can imagine that but you still have to deal with it because, of course, you’ve got to be careful with what you say to the teachers because they’ve got unions. So again you have to get your point across and do it in a fair sort of way.

**How would you go about doing that?**

**Dave:** That’s a very good question. Probably, probably it depends on the individuals. I think I had a very good relationship with most of the staff. I mean there were some you met socially outside of school. With some you only met them in school and you’re glad you only met them in school. But I think respect is an important word, you’ve got to respect your colleagues. And I think respect is something that generally seems to be disappearing. Which is probably why we have all the problems we have got.

**You mentioned that you met up with your colleagues socially. What sort of stuff did you do?**

**Dave:** Nothing too exciting. I mean I seem to remember a couple of us sing in the same choir. Maybe we went to the theatre or something. Maybe the occasional drink, only an occasional one though.

**With choirs you get sometimes younger people as well. Were there ever anyone that you taught in the choir with you?**

**Dave:** No, not in that choir. Since leaving there, since retiring, I’ve been in a couple of choirs. In fact, after not having been in a choir for about 50 years, I ended up in two. Because Southwark Council started one up which they called Caruso. The whole point of that was to bring various nationalities of people together. Singing does bring people together. So I started going to that one on a Thursday evening. And they started one in the South, the Rotherhithe and Bermondsey Choral Society, which sounds very grand but it’s just an ordinary choir. That one’s on a Tuesday. So for quite a period of time, I was going to two choir practices a week. Which is a little bit much, I don’t know there is something about Thursday evenings. That seems to be a good evening for meetings. So frequently I couldn’t go to the choir. So about six months ago I decided I’ll just go to the Tuesday evening ones. But a new choir starting up, which I shall probably start going to, is one for people that have had a stroke, and that’ll be at Morley College of a Wednesday so I might starting going to that one, it’s on Wednesday afternoons so it’s all right.

**Do you think choirs bring the community together?**

**Dave:** Oh, they do, if you look at the choir now. Obviously it’s a mix of ages, the mix of men and women. There’s probably a social mix there, there’s a racial mix. And yet, the singing brings everybody together

**Do you think the school brought people together like that?**

**Dave:** I think so, I think so. I mean to be a successful school you’ve got to. Yeah, I think the school did. Staff-wise we had quite a range of backgrounds there. Yes, I think it does.

**And you mentioned unions. If you don’t mind me asking, were you ever a member of a union?**

**Dave:** Yes, I was a member of the NUT for a while. Did never go on strike. I’m not a big fan of unions but I think, you know, if they called a strike and I didn’t believe in what they were doing, I don’t think I would have gone along with it. And though I think with the union you’re supposed to do what you’re told, aint ya. If I believed in it I would go along with it, if I didn’t...because I’m a Christian, I couldn’t really go along with something I didn’t believe in it.

**How did your work affect your home life?**

**Dave:** Ah, mostly it didn’t affect it too much. You just get used to sort of work in the times. I used to take a football team on a Saturday morning. So I didn’t have to do any shopping Saturday morning because there was always sort of a football to go to.

**Was that a school football team?**

**Dave:** Oh, yeah.

**So you were a football coach?**

**Dave:** Yes, it’s because the school I first went to, which is back to my old school, Wandsworth, they played ruby and I managed to get them to introduce a football team, which I was very pleased to do. And actually as a pupil I played ruby for a school team, not many games, didn’t enjoy it. Football is definitely a thing for me.

**You mentioned that you had a stroke; do you reckon that’s to do with your work? Stress? Anything like that?**

**Dave:** No idea, no idea. No I went to bed one night thinking it was one of my migraines. I suffer migraine. Next thing I knew I woke up in hospital. I was in three different hospitals best part of the year. And... I don’t know, I think stress can bring these things on but honestly I don’t know.

**How has your work affected your health in any way?**

**Dave:**  My work or stroke or-?

**Working at the school, did it affect your work in any way at all?**

**Dave:**  No, no I had very little time off. I’m one of these people that you know I’ve got to be really ill to take some time off. Unlike some. I think the only time I took some time off, I think I had the flu on one occasion and ah... No I didn’t take much time off at all. Because I mean, the school had already packed up when I had the stroke. That was the big thing in the end work-wise but... The stroke has affected me a lot. Probably, you don’t know to know too much about my stroke. I’m lucky in many ways because it didn’t affect my speech. The only time it affected me, I don’t remember this, when I was first in hospital, I was told I used to shout and swear and that’s not me. The only thing now, the only left over I’ve got from my stroke, I’ve got fixed hips and if I was to stand up you can see the peculiar shape. And I’ve got to remember to lift my left foot. I tend to drag my left foot and I have been known to trip over, dive and climb off the floor. In fact the last time was a Friday about three months ago. I was going round the corner to get my fish and chips, Friday evening. Crossed over the Zebra crossing; turned right, a few steps, straight down, lots of bleeding. Dear lady came over, said: “I’ll get an ambulance”. “No, no, no. Just somebody help me up, please”. So I went round, got my fish and chips, and went straight home. I’m just glad I fell there rather than with a bag of fish and chips. And I also find, I think that has affected my memory as well. And I’m far more emotional now. Things get me upset quicker.

