

# FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION OF NEW TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Spring 1975  
Volume 17  
Number 2

50p

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**Forum** is published three times a year, in September, January and May. £1.50 a year or 50p an issue.

# New directions

When this journal was founded a decade and a half ago, most urban primary schools were streamed, eleven-plus selection was almost universal and secondary children were generally further segregated in so-called ability streams and/or sets within those schools to which they were allocated. **Forum** therefore campaigned initially for unstreaming at the primary stage, abolition of eleven-plus selection and reorganisation of the secondary stage along comprehensive lines. We presented the educational and social arguments in support of these policies and published articles from pioneering nonstreamed primary schools to show how it was both possible and beneficial to unstream. As secondary modern and the early comprehensive schools began to experiment with nonstreamed teaching in the first years of secondary education, we were able to promote discussion based on experience of the ways and means, problems and solutions, and the implications for the curriculum and teaching methods.

Because many primary schools, especially those in rural areas, have always been too small to stream, and often too small to form classes homogeneous by chronological age, there has been more experience of teaching children under eleven in classes that are heterogeneous in both intellectual performance and maturity. Moreover, primary schools inherit a 'progressive' child-centred tradition that has been developing for nearly fifty years through the example of pioneer schools and teachers. Abolition of eleven-plus releases primary teachers from constraints that are alien to this tradition and enables them to forge ahead in developing new approaches in line with more recent research on children's learning and general development. Nonstreaming has been an inevitable concomitant.

At the secondary stage nonstreaming was the logical structural move following comprehensivisation, or the secondary modern school's attempt to mitigate the effects of rejection at eleven. It soon became increasingly evident that nonstreaming must lead secondary teachers to reconsider not only their teaching methods but also their educational aims and the traditional organisation of the curriculum in separate subject compartments of knowledge.

Here they are following trends already well established in primary schools but which have to be much more fully developed in terms of adolescent development and the adult constructs of human knowledge which the traditional curriculum seeks to impart ready made.

Teachers committed to nonstreaming in primary and secondary schools have found that their objectives differ from the attainment-oriented objectives of streamed schools, while they by no means discount achievement—their spectrum is wider. Failure to recognise this has bedevilled the few attempts that have been made to evaluate the effects of nonstreaming. Recognition has often led nonstreamed schools to devise Mode 3 GCE and CSE courses.

Thus the discussion perforce shifts from methodological questions about how to teach nonstreamed classes to more fundamental questions about the purposes of secondary education for all as they pass through adolescence—questions that cannot be posed in the context of bipartite organisation. Content, methods and class organisation follow from the reappraisal of aims.

In this number of **Forum** the first article juxtaposes two apparently conflicting approaches to these fundamental issues, and the next three focus on humanities as a key area of the curriculum where the trend towards interdisciplinary and integrated courses reflects both these very different approaches. Patrick Bailey's discussion paper on the role of subject specialists when a school goes comprehensive is, of course, relevant to these issues.

The thoughtful reconstruction of the curriculum for nonstreamed, fully comprehensive education from primary through secondary requires new resources for learning, replacement and adaptation of old school buildings and a teaching force large enough both to permit teachers to meet together for intensive course planning and to ensure satisfactory arrangements for the promised extension of in-service education. Reg Prentices's dire warnings of austerity for the education service, including a cut-back on the 1981 target figure of 510,000 teachers, pose a grave threat to such developments, just when a reduced school population could facilitate them.

# Comprehensive Education and the Reconstruction of Knowledge

The Editorial Board held a discussion on new directions for **Forum** in the context of nonstreaming and comprehensive secondary schools for which it has always campaigned. The discussion focused on a paper by Michael Armstrong in which he tried to make explicit the implications of a number of recent contributions to **Forum**. The following article is a revised version of that paper and is intended to carry argument about curriculum content and methods in secondary education onto new ground. Contributions in response will be welcome.

Comprehensive reorganisation has never been more than a precondition of secondary school reform. Occasionally, forced into co-existence with grammar schools or persuaded to conform to their tradition, the comprehensive school has signified little more than a name. More often, though, reorganisation has marked the beginning of a search for a new tradition which might eventually transform secondary education from an exclusive pastime into a common pursuit. This search has led first to the abolition of streaming, next to the development of techniques of individualised learning, and finally towards the adaptation, in secondary school conditions, of the slowly emerging primary school tradition with its emphasis on self-direction and the experience of the individual child.

Unfortunately, perhaps because the primary school tradition has been plundered largely on behalf of the immediate cause of unstreaming rather than from any particular appreciation of its relevance to secondary education as a whole, few attempts have as yet been made to provide a rationale for the adoption of the new tradition by the secondary school, or to explore its ramifications. It is time the attempt was made. Not only is there a danger that the primary school tradition will be misunderstood and therefore taken over into the secondary school in a sloppy and self-defeating way. There is the greater risk that the current pessimism about formal education, reflecting disillusion with the achievements of a hundred years of popular education, will be reinforced by a failure to understand the significance of the new primary school for any interpretation of the comparative failure of popular education in the past and for a proper understanding of the conditions for its success in the future.

The last few numbers of **Forum** have shown the necessity for such a rationale. Over and over again an article or review or report suggests something of the form which the necessary rationale might take.

The Autumn 1973 number of **Forum** (vol 16, no 1) reveals a sharp, though only implicit, contrast between the views of two notable, and notably progressive,

American educators—Jerome Bruner and David Hawkins. Reviewing the latest collection of Bruner's educational writings, Brian Simon cited Bruner's conviction that 'the pedagogical problem is how to represent knowledge, how to sequence it, how to embody it in a form appropriate to young learners'. Bruner goes on to acknowledge, according to the review, that 'how one manages to time the steps in pedagogy to match unfolding capacities, how one manages to instruct without making the learner dependent, and how one manages to do both these while keeping alive zest for further learning—these are very complicated questions that do not yield easy answers'. In the same number, David Hawkins, in an essay entitled 'Two Sources of Learning', suggested that the questions which Bruner asked are unanswerable so long as they are posed in terms of how to *represent* knowledge in forms appropriate to children. For Hawkins, the pedagogical problem is not how to *represent* knowledge but how to *reconstruct* it. This distinction, between representation and reconstruction, is fundamental, as I think Hawkins' essay demonstrated. But the essay is in places obscure and the following interpretation may not be entirely faithful to Hawkins' intentions.

Hawkins began by describing a contrast between 'fluent human understanding' and what he called 'the scholastic tradition'. 'In the scholastic tradition the organisation of accrued knowledge has been characteristically linear and sequential. The metaphor of the *course* is overwhelming. Formal discourses uttered in real time are unavoidably one dimensional. These link up in the endless march, trunk to tail—a march which dominated the tempo and rhythm of traditional schooling. Fluent understanding, by contrast, implies a richly interconnected network of ideas and stored knowledge evolved by abstraction from many passages of experience. Any node of this network has the indispensable virtue which the computer buffs call "random access". It can be reached from many other parts of the network without long marches.'

According to Hawkins, the most significant achieve-

ment of the British primary school over the past decade or two has been to challenge, and to challenge successfully, that 'conception and organisation of subject matter which is the fruit of a long scholastic tradition'. 'What the best traditions of early education have done amounts to a major reorganisation of subject matter into a common and coherent framework. The sand and water and clay, the painting and writing and reading, the cooking and building and calculation, the observing and nurture of plants and animals are woven together into a complex social pattern which sustains romance as it extends a concern for detail and for generalisation. The organised discourse and text do not disappear but they do not dominate.'

'This reorganisation,' Hawkins continued, 'though incomplete and still mostly inadequate even for the early years, represents at least the beginning of a major practical and intellectual achievement. This is not usually recognised very much; teachers of the young are not usually regarded, by themselves or by others, as "intellectual". Yet the skilful among them are able to see order and number, geography and history, moral testing grounds and aesthetic qualities in all the encounters of young children with the furniture of a rich environment. If such an achieved human character is not to be called "intellectual", it yet argues a considerable intellectual capacity, and one which could well be envied by those of us who have become imprisoned in the higher branches of learning.'

## Implications for adolescence

How can a similar style and conception of education be extended to the world of older children, of adolescents and adults? Only, Hawkins argued, by means of the 'radical reconstruction of subject matter itself'. The aim of such a reconstruction is 'to increase the interfacial area between organised knowledge and those kinds of fresh inquiry and experience which children can be led to seek and enjoy in a rich environment. It can be accomplished only through simultaneous reorganisation of knowledge itself *and* of the matching kinds of working environment where such knowledge has a chance to come alive'.

At this point Hawkins directly challenged the view implied by the remarks of Bruner quoted earlier. 'The notion that we can achieve such worthy ends merely by "curriculum reform" or by the improvement of teaching strategies' is almost a guarantee of failure. 'It is not only

the curriculum which needs reforming but the very systems and organisations of knowledge which it presupposes. It is not only the procedures of teaching which need attention, but the very nature of teachers' own involvement with subject matter'. What is at stake is more than 'pedagogy'. 'A teacher must learn to resonate with the naïve perceptions and thought processes of those he teaches, to map these into his own domain of subject-matter comprehension. To do so he must have a wide, fluent and reflective grasp of that very subject matter'.

Thus, where Bruner recognised the pedagogical problem of how to represent knowledge in a form appropriate to young learners, Hawkins found questions which transcend pedagogy and concern the structure of knowledge itself. He concluded that 'as many kinds of subject are now organised it is not obviously nor easily possible to transform the teaching of them to a more self directed and informal style of work in schools'. We must therefore search for ways in which 'wider ranges of subject matter can be revived and reconstituted and extended so as to make it more diversely accessible and appealing to growing minds, more interwoven in the texture of a rich school environment'.

## A mutual process

Representation or reconstruction, a matter of pedagogy or a problem concerning the nature of knowledge itself? The question may be illumined by quoting from one of Tolstoy's essays entitled 'Should we teach the peasant children how to write or should they teach us?' It is hard, at first, to believe that Tolstoy intended the title to be taken seriously. Yet he quite certainly did. The essay described how by happy accident he hit upon a way of teaching his pupils how to set about writing stories. The details of his method, or lack of method, and the account he offers of the stories which his eleven-year-old pupils wrote, are fascinating in themselves, but the significance of his essay lies in the conclusion which he draws from his experience. 'I cannot convey' he writes, 'the feeling of excitement, joy, fear and almost repentance which I experienced in the course of that evening. I felt that from that day onwards a new world of delights and sufferings had opened for him (he is referring to one of the two boys who wrote the first story he describes)—the world of art; it seemed as though I had been prying into something which no one ever has the right to see—the birth of the mysterious flower of poetry. I felt both fear and joy, like a treasure seeker who should see a flower upon a fern; I

was joyful because suddenly, quite unexpectedly, the philosopher's stone which I had been seeking in vain for two years was revealed to me—the art of teaching how to express thoughts; I felt fear because that art called forth new demands, a whole world of desires which were not consonant with the environment in which the pupils lived, as it seemed to me in the first moment. There was no mistaking it. It was not chance, but conscious creativity . . . For a long time I could not account for this impression which I had received, although I felt that this was one of those impressions which educate a man in his mature years, which raise him to a new level of life and force him to renounce the old and devote himself entirely to the new. The next day I could still not believe what I had experienced the day before. It seemed to me so strange that a semi-literate peasant boy should suddenly evince such a conscious artistic power as Goethe, on his sublime summit of development, could not attain. It seemed to me so strange and insulting that I, the author of "Childhood", who had earned a certain success and recognition for artistic talent from the educated Russian public, that I, in a matter of art, not only could not instruct or help the 11-year-old Syomka and Fyedka, but only just—and then only in a happy moment of stimulation—was I able to follow and understand them. This seemed so strange to me that I could not believe what had happened the day before.'

Who should teach whom? Hawkins' essay seems to confirm, in the language of a contemporary argument, the urgency and literalness of the kind of question which Tolstoy was prepared to ask. For the process of education, in science as in art, cannot adequately be interpreted as one of presenting bodies of knowledge, skills, disciplines of thought, in a more or less acceptable form to individual learners. It is better to think of it as a coming together of teacher, pupil and task in a dynamic relationship through which subject matter is reconstructed for both teacher and pupil in the light of their common or collective experience. Education should not, at any stage, be seen simply as a process of cultural transmission—as it tends to be, for example, in the writings of recent philosophers of education with their metaphors of 'initiation' or 'induction'—but equally and simultaneously as a process of cultural transformation.

Tolstoy wrote his essay in 1860 among the earliest glimmerings of popular education. It may be that the reluctance of educators and of 'educated' men, then or since, to take his question seriously helps to explain the comparative failure of popular education in the succeeding century. Hawkins again: 'for a century we have

been committed to the universalising of education, but perhaps only recently have we begun to realise how inadequate to this challenge our own education has mostly been'. Instead we—teachers, educationists, theorist and practitioner alike—have relied upon a steady diet of formal didactic teaching which 'has never been effective except as a consequence and concomitant of a more eolithic kind of education taking place outside of school years and walls—of a kind moreover very unevenly available in economically and educationally stratified societies'. We are still victims of that grammar school tradition, the values of which, as Joan Simon showed in her report of the *Forum/CCE* conference of 1973 (vol 16, no 1), 'have been preserved over the whole range of secondary education, including comprehensive schools, largely by way of the structure of examinations'.

## Dangerous solutions

Much of the pessimism about education to be found in the writing of commentators like Christopher Jencks (see Nanette Whitbread's article in *Forum* vol 16, no 2), of the deschoolers, the protagonists of an 'alternative' education for the working class, and others, seems to spring from a sense that the grammar school tradition is as stubborn, ubiquitous and persistent as it is futile. Unfortunately, but characteristically, their reaction misses the point. What is required is not a rejection of the school or the schoolmen's knowledge, however bourgeois in origin, nor even of the scholastic tradition itself, but a reconstruction of the relationship between knowledge and individual experience and intuition. Of course such a reconstruction, by paying attention to the learner's individual experience, must necessarily respect his social background and tradition. But the reconstruction works both ways. The child's experience, too, is transformed, and that in the light of traditions of thought and knowledge and culture which will not all be intimate aspects of his own particular background or tradition.

