

EDITORIAL

---

## The Story of *FORUM*, 1958-2008

CLYDE CHITTY

### How *FORUM* began

The spring of 1957 saw the publication of a collection of essays edited by Brian Simon, a lecturer in education at Leicester University, looking at changes that had taken place both in the school system generally and within individual schools in the decade or so since the passing of the 1944 Education Act, and with the title *New Trends in English Education*. The timing of the book's publication was propitious, in that the mid-1950s was a period of really exciting new developments in the education system of England and Wales, with the opening of Kidbrooke School, London's first new purpose-built comprehensive, in the autumn of 1954; the launch of the two-tier Leicestershire Plan for comprehensive reorganisation (very much the brainchild of Brian's colleague Robin Pedley) in 1957; and the publication, also in 1957, of a report by the British Psychological Society questioning (albeit tentatively) the validity of Cyril Burt's theories about fixed innate intelligence.

The 'trends' identified in the 1957 book could be summarised under four main headings:

- (1) the abolition of A, B and C streams at the junior school stage in favour of a common basic course at the outset of school life;
- (2) the entry of secondary modern school pupils for external examinations, which showed that some could reach a standard of achievement as high as, or higher than, many grammar school pupils;
- (3) the introduction of comprehensive schools, a number of which had now been successfully operating for a decade, and which, if generally established, would make eleven-plus selection unnecessary;

(4) the evolution towards a common curriculum within the new comprehensive school which pointed the way to a well-balanced general education for all at the secondary stage.

The book received a lot of favourable media attention, and out of its success grew the idea of establishing a progressive journal – ‘for the discussion of new trends in education’ – the title of the 1957 book becoming the new journal’s sub-heading. And so *FORUM* was launched in the autumn of 1958, with Brian Simon being joined in running the new journal by his colleague Robin Pedley and by Jack Walton, a head of department at a comprehensive school in Birmingham – the three of them setting up PSW (Educational) Publications for the purpose of managing the journal on a day-to-day basis. Brian Simon and Robin Pedley were to be co-editors, and a number of the contributors to the 1957 book – including Edward Blishen, a teacher at Archway County Secondary School in Islington, north London, and author of the widely-acclaimed 1955 novel *Roaring Boys*, Marjorie Cooke, head teacher of the Priory Girls’ Secondary Modern School in Acton in Middlesex, George Freeland, head teacher of Mowmacre Junior School in Leicester and Jack Walton – became founder members of the Editorial Board of the new journal and stayed to guide *FORUM* through its early years.

Later on in this number, we reprint the Editorials from the first two numbers of *FORUM*, which give some idea of the excitement and optimism that accompanied the launch of the journal. In the first number, the co-editors talked of *FORUM* being seen as ‘an expression of the educational ferment of the present time’ and as acting as ‘a forum for a lively discussion and exchange of experience’ among teachers and administrators. This initial number carried an authoritative article by Raymond King, head teacher of Wandsworth Comprehensive School in south-west London, on the progress of the London School Plan and reports by two head teachers in Leicestershire on the first year of the Leicestershire ‘Experiment’ in comprehensive organisation. There was also a symposium on science teaching by two comprehensive departmental heads and a discussion of advanced courses being developed in a number of pioneering secondary modern schools.

### **Exciting Developments in the 1960s**

The 1960s, and especially the period from 1964 to 1968, was a time of great expectations for those who campaigned for reform and progress in all areas of public life – and particularly for those who shared *FORUM*’s educational values. Writing about his recollections of the 1960s in the journal *Education* in August 1990, Maurice Plaskow, who had been a Curriculum Officer for the Schools Council from 1970 to 1984, observed that, for those who believed in an extension of educational opportunity, it surely had been ‘the best of times’:

It is now fashionable to deride the 1960s as culturally aberrant and wildly idealist. Yet healthy idealism may be preferable to entrenched

ideology parading as pragmatism. Many of us who were active in education in the 1960s look back on a time of optimism, a spirit of shared concerns and the beginnings of an articulation (in every sense) of an education system which would offer the greatest possible opportunities to everyone as an entitlement, not as a privilege.

