

# FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION OF NEW TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Summer 1975  
Volume 17  
Number 3

50p

## The Question of size

**The Small Primary School: Problem or Paradigm?**  
*Eric Davies*

**The Educational Advantages of the Small  
Primary School**  
*Rachel Gregory*

**Ladders or Trees?**  
*Byron Thomas*

**Teachers and Community in a Small Primary  
School**  
*Peter Thomson*

**A Question of Size**  
*Elisabeth Halsall*

**Schools Within Schools**  
*Roger Seckington*

**Discussion**  
*Maurice Levitas*

**The Size Factor in Comprehensive Schools**  
*Mike Towers*

**Sociologists and the Politics of Comprehensive  
Education**  
*Michael F. D. Young*

**A Teacher's View**  
*Colin Yardley*

**Reviews**  
*Nanette Whitbread, Emmeline Garnett,  
Derek Roberts, Alison Atton, Joan Simon, Dorli Meek*

# CONFERENCE

*run jointly by*

## FORUM and the Campaign for COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION

### ***Non-Streamed Teaching in the Comprehensive School***

Saturday 7 June 1975

10.30 am to 4.30 pm

**FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE**

Euston Road, London NW1

The annual CCE/FORUM conference will focus this year on the key issue of unstreamed teaching in the comprehensive school.

**The morning session** will concentrate on the 11 to 14 age-range. **The afternoon session** on the 13 to 16 age range.

Problems of teaching mathematics and modern languages will be discussed by teachers with experience. The teaching of science, of the humanities, and the provision of a common course taught in unstreamed classes throughout the 11 to 16 age range will be the subjects of opening speakers (limited to 15 minutes each). There will be plenty of time for discussion.

All opening talks will be given by teachers with practical experience of non-streamed teaching.

*Full details from:*

**Conference Organiser, 52 Wood Vale,  
London N10 3DN**

***To whom conference fee of £1.20 should  
be sent immediately, as space is limited.***

# Editorial Board

**Michael Armstrong** Countesthorpe Upper School, Leicestershire.

**Clyde Chitty** Deputy Head, Roger Manwood School, London.

**Kenneth Coram** Headmaster, Bandley Hill Junior Mixed School, Stevenage.

**Annabelle Dixon** International School, Geneva, Switzerland.

**G C Freeland** Ex-Headmaster, Alderman Richard Hallam Junior School, Leicester.

**H Raymond King** Ex-Headmaster, Wandsworth School, London.

**Eric Linfield** Senior Lecturer, Newton Park College of Education, Bath.

**Roger Seckington** Principal, Heathfield High School and Community College, Earl Shilton, Leicestershire.

**Peter Thomson** Myatt Garden Primary School, London.

**Jack Walton** Senior Staff Tutor, University of Exeter Institute of Education.

**Roy Waters** District Inspector ILEA.

**Editors Brian Simon** Professor of Education, School of Education, University of Leicester.

**Nanette Whitbread** Principal Lecturer, City of Leicester College of Education.

*Editorial Communications.* MSS and contributions to discussion (800 words maximum) should be addressed to the Editor, 11 Pendene Road, Leicester, LE2 3DQ. Tel: Leicester 705176.

#### *Business information*

Correspondence relating to subscriptions etc, should be addressed to The Manager, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield. Tel. Lichfield 51159.

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

# The Question of Size

Should schools be large, or small? If small, what can be done about the many large schools already existing? This issue is devoted specifically to a discussion about size, both in primary and secondary education.

But first, a welcome to two positive steps in the long haul to comprehensive education. The direct grant list is at last to go, so bringing to an end the clear anomaly of state support for highly selective schools by a government committed to end selection. FORUM will carefully monitor this move, with the aim of ensuring that these schools are really brought fully and completely into the maintained system, as argued in our evidence to the Public Schools Commission in 1967 (see Vol 10 No 1).

Secondly the ILEA – the pioneer comprehensive authority in its earlier guise – announced early this year that selection is at last to end in London. Faced with the intractable problem of 50 or so ‘voluntary aided’ grammar schools, the London School Plan of 1944 was caught in a special difficulty. That this, at long last, seems about to be overcome marks an important stage in the move towards genuinely comprehensive education.

With just over half the students of secondary school age now in comprehensive schools there is clearly still a long way to go. It is by no means too late, therefore, to raise again the key question of size of school, drawing both on the experience of teachers, and on research; and also bringing primary education into the discussion. Indeed it is to the considered advantages of the relatively small primary school that we give pride of place, in a series of four articles which examine this question from various angles. The general conclusion emerging very clearly is that the case for the small school rests largely on educational grounds. It is worth drawing attention to this at a time when education is once again under strong economic pressure. The clear danger is that economy will override education in the short-sighted manner it so often has in the

past, and that educationally desirable steps will not be taken. This must not be permitted.

The argument that small schools are best is taken up again at the secondary stage – though this, admittedly, is a more controversial issue. It may be worth recalling that the very large comprehensive school was the product of inordinately short-sighted thinking by the Ministry of Education back in the late 1940s. Circular 144 (June 1947), which announced that comprehensive schools must have a *minimum* entry of 300 to 330 children (and so a total *minimum* size of between 1,600 and 1,700) was based entirely on intelligence test theory. 70 per cent of children, it was then held, were incapable of significant intellectual development and would never reach the sixth form. A viable sixth, therefore, required a massive entry.

These ideas have since been blown sky-high; nevertheless the Ministry insisted on very large schools (except in rural areas); even, in the 1950s, raising the figure to 2,000! Even so, the case for small schools was being put even then, some 20 years ago, based on the highly successful experience of schools like Castle Rushen (470) in the Isle of Man, and even of Windermere (220) – though now enlarged as The Lakes Comprehensive. Such schools were simply not permitted in urban areas, as Middlesex discovered when their whole scheme was rejected (by a Labour Minister) in 1949, on the grounds that the schools planned were ‘too small’.

Now London is planning 3 form entry schools (90 pupils); other authorities are reconsidering the matter. Nor is it too late to adopt the policy recommended by our contributors, and develop ‘Schools within Schools’, so fusing the academic with the pastoral organisation. This, at least, is what is recommended here—as a means of preserving the advantages of the large school and combining these with the evident rewards gained from close pupil-teacher relationships only possible where units are small. This solution clearly deserves serious consideration.

# The Small Primary School: Problem or Paradigm

**Eric Davies**

Eric Davies, who introduces the discussion on school size, was himself head of Ipplepen primary school, a three teacher school in Devon, and later of a larger Bristol junior school before joining the University of Leicester School of Education in 1966.

It may seem at first glance inappropriate to consider the small primary school in a journal devoted to new trends in education. One could easily object that the small primary school is virtually synonymous with the small rural school which has been a chronic educational problem since local education authorities were set up in 1902, and even before that. All this is in some measure true, but there are vital factors in the continuing development of small primary schools which set them firmly in the forefront of educational endeavour. There is a strong element of paradox in the characteristics of very small schools. For instance the importance of these small institutions is here being argued but their numbers are steadily declining. Yet small schools figure more significantly in our total complement of schools than many people realise. However, before we can look at the current position in some detail it is necessary to define 'the small primary school' more precisely.

Most primary schools are organised round a number of classes each under the supervision of a class teacher who provides most of the teaching. The head-teacher has over-all responsibility for this work but does not usually have full-time charge of a specific group of children as have the rest of the staff. With smaller schools, however, the separate supervisory role of the head is more difficult to justify, and in schools of less than 200 pupils the head-teacher is most usually a class teacher with a part-time administrative role. It is suggested that the small primary school may be defined as 'a primary school in which the head-teacher in addition to his over-all responsibilities as head is in full-time charge of a class'. This is the case in most primary schools of up to about 200 pupils.

The number of maintained primary schools in England and Wales in January 1972 was 23,136; the number of primary schools of all types with less than 200 pupils on roll was 10,761, approaching half of the total (see table below).

Number of schools or departments with the following numbers of full-time pupils on the registers.

England and Wales	Up to 25	26 to 50	51 to 100	101 to 200
Maintained primary schools				
Infants	39	98	449	1,919
First	4	16	47	128
Junior with infants	516	1,763	2,413	2,593
First and middle	—	1	4	13
Junior without infants	4	14	89	627
Middle deemed primary	—	1	1	22
All age	—	—	—	—
Total	563	1,893	3,003	5,302

If the single largest sub-category 'junior with infants' (which is the usual form taken by small rural schools) is taken alone then the number of 'small' schools is still 7,285, almost a third of all primary schools. It is recognised that this represents numbers of schools rather than numbers of pupils, but this is still a sizeable sector of the total provision for primary education.

## Embarrassment or asset?

Small primary schools often present considerable problems to l.e.a.s.: they usually occupy 19th century buildings which are in many ways ill-suited to modern education methods and are expensive to maintain; in remote and unattractive areas these schools are difficult to staff. Add to this the relative cost of providing adequate staff for small numbers of children and it is easy to see why the Plowden Report recommended that one- and two-teacher schools should be closed wherever possible. It must be admitted that all this does little to recommend the small primary school to educationists except as a problem. L.e.a.s for counties like Norfolk or Devon with very large numbers of small schools might be forgiven for regarding these minor institutions as more of an embarrass-

ment than an asset. This is to overlook the possibilities of the small school. Many affectionate accounts have been written of village schools but it is no part of the writer's task to be sentimental. Many very small schools ought to be closed for educational as well as economic reasons. The Plowden recommendation that primary schools should usually have at least three classes is very reasonable. Yet it is to be hoped that the drive for economy and supposed efficiency will not lead to even more closures, of three- and then of four-class schools, for the small school has important qualities worthy of preservation and close study. These small schools have impinged on modern educational practice in a variety of ways.

Schools with fewer than six teachers cannot have classes organised into age groups spanning a single year as in the conventional primary school. Children of different ages must be taught together and the smaller the school the wider the age range. With a poor teacher the added challenge of having to cope with such a wide range of ability can produce very mediocre results, but with teachers of greater proficiency the opportunity of teaching in this setting has produced work of unusual sensitivity and in some small schools there has been outstanding achievement. Teachers such as Sybil Marshall in Cambridgeshire, and Margaret Langdon in Wiltshire inspired others to follow their example.

## Special quality

In his introduction to *Family Grouping in the Primary School* Christian Schiller, former HMI, writes of the special quality he noticed when visiting some small rural schools early in his career.:

'In the village school . . . when it was good there was a quality I had never found before; in their resourcefulness, in their mutual understanding, in their whole bearing, the children showed a maturity of growth that even the best town schools lacked'.

The form of the small 19th century buildings suggested to some teachers a method very different from that intended by the Victorian founders. The large single school-room prescribed so strictly by the Committee of Council for Education in 1851 presented a problem where two classes had to be taught formally side by side, but common sense in such a situation suggested co-operative teaching and the development of small group work with teachers talking quietly to small numbers of children. Where 'schoolroom' and 'class-room' were divided by the familiar wooden glazed partition, this was often moved back

permanently creating more space. Here then was the germ of the idea of an open-plan school, with co-operative teaching of small groups over a wide age-range.

Large modern schools have now been built to accommodate this style of teaching. One of the earliest purpose-built open-plan schools of this type was a small village school at Fimmere in Oxfordshire. Two old village schools needed to be replaced and the Development Group of the Architects Branch of the Department of Education and Science designed Fimmere School in co-operation with the architects of the I.e.a. The school has a central hall which opens on to two class-rooms each with bays, quiet areas and practical areas. The hall, which can be screened off, acts variously as teaching space, hall, dining room and community centre. Elements of this design can be seen in hundreds of schools built subsequently in England and Wales.

The rural child has often been stereotyped as dull and biddable, and in the early fifties group attainment tests seemed to show that achievement levels of children in small rural schools were lower than those of urban children. Yet further examination in 1959 suggested that when socio/economic class is taken into account these differences disappear.

More recently the enquiry by the National Foundation for Educational Research into the teaching of French in primary schools found evidence of unusually high achievement in small schools. The results were striking and have subsequently been confirmed in more recent work. Although N.F.E.R. staff felt that some further investigation of the general functioning of small primary schools would be a very worthwhile research project, no progress has been made for want of financial support. It is to be hoped that despite the current economic difficulties some money will be found for this enquiry, which may well have important outcomes for the future of primary schools in general.

## The head-teacher

The role of the head-teacher in the small school is of vital importance, for he is not only administratively responsible but also the principal teacher, with often half or a third of the children of the school directly dependent on his teaching skills. This combination of experience is unique to the small school and its significance often underestimated. Few have pointed to the great value of such experience for future heads of large schools, lecturers, inspectors, advisors or administrators. It is not paralleled

by the experience of the deputy head in a large school, for the ultimate responsibility for decisions and policy making lies with the head. A headship in a small school enables a teacher to be at the same time and in the fullest sense, teacher and administrator.

This type of experience could well be more highly prized by I.e.a.s, especially since the pattern of primary education seems to be moving in the direction of co-operative teaching of classes with wider ranges of age and ability in buildings with open-plan facilities.

It has often been assumed, especially by teachers and administrators in urban areas, that experience of a small rural school is almost irrelevant to the tasks involved in a large urban primary headship. It is one of the purposes of this article to suggest that this is by no means the case and that I.e.a.s could well encourage their young capable and ambitious teachers to seek headships in small schools. Furthermore, the relevance of such experience to future heads of year groups in middle and high school should not be overlooked.

## Remoteness

Finally, there is the problem of small schools distant from urban centres, and the way in which this disadvantage is being met. In remote areas the teacher in the village school can sometimes feel cut off from the broader aspects of society. This very fact, however, has precipitated interesting developments amongst small schools and between secondary schools and their contributory primary schools. Sometimes informally, sometimes with I.e.a. encouragement and backing, teachers from groups of small primary schools have met for consultation and co-operation. In the case of one I.e.a. contacts of this sort have been formalised so that neighbouring schools are grouped for various administrative procedures, like the appointment of staff with more or less complementary abilities and enthusiasms, or the provision of expensive equipment which may be shared, e.g. use of a mini-bus. Inter-school contacts of this sort in rural areas may suggest a pattern to be followed by larger urban schools in which the immediate need for such co-operation is not so sharply felt but may produce similar dividends.

The primary-secondary links have various forms and now go far beyond the mere visiting of the secondary school by the prospective pupils from outlying village schools. Staff from both types of schools co-operate in various ways. The large secondary school can offer specialist facilities and large halls for combined activities, e.g. in sports, music and drama. Moreover, secondary school staff representing a wide range of school subjects can act as specialist advisers to the local primary schools, and themselves gain by visiting the schools, becoming familiar with their methods and getting to know and be known by the children. Again, here is an enterprise engendered by the needs of small rural schools which could well be emulated in urban areas.

For all the problems which are associated with the small primary school, it has also many important characteristics and potentialities which merit the close attention of all who are concerned with education.