In the same number of *Forum* which contains Hawkins' essay there is an article by Peter Prosser, which, by implication, recognises the problem of reconstruction which Hawkins raises and shows how, within the context of the middle school, to begin to negotiate possible routes towards its solution at secondary school level. It also reveals very plainly the formidable nature of the task. The article concludes as follows: 'It may be that we are trying to reconcile the imaginative growth of scientific ideas in a rather haphazard way with the orderly develop-

ment of scientific methods and knowledge as traditionally done—and there is certainly an argument in favour of the less structured approach to science, which is imaginative, if only on the grounds that it is often the divergent thinkers who make progress. This is, I suspect, the mirror in our school that reflects the fluctuation in fortunes of the various Nuffield schemes nationally. We have a kind of love-hate relationship with their philosophy, so we embrace their approach to first-hand activity and to individual investigation, while covertly modifying them to fit into a code of practice that makes us feel secure. At the moment I am a coward. All my imagination and my theoretical knowledge tell me to abandon structure, to make science more akin to the art that it really is; but my professional conscience is more secure with a structure—with bounds, with sequence, with the Upper School and its external examinations; and that is why we have gone to such great pains to ensure that the science that comes out from our integrated courses is predictable and structured. Perhaps in two years, when we have settled down, we shall be able to tell a more adventurous story; I very much hope so<sup>7</sup>.

Prosser's dilemma is inevitable at this moment of time. His solution, and his recognition of its transitional quality, is honest, cautious and reasonable. Many of the best comprehensive schools find themselves in a similar predicament. Some of us believe that the future success of comprehensive education is dependent upon a rigorous search for ways of helping teachers like Prosser to take, with equanimity, the more adventurous path which their imagination and theoretical knowledge recommends.

The difficulties, of course, are forbidding and it is as well to recognise them from the start. Here are three in particular, each of them suggested by a reading of *Forum*.

## 1 Examinations

Joan Simon, for instance, pointed to the continuing constraints imposed by an examination system which 'still, by its very nature, presupposes that it is the object of secondary schooling to discriminate between pupils and place them in a hierarchy or rank order'. Hierarchical ranking in turn presupposes the continuation of the scholastic tradition with its characteristic linearity, its 'unavoidably one-dimensional' character.

## 2 The subject-centred curriculum

In a different context, Pat Radley's review (*Forum* vol 15, no 3) of the most recent handbook on the teaching of

English suggests how, even at its best, subject teaching fails to grasp the fundamental problem of reconstruction. 'This is a strong book,' he writes, 'firm about its knowledge, ideals and expertise, convincingly written and abundantly illustrated with examples. All the more regrettable that its context is deliberately narrow. Our discontents in education at all levels centre on the lack of coherent experience and we need help in making relevant connections, in re-establishing total meaning. Salvation through English teaching is no longer enough . . . Why, after all the richness, does one have to voice reservations? What is missing is a feeling of personal context and personal meaning. We need to make sense of our lives as teachers and learners, alongside other teachers and learners: subject specialism is our medium. To the question posed early in the book, "Why are you teaching English?" we have an answer, not in personal terms, but in terms of Explorations of the Teaching of English; the question "why" is answered, despite all the sensitivity and sympathy, merely in terms of "how". Only in the context of newly conceived and clear reasons for having schools, and for having syllabuses, and for having to make compromises, can good books like this be valuable.' I am arguing that the thesis of reconstruction may be able to provide the 'newly conceived and clear reasons' which Radley wants. His review shows just how thoroughgoing is the reconsideration of cherished beliefs and practices which the thesis entails.

## 3 Standards

But perhaps the dimensions of the task emerge most clearly of all, if only, again, by implication, in Jim Eggleston's article (*Forum* vol 16 no 2) on 'Prediction, Description and Choice,' where he outlines the alternatives to our present examinations. 'At present the alternative examinations and proposals for new examinations offer pupils alternative populations with which they will compete, and thus establish their places in an intellectual pecking order . . . There are (other) alternatives. If we can describe what we expect our pupils to be able to do, whether it be to recite a set of facts or engage in defined intellectual skills at some prescribed level, then it may not be beyond our wit to devise tests to measure performance relative to prescribed standards rather than relative to competing candidates. Under such a regime goal achievement might replace competition as the spur . . . The implications are worth considering. Teachers would have to be clear about their educational goals and the progress of their pupils towards these goals would need to be worked out and monitored. Pupils would also become acquainted

# MACOS at one School

**Doug Fanthorpe and Dennis Longstaff**

Both Doug Fanthorpe and Dennis Longstaff have taught for about ten years in Leicestershire High Schools and are now on the staff of Heathfield High School and Community College, the former as Deputy Head and the latter as Head of Resources, where they are leading members of the humanities team.

This article represents one school's experience with the MACOS project outlined by Ron Morgan in *Forum* (vol 16 no 1). Here we are concerned with the practical application of the prescribed course materials rather than an evaluation of the philosophy behind the project in a High School with 750+ pupils aged 11-14 on roll. MACOS is taught as the first year of a social studies course to completely mixed ability groups by a team of teachers who, collectively, have considerable experience in both following and devising courses aimed at a similar age range to MACOS materials. The social studies time allocation consists of six periods comprising a morning or afternoon session plus a double period. Four of the eight first year classes meet together. During the introductory year five teachers were involved in the social studies team, four of these at any one time, including one sociologist, three geographers and one historian.

During the development of any new course, the pressure caused by lack of time and changing situations in the normal teaching role often necessitates concentration on resources and methodology. All too often the long term evaluation of the course and, of equal importance, the original aims and conceptual structure receive relatively brief analysis and discussion at team level. In practice it follows that the greater the numbers involved in the team,

the more difficult it becomes to find time to meet and to agree on any new development.

Some marketed curriculum projects are designed simply as a collection of teaching materials to be used in any way that the team decides, in that while there may be an underlying theme there is often no sequential structure. MACOS, however, was prepared as a highly structured conceptual course based on the notion of the spiral curriculum.

As a team, we first had to decide whether to use the MACOS pack merely as a superb set of teaching resources, or to accept the conceptual structure underlying the materials (perhaps with a view to re-evaluating our already developed courses). In the teachers' material Bruner states that the course is to be adapted by those teaching it. In practice, the very pressures mentioned above can lead to the lessons suggested becoming the teachers' bible. As the course is so highly complex it may arise that, even after induction courses as mentioned below, members of the team may well not completely understand the conceptual 'whole' of each Bruner 'day', or indeed of the course as a whole.

We originally felt that if we were to adapt the course to our own specific situation, we first needed to follow the course as prescribed. Only then did we feel we would have the understanding necessary to justify adapting the

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*Continued from previous page*

with both the goals and their progress towards them; instead of conniving as we all do now at a loss of information on the altar of normative testing, we would be in a position to supply a descriptive profile of information about students' strengths and weaknesses.'

Eggleston's argument is compelling. Yet if we accept the reconstruction of knowledge as part and parcel of the process of education we are bound to be worried about some of the implications which he considers. 'Educational goals' reached through the achievement of 'prescribed standards' are perhaps more or less easily clarified by teachers pursuing a tradition which conceives of education as the transmission of a given body of knowledge and skill. But if teaching is as much a transforming as a transmitting process, how can 'standards be pre-

scribed'? Our thesis necessarily questions the relevance or appropriateness of *prescribed* standards and *predetermined* goals. Maybe Eggleston's proposals are themselves, in turn, no more than a transitional stage towards a more fundamental reconsideration of the nature of 'standards'.

In the long run the thesis of reconstruction, with all its theoretical and practical ramifications, can only be fully explored through a radical programme of teaching and research. This time the teachers must become research workers and the research workers must teach—nothing less is likely to uncover the answers. Meanwhile *Forum* can begin to clarify the issues and to describe the attempts already being made, above all at primary school level, but also at middle school level and even in a small way at upper school level, to resolve them.



prescribed course. However, as one of five schools who undertook the course in the county, we were in regular contact with schools who had decided either to adapt or to integrate the course from the outset, and thus were able to share impressions.

The original introduction of MACOS into the authority followed agreement between the Heads of five high schools and the education authority as represented by the advisory service in order to share the relatively high cost of purchasing the materials. With any highly structured course a great deal of preparation is obviously necessary before the course is introduced. To this end an advisor, a teacher centre leader, a head of resources and a deputy head attended the Norwich induction course. Subsequently, a series of afternoon familiarisation sessions were held at a central teachers' centre to give staff practical experience with the materials so as to facilitate their introduction into the five different schools. An intensive course was held at Horncastle Residential Centre shortly after most schools had initiated the project. Inter-school follow-up meetings were held during the initial year.

## Early appraisals

During our first year we held weekly departmental meetings both to discuss and organise the application of MACOS and to assess its impact and validity to our particular situation. This involved a critical evaluation of materials and methods suggested in the handbooks. It was immediately obvious that much of the material was far more professionally produced than any we had previously developed. In this way the authority of the materials made a great impact on the pupils, generated much necessary discussion, and provided jump-off points for a wide variety of alternative studies. Unfortunately, the very nature of this highly-structured course, together with the constraints imposed by the county-wide, five school co-operation over materials, limited our ability to encourage the divergent approach. Thus the dichotomy between practical necessity and educational ideal arose at a very early stage.

Whether or not there is agreement concerning Bruner's theory on learning processes, it must be said that a great deal of planning went into the ideas behind the conceptual whole of each Bruner 'day'. In general, we have found that the spiral curriculum does provide all pupils with the opportunity to understand and develop the basic concepts built into MACOS. In our experience this included the less able pupils, who often grasped ideas

well beyond previous teacher expectations. This cannot be attributed only to those activities based on concrete operations as many key concepts depend upon discussion of the highly abstract.

## Modifications

Many of the ideas included in the teacher handbooks we have found original and useful in other contexts, in that they offer a variety of experience to the pupil. While these ideas may be very useful to the teacher under pressure, they need supplementing, adapting, and developing and must not be regarded as a panacea for all educational ills. An example would be in relation to the poor reader who may be overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of written questions, etc. In other words, in the light of pupil experience, we found it necessary to modify the methodology in relation to pupil use by building in greater flexibility. This has to be developed from the class teaching notion inherent in many of the suggestions which, if followed slavishly, readily leads to identical activities being carried out in adjacent classrooms.

To explain the changes envisaged it is necessary to outline briefly the changing school situation. During the last eighteen months a building programme has been in operation which has facilitated a change in both the social studies area and teaching methods. The social studies department has recently moved into an area consisting of one large activities room and a very large space which was previously made up of three classrooms, now fully equipped with new furniture. The team can also claim the use of a lecture theatre, large library area and is making heavy and increasing demands upon an expanding reprographic department so necessary to the successful application of MACOS. The team has changed in that it now includes another sociologist who has experienced MACOS and involves two remedial teachers. Unfortunately this year it has proved possible to build in only two periods of staff planning time into the timetable and this has partially caused a division of energies owing to the parallel adaptation of MACOS and the introduction of a new second year course. Thus several of the changes we feel necessary will be introduced over a two year period to allow a planned, constantly evaluated approach.

At the time of going to print the team will have been involved with MACOS for eighteen months and it should be understood that we are still in a learning situation and

constantly re-evaluating our position to remain aware of the effect any changes will have upon the spiral curriculum notion. This does not necessarily mean we intend to adhere to the spiral, but feel that we shall at least understand divergence from the original concept.

## The main adaptations

Perhaps the most important changes have been to make it much more open-ended, less teacher directed, and suitable for the whole spectrum of ability. This not only includes the preparation of extra resources for the less-able pupil, but also the provision of aspects to stimulate and develop the gifted child.

Adaptations which we feel are necessary to do this would, in particular, be to provide greater variety to the large amount of written work involved which seems to be mainly of the functional, reporting type. Much can be gained by introducing more creative elements, not simply as options and working not only into creative writing, but into poetry, drama, art work, modelling, etc. This immediately necessitates links outside the social studies area and methods of introducing this will vary between schools. Facilities must be organised for this variety—for example by allocating specific activity areas within the base, particularly between practical and quiet reading alternatives. Obviously with such a large emphasis on animal studies, strong links need to be forged with the science/biology departments and ideally to build some of their staff into the MACOS team.

As well as providing varieties *within* the base, an extension of the built-in field work beyond the playground and neighbouring schools is advisable, including play groups, old people's homes, the zoo, natural history museums, etc. It may well be important to realise that with such a large amount of time devoted to each theme, alternative studies may be necessary to illustrate similar techniques in a different environment and with a different people. For example, to study aspects of Bushmans' hunting techniques in the desert.

With all the varieties based around the course studies, not only does the lead-in lesson based on the film act as a unifying agent, but large group assemblies are possible

based upon displays, reading, acting, etc., thereby providing a rounding-off technique from which the pupils learn via others' experiences.

These ideas and others outlined have necessitated an increase in the time and facilities allocated to MACOS. In our case, this extra time has been achieved by increasing the number of periods per week and by using the social studies allocation for the whole year. Five teachers are now involved with each half-year group to allow a wider variety of activities to take place and to make provision for the less-able pupil within the social studies framework.

Having already stressed the substantial cash outlay for the initial pupils' material, we have tried to become as self-sufficient as possible and to this end have acquired our own projector, a second pack of pupils' materials and ultimately hope to purchase several key films and finally to provide back-up services in the form of video-cassettes, library resources, teacher packs for student-teacher use and supplies of art materials.

Many of the new curricular projects being developed entail relatively high expenditure which very few departments can afford in isolation and therefore central co-operation is often necessary initially. As an innovation in *this* school MACOS has been a catalyst for change within the social studies department and has stimulated differing reactions throughout the school, varying from casual interest, through concern over subject encroachment, to the beginnings of active links between departments. Within the department we have realised for some time that the introduction of MACOS not only replaced an existing scheme in Year 1, but also completely changed the second year course as a natural progression in pupil experience.

With such a highly structured sequential course two logical alternatives seem open. The material may be purchased well in advance so that staff can familiarise themselves with it via residential courses and visits, attempt to follow the course and then adapt it themselves. Alternatively a school could attach itself to a similar school already following the course, and, gaining from this experience, obtain adapted material and ideas directly. Inter-school staff discussions for exchange of experiences seem invaluable when using and adapting such a structured course.

# Towards Independent Learning

**Peter Gallie**

Originally an historian, Peter Gallie taught at Christ's Hospital and then at an Oxfordshire comprehensive where he became interested in curriculum development and learning methods. He is now Head of Humanities at the Bosworth College, a Leicestershire Upper School.

Innovations on curriculum and learning method have a way of breeding dissatisfaction and further change. It is in the nature of an experiment that it requires critical assessment, whereas the continuation of traditional practices carries its own apparent justification. Furthermore, changes which start as improvements within a traditional framework can soon lead to a questioning of processes of learning and of fundamental aims. The criteria of success change accordingly, and the innovations may appear increasingly at variance with the other educational assumptions, experiences and practices of the students, the school and of society.