The campaign for the reorganisation of secondary schooling along comprehensive lines and for the widening of access to institutions of higher education was often part of a much broader campaign to bring about the creation of a fairer, more open, more egalitarian society. Writing in *New Society* in June 1965, the leading sociologist A.H. Halsey, an early contributor to *FORUM*, began his widely-quoted article on 'Education and Equality' with the ringing declaration:

Some people, and I am one, want to use education as an instrument in pursuit of an egalitarian society. We tend to favour comprehensive schools, to be against public schools and to support the expansion of higher education.

Brian Simon himself was an admirer of Halsey's work at that time, but he was wary of viewing the relationship between educational reform and social change in quite such simplistic terms!

Many of the articles in *FORUM* captured the spirit of the times and articulated the hopes and aspirations of the journal's loyal subscribers, particularly with regard to the issue of comprehensive reorganisation. At the start of the decade, the number of pupils being educated in comprehensive schools in Britain amounted to less than five per cent of the secondary school population; but, between 1960 and 1964, one-quarter of all local education authorities were making major changes in their selection procedures. Articles in *FORUM* charted the swing towards comprehensive education in various parts of the country, those by Joan Simon published in 1964 and 1965 covering developments in Bradford, Sheffield, Liverpool and Manchester.

*FORUM* obviously welcomed the publication in July 1965 of Circular 10/65 making it clear that comprehensive schooling was now national policy, but there was concern that the Department of Education and Science (DES) *requested* rather than *required* local education authorities to prepare plans for reorganisation in their area. It was also worrying that two of the six patterns of comprehensive reorganisation listed in the Circular, and considered acceptable as 'interim solutions', involved the use of parallel schools for students over the age of 13 or 14 and the continuance of some form of selection. An article by Brian Simon in the Spring 1966 number of *FORUM* (Volume 8, Number 2) attacked the so-called Doncaster–Cardiff Plan, whereby parents of children aged 13 had to decide whether or not they wished them to remain at school for a further five years and sit 'A' Levels. If they were prepared to guarantee that they would do so, their children could be transferred to the 'upper' or

'grammar' school. If not, they would remain in the 'high' or 'modern' school and leave at 15 or 16. Brian argued that a deliberate attempt was being made to build into the state system of education, under the umbrella of comprehensive schooling, a clear principle of social selection. Parental choice was now to be *the* determining factor in the division of children into two parallel types of school, 'each with its own particular resources and facilities and specific vocational direction'.

Brian had in mind here the experience of the early years of the Leicestershire Plan where a choice had to be made at the age of 14 and only those who wished to sit external examinations could move on to the 'upper' or 'grammar' school. From research carried out by John Eggleston for an article published in *New Society* in March 1965 with the title 'How Comprehensive is the Leicestershire Plan?', it was abundantly clear that, to put it simply, middle-class parents chose an extended education for their children more frequently than did working-class parents. In a predominantly working-class area of Leicestershire (South Wigston), 77.5 per cent of non-manual workers' children transferred to the 'upper' school in 1964, compared to 30.0 per cent of manual workers' children. In the predominantly middle-class area of Oadby in the same year, the percentages were 89.2 and 59.1 respectively. It was partly as a result of such findings that the Leicestershire Education Committee took the decision that transfer would take place automatically for all children at the age of 14 when the school leaving age was raised to 16.

One of *FORUM's* major concerns in the first decade of its existence was the issue of non-streaming. Its first conference on the subject, concentrating on non-streaming in the junior school, was held at the Institute of Education in London on 17 November 1962 and attracted an audience of over 200 teachers. The main speaker in the morning session was John Daniels of the Nottingham University Institute of Education, who pointed out that such a conference would have been 'inconceivable in 1950'. There was now 'universal interest in the question of non-streaming, if not universal agreement about it' (reported in *FORUM*, Volume 5, Number 2). The second *FORUM* Conference on non-streaming, held in London on 25 April 1964, broadened its remit to include discussion of non-streaming at the secondary stage, and this took up the whole of the afternoon session. It was opened by Peter Mauger, head teacher of the Nightingale County Secondary School in Wanstead, east London, who said that among the things that had driven him to unstream his school was the observation that the children segregated themselves according to their streams, even in the playground. There had, in his view, been 'an unquestionable social gain' from the school's non-streaming policy – 'there was now neither segregation among children, nor the rejection of some children by others' (reported in *FORUM*, Volume 7, Number 1). The success of this second conference with its wider scope led the Editors of *FORUM* to devote much of Volume 7, Number 3 (Summer 1965) to the topic of 'Non-Streaming and the Comprehensive School'. And the Editorial left readers in no doubt that this was an issue of paramount importance:

The key matter in English education today, which touches on every other of moment, is streaming. It raises directly questions of aim and purpose, psychological problems concerning the nature of learning, pedagogical interests in the content and methods of education and issues surrounding pupil–teacher relationships.