### References:

1. Department of Education & Science, **Statistics of Education 1972 Schools**, Vol. 1. HMSO, 1973.
2. Central Advisory Council for Education (England) **Children and their Primary Schools** (Plowden Report), Vol. 1 HMSO, 1967.
3. Ridgeway, L. and Lawton, I., **Family Grouping in the Primary School**. Ward Lock, 1965.
4. Clare Burstall, **French in the Primary School**, NFER. 1970.
5. Clare Burstall *et al.*, **Primary French in the Balance**, NFER. 1974.
6. Barr, F. 'Urban and Rural Differences: Ability and Attainment'. **Educational Research**, Vol. 1, 1959.
7. Ministry of Education 'Building Bulletin' No. 3. **Village Schools**, HMSO, 1961.
8. Manning, P. (ed), **The Primary School: an environment for education**, Pilkington Research Unit 1965 (Includes short appraisal of Finnere School by J. D. Roberts).

# The Educational Advantages of the Small Primary School

**Rachel Gregory**

Rachel Gregory has considerable experience of teaching in small primary schools—in Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, and now at East Hyde, Bedfordshire. Earlier she spent two years in scientific research in Australia.

**Forum** is for the discussion of new trends in education. There is nothing new about most of our small primary schools, and there is no recognisable trend towards the establishment of deliberately small schools. Most of our small schools are in existence as a result of geographical or historical accident rather than educational design, and the present trend is to close the smaller village schools and replace them with larger educational establishments. However, small schools have a vital part to play in connection with present trends in educational thinking. In many ways they provide the optimum environment in which the new ideas and ideals of educational philosophy can be put into practice. Our role as teachers in the contemporary educational scene is to encourage children to develop as individuals. We must help them to recognise and develop their talents, introduce them to their rich heritage, and give them the basic skills and knowledge which will enable them to live their lives to the full. I do not wish to suggest that teachers in larger schools cannot, and do not, create effective learning situations, but I do believe that the smaller schools have major educational advantages stemming from the smaller numbers involved and the resulting emphasis on the individual. Those of us who are fortunate enough to teach in small schools recognise that our environment is, by its very nature, well-suited to present learning methods.

My experience as a primary headteacher has been in one- and two-teacher schools. In schools of this size the small numbers of staff and children involved make it possible for very close relationships to develop between all the members of the group—particularly between the teacher and each individual child. The teacher's knowledge of the children can be built up over several years close contact. In larger schools such close relationships are the exception rather than the rule because the children

are more likely to be associated with a greater number of teachers during their primary school years. More teachers have some knowledge of each child but few have the intimate knowledge commonly found in the very small primary schools. In the family atmosphere which inevitably prevails in a small closely-knit school community, a balance can be achieved between individual freedom and respect for what others have to contribute. In a secure and relaxed atmosphere each is conscious of having an important place in the group, and the children are noticeably less concerned with self-preservation and secure enough to be interested in others. Such an atmosphere provides a firm and secure foundation for learning.

## The village school

One of the greatest educational advantages of the small village school is for the child starting school for the first time at the age of 4 plus. While the urban or suburban school is frequently outside the experience of the majority of pre-school children, the village school forms part of the community in which the child has been growing up. In all probability the building will be familiar to the child, the teachers will be familiar and may well have known the child since birth, the other children will be brothers, sisters, cousins, neighbours, and the day by day companions of the child. Starting school is not a traumatic experience necessitating a sharply defined break between life at home and life at school, but merely a gradual extension of already familiar experiences. Usually, in a small school, new entrants will have spent several days or half-days in the school before starting full-time.

Another advantage in a small community is that only two or three new children will be starting school at any one time and the teacher has plenty of time to help them

settle down and overcome any initial difficulties. The other children, who have been at school longer, will be eager to display their greater experience and help the newcomers to fit into the pattern of school life. This easy introduction to school helps to give the children confidence and makes learning easier. In contrast, many children are faced at 4 plus with a bus journey, which takes them out of their own environment to another village, an unfamiliar building, and vast numbers of strange faces. They may even be in a reception class where all the other children are as bewildered as themselves. Children are resilient and most will survive this upheaval but it may take longer to achieve the sense of stability and security which is an essential condition for learning to take place.

## Vertical grouping

Vertical grouping is in its natural setting in the small village school and it has many other advantages besides helping new entrants to fit into the pattern of school life. Whether it is a one-teacher school with an age-range of 4 plus to 11, or a two- or three-teacher school with a narrower range in each class, both younger and older children benefit from learning side by side. The younger children learn a great deal from watching the older children do things. They try out the ideas for themselves and they also aim higher in their activities. They subconsciously absorb the vocabulary which the teacher uses with the older group and this proves useful later on when new terms are found to be already familiar as sound-patterns. Their increased vocabulary also helps with communication generally. The younger children are also familiar with the apparatus and equipment that the older children use. They explore many of the possibilities and discover some of the limitations during play.

The older children also benefit in many ways. They watch the younger children reaching stages that they remember going through themselves, and they see educational development as progressive. Children love an appreciative audience, and a mixed age-group provides a ready-made audience to listen to stories, admire works of art, watch plays, and enjoy many other activities. The, largely uncritical, younger children help particularly to increase the confidence of the rather shy older children and give them a sense of successful achievement.

One of the criticisms which is often levelled at small schools is the lack of competition, but as the emphasis nowadays is on each child learning at his own individual

rate, this criticism is irrelevant. More important is the fact that in a small school no-one fails to achieve. The slower-learning children are not lost in a crowd but are a vital part of the group. When, for example, children are sharing their own creative writing with each other, there is time for everyone—not just 'the best'. Knowing that both teacher and other children are looking forward to their contribution stimulates each child to produce his best work.

Children learning in a small school will normally spend several years with one teacher and there is consequently a continuity of teaching methods. In many larger schools skills, such as learning to read, are impeded by annual changes of teacher. Each teacher must re-assess the child's level of attainment, and take him a few stages further before losing him to another colleague. Even if teaching methods and reading schemes are standard throughout the school, there will inevitably be some variation between classes, and the knowledge each teacher builds up about each child's ability, and the exact foundations that have been laid, will be partially wasted as much of this kind of knowledge is intuitive and personal and cannot be passed on from one teacher to another.

Reading is one area of the curriculum where few will dispute the advantages of smaller schools. With small numbers of children in a class, and few at any one age or stage, it is comparatively easy for the teacher to help each child with reading, individually, every day: to listen to him read, to go over specific difficulties, to revise yesterday's problems and make sure they have been overcome. Word-building and other aspects of reading groundwork can be discussed and explained individually as the need arises. Other reading activities, in groups or individually, supplement the individual attention that each child receives. Teaching small classes in village schools, I have found that the average or just below average children usually have a reading-age that matches their chronological age, but I feel that in larger classes, where daily un-hurried help may not be so readily available, some of these children might well be classed as backward readers.

## Project work

School topic or project work is most rewarding in a small school with children of a wide age range in one group. Contributions from all levels help to build up a composite picture. For example, a project on Ice and Snow might include work varying from a scientific treatise on crystal structure to a four-year-old's painting of a



snowman. The feeling that all can contribute helps to give the small school a sense of unity in its diversity.

Perhaps in some aspects of Music and Games the small school is at a disadvantage. The chance to play instruments in an orchestra, or sing in a choir, is not always available in a small rural school—although this depends more on the interests and talents of the teachers than on the size of the school. However it is certainly true that there are more opportunities in a larger school. In games too, the older children may lack the opportunity to play organised games, such as football, with proper teams, recognised rules, and matches against other schools. In my present school there are only ten Junior boys, and five-a-side football is played, with local rules. However, I feel that the advantages of this type of game far outweigh the disadvantages. Boys, who would never be good enough for the fourth team in a larger school, are captaining sides, scoring goals, and making decisions for themselves and their teams. Most important of all, they enjoy the game and know that they are vitally important to their team. In my previous, even smaller, school, the family atmosphere resulted in a sensitive concern for others which at times became of more importance than individual performance or winning. In a game of cricket, the older children were most concerned to see that the younger children were not out too soon. Infants are usually considered too young for organised games of this kind, but in a very small school total participation is accepted and the game enjoyed by both Infants and Juniors.

## Leadership

Qualities of responsibility and leadership emerge from almost all the children in a small group. The older children play an increasingly important part, both in relation to the teacher and to the younger children. In a small community all members contribute in their own characteristic way—even if it is by their shyness and quietness. Interest in other people is usually characteristic of life in a small village. This interest is also found in the classroom of a small school in contrast to the instinct for self-preservation which is commoner in towns and cities and is noticeable in many larger schools. The children in a small school also have every opportunity to become self-reliant and resourceful. They learn to help themselves and each other and realise that the school is only a thriving community if each member plays his part.

It is impossible to talk about the small village school

without mentioning its place in the village. The school is a very important part of any village and the inhabitants have a special interest in and concern for their school. Many of them have been to the school themselves or have had children there and the school is part of their lives. They are interested in all its activities and the changes that take place. This interest is a vital link between the generations and gives a sense of continuity to life. The teachers usually know the children's parents well and may meet many of them outside school at various village activities. Friendly relations between home and school are of great value to the children. Frequently the school is the only meeting-place for village activities and samples of the children's work are commented on and appreciated by a much wider audience than just the school community. The fact that most of the children are known personally to the adults in the village heightens the interest. All this helps to widen the horizons of the school and gives added purpose to the school activities.

## The community

The small rural school often becomes a place where people in the community come for help and advice. Teachers can express their concern by helping and caring for the community as a whole. Such an example also shows the children how to play a useful part in the community themselves.

Working in a small school also has many advantages for the teacher. It is a rewarding experience to know a few children intimately; to teach individually, matching method to child; to follow the progress of each child over a period of years; and to work in a relaxed family atmosphere. It stretches the teacher's initiative since it is essential to achieve a balance between the security of tradition and the stimulus of new ideas. The children may be with the same teacher for several years and enthusiasm must be maintained.

The small primary schools, with less than a hundred children, are excellent training grounds for head-teachers. There is no chance of these heads becoming full-time administrators, remote from the classroom, because in schools of this size the head usually copes with full-time teaching in addition to the administration. The administrative problems of running a small school are very similar to those of a larger school, but on a more manageable and personal scale. When filling in forms in a small school, each number becomes an individual child with a

# Ladders or Trees?

**Byron Thomas**

Byron Thomas, head of a small primary school in Leicestershire, discusses here his changing approach to primary education, and finds the small school well adapted to realising his objectives.

Professor David Hawkins 'On Living in Trees', discusses paths through and into learning. One such path he suggests is symbolised by the roots, trunk, branches and leaves of a tree. Another by a ladder or tree with all but one branch lopped off. It was this analogy, and the thoughts stimulated by the article that made me look carefully and with excitement at my own teaching of young children. It is, on reflection, the practical application of some of these thoughts that has presented the most difficult problems of my teaching experience.

After many years teaching in which the central priority has been self directed learning, I believe that some very important factors influencing the education of children are the expectations of parents and their assessment of the school and staff. In relation to this I suggest that of the two networks suggested by David Hawkins, the 'ladder' is decidedly preferred by most parents. Furthermore it is

the very properties of the 'ladder' that parents feel are advantageous. I also suggest that another attribute of education treasured by parents is rigour. At the root of many complaints are unvoiced feelings of the lack of rigour in school work. When a course of study cannot be easily assessed and placed on a scale of measurement by parents it will nevertheless be countenanced if it appears exhaustive and continuous. The implication and expression of these preferences and the resulting pressure placed on children and teachers create the sort of problems with which I have always been faced.

Professor Hawkins also talks of good classrooms which occupy the third points of an imaginary triangle, with the stereotype authoritarian and permissive classrooms at the other corners. I find this a useful way of breaking away from the contrasts of permissive or authoritarian and find it a fair description of the position of my own

---

*Continued from previous page*

name and a personality. In larger schools the danger is that each personality may become a number.

It is a tragedy that many of our smaller schools are being closed and replaced by larger schools which, by their very size, are often less suitable environments for the education of younger children. I would like to see a new trend towards the re-opening of primary, or First Schools in villages, and the planning of smaller schools in towns and cities. The educational advantages for the children far outweigh the disadvantages.

However, as such a trend seems unlikely at present, perhaps we should be thinking in terms of incorporating some of the desirable features of small schools into more of our larger schools. Many large schools are already using ideas that have their origins in the village schools. For example, the advantages of vertical grouping have been realised by schools throughout the country and many urban as well as rural schools are now organised on this pattern. Vertical grouping helps new children to

settle, enables children of different ages to learn from each other, and provides teacher-continuity at an age when security of relationships and teaching methods is at a premium. Appreciating the advantages of the country schools' interest and involvement in the community, many urban schools have made an effort to play more part in their community. With greater knowledge of the environment and its people closer relationships are being formed between home and school. The school also has more opportunity to know the pre-school children and these children are less likely to be unfamiliar with the school if it is an important centre in the community.

Our schools should provide an environment where the emphasis is on the individual. Each child must feel himself to be part of a group where other people care about him, and where the learning situation is relevant to his particular strengths and weaknesses. In our small schools this situation often arises naturally but in larger schools we may have to strive to create it.

school. However, I am aware that the position of my school in this triangulation is not only affected by the choices and disposition of children and teacher, but is much more a compromise position forced on it by the expectations and wishes of parents.

During the last four years I have been teaching in a very small primary school. In my first year at the school the child's day was mainly taken up by activities of the recognisably authoritarian stereotype. All children were involved in a number and language programme and general basic skill work for most of the time. The successful children in this system seemed happy and alert. The unsuccessful children were clearly marked by the various manifestations of boredom. The educational ladder was clearly defined and parents were generally satisfied by the achievements of the school. The only evidence of dissatisfaction was found among a minority of parents who complained of their children's academic failure. Some parents also complained that their children were hindered by the disruptive behaviour of other children (usually the ones who consistently failed in academic subject areas). The children knew what was expected of them and the majority began the 'climb' with enthusiasm. When their enthusiasm waned it was a simple matter to refire it by clearly explaining the 'ladder'.

The central priority changed and more slowly the paths into education diversified. A typical day now begins before the 'school time' with children entering classrooms to begin work (normally activities they have initiated) before the school is assembled. There has been a considerable diversification of classroom activities and the children respond well to this. Work done by the children in self directed activities is of a very high standard. Other areas of work show the deliberate hand of teacher intervention, and all children are sometimes told what to do. The atmosphere and work of the school reflect a successful partial transition from the 'ladders' to the 'trees' of educational pathways. The stumbling block to this development is presented by the attitude of children to

what they clearly regard as 'work' and 'play' activities. Although it is obvious that more time and involvement is directed towards the activities they like and are interested in (usually activities they choose) and that the evidence suggests that they learn best those things they choose to learn, these activities are not as valid to them as the ones directed by the teacher. The favoured activities are those chosen, organised and administered by the teacher, and in which results can easily be placed on a scale of performance—one child in competition with others. I believe that this dichotomy far from implying some basic need of the children is more a reflection of the attitudes of parents and their goals in education.

The school in which I teach is a small one. The classes are small and the community it serves is a small and identifiable one and all these conditions are, in my opinion, advantageous in dealing with the above problem. Because of its size it is easier for the school to have expectations and traditions of its own. The smallness of the unit enables children to place themselves easily among these expectations and traditions and gives them a background, purpose and identity to their choices. Teachers of small classes are more able to watch what the children do, diagnose their state, their level, their special problems and so make provision for them. Small schools are easily able to provide a context to these choices. I believe the solution to the problem of developing education along more diverse networks is not only one of allowing children to make choices, but in validating those choices in their eyes and in the eyes of their parents.