We have limited and local experience of change in the Bosworth College Humanities scheme. It is taken by all the 600 students who come to the college at 14 each year, occupies 20% of their weekly timetable and leads through to qualifications in English and in Community Studies at Mode III 'O' level and CSE. In addition to taking Humanities the students can choose courses in Social and Economic History, Modern World History, Geography, Religious Knowledge, Literature, Communications Studies and Social Studies. The teachers from all these departments are linked in twelve Humanities teams, each of three or four teachers with about 100 students. They follow a sequence of ten units, each lasting half a term, on The Family, Adolescence, Education, The World of Work, The Neighbourhood Community, Individual and Society, Beliefs, the Law, War and Society and Ideas of Progress. These are used as subjects of study, as stimuli for wider enquiry and as themes for reading and imaginative expression. The course work produced by the students is continuously assessed for purposes of CSE grading; course work also makes up a large element of the Mode III 'O' level examinations. The students remain in mixed ability groups throughout.

The framework of units and assessment system originally adopted remain largely unaltered. The methods of learning and, indeed, the aims, have changed. The causes of this change lie partly in the nature of the undertaking, partly in our experience in putting it into practice.

One cause of change has been, I think, the synthesis of attitudes and approaches brought by those who have taught English previously and those who have taught other subjects. Before the Humanities Course was estab-

lished the English department operated a Mode III CSE course in which broad themes of social relevance such as 'Conformity and the Outsider' were taken as the basis for discussion, reading and creative work. In the Humanities this has been extended and the themes more fully defined. Our experience has largely justified this, and where the students have had the opportunity of studying the concepts involved more fully they do generally express themselves more adequately and clearly, often also more imaginatively. But the English department bring a different interpretation of the word 'understand' to those of us trained as historians, social scientists or geographers. For them the word implies self discovery, an expansion of the student's existing ideas and awareness rather than the acquiring of a distinct body of knowledge and concepts. As a result we are now less concerned with teaching a common course to all students, more concerned with using the ten topics as a basis for a range of linked activities, though holding to the belief that there are certain central points of understanding which it is valuable for all to acquire.

## Student criticism

The students, fully aware that this is a new course, have been invaluablely critical, and we have learnt from their responses. Their influence has been one factor causing change in the type of materials we have prepared. At first we produced a series of booklets on such topics as child development and marriage customs which appeared as mini-text books and were used as such. Increasingly now we are concerned with devising materials which can be used as a basis for individual or group activities and are therefore the means for learning rather than the subject matter of learning. The students' criticisms have come in a number of forms. Among the first bundle of assessments made by them was a remark by a girl who had just completed the unit on the family and marriage. 'I see no relevance in the Humanities Course, she wrote, 'to someone like me who is just approaching adultery.' The malapropism seemed amusingly forgivable; her short-sightedness did not. It took a generation of students to persuade us that the intricacies of oriental polygamy and the causes of the decline in the birth rate

are no more necessarily relevant to them than Pitt's Sinking Fund or the Watersheds of New South Wales.

Increasingly we have come to question the relevance of the methods of learning which we are fostering as much as the relevance of the material, and to feel that no generalisations about either should be made. During the last two years, with a number of students feeling that they are only continuing in education under duress because of the raising of the school leaving age, we have been particularly concerned with examining the methods which some of them have rejected outright. What implications for the learner do these methods have? Are the methods we use re-inforcing a sense of inadequacy in academic skills of communication? Are they denying the independence which many students assume they would have outside school? Are they demanding an outward demonstration of co-operation with the requirements of authority which in itself may cause a student to lose face with his peer group? We have groaned frequently at the difficulties of establishing the Humanities scheme among such reluctant learners; it may be that their presence has stimulated us to think again about what may be learnt from learning methods for the benefit of all the students.

## **Heterogeneity**

The groups with which we work are of mixed ability and mixed inclination. This has naturally made us increasingly concerned with encouraging various sorts of independent learning as against group teaching which may be at the wrong level for some and rejected from the outset by others. However, the fact that we are concerned with all the students and not just with those considered unsuitable for 'O' levels, as is the case in many integrated courses, has itself been influential. We have not had to compare the work with the more easily measured achievements of students taking History or Geography courses. Nor have we had to assume the same criteria.

Because all the students are involved in the Humanities scheme throughout their fourth and fifth years we now have 30 teachers sharing the work. We form a significant proportion of the staff as a whole, and this probably contributes to what may appear as unusual audacity in introducing changes and expressing the need for more. More influential, I think, is the close co-operation which has developed among the smaller teams of three or four teachers who work alongside each other and meet weekly to plan the activities they will offer. In such a team much more experiment is possible in providing choice or

allowing for individuals and groups to develop their own work than is normally possible where one teacher is alone with one class. We are only beginning to realise the possibilities of this, and to take up the further possibilities of making use of the variations available among the 13 teachers and 300 students who are all doing Humanities at any one time in one area of the school. We find ourselves torn between wanting to exploit these possibilities more fully and at the same time wanting to ensure that individuals are not lost or confused in the flexibility.

The move to a newly-built area of the school has, perhaps, been the most influential factor in making for change. Initially Humanities was taken around the school, in the Lecture Theatre, Dining Hall and Laboratories. For the most part, each set remained with one teacher and methods were conventional if not formal. The present Humanities area consists of three large rooms, unpromisingly open in plan. Each of these, the equivalent of three classrooms, is linked with one room of normal size for the use of the team of three or four teachers and their students. They are far from ideal areas. There are too few small enclosed places where students can go to work really quietly or really noisily. However, the range of activities possible in these rooms is considerable and new, though the traditional one of a class listening to one teacher for a long spell is difficult to contrive. The great value of the large areas has been that they have forced us to consider not just how students are to learn within them, but how students learn at all.

There are, it would seem, as many answers to that question as there are students. That is one reason why we are particularly concerned at present to extend the opportunities for independent learning and to encourage the students to take them up. This would not be too difficult if it meant simply the preparation of large numbers of work sheets giving directives for more or less structured enquiry and written answers. We certainly need these, but independent learning does not just involve teachers' instructions being written instead of spoken so that students can work at their own pace and co-exist in mixed ability groups. Independent learning seems important for a more basic reason; it carries enormous implications for the student in his attitude towards himself as a 'learner' and indeed himself as a person in relation to others. If he does not leave us ready and able to go on learning about himself and his world, ready to adjust and even radically change his ideas in the face of new experiences and new knowledge, then we have failed. We want the students to learn in such a way that what they learn is not just an addition to their stock of knowledge but

involves an alteration in their understanding. That alteration can only be made by them, not imposed on them or presented to them.

The same applies to our concern for students taking an independent responsibility in any critical or creative work they undertake. We are aiming to encourage them to explain what a writer or film producer has communicated to them personally, what a work means within their experience, rather than making a general statement about what it was intended to mean or what techniques it employs. Similarly in any writing they should choose a style which seems appropriate for the purpose, and that purpose should be fully evident to them.

## Old attitudes

In moving towards these aims we meet considerable difficulties. One of them is the ingrained feeling of students, and indeed of teachers, that learning involves acquiring a body of knowledge which can be regarded objectively, defined, analysed and absorbed more or less successfully. But when the object of a learning activity cannot be defined, let alone regurgitated at some selected time, both teachers and students may feel that they are in a deceitful situation and not meeting the expectations of their roles. Let us assume, for instance, that while making some sort of survey a student realises, as many do, that the way he words his questions affects the type of answers he receives. This first realisation might lead on to a developing awareness, outside and beyond school, of the power of language not just in surveys but in all sorts of situations. Furthermore, in his survey he is aware of himself wielding that power over other people and responsible for the consequences. It is not just a concept introduced to him in the abstract to be remembered or forgotten. And yet the realisation may occur as a trivial thing in the school day, possibly in an uncompleted survey. The teacher may feel that the student has achieved little; he, as he asks himself what he has learnt at school that day, may answer 'nothing'. We are accustomed to wanting some sort of wages for our efforts, and feel cheated when none are apparent.

The expectations of students are important in the way they react to Humanities and therefore in the way they are able to benefit from it. Many tend to regard teachers as takers of work and givers of marks, and find it difficult to adjust to taking up independent activities where the teacher plays a different role and where they are expected to adopt objectives for themselves. The would-be adultress

who was mentioned earlier was complaining at the irrelevance, to her mind, of the learning activities as much as the irrelevance of the subject matter. Much of her school experience would make her think that skill in taking notes and writing the 30 to 40 minutes essay was the essence of sophisticated learning. Too much of what she had been asked to do in the Humanities scheme smacked of primary schools.

There is, however, an apparent danger in laying too conscious an emphasis on the importance of method in learning at the expense of concern for the subject matter. To a student taking up a topic of enquiry or embarking on a story the subject matter must remain of central importance if he is to remain concerned about it and develop a suitable approach to it. The teacher needs to re-inforce his feelings of its importance, though he may be inwardly concerned with the method of enquiry or expression. This is no new problem, and applies just as much in any conventional teaching where comments on the punctuation alone and total disregard of the accuracy or interest of the material can act as an infallible dampener of enthusiasm. However, it appears repeatedly where choice is offered, as it is repeatedly in the Humanities. Where students assume that there is one body of knowledge and skills required by the educated man, they may well ask why it does not matter whether they take up this option or that. Are they all, then, equally irrelevant?

'Relevance' is, perhaps, a bogey we have raised to our own confusion. It quickly becomes associated in our minds with 'utilitarian'. We, as authorities, appear to have chosen the ten units or themes of study because knowledge of them will be 'useful' in a way that all that dead and foreign stuff in History and Geography cannot be. We are then judging the relevance of a topic, skill or concept by its possible future use. We should be looking to the extent to which it can extend the existing understanding or skills of the student; what is relevant to one may not necessarily be relevant to another. The ten themes serve a purpose because they allow so many opportunities for activities which relate to the current experience and concerns of many of the students.

However, many students also want to delve into Ancient Egypt or Science Fiction. It seems to me that these can also be entirely relevant to those students, depending on how they have been taken up and are being treated. I am not suggesting here that the only important element in a study or a story should be that it is taken up voluntarily. What seems important is that the students should feel that they are asking their own questions or choosing their own approach. They should feel creatively

# Reconstructing Knowledge: an example

Michael Armstrong

A member of the Forum Editorial Board, Michael Armstrong worked at the Nuffield Resources for Learning Project immediately before taking up his post at Countesthorpe when the school opened. His teaching there has all along been in an interdisciplinary humanities team concerned with the upper school age range, and this is the context for his present article.

My contention is that the process of education should imply a dynamic relationship between teacher, pupil and task out of which knowledge is reconstructed, for both teacher and pupil, in the light of a shared experience. I want to try to illustrate the relationship and its fruits from my own limited and tentative experience in a Leicestershire upper school.

I think that the relationship in question depends upon a number of preconditions—upon unstreaming for example, upon a reintegration of ‘pastoral’ care and ‘academic’ care—and above all upon an acknowledgement of every pupil’s capacity for, and need of, autonomy in the pursuit of knowledge. Here I shall focus attention on the experience of learning itself and on the collaborative context in which it thrives.

That context might be defined as the kind which encourages ‘conversation’. There is a fascinating paragraph in one of R S Peters’ essays in which he sets out to define the quality of a conversation. ‘Conversation is not structured like a discussion group in terms of one form of thought, or towards the solution of a problem. In a conversation lecturing to others is bad form; so is using the remarks of others as springboards for self-display. The point is to create a common world to which all bring their distinctive contributions. By participating in such a

shared experience much is learnt, though no-one sets out to teach anyone anything. And one of the things that is learnt is to see the world from the viewpoint of another whose perspective is very different.’

Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, Peters assumes that ‘conversation’ is possible only between people who are already ‘well-educated’. A large part of the contemporary philosophy of education rests on this mistake. By contrast, my experience of working and talking with children and adolescents suggests that the conversational form, much as Peters describes it, is characteristic of the most fruitful encounters between teachers and pupils throughout the process of education.

I shall describe one particular episode in my most recent experience which seems to share something of the conversational spirit. Of course by far the greater part of my and my colleagues’ work at Countesthorpe is not yet of this kind. Much of it is still heavily didactic, rooted in the scholastic tradition and imprisoned by our own inflexibility of mind.

Carol is a sixteen-year-old student who lives on a council estate on the outskirts of Leicester. She’d like to work with children eventually and she’s hoping to get accepted for an NNEB training at the end of the year. Towards the end of last term I asked her whether she’d

*Continued from previous page*

involved. The teacher’s role is at heart helping them to establish links between their experiences and existing range of concepts on the one hand and the concepts involved in the study on the other, whether it be a poem or a period of history. It is not original to point out that this involves an understanding of the students as much as an understanding of the subject matter. Nor is it original to point out that this understanding of the students is severely limited where we meet them so transitorily. Nonetheless, it is a problem that leads inevitably to a growing feeling among teachers in the Humanities that the students might actually learn more if offered less by fewer people.

Again in considering our problems and our failures we come up against more than our own inadequacies and the inherent weaknesses of the course, however considerable

they might be. We grow increasingly aware of the restrictions imposed upon us by working in a context where the students have developed a clear notion of what learning involves and find that notion re-inforced by what they find elsewhere. The Humanities scheme constitutes only a small part of their educational experience. We hope that it helps them to relate to much that is educational, though not formally so. However, it is undoubtedly at variance with much of their other formal education, and appears likely to become more so. In a paradoxical way, for some students we are therefore offering experiences which they regard as alien just when we are hoping to offer an education which is less alien. The dissatisfaction bred by changes in curriculum and learning method among teachers will, I hope, be inward looking at first. I think it is inevitable that it should also become outward looking.

like to spend one day a week this term working in a small village primary school about five miles away. A friend of mine taught there, I knew something of his work and admired and envied it, and I felt the experience would be valuable for Carol. By the time I talked it over with her I already had a good idea of what, in general terms, I hoped she would get out of it—experience of working with children, an opportunity to observe an exceptional teacher, and a chance to acquire, through experience and study, the beginnings of a general understanding of learning and development in young children.

Carol's attitude, I think, was that she would try it and see. 'I was expecting big things' she wrote later; but she was equally certain that she wouldn't stick at it if she found herself bored, frustrated or ignored, as I think she half suspected she might be

I didn't say much about the school before we first went, only that it was very small, that I'd been there and liked it a lot, and that I thought the teacher she'd be working with was rather exceptional. I warned her not to expect too much to begin with and I asked her to keep a regular diary of each week's visit.