This number of *FORUM* included an edited version of a talk given earlier in 1965 by a head teacher in Llanelly to the 73rd Annual Conference of the Incorporated Association of Head Masters. And such was the mood of optimism prevailing at the time that he could choose as his text: ‘If comprehensive schools were the educational battlecry of the last General Election, non-streaming may be that of the next’. Then the third of the three 1960s *FORUM* conferences on non-streaming, held on 4 June 1966, was undoubtedly the most successful of the three. It was organised jointly with the Comprehensive Schools Committee, a pressure group which had been launched in the autumn of 1965; and over 400 teachers were packed into the Assembly Hall of the Institute of Education.

In the midst of all this activity, the *FORUM* Editorial Board submitted evidence to the Plowden Committee established by the then Minister of Education Sir Edward Boyle in August 1963 ‘to consider primary education in all its aspects and the transition to secondary education’. This evidence, which was reprinted in full in Volume 7, Number 1 (Autumn 1964), concentrated on the case for non-streaming and made much of the fact that four members of the Board were experienced junior school head teachers who had successfully unstreamed their schools during the last ten years. It was argued that streaming had once been justified on the grounds that children were born with ‘a fixed and largely unchangeable mental endowment’. Now, however, the basic rationale of streaming was no longer held by most leading educationists, with stress now being put on the need to ensure for every child the conditions in which intelligence could be ‘acquired’. In *FORUM*’s view, the very act of unstreaming opened up quite new perspectives for the junior school, and it became possible to think in terms of providing an education – or educational experiences – suited to the needs of all the children in the school. Once the facile approach of simply dividing children up according to their supposed inherent ‘ability’ had been discarded, new and exciting educational opportunities arose which involved a fundamental change in teachers’ expectations of their pupils.

### **A Period of Limited Advance**

With the 1970s came an era of reappraisal, pessimism and doubt – though the decade was not without some positive features in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy.

Harold Wilson’s Labour Government was defeated by Edward Heath’s Conservative Party in the General Election of June 1970, and Margaret Thatcher became Secretary of State for Education, a post she held for four years

– though it seemed much longer. She had been strongly opposed to Edward Boyle's policy of a limited engagement with the comprehensive reform, and she worked hard to halt, or at least slow down, the process of reorganisation. In 1973, *FORUM* took a bold initiative with the publication of the pamphlet *Indictment of Margaret Thatcher, Secretary of State 1970-1973*. Written by Joan Simon, it set out to expose a series of arbitrary actions by the Secretary of State, bringing to mind the contemporary indictment of the President of the United States over Watergate. In the event, in spite of all her strong prejudices against comprehensive schools, Mrs Thatcher was unable to overturn the prevailing orthodoxy that reorganisation was almost inevitable. Indeed during the period 1970-74 more schools became comprehensive than either before or since. Mrs Thatcher later complained to the Editor of the *Daily Mail*, in an interview published in May 1987, that she had been 'quite unable to stop this rollercoaster of an idea'.

In the spring of 1974, a special number of *FORUM* (Volume 16, Number 2) was devoted to one of the journal's abiding concerns, that 'Schools CAN Make a Difference' – not necessarily in bringing about *short-term* social change, but certainly in enhancing the life-chances of hitherto deprived working-class youngsters. This bold assertion was made against the background of the emergence, or re-emergence, of a number of crude determinist views about human potential. To begin with, there was the publication of research studies, especially in the United States, which claimed that schools actually *exacerbated* existing divisions in society and could do little or nothing to enhance the academic achievement of working-class pupils. Then there was the renewed popularity of the fatalistic ideas of psychometry – resurrected by Arthur Jensen and popularised by Hans Eysenck – arguing that a child was born all that he or she may become. And added to this was the serious attention given to the recent theory of 'linguistic deprivation' upholding the view that working-class children in general, because of their 'restricted' linguistic environment, did not develop the abilities for conceptual thinking in the same way as did middle-class children using their superior 'elaborated code'. As the Editorial for the number pointed out, 'the child is now caught both ways'. Both through 'heredity' and through 'environment', human abilities would appear to be fixed and determined. There was nothing that the school or teachers could do about it. It was *FORUM's* task to challenge this fatalistic nonsense and to reassert the crucial role of the classroom teacher in developing pupils' abilities and talents.