If the aim of our schools is to help children acquire the capacity for significant choice and that learning becomes a process of choice, then as a method it has to find currency with parents. A failure to identify it as a valuable way of learning to the children and their parents will result at best in a decline of those practices in our schools which Professor Hawkins finds so exciting, and at worst will lead to the increasing irrelevance of our schools.

# Teachers and community in a small primary school

**Peter Thomson**

Peter Thomson has been teaching in North Lewisham since 1969. He worked in one of the Deptford E.P.A. project schools and then moved to a nearby school as it opened. Both were junior and infant schools under one head teacher with two classes in each year. He is currently on secondment to a course in community work.

There are two particular problems in the modern urban primary school. The first is the fragmentation of the teaching staff and the second is the difficulty in responding as a unit to community demands.

Neither problem is insuperable in the larger school but the small school does seem to have some advantages. In an infant and junior school of four or five classes the unit is small enough for everyone at the school to know and be known to everyone else (except possibly for reception children). Moreover the numbers are small enough to enable each member of staff, alone, to organise a weekly session with all the children in the school. One advantage is that the rest of the staff are then available as a group, for consultation with groups and individuals normally dealt with by the head or home school liaison teacher in the larger primary school.

## Teacher participation

In the inner city the trend is towards a participative relationship between head and staff. This can lead to an anarchic system and fragmentation ('Relatively participative control systems; relatively low degree of commitment to overall objectives'). However a more appropriate model for a number of important school functions is the integrated organic system ('Relatively participative control systems; relatively high degree of commitment to overall objectives').

In the teaching of reading, for example, it seems that an even wider variety of schemes will continue to be used in any one school. The schemes and the ways in which they are used will reflect the predilections of the teacher as much as the agreed needs of any particular child. The head and senior member of staff have traditionally had the task of integrating the reading schemes. At times this has been difficult particularly at the infant/junior transition. The determined teacher has always been able to make his own work relatively invisible unless there are

problems. In a participative situation integration becomes more difficult because control of the purse strings is no longer possible. Records now reflect the progress of each child rather than the programme of the teacher, so in this instance control is less direct. In the inner city, where most staff can turn over in one year, accommodation becomes more important than control. Pressures may be so great that even consultation becomes difficult and with some successful union activity the individual teacher feels better able to resist pressure from above.

A picture emerges of a skilled professional who is relatively uncommitted to the organisation but who is interested in using his energy and his techniques to solve problems in his own way by working with a variety of groups and school equipment.

Team teaching can lead to further fragmentation. Each team accommodates the goals of different individuals who recognise that they can only obtain their objectives by participation in the goals of others. But each team generates its own solidarity. Control of the teams and compromise by the teams become more difficult.

Strong teams and isolated class teachers lead to fragmentation. One way, and certainly not the only way, that teachers can function as an organic unit is in the small school. With only four or five teachers the school is less likely to break into competing groups or to have a core of committed teachers and a periphery of teachers uncommitted to the organisation. In any case this group would have to remain small because there would be regular and face to face consultation with a large number of others.

## Community participation

In the small school the specialist is not prominent and the staff as a group are obliged to replace him. Contacts will not be filtered through the home school liaison teacher (s/he won't exist) or through the head (s/he will

be teaching). Once it is agreed that all staff will take decisions together there is the possibility of taking some of these decisions more openly.

The maximum imaginable parent participation would be power of hire and involuntary transfer plus mandatory teacher assignments ('A neighbourhood corporation with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds is the model most frequently advocated'). In contrast to this in the inner London school it would only be feasible for parents to meet candidates before appointment by the managers. But even then parents have no power to mandate their representative, neither has s/he power to report back in full. The powers of the managers and the parent teacher association are so limited that it is doubtful if they can be an effective vehicle for fuller participation in their present form.

It seems inconceivable that the neighbourhood will remain stuck on the bottom rungs of the ladder of participation. However those who are pressing for more local participation should be aware of the limitations. Budgets remain limited whoever controls them. Moreover the work situation (the most significant determinant of life chances) is usually left out of the formula of local control.

Now assuming that through a combination of necessity and opportunity the teachers in a small school agree to take decisions together and that this does open up another possibility for local intervention, where can a start be made?

In the larger school the allied worker and the para-professional has traditionally had only a filtered contact with the class teacher. The head relays points raised by the school secretary and the ancillary staff to the staff meeting. Further integration can only be accomplished by face to face representation within the decision making group of teachers. (Justice as well as integration demand that all workers within the school qualify for social priority money—unfortunately named 'dirt money' in Liverpool or 'combat money' in New York.)

The social worker, the Community Relations Officer, the home help, the welfare rights worker, the child minder, the school crossing man, the educational welfare officer, the playcentre staff, the playgroup staff, the health visitor, the policeman, the dinner supervisor, the school cleaner, the schoolkeeper, the student, the school nurse and doctor all work and in some cases live in the catchment area.

In the small school, while still respecting the family's right to privacy, some important decisions can be made in a more public manner. Here the whole staff can meet

fairly formally with the allied worker at the working lunch or at the staff meeting. Here too it should be possible to alter the casual and personal arrangements that each teacher makes with the cleaner and to alter the more formal contact through team-leader, head and school-keeper. A termly meeting between teachers and cleaners would be an important element in the ongoing discussions about display, storage and use of the building during the third and fourth session (i.e. after 4 p.m.).

## Parent participation

This has largely been seen as a public relations exercise by the teacher. The message of new maths was more important than the debate. The teacher was more interested in arranging the context of the debate (the demonstration lesson) than in the dialogue.

In large schools that I know, every week teachers meet, talk and work with parents in the classroom, the pub and the staffroom. The head teacher and the home-school liaison teacher are accessible and parental views do filter through to the staff meeting. But at the staff meeting each teacher has his own particular priority of ideas to trade. In the larger school only rarely do parents impinge directly upon decisions made by the decision makers.

Here too the general meeting of parents and teachers tends to be heavily structured by the teaching staff. Not only can the teacher feel more threatened than the parent but in any case this type of meeting is not called upon to make decisions. Information about the strike or the Child Guidance Clinic tends to flow one way.

I have worked in decision-making groups where parents outnumber teachers. These were concerned with the extended school day (community use of the school as an evening base.) But in the general atmosphere of deference to the teachers' wishes it is hardly surprising that parents don't outvote teachers (and in this case adolescents) even on a subject about which they feel strongly—adolescents smoking in school buildings.

Over the years parents and others from a number of local voluntary groups have suggested to me that tables should be taught, the alphabet should be taught at an early stage in the teaching of reading; there was too much movement in and around the school; painting was a low teacher priority, a high child priority and (for this particular parent) a high parent priority; more attention should be paid to black studies; further improvements should be made to the playground—a child and parent tended garden, a kiln and a parent erected play structure.

As far as the outsider was concerned the final decisions were made behind closed doors. Some parents are willing and able to present this kind of case to the whole staff. If they were present while a decision was being made they would be in a position to monitor the speed and quality of application of an agreed change in practice.

A small group from a local church concerned about school assembly might well be overawed in the larger school by more than twenty staff some of whom don't even attend assembly. In the smaller school they would be in a position to seek certain assurances from each member of staff all of whom would presumably be taking their turn at organising the assembly.

It is true that this does not take us very far up the ladder of citizen participation. For a long time to come teachers are going to be in a position to safeguard the interests of the minority who for example are passionately against the introduction of school uniform.

## Teacher and community participation

In a study of school parent programmes in the U.S.A. Joe Rempson concludes that 'trying to change the behaviour of a population without altering significantly the basic contributing circumstances—holds more hope than promise'. And certainly teachers on an area basis in North Lewisham have been working—together with parents—on neighbourhood problems. They have been taking action on pre-school provision, opening the school as a centre for community activities, organising weekend and evening trips, improving local amenities and discrediting means tested support schemes.

In the anarchic system, teachers who see this type of action as irrelevant are not in a position to prevent it from taking place. But neither are the teachers who are engaged in such action in a position to focus staff attention on neighbourhood problems unless the decision making group (that has hopefully emerged in the small school) has a wider reference than either academic or behavioural problems.

The model of the small rural school may have some relevance to the urban setting. It should not be necessary to lop off the head but the structure should flatten itself out considerably. Then parent, community worker and teacher will deal directly with those who have power (and not those who seem to).

The advantages of the small school are not clear enough to warrant widespread application. The strain on staff—already great—would be increased. This kind of self integrating organic structure will entail intensified personal strain and increased personal anxiety. Fewer staff will be available to work longer hours—if the extended school day was not to be run entirely by an outside agency. To prevent the larger educational unit developing as a community resource at the expense of the educational corner shop the small unit will have to work hard in negotiations with those agencies who control this type of community provision.

### References

1. P. Sadler and B. Barry, *Organisational development*, Longmans, 1970.
2. Sherry R. Arnstein 'A ladder of citizen participation', *Journal of American Institute of Planners*, July 1969.
3. Joe L. Rempson 'School parent programs in depressed urban neighbourhoods', in Dentler Mackler and Warshauer (eds), *The Urban R's*, Praeger 1967.

### A SUBSCRIPTION TO FORUM

To: FORUM,

11 Beacon Street, Lichfield.

\* Please send three issues of **Forum**, starting with Vol. .... No. .... to the address below.

I enclose cheque/P.O. for £1.50.

\* Please send a Banker's Order Form to the address below.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....  
.....

\* delete as appropriate

# A Question of Size

## Elisabeth Halsall

Elisabeth Halsall, well known for her studies on the question of size of comprehensive schools, takes the discussion here to the secondary stage. Now at the University of Hull, she taught for many years in grammar schools before moving to comprehensive schools, first as an assistant teacher, and later as deputy head.

One of the most disturbing aspects of recent reorganisation plans is that, in spite of much evidence of the shortcomings of large schools, particularly on the social side—and especially therefore of those schools situated in inner parts of cities where social problems are endemic—some LEAs still seem to be planning rather large schools or, worse, split-site large schools or are extending medium-sized schools. An issue of *Forum* on the small school is therefore timely.

In large schools management problems such as that of communication, and to a less extent that of movement can be solved, though only with the expenditure of considerable effort; the problem of disciplinary control is, however, more intractable. Pupils do not know teachers, teachers do not know pupils, there is too much space and too many corners round which to 'get lost'.

Contrast the situation of the small school, where these problems do not occur to any extent. Research has shown that in small institutions<sup>1</sup> in general people are absent and resign positions less often, are more punctual and more productive, are more important to the groups in which they find themselves, function in positions of responsibility more often and in a wider range of activities, are more frequently involved in roles directly relevant to the tasks of the group, have broader conceptions of their role, demonstrate more leadership, participate more frequently when participation is voluntary and are more interested in the affairs of the group or organisation. They also find their work more meaningful, are more familiar with the organisational arrangements and are in general more satisfied with their work. Small institutions are also shown to give rise to better communication and social interaction.

Less research has been done on the effects of size of schools than of other institutions, but in general the results are similar.<sup>2</sup>

As far as teachers are concerned, those in large schools see the head as remote, whether he is so by personality or not (and what they feel him to be has been shown to be

more important for their reactions than what he really is), and the organisational climate as 'closed' rather than 'open'. Teachers in open climate schools experience greater satisfaction and also greater confidence in the head's effectiveness and in that of the school. Teachers in large schools experience more communication problems and more misunderstandings, know their pupils less well, take less part in decision-making and have to work harder. The adverse effects of large size on teacher morale are greater in poor socio-economic areas.

Research has also shown that pupils in small schools know each other better, participate more and in a more lively and versatile way in school activities, and more of them hold important positions. There is less risk of becoming isolated because there are greater forces tending to participation. Pupils in small schools report greater satisfaction with their schools and their activities, and their satisfactions are of a more worth-while type. These findings would help to explain another reported finding from one study, namely that larger schools tend to have higher drop-out rates.

## Movement problems

The problems of movement on a large school campus, where buildings may be up to a quarter of a mile apart, hardly need stressing. They are, however, exacerbated by the traditional system of subject options in the fourth and fifth years. At change of lessons some of the pupils in these years may be coming from distant parts of the campus. All the pupils are affected, however, since the lesson cannot begin until all, or nearly all, are present. This is one of the reasons why timetables are so frequently worked on double-period systems, as a way of confining wasted time to break periods. In other words, a curricular decision has been taken not for an educational reason but for an organisational one. It may not fit the teaching needs of some subjects (for example, modern languages).

The discipline problems that result from large size are less easily solved than the movement problems. Not only do they exist; it can be shown mathematically that they *must* exist, in relation to a smaller school operating in exactly the same conditions. A mathematical analysis by the writer showed that close knowledge of children outside the classroom is twice as difficult in a 14 FE school as it is in a 3 FE school. When this index was combined with an index related to size of building to produce an overall index of difficulty of supervision and control it was found that, according to the weightings used, outside the classroom control is from 3 to 9 times as difficult to exercise in a 14 FE school as in a 3 FE school. Good discipline in a large school is therefore bought at a much greater cost to the teacher. The NFER, finding that teachers in large schools work harder<sup>3</sup> than those in small schools may well be related to this point.

Finally, as regards the non-curricular aspects of school life the large school is likely to have a disproportionate number of administrators<sup>4</sup> and, other things being equal, to be less innovative.

## Disadvantages?

In short, there is a formidable list of advantages for the smaller school. What are its disadvantages? The constraints for the smaller school are curricular constraints, but these are not as great as has been supposed. On the assumption that we continue with a highly specialised sixth form curriculum and therefore as a result with a complex system of options in the fourth and fifth years, it is possible to provide ten 'A' level subjects in a 3 FE 11-18 school<sup>5</sup> and eighteen in a 4 FE. 80 per cent of sixth form student choices centre on ten subjects, 97 per cent on seventeen. The 4 FE school is therefore viable without taking any further measures. The viability of the 3 FE school can be considerably improved by a timetabling stratagem<sup>7</sup> or by the provision of a limited number of correspondence courses<sup>8</sup> (say five, one each for five individual pupils, opting for peripheral subjects). The large school's advantages are then reduced to the provision of separate 'O' level and CSE repeat courses, of sixth form advanced technical courses and of alternative classes in a given subject, to deal with the problem of timetable clashes, preventing pupils from making free choices. The small school can avoid clashes by extending the school day for sixth formers to 4.45 p.m. and compensating staff for work done after four by, for example, an afternoon off. Linked courses in colleges of further education

resolve the problem of providing technical courses, and only the problem of some timetable constraint, arising from returning sixth formers to the fifth for 'O' level and CSE repeats, remains. The curricular problems of the small school, though they exist and can cause difficulty, are thus less intractable than the disciplinary problems of the large school.

With regard to academic achievement there is relatively little evidence of the effect on it of school size, and many of the results are contradictory. At present, the most prudent conclusion<sup>9</sup> is that schools of below 500 may have slightly poorer academic results, with the suspicion that teacher quality and poorer facilities, indirect effects of school size, may be the predisposing factors. Even so, the sketchy evidence available needs to be evaluated against a background of data as to the actual proportions of the variation in school achievement that is due to the organisational characteristics of a school. An important study<sup>10</sup> covering 2,069 pupils from eighty-eight classes of forty-four schools in twenty-two districts showed that 19 per cent of the variation between pupils was due to the class, 68 per cent to the individual pupil, 10 per cent to the district and 3 per cent only to the school. Perhaps we should not worry too much about the effects of school size on achievement.