The first visit was quite a shock. Carol found she was far more constrained than she'd imagined. 'First I went to see the boys doing woodwork. I asked a little boy what he was making. He told me he was making a whale and that he was trying to make it smooth with some sandpaper, and that was it, end of conversation. I think he was dying to tell me all about the whale but I just couldn't find the words to say anything to him.'

As she moved from group to group her responses grew more complex. 'I went up to the top end of the room where Mike was reading with a little girl. Then he let me take over. I felt rather strange because things flashed through my head to when I was sitting on a tiny chair reading with a little piece of paper under the line so that you don't lose the line you're reading. It really took me back. I felt rather big, learning her new words, not big-headed but that I was helping somebody to learn something new. After two pages of reading I thought I'd let her read on her own, as she seemed very nervous about it all and soon as I got up from the table she started chatting to her friends. I would have loved to know what she was saying about me.'

Talking and writing about the morning afterwards helped Carol to clarify her feelings and to sharpen her perception but the disappointment of not getting on 'more freely' remained. The following week was worse if only because it was no better. When I came to pick Carol up at the end of the morning she seemed more worried

because I was late than interested in what she'd been doing. I talked to her a little about what we might do to help things along and later I made one or two suggestions in her diary but she hadn't had time to read them before the next Friday came. On the way to the village that day she told me she wouldn't go again unless things worked out better. I was mildly worried.

When I came back at the end of the morning, on time this time, she was really excited. All the way back in the car she chatted about what she'd done. I wasn't going to see her again before the following week and asked her to make sure to write everything up in her diary before it all slipped her mind. On the Monday she brought me the account that follows.

*I didn't fancy going this week at all, over the thought that not one child would talk to us or anything.*

*Just before we got to the classroom thoughts went through my head that they would all turn round and stare at us again. I wish I knew what they thought of us, I think I'll ask them one day.*

*Well as I expected they turned round and stared at us as if to say oh no not them again, but! nevertheless my mind didn't listen, I just went straight on in. First I went up to the boys. Well anybody could see they were dying for me to ask what they had got in their miniature garden, so I asked them. Well they had made a garden and planted lots of plants and grass and things like that. Then they had collected lots of insects and things like frogs and toads, slugs, ugh! I had to pretend I liked them but ugh! boys will be boys. They had put them in this miniature garden to see where different animals went to different surroundings. I thought it was a very good idea!, well we had a laugh, only because they frightened me to death. After speaking to them first I felt inclined to stay with them just because I had got to know them straight away but I decided to go and try and talk to some others but well I found them to turn to ice at the thought of me talking to them, worrying whether they were the ones I was going to choose. Still I don't blame them, I remember when I was their age, sitting on one of those tiny chairs sprawled over my book so the teacher couldn't see my writing, then all of a sudden I would sense a teacher or somebody looking over my shoulder, I would feel a hot flush go to my cheeks as I blush to myself, meanwhile my heart's going ten to the dozen.*

*I decided to look around and see some of the work the children had done, yet again I got fed up of that. Some of the girls were drawing pictures and then colouring them in with wax crayons. I was dying to do some drawing or painting or, well to admit it, I was dying to try what they*

were doing, so I went and got a piece of paper and sat in the corner where I thought nobody could see me. I was happily drawing away when I heard giggling. I looked up and I saw a crowd of girls watching me draw. One of the girls said 'what's that Carol' and I asked them to guess what I was drawing, not knowing that when I had finished they were still guessing. I had drawn a rose with lots of leaves around it, but the children thought it was a lettuce with privet leaves around it. We had lots of laughs and a few not so funny jokes about my drawing. This is where the relationship between the children and I began. They started calling me Carol and laughing and joking, I knew I had started something.

They all went to break and I stayed and coloured my drawing. I had nearly finished my lovely bright red rose with bright green leaves and a blue background when the children came back in. Well, was I shocked at the comments I got from 10-11-year-old kids.

a) Oh Carol that's absolutely fabulous,

b) Oh isn't that beautiful Carol,

c) Oh Carol! so on and so on. I felt rather an artist. One girl gave me a good talking to and told me (told me) mind you that I should be an art teacher and go and teach them.

After finishing the drawing somebody wanted the pleasure of screwing my so called fabulous picture up. This was to make cracks in the wax to give an old looking effect.

The kids argued over screwing it up, until of course Byron spoke up 'let me have the pleasure please' so he stood there in front of me screwing it up while the kids watched my face drop. After he ironed it and I painted it, I was told it looked very nice. After that I got on great with the kids. I was quite amazed with the difference it had made just joining in with them. It was dinner and they said good-bye. Mike came to pick us up.

I don't think I've ever read a more truthful account of the transition from stranger to friend, or observer to participant, whether in the context of a primary school classroom or elsewhere. It opens with the desperation that accompanies a sense that the people you want to get to know are at heart inaccessible. It picks out the constricting shame and embarrassment small children often feel at an invasion of the privacy of their work, especially of their writing—a vital insight to anyone who wants to teach. It acknowledges, wryly, the difficulty of sharing those pleasures of others which touch upon your own squeamishness. And then, out of an awareness of the stubborn self-absorption of this classroom of children emerges a beautifully precise and unforced appreciation of how a relationship can begin.

Carol's technique was to assume the same self-absorption as the others, drawing away alone in a corner—an intuition I had in no way hinted at to her and would probably have imagined to be fruitless. The effects it had on the children are noted with great faithfulness and clarity—from giggling to joking to calling her by name and finally to congratulation and serious conversation. When she 'joined in' Carol had not yet read what I had written in her book about 'taking your own drawings along with you and doing them alongside the children', but even if she had, I would not have foreseen just how she would set about joining in nor how clearly she would perceive the significance of her action.

Besides its central perception Carol's piece is full of incidental appreciation of children's responses. She shows an immediate understanding of the importance of playfulness—of interpreting the rose as a lettuce, of 'the pleasure of screwing my so-called fabulous picture up'. She is aware, too, of the element of competitiveness and desire for recognition in the repetitive fulsomeness of the children's responses to her work and even, on a later occasion, to her clothes. 'Then after all these remarks a strange thing happened. A girl said that's a beautiful bracelet Carol, I do like it very much, and I said thank you. Then another girl proceeded in saying I do like your necklace Carol it's very pretty, I said thank you. THEN Oh Carol I like your shirt, then, I like your trousers, I like your shoes and so on. It was very funny, it was like after one said it the others felt they had to say something to get a thankyou from me or something like that.'

Later still, chatting over another day's visit, Carol told me of the girl who'd sat next to her most of the morning, constantly looking over her work and saying how lovely it was and how much inferior her own work was by comparison. Once, when Carol had failed to reassure her the girl, after a pause, had added half to herself 'perhaps mine isn't really so bad'. We spent quite a time on the significance of this reaction.

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Six weeks have passed since our first visit to Dunton Bassett and I can begin to reflect on what each of us has achieved so far out of our experience. Part of Carol's achievement, I think, is to have rediscovered her own childhood. It may even be just because she had rediscovered her own childhood that she has also discovered how to enter imaginatively into the childhood of others and so how to talk to children and work with them and study them. Each discovery has emerged in part out of experience and intuition and in part out of reflecting on



experience and intuition in talk and in writing. And both the talk and the writing have been 'conversational' in essence and in tone.

As for me, I feel that, reading what Carol has written, talking over her experience with her and spending some time in the same classroom myself, has enriched my understanding of how to observe children and how to create relationships with them, in ways which I would not have discovered for myself.

When it comes to our future course of study I can only make the most preliminary observations. In a sense I know perfectly well what kind of direction I would like it to take. I would like to help Carol to deepen her understanding of the class by developing further those techniques of observation and participation whose essence she had already understood intuitively. I would like to help her to develop the skills of teaching. I also hope that eventually she will begin to investigate at a more general level the nature of cognitive growth. I am equally certain that all of these lines of development will prove to be lines of development for me as well as for Carol.

One important step is to try to involve the teacher of the class she is working in more directly with her own study. By his example and his conversation he would be able to help her more than anyone I know towards a general understanding of how small children learn. Another step, of course, is to interest her in the literature of child development. I have started by asking her to look over a beautiful short study of kindergarten children by Frances Hawdins, *The Logic of Action*, which I will later work through with her.

However, the literature presents innumerable problems, both in general because of its insupportable abstractions and its impoverished vocabulary, and in particular because Carol is one of those people whose extreme slowness at reading has developed into a genuine aversion to it. Nonetheless I don't despair of being able in some measure to resolve the reading problem. But what I know I must try to avoid at all costs is the splitting apart of the generalisations and the conceptualisations from that intuitive grasp of particularity which has been Carol's supreme advantage over the past few weeks.

It is enormously difficult for secondary school teachers like myself to avoid this splitting of knowledge. The shift into a formal mode of learning is so often accompanied by a dry didacticism in which contact with particular forms of life is lost. Techniques abound, concepts proliferate, but somehow they never lead back to observation and participation in those particular circumstances where it is necessary once more to search and explore, with an

open mind, wide sympathy and as much imagination as one can muster.

This stage of transition to more formal modes of learning marks the point at which so many of my own students' fruitful experiences seem to wither away. Often our more sympathetic critics tell us that this is because we have ignored the need for precision in learning after the initial romance, or because we have underestimated the necessary grind inherent in any effort at intellectual mastery. Part of my answer would be to point once more to Carol's writing and talking. Informality does not imply carelessness nor any lack of intellectual control. I would point to the lack of irrelevancies in the extract I have quoted from her diary, and to its sharp sense of what is significant. It is a piece of critical discrimination of a high order. Another part of my answer would be to suggest the interconnectedness of imaginative insight and patient toil. It is not a matter of one succeeding the other but of both being part of each other.

However, I would be prepared to concede that the criticism has a certain force. Yet it should not disguise the more fundamental problem. For the reintegration of formal and informal modes of learning, of the lecture and the conversation if you like, itself requires a substantial reconstruction of knowledge. Somehow or other we are seeking to extend a power of generalisation and conceptualisation without losing the strength of an understanding which is rooted in a sense of particularity. But how?

Just once or twice over the past four years of teaching at Countesthorpe I feel that I have perhaps succeeded in this task. For example, I think of a student who studied some of the problems of old people, the mentally handicapped and 'disadvantaged' children, starting from a particular sequence of personal experiences, extending them to embrace the theoretical perspectives of a sociologist such as Peter Townsend as illustrated in his essays on *The Social Minority*, and returning again to the personal world and its obsessions and fascinations. Such successes owe more to luck than judgment. I am not yet in a position to analyse them or generalise from them as I would wish. I hope that Carol's work will be one of the successes when it is completed. At present all I can say is that it has started well. I have tried to work out why in this article. Now, I hope that other readers of *Forum* may be able to describe more ambitious and more complete examples of a similar pattern of learning. We need many descriptions and many analysis. Then perhaps we will begin to see more clearly what we need to do.

# Discussion

## Open Discussion?

These notes have been prompted by sixth-form students and centres on the topic of classroom discussion; essentially dealing with the consensus view that too often 'open' discussion is really 'closed' because it is at heart 'one answer orientated'. This is not a new point but it demands constant re-examination. It also leads to the second point we've thought necessary to raise which is what guidance a teacher needs to give students if they are successfully to follow up their demand of being allowed to follow their own ideas through.

The injunction 'think for yourself' is a particular favourite of arts subject teachers. One of the students remarked about such teachers 'I am sure they all *think* they are treating us as mature, thinking individuals, but they have a tendency to formulate a question with one answer in mind and hammer away at it, ignoring other, equally valid answers.' The emphasis on the 'think' is a good insight. The intentions may be good but the result fails – this is salutary because we know that descriptions of what goes on in the classroom and what students felt has occurred do not match up at all. Teachers and Educationalists, like writers, have a tendency to generate fictions from the facts of the situations they are describing.

It is difficult to be flexible and allow alternative possibilities especially when the student is restricted by his own unsureness and when the teacher, sometimes rightly, feels that his own point is the more useful.

The call from the students is to recognise that 'with the teacher's usually more effective intellectual capacity for argument, there often results what could be called bulldozing'. A stronger term might be coercion but this emotive word was not often thought to apply and it was accepted that whilst the distinction between teaching and coercion was hard to define, logically it did exist. The plea was rather for what might be called

'intellectual etiquette'; that the teacher should 'act as a sensible guide and sounding-board in discussion, not vent his full arguing capacity on dispelling any ideas deviating from his own'. 'When a pupil begins to argue from an alternative point of view it is usually in the manner of tentative suggestion or exploration which is easily defeated by the teacher's personality or technique of argument.' The same speaker went on to say: 'it has been said that pupils, in voicing this sort of complaint, resent the superior knowledge of teachers. This is not the case. Students accept the teacher's superiority in this. But, when first coming to grips with new knowledge, pupils do not want judgments or even opinions *forced* upon them . . .'

The upshot of this was a request for teachers to give more time for the exploration towards students' own ideas and, where possible, for judgments to be arrived at through discussion rather than foisted upon them. They want to be shown and best of all *experience* the logic of those opinions. Likewise they want to gain experience in discovering the logic of their own ideas and opinions. 'So much emphasis is placed on material learning that discussion takes second place. I believe that class discussion is the way of *teaching* logical and constructive thinking.'

From this last idea we formulated the following conclusions:

What is entailed is discussion about such things as facts, opinions, and generalisations in order to avoid unnecessary time wasting caused because people do not know how to think. We are not talking about designing dog exercising machines but about concepts fundamental to argument. Of particular interest we've found is the nature of 'opinion' – how does one justify an opinion, what is it about the interpretation of facts that makes one look again – why are 'facts' so seldom neutral? In itself such work involves reflection about thinking as well as providing the structure for less tentative and more assured debate by

students and teachers over the content of a particular book or idea. It is impossible here to elaborate fully on the content of such a 'course' but much of its substance is contained in Neil Postman's and Charles Weingartners' book **Teaching as a Subversive Activity**.

Lastly there is the requirement that discussion and questioning be thought of as an ethical activity. Questions of the kind 'Why should we?' 'Why do we?' 'What do you mean?' demand re-evaluation of some person's ideas and therefore should be well intended. It involves an awareness of the responsibility of being a question-raiser, that he has to respect other people and their feelings; that the indulgence of throwing out an antagonistic bait is cruel and counter-productive in that when the baiter himself wishes to be taken seriously he may be rebuffed. On this basis *all* concerned should be able to move towards open discussion in its fullest sense; contingent as always on the feelings and aptitudes of the teachers and students concerned.