Towards the end of the 1970s, *FORUM* contributed to the national 'debate' about the school curriculum inspired by James Callaghan's Ruskin College Speech delivered in October 1976 and calling, among other things, for the introduction of 'a core curriculum of basic knowledge'. The idea of 'a core curriculum' for the primary school was put forward by Michael Clarke, writing about Little Hill Junior School in Leicestershire in Volume 21, Number 2 (Spring 1979); and the introduction of 'a common culture curriculum' based upon HMI's eight 'areas of experience' was advocated by Clyde Chitty, writing

about the curriculum adopted by the newly-established Earl Shilton Community College in Leicestershire in the same number.

In his autobiography, *A Life in Education*, published in 1998, Brian Simon expressed the view that *FORUM* was at its 'most influential' during the 1960s and early 1970s – 'when meshed closely with the grain of the times' (p. 88). There is some truth in this statement, and it is noteworthy that I have devoted the major part of this article to the heady days of *FORUM*'s early history; but it tends to overlook the undeniable fact that *FORUM* has played a major role since 1979 in exposing the flaws and misconceptions in government policies while, at the same time, reiterating the values which inspired its launch back in 1958.

### **Three Decades of Vigilant Opposition to Government Education Policy**

Things were pretty bad in the first half of the 1980s, with Keith Joseph's unhappy period as Education Secretary (1981-86) marked by precious little sympathy with the aims of the comprehensive movement, but it was the education agenda of Margaret Thatcher's third administration (1987-90) that provoked the Editorial Board of *FORUM* into a frenzy of activity. Brian Simon himself was writing *Bending the Rules*, a bitter critique of government policy, in November 1987, just as Kenneth Baker was launching his Education 'Reform' Bill in the House of Commons. We publish a brief extract from this highly-praised book, which went into several editions and reprints, elsewhere in this number, enabling us to savour again a work which was described by Bernard Barker in his review in *New Society* as 'a frontal assault on the Secretary of State and all his works'. A scathing editorial in the Spring 1988 number of *FORUM* (Volume 30, Number 2), headed 'A Malign Bill', characterised the measure as 'an attempt to destroy the statutory system of public education created by the 1944 Education Act'. It could be seen as 'an integral part of the present Government's attack on local democracy and the principle of collective responsibility for community services'.

Then in March 1988, *FORUM* organised a mass 'Demonstrative Conference' in London to register the education world's opposition to all aspects of the 1987 Bill. In the words of former Board member Edward Blishen, who reported on the Conference for the Summer 1988 number of *FORUM* (Volume 30, Number 3): 'It happened on Saturday, the 19th of March 1988 at Friends House in London: an astonishing day, on which 500 people listened to nearly 30 speakers, drawn from most of the corners of education, and during which the most extraordinary professional unity was manifested'. The day ended with the unanimous acceptance of a Statement of Intent, pledging those present to 'continue the fight against this reactionary measure while it is still under discussion in Parliament', and, in the likely event of the Bill becoming law, virtually unamended, to 'carry through a powerful campaign to protect schools and colleges from its worst effects'.

One of the most memorable speeches of the day was that delivered by Michael Armstrong, long-standing Editorial Board member and at that time head teacher of a primary school in Oxfordshire. This speech focused, among other things, on the fallacy of thinking of a school curriculum *solely* in terms of subjects. In Michael's words:

Most of the really fruitful classroom inquiries, whether on the part of an individual child, a small group of children, or an entire class, have a way of moving in and out of subjects, conflating traditions, confusing boundaries, eliminating distinctions and creating new ones. So a study of the life of a frog becomes an exercise in philosophical speculation, scientific observation, literary fantasy and artistic method. So designing a set of earrings turns into an investigation of the psychology of faces. So an examination of mathematical powers embraces the geography of the universe and the mythical origins of the game of chess. ... In learning, from nursery to university, all the significant insights tend to come to those, teachers and pupils alike, who refuse to be bounded by subjects, who are prepared to move freely between traditions and beyond traditions – from science to philosophy to art to some new field of inquiry – without embarrassment. ... For every significant curriculum rewrites to some degree the history of knowledge.  
(Reprinted in Volume 30, Number 3)

From this moment on, *FORUM* has found itself in a state of more or less permanent opposition to the official government line on education, many of the issues that have alienated members of the Editorial Board being too recent and familiar to be rehearsed in detail here. If any of our readers felt that things must improve with the defeat of John Major's Conservatives and the election of a New Labour government under Tony Blair in May 1997, they were to be swiftly disillusioned. The last ten years have seen the continuation and intensification of Conservative policies on education, particularly with regard to such issues as inspection, testing, the continued emphasis on teacher accountability and the perceived need to privatise more and more areas of the education service.

