

EDITORIAL

Adventures in Education

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In the second-hand bookshop long established where Willow Lane meets St Giles Street in Norwich, uphill from the house George Borrow used to rent, I found a paperback edition of Willem van der Eyken and Barry Turner's *Adventures in Education*, first published by Penguin in 1969. When he saw what I intended to buy, the shop's doleful proprietor knocked fifty pence off the asking price, because, he gloomily opined, 'There are no adventures in education.'

I didn't contradict him. Fifty pence saved in a time of austerity is not to be sniffed at. But I think he is mistaken. After all, in school every lesson might be deemed an adventure in the sense that it is an endeavour at risk, in hazard, which may go well or badly. Some might even claim that the coalition government's promotion of academies and free schools offers great scope for the adventurous, forgetting that an adventure in education must enlarge the imaginative franchise in the matter of teaching and learning, and that the impulse of the adventurous spirit is always to invite rather than coerce, to widen rather than restrict, to trust, hope and invent rather than fear and comply. There are, it seems, academies in which every classroom must look exactly like every other classroom, where the imposed subject-curriculum, predetermined beyond the school, is a teacher-proof package of detailed steps each pupil must undeviatingly follow, and where for a lesson to be rated outstanding no child may speak. Nothing adventurous here.

Van der Eyken and Turner argue that progressive change in education comes about not by acts of Parliament but by the activity of people. They refute the view that Parliament is (as they put it) *an instigator rather than the recorder of change* (p. 7). The path of progress in education is cut and cleared not by legislation but by *the enthusiasm, skill and devotion* of particular teachers, administrators and inspectors *who... have pressed new ideas to the attention of their colleagues* (p. 8). Their book salvages five examples: the Malting House School,

the Burston school strike (which began exactly a hundred years ago), the original Forest School movement, the work of Marion Richardson and Robin Tanner, and that of Henry Morris. From each of these it seems to me we still have something to learn.

The chapter about Marion Richardson and Robin Tanner is at the heart of *Adventures in Education*, and testifies to the centrality of children's art-making in the adventurous general approach to education which van der Eyken and Turner hoped their book might stimulate the profession to recall. The chapter opens with an account of the 1927 exhibition of child art from Vienna which was held in London and which helped coalesce a new way to understand and regard children. For behind the commitment to children's art-making is a commitment to the idea of the child as artist, with all which that entails in terms of seeing the child as inventive, persevering, discriminating, decisive, involved in their work and self-driven – given the right circumstances and resources – to explore and develop whatever the engagement with their work has to offer. A visitor to the exhibition, Christian Schiller, who would later become the Ministry of Education's first Staff Inspector for Primary Education and a member of the Plowden Committee, said of what he saw:

[I]t was as if the convictions we had always had of the potential of young people was suddenly presented, alive, before us. You must remember that the concept that each child was different and unique, and that each was capable of making an individual contribution and a personal statement was not merely not established; it was simply not accepted by the majority. Throughout the country there was a sort of 'underground' of teachers who, convinced that this was the case, were working towards a single goal, not only through art and craft, but in every sphere of education. (Van der Eyken & Turner, 1969, p. 98)

Robin Tanner, later to work with Schiller as an HMI (Her Majesty's Inspector), was then a young teacher at Blackheath Road Boys' School in Greenwich, spending his evenings studying and drawing at Goldsmiths College of Art. (He would become a Royal Academician.) Unconventionally, he took his pupils out of school to see art first-hand at the Tate Gallery, and in school encouraged them to paint murals. When he taught in Wiltshire he would have his pupils paint murals too, as well as design, produce and bind books, cut blocks to print with, and draw and paint their own choice of subject freely. His view was as follows:

Art should be an attitude of mind to all work, and should not be regarded as a frill or something divorced from ordinary intelligence. It should be bound up with everything we do, regarded neither as mere licence nor as a set of purposeless exercises... (Tanner, *Children's Work in Block Printing*, quoted in van der Eyken & Turner, 1969, p. 109)

Teachers who worked with Tanner when he was a member of the inspectorate said he gave them *a new dignity* (Van der Eyken & Turner, 1969, p. 119). They testified to the energising experience of participating in the conferences he put on, during which they met and discussed with practising artists. Such opportunities left them feeling trusted and enabled. Imagine an inspectorate which did all that ...

This issue of *FORUM* gathers its contributors under the banner of van der Eyken and Turner. To adventure is to step out, into what's as yet unknown. Deb Wilenski does so in company with a class of four- and five-year-olds who lead the way into snowy woods. Her article pays close attention to the many ways children make meaning in such circumstances. She discovers, considers and relays what she calls 'children's thinking and fascinations' here. She also confronts the possibility that she makes too much of what the children say and do, that she 'goes too far'. Readers who step out with her can decide for themselves, and weigh up the truth of her claim that 'disorientation can precede startling creativity'.