PETER DORMER and students:  
SALLY STRAHAN, SUSAN  
ZUCHIEWIEZ, KEITH CHOPPING,  
MARK BLAKER  
*Sudbury Upper School*



# Going Comprehensive

## Patrick Bailey

It is hoped that this discussion paper will prompt subject teachers in reorganised schools to respond with their experiences of rethinking their tasks and roles. Patrick Bailey argues that the success of comprehensive reorganisation depends upon a re-definition of the teacher's tasks, and outlines the tasks which now appear to be required of the subject specialist in the new schools.

When Secondary Comprehensive Reorganisation takes place, all members of staff responsible for teaching subjects find that they have arrangements to make and tasks to perform which were either unnecessary in the simpler selective schools, or which existed only in embryo form.

In this new situation, it is important for each subject specialist or departmental team to think out their responses to a number of key questions. These relate to the nature and educational contributions of the subject itself and to four broad areas of school operation: course design and organisation; teaching methods and the organisation of teaching groups; communications and consultation procedures; and staff professional development.

*What are the distinctive educational contributions of the subject?*

This is the most important question of all, which it is essential to consider before starting to plan courses. Many teachers enter the schools from Universities and Colleges without having thought out in detail why they believe their main subjects are worth studying. Much less have most of them considered in any depth why their subjects should be taught in schools. There seems to be little doubt that this is one major reason why subject teaching in schools has continued with so little change over the past few years, despite great changes in most subjects at University level, and why the new ideas are now being disseminated so slowly through the school system. Comprehensive reorganisation makes it imperative to think out from first principles why one is teaching a subject at all and what its distinctive contributions are to the curriculum. Is it necessary to teach chemistry or history or art to eleven or fifteen year olds; and what is meant by chemistry, history, art and so on in any case?

Most teachers find this examination of the nature and educational value of their subjects very difficult, as indeed it is. Part of the difficulty however arises from the tendency to think of subjects primarily in terms of content; yet the content of a subject is never the only reason for teaching it. In order to think usefully about the contributions of a subject to the school curriculum, it is necessary

to consider what ideas or concepts it conveys which are both different from those conveyed by other subjects and important to the education of young citizens. The content of a subject is in some measure of secondary importance; it may be thought of as the product of the ideas of that subject and the means by which those ideas are made effective. In addition to ideas and content, all subjects are concerned with the development of specific skills; and there are in addition a whole range of general learning skills for the development of which all subject teachers share responsibility. Only when subject teachers work out the distinctive contributions of their subjects in terms of ideas, content and skills can they communicate effectively about curriculum matters.

This process of identifying the distinctive contributions of subjects in comparable terms is essential before attempts are made to link or integrate subjects. It is impossible to integrate subjects on a content basis alone. At best, superficial correlations will be achieved which lack progression and rigour. But ideas can be related, as for example ideas about society and environment contributed by geographers, historians, biologists and sociologists.

The results of subject-based thinking have to be exchanged throughout the whole school staff, and the nature of each contribution has to be understood by all members. The importance of this exchange at the initial stages of curriculum re-planning cannot be over-stressed. To try to build up a comprehensive school curriculum without identifying clearly what each subject specialist has to offer is bound to be a time-wasting exercise.

The whole staff, as well as clarifying its ideas about subjects, has to consider the overall purposes and structure of the curriculum. For what purposes does this school exist? It may be decided that its purposes are to equip all its pupils to survive in the society and environment in which they find themselves; to help them to understand this society and environment so that they can work eventually to improve both; and to encourage the personal development and self-knowledge of each individual.

Subject specialists then have to consider how their specific contributions can best assist these overall purposes. They may well decide that traditional courses

developed in the selective schools in times very different from the present have little to offer a majority of pupils. If so, then the arduous task of designing courses which relate to their pupils' life experience has to be undertaken. Certain aspects of a subject may appear to be much more important than others in the context of a particular school, and courses may therefore be designed which stress these aspects and use them as starting points for wider studies. At every stage, it is important to remember that this fundamental curricular re-thinking is only effective when discussions of desirable ends are followed by detailed and intensive planning.

*What courses have to be mounted?*

It always helps the subject specialist at the time of reorganisation to recognise clearly how many separate courses have to be mounted. Bearing in mind the working of options systems and similar choice procedures which may cause some pupils to drop work in some subjects at the ages of thirteen or fourteen, it is also necessary to determine the length of each course. If this is not done, some pupils will have only fragments of courses, of little value in themselves. It must be clearly decided which courses have to be complete in themselves, and which are parts of longer sequences of work.

It is also important to recognise at an early stage the constraints within which course planning has to take place. These usually include limited time, external examination requirements, a shortage of appropriate books and other resources and of money to buy these quickly, a shortage of specialist teaching spaces, and limited staff experience. Maximum freedom of manoeuvre can only be obtained by recognising these constraints clearly. Problems may also be produced by intended changes in teaching methods. Before certain new courses can make headway it may be necessary to teach pupils how to learn for themselves, how to express themselves independently in acceptable English, how to use a library index to find information, and so on. The more precisely a teaching situation can be analysed in terms of opportunities and constraints, the more realistic and effective course and lesson planning can be.

It is also necessary to consider what aspects of a subject should be taught to each age level, and whether there is any information based upon research or experience which suggests that certain ideas are more suitable for one age group than another. The alleged necessity for linear progressions in subjects should also be scrutinised critically. Such progressions may reflect adult logic rather than

pupils' capacity to learn, and they can greatly restrict freedom of action in course planning. The repetition of ideas in different contexts and at increasing levels of difficulty is an essential part of all good teaching, and linear progressions may not help these.

It may be decided that pupils should be given a common multi-disciplinary curriculum in the early years of Secondary or Middle school, and that the various subjects will be derived from this broad body of learning. When this happens, each subject teacher has to build work into the common course which provides the necessary foundations for specialist work further up the school. Similar considerations apply to all linked or integrated courses in which subject specialists participate. They must provide substantial, orderly and balanced learning experiences in all contributing subject areas, and they must relate to specialist courses but not overlap with them. Integrated courses are most valuable when they are seen by the pupils to be related to, and to relate, subjects.

Teaching is usually most effective when it relates to the first-hand experience and knowledge of the learner, at least in the first instance. Therefore the subject specialist or department may find that they have to relate their teaching to the circumstances of the school, and probably they should always try to do this. They may have to consider for instance how to present their subject to boys and girls from a run-down inner city area, from country villages, from city-fringe housing estates, from an affluent suburb, and so on.

*What teaching methods will be used and how are pupils grouped?*

When comprehensive reorganisation takes place, teachers often take some time to realise just how closely teaching methods are related to the organisation of teaching groups. In an increasing number of schools, subject specialists and departments are now left to decide how to group their pupils within a loose timetable framework. When this occurs, it is important that teachers responsible for subjects examine the consequences, in terms of teaching methods, of each proposed change in teaching group organisation. This is especially necessary when a change to mixed-ability classes is envisaged.

When working with a mixed-ability group the teacher becomes primarily a designer and manager of learning situations. The oral lesson, which works well with homogeneous classes and sets, can now be used only with individuals and sub-groups. The distinction between course and lesson planning also becomes much less

distinct. Each course has to be divided into a sequence of partly self-contained though related units. Each unit has to be structured so that it provides stretching learning objectives for all pupils, and a variety of work to suit the more and the less literate and numerate.

Necessary resources such as books and reference materials, slides, tapes, films and apparatus have to be identified and obtained. Above all the teacher himself has to produce learning materials, because commercial items are seldom just what is required.

However courses are structured and no matter what teaching methods are employed, the progress of individual pupils has to be observed and recorded. Pupils' records will normally be a matter for whole-school decision, but the subject teacher has to make his own detailed arrangements within the agreed framework. He should therefore avoid making the sustained observation of pupils more difficult than it need be by the structure of his courses. Ultimately all effective teaching consists of exchanges between people who know each other, and to achieve such a relationship can be far more important than arranging an elegantly ingenious course which involves so many teachers that the pupils get to know none of them properly.

#### *What consultation procedures are necessary?*

It is clear that good communications and abundant consultation between staff are an essential basis for comprehensive reorganisation. From the point of view of the subject specialist or department, it is necessary at the time of reorganisation to recognise what kinds of consultation are necessary. This depends upon the form of the reorganisation.

In areas where reorganisation gives rise to 'all-through' comprehensive schools spanning the ages from eleven to sixteen or eighteen, most consultation will take place within the school. Where reorganisation takes the form of a tiered system of schools, eg nine to thirteen, thirteen to eighteen, consultation is necessary between schools also. And in any case it is desirable that there should be some regular consultation between teachers in Junior schools and those in the Middle and Secondary tiers, so that proper connections between the work of the two are assured.

Large 'all-through' comprehensives are often divided into Lower, Middle and Upper or Sixth Form sections, each under the leadership of a senior staff member and with a fair measure of curricular autonomy. This situation closely resembles that which obtains in a tiered system of Middle and Upper schools, and similar consul-

tations are required in each case. Subject teachers responsible for the work in each section or school have to decide what aspects of their subjects should be taught at each stage. In doing this they will become aware of the conflict between the child-centred approaches of the Junior school and the examination pressures of the Upper schools. In order to achieve the greatest possible freedom for the Lower and Middle sections or schools, it is essential to identify and agree the requirements needed by each subject specialist in the Upper school to allow his work to go ahead without hindrance. These requirements must be kept to a minimum unless they are seriously to restrict the curriculum at lower levels.

The subject teacher in a Lower or Middle school must recognise the legitimate requirements of his upper-tier colleagues. This is especially important when for example several Middle schools send pupils to one Upper school. Unless all the Middle schools include the agreed minimum subject elements in their courses, the Upper school subject departments will have to mount remedial courses for all pupils on transfer. These courses will inevitably repeat work already covered by pupils whose schools have followed the agreed course. Repetition is not a good introduction to a fresh stage of schooling.

#### *What staff professional development is necessary?*

Comprehensive reorganisation calls for the professional appraisal of all staff members. The subject teacher in the small school usually has to appraise himself; the head of department in a large school has to appraise both himself and his colleagues, informally perhaps but nonetheless effectively. The purpose of appraisal is to find out how well the subject staff are equipped to meet the demands of reorganisation, in terms of handling unfamiliar kinds of pupils, teaching new courses and using a wider variety of teaching methods than formerly. When this situation has been clarified, it is possible to identify gaps in the subject competence and professional experience of the individual teacher or the team, and take steps to remedy these through in-service training or new appointments.

The head of a subject department, like a Head Teacher, has to remember that one of the most important objectives of teacher deployment is to extend the professional scope of individuals. Therefore all members of a department will be involved in the full range of work, though not necessarily every year, so that they become familiar with all kinds of pupils, courses and teaching methods. The notion that it is more prestigious to teach a sixth form

# The Reform of Secondary Education in France

Guy Neave

Guy Neave is at the Centre for Educational Sociology at the University of Edinburgh. He here compares the comprehensive reorganization of French secondary education through the creation of Collèges d'Enseignement Secondaire with developments in this country over the past twelve years.

There is, curiously, much similarity in the development of the British comprehensive school and the story of Horatio on the Bridge: the educational lobbies act just like the Etruscans;

'Those at the back cried "Forward",  
Those at the front cried "Back".'

Of course, it would be cruel and uncharitable to cast successive Ministers of Education in the role of Horatio and his companions. But after one decade of secondary reorganisation what do we have? Around one half of children of secondary school age in the state sector now attend comprehensives. To the grammar and public school lobby, this is too much and too fast. To supporters of the comprehensive school movement, it is too little and too late. Neither group, however, possesses an objective criterion for its assertions. There is no yardstick, no effective measurement for judging whether comprehensive reorganisation has been indecently swift or tediously slow.

The United Kingdom is not the only country to reorganise its secondary education. Sweden has completed its major reform of secondary education and is now pushing towards curriculum reform at the 18+ level. Germany, Austria and France are also in the throes of change, whilst Finland recently set herself the target of establishing a completely comprehensive education system by 1985.<sup>1</sup> A comparison between the development of secondary reorganisation in the UK and in another

country can, however, provide us with a useful and less subjective criterion for assessing our progress within an international perspective. Further, it also allows us to see how different countries tackle various aspects of the reform which, in England, have been subject to particular controversy. For instance, the definition of catchment areas and the allocation of pupils to secondary school.

There is one major advantage in taking France as our country for comparison. Both England and France were at a similar stage in their reorganisation at a similar point in time. In 1959 the Crowther Report here and the Berthoin Commission in France, both recommended raising the school leaving age to 16. The Berthoin Commission, in addition, proposed that this be carried out within the framework of a single type of school catering for all pupils between the ages of 11 to 16. The *Collège d'Enseignement Secondaire* was thus the specific agency in the French ROSLA programme.

There are, however, marked differences in the organisational patterns that emerged from reorganisation. Local variation and initiative in England have created 21 different types of school arrangement with tiers divided at any age between 9 years to 16.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the French opted for what one might term a middle school solution. The *Collège d'Enseignement Secondaire* (CES) caters for 11-to 16-year-olds with a modified type of lycée or a *Collège d'Enseignement Technique* (CET) to deal with the 16-to 18-year-olds. Such a pattern replaced an admittedly chaotic situation composed of a mixture of all age schools in some rural areas, and a rigid division between *Lycée* (long course academic) and *Collège d'Enseignement Général* (short course mainly vocational) for the remaining secondary sector.

In this article, however, we shall deal only with the Collège d'Enseignement Secondaire, comparing its development with the English comprehensive school.

## Aims for CES

First established in 1963, CES's general aims were laid down in the Ministry Circular of October 17th of the same year. The general aims may be summarised under three heads: the administrative, the pedagogic and the social.

*Continued from previous page*

than a first form, a more able group than a less able, is to be firmly resisted. The point needs to be firmly established that the task of teaching the less able and less interested pupils is one worthy of the ablest teacher.

### Conclusion

This paper has outlined the tasks which a subject teacher is likely to face when a school undergoes comprehensive reorganisation. It amounts to a major re-definition of the teacher's job, and for this to be acceptable to teachers a thoroughgoing re-structuring of salaries may be required. Be that as it may, it can be argued that a re-definition of the teacher's tasks along the lines suggested is crucial to the whole success of the comprehensive school.

Administratively, the school was to bring together all children from the relevant age groups under one roof. From its inception, the CES was intended to provide the education for all 11 to 16 year olds. Hence the problem of co-existence was one merely of transition until such time as all schools could be reorganised.

Pedagogically, the new school was seen as uniting the various disparate sections of the teaching profession as a preliminary to introducing wide ranging reform in both curricula and in teaching methods within a predefined administrative structure. When one considers that only recently has curriculum research in England sought to deal specifically with comprehensive schools, one sees the importance attached both to structural innovation and curriculum renewal as a co-ordinated process by the French authorities.