In the autumn of 1991, at the time when the hundredth number of *FORUM* was published (Volume 34, Number 1), it was felt by members of the Editorial Board that the journal's original sub-heading was no longer really appropriate. The journal was still discussing 'new trends in education', but nobody should imagine that it was endorsing them. After a long discussion, it was decided that the sub-heading should be changed, and 'for promoting 5-16 comprehensive education' was finally rejected in favour of 'for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education' – which remains its underpinning rationale in 2008.



### Editorial Board Details and Recent Innovations

November 1988 saw the death of Robin Pedley, one of *FORUM*'s founders and co-editor of the journal until he moved from Leicester to Exeter to take up the post of Director of the Exeter University Institute of Education in 1963. In his appreciation of Robin in the Spring 1989 number of *FORUM* (Volume 31, Number 2), Brian Simon described him as 'the leading figure in what might be called the heroic period of comprehensive education – the 1950s and the early 1960s'. In this generous tribute, Brian referred to Robin's Pelican Original, *The Comprehensive School*, which was first published in 1963 and went through nine reprints and new editions by 1979, as 'the most influential book on comprehensive education ever written'.

In 1989, Brian Simon himself stood down as an editor of *FORUM*, and the task of producing three numbers a year was now in the hands of Nanette Whitbread, who had worked with Brian on the journal since the summer of 1966, and Clyde Chitty, a lecturer in education at the University of Birmingham who had joined the Editorial Board in 1974 and had acted as Reviews Editor since 1982. In his Acknowledgement of all that Brian had achieved with the journal, a piece which appeared in the Summer 1989 number (Volume 31, Number 3), Michael Armstrong referred to 'the unique combination of modesty and authority' with which Brian had presided over 'the passionate enterprise' of running the journal for more than 30 years.

November 2000 saw the death from cancer of Caroline Benn, who had contributed many articles to *FORUM* since 1967 and who had worked on two authoritative studies of the British comprehensive school: *Half Way There*, co-authored with Brian and first published in 1970, and *Thirty Years On*, co-authored with Clyde and first published in 1996. And then in January 2002, Brian himself died after a long illness. He had campaigned throughout his life for all the causes he believed in, and he once told Clyde that he saw the creation of *FORUM* as one of his proudest achievements. In the Obituary that Clyde wrote for the *Times Educational Supplement* (25 January 2002), he said that Brian had been 'guided by a faith in human perfectibility'; and in his tribute to Brian in the Spring 2002 number of *FORUM* (Volume 44, Number 1), he described him as 'without doubt one of the towering figures in the story of 20th century educational advance'. In the same number, Michael Armstrong saw Brian as 'one of the first great heroes of the movement for comprehensive education, a visionary in a struggle which is far from over'.

Clyde has worked with a number of highly efficient co-editors since 1989. Liz Thomson, then Vice Principal of Bishop Grosseteste College in Lincoln, became an editor of *FORUM* in 1994 and assumed joint responsibility with Clyde for producing each number when Nanette Whitbread stood down as an editor in the summer of 1996. Annabelle Dixon joined the editorial team in the summer of 1998 and took over completely from Liz Thomson the following year. She thoroughly enjoyed working on the journal, but her period as co-editor was cut short by her untimely death in May 2005. A number of

colleagues paid tribute to her work as a teacher in Volume 47, Numbers 2 and 3, Mary Jane Drummond writing that her deep understanding of children and their learning was daily put to good purpose 'coupling up her dearly held educational values (respect, justice, integrity, love, freedom) with the routines and rituals of schooling and with moment-by-moment interactions in the classroom'. In that double issue, we reprinted an article of Annabelle's 'Space, Schools and the Younger Child', which had first appeared in *FORUM* in 2004. In this number, we reprint Annabelle's last two *FORUM* editorials – for Volume 46, Number 2 and for Volume 47, Number 1.