This review of the effects of school size may pertinently be concluded with some reference to findings about ideal size. One study<sup>11</sup> found that, if educational factors only were used as criteria the ideal size proved to be between 400 and 999 pupils. Another study<sup>12</sup> which also included cost and administrative factors gave a size range of between 800 and 1200. There is thus reason to suppose that the Circular 10/65 guideline of a *minimum* of 6 FE should have referred to 6 FE not as a minimum but as an *average*, or an *ideal* size, that would have combined the advantages of least curricular constraint and, possibly, best academic achievement with those of good opportunities for personal development, participation and satisfaction,

## A radical re-think

Is there then no hope for large schools, especially in difficult socio-economic areas, short of continually overloading their teachers? Surely we cannot be so defeatist as to say no, there is not. At the same time we must undertake a radical re-think about them. We ought not to build any more and we should reappraise what we are doing with those we have, with the aim of producing 'small



school' conditions in them. This we originally aimed to do when we set up house and year systems, but we had not thought sufficiently hard or clearly about the problem. The essence of it is that we have to minimise movement and to ensure that pupils know teachers and teachers know pupils, outside as well as inside the classroom. Only then will trivial matters of both discipline and pastoral care be dealt with on the spot, in conditions of maximum salience and therefore with maximum effectiveness and speed. Only thus can large problems be prevented from developing.

To achieve this position, it is essential that particular groups of pupils should wholly, or at least mainly, be taught within restricted areas of the school by a restricted group of teachers who themselves do not often have to venture outside their own area. Only then can teachers and taught really know each other by face and by name and have the opportunities for the continual out-of-class face-to-face informal inter-action which promotes good pastoral care and supervision.

Let us take an example. A year group located in one area of a school building and taught by one group of teachers only would experience the conditions described, but the teachers themselves would experience certain crucial dissatisfactions if they were specialist teachers. They could find themselves working over roughly the same material with up to a dozen forms and, in spite of some variation in method and approach, therefore get very bored. Whatever arrangement is come to for splitting up a large school it must ensure variety of teaching for its teachers. One way of doing this would be to divide the first three years of a 12 FE 11-16 or 11-18 school into three equal vertical groups or blocks and situate each block, consisting of four forms of each of the first three years, in one area of the school. Each teacher would be assigned to one of these blocks and would not teach outside it, except for classes in the fourth year upwards. Similarly a 10 FE school could be divided into two blocks. Pupils would not move outside their own block area, unless to a specialist room not available within their own area.

The fourth and fifth year could be similarly divided up, at least as far as compulsory subjects and, possibly, popular subject options are concerned. Fringe option subjects and maybe all options would have to continue to be taught on a school-wide basis.

Teachers would teach mainly classes in their own block area, whether it was one of the three (two) lower school areas or one of the upper school areas but they

would get enough teaching in the upper school (or, if their main assignment was in the upper school, the lower) to give variety of teaching experience, so necessary to maintain freshness of approach and to further future career prospects.

Clearly, some buildings would adapt less well to this system than others. Where they adapt badly a double period timetabling system (or a treble or quadruple period system, with integrated studies) is inevitable if one is to reduce (though not eliminate) the adverse effects of large size. Even so, one would have to consider the problems of the rather weak or inexperienced teacher who cannot be left too long with any difficult form.

## For smaller schools

There is too much research on the favourable effects of small size for us to ignore it. It is particularly relevant to the facts of life in inner city areas, such as, for example, those of London or Manchester. In these areas social problems are considerable and failure to solve social and socialisation problems in the school results in equal failure on the educational side, as well as in truancy, absconding, thieving and delinquency, for all of which society has to pay a high social and economic price. Policy-making amongst administrators ought therefore to be directed away from building large schools, extending medium-sized schools or setting up split-site schools, and towards off-setting the minor curricular constraints of small schools by encouraging linked courses and by supplying a limited number of correspondence courses. The cost of the latter would eventually be off-set by the reduction of costs in truancy and delinquency proceedings.

Policy amongst heads and staffs of large schools would have a similar aim, that of creating small school conditions, as far as is possible, within the large school.

## References

1. Campbell, W. J., 'School size: its influence on pupils', *J. Educ. Admin.*, Vol. III, No 1, May, 1965, pp. 5-6, quoting the results of 25 studies.
2. Halsall, Elizabeth, *The Comprehensive School: Guidelines to the Reorganisation of Secondary Education*, Pergamon, 1973, pp. 85-95. See also: Barker, R. G. and Gump, P. V., *Big School, Small School*, Stanford, California, 1964.
3. Monks, T. G. (ed.), *Comprehensive Education in Action*, NFER, 1970, p. 51.
4. Terrien, F. C. and Mills, D. C., 'The effect of changing size upon the internal structure of an organisation', *Amer. Sociological.*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1955, pp. 11-13.

# Schools Within Schools

## Roger Seckington

Roger Seckington is a member of the Editorial Board of FORUM. Now principal of a Leicestershire Middle School (and Community College), he was earlier head of the lower school of a large West Country comprehensive.

Large comprehensive schools already exist. Many more are growing rapidly. Like the curve of world population increase some schools are now showing an exponential growth figure. Pupil numbers from 1962 for a neighbouring upper school (a 14-18 comprehensive) illustrate this escalation.

1962—774	1967—986	1972—1582
1963—816	1968—1017	1973—1909
1964—841	1969—1077	1974—1909
1965—905	1970—1098	1975—2050 projected
1966—969	1971—1229	1976—2270 projected

In the decade 1962-1972 the school doubled in size. It could double again by 1982 if appropriate steps are not taken to stop it. For the last ten years planners and builders have been at work trying to keep accommodation somewhere near the required level. This school has already passed its notional maximum size of 1,800 and will only achieve this figure when a new school is built and the present catchment area reduced.

Some authorities planned for large schools. In others the schools just grew. In the latter case this was due not so much to lack of planning as to population expansion outstripping resources to build new schools. Established

*Continued from previous page*

5. Halsall, Elizabeth, *Timetable Allocations for Small Comprehensive Schools*, Univ. of Hull Institute of Education, 1968, and also *The Comprehensive School: Guidelines*, Appendix II and pp. 100-115.
6. *London Comprehensive Schools*, 1966, Appendix XI, ILEA, p. 127.
7. Halsall, Elizabeth, 'The Alternate Years Method of Time-tabling', *Comprehensive Education*, Spring 1973.
8. For the effects of correspondence courses see Taylor, L. C., *Resources for Learning*, Penguin Education Specials, 1971, p. 260.
9. Halsall, Elizabeth, *The Comprehensive School, Guidelines*, p. 120.
10. *Ibid*, p. 120 (from Greenfield, T. B., 'Administration and Systems Analysis', *Canadian Admin.* No. 3, April 1964, pp. 25-30).
11. *Ibid*, p. 121.
12. *Ibid*, p. 136-43 and the author's 'Organisation on a Comprehensive Campus', *Education*, Vol. 6, May 1966, pp. 951-2.

## ADVANCE NOTICE

The Autumn FORUM Vol 18 No 1 will contain a full report of the FORUM/CCE conference on Unstreamed Teaching in the Comprehensive School. Also an article by Dr. Thompson, of The Woodlands School, Coventry, on unstreaming a comprehensive school.

Michael Armstrong and Clyde Chitty take the discussion of size further, the former developing the idea of 'Schools within Schools', the latter discussing the advantages of large secondary schools.

## ORDER YOUR COPY NOW

from: 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield

schools grew through inertia. In some areas large schools were, at least for a time, policy on the grounds that they offered a more viable curriculum, especially in the sixth form. A number of large purpose-built comprehensive schools were constructed as a result of this policy, and the planners were able to make some attempt to overcome the problem of size in their designs. House blocks were one popular device to produce manageable social units. Far and away the majority of today's comprehensives are, however, the result of a re-organisation which has made use of existing plant. For a time I served in a comprehensive school on the south coast that in 1967-68 grew out of three secondary schools each of approximately 600 pupils. The new school of 1,800 pupils used the three separate, though adjacent, sets of buildings as they stood. New patterns of organisation and management had to be developed quickly to cope with what had overnight become a large school.

Much more typical would be the growth pattern of my present school. It opened in 1938 with 355 pupils on roll. By 1953 there had been virtually no upward growth with numbers then at 397. The post-war bulge, the re-organisation from secondary modern to a comprehensive 11-14 high school in 1957, and ROSLA in 1972 variously affected what was essentially a steady linear growth. Current pupil numbers are 740. By next August they will be 800 and by August 1976 nearly 900. For an 11-14 high school it might be argued that 900 is a large school. Whether so or not, it is certainly altering and school organisation will need to reflect this.

## An optimum size?

For years teachers have debated the question of size of schools, with much talk of optimum size and break points. Notional school sizes are almost as varied as the numbers of debaters. Unfortunately there has been too little research or serious comment on the question of size and its effect upon the individual learner or teacher. Amongst the important contributions to this debate have been those of Elizabeth Halsall, in *The Comprehensive School* (1973) and elsewhere. It is difficult to see how anyone can be very positive about notional sizes, given the enormous variety of types of school and the equally immense range of resources at their disposal. Even in some relatively small schools congestion and overcrowding may produce worse problems than sheer size. In fact I am sure that to the individual, size is relative to the overall attitudes, style of organisation, available accommodation, and

human and physical resources. Some teachers justify the large school on the grounds that it can be an exciting, vigorous establishment with so much opportunity for all, especially in curricular and extra-curricular terms. It is argued that such schools have the man-power and resources to meet the organisational demands. Other teachers feel strongly that the smaller school can offer a viable curriculum, and establish a stable, indeed highly personalised, environment for the learner without the elaborate infra-structure of the larger school.

## House systems

House systems were adopted at an early stage in the development of the big comprehensive as a way of breaking down the large unit into smaller units. Purpose-built comprehensives like Woodlands in Coventry or David Lister in Hull have a number of house blocks around the site. Each house block forms a base area for between 120-200 pupils. Each house is a complete vertical section of the school and is basically conceived as a large family unit. For social and pastoral purposes the base area is self-contained. A housemaster/housemistress and tutors provide security and continuity of contact for the pupils. The pupils register, have assembly, spend breaks and lunch hours, free periods, indeed most of their non-lesson time, within the house block. Elaborate, and usually excellent, systems of record cards, reporting, and home-school links mean that each pupil is well known to at least a few staff. For lessons the pupils move out into the main school, where the composition of each teaching unit depends on the courses, options, and general policy in the school towards ability grouping.

Schools with no separate physical accommodation have to graft on their house system. The benefits of having a small group of teachers with time and a clear job specification to look after a reasonably sized group of youngsters may be considered to outweigh the rather artificial nature of the 'house' in this situation, and the general sense of homelessness that is bound to exist. Despite practical difficulties many established comprehensives have, however, adopted houses as pastoral units. Staff in large schools may justly claim that each individual pupil is known well by someone in the school, and may go as far as to suggest that their system is better than the vague hand-to-mouth style of some smaller schools. In their turn smaller schools have adopted an overt pastoral care system closely modelled on the larger comprehensives.

Unless the academic organisation includes vertical

grouping it is doubtful whether the individual child gains much from a vertical pastoral organisation. The most meaningful group to a child is the smallest, generally the class, and at work or play the individual child normally seeks the company of similarly aged children. I tend to feel that unlike a house a year group, however large, is something with which most children can identify, because it is a unit which has expression in the timetable; and it is a system that can be a significant, though by no means complete, step towards drawing academic and pastoral organisation more closely together. An horizontal pastoral division requires little in the way of specifically designed accommodation, and so fits most comprehensive school buildings. If the school is unstreamed the tutor group is the basic unit for both pastoral and academic organisation.

At Heathfield we have tried to align the pastoral with the academic organisation. The school is unstreamed. In practice, since the grouping policy differs between departments, we do have some setting across half-year groups in French and mathematics. The key unit around which the school is organised is the half year. Each half-year, which we call a 'population', is mixed ability with 120 children in four tutor groups. Six teachers look after a half-year group, a leader, four group tutors and an extra member who acts as a floater. These form a pastoral team, but are also mainly from the same academic department. Each subject department has a minimum of four teachers and a suite of rooms/spaces which will accommodate a complete half-year group. A subject team has pastoral responsibility for a half year and that group uses their departmental area as a base. For example the social studies team is responsible for half the second year.

We make no claims that this is a particularly radical development. We still have a pastoral staff of year teachers/tutors, and an academic organisation consisting of several well-defined subject departments. What we feel we have achieved so far is to find a reasonably sized unit on which both the pastoral organisation and the academic organisation can be based. Consideration is being given to at least two developments. Firstly to let the academic team of teachers become completely responsible for the pastoral care work. This would mean disbanding the

overt pastoral organisation of year teachers and support staff. Secondly to try and widen some of the subject areas so that the teams of teachers would be responsible for much more of the academic work with a particular group of children. Our problem, so familiar in secondary education, is that of the specialist subject teams. At the moment each team only sees their particular half year for approximately a sixth of the week.

The idea has, perhaps, been taken furthest by another Leicestershire comprehensive school (Countesthorpe), where the teachers are responsible both for much of the academic work and for pastoral care with half-year groups of students. The team comprises teachers from a variety of core subject specialisms and is capable of meeting the needs of students over a significant part of their total curriculum. It is understood that students may spend long periods in the base area through need or inclination, only moving out to more specialist areas as their individual programme requires. This is possible because of the highly individualised approach to learning adopted there. This plan seems to overcome the dichotomy between pastoral organisation and academic organisation and get close to the heart of a stable and meaningful relationship between teacher and student. It does not depend on an elaborate dual system and is best operated with groups not exceeding 150 in number. It meets the need for educationally viable units within the school, so that the individual pupil is not lost and feels cared for.



# Discussion

## Educating the Educator

Douglas Holly, in reviewing my *Marxist Perspectives in the Sociology of Education*, takes me to task for some omissions. However he does show some concern that an authentic Marxist view on the sociology of education should be developed.

How strange then, especially these days, when a shrinking capitalist world in deepening crisis provides abundant proof of the principles of *historical materialism*, when we cannot but witness the current process of intensifying *class struggle*, and when finance-capital continues to demand an undiminished right to extract *surplus value* (of exploitation) that Holly should propose to place other concepts at the heart of Marxist theory! These three italicised ideas are widely accepted, especially by people active in the Labour movement, as the bases of Marxist teaching. Since they are seen to have a direct correspondence with the realities of life, as well as with the bulk of Marxist writing - they continue to inspire a vast amount of responsible work and thought on behalf of that movement. We have, in addition, Lenin's word that they were crucial to the direction of the Russian revolution.

What purposes are served then, objectively, by selecting *alienation*, *praxis* and *ideology* as Marx's 'great conceptual contributions'? Is this substitution not a particular fashionable instance of academic mystification attempting to devalue workers' intellectual currency and serving thus to frustrate precisely the ideological victories of Marxism in the 70s? Is it not also a means of

misdirecting social, economic and political action? These are the kinds of actions Marx was writing about when he said that *men change circumstances, which, being changed, produce changed men* - 'the coincidence of changing circumstances and human activity'.