Socially, the CES was regarded as the instrument by which the school could be transformed from its traditional role of conferring individual social mobility to a vehicle for raising educational standards for all (*promotion sociale*). Recent official publications have laid greater stress on the social role of the CES and upon its creating co-operative rather than competitive social values<sup>3</sup> — a role which many have attributed to the comprehensive school in England.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to the lack of national definition that exists in this country, the French 'comprehensive school' has its function, purpose and long term aims clearly stated. Indeed, secondary reorganisation in France is marked at each stage in its development by a welter of Ministry circulars, decrees and instructions, a procedure somewhat different from the weak and 'permissive' legislation which has characterised it this side of the Channel.

## Speedy reorganisation

In the short term the evolution of the CES has been particularly rapid, partly under pressure from the post-war 'baby boom'—probably a more crucial factor in France where the population has been stagnant almost since the turn of the century—partly because of a rapid shift in the geographical distribution of the population. Between 1962 and 1970 over four million people left the countryside to settle in new industrial suburbs. Combined, these two factors generated the 'school explosion'—a phenomenon more powerful in determining the need to expand educational facilities than the demand for extended secondary education on its own. Pressure for

places, the rural exodus and the 'bulge' not only placed immense strain on existing resources, but also placed a premium on the speedy execution of reorganisation.

In 1964 both England and France were on a similar footing in respect of the proportion of 11 to 15+ year olds in reorganised schools. They were also at a similar stage as regards the number of schools officially classified as 'comprehensive' or collèges d'enseignement secondaire. In England and Wales, the maintained sector had 7 per cent of 11 to 15+ year olds in comprehensive schools, compared with 6 per cent of the equivalent French age group. 195 schools in England and Wales were classified 'comprehensive' in 1964 as against 209 Collèges in France. From this point there is a massive divergence in the expansion of the reorganised sectors of both countries up to 1972, the year when the latest figures were available. The average incremental changeover in terms of *pupils* moving into reorganised schools has been 4.25 per cent per annum for England and Wales, compared with 7.7 per cent for France over the same period (see Table). Thus, having started out at almost the same level, the rate of expansion in France is almost double that of England and Wales over the same period.

In terms of the number of reorganised *schools*, the comparison is even more revealing. The number of purpose built French CES during the past eight years is almost equal to the total number of English and Welsh comprehensives in existence by 1971 (see Table). Since 1965 1,290 CES have been built and staffed from scratch.<sup>5</sup> As a recent survey commented on the target set of 300 new CES per year set by the VIth Plan, 'It should soon overcome the shortage of places, thus allowing the final consolidation of the second level 'common school'.<sup>6</sup>

It is perhaps important to point out that centralised decision taking in French education extends to areas from which it is rigidly excluded in England: curriculum, internal school organisation and educational planning. The French education system reflects in consequence a far greater uniformity than England's, a uniformity that emerges clearly in such matters as school size and the definition of catchment areas.

One of the main targets in French reorganisation is to bring down the overall size of schools, and to provide an optimum number of pupils both for flexible teaching purposes and for guidance. The newer, purpose built schools are standardised taking 600, 900 or 1200 pupils<sup>7</sup> thus allowing industrial building techniques to be employed which, in turn, accelerate the rate of reorganisation.

## Secondary Reorganisation in England and France 1964-1972

	11-15+ year olds in reformed sector of secondary education as proportion of all 11-15+ year olds in state secondary education		Number of schools classified as CES and Comprehensive by year.	
	France <sup>10</sup>	England and Wales <sup>11</sup>	France <sup>10</sup>	England and Wales <sup>11</sup>
1964	6%	7% (9%*)	209	195
1965	14%	9%	393	262
1966	22%	11%	603	387
1967	31%	14%	876	508
1968	40%	21%	1,206	748
1969	47%	26% (26%**)	1,555	962
1970	55%	31% (32%**)	1,898	1,145
1971	60%	36% (38%**)	2,122	1,373
1972	unknown	41% (44%**)	2,666	1,591

\* Note that the bracketed figures include school classified as multi-or bi-lateral in addition to those officially designated 'comprehensive'.

\*\* Note that the bracketed figures include all 11-15+ year olds in middle schools 'deemed secondary' in addition to those classified as 'comprehensive'.

## Catchment zones

Whilst catchment areas are defined locally in England, they are a matter for central decision in France. Generally speaking, they are determined on administrative and demographic criteria. They do not, therefore, involve the often contentious issue of parental choice, whether guided or personal. The main criterion is population density. In country areas, the catchment zone tends to coincide with the administrative centre of the *Département*, the *chef lieu*. In addition, they are divided into three types in relation to the population characteristics of the area: low, medium and high.

In low population areas, they are drawn to allow a minimum number of pupils to a given school, that minimum being usually 600. The size of the catchment zone depends on the topography. Children are either bussed in daily or boarding wings are provided in certain instances.

In medium population areas, the catchment zone criterion is one of travelling time. Zones are drawn up to permit a travel time of no more than 45 minutes. There are no boarding facilities.

In areas of high population density, the arrangement is based on 'feeder schools'; pupils attending a given primary school will automatically enter its linked CES.

As one would expect, catchment zones are defined by Ministerial Circular which covers the whole country (Circular of June 11th 1971).

## Towards flexibility

To an English eye, the French education system suffers from a monumental inflexibility, monstrous bureaucratic control and a rigid 'tracking system' that consigns pupils to academic, technical or vocational education with the finality of the Last Judgement. Nor would the French deny this.<sup>8</sup> The CES, however, is regarded as one of the first steps away from the monolithic and Napoleonic model. Recent changes have given a certain measure of teacher control over the curriculum by allocating 10 per cent of the weekly time table to be used as teachers see fit. Another move away from the traditional arteriosclerosis of the system comes with changes in teaching groups. The normal pattern within the CES has been to assign pupils to three 'bands'—classical, consisting mainly of arts, literature and Latin, modern 1 and 2 made up of scientific or technological studies and a third for non-academic children consisting mainly of technical or vocational courses. In certain experimental CES attempts are under way to break down this rigidity through introducing



a pattern not dissimilar to 'progressive differentiation' mentioned in the Hadow Report of 1926. Progressive differentiation involves combining both streaming and setting to allow pupils to work at a pace suited to their aptitudes and abilities.<sup>9</sup> Since most French children are taught in a single class for all subjects, this experimental programme is some step towards flexible teaching groups.

However, when one compares this situation with the grouping practices current in English comprehensives, clearly the internal organisation of the CES appears overridingly cautious where not downright antediluvian.

Though outdated by comparison with prevailing trends in English education, these faltering steps, one must remember, are the first attempt in the history of French education to individualise teaching on a mass basis. However, curriculum renewal, new teaching methods and new grouping systems have the advantage that, in France, they are all co-ordinated within the structures of a single type of school, rather than being sprinkled over the educational scene for general application to grammar, secondary modern or comprehensive as the fancy takes one. Thus, whilst the educational edition of *le vice anglais* has been to split innovation into two separate areas—structural reorganisation and curriculum innovation—the French seek to harmonise these aspects into part of a total reform of secondary education.

## Pertinent comparisons

Several points arise from this short comparison of secondary reorganisation in France and England. First, much has been made of the unseemly haste of 'going comprehensive'. Compared with France, progress in England is almost sedate, accompanied by a vacillation rarely equalled since Nero's version of Son et Lumière. Second, structural reform and curriculum innovation must go hand in hand. Indeed, the French view is that without such simultaneous attacks on both fronts, reform is likely to prove stillborn.

Some people may say that on the basis of its internal organisation, its lack of flexibility and the degree of streaming that the CES appears to endorse, the 11 to 16 sector of French secondary education cannot be comprehensive in the sense we understand it. If this is so, then on the criterion of gross structural reorganisation we should perhaps admit to having no comprehensive

system of secondary education at all. After a decade of 'going comprehensive' England and Wales still lag four years behind France in the proportion of children in the reorganised school. Furthermore, given the presence of bi-partite and comprehensive, grant aided and independent, preparatory and primary schools, it is debatable whether by European let alone French standards, we have a system at all, let alone a 'comprehensive' one.

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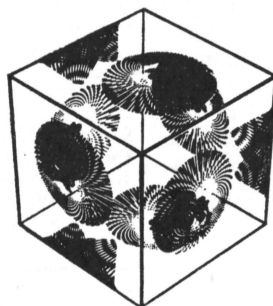
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# Family Support and the Young Reader

**Douglas Hubbard and John Salt**

Both Douglas Hubbard and John Salt had extensive and varied school teaching experience before joining the staff of Sheffield Polytechnic as, respectively, Lecturer in Primary Education and Dean of the School of Social Studies. They previously contributed to *Forum* vol 16 no 1.

In recent years there has been a widening of interest in the social as well as the more distinctively perceptual factors involved in the complex process of learning to read. Similarly, there has been some widening of investigation in another dimension, that of time, as the importance of the more extended developmental factor in reading has been more sympathetically considered. Moreover, and as in so many other areas of investigation, a new impetus has come from action research in communities rather than from the development of laboratory techniques.

It is, in fact, against this background that this study on which this note is based was carried out, and in particular it should be noted that the conclusions embodied in it derive from a community investigation, an intensive look at the way of life and attitudes to education of some thirty-three families in a northern industrial community.

Within this context, then, how was the process of reading conceived of, and to what extent was it valued? It is, of course, relatively easy to answer the second question, albeit in rather general terms. Faced with the straightforward question: 'What would you think was the main reason why your child should go to school?', the mother was likely to answer: 'To learn how to read.' Moreover, the relative success or failure of the individual child in his early years at school at least was most customarily gauged in terms of the grasp of a developing reading expertise.

In the area of the conceptualisation of reading, however, some degree of confusion existed. In particular there was evidence of discontinuity, particularly in the matter of overt emotional support for reading development, something which appeared often to be to the disadvantage of the individual child. This question of discontinuity is, in fact, worth exploring at some length.

Now, in respect of the pre-school years, the informal and often unconscious preparation of the child at the pre-reading stage was often surprisingly good, even in the case of those families in the sample who were recognised as being within the boundaries of an Educational Priority Area. In something like ninety per cent of cases children were customarily read to: they had some developed skill in discussing pictures in books, together with a related ability in the physical handling of books. Moreover, when busy mothers might have been considered

to be deficient in providing this type of experience, their places were often taken by older siblings.

Clearly, the perceptual processes involved in the activity touched on in the above paragraph were of very great intrinsic importance, but attention should also be drawn to the vital social forces at work. Viewed radically, this pre-school reading experience could be seen to take place in a setting of deep emotional support, the process as a whole being characterised by a naturalness, a centrality to family life, and a reference to a deep social morality. In a sense 'reading' had become part of the regular rhythm of the child's life: the whole business of pre-reading had become an integral part of the child's socialisation in the family environment. In all this, too, the mother had accepted commitment: it might well be assumed that progress had been made in laying the value foundations of reading.

## On starting school

So far, then, there would appear to be some scope for optimism. It was noted, however, that *after* the child's entry to school factors of discontinuity and frustration tended to creep in. In particular the initiation of the child into reading at school appeared to be accompanied by a significant fall in active emotional support in the home in the terms in which we have written. The processes involved were, of course, complex: there were many latent rather than manifest factors in the situation: and certainly there was no suggestion that this apparent withdrawal of emotional support for reading activity was a conscious or deliberate process.

Obviously the inevitable existence of a complex relationship between school and home was of some significance in this context. Entry to school inevitably involved major shifts in the power structure relative to the individual child. Authority was now shared between parent and teacher, and paradoxically—and occasionally grievously—it was the child from the home providing the strongest pre-school emotional support who could be seen to be the one most at risk.

It was not, however, simply a question of a relatively clear-cut abdication of family responsibilities in favour of

those of the school. Very subtle changes in family attitudes were, in fact, likely to occur and deserved special comment. In particular, the emphasis in the family's concept of 'reading' tended to shift from ideas associated with a pleasant social intercourse to ideas of a more functional nature in which elements of competition loomed large. Matters of relative performance came to the fore as the key question now emerged as, 'Which book are you on?' Reading, in fact, quickly became a central element in the stratification of success and failure. It tended to become, conceivably far too soon, an essentially 'isolate' activity, shorn of the emotional warmth and involvement attendant on its preliminary stages.

## Poor readers

At this stage the child was now learning to read rather than, in a sense, living to read. Clearly, there were children whose acute early reading difficulties might well derive from the problem of discontinuity outlined here, and, clearly, too, much thought should be devoted to children in this category, not least in view of the poor self-image that is associated with being a poor reader or a non-reader. There was also, however, a more complex issue, and that related to failure of children, often intelligent children, progressively to develop reading attitudes and/or reading skills at appropriate levels throughout their school careers. Teachers and parents alike were all-too-aware of the existence of the child who 'can read, but he won't'. In other words, the tragedy of the situation was not only that some children do not learn to read (serious as this may be), but that many children who have a superficial skill in word recognition, who can 'bark at print', look on reading as an essentially alien activity in terms of the values implicit in their wider social environment. This state of affairs is likely to exist, of course, in the case of children from homes where parents are not customarily seen to read or, perhaps equally important, to share their thoughts on what they read, as the researches of such workers as Kelmer Pringle have already clearly concluded.

All in all, then, the investigation referred to in the opening paragraphs of this note suggested that there could be marked discontinuities as between the emotional experiences of informal pre-reading and the often startlingly different process of actually learning to read and that these discontinuities existed in a time dimension (pre-school child/infant pupil), a spatial dimension (the home/the school) and, most important of all, a value

dimension (when, for the child, a whole new complex of attitudes to pictures and print came into existence as the 'real business' of reading began).

## The way ahead

So much, then, for an analysis of the problem, but what of the provision of remedies? In this, as in all else, there is the need to be realistic, and perhaps one should preface remarks under this heading with the remark that there is a limit to what can be attained by orthodox educational provision. In the matter of emotional support for pre-reading and early reading activity the classroom teacher simply cannot take the place of the family participants to whose complex involvement we have drawn attention in the earlier paragraphs of this note. The problem, in fact, is not one of substituting for the family's emotional support in the matter of pre-reading, but of positively encouraging such support in the widest possible range of families and ensuring that it is maintained *to the optimum point beyond the pre-reading stage*.

In defining more precise objectives, however, attention must be drawn to the need to create awareness—awareness, in both teacher and parent, of the need for the continuance of the 'socialised reading' characteristic of the pre-school experience, for without this continuance, as we have argued in this note, a child may well be thrust into situations in which reading *per se* rapidly comes to be seen as an isolated activity not necessarily related to the values and moves of his everyday existence.