**Just going back to when you were off sick. Did you ever receive sick pay?**

**Dave:** Yes, yeah. That’s one of the things, within the teaching contract, you get sick pay.

**And when you were a head teacher, obviously the school was closing down, how many employees were there?**

**Dave:** 50 initially. That includes teachers, cleaning staff, dinner ladies all that sort of thing.

**What was it like working in the school, in terms of the noise, and smells, and lights?**

**Dave:**  It was enjoyable, you just get used to it, it’s all part of being there. I mean if I could I’d do it all over again.

**Do you think you as a teacher, and then deputy head and then head teacher, do you reckon your wage was decent?**

**Dave:** Yes, I think so, I was quite happy with that. I mean I wouldn’t refuse more but I was quite happy with what I got.

**What sort of things in terms of your work, made you feel contentment?**

**Dave:** I mean there is always .. .when you see.. I suppose with staff as well but most particularly with the children when you see them, making progress, that’s very rewarding, particularly those that had real problems and then suddenly you could see they’re making progress. And also to me what is rewarding, I think when you see the parents are working hard to help their children. Because some parents think the education of their children is something that happens in school. They don’t realise that they have got an important part to play at home. And the children that progress are the ones that the parents help. I mean I see that now when I go to help the children with their reading. The children that take their books home and their mom or dad helps them and the next time they come back, they’re that much better. Whereas with the ones that don’t get any help, it’s a struggle to make any improvement with them. I mean, parents do play a very important part in their children’s education. I know some of them just think the school will sort it out. It’s not like that. The school does play its part, the parents have to play their part as well.

**How did it make you feel when a parent wasn’t helping or playing their part?**

**Dave:** I just felt sorry for their child because there is nothing you can do. I mean the child is doing the work that his got to do. The parents say: “well, he’s done his homework, so what?” sort of thing. The children that do progress are the ones where the parents do play their part. I think that is the frustrating part. You know, you’d like to really have a go at the parents but that wouldn’t do any good. Because, you see, children make progress and, within the school setting with the limited time, there’s only so much you can do. With the parents spending a bit of their time to work with their children on a one-to-one basis, that could make so much difference.

**How did it make you feel when your child did well?**

**DAVE:** Oh, it’s great. It makes you feel happy. Not in terms of taking the credit for it because I mean, mostly, in the subject that I taught, wasn’t an important one in so far as the children’s future was concerned. Seeing they’re making progress in the basic subjects, ah, is a lovely feeling. That’s where the satisfaction of teaching comes from.

**How does it make you feel or how did it make you feel that you were teaching a subject that you felt they didn’t feel was too important for the majority of them?**

**Dave:**  Yeah, I mean I think they were quite happy for their children to be doing something on the practical side. I suppose they thought they would be doing odd jobs around the home. I hadn’t really thought about that one, to be honest. Because most of my work, although I was teaching wood work and metal work, most of my time and the extra money I was paid for was on the social side, the pastoral side.

**What sort of social stuff did you do?**

**Dave:** No, I don’t mean social in terms of having a good time but it’s the liaising with parents, making sure that or trying to make sure that children enjoy coming to the school, supporting the teachers if they were having problems. It’s difficult to put it all into words, really.

Coz we speak about the wood workshop and the sort of stuff they made in that, the metal work, what’s sort of stuff?

Oh dear, I didn’t do much metal work, I must admit. I’m just trying to think what I did, actually. I only did a year of metal work and that was sort of fairly basic like perhaps making a bracket, drilling a hole in it.

**Do you mind me asking why did you only do a year of metal?**

**Dave:** Because there were people to do the metal work, and I was doing the wood work mainly. And obviously the more you get promotion on things like ‘Head of the Year’, you got more non-teaching time. And obviously as deputy head I wouldn’t be doing as much teaching as I had at a lower level.

**What made you decide to go for the Deputy Head?**

**Dave:** Well I suppose having gone from House Master or Head of the Year, Senior Master, it seemed the obvious progression, plus let’s be honest, there’s more money. You know. But I don’t know, I suppose as Senior Master I did enjoying trying to help, both staff and pupils, Deputy Head seemed the next most obvious progression.

**What made you go for Head of the Year? Was that the step of being teacher and then Head of the Year?**

**Dave:** Yeah, well I mean I first went there, I went there as a House Master and then decided to do away with the house system, so became Head of the Year. It’s just basically a way in education to get a promotion. And i quite like the pastoral side of it where you’re not just looking at any particular subject but making sure that a child is learning, is enjoying their learning as far as possible. And obviously a certain aspect of it is the discipline side as well, if a child is misbehaving they get referred to you and you have to wave a magic wand and make it better.

**Are there any specific cases where you helped or where you had to discipline a child that had come to you that sticks with you?**

**Dave:** No, I can’t think of any individual one that sticks in my mind.

**How did the school benefit the community? Was it not just educating the community but was it also a meeting place?**

**Dave:** Yes, it was also used for adult education, evening classes. It was a good resource there. They had a good gym, so that was popular for sports groups to use it. I’m just trying to think what groups used it. Obviously there was an art groups, they had good art facilities there. People of all ages who fancied themselves an artist could came along to have a go

**Were there any kids that you remember from when you were working at school?**

**Dave:** No, as I said since my stroke I‘m afraid my memory is far away. I mean my diary is my memory. I’m just trying to think of any individuals there. One thing, just one thing on my stroke, I didn’t know about this until afterwards, but while I was in hospital, my wife was asked twice to sign a ‘Do not resuscitate’. Which she didn’t. If she had done we wouldn’t be talking now. So I’m just pleased she decided she wanted me around for a bit longer.