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## The Rose Report [continued]: 'the invisible worm'

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**ABSTRACT** While Colin Richards' article is a trenchant analysis of the big themes and missed opportunities of the Rose Report, this response examines some of the small print. It concludes that the document is disfigured by many minor blemishes, and is also fatally flawed by a crude misapprehension of the nature of progress and the purpose of education.

Colin Richards' masterly article exposes the Rose Report as a woeful mix of conservative cliché and missed opportunities; he focuses on the big issues, and more important, on the lack of any coherent or principled discussion of them. In passing, he derides the presentation of the report as 'absurdly glossy', and this is my single point of disagreement with him. The copious full-colour photographs of correctly ethnically diverse young people in shiny uniforms are, indeed, absurd; but there is nothing glossy about the text itself. A close study of the small print leads to a different conclusion: preposterously shoddy.

Let's start with the footnotes. Annex B contains the proposed 'Programmes of learning'; each of the six areas of learning is accompanied by 'Explanatory text', but what bizarre explanations they are! In 'Scientific and technological understanding', for example, the first two 'key skills' listed are 'observe and explore'. These simple words are 'explained' in six lines of small print; 'communicate', another key skill, takes four lines to define. In the tables showing 'curriculum progression', the eleventh item in the 'Early' phase of primary education is 'to explore sources of light and sound and how we sense them'. This too requires explanation, in footnote no. 20: 'This includes light and dark, shadows and reflections and sources of light and sound'. In 'Understanding the arts', we read that 'this area of learning includes art and design'. And the helpful explanatory text explains: 'Art and design includes art, craft and design'.

What can we make of this reckless inattention to detail? Unseemly haste in drafting? Over reliance on a tightly formulated writing frame? Disrespect for teachers? Distrust of teachers? All of the above?

Let's move to a slightly higher level. One multi-coloured representation of the 'proposed primary curriculum' is a set of concentric circles. At the centre are five shining faces, who stand for all the children who will be on the receiving end of it; around them circle three 'broad aims', imported wholesale from the current secondary curriculum; on the outermost circle of this system are the six areas of learning. Sandwiched between these two layers is a new collection of labels; a sky-blue circle is divided into three interlocking zones, which are: 'Essentials for Learning and Life', 'Personal development', 'Literacy, numeracy and ICT' – all good things to be sure. But hang on a minute – literacy and numeracy also appear in the outermost circle of planets, the six areas of learning. So they are doubly represented – and, look! Pages 76 and 77 display what is hidden inside the catch-all phrase 'Essentials for Learning and Life': six items, the first three of which are, once again, literacy, numeracy and ICT capability. And the other three essentials for learning and living? They are: 'learning and thinking skills', personal and emotional skills, 'social skills'. In other words, the Rose Report is telling us, learning and thinking are essential for learning and living. This is shoddy thinking made manifest; it reveals an appalling muddle in the model of curriculum proposed in the report. And it is not the only one.

At the head of each full presentation of the six areas of learning, the same statement appears: 'Learning in this area should include an appropriate balance of focussed subject teaching and well planned opportunities to use, apply and develop knowledge and skills across the whole curriculum'. *Learning includes teaching?* Since when?

One last example before we move on; the report makes much of its mission to 'make the primary curriculum more manageable', 'to reduce prescription and overload' and to increase flexibility (p. 11). In the area of Scientific and technological understanding, this reduction has been so successfully carried out that the word 'evolution' does not appear – as 26 leading UK scientists pointed out in a letter to Ed Balls in July this year. Swimming, however, is a different matter. The page that describes 'Breadth of Curriculum' for the area of learning 'Understanding physical development, health and well-being' (incidentally this label contains another category error, in my view) includes the requirement: 'Children should be able to swim a minimum distance of 25m.' The explanatory text runs alongside: 'All pupils should learn to float and to move safely in water and to swim unaided or unsupported on their front and on their back. They should learn to swim unaided and how to survive in water.' No unnecessary prescription there, then.

I could go on, but will pass to the crux of the matter. Buried away in paragraph 35 of the executive summary (p. 18) is a little sentence which, to complete Colin Richards' quotation from William Blake, we may say constitutes 'the invisible worm' at the heart of the rose. Here it is.

Because progress is goal related, the goals of learning must be explicit...

While trying to digest this extraordinary statement, I imagined setting an exam paper for those in the upper echelons of educational bureaucracy, based on this one sentence. The rubric will read:

Discuss, with reference to the work of  
EITHER: Dewey, Isaacs, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Margaret Carr  
and Michael Armstrong.  
OR: Mozart, Goya, Blake, George Eliot, Charles Darwin,  
Le Corbusier, Adrienne Rich.

This sentence is the clue to the whole sorry muddle. With this view of progress at its centre, the new 'proposed primary curriculum' is just one more manifestation of the familiar, misguided 'ladder model' of education, up which, rung by rung, every child must climb. Or the long-jump model, where the teacher's question of the child is not 'What are you learning?' or 'What kind of person are you learning to become?' but 'How far can you jump?'

Of all the eminent educators who will be rolling over in their graves as they learn of this egregious blunder, the most agitated will surely be the great Lawrence Stenhouse. By way of conclusion, it is worth reminding ourselves of one of the pillars of his coherent, principled rejection of the objectives model and all its works:

*Education as induction into knowledge is successful to the extent that it makes the behavioural outcomes of the students unpredictable.*  
(1975, p. 82, italics in original)

#### *Reference*

Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*. London: Heinemann.

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