Clearly there is much to be done here, both in the matter of teacher education and also in the rapidly-developing field of parental education which has secured a vital impetus from the widening recognition of the importance of home-school relationships. Clearly, too, there are strong arguments for the development of reading material which is designed to encourage the extension of the socialised reading to which we have drawn attention in this note; it is indeed possible to envisage the development of a new range of 'involvement' readers, supported by guidance literature, with their use encouraged by expanded home-and-school programmes and library services. In these and other ways the regrettable, complex discontinuities which undoubtedly exist in the process of coming to terms with the printed work, and which have been tentatively analysed in this note, may be minimised as conclusions from a developing sociology of reading are put into practice.

# Cartoon Comics

## Bob Dixon

Now a lecturer at Stockwell College of Education, Bob Dixon taught for about ten years in a variety of schools including Risinghill, and has a particular interest in all kinds of children's fiction. Here he examines attitudes and stereotypes in the cartoon strips of some popular comics.

Cartoon comics can be considered as providing psychological compensation for inadequacies or for painful problems in real life. This explains the drug-like effect they often have. In many strips that deal with wealth and sometimes with a side-effect, snobbery, the compensation element is very strong.

It is in this context, I believe, that we must see the wealth and, of course, the class element in these comics. In 'The Toffs and the Toughs', a strip in **Whizzer and Chips**, the toughs win in the end after the nasty toffs have had their way most of the time but it is all presented as part of the natural order. The basic social structure is never questioned. Of course, the strongest form of indoctrination is that in which any possibility of conceiving alternatives is ruled out. Thus Tiny Tycoon in the same comic presents making as much money as possible as a normal and humorous pursuit. 'Ivor Lott and Tony Broke' in **Cor!!** and 'Lolly Pop', a kind of rich, northern business-man in **Shiver and Shake** who keeps his son in poverty, work the fertile field of contrasts again as does the strip, 'The Upper Crusts and the Lazy Loafers' in **Whoopee!** Of course, the Lazy Loafers win but it is, perhaps, in 'The Bumpkin Billionaires' in the same comic that this line is taken furthest in cartoon comics in Britain. Here, the straw-chewing bumpkins actually do have the money and buy Ma, for her birthday, the crown jewels of Kolinoor, an ocean liner complete with bottle of champagne for launching and a heated swimming-pool. Ma's reaction to these gifts is significant as well as being funny. She calls the crowns 'real good pastry cutters' and young Billy tells her, as he hands over the sceptre, 'And there be a rolling pin to go with 'em, Ma!' Daisy presents the ship and bottle of champagne which Ma takes for 'a bubbly shampoo'. Daisy tells her, 'They made me take the ship as well!' Finally, when Pa hands over the swimming-pool, she says, 'Yipee! an extra big sink—so I'll only have to do the washing up once a month!' and in the last frame she comments, 'Aye! I'm roight glad you didn't get me nothing fancy, family! We be simple folk at heart!' Money is not important, really, and most people wouldn't know what to do with it if they had it. It is an extension of the keeping-coals-in-the-bath argument.

Children have constantly to cope with authority in one form or another so we naturally find that there is a great preoccupation with authority in these comics. However, as in the case of wealth, the system itself is not in question. Authority, however, unlike the rich, often wins and many strips end with a caning or beating. Presumably, laughing at this kind of thing in the comics is one way of trying to cope with a situation in which a child is totally helpless. Almost every comic has a strip about school or a school-teacher, in these comics usually a man and almost invariably a stereotype with gown, or at least mortar-board, and cane. Outside the school, a child has parental authority to cope with and although we often see him, or her, vanishing into the distance at full speed in the last frame it is frequently with a 'Grrr you wait!' or a 'Come back!' ringing in his ears. It is clear that retribution is only delayed and that might will win in the end. Outside school too, there is the authority of the wider society, represented by the police. In cartoon comics, children virtually never seem to beat the police, even temporarily, though they may do so vicariously through the heavily-disguised robber with his black mask, hooped sweater and bag labelled 'Swag'. As like as not, he will have a stubbly chin and cloth cap as well. 'Bluebottle and Basher' in **Buster** encapsulates the endless struggle between the forces of law and order and the criminal underworld. In **Beezer** of May 18, 1974, in two consecutive strips, we see the conventional ending to countless comic strips and stories for children—the police lead away the crooks. Often, in fact, the comic characters are drawn into rôles supportive to the police usually working quite independently of them until, in the last frame, they hand over the criminals and, as like as not, collect a reward. In cartoon comics, it is never a question of murder but always of theft, the criminal, being so heavily disguised, is very obvious and it is simply a matter of catching him. It is interesting that there is such a preoccupation with the safeguarding of property when most people haven't any, to speak of.

In cartoon comics, as might be expected, war is presented as something of a game and we do not actually see anyone being killed. The Germans are usually on the other end and are presented as rather stupid, humourless people speaking funny English. 'Vos der pig-boys cleaning

der statue, fat Hans?' asks the German colonel as he scrubs himself in a bath containing the obligatory plastic duck. This is in 'The Kids of Stalag 41' from **Buster and Jet** and we are told in a panel at the beginning of the strip:

'Stalag 41 was a prisoner-of-war camp in Nazi Germany full of British boys who gave their Kommandant, Colonel Klaus von Schtink, a terrible time.'

**Sparky** has Baron von Reichs-Pudding ('The Flying Hun from World War Wun!') who says 'Der-Har-Har' as he outwits the 'Englander swine' early on in the strip, only to end on the note 'OOAAH!' in the last frame. The issue of **Buster and Jet** already referred to also has two half-page and two full-page illustrated advertisements for war-toys, a full-page comic-strip advertisement for 'commando shoes' and a full-page comic-strip advertisement for the navy—'Navy plucks crew from jaws of death'—as well as a quiz on the police.

Foreigners are funny, rather than evil, at this stage but we do get the beginnings of the laying down of national and racial stereotypes here, as we have seen in the case of the Germans. There are usually a few strips of comic red indians around who keep saying 'um' and 'how'. On the other hand, it is sometimes difficult to know when poking fun enters a nationally- or racially- sensitive area and becomes something less than good-natured. The trouble starts, in my opinion, when undesirable characteristics are seen almost exclusively as being attached to specific national and racial groups.

Undeniably, this group of comics has many heartening features—perhaps more than other groups. No one could object when Moana Lisa and Fuss Pot get their deserts while in a strip such as 'The McTickles' in **The Beano** we see the cartoon medium, both as far as the words and the pictures are concerned, used to its best advantage in the creation of sheer fun. **Whoopee!** No 3 has a rather unusual but very successful use of the medium in one strip which satirises 'The traditional British holiday camp.' It is when we move to wider concerns that doubts set in and this happens most, as we might expect, in those strips which, by their nature, look forward to comics for the older age groups. It is sad to see 'The Lone Ranger' in **Whoopee!**, because, although the strip looks forward to an older age-group, it is extremely backward-looking in its attitudes, as the first exchange between Tonto, the faithful red Indian and the Lone Ranger shows:

'Wah! Kemo Sabay! It is a mighty IRON HORSE! That's right, Tonto! A locomotive of the SANTE FA RAILROAD COMPANY! Civilization is spreading further west all the time.'

Some people might wish to quarrel with the last statement. However, after the 'Mexican bandits from across the border' have been dealt with, we are promised 'Another action-packed adventure in the fight for law and order next week!' Whose law? Whose order? By what right? Isn't it time we knew? Some people might think that what is here regarded as spreading civilisation is really nothing more, nor less, than genocidal conquest. Furthermore, as long as we have a 'free press', it is unlikely, ironically, that such people will have much chance of putting their point of view to children. All children get is the lore and ordure of the cowboy 'civilisation'. Even the title, 'The Lone Ranger', carries its message. First of all, Tonto, apparently, doesn't count and what about the charisma attaching to the solitary male hero? Does it not relate to a fundamental strand in capitalist ideology—individualism—and does this not relate, in turn, to social darwinism, the survival of the fittest? And what has this to do with civilisation? A lot of people think that civilisation has something to do with rising above this. Others seem to know instinctively what civilisation is—like the envoy of Charles II, in a 'Victor' strip, on landing in 'the new colonies in America' and seeing a solitary red indian, who is shackled: 'These leg-irons are a sign of contact with civilisation,' he remarks, with unconscious irony.

## ADVANCE NOTICE

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# Reviews

## Reforming the sixth form

**The English sixth form: a case study in curriculum research**, by Philip H Taylor, W A Reid and B J Holly. Routledge & Kegan Paul (1974), pp 186. £3.95.

This well-produced and timely book is the result of four years' work by Professor Taylor and his associates at the Birmingham School of Education. The team used a sample of 180 schools in a limited area of the west midlands and north-west of England, approximately one-third of all the maintained schools with sixth forms and direct grant schools in that area, with a few independent schools thrown in. The book sets out 'to make explicit (certain) characteristics of the sixth-form curriculum which previously were unnoticed or neglected' and impresses as a systematic, clearly argued and revealing inquiry. Teachers and head-teachers were questioned about the needs of sixth forms, the aims and objectives behind the curriculum, any influences or constraints upon it, and various proposed reforms. Their responses, quantified, tabulated and scrupulously interpreted, offer valuable evidence as to the conditions which are necessary for successful curriculum development.

The work demanded for university entrance is still the basis for the whole sixth-form curriculum. Every year or two for the last fifteen years major proposals have been put forward nationally for broadening that curriculum. Universities officially tend to express approval of such intentions, but this official attitude is not reflected in the activities of admissions tutors, so that little or no curricular change has resulted: and the growing number of 'new' sixth formers not aiming at university or at higher education at all are even more adversely affected than are their more academically ambitious contemporaries. How does the existing

system so effectively defend itself against all attempts to change it?

In this country, in which the traditional autonomy of the head in his school and of the teacher in his classroom is so highly prized, the influence of heads and teachers is all-important. Sixth-form teachers and their heads are almost invariably the products of a well-insulated, conservative, élitist and highly specialised system of higher education. Generally speaking such people, however intelligent and conscientious, will strongly resist change unless and until they find themselves in a situation in which the traditional curriculum proves so inappropriate as to threaten to become utterly unacceptable. It is small wonder that support for curricular change is relatively strongest amongst teachers in comprehensive schools.

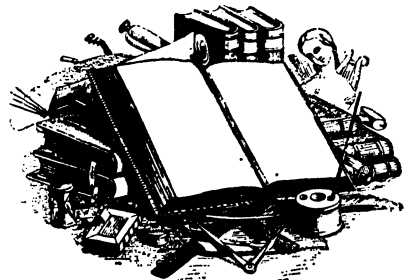
Even when teachers appear to be in favour of reform, there is no guarantee that they are actively promoting change. For example, responses indicate a desire to see more general education in the sixth form, and more attention paid to developing the cultural and aesthetic sensibilities of sixth formers, while at A-level interest and enjoyment in the subject ranks very highly indeed among teachers' objectives. But 'whether or not these responses correspond with what teachers would be assessed as doing by an impartial observer is an open question'.

Nor is it simply a matter of the wishes of the most traditionally and narrowly academic university elements prevailing against the broader inclinations of sixth-form teachers. 'As far as most sixth forms are concerned the universities are seen as sharing, at least to some extent, the role of the schools themselves. To the extent that both universities and sixth forms are seen as standing for the same values in public life and education, criticism of the former would imply criticism of the latter as well. What the universities do is seen by teachers as legitimate.'

So what hope is there left? Well, the most important need according to head-teachers is 'to find ways of providing for students who are not suited to traditional courses'. No doubt curriculum change is seen by many 'as an exercise in coping rather than innovating'. But it is significant that one of the few suggestions which heads see as very likely to contribute helpfully to the development of their sixth forms, out of many proposals put forward by the researchers, is that the curriculum be based on a system of 'credits', with freedom to follow a smaller number of subjects to a high level or a larger number to a lower level. If this formula were adopted, schools which because of changing circumstances felt a need to change would be able to do so: and, to be realistic, that is perhaps the one thing that is most urgently necessary in the present critical situation.

This book could be salutary in that it points the way to the kind of discussion and research, both widespread and detailed, which are a necessary basis for effective curriculum reform. Certainly the authors have a point when they suggest that the fate of various official proposals for new sixth-form curricula marks 'the demise of the notion that a few well-meaning individuals can, within closed doors, solve the educational problems of a dynamically evolving society'.

ANDREW FINCH. *Longslade School, Leicestershire.*



## New look at 16+

**Post Compulsory Education, a new analysis in Western Europe**, by E J King, C H Moor, J A Mundy. Sage Publications Ltd (1974) pp 460 £6.00.

Educational expansion at any stage has long term effects which are not usually foreseen by the instigators of the changes. This is in spite of the fact that the materials, or victims, of these reforms are not static objects, but human beings in that stage of their lives when they themselves grow and change most rapidly. For example, the 1870 elementary schools (UK) were to provide basic instruction in the three 'rs' for the children of the proletariat; the result was that many of these children, given the skills of reading and writing, wanted and had the ability as they grew into adolescence, to go much further. Hence the 'higher tops' and later the secondary schools. The comprehensive reform of the 1960s was to provide good secondary education for all boys and girls at least to the age of 15 or 16. The result was that many of these, who had been in secondary modern or senior elementary schools, given the opportunity for broader study and extended schooling were eager and able to continue their education after the age of 16, though not necessarily on the traditional lines of the old grammar school sixth form. Hence the staying-on trend which has built up the current pressure for more courses and institutions for the post-compulsory school-age cohorts.

What has happened in the UK and elsewhere is that school students themselves by their response to organisational and social change at an earlier stage have demonstrated new needs at the later stages and are compelling educators to re-think not only the scale, but the content, style, and orientation of the provision for the post-sixteens.

In the UK this area is perhaps the one which demands most attention at

the present time. So far the efforts made to cope with it are blinkered by past experience; eg the attempts to reform by tinkering about with the existing examination systems, or by endlessly re-defining what we mean by 'a sixth former' ('trad' or 'new') but still a sixth former, or by the complacent acceptance that FE (as now conceived) provides an escape route for the 'sixth former' who reacts against school (also as now conceived).

I have so far leant heavily on the English experience where education is not centrally planned and where change and innovation seem to 'happen'. But many of the same phenomena are to be seen in countries where there is a centrally planned system. The research by King, Moor, and Mundy has resulted in an admirable report about post-compulsory education in five European countries, England, France, W Germany, Italy and Sweden (chosen for soundly argued reasons). In each country three cities or districts were selected which were reasonably comparable; a favoured metropolitan suburb with a high staying-on ratio, an enterprising and rather prosperous area of perhaps new industries and a less favoured centre of heavy industry or with a changing occupation structure still lacking many modern opportunities for school leavers.