As Marx says, this means 'that the educator himself needs educating'. At least he must be brought to abandon streaming, selection, sub-cultural and occupation-oriented diversification. That is, he must be brought to accept universalism as an educational principle. Of course universalism is not the same thing as socialism. On the other hand, socialist advance cannot proceed either before or after the inauguration of workers' power without universalism as one ideological orientation. Perhaps the following quotation will help Holly to accept this.

'The universality towards which it (capitalism) irresistibly strives encounters barriers in its own nature, which will, at a certain stage of its development, allow it to be recognised as being itself the greatest barrier to this tendency (i.e. universality - M.L.) and hence will drive towards its own suspension'. Marx, *Grundrisse*, (Pelican, p.410).

So far as Marxism and sociology are concerned, it was pointed out long ago that the provisions of materialism alone made possible a scientific sociology. But it is not therefore proper procedure for a Marxist to reject with grand 'revolutionary' gestures everything that makes up the sociology of education. The right thing to do is to show how the principle that every social relationship is shaped or facilitated in its own special ways by the material sub-structure of society applies also to education. But this means that one must, besides rejecting

some ideas as false, weave into the teaching of Marxism such concepts, research and experience as have scientific validity. It is this that I have tried to do.

The same discernment should also be applied to the work and ideas of Joseph Stalin. The value of Stalin's remarks on language consists in their fundamental denial of 'class languages', and in their making possible therefore a sustained argument against the relativists.

MAURICE LEVITAS

*Neville's Cross College of Education*

## REDUCED RATES SCHEME

Forum can be obtained cheap by students in Colleges and Universities. The price of each copy to individual students has been reduced to 20p. Bulk orders should be sent to the Business Manager at the address given below. One free copy of Forum is made available for every 20 copies ordered. Lecturers in Colleges of Education and in University Education Departments are asked to take advantage of this substantial concession. Please fill in the order form below.

Name .....

Address .....

College or University .....

Please send me.....copies of Forum on the reduced rates scheme, for which I enclose cheque/postal order for.....

Return this form to the Business Manager, Forum, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield.

# The Size factor in Comprehensive Schools

**Mike Towers**

Mike Towers worked in Leicestershire for 15 years both in Middle and Upper Comprehensive schools. He was involved in a number of teachers' organisations and worked in a teacher-tutor scheme at the University of Leicester School of Education. He was a year-tutor at Countesthorpe College until his present appointment as headmaster of Upper Wharfedale County Secondary School in the Yorkshire dales.

Try asking people not closely connected with education what they imagine to be the average size of comprehensive schools in this country. The answers I receive almost invariably exceed considerably the figure of less than 800 contained in the 1968 N.F.E.R. Survey and the more recent evidence of Benn and Simon in *Half-Way There* (2nd edn.).

An overall average figure, however, is particularly irrelevant in considering the question of size of comprehensive schools.

In a recently produced booklet by the St. Marylebone Grammar School Parents Association, an attack is made on I.L.E.A.'s plan to merge St. Marylebone Grammar School with Rutherford Comprehensive School in 1978. It is claimed that I.L.E.A. would be repeating its 'dreadful mistakes' in creating mammoth comprehensives if it succeeds in turning St. Marylebone with 530 pupils into a school of more than a 1,000.

A mammoth comprehensive of over a thousand? It is less than ten years since certain political ministers and writers on education were still insisting on 2,000 as a minimum viable figure. It is from this expression as much as from the early, very large comprehensives that a popular myth has arisen with obvious political advantages for the opponents of comprehensive education. 'Comprehensive schools must be large to work, but large means problems, often insoluble—therefore comprehensive education is a failure.' There has been little recent coverage in the media of balanced evidence to counter this biased view. More often time and space is given to sentimental, prejudiced and politically doctrinaire outbursts.

The size of schools in this country became controversial with the development of comprehensive schools. In the early years large comprehensive schools, which contrasted with the traditional size of secondary schools, were attacked as being too large, impersonal education factories. Although this criticism has persisted, often in areas of scheduled reorganisation, small comprehensive schools

have in recent years, also been attacked because of their smallness.

The original large estimate of what was viable was confounded by the success of a number of small comprehensive schools which slipped through the bureaucratic net, and by the rapid, unforeseen increase in the percentage of year groups staying on after school leaving age in new comprehensive schools.

Experience has run counter to the reasoning explicit in the Crowther Report that comprehensive schools, to succeed at the senior end, would need to contain the same elements as existed separately in grammar and modern schools.

It is regrettable that the question of 'too small' or 'too large' exercises a divisive influence on educational thinking, distracting attention from the real issue of consolidating truly comprehensive education.

Both camps, perhaps for local reasons, may have vested interests in promoting their cause, but I would suggest that there is a case for accepting variables in size and in considering size as only one factor amongst many which are crucial in determining a school's success.

The factor of size is complicated by the variety of types of comprehensive schools—the six schemes which arose through local authority initiatives described in D.E.S. Circular 10/65. It varies just as much according to local conditions, siting, existing buildings, previously existing secondary schools, sex, denomination and geographical location.

As Benn and Simon show, schools in cities, towns and suburbs are generally appreciably larger than their typical rural counterparts. The size factor I think should be carefully examined according to the individual circumstances of schools. There are advantages and disadvantages in both small and large schools, although many would argue that the disadvantages are felt most keenly at the extreme ends of the spectrum.

But what is 'too large' or 'too small'? In an article in

**Trends in Education** (April 1971) Elizabeth Halsall shows what can be done in range of curriculum in an analysis of the timetable of a 3FE comprehensive school. In the same publication in July 1971 Celia Barker, although making reservations about cost and the limit on pupils' curricular choice, describes the success, which shows particularly in the warm and natural pastoral function, of small comprehensive schools in the rural county of Westmorland.

Upper Nidderdale High School at Pateley Bridge in the Yorkshire Dales is a small 11-16 comprehensive school with at present fewer than 400 pupils. It was reorganised from a small county secondary school. I recently had the pleasure of spending a day there. It is a school which gives a resounding affirmative to the question of whether small comprehensive schools can be viable and successful.

It is housed in disadvantageous buildings but makes the best possible use of them.

What is immediately impressive is the atmosphere of positive and purposeful learning. The enabling authority has provided a favourable staffing ratio which allows classes of 20 or less. There is a remarkable width of curriculum for a school of this size with the opportunity of many senior pupils to follow minority interests. Linked courses at Harrogate College of Further Education increase the senior options and C.S.E courses still further. Detailed, individual careers advice is provided and there are excellent opportunities to go on to sixth form studies or to other kinds of further education.

Because of the scale involved the organisation of the school operates in a way which allows genuine care for the needs of individual pupils. Flexibility is a constant advantage which shows in a variety of individual arrangements. In a number of areas I saw single members or small groups of the fifth year working alongside small classes of younger pupils.

Upper Nidderdale High School has the advantage of serving a definable community and has close ties with local people and organisations. A close, supportive relationship exists between home and school on a continuous and informal basis. Quite simply, people know each other—children, teachers, parents and other members of the community into which the school fits as part of its way of life. The family atmosphere in the school enhances its educational and social purpose.

No one, I think, would claim that this school is a model for all comprehensive schools, but it is in its local context, unquestionably viable and demonstrates that a compre-

hensive school can operate successfully at a level far below the size popularly accepted as workable.

Although the argument was never used against schools under the tripartite system, it is often claimed that comprehensive schools are unable to provide the resources and range of opportunities that large schools can. Elizabeth Halsall, in the article referred to above, and Michael Armstrong in *Where*, July 1970, point out the quality of participation which is possible by pupils in the sort of curriculum small schools can devise, particularly if supported by the kind of technical facilities which, in recent years, have dramatically advanced learning. Small schools can offer an opportunity for personal development which few large schools are able to match. Open-endedness, flexibility, versatility, and an intimacy with personal needs enable small schools to overcome their alleged narrowness.

A large school can, of course, offer a wider range of opportunities, although whether these are available to all students and whether they are fully accepted is another question. However, the depth and quality of study which a small school can focus on a more limited range of options suggests a greater academic opportunity than is often supposed.

Small schools are able to emphasise active participation and the opportunity of individual initiative and responsibility. Such experiences are valuable, maturing influences. Children in such schools to whom I have spoken express satisfaction that they are on at least nodding terms with most people in the school and it must be to the advantage of stability and security that all aspects of their school lives, their work and their personal development are part of the same experience. Whatever talents, abilities, weaknesses or personalities children possess they are important and they can be cared for as individuals.

North Yorkshire treats small schools generously on an ad hoc basis, and I think all local authorities have a duty to do this in terms of staffing ratios, allowances, ancillary assistance, resources and scale points. Small comprehensive schools are attractive places in which to work and there is evidence that teachers show a very high commitment and interest in the affairs of such schools and derive a high degree of satisfaction from their work; career opportunities, however, are presently weighted heavily in favour of large schools.

Michael Armstrong has argued the case for consortia of small schools sharing high cost resources and even teachers. This challenging idea is worth taking up by an adventurous authority.

A school counsellor who works in a large city comprehensive in the North-east, discussing the validity of the economic motivation to group resources and staff in large schools, told me that he considered that the real problems in large schools were management problems. He argued that teachers, traditionally trained in academic and teaching skills, find it hard to cope with the complex organisation of such schools. Specialists tend to retreat into the esoteric security of their subjects, sheer size deterring them from inter-departmental co-operation.

This sounds a pessimistic picture and does an injustice to many large schools.

This school counsellor fulfils one of a number of new roles of responsibility—in pastoral work, resources, curriculum development and administration—which large schools have found it necessary to create. This is not universally popular.

Des Clayton, the recently retired chairman of the A.M.A., in a speech on the 29th December 1974 called for an enquiry into a new non-academic 'elite' of administrative teachers created by large reorganised schools with many teachers doing non-teaching jobs.

Not very encouraging for people who often carry the severest pressures in large schools.

Countesthorpe College in Leicestershire has developed a basic organisation of separate teams of teachers and students working together for a large proportion of the timetable in their own areas of the building—small schools within a large school. The result has been a great deal of exciting and innovative work. Yet, in spite of the remarkably open and democratic form of government, this has also, to some extent, diminished the overall feeling of a shared enterprise. This is, I think, an inevitable drawback for large schools and of course, by itself does not lessen the value of Countesthorpe's contribution to a form of

comprehensive education which gives students a real equality of opportunity.

How much is size a factor in the success of Countesthorpe or in the success of Upper Nidderdale School? Obviously size conditions the pattern of education in these very different schools but it is the dedicated concern for and attention to the educational and personal needs of individual children which both schools have in common that has made them work. It is important to regard these schools not merely as representing examples of success for a certain size school but to see them both as examples of the success of comprehensive education.

At the North of England Education Conference at Newcastle early this year Professor John Vaizey, in spite of saying that he believed that the period of educational expansion had seen a massive improvement in educational standards, expressed a feeling of disillusion about the present state of British education.

I think there is cause for optimism. The greatest advances in education in recent years have occurred in comprehensive schools. Ending selection at 11 plus has given new dimensions to the work of primary schools. The kind of resources and organisation of learning which have been developed in many successful comprehensive schools have given impetus to many other schools.

There is also cause to be greatly encouraged by the development in comprehensive schools of the 'open' sixth form so clearly described in Guy Neave's recently published book *How They Fared*.

Hopefully, the next few years will see an acceleration of the development of completely comprehensive state education. In this period of reorganisation local authorities will no doubt consider the size factor of schools in particular localities. They may well revise their ideas on large schools and I hope not reject small schools simply on a criterion of size.



# Sociologists and the politics of comprehensive education

**Michael F. D. Young**

Michael Young, who comments here on two articles on 'new direction' sociology in the Autumn, 1974, issue of *FORUM*, is now Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Education, University of London. Earlier he taught science in London secondary schools. He has recently been engaged in work with science teachers in a London comprehensive school both as part-time teacher and researcher.

It was no doubt a surprise to most *Forum* readers to discover two articles on the sociology of education in the autumn issue (Vol. 17, No.1). What might the rather esoteric sounding debates among sociologists and other academics have to do with those whose concerns are primarily the transforming of the ideal of 'comprehensive education for all' into a reality in our schools? The struggle for comprehensive education, which is shifting away from questions about selective schools (though many remain) to the processes of selection within all schools, is, as others have argued, fundamentally a political struggle. It is about how to achieve the redistribution of educational and other resources in such a way as to overcome the persistent discrimination against working-class children in our educational arrangements. The evidence such as it is suggests that moves to abolish streaming and other forms of selection, whatever their other merits, have not made very much difference, at least in terms of the political objectives of redistributing power and resources. There are a variety of explanations of this situation, but there are as many problems with those that emphasise what goes on in classrooms or homes as with those who refer to some abstract notion of the socio-economic structures of society. It is here that the debates about the 'new' and 'old' sociology enter in, though admittedly with as yet remarkably little direct significance for teachers.

A sociology that is to be of relevance to teachers has to start with classroom practices but cannot stop there. It also requires us to explore the practices of those who seem to teachers to impose constraints on their attempts to implement radical change, a point Geoff Whitty and I have argued elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. This leads to two kinds of linked concerns. Firstly we need to understand how, for example, exam. boards, and union and LEA negotiators (through the Burnham points system) sustain the

hierarchies implicit in the selection processes in schools. Secondly, we need to consider in what ways educational strategies for change are limited in that they do not recognise that they also involve changes in the relations of production in industry; in other words, selection, though a crucial educational practice, needs also to be seen as an economic and a political practice.

Consideration of the problems confronting teachers in comprehensive schools who have begun to abolish streaming, inevitably leads us to examine prevailing notions of teaching, knowledge, and ability, which are a feature not just of our schools, but of the social order of which schools are a part. It is to some of these concerns that those labelled 'new direction' sociologists have in various ways addressed themselves, as Olive Banks notes in her article. She offers a careful and fair comment on the tendency for sociologists to 'take it too far' in ways which she sees as becoming potentially harmful to the cause of reducing class inequalities in education. What seems important, as I think Olive Banks brings out clearly, is that if we are really serious about 'education for all', we have to examine not just access, but what people have access to—the whole set of practices, of which examining and selection are but two, which historically have sustained the hierarchies implicit in our conceptions of what education is and ought to be. In doing this we inevitably display education as, in the broadest sense, political, not just at the level of national or party policy, but in the schools and in the classrooms. I want to develop this a little in relation to some of the points raised in the two articles, because I see it as of very direct concern to any of us who are concerned to see 'comprehensive' as more than just a category of administrative reorganisation. Firstly, then, I should like to take up three points from Olive Banks's article.

1. Olive Banks is right to point to the sociological

naivety of over-emphasising 'man as a *determining being*', and how this can lead to a simplistic 'blame the teacher' explanation of school failure. In the articles I have referred to, Geoff Whitty and I have endeavoured to take this point up by linking the teachers' struggle for change to the struggles of those outside the schools. This is not to say that teachers' practices are not central to educational change, but to avoid isolating education, not just conceptually as Olive Banks seems most concerned about, but practically as well.