Since 2001, we have produced a number of Special Issues, each concentrating on a particular theme and many the responsibility of 'guest editors'. Volume 43, Number 2, on the theme of 'Student Voice', was edited by Michael Fielding; while Jane McGregor chose 'Space and Schools' for the theme of Volume 46, Number 1. A special double issue in 2005, Volume 47, Numbers 2 and 3, with the title 'Reclaiming the Radical Tradition in State Education', was edited by Michael Fielding, and the following year, Sheila Dainton edited Volume 48, Number 2 with the theme 'Every Teacher Matters: a tribute to the teaching profession'. Still in 2006, Michael Fielding edited Volume 48, Number 3, asking 'What it Means to be a Teacher', and the following year, Derek Gillard produced a special double issue, Volume 49, Numbers 1 and 2, celebrating the 40th anniversary of the publication of the Plowden Report, *Children and their Primary Schools*. Volume 49, Number 3 focused on the issue of Faith Schools; and Volume 50, Number 1 largely dealt with the case against (City) Academies and Trust Schools. Our last number, published in the summer, was edited by Sheila Dainton and took as its theme 'School Size: deepening the debate'.

For the last 16 years, *FORUM* has had the good fortune to be managed by Roger Osborn-King, now of Symposium Journals, who attends every editorial board meeting and has done so much to ensure that *FORUM* remains a remarkably successful, widely-read journal. The Editorial Board meets in London three times a year, and the somewhat thankless task of taking the Minutes of each meeting is undertaken (cheerfully) by Derek Gillard. The longest-serving member of the Editorial Board is Michael Armstrong, who joined the Board over 40 years ago in the summer of 1966 and is now its chairperson. He has contributed a number of ground-breaking articles to the journal over the past four decades, and his recently-published book, *Children Writing Stories*, was the subject of a review symposium in the last number. There are two Honorary Editorial Board Members: Nanette Whitbread, a co-editor of *FORUM* for 30 years, and Roger Seckington, a former chairperson of the Board.

Since the death of Brian Simon in January 2002, two special lectures have been given to celebrate his life and work – the first by Tim Brighouse on 28 September 2002 looking at new models for the urban comprehensive school (reprinted in Volume 45, Number 1) and the second by Jane Davidson on 7 February 2004 describing the then educational scene in Wales (reprinted in

Volume 46, Number 2). It is hoped that future memorial lectures will be given by Robin Alexander and Michael Rosen.

### **Conclusion: prospects for the future**

One of the key ideas underpinning *FORUM's* campaigning work over the past 50 years has been an uncompromising belief in the concept of human educability. Hostility to the notion of fixed inborn ability was, of course, one of the themes running through *FORUM's* evidence to the Plowden Committee discussed earlier in this article; and the debt that Brian Simon owed to the Russian psychologists A.R. Luria and L.S. Vygotsky is obvious in the following key passage from that evidence:-

Today ... some psychologists are tending more and more to adopt a dynamic approach to the development of abilities. These psychologists hold that, strictly speaking, no child can be said to be born with a given ability; he or she is born with what may be described as the anatomical-physiological prerequisites for the development of this or that ability (for instance: mathematical or musical). These abilities have to be developed in practice – in the process of the child's education.

In 1982, *FORUM* published two articles by Caroline Benn (in Volume 24, Number 2 and Volume 24, Number 3) in which she set out to challenge what she called the 'myth of giftedness' and to argue for the encouragement of human ability or 'genius' in all its various forms:-

We give up our commitment to looking for gifts, talents and abilities in the vast majority of children once we have accepted the argument that the search for 'giftedness' has to be limited to the hunt for a few. ... The way we can support 'giftedness' (whatever it may mean) is by encouraging a flexible, alert, high-standard, stimulating and supportive comprehensive education service for everyone at every stage of their lives. ... A comprehensive system is the only way we can openly ensure attention to all equally and, at the same time, protect and reveal the full range of human gifts. Encouraging human ability in all its various forms is one more reason why we must continue to work to get a genuine comprehensive education system safely started in Britain – and then promote it relentlessly when we have.