Van der Eyken and Turner saw their book as *an exercise in the archaeology of education* (p. 8). The five adventures they describe had not been recounted before. Mary Jane Drummond likewise honours the work of a pioneer: the American educator Caroline Pratt. Her article marks the centenary of the opening in Manhattan of the Play School which Caroline Pratt established and which, as the City and County School, continues to educate children in New York. We are powerfully reminded that for Caroline Pratt the adventure began with, and lay in, learning from children: taking seriously what they say, do and intend; paying it close attention, recording it, thinking further about it. Two articles written by teachers acknowledge the reality of this 'reverse' learning, and how it must occur to a greater or lesser extent in any classroom worthy of the name. David Hewgill draws on the experiences of his NQT (newly qualified teacher) year to reveal and illuminate the pressures and pleasures in store for a primary teacher entering the Govian dispensation. Rami Abu Zarad, writing under exceptionally difficult circumstances and in a language not his mother tongue, wryly and humanely reflects on his time as a teacher in a Syrian private school. Rachel Marks shows through vivid examples what goes by the board in primary schools which introduce structures – notably, grouping by so-called ability – from the secondary sector. Such grouping damages the vital relationship between pupil and class-teacher, and vitiates the possibility that the set-teacher can learn from the pupil.

In the wake of recent government pronouncements about the curriculum, John Yandell asks: 'Whose knowledge counts?' The question (which also sounds through Rachel Marks's article) propels a sharp critique of approaches to knowledge which declare that 'the best that has been thought and said' is already decided and beyond dispute. John Yandell draws on the writing of Lev Vygotsky to endorse a view of knowledge rooted in co-construction, and to offer an alternative view of schooling grounded in this daily transformational work by pupils and teachers. Tony Cotton points to the ideological differences

between subject associations and government in terms of beliefs about teaching and learning, and the ways these hamper participation in consultation over curricular proposals. He argues that ministers will adopt populist positions, while subject associations must take the longer view in seeking to further educational aims and purposes which benefit the communities they are part of and represent.

The importance, particularly in the current climate, of a community of practice in helping a teaching identity to form is explored by Jenifer Smith with Rebecca Griffiths. The practice in question is that of writing. Jenifer Smith convenes a writing group for teachers in which, by writing themselves, and by discussing the writing of their pupils, teachers at all levels construct professional knowledge and re-construct who they are in the classroom. Like Mary Jane Drummond, Jenifer Smith retrieves another aspect of the useable adventurous past by touching on her time at Countesthorpe College, described as something almost unimaginable these days: 'a maintained democratic school'.

Vicky Grube, US artist and academic, writes about the art club she organises for young people, a group which might also be considered a community of practice. When we join with others who share our sensibilities, she states, we have the potential for doing good. She offers a way of reading and valuing what is produced by the young artists she enables, even such work as might seem at first sight merely trivial or derivative. Mike Cole brings news of a school in a particularly impoverished community: Barrio Pueblo Neuvo, in the city of Mérida in Venezuela. Those who work at the school are consciously building a curriculum and pedagogy better suited to the needs of students in a society where many are struggling for socialism. The aim is for children to be 'critical and proactive', and to see themselves as having a participatory and transformative role in their polity.

The international dimension to this issue of *FORUM* is amplified by a quartet of articles focusing on projects which develop aspects of student-voice work in Australia, New Zealand, Canada (where Ontario's Ministry of Education funds and champions student voice initiatives) and the USA. *FORUM* board member Jane McGregor has gathered these contributions; she introduces and contextualises them on page 65. The potential for teachers and institutions to learn from children, young people and students through student-voice work remains powerfully realisable, as these articles witness.

Among the remaining articles, Trevor Fisher, responding to the crying need that Clyde Chitty identified in the previous issue of *FORUM* for a counter-offensive against current policies of the Department for Education (DfE), proposes a line of march; and Robin Alexander notes some of the successes of the Cambridge Primary Review project so far and re-asserts some key principles – notably, that 'standards and curriculum breadth are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive', and that 'well-structured classroom talk' is highly important for learning – before explaining what's next for perhaps the most thoroughgoing, wide-ranging and deeply considered large-scale adventure currently under way in English education.

If the movement for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education be considered an adventure, too, *FORUM* has been its log. The record it has kept of the path teachers, administrators, inspectors and others have cut and laid in pursuit of comprehensive education over the past five decades and more can now be fully reviewed thanks to the digitisation of the journal's run to date and the posting of each issue online. All but the most recent handful of issues can be freely viewed and downloaded from the journal's website. The editorial board of *FORUM* and the journal's publishers are immensely grateful to Angela Cutts, librarian at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, and to her colleagues, who so kindly and courageously allowed their stock of printed back numbers to be copied to create this archive. We invite readers to explore it, along with the articles in this issue:

www.worlds.co.uk/forum/content/maincontents.asp