2. There probably has been, as Olive Banks argues, a tendency to 'romanticise' 'working-class' culture, which could be as unhelpful as the much more widespread and pervasive idealisation of 'mainstream' culture. Treating the knowledge children bring to school as valid in itself does not *per se* solve anything, but it does have radical implications for all our educational practice. It is surely too easy to dismiss this as 'plausible and attractive', rather than trying to work out what it might mean for teachers and sociologists. Postman's polemic against reading is both crude and potentially harmful, but so, as James Herndon<sup>2</sup> describes so well, are reading schemes. To refer to literacy as the 'bedrock of formal education' seems to be avoiding the problems for sociologists and teachers of trying to understand what it is about reading (and maths.), as they are experienced in school, that make them 'problems' for too many children rather than ways of liberating themselves in the world.

3. Olive Banks wants us to remember that education is not separate from the 'wider social structures'. The problem seems to be how to do this without separating sociological theorising about education from the lived experience of those involved. This points, for me, to the political character of sociology and education which Olive Banks's conception of mainstream sociology does not address and which those of us concerned to develop alternatives have not yet fully confronted.

Unlike Olive Banks, who grounds her criticisms in a particular tradition of sociology, Joan Simon's position is far less clear, and I want to take very briefly three examples to show the problems that this gives rise to.

1. Joan Simon criticises interaction studies like Nell Keddie's *Classroom Knowledge* for 'leaving aside concrete aspects of this edifice (of differentiation of children and of subject matter) which also directly influence children'. What are these *concrete* aspects? How do they *directly* influence children? We are not told.

2. Joan Simon criticises a concern to make explicit one's political grounds as 'an admission of inherent

weakness only to be remedied by lapping over into another sphere'. What on earth can this mean? What other sphere? Does Joan Simon really want to argue for the separation of education from politics? If so, what could the 'concrete aspects' refer to, and what has the working-class struggle for education through political parties and trade unions been about?

3. Joan Simon comments towards the end of her article that it may well be that teachers do not need to be concerned about debates among educational theorists. This scepticism about theorists is a view that many would share, but Joan Simon goes on to write 'it is not in the form of struggles between rival academic subjects that the future direction of education will be decided. These merely reflect the real conflicts being worked out in the arena'. What *real* conflicts? What arena? If this means anything it is asserting just what earlier she described as the inherent weakness of 'lapping over into another sphere'.

Either we do recognise the political character of sociological and educational practice or we do not. It is just mystification to hide this with obscure metaphors and by referring as Joan Simon does to 'the educational point of view', as if there could be *one*. It is both the strength and vulnerability of the conception of knowledge underlying much of what has been labelled 'new' sociology, that it displays the political character of education and of itself as human productions. It is a weakness recognised by those involved and pointed to by both Olive Banks and Joan Simon, that it has tended so far to be ahistorical, and has not yet provided for the *practical* possibility of the changes about which it speaks. This, however, is, as I have indicated, no less a weakness of Olive Banks's and Joan Simon's analyses, the difference being that in Joan Simon's case she does not even seem to be aware of the problem.

## References

(1) Geoff Whitty, 'Sociology and the problem of radical education change; towards a reconceptualisation of the "new sociology of education"', in *Educability, Schools and Ideology*, edited by Michael Flude and John Ahier, Croom Helm, 1974.

Geoff Whitty and Michael F.D. Young, 'Sociology and the politics of school knowledge', in *Teaching London Kids*, 6, May, 1975.

(2) James Herndon, *How to survive in your native land*, Bantam Books 1972.

# A Teacher's View

**Colin Yardley**

Colin Yardley is head of the science department at Crown Woods school, London. Believing in the vital importance of stability of staffing, and (he writes) in 'do-as-you-would-be-done-by', he has remained at Crown Woods for the past 14 years; a school, he adds 'listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the biggest in the country'.

What have we done to deserve this?

Still deeply involved in the rethinking of the secondary curriculum so healthily impelled by ROSLA, teachers need every help and encouragement. Instead we get the sabotaging blow of the financial cuts. And as teachers more and more exploit the opportunities opened up by comprehensive reorganisation, particularly indicated by the gathering momentum towards unstreaming, they need every assistance that the training and research facilities of the colleges and institutes can give them. Instead—and here I speak of the London area—we get the confusion born of 'new direction' sociology.

As Joan Simon pointed out in the Autumn (1974) issue of *Forum*, 'Teachers do, really, have a hard time.' After helping to demolish psychometry by bursting through the ceilings it erroneously imposed on children's abilities, teachers were then confronted with a theory which substituted for genetic determination the apparently inexorable factor of social determination. Being aware of the manifold deprivations suffered by many children before they even attain school age, some teachers have been too ready to make assumptions about such children's desire and ability to learn, assumptions which lead to limited and self-fulfilling expectations. But as Nanette Whitbread

has pointed out, there is clear evidence of 'the kind of school and teachers which *together* can make a difference'<sup>1</sup>. The most socially aware teachers are only too conscious of the fact that education cannot entirely compensate for all the depredations due to poverty, bad housing and racial discrimination. These can be effectively tackled only by major political changes, but most teachers recognise that, in the face of the deficiencies of our society, it is their paramount task to ensure that school does significantly compensate.

## Difference, or disadvantage?

Even before the profession is fully awakened to the dangers of this new brand of determinism, another movement creates a tangential reactionary line. What teachers have come to diagnose as cultural disadvantage in many working-class and immigrant pupils is, we are told, merely cultural *difference*. The concept of cultural *deprivation* is easy meat for criticism. As Nell Keddie points out, no group can be deprived of its culture<sup>2</sup>. She goes on to suggest that the term is used as 'a euphemism for saying that working-class and ethnic groups have cultures which

---

*Continued from previous page*

Joan Simon writes: There is a lucid and readable discussion of what has been wrong with sociology in Hugh Stretton, *The Political Sciences. General principles of selection in social science and history* (1969). Social scientists, he writes, 'are influential people these days. They advise and staff governments and other institutions—including, it may be interpolated, councils distributing large research funds and publishers' offices—and 'help to educate almost everybody. Most of them teach more than they discover. Their work needs watching, for its increasing social effect'. Given recent negative effects on educational research and in schools *Forum* was asked to

look at the latest vagaries in the sociology of education.

The resulting analysis was considered stringent and overdue, according to various reactions. The 'new direction' advocated is seen as no cure for ills but rather symptom of a new disease; a dangerous one at that given the retreat into relativism, and the radical pretence of speaking in the interest of working class' children coupled with an anti-teacher attitude. In case anything in my article suggested that such views are typical of the department of sociology in the Institute of Education of London University, it should be said that this is not so.

are at least dissonant with, if not inferior to, the "mainstream" culture of the society at large'.

Teachers, by virtue of their daily confrontation with hard reality, tend to be very candid (even if often wrong-headed) people, avoiding euphemisms. No matter how conservative may be the interpretation many of them make of its basic causes, teachers know that cultural disadvantage is the other side of the coin of social disadvantage. (And considering her professions of sociological radicalism, Nell Keddie delicately avoids nailing an exploitative economy as the fundamental cause. Although the omission perhaps exposes a basic flaw in her science.)

Several years ago, Alec Clegg<sup>3</sup> suggested that, due to their home circumstances, perhaps 12 per cent of children live through 'extremes of wretchedness' which blight their educational chances. The National Child Development Study<sup>4</sup> has shown that disadvantage begins for many children even before they are born, often of teenage, or heavily-smoking mothers, who may not seek proper ante-natal care. How can early years marked by ill-health, in poor housing in a low-income family tend towards anything but environmentally induced stunting of intellectual development? Lacking the refined susceptibilities of some sociologists, most teachers would define such a disadvantaged state of affairs as *inferior* to that which is almost invariably produced in the average, white, upper middle class family.

The educational problems produced in socially disadvantaged homes are quite clear to teachers. The theoretical framework put forward by Bernstein conforms to their experiences in the classroom of the linguistic limitations and learning difficulties of many children. From better understanding is flowing improved practice. Douglas Barnes' little book, *Language, the learner and the school* has been studied and discussed by staffs up and down the country. The L.A.T.E. discussion document, 'A language policy across the curriculum' has favourably influenced teaching well beyond the confines of English departments.

A study of Tough<sup>5</sup> in this country adds detail to our understanding of the restricted experience of language use suffered by pre-school children from a large proportion of working-class homes. Compared to children from more 'enriching' homes they have less ability to use language in order to plan collaborative actions, to anticipate and predict, to see causal and dependent relationships, to deal with simple hypothetical problems, or to reflect upon their own and other people's feelings. If language is little used in the home for purposes of description, explanation,

hypothesising or analysis, then the child will inevitably lack practice at using language at this level of complexity and abstraction, which is precisely the level in greatest demand for learning purposes in school.

## The teacher's task

Far from concluding that all this proves the futility of trying to give all children generous learning opportunities, teachers almost instinctively adopt the tough-minded approach recommended by Denis Lawton<sup>6</sup> which avers that their task is to bridge the 'considerable gap between the normal linguistic performance and the potential attainment of certain working-class pupils.' There is a world of difference between this interventionist position and that of the social 'relativist' school. Nell Keddie issues the stricture that we should 'reconsider the notion that working-class speech is unable to cope with what are felt to be high-level abstractions and consider whether, like black nonstandard English, it is better seen as a dialectical variation of standard English rather than a different kind of speech from that required for formal and logical thinking.'

I have no idea what she means by 'dialectical variation', but it is clear that Bernstein's codes are not viewed as extremes within a common culture, but as parallels, with their respective correlated value systems, so that they defy measurement of their comparative worth. Most teachers will differ, inclining to the conclusion drawn by Maurice Levitas<sup>7</sup>, 'that if one type of linguistic equipment facilitates better performance than another in the school situation and prepares more successfully for a wider range of social probabilities, it is not merely different but better.' We thereby risk criticism for applying our 'middle class categories' and attempting to repair the child, whereas the fault—it is asserted—lies with the school and the teachers.

It is this criticism which is less and less deserved with each passing day, an ascribed tendency 'not to perceive the collective social class basis of pupils' experience but to fragment that experience into the problems of individual (and "disadvantaged") pupils'. If teachers are being accused of striving to treat pupils' individual needs, they plead guilty. If they are accused of ignorance of children's collective social and educational needs, then they deny all charges. No section of the community has a better record of political action in defence of the interests of children. The recurrent economic crisis notwith-

standing, teachers are constantly clamouring for more and better in every field of child welfare and education, and if there is nothing forthcoming, then for positive discrimination in favour of the disadvantaged.

Over very recent years, the effects of the 'new direction' in sociology have been felt in the schools. In their evangelising zeal, the London Institute and Goldsmiths College send out many a missionary. Of these newly qualified teachers—if they remember their sociology lectures—some will see in retrospect that it was a case of over-sell with a second rate product. But their former lecturers continue to be motivated by the conviction that students in training are open to influences far more radical and humanist than any to be found in the schools. Here again, one sees their outrageous devaluation of the work of countless teachers in thousands of our schools.

No teacher, no matter how long he has been in the profession, should be unwilling to have his ideas challenged, but it tends to be the new young teacher victim of undiluted 'new direction' sociology who suffers the doubly perturbing experience of veteran staff questioning his unhelpful philosophy and classroom realities undermining its validity. The message of Rosenthal and Jacobson with regard to teachers' expectations, and the exhortation of Jerome Bruner to strive for individual excellence have penetrated quite deeply among teachers. Even the somewhat less dedicated are suspicious of theories which, like the 'new direction', might be taken to imply the sanctioning of relaxation of academic rigour and the pursuit of a 'soft' line with the less responsive part of the class.

## Integration?

The 'new' sociology has a second string to its bow. In a lather of pretentiously worded abstractions—a style which seems to be almost obligatory to members of this movement—Geoffrey Esland<sup>9</sup> inveighs against the rigid demarcation of the traditional subject disciplines and sets out a model for research into integrated studies programmes. Teachers who undertake the enormous burden of work involved in such courses will perhaps be unaware that they are embarking on 'a socio-culturally located "project of action",' and will be pleased to have their expertise investigated as 'an epistemologically-located interpretational system on which particular actions are grounded.' This stratospheric word-monger comes down to earth only when he has to deal with the concrete questions to which answers are sought: why teachers decide to introduce integrated studies; what forms the

teaching takes; how does the new project fit into the rest of the curriculum; what changes follow in teachers' responsibilities and working relationships. And also a major question as far as that sceptical, self-critical bunch—the teaching profession—are concerned: what criteria are to be used to assess the success or failure of the project and the progress of each pupil.

But as yet, research results have not been published and one wonders whether the birth of the 'new direction' school was really the essential prerequisite for the conduct of such an investigation.

Most teachers would readily admit to the artificiality of some subject boundaries. Much work is going on at secondary level in order to follow the example of the primary schools by blurring or removing the demarcation lines. But is it really true, as Michael Young insists<sup>10</sup>, that curriculum content is designed and disciplines may be delineated as they are in order to accentuate the segregationist organisation already present in much of the education system? The only two concrete examples he cites in justification of this stance are very dubious. Firstly, he very knowingly suggests that a research project into the sponsorship of the Nuffield science schemes might reveal that the courses were designed for the public, direct grant and grammar schools. That is one M.A. thesis we can do without. He need look no further than the teams of authors and the schools from which they came, and the lists of trial schools printed in the published course books. And it was way back in 1967 that Michael Robinson<sup>11</sup> wrote in *Forum* that 'Nuffield was never intended to be more than a course for the top 10 per cent going forward to O level.'

Secondly, Michael Young gives the Schools Council a deserved slap for sponsoring some curriculum innovations which were intended to be restricted in their availability to less able pupils, thus tending to legitimise divisive forms of organisation within and between schools. He is at fault in being in apparent ignorance of the fact that the Schools Council is a virtual battleground, its sedate wars faithfully reflecting the crucial struggles going on countrywide in attempt to democratise and unify the education system. But I expect the progressive role played by most teacher representatives in the Schools Council apparatus would not be quite radical enough for the 'new direction'.

In relation to both the Nuffield projects and the work of the Schools Council, Young misses a vital point. Teachers have taken these innovations and with discrimination and ingenuity they have re-thought, re-structured

and re-written them to fit the actual needs of the full range of pupils. But this enormous slog goes without recognition, perhaps because it does not fit the 'new direction' stereotype of the socially passive teacher, or perhaps because it still tends to conform in the main to traditional subject boundaries, which are an anathema because they represent a 'new absolutism'. It is only the more dramatic, eye-catching iconoclasm which is likely to register with the 'new wave'.

An interesting phenomenon is how some of the decidedly non-radical features of the 'new direction' tie up with notions of the more excitable Left. For example, Douglas Holly<sup>11</sup> places extraordinary emphasis on the 'subordination' of the pupil within a 'pedagogy which stresses traditional categories and traditional subject content' and renders the pupil 'by definition, a tyro, someone in a relationship of incompetence.' He goes on to propose that 'the virtual abolition of the conventional curriculum is a matter of very deep social importance.'

Where in all this figures the problem that we are not yet even 'half way there' towards comprehensive reorganisation? By all means let us have go-ahead schools which, if successful, will act as shining citadels showing the rest how it can be done. But let us recognise present realities. We have still to turn the vast majority of our secondary teachers, who were trained for the segregationist system, into comprehensive school teachers. Calls, at this time, for a revolutionary change in the secondary school curriculum only divert from the pressing need to establish a common curriculum for all pupils, and 'for a common depth in the disciplines to which all pupils should be expected to have penetrated.'<sup>12</sup> The educational ambition of teachers on behalf of their pupils is a motive force to be prized, not confused by propositions of different kinds of learning for 'different kinds' of cultural background.