Volume 43, Number 3 (Autumn 2001) included a shortened version of an inaugural lecture given by Clyde Chitty at Goldsmiths College on 27 February 2001. With the title 'IQ, "Racism" and the Eugenics Movement', this *FORUM* article set out to show that a belief in genetic determinism in the area of human intellectual capacity grew out of a set of ideas about sustaining and improving the 'quality' of the human race – broadly covered by the term 'eugenics' –

which were put forward by explorer and scientist Francis Galton in the second half of the nineteenth century. And this thesis was developed by Clyde Chitty in his book *Eugenics, 'Race' and Intelligence in Education* which was published in 2007 and reviewed by Lucy Russell in Volume 50, Number 1. This book devoted much space in its concluding chapter to the 'Learning without Limits' Project set up at the University of Cambridge School of Education in 1999 and designed to explore ways of teaching and learning free from determinist beliefs about so-called ability. Three members of the *FORUM* Editorial Board, Annabelle Dixon, Mary Jane Drummond and Patrick Yarker, were closely involved with the project from its inception; and the resulting book that was published in 2004 with the title *Learning without Limits* was described by Tim Brighouse in a review in the *Times Educational Supplement* published in June 2004 as 'a book that could change the world'. In his 2007 book, Clyde argued that 'if only education ministers could find the time to read *Learning without Limits*, and texts with a similar message, they might view their task very differently' (p. 131). Yet as if to prove that all this was falling on deaf ears at the Education Department, a 2005 Department for Education and Skills (DfES) White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*, included the quite extraordinary statement that children could be divided into three main categories: 'the gifted and talented, the struggling and the just average' (p. 20).

Ministers seem to take no notice of any books or research findings that do not accord with their own entrenched beliefs. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, the Prime Minister seems to be firmly of the opinion that the Blairite legacy – and particularly where it applies to education and health – is one of solid achievement which must be preserved and built upon. Writing in the *Financial Times* in March this year, Gordon Brown argued that it was now time to implement 'the third act in public sector reform'. According to his analysis of the situation, the first act – indeed the Government's first task in 1997 – demanded 'a programme of investment and repair designed to remedy decades of neglect and to establish a basic level of standards below which no school or hospital would fall'. This inevitably meant using national targets, league tables and tough inspection regimes to monitor progress. To ensure that the Government obtained maximum value from each pound spent and that struggling services were turned round, the second state of the reform programme focused on 'tackling underperformance and reducing variations in standards'. It was now time to go further and move to the third stage of reform where, in the case of education, choice and diversity were enhanced and new providers were brought in to create the dynamism for transforming underperforming schools. The Government would 'empower and enable more of our best headteachers to turn round low-performing schools', would 'create new trusts and federations' and, in areas of real need, 'drive forward an even faster expansion of the Academies Programme'.

It would, of course, be wrong to end this review of *FORUM's* first 50 years on a note of pessimism and gloom. We are currently witnessing the death throes of the New Labour Project, which was always doomed to be crushed by

the weight of its internal contradictions; but this does not signal the death of the Labour Movement itself. If, as now seems likely, David Cameron's Conservative Party wins the next General Election, Labour will have a chance to remake itself over the next ten years, and, even if there is very little chance of it becoming a socialist party with a decent education policy to match, it might at least rediscover some of its social democratic principles. And whether it does or not, it is important to emphasise that wonderful things will go on in our primary and secondary schools – quite regardless of any facile directives from the Centre. This point comes through very clearly in Roger Seckington's article for this number focusing on a small rural comprehensive school in west Dorset with which he has had varying levels of contact for more than 40 years. In Roger's view, it was a good school in the 1960s and remains so today. His overall verdict is that 'whilst in many ways the larger educational world has changed out of all recognition and there is immense pressure on schools, judged by what is going on in the classroom and by the wider school activities, relationships are excellent, good practice abounds and outcomes are very satisfactory'. And while this may be 'a highly personal and subjective judgement', it is doubtless one that could be made of thousands of primary and secondary schools up and down the country

Try as they may, politicians of both major parties will find it very difficult to undermine everything that has been achieved since the 1960s. If any of our readers ever allow themselves to be depressed by the latest ghastly utterance from a New Labour or Conservative minister, it is useful to bring to mind Caroline Benn's favourite dictum, which comes from the 1776 Tom Paine classic, *Common Sense*. 'We have it in our power to begin the world all over again'.

Not a bad slogan with which to embark on our next 50 years.

---

I would like to thank my partner, Gang Chi, Sheila Dainton, Richard Harris and Patrick Yarker for all their help with the preparation of this special number.