The researchers were very conscious of the differences of culture idiom and institutional form (not to mention nomenclature), but they recognised a comparable climate of decision in most of the centres visited. Indeed, 'similarity of concern for re-orientation, sometimes anxiety about re-orientation, ran right across formal differences between cultures, administrative patterns, and even distinct socio-economic levels and school types in one and the same country'.

The method of the research involved administering meticulously prepared questionnaires (printed in the appendices) to principals, staff, and students. The researchers recognised that questionnaires are not enough and great pains were taken to discuss with

administrators and people in schools and colleges the purposes and form of the questionnaires and interviews.

The results show a number of similarities; for example the general recognition that the problem is not just one of housing the growing number of stayers-on, but of finding structures, curricula and styles to meet their rapidly changing needs. Then everywhere the attitudes and qualifications of the many different kinds and traditions of teacher now involved with the 16 to 20 group are being examined. But perhaps the most fundamental common problem is the search for a base or framework for the education of the older adolescent, freed from the influence of the Universities, which for obvious reasons dominated the 'sixth forms', and their equivalents elsewhere, in the past.

In Sweden where the staying-on rate increased earlier there is more recognition than elsewhere of the need to abandon the compulsive and exclusive end-on syndrome, and to replace it with the concept of recurrent education.

Everywhere the paradox is recognised that wanting to stay on is accompanied by criticism and discontent. Thus the students themselves are still one of the most potent agents of change.

Post-compulsory education is a topic of concern which crosses national boundaries. The fresh look at the problems to which this research points is bound to throw light on other problems of education at lower and higher levels of attainment and it is a 'point d'appui' for further inquiries. Within the age range of the over sixteens it reveals the need for a 'sustained programme of researches (with feed back) into new and evolving educational provision'.

Happily the researchers promise to follow up with a more personal and practice-orientated book which will make stronger reference to evolving experiments in Britain.  
MARGARET MILES



# Marxism and mystification

**Marxist Perspectives in the Sociology of Education**, by Maurice Levitas, Routledge & Kegan Paul (1974), pp 208, £2.00.

Marx himself observes – albeit in a wider context than the ‘sociology of education’ – that it is neither circumstances nor upbringing that produce men but *men themselves* and that therefore, ‘the educator himself needs educating’ which, in turn, involves a ‘revolutionary practice’. In effect Marx is pre-empting the later claims of academics like Weber and Durkheim to explain the world in terms of a mechanistic science of society. From a strictly Marxist point of view therefore the only acceptable ‘sociology’ is one which places men and women at the centre of the stage and studies the dialectical interplay of human designs in relation to economic interest and the consequent power struggles between social groups.

The problem of Maurice Levitas’ book is that it fails, precisely, to criticise at a fundamental level the bourgeois sociology upon which the standard ‘sociology of education’ is based. Weber, Durkheim, Parsons and the lesser luminaries are all treated as though they only needed a little Marxist insight to be thoroughly acceptable to him. He tells us in the introduction that among his purposes is ‘to strengthen sociological starting points by adding to them a Marxist element’. But this is to miss the point of a ‘Marxist perspective’ completely. Marxism is not a tincture that can be added to any old social theory that happens to be being peddled to teachers at the moment – it is a self-consistent system of thought which offers a practical alternative. You don’t even have to be a Marxist to recognise that – bourgeois sociologists themselves realise it; which is probably why they don’t offer a Marxist analysis as part of their ‘sociology of education’ courses.

To take one example: Levitas makes great play throughout the book with the term ‘universalistic’, almost equating it at one point with socialism. But the term ‘universalistic’ is part of a specific system of mechanistic social description originating with Durkheim and elaborated by Talcott Parsons – a fact duly noted by Levitas. How then, if we are to make sense of the term at all, can it be used as part of a Marxist perspective? The term is of no use whatever in penetrating the class nature of society – as we are urged to do in other places in the book. To say, as Levitas does, that an absentee miner is employing a ‘universalistic orientation’ is simply to use the term in a way which would not be acceptable to Parsons or to the bourgeois ideologists who follow him. For Parsons and his ilk the absentee worker is definitely employing ‘particularistic’ – and therefore lower-level orientations in putting self before work. This is precisely how sociologists mystify reality – by pretending that there are scales of value somehow to be abstracted from the concrete interests of actual people. This is the precise usefulness of terms like ‘role’, ‘status’, and ‘orientation’ to the ruling class who employ and prefer the wordspinners and mystifiers.

The puzzling part is that Levitas is himself very clear about the class nature of our society and the education system. His chapter on ‘Social mobility or social revolution?’ is possibly the clearest account of Marxist objections to the ‘social mobility’ idea yet to appear in print. Why then does he succumb to the neo-positivist formulations which he ought to be stripping of their pretensions to intellectual rigour? Why does he try so strenuously to make them respectable by a forced marriage with Marxism? Perhaps because of a professional commitment to the ideological status quo in teacher training. He certainly appears to think, in the face of all the evidence, and in the teeth of articulate student protest, that colleges of education represent a worthy fulfilment

of working class demands; that ‘the four-sided study of education’ represented by courses in philosophy, history, sociology and psychology produce well-equipped teachers; that, as a result of such organisational devices, there is ‘growing awareness in the literature of the importance of social class objectives’. In fact Levitas seems to have a blind spot when it comes to teacher-training and higher education in general – a blind spot that amounts to total myopia as regards the ideological nature of those definitions of what counts as valid knowledge in the social sciences when introduced to teachers in particular.

The same puzzling contradiction appears in his dealing with the social nature of language. An otherwise important discussion on the question of ‘linguistic deprivation’ – one which is not helped, however, by the introduction yet again of the ‘universalism’ idea – is trivialised at the beginning by a gratuitous reference to the ‘theories’ of the late and not altogether lamented J B Stalin. To argue as he does that some Marxists have regarded these ideas seriously is to do nothing for a principled Marxist analysis. Indeed one might argue that what confuses the reader in Levitas’ work, and re-observes what is sometimes revealed with great insight, is a certain fascination with ‘authorities’ – even bourgeois ones. He seems to need to rehearse the ideas of anyone who has achieved eminence in sociology – and sometimes even the eminence is doubtful – *before* engaging their ideas critically; there is a reluctance, you feel, to take on the great names. Yet anyone who decides to adopt a Marxist approach *must* do this, not in any spirit of anarchist iconoclasm – as though ‘names’ mattered anyway – but because the great reputations of bourgeois social science are built on the sand of ideology. This is what is not always clear in Levitas’ account. Indeed Marx’s great conceptual contributions – ideology, alienation, praxis – don’t get much of an airing. The reader will

come away from **Marxist Perspectives on the Sociology of Education** no wiser, in fact, about the specifically Marxist perspectives. Instead we are given an often stirring account of the results of *applying* such a perspective – a Marxist version of social class, language, society and so on. And this is no inconsiderable achievement in the context of the almost completely bourgeois treatment of these ideas as presented to teachers. All honour to Levitas for his courage in taking a committed viewpoint in terms of politics. But what progressive teachers need – and it's only progressive teachers who are likely to read this sort of book anyway – is some alternative means of understanding the world, a more finely-ground lens through which to scrutinise the familiar. This, in essence, is what Marxism represents. It is essential therefore that an introduction to a Marxist approach to anything contains a simple exposition of Marx's more important ways of thinking and handling the data of reality *before* moving to a consideration of the conventional and approved models. On the whole Levitas does not adopt this approach. Instead – with the important exception of the chapter on social class – he proceeds from an account of the conventional model to an *assertion about* the Marxist viewpoint, often attempting an impermissible degree of assimilation en route. Which explains why the chapter on social class excels: for here we are shown *how* Marx and Engels arrive at their view of class relations – and, incidentally, why the 'accepted' view of class is not simply a little bit wrong but actually mystifying and harmful. If this is true about the class concept it is also, surely, true about notions of 'status', 'role-set' and so on. These terms are equally the means by which the reality of economic and other power relations are obscured. It is unfortunate that Levitas accepts them so uncritically.

DOUGLAS HOLLY,  
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## Philosophic obscurantism

**Educational Theory: An Introduction**  
by T W Moore, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1974), pp 102, £2.25.

Why theorise about education, or anything else? The basic purpose might be defined as 'understanding'. To aid and deepen understanding of a highly complex world, whether natural or social, many disparate pieces of knowledge must be condensed and codified – and this implies dependence on forms of generalisation, or theoretical linkage.

Much depends on the nature of these, the extent and quality of research, how far theory derives from and fructifies practice so that the way ahead is cleared and dross deposited by the wayside.

In education the position is relatively chaotic. Right up to the modern age philosophising of one kind or another has done duty for educational theory, including umbrella general 'theories' which round off corners in a specific way rather than pinpointing gaps or contradictions. Research is a relatively new development – much influenced by politics, economics, academics – which may not take up matters of most moment to those engaged in the business of education. And as yet findings are slight and patchy so that there are many interstices to be filled – or opportunities to jump in with favoured nostrums.

There are attempts to rationalise particular areas – 'learning theory' or 'curriculum studies' – but the interrelationships between these and other aspects may be far from clear. Confusion is compounded by the fact that psychology and sociology – the two disciplines mainly depended on – do not present a unified view, nor easily tally with each other, but incorporate various approaches, even contradictory ones.

Badly needed, in the circumstances, is a map of the area, sketching in the present state of knowledge, the interrelations of different aspects of experience and enquiry, where there is relatively firm ground and at what points conflicting concepts, or mere speculation, reign. The aim being to clarify how educational theory can best be developed to a higher level.

But no one is mainly concerned with the problem in this sense. Instead, teachers are invited to embark on one or another set of planks, poised above a bog of ignorance. Guides may eloquently proclaim the security or breadth of view from their chosen planks. But so inadequate are the various routes that it is necessary to slide eclectically from one to another to get along – and slips into the bog are more than probable.

This form of progress is likely to cause disillusion with theory, rather than extending understanding, and does little or nothing to consolidate a main road. There should be a better mode of advance.

If so, Mr Moore's book does nothing to map it, but merely introduces a will o' the wisp. Come *this* way, the flickering light invites, and at first it may seem to illuminate – but it proves to be no more than an emanation from the bog.

In other words a regression to philosophising is advocated, as a guide to defining objectives and relationships in educational theory and practice – on the model of the 'philosophy of education' cultivated for the past decade or so in the Institute of Education of London University. But the type of logical and linguistic analysis indulged in cannot introduce a new idea, nor clarify the process of change. It only operates to rake apart bits and pieces already around into a given pattern, prearranged by the initial assumptions on which logical argument is grounded.

Thus 'educational theory' is analysed, in terms of past and present imperfections, and emergent scientific aspects are jammed below hatches as a mere 'groundwork' – for ever and a

day. This clears room at the top for directive explanation and evaluation on the part of philosophers who aspire to define both how thought should be patterned and the kind of values which 'ought' to define operations – but can only do so in a conservative, if not backward looking, way.

The present book revives – in the service of popularising in colleges of education an approach which has run up something of a blind alley – the 'great educators' scheme. Two chapters dissect selected umbrella 'theories' of the kind now outgrown – Plato, Rousseau, James Mill, Dewey – oddly enough labelled 'historical theories' and held to 'cover the period between Greek times and the present day'.

What should go to make up a 'general theory' today? There follows an outline of the humble 'groundwork' – or selected psychological and sociological aspects – which skirts the key issues in pursuing the approved pattern of discourse. It flits through 'child study' (Piaget and Freud, 6 pp), 'learning theory' (associationism and gestalt, 3 pp), 'sociology' (Durkheim and 'recent sociology of education', 4 pp)!

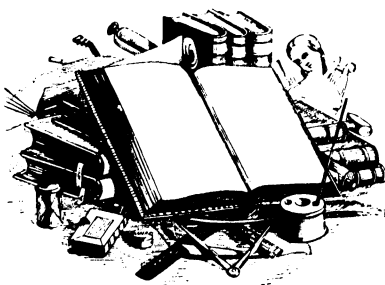
Finally a 'contemporary model' of how educational theory should be filled out merely rationalises the present position. For it indicates that teachers have to construct their own guides to practice. And that the principles to be followed are those favoured by that doyen of latterday philosophising about education, R S Peters.

Such partiality is to be expected in the philosophy section of the Students Library of Education, edited by R S Peters. What is astonishing is that this book figures in a new section of that library labelled 'indisciplinary studies' which might be expected to live up to its name – were it not that the editor of this is also R S Peters who, no doubt, is convinced that this is the only valid approach to formulating educational theory.

If to call such a study 'interdisciplinary' is derisory, at least it provides a usefully clear illustration

of what some philosophers understand by the term. And how far this rules out disinterested co-operation of the kind needed to raise educational theory to a new level.

JOAN SIMON



## Why no children?

**Inside a Curriculum Project** by M D Shipman, Methuen (1974) pp. 190 £3.25, paperback £1.75.

The Keele Integrated Studies Project is well known amongst humanities teachers since the publication of its curriculum materials and teachers' handbooks. These appear to have stimulated at least curiosity, and at most major curriculum change in many secondary schools. It is therefore surprising to read in this account of the project's life, that its impact in the trial schools around Keele seemed rather marginal.

The author was an observer of the project at every stage in its development and concentrates his account and analysis on the relationships between the project, local schools, the LEAs, the university and the Schools Council. It is a story of confused communication, half-hearted response and failure to create a lasting change in school organisation. You gain

the impression that the project's view of itself was so introverted that perhaps it missed out on the excitement and curiosity which must have been a part of many of the classrooms involved in collecting and testing materials. The book does quote the response of a few of the teachers at trial schools, but there is no mention of children at all. The published curriculum materials, *Exploration Man*, *Living with Others* and *Communicating with Others* are so lively that I cannot help feeling that the project must have missed out on the real moments of communication in the classrooms and staff rooms.

The book is an important archive because it documents a stage in curriculum development from which we are in the process of learning more successful methods of stimulating change. It is not a book to read as a guide to innovations, but rather will be a comfort to teachers attempting an evaluation of their own work, to find that their frustrations and failures are common experiences. What of course must be missing from such a book is the wider perspective of the changes that have taken place in the educational system in the same period as the project's life. It is perhaps the increased willingness of teachers to open their curriculum to the comment and criticism of students that accounts for the Keele curriculum materials' success.

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