Knowing that many working-class children lack the facility for more elaborated utterances because they lack the practice, teachers of all subjects must strive to draw children into demanding situations where an intellectually extending response is elicited.

Wherever 'new direction' criminal philanthropy impinges, teachers will recognise that it butters no parsnips and will rebuff it. When a thriving educational debate is in process, there are bound to be fringe theories emanating from external sources and creating pockets of turmoil. It is the experience, needs and aspirations of the schools which, when articulated by teachers and researchers, will add to the corpus of the genuinely new and growing theory of education.

#### References

1. Nanette Whitbread, 'How schools make a difference', *Forum*, 16, No 2, Spring 1974.
2. Nell Keddie (ed.), *Tinker, tailor . . . . the myth of cultural deprivation*, 1973.
3. Alec Clegg and Barbara Megson, *Children in distress*, 1968.
4. Peter Wedge and Hilary Prosser, *Born to Fail?* 1973.
5. Y. J. Tough, *Focus on meaning: talking to some purpose with young children*, 1973.
6. Denis Lawton, *Social class, language and education*, 1974.
7. Maurice Levitas, *Marxist perspectives in the sociology of education*, 1974.
8. Nell Keddie, 'Classroom knowledge', in Michael Young, *Knowledge and control*, 1971.
9. Geoffrey Esland, 'Teaching and learning as the organisation of knowledge', in Michael Young, *Knowledge and Control*, 1971.
10. Michael Young, *Knowledge and Control*, 1971.
11. Michael Robinson, 'The Nuffield Science Teaching Project', *Forum*, 9, No. 3 Summer 1967.
12. Douglas Holly, *Society, schools and humanity*, 1971.
13. John White, *New Society*, 6 March 1969.

# FORUM

## Index to Volume 19

	Page
Arnold, With Apologies to Matthew: Joan Simon	20
Assessment in the Primary School: Filling in Some Gaps: Ann Riley	100
Black Papers, Levels of Debate and Levels of Control: Research and the: Gabriel Chanan	23
Comprehensive Reform: all over but the reorganising: Caroline Benn	2
Coping with Reactionary Criticism of Schools — suggestions from the US Experience: William T. Lowe	8
Corporate Management and the Local Education Authority: Michael Harrison	12
Discussion:	
Genuinely Comprehensive?: Maurice Dybeck	91
School Counsellor in Schools in Britain, The Case for the: Marilyn Rhydderch-Preece	15
A Streaming Experiment in Cyprus: P. F. W. Preece & P. Z. Papazachariou	50
Educational Research and the Primary School: Brian Simon	70
Informed Vision, The: a programme for educational reconstruction: Michael Armstrong	76
Play, The Role of: Margaret Gracie	83
Professional Philosophy of Teachers, The: K. G. Collier	104
Reading Crash Course: Inga Corral	51
Remedial Arrangements, One School's: Trisha Jaffe	48
Remedial Strategies in the Primary School: Ray Pinder	39
Remedial Strategies in Secondary Schools: Colin McCall	44
Remedial Teaching in Humanities: W. F. Quinn	55
Room for Thought: John and Dorothy Paul	81
School, Talking in: Martyn Richards	88
Schools, What has really happened in?: D. W. Blades	86
Staffing Ratio in the Secondary School, The: Don Proud	27
Suitable Cases for Treatment?: David N. Thomas	36
Thirty Years of Change: Michael Clarke	96
Tyndale and the Left: John P. White	59
Voucher System, Economics of the: Norman Morris	16
When will they ever Learn?: Alistair McIntosh	92

## Authors—Volume 19

	Page
Armstrong, Michael: The Informed Vision: a programme for educational research	76
Benn, Caroline: The Comprehensive Reform: all over but the reorganising	2
Blades, D. W.: What has really happened in Schools?	86
Channan, Gabriel: Levels of Debate and Levels of Control: research and the Black Papers	23
Clarke, Michael: Thirty Years of Change	96
Collier, K. G.: The Professional Philosophy of Teachers	104
Corral, Inga: Reading Crash Course	51
Dybeck, Maurice: Genuinely Comprehensive?	91
Gracie, Margaret: Role of Play	83
Harrison, Michael: Corporate Management and the Local Education Authority	12
Jaffe, Trisha: One School's Remedial Arrangements	48
Lowe, William T.: Coping with Reactionary Criticism of Schools — suggestions from the US Experience	8
McCall, Colin: Remedial Strategies in Secondary Schools	44
McIntosh, Alistair: When will they ever Learn?	92
Morris, Norman: The Economics of the Voucher System	16
Papazachariou, P. Z.: Streaming Experiment in Cyprus	50
Paul, John and Dorothy: Room for Thought	81
Pinder, Ray: Remedial Strategies in the Primary School	39
Preece, P. F. W.: Streaming Experiment in Cyprus	50
Proud, Don: The Staffing Ratio in the Secondary School	27
Quinn, W. F.: Remedial Teaching in the Humanities	55
Rhydderch-Preece, Marilyn: The Case for the School Counsellor in Schools in Britain	15
Richards, Martyn: Talking in School	88
Riley, Anne: Assessment in the Primary School: filling in some gaps	100
Simon, Brian: Educational Research and the Primary School	70
Simon, Joan: With apologies to Matthew Arnold	20
Thomas, David N.: Suitable Cases for Treatment?	36
White, John P.: Tyndale and the Left	59

## Index to Volume 20

	Page
Assessment in the Primary School: Stephen Rowland	78
Assessment and Testing at Local Level: Alan Evans & Arthur Jarman	75
Biculturalism in the Primary School: Jeff White and David Houlton	2
Disadvantaged, Pre-requisites for Teaching the: Vernon Broussard	83
Examination Results, The Constructive Use of: Jim Eggleston	81
Family Workshops: Dave Bennett and Tanny Rees-Jones	92
Forum's Primary Conference: Forum Reporters	19
Green Paper, The: Brian Simon	18
Infant Schools, How Unstreamed are?: Annabelle Dixon	43
Information Trap, The: David Tripp	27
Language in the Multi-Ethnic Classroom: Hilary Hester and Jim Wright	9
Luria, A. R., Scientist and Educationist: Joan Simon	95
Mathematics and Mixed Ability Grouping: Philip Sherwood	46
Mixed Ability Grouping for Mathematics: 'Topping and Tailing': John Collins	53
Mixed Ability Teaching in the Middle School—A personal view: Arthur Razzell	50
Mixed Ability Teaching and Modern Languages in the Comprehensive School: Ian S. Taylor	57
Mother-tongue Maintenance in Primary Schools: Anne Wilkins	13
Multicultural Neighbourhood Comprehensive, A: Arfon Jones	14
Non-Streaming: Retrospect and Prospect: Roger Seckington	36
Parents, Communication with: Warwick Shipstone	90
Politics of Classroom Organisation, The: John Elliott	61
Remedial Help within Non-Streaming: Barry Chisholme	24
Social Studies and Social Control: Bernard Wakefield and Geoff Rainbow	22
Streamed and Non-Streamed: Roger Seckington	88
Testing Invasion, The: Philip Sherwood	72
Training Teachers for Mixed Ability Classes: E. C. Wragg	39
White Studies: Iris Morrison	5
Why Unstreaming?: Brian Simon	34

## Authors—Volume 20

	Page
Bennett, Dave: Family Workshops	92
Broussard, Vernon: Pre-requisites for Teaching the Disadvantaged	83
Chisholme, Barry: Remedial Help within Non-Streaming	24
Collins, John: 'Topping and Tailing': Mixed Ability Grouping for Mathematics	53
Dixon, Annabelle: How Unstreamed are Infant Schools?	43
Eggleston, Jim: The Constructive Use of Examination Results	81
Elliott, John: The Politics of Classroom Organization	61
Evans, Alan: Assessment and Testing at Local Level	75
Forum Reporters: Forum's Primary Conference	19
Hester, Hilary: Language in the Multi-Ethnic Classroom	9
Houlton, Dave: Biculturalism in the Primary School	2
Jarman, Arthur: Assessment and Testing at Local Level	75
Jones, Arfon: A Multicultural Neighbourhood Comprehensive	14
Morrison, Iris: White Studies	5
Rainbow, Geoff: Social Studies and Social Control	22
Razzell, Arthur: Mixed Ability Teaching in the Middle School—A personal view	50
Rees-Jones, Tanny: Family Workshops	92
Rowland, Stephen: Assessment in the Primary School	78
Seckington, Roger: Non-Streaming: Retrospect and Prospect Streamed and Non-Streamed	36
Sherwood, Philip: Mathematics and Mixed Ability Grouping The Testing Invasion	46
Shipstone, Warwick: Communication with Parents	90
Simon, Brian: The Green Paper	18
Why Unstreaming?	34
Simon, Joan: Scientist and Educationist, A. R. Luria	95
Taylor, Ian S: Mixed Ability Teaching and Modern Languages in the Comprehensive School	57
Tripp, David: The Information Trap	27
Wakefield, Bernard: Social Studies and Social Control	22
White, Jeff: Biculturalism in the Primary School	2
Wright, Jim: Language in the Multi-Ethnic Classroom	9
Wilkins, Anne: Mother-tongue Maintenance in Primary Schools	13
Wragg, E. C.: Training Teachers for Mixed Ability Classes	39





# Reviews

## The Comprehensive Output

**How They Fared** by Guy Neave, Routledge & Kegan Paul (1975), pp. 225, £5.50.

There has been regrettably little research into comprehensive schools, and more particularly into how successful they are in opening up opportunity and thereby reducing wastage of talent. Guy Neave's study of 969 entrants to university from 163 comprehensives in 1968 has broken new ground in this respect and, albeit tentatively, answered some highly significant questions. He was able to use data from the *Half Way There* survey by Benn and Simon on the internal organisation of the schools to supplement his own on the students, and was thus able to compare the influence of various school policies.

The schools were categorised as (1) 100 'established' comprehensives where 585 students had experienced all their secondary education, (2) 40 'transitional' where 171 had spent three to six years since the changeover and (3) 21 'crypto grammar' where 212 were a pre-comprehensive selective intake and could therefore be regarded as a control group likely to resemble grammar school products.

In a short review one can highlight only a few significant findings and their implications, especially those concerning the 126 known eleven-plus failures who formed 13% of these university entrants, mostly from long established comprehensives. Of this important minority a slightly higher proportion (44%) were from manual working-class homes, while the relative proportions of middle and working class among both eleven-plus successsfuls and those who took no such examination were the same, respectively 63% and 37%. Given that over half all comprehensives are

creamed by co-existing grammar schools, their success in sending at least the same ratio of working-class students to university as grammar schools did is significant, though underlining the continuing hold of the middle class. Dr Neave's study leaves no doubt that comprehensives are being more successful than bipartite and independent schools with late developers.

The book also goes some way in showing how this is happening. The key factor is the opportunity to catch up in open access sixth forms. More than half those from established and transitional comprehensives had completed their O Levels in the sixth, but in open sixths they took more. Eleven-plus failures were more likely to have originally taken some 'vocational' O Levels and caught up with the necessary 'academic' passes in the sixth. The open sixth clearly benefits potential university entrants as well as the less academic who might otherwise drop out at sixteen.

Both in the open sixth and lower down the school, at A and O Level, comprehensive students were more likely to have taken a mixture of science and arts subjects. Thus they showed a greater tendency to defer commitment, presumably because comprehensives gave them more opportunity to do so. 'Late developers' emerge as adolescents who take longer to discover where their interests and talents lie, and flexibility in internal school structure is obviously vital in enabling them to do this continuously from thirteen or so through into the sixth.

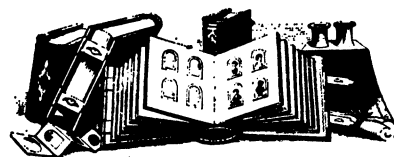
Dr Neave's questionnaires also aimed to ascertain the relative influence of home, school and friends. The school's influence seems to have been most positively significant for working-class students when that of the home was neutral or negative, and generally of no importance to those from professional homes. Working-class parents with minimal education themselves relied on examination results to tell them

whether or not to encourage their children to continue, and these students were consequently 'far more likely to rely on school assessment of their abilities and aptitudes than middle-class students'. The significance of streaming in discouraging late developers among working-class children is obvious. In this context Dr Neave has illumined much well documented evidence on the crude relationship between social class and educational achievement.

Among factors relating to 'the impact of the comprehensive school upon the university' – the book's subtitle – 'those most worth noting are that more students from comprehensives had mixed arts and science A Levels: of these more had taken a vocational O Level together with a science/arts mixture, more chose science and technology degree courses, and they came mainly from open sixth forms.

This study contains so much important material that one hesitates to cavil. But it is marred by the author's tendency to belabour points and indulge in tendentious speculation. This last feature, however, draws attention to the urgent need for further research on how comprehensive schools are continuing to draw out latent talent, how all-through and tiered structures compare in this, and what choices their sixth formers are making across the whole higher education arena.

NANETTE WHITBREAD  
*Leicester College of Education*



## A Gorsebush?

**What School is For**, by Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist, Methuen (1974), pp. 133, £1.30 (Paperback, £0.65).

I do not really want to knock this little book too hard. A lot of thoughtful work has obviously gone into it, and the subject, in 1975, is one that we should all be considering. Unfortunately, although short, it is extremely hard to read. Perceptive and useful ideas are for ever coming half into view, and sliding away again as one tries to grapple with them. The total effect of the authors' style is rather like a gorsebush, somewhat tangled and unwelcoming.

After reading it twice I did what many better reviewers have done, and turned to the blurb on the back to have the authors' intentions, at least, made clear to me. They succeed in transforming three essential concepts in the current debate: 'relevance', 'working-class culture', and 'middle-class culture'. By analysing the infinitely complex reality behind them they show that the culture of the pupils and the culture of the school do not have to be incompatible, but that their synthesis demands nothing less than the reconstitution of school as a workshop for the creation of a new culture.

There is indeed, a lot of analysis of the problems. But it never quite gets anywhere. There are a great many statements like 'Schools cannot stay as they are. We are only now on the point of discovering how to use them so that they work.' But we do not get any nearer to the actual, factual reality. The authors point out the closed door, assure us that in the very near future we are going to have to open it – and back off.

The authors are described, or describe themselves, as 'both experienced teachers'. But I get the

feeling that these pages are written from outside the school for readers who are also outside. The nitty-gritty 'how' and 'what' of a new type of education is very elusive.

'Teach the working-class assuming that they will stay working-class but that they will nevertheless be struggling for equality and for greater fulfilment—as a class.' It's a nice thought, but it does not really shine a light through the educational fog of the 1970's.

EMMELINE GARNETT

*Wreake Valley College, Leicestershire*

## Non-streamed Teaching

**Mixed Ability Teaching.** A report on a survey conducted by the Assistant Masters Association, Gordon House, 20p. post free.

**Handling Mixed Ability Groups in the Secondary School.** Edited by H. W. Bradley and J. G. Goulding, University of Nottingham, 50p.

The Mixed Ability debate has moved from preoccupation with the arguments for mixed ability grouping to the practical problems of techniques and methods. An increasing number of schools are adopting mixed ability groupings, not only because it appears to be the logical consequence of ending external selection, but because it presents new possibilities.

There are no perfect solutions to educational problems but increasingly teachers are choosing to face the problems arising from mixed ability groupings rather than those produced by streaming. Local courses organised by teachers centres, University departments and local authorities are increasingly providing opportunities for the detailed examination of problems and the exchange of practical techniques. The Nottingham

University discussion document is significantly titled; the emphasis is on handling the new system. The A.M.A. report is less concerned with practical classroom activities and, indeed, acknowledges that one reason for the survey was the misgiving of some of its members about the effect of unstreaming on academic standards.

The A.M.A. pamphlet summarises the information derived from questionnaires to members in both selective and non-selective schools which have at least one year unstreamed. It has little statistical significance. It does present a collection of teachers' views on the introduction of mixed ability systems and indicates fears and problems. The answer to the question, 'Why was a mixed ability system introduced in your school?' reveals much about the forces of democratic advance. Twenty-four schools changed to mixed ability structure by Headmasters' 'decree', one changed as a result of staff pressure!

The A.M.A. report suggests that teachers recognise that mixed ability systems avoid the dreaded 'sink' with the 'low group mentality'; there is a welcome for the improved possibility of 'social health' but little emphasis given to the effects of increased expectations of both teachers and taught on the progress of children who no longer face unnecessary falls in the selection hurdles. There is some information about how the groups were formed and which subjects found the transition easy and which found it difficult. French and Mathematics belong most often to the awkward squad. The problems of the least able are touched upon and there is an encouraging section on why some schools reverted to streaming after a temporary flirtation with the new heresy. No attempt is made to establish causal connections between failures in mixed ability teaching and the host of variables which may play a part.

However, there is a clear indication that teacher preparedness for the new

demands of mixed ability teaching is inadequate. Retaining streamed class techniques in a mixed ability situation will produce the boredom of the more able and the frustration of the least able which some A.M.A. members reported. Evaluation of the mixed ability system is mentioned but there is little indication of how this might be done. Banbury School is reported to have an evaluation project in hand and the cautious are invited to wait upon its findings rather than rush into mixed ability teaching as an act of faith. The streamed system is, of course, normal and therefore needs no evaluation to persuade teachers to retain it. The A.M.A. report is a pale reflection of much that has been written before and it is hardly calculated to inspire or provoke but it may perform a useful service in bringing the issues of mixed ability teaching to the notice of teachers who have not yet been concerned or involved.

The Nottingham discussion documents are more closely directed. The practical problems in adapting to mixed ability teaching are outlined and there is discussion of possible solutions but the reader is left to apply what is useful in other teachers' experience to his own particular problems. A concise account of the research background to non-streaming is followed by sections on grouping within the classroom and case studies on organisation. A chapter on the exceptional children at both ends of the ability spectrum is succeeded by a detailed guide to the assessment of individual progress in Science which might be adapted to other subject areas.

Collection of papers produced after a conference can often do little more than hint at the discussions which took place but there is much of practical value in these short articles. The Socratic method depended upon the perception of the questioner; the teachers who collaborated in this particular conference pose a large number of relevant questions in their

articles and provide the necessary prompting for other teachers to think about their own particular problems. At fifty pence, the discussion documents are good value from the Nottingham School of Education.

**DEREK ROBERTS**

*Campion School, Northamptonshire.*

## The New Teachers

**Teaching**, by John Watts, David and Charles (1974), pp. 151, £2.95.

In his contribution to a new series exploring the professions, John Watts, himself a teacher of considerable experience, sets out to examine two fundamental issues – what sort of person chooses to become a teacher and secondly, what sort of person does the teacher become. Drawing on his own experience, he has attempted to provide the public at large with an insight into teaching as a profession, with its own code of conduct, organisational structure and relationships, thereby hoping to introduce new concepts and attitudes to the role of teachers and, at the same time, dispel the age-old myth of the strait-laced school ma'am and public schoolmaster well-versed in the classics.

His book offers a detailed and occasionally light-hearted analysis of today's teacher and his relationships both with his pupils and his superiors in the educational system. Referring often to personal experiences, as teacher, headmaster and university lecturer, John Watts discusses the variety of reasons which induce school leavers and mature students to train as teachers. He explains not only the so-called freedoms and 'perks' of the profession – the ability to teach virtually as one likes, extensive holidays and security of tenure – which spring readily to the minds of outsiders who know little of the realities of the profession, but also the numerous frustrations and hindrances,

such as relationships with superiors within the staffroom, feuds between university and college trained teachers, the restrictions of syllabuses and a society geared towards examination success.

Many of those who so readily spring to attack schools and teachers do so in ignorance of reality. Merely because they too have passed through the educational process does not of itself qualify them to pass judgment. Persons such as these would do well to consult John Watt's book carefully, and perhaps they will realise that outsiders have little knowledge of the functions and workings of today's schools. How many tend to forget the ever increasing demands made upon teachers – the need to explore with the pupil instead of preaching to him, the values of child-centred education, and perhaps most overlooked of all, the dual function of the teacher as both teacher and pastor of those in his care? How many other professions can boast such a wide and ever expanding diversity of functions?

John Watts does not confine himself solely to the teacher but he discusses also the roles and relationships between head teachers and their deputies, governors and educational authorities, the various teachers' unions and the innovatory Schools Council, explaining where responsibility lies for issues such as curriculum, discipline and finance. Nor does he neglect that other important body which plays an unobtrusive but crucial role in the teachers' daily routine – the numerous ancillary staff and assistants.

Many a parent baffled by his child's use of terms such as humanities, form tutor, year co-ordinator, director of studies, would be well advised to consult this book as the author gives a detailed analysis of the structure of different kinds of schools, both comprehensive and selective.

As a parent, former teacher and headmaster, John Watts is more than qualified to sit in judgment on his profession. His approach is at once

informative and useful to all interested in teaching and schools, and he produces a lively account of the modern educational system and its teachers. The book itself provides an adequate wealth of detail for the public at large for whom it was written and it answers many of the questions so frequently asked about the profession: what qualities do we look for in student teachers? What should we expect of teachers? What is the relationship between headmaster and his school? Why are teachers introducing curriculum changes and breaking down traditional subject barriers? To teacher readers, much of what John Watts writes must, I feel, echo their own sentiments, although some would perhaps take issue with him on his attitude towards so-called 'priggish schoolgirls' and those 'intent on changing the world' who aspire to be future teachers, and to his views on school management and discipline. Others would doubtless grow even more envious of those schools to which he constantly refers in forward-looking counties like Leicestershire and Cambridgeshire where educational innovation is encouraged and is proving successful.

ALISON M. ALTON

## More Readers

**Equal Opportunity in Education.** A reader in social class and educational opportunity, ed. Harold Silver, Methuen (1973), hardback £3.60, **Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education**, ed. John Eggleston, Methuen (1974), hardback £4.80, paperback £1.95.

Silver's selection of readings has a first section covering 1922-47 under the heading 'Secondary Education for All?' It opens with Tawney's protest against the hypocrisy of rationing education

on lines of class, even while professing democratic values. But the moral overtones were to be submerged under subsequent psychometric and sociological analysis purporting to deal with established scientific findings, in a 'value-free' way.

'Selection under attack 1948-67', the second section, opens with a disciple of Tawney and founding member of the *Forum* editorial board, Shena D. Simon, whose *Three Schools or One?* allows for the initial date. Five years on came the critique of intelligence testing and its effect on the English school system by one of the editors of *Forum*. This took up and developed, in relation to the English scene, points raised in a notable American study *Who Shall be Educated?* (1946) by Warner, Havighurst and Loeb (from which there is a better extract). There followed some sociological studies of opportunity and mobility in relation to social class.

But, in reality, of course, the 1950's was an era of consolidation of bipartitism. Concentration on the few opposing voices tends to obscure the sharpness of the conflict. And there remained a long way to go.

Indeed – to judge from Eggleston's preface to his selection of research papers – in the sociological sphere the idea that 'intelligence is not an intrinsic quality of the child' seems radically new in the 1970's. Even now it is only arrived at in an impressionistic way, rather than by disciplined assessment of the biological framework and methodological shortcomings of mental testing which is necessary to an informed and critical approach.

Silver's survey should assist sociologists to gain some historical perspective, which they also lack. (Indeed Eggleston labours under the delusion that historical explanation has to do only with 'unique events'!) But, despite general and sectional introductions to the readings – which themselves plumb points in a continuing discussion of equality of

opportunity – the actualities which changed the course of the discussion, including the advance of comprehensive reorganisation, tend to slip from view.

Extracts covering the 1960's range from Jackson and Marsden (1962) to Plowden (1967), with excursions via G. H. Bantock, Robbins, J. W. B. Douglas, Sweden and Circular 10/65. This introduces the comparative element, political decision making, the beginning of the conservative backlash. But perhaps the Robbins Report (1963) marks a watershed. For not only was evidence marshalled relating to the pool of ability, to prompt a great expansion of higher education, but there resulted a shift of administrative attention to consolidating a binary system at this level – a cause plainly lost at the secondary stage.

The final section is oddly headed 'Next Monday 1968-73', from a reminder by Titmuss that inequality can hardly be abolished 'next week'. Something of a hotchpotch – bits of Black Paper, bits of orthodox and 'new' sociology and whatnot – it indicates that to come so far up to date is to risk losing perspective and landing in the midst of unfinished business. But the point emphasised is A. H. Halsey's exposition of the case for positive discrimination, likely, in the editor's view, to become a central issue. He wisely refrains from foretelling the outcome of the present confusion within the sociology of education reflected in his selection.

This is also mirrored in Eggleston's symposium, particularly in his own preface. The book is intended, he says, as 'a guide for those who seek access to the intellectual and emotional core of research and, in so doing, wish to use it critically'. What can this mean?

Perhaps he has in mind his own later argument, namely that sociology has been bent on gaining scientific respectability and academic recognition in a highly opportunist way; that this has now produced a strong reaction, bringing the established methodology into question, and prompting an

emotional reviewing of sins and alternative prospects; but that nonetheless both intellectual and emotional approaches have stimulated useful work, though findings must be carefully assessed by prospective users. With this last proposition there can be no disagreement, though Eggleston is not a sure guide to the weaknesses of either camp.

So far as education is concerned the need is for an intelligent rapprochement between disciplines, but there is no sign of a recognition of this. That Eggleston denigrates academic psychology by comparison with the 'exciting' hypotheses of Freudianism, evades the salient question for sociology of finding means to incorporate the historical element, and plunges into philosophical argument without the necessary equipment to keep afloat – all this suggests opportunism in a new guise.

Unfortunately this book, unlike the other which is also from Methuen, is badly produced and unpleasant to read. It does, however, contain some useful articles – in particular Colin Lacey's rigorous study of the process of unstreaming 'Hightown' grammar school.

JOAN SIMON

## Comprehensive Guidance

**A Matter of Choice: a study of guidance and subject option** by M. I. Reid, B. R. Barnett, H. A. Rosenberg, NFER (1974), 259 pp. £3.85.

In some secondary schools, pupils entering their fourth year are now offered a considerable choice of subjects, alongside their compulsory core course. This is a relatively new phenomenon, and the present study is particularly welcome in that it deals

with what is virtually uncharted territory. It sets out to analyse the choice structure and guidance procedures provided by five comprehensive schools for their students towards the end of their third year, examines the part played by teachers, pupils and parents in making these subject choices, and attempts to assess just how satisfactory the choices were found to be.

In all four schools the task of guiding pupils' choices was shared by senior academic and administrative staff, house staff and counsellors, and many of these felt inadequately equipped to carry out their guidance role satisfactorily. Most teachers are in fact expected to fulfil this highly complex role by rule of thumb, and the study illustrates a great need for more readily accessible courses in this field.

The major part of the research is concerned with pupils: why they chose as they did, who influenced them, how directly their choices were related to vocational plans and how far they were satisfied with their subsequent courses in their fourth year. The findings tend to be somewhat predictable. Take pupils' criteria for choice of subjects, for instance, and their subsequent satisfaction with these choices. It was found that pupils of below average ability were more likely to select subjects because they felt that they were 'no good' at the rest, were not able to think of any other alternatives, thought that a subject would be easy or that it sounded attractive because it was new. By contrast, the more able pupils tended to choose subjects at which they were good and which they liked and in which they hoped to do well in public examinations. And the more able pupils were found to be generally satisfied with their choices, while the rest were rather less happy with their courses.

This pattern runs right through the study. The authors devote a number of chapters to such questions as misplacement of pupils, absences,

leaving intentions, parental involvement in choosing options, as well as parents' subsequent satisfaction with these choices. In each of these chapters, able children emerge as those most suitably placed, most satisfied, least frequently absent, etc. And these favoured pupils who are clearly best catered for by the system tend to have interested parents and to belong to the non-manual classes.

The results of this study are, then, not particularly surprising. It is, nevertheless, an important book. It has analysed what are, after all, very new procedures in a very new kind of school. And it has highlighted the fact that, despite the many advances which this new kind of school has brought, we are still catering least well for those who most need our help.

D. L. MEEK

*Longslade Upper School, Leicestershire*

### INDICTMENT OF MARGARET THATCHER

There are still a few copies of this unique **FORUM** publication, available. This puts Mrs. Thatcher's record, as Secretary of State for Education, 1970-3, under a microscopic examination; concentrating specifically on her arbitrary actions relating to comprehensive education.

#### ORDER YOUR COPY NOW

Price: 40p post free  
from: 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield

## **The following BACK NUMBERS of FORUM are still available price 50p each.**

- Vol 1 No 3 Experiences with a backward class; General Subjects in the Junior School; Teaching English.**
- Vol 2 No 1 French in non-selective schools; children who are backward; Education of the average child.**
- Vol 6 No 3 Symposium on the Robbins Report.**
- Vol 7 No 2 Special number on Further Education.**
- Vol 8 No 2 Special number on the Probationary Year.**
- Vol 9 No 1 The Schools Council at Work; CSE on Trial.**
- Vol 9 No 3 Symposium on the Plowden Report.**
- Vol 10 No 1 The Sixth Form in the Comprehensive School; Curriculum planning in a large school.**
- Vol 10 No 3 Focus on Groups — teaching in groups.**
- Vol 11 No 2 Two Years after Plowden; Self-directed learning.**
- Vol 11 No 3 Freedom of Choice — for whom? A new Education Act?**
- Vol 12 No 2 From secondary to primary.**
- Vol 12 No 3 Teaching Unstreamed Classes.**
- Vol 13 No 1 Teachers for Comprehensives; Mixed ability science.**
- Vol 13 No 2 Assessment — for Whom? Recent trends in examining.**
- Vol 14 No 2 Innovation in Education.**
- Vol 14 No 3 ROSLA and De-Schooling.**
- Vol 15 No 1 Democracy and Innovation in Education.**
- Vol 15 No 2 16 to 19.**
- Vol 16 No 1 Resource-based learning.**
- Vol 16 No 2 Schools CAN make a difference.**
- Vol 16 No 3 Going Comprehensive in England, Wales and Scotland.**
- Vol 17 No 1 The 'new' sociology and education.**
- Vol 17 No 2 New Directions.**

Order from: **Forum**, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield.