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# FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION OF NEW TRENDS IN EDUCATION

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# Stop Cuts not Innovation

**Forum** sees the issue of 16+ examination reform as closely bound up with making a reality at school level of genuinely comprehensive education for all to the minimum school leaving age. The satisfactory implementation of policy and organizational decisions on both require substantial improvements in resources, and hence both are threatened by cuts in educational expenditure.

We last published a special number on assessment five years ago, having looked specifically at CSE five years before that. Our main focus has, however, been on curricula and teaching approaches to enable all children to develop their full potential for learning from the day they start to whenever they leave school. Hence we have argued against labelling and segregating them in so-called ability streams or sets, and have advocated nonstreamed classes or flexible grouping of teachers and children.

Of course we have been well aware that the dual examination systems of GCE and CSE have imposed constraints on teachers to divide and hence label young secondary school pupils to prepare them for their GCE, CSE or non-examination destinations. Such has been the divisive, anti-educational influence of 16+ examinations which has run counter to the ideal of comprehensive reorganization even as this has gained momentum over the past twelve years. The present examination structure is dysfunctional in the comprehensive school context as it prematurely selects a minority for sponsorship.

Thus it is logical for **Forum** to welcome the Schools Council Sub-Committee's proposal that a common examination system replace the present divisive structure. Our Editorial Board Statement is published in this issue.

The nature of these examinations is equally important and must relate to their purpose which must be appropriate to the context of comprehensive secondary education. Modes 2 and 3 have offered teachers an opportunity to construct courses more suited to the aims and demands of comprehensive schools than GCE was ever intended to be, and CSE has had considerable impact on some GCE boards. It is proper for teachers to control the examination of their own pupils so that teaching and assessment objectives synchronise, with the curriculum determining the examination instead of vice versa. Articles in this issue by H. G. Macintosh on Mode 3 and by J. F. Eggleston on mastery testing both treat of these matters. We also review a book edited by the former and containing a chapter by the latter.

Primary school teachers, now largely freed from

the educationally distorting constraints of 11+, have been accused of allowing standards of literacy and numeracy to slip in the process of liberating the curriculum. While hard evidence from the NFER and others substantially refutes such accusations, DES has responded by setting up an Assessment of Performance Unit which has aroused some suspicion. Clearly, teachers need criteria and means for assessing children's individual progress and evaluating their own teaching strategies, but without becoming victims of external constraints on their professional judgement. To promote discussion of how this may be achieved at the primary stage we publish articles by Wynne Harlen on the way teachers are devising check-lists for observing and recording individual progress so as the better to inform their teaching decisions, and by Brenda Engel on recent American experience.

As we go to press we are alarmed that many educationally sound developments of recent years, which we seek to promote and extend, are at risk of being stifled and undermined by short-sighted economies promulgated in the White Paper on Public Expenditure. Innovation cannot be achieved without cost nor, especially, without adequate staffing. The rejection of the marginal 10% improvement in staffing allowed in the 1972 White Paper, and a consequent standstill in staffing standards, means rejection of extended educational opportunity where it is most needed. It will hit small group remedial help with numeracy and literacy in primary schools and sabotage such other time consuming, staff intensive developments as school-based curriculum development at all levels, Modes 2 and 3 submissions and elaboration of continuous teacher assessment schemes.

The progressive features of the new Education Bill will be gainsaid by cuts in projected expenditure on education, as will the much vaunted new attention supposedly to be paid to the hitherto neglected 16-19 educational dropouts.

Resigning as Under-Secretary of State in February, Joan Lester said: 'Thinking that sees education as a consumer industry is wrong-headed. It is an investment industry.' **Forum** believes in investment in our children's future by providing the nation's schools with the human and material resources, which many currently have not, to extend opportunity for educational success to all through breaking down anachronistic barriers that wastefully eliminate or alienate so many prematurely.

# Examinations at 16 Plus?

A statement by the **Forum** Editorial Board

The Schools Council has now got all the 'evidence' or views of teachers' associations and others in response to its proposals for a single examination at 16 plus. It is now weighing this material and will, presumably, shortly come to a definite decision as to the recommendation to be made to the Secretary of State. If one thing is clear, it is that this matter raises questions of profound importance for the future of secondary education, and for comprehensive schools in particular.

The **Forum** Editorial Board feels it has a duty to make its position clear, and a right to be heard in this controversy. **Forum** has been the only journal consistently to support the move to comprehensive education since its foundation in 1958 – today a considerable proportion of students aged 16 plus are in *comprehensive* schools; soon, these will be in the majority. Further, we have as consistently supported the move towards the unification of the school through the modification, or abolition, of streaming and other divisive procedures. In our view, this movement is resulting in an entirely new situation so far as examinations and assessment are concerned – a situation which necessitates a fresh look at the whole business of examinations at 16 plus.

There is no doubt whatever that the present examination system is obsolete – that it can no longer be defended on rational grounds. For one thing, this system evolved under the old tripartite system, and so necessarily reflects the divisive nature of that system – now at last on its way out. GCE derives historically from the pre-war School Certificate examination, expressly designed for grammar school students only – after World War 2, therefore, for the supposed 20 per cent or so of the so-called 'ability range'. CSE, which originated in 1964, was a belated response to the attempts of secondary modern schools to thrust upwards and offer some objective (and better job opportunities) for their students. It was specifically designed for the 40 per cent of students below the grammar school group in the ability range. The two exams, therefore, in theory cover 60 per cent of students only – leaving 40 per cent of all students out in the cold. Such is the position at present. While the organisational form of secondary education is being unified through the establishment of comprehensive schools, its inner structure or content too often remains bipartite in outlook and, unfortunately, in much of its practice.

This situation presents untold difficulties to comprehensive schools – hence the urgent need for change. As non-streaming becomes more common in the 11 to 13/14 age range, pressure to allocate students to either GCE or CSE exam syllabuses forces streaming or banding

on schools for the 14 to 16 courses. It is true that some schools, utilising Mode 3 with both CSE and GCE examinations, have managed to develop a situation where all students can be kept (and taught) together up to the age of 16, but this is still a rare phenomenon and involves a great deal of labour and much negotiating with examination boards which is not always successful in its outcome. Nevertheless these schools have shown the way forward. They have proved in practice that the means already exist to overcome the divisive features of the present exam system, and, further, that students well below the so-called 60th percentile can be assessed, and can benefit from working towards a teacher (or school) based examination. In this sense, then, the lineaments already exist for bringing into being a form of school-based examination (or system of assessment) for *all* students aged 16 plus.

## Assessment for all

In our view, this must be the way forward. It is not only desirable now, as a first step, to fuse GCE and CSE into a single examination at 16 plus as the Schools Council suggest, but it is also essential to begin now to transform this examination into a system of assessment to cover all students, and not only the so-called top 60 per cent. How this may be done we discuss later. In the meantime we wish to make it clear that we see the single examination as the first condition for advance, but not the whole that must be aimed at, if present positive developments in the schools are not to be inhibited.

What are these developments that must be taken into account? First and foremost there is that referred to at the start – the swing away from streaming and towards a more flexible structure that permits of mixed ability grouping. It is this that is the new, developing feature of comprehensive schools, and it is in our view essential that nothing be done now to freeze this movement, or to turn it back. Our reasons for this lie in the belief that these more flexible structures are profoundly in the interests of the mass of the children, and that the swing against streaming, in delaying the labelling, docketing, and subsequent programming of children, is educationally highly desirable and indeed a necessary condition for that raising of academic standards which critics of comprehensive education so often urge. These new procedures allow time and scope for students – and their teachers – to discover their direction, develop their

interests and abilities and enhance their knowledge and skills before irrevocable decisions are taken as to their educational 'ceiling' and therefore their life perspectives. Certainly this approach presents new problems to teachers and the last two numbers of *Forum* have concentrated on these issues; but it is significant that, in spite of this, teachers are voting with their feet to bring these new procedures into being and are fully prepared to face up to, and to overcome, the new problems of teaching and learning involved.

To allow for this development – and to provide the conditions where it may be nurtured and taken further – requires that any assessments made at 16 plus must embrace *all* the students; or, to put it the other way round, that an examination is not set up which necessitates the segregation of particular groups of children from what might be called the mainstream. As every teacher knows, this means providing similar objectives for all children in terms of assessment. Not to do this, as at present, is to prepare a recipe for failure for a significant proportion of the nation's children – a course which is educationally indefensible, and emphatically one which, in the circumstances of today, the nation cannot afford.

## Mastery Learning

Any system of assessment at 16 plus must, in our view, now be worked out in terms of the educational requirements of the schools, that is, of the children themselves, and not of the universities, the professions, industry, or any other section of the community. The school's objective must remain that of finding the optimal conditions for personal growth for each individual child. This does not mean that these other demands must not be taken into account, and means found whereby the form of assessment eventually decided may prove of value to these bodies and interests. But this must not be the prime consideration in determining the nature of assessment procedures. In view of the profound 'backlash' effects traditional examination procedures are known to have on the schools and children, the primary aim must be to develop those forms of assessment that reinforce the achievement of teachers' and pupils' objectives through the educational process. This means that assessment procedures must, fundamentally, be school based and teacher controlled. Further it means that such assessments must be grounded on mastery learning (which

Professor Eggleston advocates in this issue) rather than on examination procedures of the old kind designed specifically to differentiate between students according to the so-called normal curve of distribution. This latter examination technique was developed to facilitate the selective function of schools; what we are concerned with here is not selection, but the provision of objectives appropriate to the needs of *all* students in the complex world of the late 20th century. And this, incidentally, is to raise sights for the majority of the children, not to lower them.

Our position, then, is clear. We favour, as an immediate first step, a single system of examination for all children at 16 plus. But we believe that this must allow scope for the transition to a system of *assessment* for all students – not of 'examination'. This latter system must be school based and teacher controlled, and involve techniques related to mastery learning. External moderation should be employed as is already the case with Mode 3 examinations. Such must be the perspective.

This has certain implications. First, the system of assessment should not result in a set of grades for each individual student. Mastery testing does not lend itself to grading and such practice is educationally undesirable. Second, we stress the need for school and teacher based assessment – as is, of course, the practice at universities; if university teachers can take on this function for their students why should it be denied to school teachers? Third, we see the establishment of a single examination at 16 plus as only the first step towards the general development of new modes of assessment throughout the secondary school age range – a fundamentally different concept to that of the one-off examination at the end of a 'course'.

## Mode 3 flexibility

A considerable amount of work is now underway which can form the basis of these new forms of assessment; reference may be made here to Dr Wynne Harlen's article in this issue which reports developments designed primarily to enhance the teacher's awareness of his/her pupils' educational development in terms of specific skills, abilities and level of concept formation. Such teacher controlled assessment also enables teachers to encourage pupils to participate in self-assessment and so to take more responsibility for their own learning. It puts the onus on teachers to evaluate their teaching, thus

building evaluation into its proper place in curriculum development. Forms of assessment can be devised which relate to teachers' educational objectives, as is already the case with much of the Mode 3 assessment procedures. It is clearly important to encourage this development rather than to inhibit it, and, in this connection, we wish to draw attention to Mr Macintosh's fears, expressed in his article in this issue, that teacher based (or Mode 3 type) assessment is threatened by the Schools Council's proposals. To fasten a single rigid system on the schools now could be disastrous. Current decisions must be based on an understanding and appreciation of present trends in the schools, reflect these new developments, and allow for their further extension. This is the key issue.

## In-service training

Finally, such a perspective requires one thing – and that is the development of greater expertise among teachers in the new modes of assessment. As Mr Macintosh shows in his article, Mode 3 has not been taken up to the extent hoped for earlier. Nevertheless the proportion of students examined by this Mode has steadily increased. A vigorous campaign of in-service education on these new techniques is both desirable and necessary. But to do this effectively teachers need time and adequate back-up in terms of resources; these are essential and this certainly means an improvement in overall staff-student ratios so that teachers can be freed for this necessary work. According to Professor Jack Wrigley, teachers have already shown that they can and do master the techniques required without difficulty; in his preface to the new Examination Bulletin recently published by the Schools Council he expresses his belief 'that teaching and examining should be considered together, that the knowledge needed to understand assessment techniques is not great, although important, and that teachers are quite capable of handling the techniques required'. We suggest that the teachers should be enabled to seize this opportunity, and that they should understand that they are the only people who can do the job effectively.

In sum, **Forum** holds that the move to comprehensive systems of education together with a minimum leaving age of 16 means that assessment over the full five-year secondary stage for *all* is now possible and should be implemented. We propose that the solution to this key problem should take the lines set out in this statement.

## Assessment

New readers may be interested to know of previous **Forum** articles on examinations and assessment, still available in back numbers.

- J. F. Eggleston:* **Prediction, Selection, Description and Choice**  
(vol. 16 no. 2)
- Tom Kydd:* **Reviewing exams**  
(vol. 15 no. 2)
- P. L. Uglow:* **A Panel Chairman looks at CSE** (vol. 15 no. 1)
- J. F. Eggleston & D. Holford:* **Recent Trends in Examining**  
(vol. 13 no. 2 & vol. 14 no.1)
- D. Wheeler:* **New Methods of Assessment**  
(vol. 10 no. 2)
- J. F. Eggleston:* **Assessment Procedures and Curriculum Reform**  
(vol. 10 no. 1)
- J. F. Eggleston:* **CSE Science**  
(vol. 9 no. 1)
- F. Worthington:* **CSE Technical Drawing & Handicraft**  
(vol. 9 no. 1)
- R. Adams:* **CSE Home Economics**  
(vol. 9 no. 1)
- K. D. Bradshaw:* **A School Reaction to CSE**  
(vol. 9 no. 1)

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# Educational Evaluation in the USA: a biased view

**Brenda S Engel**

Brenda Engel has taught art in elementary schools in the Boston area, worked as an advisor in open education for Greater Boston Teachers Center and Education Development Center and taught workshops and courses for teachers. She is currently working as a free-lance consultant as well as teaching at Lesley College in Cambridge, Mass. She has published two monographs, *Arranging the Informal Classroom* and *A Handbook on Documentation*.

Evaluation of an educational programme in the past, when it existed at all, was an adjunct to the main event. It did not, in general, loom as large or exercise as much influence over the process of education as it does nowadays in the USA and it was certainly not anticipated with the same mixture of reverence and anxiety. An enormous amount of time, money and human energy currently go into the evaluation effort and one begins to wonder why. One explanation which seems to me persuasive is that evaluation has moved into the space vacated by philosophy and ideological commitment. The latter are at a low ebb here for a variety of much examined reasons: the rapid advance in technology, a disillusionment caused by Watergate and other evidences of public corruption, the Vietnam war, racial and sexual oppression, etc. So we look to evaluation to tell us what is good or bad, successful or unsuccessful, deserving or undeserving.

In addition, because of a traditional and deep-rooted belief in science, in 'The Scientific Method,' there's a demand for clarity, efficiency, hard data, in what is popularly and often moralistically called accountability. Means of assessment (which are seen as being mainly statistical) become separated from purposes of education (which are stated verbally and theoretically) and, in fact, become substitutes for them. Means as ends. And the most popular means are standardized tests with their quantified outcomes and aura of indisputability. Numbers are numbers. They can't be argued with, as people are fond of saying, and everyone knows that 108 isn't as good as 128. The human event behind the 108 is usually obscured by a fog of mystification, not available for scrutiny to the layman. A recent report claimed significantly that 'since 1948 Educational Testing Service has doubled in size and revenue every five years'.<sup>1</sup>

Belief in the validity of The Scientific Method applied to human beings has thus encouraged a fracture in the educational 'gestalt': knowledge is regarded as independent of the knower; facts, of meaning; evaluation, of educational theory. We are reduced to testing what is testable and one is reminded of the old story about the drunk groping for his lost coin under the street lamp

where the light is brighter rather than looking for it where he lost it, in a somewhat less well lighted place.

Right now there are some indications that this dreary picture may be changing, evidenced by a good deal of criticism of testing and evaluation. Recently a meeting of twenty-five national educational institutions, convened in Washington by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation, issued a number of caveats and suggestions for further study. At the same time, across the country, plans for reforms have been made and new ideas offered in the last few years.

## Reappraisal and Reform

A number of developments have contributed to this criticism: open or informal programmes here which have frequently been hamstrung or forced to compromise by the application of methods of assessment essentially designed for a different concept of education;<sup>2</sup> the obvious inadequacy and unfairness of judging teachers, classrooms and whole educational programmes by the results of standardised tests; increasing attention to Piaget's theories of development which have shaken the image of the child in school as a container being filled with information the level of which is measurable at any point; parents, teachers and children sharing a new general awareness of the hazards of passivity, of allowing people to be treated, judged, made into objects by others. An editorial from a prestigious periodical which recently devoted two issues to the subject of testing includes this sentence: 'Yet, in a sense, our dream of an efficient system of evaluating and classifying people has come true. Why, then, has the dream now turned into a bogey that haunts us and troubles our sleep?'<sup>3</sup> Loss of belief, perhaps, in the applicability of The Scientific Method to questions involving human options?

In the meantime, new concepts of evaluation are emerging, the most radical of which assume a different paradigm<sup>4</sup> underlying the educational process and the

process of evaluation. The paradigm, elaborated and schematised by three research psychologists – Chittenden, Amarel and Bussis – considers the child as an active learner rather than as an object undergoing a treatment. Evaluation is therefore extended to include a 'wide variety of student/teacher behaviors' as well as 'aspects of the physical environment'<sup>8</sup> which both influence and present opportunities to the learner. The concomitant change in the theory of schools and schooling substitutes for the commonly accepted belief in behaviourism a phenomenological view: 'Finally, the conception of knowledge underlying a new paradigm would assume that understanding, imagination, valuing and affect are inseparable aspects of human thought which, in turn, is inseparably bound to phenomenal experience'.<sup>9</sup> And 'Such things as "problem-solving" and "self-concept" have clearest meaning, however, when they are embedded in the real transactions of the school'.<sup>7</sup>

## Open-ended networks

What, first of all, are the actual educational implications of these beliefs? They are, not surprisingly, consistent with progressive or informal educational theory with its emphasis on the imagination of the individual, on problem-solving as opposed to information-storing, on the importance of personal and social factors. In school terms: art and poetry are valued; groups are often of mixed ages; activities that take place outside the school walls are recognised as part of education; specific subjects for study are not detailed in advance; knowledge is viewed as a network rather than as a ladder;<sup>8</sup> behavioural objectives are not set. As a result of this broader, less standardised concept of education, appropriate evaluation becomes likewise less standardised, less apparently 'certain'.

New instruments for assessment are being developed, some of which have limitations almost as serious as the old ones had: tests which are non-competitive and designed to provide feedback to teachers and children but which still depend on a view of the educational process as divisible into bite-sized pieces; check-lists of various kinds (of developmental factors, classroom skills, even of school equipment) which can be helpful (putting together the whole jigsaw puzzle in order to make sure none of the pieces of the picture is missing) but also entail a fairly set view of the content of education. More interesting, perhaps, are open-ended tasks designed to assess programmes in which children are encouraged to

exercise thought and imagination;<sup>9</sup> and Piagetian-type tasks to assess developmental progress<sup>10</sup>. In addition, educators and researchers at the University of North Dakota (under the leadership of Dr Vito Perrone) and at Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey have been working with open-ended interviews to investigate ideas and attitudes of parents, teachers and children.<sup>11</sup>

## Goals-related evaluation

On a more comprehensive scale, a number of schools and systems are using goals-related evaluations of individuals and programmes which depend on a multiplicity of documents and instruments ranging from interviews and inventories to standardised test scores. Some kind of summary judgments and recommendations are usually made, based on the information gathered compared to explicit goals. Such evaluations have been made by both outside agencies and internal evaluators and are aimed primarily at improvement of the programme; sometimes they are also presented as evidence to a funding agency.

Patricia Carini, at the Prospect School in Vermont, has used the process of documentation itself to demonstrate accountability: 'We assume that the single most important factor in a program is that it be self-reflective since reflection provides an informed basis for program evaluation. Thus it is not always so important to judge what a program looks like, or is accomplishing today as to grasp what its potential is for ongoingness, continuity and renewal. We also assume that parts of a program cannot be judged in isolation, but only in their relationship to other parts of the program and to the program as a whole'.<sup>12</sup> Meaning emerges from the materials itself and documentation is seen as a continual process central to the school's existence.

## An alternative paradigm

Last spring (1975) I spent about ten weeks observing and then compiling and writing an *Evaluation and Documentation of the Cambridge Alternative Public School*. My approach was based on ideas and methods of a number of colleagues and friends, among others, Michael Patton of the University of Minnesota: 'More concretely, the alternative paradigm relies on field techniques from anthropological rather than natural



science tradition, techniques such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, detailed description, and qualitative field notes'.<sup>13</sup>

In the final report, each of the eight classrooms in the school is described by a series of documents: a subjective, personal impression; photographs; a map of the space and arrangement; a check list of materials; a weekly schedule; two activity charts (which indicate what each child in the classroom did for about an hour and a half on two separate occasions); two interviews with each teacher on subjects such as the curriculum, means of control, record-keeping, personal background and experience, etc; a curriculum summary; a diagram of social relationships among the children; samples of children's work. I included a twenty-page evaluation of the classrooms consonant with a definition of evaluation formulated by Allen Graubard ('understanding the relation of theory and practice'<sup>14</sup>), juxtaposing quotations from sources congenial to the philosophy of the school (David Hawkins, John Blackie, John Dewey, Michael Armstrong . . .) with my own reactions derived

from the above documents. This section is divided into three parts: I. Context (organisation of space and materials, organisation of time and subject matter, relationships). II. Curriculum and classroom functioning (what is offered, individualisation, involvement in subject matter, child input, developmental issues). III. Evidence of learning (informal assessments, areas of evidence, record-keeping).

The usefulness of this kind of non-statistical, comprehensive evaluation is currently being put to the test (so to speak) in a number of different places. We are assuming a commitment to a less formal view of the educational process and are interested in usefulness – to educators, parents and children. Lillian Weber has spoken for those whose teaching is informed by philosophical conviction (precisely that which is lacking in most educators here) and who turn to evaluation for a particular kind of support: 'For what we in Open Corridors look for in the evaluative process is nothing more than help for a better implementation of our chosen direction'.<sup>15</sup>

#### References and Notes

1. Steven Brill, 'The Secrecy Behind the College Boards' *New York Magazine* (October 7, 1974).
2. For a thoughtful consideration of this subject see: George Hein, *An Open Education Perspective on Evaluation*, (Grand Forks, ND, North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation, 1975).
3. 'Standardized Testing in America' editorial in *The National Elementary School Principal* (July/August, 1975) p 3.
4. This use of the term paradigm is elaborated by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1962). For its specific application to educational evaluation see: Michael Patton, *Alternative Evaluation Research Paradigm*, (Grand Forks, ND, North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation, 1975).
5. Anne M Bussis, Edward A Chittenden, Marianne Amarel, 'Alternative Ways in Educational Evaluation, in *Testing and Evaluation: New Views*, (Washington DC: Association for Childhood Education International, 1975) p 11.
6. Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, 'Alternative Paradigms in Educational Evaluation' (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service; an unpublished research memorandum, 1974 p 9.
7. *Idem*
8. For a discussion of David Hawkins' ideas on the 'reconstruction of knowledge' see his book entitled *The Informed Vision* (New York: Agathon Press, 1974); also an editorial in *Forum* (Spring, 1975).
9. See: Eleanor R Duckworth, *A Comparison Study for Evaluating Primary School Science in Africa* (Newton, Mass: Education Development Center, 1971).
10. See: Nancy Langstaff *Teaching in an Open Classroom* (Boston: National Association of Independent Schools, 1975).
11. The three researchers mentioned above in footnotes 4, 5 and 6 have been working on teacher interviews: Nancy Miller at the University of North Dakota has developed a child interview entitled 'And What Do You Think?'
12. Patricia F Carini, 'Documentation, an Alternative Approach to Accountability' *Evaluation Reconsidered*, (New York: Workshop Center for Open Education, 1973), p 16.
13. Michael Patton, *op cit* p 8.
14. Allen Graubard *Free the Children*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) p 151.
15. Lillian Weber 'Toward the Finer Specificity' *Evaluation Reconsidered*, (New York: Workshop Center for Open Education, 1973) p 3.

# Assessing progress by teachers, for teachers

Wynne Harlen

From teaching science in schools and as a lecturer in a College of Education, Wynne Harlen has been working in the field of curriculum development in science for the primary and middle years since 1966, as evaluator of Science 5/13 from 1967 to 1973 and as director of Progress in Learning Science since then. She is author of **Science 5/13: A Formative Evaluation** (Macmillan) and contributor to two Schools Council Publications on curriculum evaluation.

Issues surrounding assessment are frequently confused by failure to clarify the objectives of the assessment, by which I mean what purposes an assessment is intended to achieve, rather than what is being assessed. Of course the question of the content of assessment is a central one but the question 'Why assess?' is better considered first since the answer determines to a large extent the 'what' and 'how'.

Assessment refers to the variety of processes through which information is gathered about pupils' achievements and characteristics. The information may be gathered for several purposes: to give feedback to the pupils about their performance; to convey to others – parents, employers, those in other educational institutions – the progress and achievements of the pupils; to compare achievements across schools and from one point in time to another; to guide the teacher in making decisions about how to help the progress of individual pupils. The source of information – the behaviour of pupils – is the same in all cases but the emphasis upon various aspects and the detail required about them varies for these different purposes. The following discussion is concerned with assessment carried out by a teacher, as part of the process of teaching, for the purpose of informing decisions about pupils' learning experiences. The objective of this kind of assessment is to make teaching and learning more effective; it is at the heart of the process which leads to the outcomes forming the raw material for all other kinds of assessment. But it is not only the most important – and, sadly, the most neglected – area, it also can provide data which would serve most of the other purposes of assessment.

The characteristics of this kind of assessment are that it is on-going, cumulative, diagnostic and focused on the individual pupil's development and progress. In some degree it is always part of teaching since teachers have to make decisions about the activities, materials, approaches and kinds of intervention to provide and are guided in these decisions by the abilities and characteristics of their pupils. It is particularly relevant, however, where pupils are taught in mixed age or mixed ability groups and where an attempt is made to cater for the individual

development of each one. Such organisations create the need for ongoing assessment but they also provide opportunity for it to be carried out. Mixed ability grouping acknowledges by its title that the children in a class or group are not equal in development or in achievement, but whatever the title there are always variations within any group and to treat children as if they were the same, ignoring the differences, increases and does not diminish the variation between them. When approaches and activities are varied and matched as far as possible to the development and learning characteristics of the children there is more opportunity for effective and efficient learning than when the same fare is provided for all. Support for the belief that children do learn more effectively when learning experiences are matched to their individual stages of development comes from the study of children's mental development (Piaget 1970, Bruner 1960), experience of the damaging effect of mismatching (Bloom, 1971) and from the opinion of experts (the Plowden report 1967). Evidently the first essential step in any attempt to put this into practice is to have information about the many aspects of each child which are relevant to his learning.

Even though there are strong reasons for teachers attempting to 'match' learning experiences to pupils we have to acknowledge that it is impossible to do this at all precisely. There is just not enough known about how to promote learning in pupils with different characteristics, and even though a considerable amount of research is being carried out in this field it is unrealistic to expect that a set of guidelines can be provided for adapting activities to particular combinations of abilities and characteristics. The alternative is for teachers to use a strategy for making decisions in which 'assessment' plays an important part. Information about the pupil is used to arrange the best approximation to a match but each decision is immediately followed up by gathering information about its effect and this feedback is used in making further decisions. The process is continuous and is one of successive adjustments to the ever-changing situation. The strategy is one which many teachers employ intuitively; but others find more difficulty in obtaining

and using relevant information, particularly in respect of certain areas of children's learning – mathematics and science, for example. Attempting to bring what may be an intuitive process to a conscious level reveals that it is a complex matter which cannot be dealt with here as a whole. It involves far more than assessment, though this is the only aspect to be given attention in the following discussion. From an attempt to define the field I now turn to the question of what, in this context, is to be assessed.

## Goals of learning

In implementing the strategy just outlined teachers make decisions to provide certain experiences for their pupils, matched as far as possible to the pupils' development, so that there can be further development and progress towards certain goals. The goals embody the characteristics, abilities, knowledge, attitudes and skills which we hope children will acquire or develop through their education. Progress towards the goals depends on whether opportunities are provided for the pupils at the right level and in a form such that the pupils can benefit. Thus 'development' in this context implies development in the skills, concepts, and so on, which constitute the goals; asking the question 'What to assess?' is answered in part by asking 'What are the goals of learning?' As an example of the kind of statement of goals which has been found useful as an answer to this question we can take the product of the work of several groups of teachers who took part in the Schools Council 'Progress in Learning Science' project. Several groups working independently drew up lists of the goals of learning science for children in the primary and middle years. The consensus of their findings may give some idea of the extent and nature of the goals and the level of generality at which it seemed appropriate to express them. For the period of early development (lower primary years) for example the goals were:

observing	the concept of:	curiosity
raising questions	–causality	originality
exploring	–time	perseverance
problem-solving	–weight	willingness to
	–length	co-operate
interpreting findings	–area	openmindedness
communicating verbally	–volume	self-criticism
communicating non-verbally	–life cycle	responsibility
applying learning	–classification	independence

A slightly different list was agreed for later develop-

ment (the middle years) and there would be changes for successive stages of development up through the years of secondary education.

The precise identification of goals is not of great importance at this point but the example is given to show that a list of goals is likely to encompass a wide range of attributes – attitudes, personal characteristics, concepts, skills – and poses a severe problem when it comes to the question of how the assessment of development with respect to these goals can be carried out. In considering possible methods it is necessary to keep in mind the purpose of gathering information, that of using it for making day-to-day decisions in the classroom. This means that information has to be gathered frequently and repeatedly, whenever required and not at fixed times. The ideal method would, then, provide for this kind of use, enable information to be gathered about individual children without affecting others, would encompass the widest range of goals, and would not interfere with normal working nor demand too much time on the part of the children or the teacher.

## Teachers' observations

Evidently conventional tests have very few of those desired features and are not suitable for use in this context. Even when an attempt is made to extend the range of paper and pencil tests, as was done, for instance, in the evaluation of Science 5/13 (Harlen 1975) when items were presented with the help of film sequences and items were included which related to attitudes as well as cognitive skills and concepts, the information obtained was severely limited by the method of collecting it. Teachers who took part in the Science 5/13 trials when the children were tested were able to point to changes which they had noticed in their children during the work and which were not shown in the test scores, changes in the children's questioning, enthusiasm, powers of observation, perseverance. In reporting these things the teachers were using a method of assessment which has the flexibility and capability for encompassing very many different kinds of behaviour in children – through using the observations they are all the time making in their daily work with the children. Here we have the basis of a method which has all the features mentioned above as being required for assessing progress towards the goals, and one which also enables teachers to gather other information which is relevant to matching, such as about children's interests, preferred modes of learning and response to different forms of motivation.

Observations made during normal learning activities provide information about pupils' behaviour in a variety of situations not just in a few tasks specially selected for the purpose of testing, and clues to the development of various ideas can be picked up on several different occasions. After all it should not be necessary to set up special situations for finding information about progress, for if normal activities really do give opportunity for the goals of learning to be achieved they also provide the chance for the teacher to see how far progress has been made. However it has to be acknowledged that observation is subjective and considered to be less reliable than other forms of assessment; there is a danger that the 'information' obtained is little more than personal opinion. This is why it was described earlier as the 'basis of a method', not a method in itself. To become a viable method it requires a structure for focusing the observations on particularly significant behaviours and a set of criteria for interpreting what is observed. It may also be necessary for teachers to be trained in observation, a skill which involves far more than simply looking.

## Check-lists

As an example of one way in which this can be done we can consider the 'Progress in Learning Science' project again. Check-lists for focusing observations were developed by taking each of the goals and working out statements of behaviours which indicate progressive levels of development. For 'applying learning', for instance, the statement indicating the lowest level is:

'Rarely makes use of previous learning in a new situation, without help',  
at the next level, showing signs of development:

'Makes an attempt at tackling new problems but may fail through applying skills or knowledge which are not relevant',  
and at the third level, the most mature expected in the early period of development:

'Generally makes use of previous learning which will help with a new problem'.

The whole check-list is made up of a series of statements of this kind for each of the goals. The list thus suggests what behaviours to look for and provides a framework for interpreting the observations in terms of development. In using the check-list information about any aspect of development is accumulated from observations extending over a period of time and is drawn upon whenever necessary for making decisions about activities

and the kind of help appropriate for a particular child.

It is not necessary for observations to be recorded for this method of assessment to serve the purpose of supplying the feedback for matching. However, cumulative records can be made which enable progress to be motivated and the stages reached in development of the various abilities and attitudes to be seen. A convenient way is to use some form of record which displays the results of using the check-list as a profile of a child. Subsequent observation can be entered on the same record sheet so that each new profile reveals where progress has been made. Such a record, made about twice a year, enables additional value to be obtained from the observations beyond that of the immediate use of the information by the teacher. The profile shows where a child's strengths and weaknesses lie and the detail in the record prevents any tendency to label a child, since it is clear that he is not 'good' or 'poor' overall but at different stages in the development of the range of abilities and attitudes. The record highlights the peaks and troughs in development more clearly than when the information is in the teachers' head, and enables her to form a long-term plan for helping a child. The signs of progress shown when cumulative records of this kind are built up enable a teacher to see if progress is being made where she expected it. Moreover this kind of record could be summarised at the end of a year or at any other time, to give a written or oral report to the child or to his parents.

## Teachers' records

The continuity of a child's progress as he passes from one class to another or one school to another depends upon teachers passing on information, but it is quite often the case that this is not done and, where it is, that teachers receiving information make very little use of it. Some say they prefer not to be 'biased' by what other teachers have written. It is a pity that teachers themselves do not have more trust in each others' ability to assess and in their own ability to accept information for what it is, a record of interaction between the pupil and his teacher. A teacher's own judgement need not be impaired by what others have recorded and some information is surely better than none at all if serious mismatching is to be avoided in the period during which a teacher is getting to know a child. But there is some force in the argument that the 'standards' set by one teacher differ from another and that too often value judgements replace more objective descriptions. This is because so far little atten-

# Mode 3

## Henry G Macintosh

After five years teaching History in secondary schools, Henry Macintosh was a civilian lecturer in general studies at the RMA Sandhurst for six years between 1958 and 1963. He joined the AEB as Deputy Secretary in 1964 and became Secretary of the SREB in 1970.

When the first CSE examination took place in 1964 some new educational jargon was born and we heard for the first time of Mode 1, Mode 2 and Mode 3 examinations. Modes 1 and 2 were nothing new, Mode 1 being the traditional external examination in which syllabus, methods of examining and marking are all determined and undertaken by the examining board. Mode 2 was the old 'special syllabus' through whose use schools were able to put forward their own syllabuses to an examining board; if approved the board then examined and marked them as with its own syllabuses. Mode 3, on the other hand, was new. Under its provisions the whole process of syllabus development, examination construction and marking is carried out internally by the teachers in the schools responsible for the submission. The examining board's responsibility is to ensure through moderation that the results for any particular Mode 3 are comparable with all other results issued by the board whatever their subject or mode of examining.

It was never intended that Mode 3 should be confined solely to CSE. The freeing of GCE 'O' Level from the need to secure the approval of the Schools Council subject committees facilitated its development here and all GCE boards now include provision for Mode 3 at 'O' Level. At 'A' Level where approval is still required progress has been very slow indeed. The control which a GCE board can exercise over Mode 3 is however far more stringent than that of a CSE board. Put simply, a GCE board can reject a proposal because it does not like it. CSE boards on the other hand are limited by regulation to rejection on only two grounds – although the actual process of approval can and indeed does vary considerably from board to board. The two grounds are first, that the subject is unexaminable and, second, that the subject description proposed by the school is not a fair one.

The number of teachers directly involved in Mode 3 is still however relatively small and many schools are not

*(Continued from page 84)*

tion has been given to establishing criteria for assessing achievement and progress; when there is a common language for describing pupils' behaviours and communicating information the case for preferring so-called 'objective' methods of assessment will be considerably weakened. In the beginning it requires hard work and a willingness to expose our perhaps unclear thinking about the goals we have for our pupils and the stages through which they pass in progressing towards them. As Hugh Benzie wrote in a recent article in which he argued that teachers' assessment should replace external examinations, 'Making realistic and objective assessment is going to depend on training and the acceptance of responsibility. There is nothing to be gained by criticising the

human weaknesses of teachers, no more than would be gained by criticising the human weaknesses of doctors, lawyers or clergymen.' (Benzie, 1975).

Responsibility is engendered when assessment becomes part of a teacher's role. A teacher who has the tools to find out whether pupils are making progress in all aspects of their learning and personal development will be constantly using these tools to help this progress. If she finds that progress is not being made by a number of pupils she will not be able to blame the external examination or syllabus, but will seek the reason in the opportunities she provides for the pupils' learning.

Teachers who continuously monitor their pupils are more likely to be continuously monitoring themselves.

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affected by it at all. In 1975 22.4 per cent of all CSE subject entries were made through Mode 3. The corresponding figure for 'O' Level is of the order of 1 per cent. Mode 3 has however played an indirect but very important part in encouraging change within public examinations as a whole. The past decade has seen notable improvements here, particularly in the more systematic attempts that are being made to marry course and examination objectives. These in their turn have been reflected in the use of a much wider range of techniques for examining and a more extended period for their operation – the terminal test being no longer the norm. The word 'assessment' indeed is a more accurate description of much current practice than the more commonly used word 'examination'. Mode 3 has frequently acted as a test bed or prototype model for the development and assessment of new courses, particularly of an integrated nature. By so doing it has provided experience which the examining boards have put to use on a larger scale in their Mode 1 examinations.

## Selecting objectives

Assessment is essentially an exercise in communication. Those assessing ask questions or pose problems to which those being assessed respond either in writing or orally or by undertaking some activity which may be as diverse as cooking an omelette, playing Lady Macbeth or programming a computer. These responses are then evaluated against some predetermined criteria and the results used for a whole range of purposes, not all of which are always appropriate. The nature and timing (terminal, periodic or continuous) of question, problem and response ought to be conditioned by the purpose of the assessment and by what it is desired to assess. Those preparing Mode 3 have therefore to concern themselves first of all with purposes and objectives. Having selected and weighted the latter they must then construct appropriate assessment to measure what they have chosen. If they succeed in doing this they will be able to use the information they obtain from the results of the assessment to monitor the strengths and weaknesses of their courses and to diagnose and hence remedy the problems of individual students, as well as to grade these students within the framework of a nationally recognised CSE or GCE examination. It will be noted that in this process assessment is the end and not the beginning. A good course deserves first class assessment but it is not made good simply because the assessment is first class. The

task described in the last few sentences is no easy one and requires a marriage between theoretical knowledge and practical experience in both curriculum building and assessment construction which is not often found in a single individual. Co-operative activity is thus an essential part of the construction of a Mode 3.

The remainder of the article will consider very briefly some current trends both in the methods and timing of assessment under the three broad headings of written, oral (including aural) and practical (including project work). A brief reference will also be made to the assessment of attitudes. None of what will be described is new in itself, what is new is the increased responsiveness of public examinations to these trends. In this Mode 3 has often been the trail blazer. The points made will draw attention to the difficulties that face teachers constructing Mode 3s within the present system and consider whether the proposals for reform at 16+ suggest anything to improve the position.

## Structured questions

Increased structuring has probably been the most significant recent development in written questions. By structure is meant the extent to which the wording of a question limits the room for manoeuvre of those answering it. In the past written questions have tended either to be very open or very closed in their structure. The open or essay question, eg 'Physics is Fun. Discuss' was characteristic of the public examination whilst the short answer question 'Who wrote Nicholas Nickleby?' was characteristic of the teacher's classroom quiz. Today these two no longer hold the field and have been supplemented by two major groups of questions to which the labels objectives and structured are often attached. An objective question or item of which the multiple choice format is the most commonly used is one in which for the question as posed there is only one predetermined correct answer. Those answering it are asked to select this from other given alternatives. The objective item is simple to mark but difficult to construct in direct contrast to the essay question which is difficult to mark but relatively simple to construct. The short answer question is both simple to mark and simple to construct but is very limited in what it can assess. Structured questions on the other hand present material to students in various ways and ask them to use it in order to answer a series of questions and/or to solve problems. Such questions can be tailored directly to students' needs because they can be made to

replicate the structuring of the learning process in the classroom. They thus achieve a closer relationship between teaching, learning and assessing. Although far from easy to set, mastery of the techniques involved will enhance the quality of the teacher's performance in the classroom. Structured questions are thus particularly appropriate for Mode 3 assessment when written questions are used.

## Oral and aural

In recent years oral assessment has been accorded greater weight in the assessment of subjects such as English and Foreign Languages where it has always been used. Its use has also been extended into a wider range of subjects. With the greater weight has been associated a wider range of assessment techniques; for example, role playing and the assessment of group work. The extension of oral work into subjects where it has not been a feature in the past can best be illustrated by its use with projects in History. Here an oral in combination with the assessment of the written work can be used to probe in depth students' understanding of their topic and enable them to communicate something of their sense of achievement and enjoyment. Students at age 16 can often provide startlingly different pictures of themselves as a result of oral assessment. For the teacher using oral assessment in a Mode 3 the major problems are those of time and of mastering a difficult technique. An oral entails close human contact and hence the interaction of the personalities involved is all important. Teachers can damage their own students' prospects more easily in an oral than they can in almost any other form of assessment. Mastery of the skills necessary for conducting oral assessment will however spill over into general classroom use and is therefore worth acquiring for that alone.

Relatively little use is currently made of aural assessment in Mode 1 examinations except in Modern Languages and Music, and almost none in Mode 3. It is to be hoped that the recently published work of the Birmingham Oracy Project will encourage the development of aural assessment in English and for the first time give proper recognition to an important skill, that of listening.

Developments over the past few years in the assessment of practical work have led to the disappearance of the old set piece practical once a feature of many public examinations, particularly in Science. It has been replaced on the one hand by written questions which cannot be answered unless the student has undertaken the relevant practical

work, and on the other by continuous assessment of defined skills by the teachers involved. It is this last approach which Mode 3s are most likely to use. For its implementation it requires first of all the relevant skills to be defined and then a programme of work to be constructed which will enable the students to demonstrate the skills. Finally it requires the maintenance of careful records in order to show student progress in relation to mastery of the skills. In this connection a number of useful scales usually containing 5 points have been developed by examining boards, notably the JMB, which provide descriptions of levels of performance upon the skills against which student performance can be measured. A form of practical work which has been a feature of both CSE and Mode 3 has been the project or individual assignment. In the early days of CSE great hopes were entertained of project work as a child-centred activity through which students unhampered by time pressure would be able to demonstrate qualities which they were unable to demonstrate in a formal examination. The reality has been rather less attractive as heaps of derivative work upon the Life and Times of Tutankamun and large numbers of bored students bear witness. There would seem to be two main reasons for this; first, that the role of the teacher as the key resource in project work has not been fully developed and second, that the criteria used for the assessment of project work have all too often been concerned with product and not with process. The use of oral assessment can help here but much needs to be done if we are to harness the undoubted educational potential of the individual assignment.

## Assessing attitudes

A field in which Mode 3 has been a pioneer has been that of assessing non-cognitive skills within public examinations. A number of recent curriculum projects, notably the Stenhouse Humanities Project, have placed great emphasis upon personal values whilst others, for example the Schools Council Integrated Science Project, have underlined the importance of qualities such as persistence and ability to work with others. Those wishing to assess work arising from these projects feel that they must assess such attributes of character and attitudes if they are to interpret faithfully the project philosophy. Most attitude assessment is based upon the use of scales and there are already examples of such scales similar to those developed for the assessment of practical skills in use in both Mode 1 and Mode 3 examinations. A notable

example of a more thoroughgoing attempt to assess non-cognitive skills in a Mode 3 is provided by the work of J Miller of the Blakelaw School, Newcastle, who has developed a matrix for the assessment of group discussion in the Humanities. One section of this assessment is devoted to Personal Values. This matrix, which is similar in concept to the interaction matrices used in teacher training programmes for the evaluation of teacher performance in the classroom, appears at first sight to be very complex but it can with practice be readily operated. Its use by both students and teacher not only provides the evidence upon which assessment can be based for the award of grades but also improves the quality of the discussion as a result of the need to meet the demands of the continuous monitoring process involved. It is in areas such as these that Mode 3, by breaking new ground, can make its most significant contribution; but it is here, of course, that the demands upon skill and time are also at their greatest.

## Continuous assessment

As important as the changes in methods of assessment have been the changes in its timing. Two features of many Mode 3s and of some Mode 1s have been course work and continuous assessment, both phrases in need of definition. Course work can be defined as all work undertaken as an integral part of a course during school hours and out of school where this is appropriate (work experience, for example, is increasingly a feature of school courses). All or some of this work may be presented as evidence for assessment. Continuous assessment on the other hand is a continuous updating of teacher judgements about their students in order to permit a cumulative judgement to be made about their performance. The key word is 'cumulative' and it is this which distinguishes it from course work. Course work stores work or judgements about work which are then used for assessment purposes at the end of a course, whilst continuous assessment makes judgements about pupils which their subsequent performance can then cause to be modified. Trevor Rodgers\* sums up both the nature of continuous assessment and the difficulties of operating it in practice when he likens it to a missile. The latter when homing in on a target does not necessarily move along the path originally planned for it. Its course is constantly modified in accordance with feedback that it provides itself for those controlling it. In this it is very similar to a flexible teaching programme which is modi-

fied as it goes along as a result of data received from student and teacher. Such programmes cannot be assessed by means of terminal measures or through the use of a relatively limited range of methods. They require a total integration of assessment and the teaching/learning process in order primarily to monitor student progress. As a by-product the assessment can also be used to award grades to students at the end of the course. Unfortunately in public examinations this by-product is seen as the main and often the only product of assessment and hence discourages those involved from putting assessment to more constructive use.

## Inhibitions

Continuous assessment indeed encapsulates the difficulties that face teachers who develop Mode 3s. These are partly the result of the inadequate pre- and in-service training that teachers receive in assessment and practical curriculum development, and partly the result of deficiencies within the current examining system. The practical question of lack of time should also not be ignored. Lack of training has encouraged teachers to undervalue competence in assessment as a part of their professional equipment and has hence affected their attitude to it. It is perfectly possible to improve the quality of training; for example, examining boards (as some already do) could run courses which are not solely designed to train item writers or oral examiners for their own use. They could also provide question banks for use by those preparing Mode 3s. Attitudes to assessment however are far less easy to change and they are very much conditioned by current public examinations. Because these last are so much better than they used to be they remove the incentive for many teachers to construct their own assessment. On the other hand for teachers who really wish to experiment the examination system is still too rigid and acts in consequence as a deterrent. Public examinations are much more amenable, for example, to the assessment of single disciplinary courses than to the assessment of integrated courses; they are still happier with terminal than they are with continuous assessment; they lend themselves more easily to the measurement of cognitive attainment than to the measurement of attitudes; they issue their results in a form which provides nothing in the way of feedback to student or teacher and, finally, they certificate individuals thus making it difficult to assess courses which place great emphasis upon group activity. All these problems can be overcome; there are



Mode 3s in existence which grade students upon interdisciplinary courses which place their major emphasis upon group work. Such courses are, however, almost always born out of compromise which can distort their original purpose and hence lessen the value of what can be learnt from them.

## The new proposals

What prospects of improving this situation are offered by the new 16+ proposals? The answer is regrettably little or none. They recommend, it is true, in the first half of recommendation 8.6 (Modes of Examining) that examinations under Modes 1, 2 and 3 should be available under the new system as well as mixed mode examinations. This of course ensures the maintenance of the status quo with its existing advantages and problems. The position is however potentially worsened by the second part of 8.6 which states 'that if under Mode 1 there is a component of the examination which is normally assessed by the candidates' own teacher *either* arrangements should be made whereby the component may be assessed externally *or* an alternative paper to this component externally marked and carrying the same weighting in the final assessment should be available *or* an alternative examination consisting wholly of external assessments should be offered'. This proposal rules out on the face of it the possibility of a continuously assessed internal element forming a part of the assessment for *all* in a Mode 1 and could in consequence further discourage teachers from developing their skills in assessment. This is particularly serious at the present time because it is worth querying whether the encouragement of school based assessment is best pursued by the current polarisation between Mode 1 and Mode 3. A more fruitful approach might well be the extension of mixed mode examinations of which one example is a board provided common core with school provided options. It could be indeed that the terms Mode 1, Mode 2 and Mode 3 and the definitions attached to them are no longer helpful and it might be better to consider all examinations as a series of interactions between board and school. These could range from totally board provided to totally school provided, with the majority of the assessment in most subjects at 16+ being a mixture of board and school provided. It would be a great pity therefore if the 16+ recommendations were to act as a deterrent to school assessed elements within the framework of external

examinations. Such elements may well turn out in the long run to be the best way of encouraging teachers to improve their competence in the construction and their confidence in the use of assessment, and hence provide a platform upon which to make a reality of teacher controlled examinations – ultimately, if we wish, to abolish external examinations at 16+ altogether.

\* In *Techniques and Problems of Assessment* (1974) ed H G Macintosh, chapter 4.

*This is reviewed on page 101. Ed.*

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# Discussion

## Personal Records

Every senior secondary school pupil needs something to work for and something to take away when he leaves to show what he has done and what he can do.

No kind of examination will do this for every pupil. We need a different kind of document which will give evidence of achievements in and out of school and which will reveal character and aptitude.

Those of us who teach in comprehensive schools know this need because we must have a means of motivating and organising pupils of all abilities. Employers know it because they know how important it is to get the right kind of people into jobs at all levels. It is not so easy to sack people and a few bored or frustrated or inept workers can do a lot of damage. As industry becomes more specialised we become more dependent upon each other. The basic technological change is for knowledge and skill to be taken over by machines and for attributes and abilities to become the vital human elements. Exams measure knowledge and skill. We must have a way of documenting attributes and abilities.

In the nineteenth century technological change forced an educational change from a system of promotion by testimonial to a system of public examinations. Now a similar change is needed. Of course reports and examinations will continue. There will always be a usefulness in personal opinions and in objective measurements. But we do need in addition to these a third system. I believe it will be a system of personally compiled records because this is logically the only other possibility and because there is now clear evidence from a lot of schools that a system of personally compiled records will motivate, will organise and will qualify pupils of any ability.

No system of this kind can be designed overnight. The examination system has taken a very long while to develop and is even now imperfectly understood and frequently misused. A new system of personally compiled records will also take a long while to develop and will also be misunderstood and misused. Eventually it will provide a base for a comprehensive system which values differences and fosters all kinds of abilities and aptitudes. That is, however, a long way off and further away than it needs to be because so few people seem to recognise the importance of getting this work going and keeping it going.

People are interested in new systems and if anyone designs a system which motivates, organises and qualifies pupils of all abilities, people will be interested and schools will want to adopt. What people are not sufficiently interested in is the continuing design and development work which moves from system to system and will eventually arrive at something worth while.

From 1967 to 1972 I was responsible for the design and operation of the Record of Personal Achievement which is now in use in about 70 schools. Since then I have formed an Association for a New Objective in Secondary Schools to bring together people who want to see established in our schools a new kind of objective which will give a sense of purpose to pupils who are at present alienated because there is really nothing in the academic system for them. I hope that the people who join this association will realise that this will take a long time and that there is no possibility of instant off-the-peg solutions. Every new system must be seen as no more than a step in a direction.

I have designed five systems. Two have never been used in any school. Another has been used in one school only but over a period of nine years. The other two are of course the Record of Personal Achievement and the Record of Personal Experience,

Qualities and Qualifications. The latter is the most exciting and potentially the most productive. It is now in use in three schools and it is so organised that the development work is driving ahead. In two and a half years it has thrown up vitally important pointers to the future. It is controlled by the teachers who use it and despite the inevitable tendency for people to be concerned with today's problems the concern for developing a future system is built into this one.

I am sure that this is work which must go on because it will eventually benefit everyone.

**DON STANSBURY**

*King Edward VI School, Devon*





## Call to Reason

Mark Twain allegedly said 'Do not let your child's schooling interfere with his education.' In England the time has come to take this comment seriously. We begin badly by allocating children to denominational schools according to their parents' religion. Oddly, the one compulsory subject in all schools is scripture. Toddlers of five and six listen politely to abstract theology in morning assembly. The most important lesson in any infant school is not writing or number but hymn practice. Mites make what they can of cherubims, seraphims and holy angels bright. As Joan Goldman has pointed out, very young children fit what they are told to a pattern of simple logic.

'Our Father, which art in Heaven, Harold be thy name.'

'Jesus didn't know his kerb drill and and he was killed on the crossing.'

A place is found each day for 'Storytime' with strong emphasis on nursery rhymes. Discussing why the cow jumped over the moon and why Humpty Dumpty had a great fall should form part of the study of folklore and be confined to the sixth form. If and when children do learn to read, there are books galore on the doings of dragons, wizards, elves, goblins, fairies and witches. The fantasy ties in nicely of course with Biblical miracles. Just why is the lesson on Noah's Ark given every three weeks?

If the aim is to teach concern for animals, why is it not done by precept and practical example? Cannot the children be told straight that stag-hunting is wrong?

Many text-books have an air of unreality. Children learn for instance that the sun is now in the sky because it disliked living in a flooded house. Teachers insist that Eskimos still live in igloos, that ducks still waddle idyllically round English farmyards and essays about monsters fighting on the moon receive high praise.

Since schools have little to do with education they are easily identified. Paths in the vicinity are knee deep in litter and lights blaze away on sunny days. Occasionally some propaganda on the Highway Code, a Cycling Proficiency Scheme or the Tufty Club is put across though usually by an outsider. Generally however curricula lack social purpose and have done since Francis Bacon's time. Improvements would come if we held schools responsible for every child's death by fire or water.

It is only to be expected that older children are ignorant of Darwin, Bradlaugh or any other free thinker. Teenagers should have a store of useful knowledge about, say, mortgages, bank accounts and nutrition. Facts on drinking and driving, seat belts and the Health Education Council's statistics on smoking ought to be publicised. No girl should leave school knowing nothing of contraceptive methods besides jumping up and down after intercourse.

Syllabuses are loaded with pointless activities but teachers themselves will never initiate reforms. Newcomers to the profession are resistant to training; having fifteen years' experience of school they are 'experts' who perpetuate the system as they knew it. To forge some links with real life, schools could grow their own vegetables, help with the harvest or work on local community projects. Pupils could dismantle television sets as well as stare at them. Future

generations hopefully would not invent a vertical crankcase or bring oil ashore through pipelines of Italian or German manufacture. While esteem is heaped on pop stars and PR men, not chemists or engineers, one cannot be optimistic.

The individual needs to excel if only at table tennis or putting the shot in lunch hour. There must be a reason for government complacency regarding our position atop the European vandal league. Perhaps smashed trains are cheaper than orthodox recreative facilities. A country which still reveres its House of Lords and tied cottage is presumably satisfied with quaint schools.

Come back Gradgrind, all is forgiven!

**D K SHEARING**

*Nene College, Northampton*



# Examinations— An alternative view

J F Eggleston

Jim Eggleston is Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham School of Education. He contributed articles on examinations and assessment to *Forum* Vol 13, No 2, Vol 14, No 1 and Vol 16 No 2.

Some few years ago I was introducing a group of teachers to the technology of test construction. 'A "good" test will have a mean score of about 50 per cent and will provide an adequate spread of candidates across the scale used. Items which are too difficult or too easy will not be included. All included items will demonstrably correlate positively at an appropriate level with the total test score. The purpose of the application of these statistical criteria is to achieve discrimination between candidates . . . and so on.'

At this point one member of the group interrupted this technological torrent to make the elementary but profound point that her main concern was not to discriminate between people but to find out if her pupils had learnt what she was trying to teach them.

More recently the same argument has been made by Bloom<sup>1</sup>.

'As testing and other terms of evaluation are commonly used in schools, they contribute little to the improvement of teaching and learning, and they rarely serve to ensure that all (or almost all) learn what the school system regards as the important tasks and goals of the education process'.

It is a matter of fact that normative tests (and this includes almost all school and university examinations) are designed to demonstrate the superiority of performance of one student over another to the virtual exclusion of describing what all (or almost all) students can do.

## Facile psychometry

A related problem is inadequacy of descriptions of attainment which are derived from normative tests designed by conventional technology to serve the purpose of discrimination between students. One of the criteria used to select test items is that of correlation between the test item and the total test score. In general terms, an acceptable item is one which is more likely to be answered correctly by students who score above the mean in the test as a whole. This procedure is based on the assumption that 'the test as a whole' is measuring something analogous to a unitary trait which can be measured on a

single dimension or scale – like temperature. The language used to describe attainment, for example pass in 'O' level Chemistry, or Grade III in CSE Social Studies, connives at the facile assumption that a complex matrix of facts, concepts and intellectual skills can be collapsed to a single dimension. The survival of this language may be partly due to the implicit or explicit application of the kind of psychometry which led to the development of intelligence tests. It is almost certainly due to the mere administrative convenience of crude one dimensional measures in securing cut-off points for promotion to the next layer of the pyramid of educational opportunity.

There is evidence to suggest that at least in some disciplines (eg physics)<sup>2</sup>, attainment is multidimensional. Pupil's scores on four sub-tests, each designed to measure a different component 'skill', did not intercorrelate highly, ie knowing the scores on one test did *not* allow accurate prediction on another. To lump these four tests together and call the result 'attainment in physics' is erroneous in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

## Assumptions queried

The two questions which arise from these considerations are:

1. Is it inevitable that normative test techniques are used in the examination of the attainments of schoolchildren?
2. Must descriptions of attainment be restricted to the inadequate system at present, almost universally in use?

As long ago as 1963 Carroll<sup>3</sup> suggested a model for teaching and assessing which calls into question the assumptions on which normative testing is based. His ideas may be briefly (if somewhat inadequately) stated as follows:

1. If students are *normally* distributed with respect to *aptitude* for some subject eg mathematics, history, biology, and *all* the students are provided with the same instruction, in terms of time and quality, the end result will be a *normal* distribution of achievement. Measures of aptitude and attainment will be

highly and positively correlated. In other words knowledge of a students' aptitude at the outset allows fairly accurate prediction of his attainment at the end of the course.

2. Conversely if the students, *normally* distributed with respect to aptitude are provided with different amounts of instructions which is based on an accurate diagnosis of each student's strengths and weaknesses, each student may be expected to achieve *mastery*. The correlation between *aptitude* and *achievement* will diminish to zero and the distribution of attainment scores will become heavily skewed.

## Mastery Testing

The centre of Carroll's focus is on the *quality of instruction* which he describes as 'the degree to which the presentation, explanation and ordering of the elements of a task to be learned is optimum for a given learner.' He takes the view that given that teachers can secure for each learner conditions near to this optimum, and given enough time, nearly all pupils will achieve what he calls *mastery*. Mastery testing is not unfamiliar. The Ministry of Transport driving test is a mastery test which, when successfully negotiated, results in a pass, not a percentile rank. Airline pilots are subjected to similar test procedures. Nevertheless Carroll's model depends crucially on the ability of teachers and examiners to distil out of the conceptual fabric of a discipline those elements which could reasonably be *mastered* by schools' pupils. Moreover these elements will have to be translated into demands which result in assessable performance. Presumably this is what Bloom means by the 'tasks and goals' of the educational process. If we cannot identify these *elements* we are without both map and compass.

To proceed along the lines of the model proposed by Carroll might well lead to a greater concern for the diagnosis of individual pupil's learning problems and to a more adequate mapping of pupil's attainments. The obvious difficulty is that the model presents a view of the processes of learning, teaching and assessing which is at variance with current practice in English Schools. At present, assessment procedures are designed to function as selective sieves.

It may be that to achieve a system which even approximates to Carroll's model we must divorce University and College selection from the measurement of attainment.

Two or three years sixth form study should be adequate to prepare pupils for University entrance by appropriate normative test procedures, providing this follows pre-'O' level courses of which mastery is assured. These courses might well take more than five years for some secondary school pupils.

At this point in the discussion it becomes clear that rather than consider the 16 plus proposals in isolation from the major issues of learning, teaching, curriculum and school organisation we must broaden the debate about assessment to include them.

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# Community School and Curriculum

**Geoffrey Partington**

Having taught history in secondary schools within the London area, and then in colleges of education in the Midlands, Geof Partington is now an Assistant Education Officer for Waltham Forest.

The main conscious pressure for community schools in England in recent years has been in areas where traditional neighbourhood loyalties have been eroded and a sense of community has disappeared or where no strong community feeling ever existed. Examples of the first come from run-down inner-city districts which have experienced major population changes: the Sidney Stringer Community School in Coventry, the Abraham Moss Centre in Manchester and the Liverpool EPA schools associated with Eric Midwinter. The second may be found in large, impersonal post-war housing estates, such as Bristol's Lawrence Weston School which was developed successfully by Cyril Poster. There is a need to provide common interests and sympathies between disparate ethnic and cultural groups in the inner-city areas and between uprooted and rootless tower-dwellers in new estates, and it is not surprising that schools should be turned to for a major contribution.

Comprehensive reorganisation makes it more likely that all schools will be more representative of their neighbourhoods, although the extent will be influenced by the extent of denominational schooling available. It must be admitted that conceptually community or neighbourhood schools are incompatible with a wide exercise of parental choice of school, or with policies designed to provide schools with intakes balanced for ethnic or academic composition. Most LEAs which have pioneered comprehensive education, have sought to create neighbourhood schools; these neighbourhoods may be wide though relatively homogeneous as in Suffolk, or quite small and socially or ethnically distinct urban areas such as Waltham Forest or Brent.

The interpretation of a community school as one which uses its neighbourhood as a major or, in some cases, a central curricular resource and a major stimulus to teaching must be distinguished from the alternative concept of a school which is itself used extensively by community groups other than children and teachers.

Educational advocacy of the interpenetration of school and the immediate outside world often coalesce with financial arguments to bring about multiple use of school facilities. Dual and triple use of school premises is by

no means new. I never attended or taught in a secondary school which did not have other users. But I cannot recall outstandingly constructive results in the realm of mutual understanding. My recollections are rather of institutionalised hostility between day school and night school teachers. It seems doubtful whether the provision of Sports Halls and Swimming Pools in our Secondary Schools will in themselves have the wide effects anticipated by some.

The influence of the outside world on the life of schools may well become powerful when resources are shared *during* school time. For instance, at Countesthorpe and some other Community Colleges in Leicestershire the mixing of Sixth Formers and adults in 'A' level classes may lead to pedagogic changes; there may also be a creche so that mothers can engage in cultural activities on the premises. Lawrence Weston in Bristol has a public library within its buildings. Harry Ree, among others, considers the shared use of facilities the most radical aspect of a community school.

## Interaction potential

Willard Waller described schools as 'despotisms in a state of parlous equilibrium' which may easily be overwhelmed by parental interventions. Other schools are laissez-faire or semi-anarchial regimes whose equilibrium is as parlous as that of more authoritarian structures and these too, will be susceptible to parental and community pressures. Community use of schools during school hours will reduce the insulation of teachers and weaken the frame of the school in Basil Bernstein's sense of control 'over the selection, organisation and pacing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogic relationship'. The presence of numerous adults whose livelihood lies outside the school system is likely to modify many aspects of pupil-teacher relationships and may have some implications for the control of education.

Community involvement may also threaten the traditional role of the school as 'a museum of virtue' (another

of Waller's phrases) preaching ideals which are little practised in the outside world. Facilities may be demanded which are not deemed worthwhile by educationists: Bingo, Birth Control Clinics and All-in Wrestling may be community needs which the school is asked to meet.

## Curricular implications

A related point on which I want to concentrate is what the community school should imply in terms of curriculum: the extent to which it should reflect 'community needs', the criteria for determining what those needs are, and the degree to which the curriculum ought to be influenced by the specific characteristics of the neighbourhood or community. These are issues on which opinions are deeply divided and about which very various views have been advanced which it is worth summarising and examining.

## National culture?

At one extreme stands Dr Rhodes Boyson who argues for a return to the 'understood' national curriculum which apparently existed in Britain until 15 years ago to well nigh universal satisfaction. Dr Boyson makes no explicit separate provision for Wales and Scotland.

All primary children would study, for example, in history 'evolution and the dinosaurs, the legends of Greece and Rome and great events in British history, approached largely through "great lives"'. All secondary pupils would attain in geography 'a thorough grasp of British geography and an in depth look at Europe . . . linked with a basic knowledge of the continents and the major countries'; projects are regarded with deep suspicion 'since they can be one of the great wasters of time and money'. Dr Boyson sees such a compulsory national curriculum as a major contribution to the creation, or resurrection, of a common culture without which 'the country would fall apart'. This approach could, perhaps, be regarded as a form of community education with Britain as the community unit, but it is antithetical to a high degree of neighbourhood responsiveness in the curriculum. A former London Head and MP for the London Borough of Brent, which has considerable ethnic heterogeneity, Dr Boyson eschews any non-British influences on literature, history or other aspects of curri-

culum; but paradoxically, he favours the 'opening of Voluntary and Controlled schools by the various religious and ethnic groups' because he believes that a 'joint religious belief is a great help in cultural identification'. While there is no reason why Moslems or Sikhs should not establish confessional schools, it seems bizarre to advocate this in conjunction with calls for a common culture.

## Local criteria?

The opposite position on curriculum and community is exemplified by Joan Leighton's description of a scheme she helped to plan at Levenshulme School in that city. The scheme is entitled 'The Manchester Child', its basis local history from pre-Roman times to the present, to which geography, RI, music, drama, dance and art are geared. The aim 'is to show that Manchester is more than a Victorian City, and that it has been at the centre of national and international affairs since pre-Roman times'. Specific parts of the scheme include 'Manchester's part in drawing up of Magna Carta, its contribution to Renaissance education, its reflection of the religious strife of the sixteenth century'. Religious education includes a study of 'religious developments from pre-Roman and Romano-British cults through the Anglo-Saxon conversion, the Reformation, Anglicanism, Puritanism, Non-Conformity, Judaism, Islam and Humanism in Manchester'. (Forum, Autumn, 1972).

This sort of scheme seems more of a strait-jacket than a springboard. It is one thing to increase children's awareness of their immediate environment or wider community, by exploiting its local history, buildings, customs, arts and industries; it is another matter to use the mere chance of local examples as a determining criterion of content. Whether or how we study Renaissance education should not depend primarily on the presence of an Elizabethan or a Jacobean grammar school foundation. The amount of theological nicety with which we regale twelve year olds cannot be rationally decided by the extent to which the locality was involved in doctrinal dispute.

It is worrying, too, that the Levenshulme Curriculum Project was 'intended for first and second year pupils in an urban comprehensive school of predominantly working class children with a considerable number of immigrant pupils'. Are we to assume that a quite different project would be more suitable for a secondary school

with a different ethnic or social composition – Sir Robert Peel in and the Battle of Peterloo out so to speak? This problem is raised especially sharply by the arguments for ‘Black Studies’ and the like. It is certainly true that the curriculum of many schools fails to develop appropriate self-images for black children, but lack of suitable models may handicap indigenous children too. It is by no means certain that separate community curricula are appropriate solutions. It is more likely that these would be increasingly divisive.

On the other hand, an ‘understood national curriculum’ will fail to win the loyalty of ethnic minorities if it includes insufficient of their experiences and cultures. Indeed, Eric Midwinter and other critics have argued that the standard secondary curriculum never had much positive influence on the average pupil and that ‘the man on the Clapham omnibus’ gained little or nothing from lessons on the Black Death, the customs of the Masai and the exports of Latin America. Even these favourite Midwinter examples of irrelevance may have more interest and significance for children than some local and environmental studies, such as the ‘97 Bus’ Project suggested in the Schools’ Council Working Paper *Society and the Young School Leaver* and subsequently savaged by John White. It is important that the many children who change school or even region during their school lives should have some curricular continuity based on criteria of significance in content and suitability of method; it is equally important that scope for initiative and innovation be not stifled and that rootlessness and anomie be combated. Community and local studies can and must be so structured as to enable intrinsic interest and relevance to contribute to systematic conceptual development of a universal character.

## Radical intent?

One conclusion seems clear. The greater the influence of neighbourhood and community on the curriculum, the weaker the frame and insulation of the school. This may be particularly the case when teachers wish not merely to reflect their communities but to change them.

Christopher Searle, for instance, wishes to sharpen the political consciousness of working class children so that they can speed the demise of an unjust social system. In the short-term he would mobilise East London schools to defend the jobs of dockers and the continued use of local hospitals claimed by the Regional Hospital Board

to be antiquated and redundant. Projects on the problems of Dockland can help children to understand changing patterns of trade, industry and population settlement, problems of job demarcation within the docks and between dockers and other transport work, and the difficulties involved in establishing social priorities; such studies of community problems and possibilities ought to be part of every child’s secondary education. But teachers should not be surprised or resentful when there is interest in and sometimes criticism of their schemes.

## Battles for control

Once the curriculum penetrates the community there will be a dialectical play of forces. It would be ingenuous for teachers to assume that they will be regarded as the sole authorities, or somehow above all battles, once the realities of outside life are seriously studied in schools.

Radicals may rightly object that political and religious indoctrination of children to accept the existing social order has always pervaded schools, and that powerful influences are still exerted by religious festivals and by at least implicit assumptions about the rightness of British institutions. Almost by definition, traditional forms of ideology arouse less attention because so much has already been internalised; but rapid flux in mores and beliefs and the development of a pluralistic society in which authority is weaker and more widely diffused may have put educational radicals and conservatives on level ground.

An extension of community studies in schools must sharpen controversies about the control of the curriculum. There is likely to be a wider tolerance of various interpretations of the Gracchi, the Norman Conquest, the French and Russian Revolutions or even the General Strike than of other than the blandest approaches to the study of contemporary conflict. Most teachers will continue to believe that curricular decisions should be made by themselves as the professionals. A greater emphasis on community or neighbourhood in curriculum may strengthen the hands of the ‘locals’ as against the ‘cosmopolitans’ or broader groupings of national professional or subject associations or the Schools’ Council.

However, from Robert Lowe and long before to Sir Arnold Weinstock and doubtless long after, stretches the alternative view which distrusts the power of the vested interest of teachers. Evidence to the Taylor Committee suggests there is no more consensus among the foes than among the friends of teacher control of the curriculum,



but it is likely that the more general and national the curriculum the greater will be the influence of national bodies such as the DES or HMI. On the other hand, the greater the interpenetration of school and community, the greater the likelihood of local control, however, exercised.

Curricular control by the local community will at least be based on knowledge of local conditions and direct concern for the success or failure of policies. On the other hand there are dangers of narrow parochialism, increased nepotism and severe restrictions on the social as well as the professional life of teachers.

The most likely immediate and important implication of neighbourhood schools is a reduction of the wide discretion in decision-making in curriculum and organisation enjoyed by teachers. The degree to which this freedom has existed may have been exaggerated or may have depended for its formal continuance on its very limited exercise. Dr Boyson is right that there was a great deal of 'agreed national curricula', different though these were in Grammar and Modern Schools, until some twenty years ago. Consensus has since become more limited, the range of idiosyncratic or ideological differences wider, while local educational innovation has increased.

## Professional accountability

Readers of *Where?* can study the rival merits of varying schools and fee-paying parents can pay their money and take their choice. For the overwhelming majority of parents choice of school, apart from between a county and a voluntary school, has always been very restricted, especially in rural areas. Comprehensive reorganisation, especially in the form of neighbourhood secondary schools, further restricts choice even though some urban LEAs can consider parental requests for alternatives if more than one school is actually accessible. In such situations, even more than in any other home-school relationship, the school must win the confidence of the decisive majority of parents if major conflicts are to be avoided. If William Tyndale had been the *only* primary school and/or Highbury Grove the *only* secondary school available to a large number of parents, London's County Hall might have followed the Bastille or the Winter Palace into history. Leicestershire's educational hierarchy might have been under seige, too, if those parents who were most convinced that Countesthorpe was a centre

of subversion and permissiveness had not been able to send their children to another school.

The greater the effective degree of compulsion to send children to a particular school, the more strongly will parents demand that curriculum and organisation correspond to their own educational ideas. This increase in public accountability may not be a loss for teachers. No innovations in curricular content, teaching methods or pupil-teacher relationships can strike deep or permanent roots unless parents and public are convinced of their value. If their professionalism is of substance, teachers will find ways of justifying their policies and of winning support and more active community co-operation in the future than in the past.

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# Curriculum Development and Staff Development

**Tony Johnson**

Tony Johnson was formerly Head of Geography and Head of Careers at Withywood Comprehensive School. He was appointed to Castle School, Thornbury, as Director of Curriculum Development and Head of Middle School, in preparation for its comprehensive reorganisation, some five years ago.

The policy at Thornbury Castle School is that curriculum change shall be a continuing on-going process rather than by sudden major revolutions. The emphasis is on development. In 1971 the school was preparing to become a comprehensive school. Members of staff, including the Headmaster, had been away on appropriate preparation courses. New staff with wide-ranging experiences and, hopefully, with new expertise and ideas had been appointed. 'Going Comprehensive' provided a new opportunity and the climate was right: comprehensive curriculum development could begin. The more important issues were probably how to sustain development in the future and how to avoid 'tissue rejection' once innovations were implemented. Certain strategies were thought to be necessary to ensure a process of continuing development.

The four major ideas introduced at that time have subsequently become basic and integral parts of the school, extending in influence far beyond the developing curriculum. They are:

**1 Staff Conferences**, which are frequently held as a means of stimulating and educating all teaching staff. A Castle Conference is really our very own school-based in-service training course and is felt to be far superior in its overall effect on the school than sending individual teachers on separate short courses elsewhere. Not, one hastens to add, that individuals do not continue to attend such courses. Its features include lead sessions from outside speakers, extensive group discussions, and as it is a 'closed' school-based conference, in-depth study of the felt needs of the Castle School at that particular time. Recent conferences have included 'Going Comprehensive', 'Mixed Ability', 'Current Trends in Education' and 'Social and Pastoral Care'. Inspiration is provided, intense discussion is generated and complacency is undermined. As a conference draws to a close the process of re-thinking, up-dating and re-training for every one of us is well under way.

**2 Working Parties** were established at the first school conference to maintain the momentum of the conference in the first comprehensive year and to provide a continuing means of detailed study and analysis of many aspects of school life. One of the most popular of these working

parties, which are re-convened each year, is the **Curriculum Development Working Party**. Its members hold weekly discussions, consult with other staff, visit other schools, and generally do their 'homework' on all aspects of the learning situation before making recommendations on curriculum innovation. Features of the working party include meaningful involvement of staff in curriculum development and participation in decision making, and continual analysis of ever-changing needs. The purely voluntary nature of membership ensures a mixture of views from a whole group-position of staff and provides useful knowledge for those who are involved in its continuing deliberations.

Both conferences and working parties provide a learning situation for the staff and total curriculum needs become more fully understood, whilst the continuing process of thinking, debating, and analysing the curriculum must surely provide for a continuing process of curriculum development.

**3 A Faculty System** was established three years ago as a result of a working party recommendation. Subjects have been grouped together in faculty areas which provide for co-operative teams of staff working together. The school has adopted a blocked timetable whereby year groups or half-year groups are programmed together for each faculty. If third year Humanities, for example, is blocked together there will be a diverse team of staff available at one and the same time. This does not preclude the teaching of separate Geography, History, RE if this is desired, but – of most importance in curriculum development terms – it makes possible a whole range of alternative approaches such as large group lead sessions, team preparation, team teaching, mixed ability grouping or setting, and integrated courses. Teachers help, support and learn from each other. There are no barriers to curriculum development – no longer are we told 'it can't be timetabled!' Through the faculty meetings (which can themselves be timetabled within the school day) and the timetable blocking, staff begin to know and trust one another, confidence for experimentation is gradually built up, and problems can be ironed out.

The Faculty System has provided us with a facilitating structure. It leaves room for growth, for development

which is ongoing. Innovation is always possible yet continued modification and refinement are easily attainable.

**4** A Resource Centre has been developed alongside the Faculty System. It too was the result of a working party recommendation and in over three years has gained in strength and indeed in utilisation as a result of successive staff conferences. Inevitably its growth has furthered the development of the curriculum. Its teacher workshop reprographic facilities have enabled new learning materials to be published as an aid to the introduction of new courses and integrated studies. Its provision for independent learning and individual inquiry has facilitated the development of mixed ability approaches. Resource-based learning approaches are seen as basic to both mixed ability and integrated courses, their widespread and successful adoption at Castle in recent years has been very much allied to the creation of our own Resource Centre.

## Continuing self-criticism

In five years we have learnt a great deal, the Castle School system is far from perfect, and we do not see it as something directly transferable to other institutions. It has been developed to suit particular needs in a particular situation. It is occasionally subjected to close scrutiny by visiting groups of education students, especially from the University of Bristol School of Education, and this produces refinements. The very nature of the system encourages a questioning, critical, analytical approach within the school, and facilitates ongoing development in many different spheres. We have made mistakes; Conferences shared with other local schools have seemed to be less satisfactory – and have certainly been less well attended. Conferences with too many speakers and too little emphasis on group discussion have also had less success.

Working Parties are incredibly time consuming, and frequently spend hours and hours, year after year, resurrecting the same discussion topics. At times a poorly researched recommendation is produced by a working party and has to be returned by the joint conveners meeting, or senior staff meeting, for further homework to be done. The Faculty System itself is continuously criticised within a faculty or within a working party – not so much in terms of the Faculty System itself, as in our original choice of subject groupings. The Resource

Centre is still in need of more ancillary help – as yet the typing facilities are limited to the work of voluntary mothers. It was created out of a library and is far too small to cope with the increasing demands.

## Staff development

Despite such problems the felt advantages are noteworthy. There is no way of training and developing the whole of the teaching staff so efficiently and effectively as the Staff Conference. The conference is directed to our needs – though external advice and contributions are essential – and everyone is involved. Avon Education Authority in recognition of its value now grant two in-service training days per year to every school. The Working Parties are a means by which all staff can contribute to the planning and development of the school, and educate themselves through discussions and debate. These Working Parties cover the areas of 'Curriculum', 'Organisation', 'Links with Primary Schools and Community', 'Social Pastoral Care'. This is not a school which moves forward in one area – say curriculum development – in neglect of the others; it is said to be unusual in that in so many spheres there is rethinking, replanning, and forward development. The Faculty System has produced a flood of combined or integrated courses, mode 3 assessment-based examinations, team preparation and team teaching approaches. It too is a learning situation for the staff, for healthy interchange of views and regular co-operative team work inevitably lead to teacher development. The Resource Centre has been the vehicle for the development of mixed ability approaches, the expansion of independent learning has been founded upon it. Again by example and by the creation of new possibilities it contributes to ongoing staff development.

## Pupils' assessment

An example of the systems at work is shown in the field of assessment. A staff conference on 'Going Comprehensive' highlighted the assessment issue in a mixed ability situation. A Working Party visited other schools and researched various reporting systems, recommending a continuous and cumulative assessment card. An attainment grade in each subject would be added to each pupil's 'Academic Record Card' every half term, this would be seen by the parent and then returned to

the pupil's file. Within the faculties this would ensure continuous evaluation of individual progress, and as a result each faculty has had its own in-depth discussions about internal marking, and the pros and cons of various forms of assessment. The ongoing development has shown up in that the latest printing of record cards incorporates two grades per subject, one for attainment, one for effort, a number relating to a list of coded comments on attitude to work etc, and a place for the parent to sign if an appointment is requested at school.

Curriculum development includes mixed ability teaching from Years 1 to 5 in most subjects, integrated courses in Science, Humanities, and Creative Faculties, mode 3 exams in every Faculty, a Social Education course, a remedial withdrawal system, and the development of resource-based learning.

In some ways it might be argued that our strategies

for curriculum development have been more directly concerned with staff development. The latest innovation has been a monthly series of two hour seminars for Faculty Heads led by a visiting speaker. For next summer there are plans for individual Faculty courses in liaison with the Teachers Centre, during the post-exam period. School based in-service training should in our experience be a number one priority. This together with a facilitating structure provided by the working party system, the faculty system, and the resource centre are, we feel, essential pre-requisites for the process of curriculum renewal and vital tools for staff development. Without staff development there will be no curriculum development – at Castle School they are inextricably entwined.

*Bibliography and further detail in Johnson, J A Staff Development Aspects of Curriculum Development University of Bristol M Ed Dissertation, 1973.*

## **ADVANCE NOTICE of FORUM vol 19 no 1**

This forthcoming number will engage with some current controversial issues.

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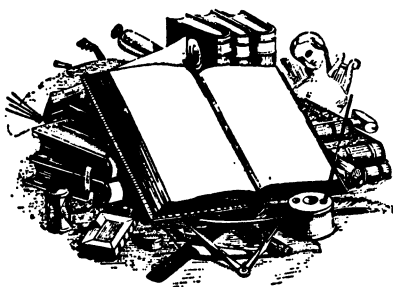
A critique of recent books by Bryan Wilson and Rhodes Boyson *by* Joan Simon

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# Reviews



## Practical advice

**Techniques and Problems of Assessment:**  
A practical handbook for teachers,  
H G Macintosh (ed). Edward Arnold  
(1974), pp 285. £3.25

Teachers have always been 'assessors' in their own classrooms, but it is only recently, largely as a result of the Certificate of Secondary Education, that their assessments have been used in examination procedures. Many teachers, who are now concerned with these procedures, have had little experience of the range of techniques in use, and have not had opportunities for considering or discussing the many problems associated with producing valid and reliable assessments. The papers in *Techniques and Problems of Assessment* have helped to fill this gap by describing different assessment procedures, statistical considerations, particular problems of assessment and and possible future developments in this field.

The book fulfils its stated objective of providing practical advice for teachers. The early chapters describe open-ended, structured and short answer questions, objective items, the assessment of practical and project work and aural and oral assessment.

As well as numerous examples, each chapter gives guidelines, where appropriate, for teachers who are writing items or developing procedures for their own classrooms or for internal or external examinations. These are of practical value to teachers. The contributors emphasise that as well as providing a measure of pupils' attainment at the end of their course. A real concern is expressed that 'activities in which pupils are engaged in their assessment match their activities in which they were engaged during their learning'. The importance is stressed of defining objectives, skills to be developed and content covered, so that only appropriate assessment procedures are developed.

There are many problems in assessment which still need to be solved and the later chapters deal with some of the issues in more depth. These include: the assessment of attitudes, course work and continuous assessment, moderation, the presentation of results and question banking. The contributors are aware of the problems which face teachers and the possible conflicts which may arise as they become both teacher and assessor, particularly in areas such as the assessment of attitudes and course work. The problems are sensitively discussed and some suggestions are made of ways these may be overcome. The importance of teacher involvement at all levels is repeatedly stressed and in 'The Preparation of School-based Assessment' the editor considers some of the strategies which may be used in working towards this goal.

The technical difficulties of devising valid and reliable measures are not ignored, and the chapters dealing with the application of statistics to assessment, item analysis and question validation clarify some of them. This will help teachers decide whether their assessments are consistent and whether they really measure what they are supposed to measure.

In spite of the clear definitions of of technical terms and jargon, there are some sections of the book which

teachers unfamiliar with the language of assessments may have difficulty in following. Some of the tables and figures in 'The Assessment of Project Work' are particularly confusing. There is no excuse for the appearance of charts on pages 109 and 116 in a form which can only be easily read if the book is held upside down! This could well deter teachers from considering ways of improving assessment in this extremely difficult area.

The book as a whole poses many questions and provide some possible solutions. It is clear, however, that there are still many aspects to explore. Some of these are considered in the final chapters: 'Measuring Attainment for Curriculum Evaluation' and 'The Value for the Teacher of Research into Assessment'.

This book provides sound practical advice about techniques which are in current use, giving guidelines and exploring their limitations, as well as opening up for teacher discussion the wider issues of assessment and the improvement of procedures.

ANNE RILEY

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## Nonstreamed teaching

**Mixed Ability Grouping: Possibilities and Experience in the Secondary School**, by R Peter Davies. Maurice Temple Smith Ltd (1976), pp 224. £3.25.

This book joins two or three other recently published works of similar basic format and approach in their consideration of aspects of mixed ability grouping in secondary schools. Teachers in the early stages of work with mixed ability groups, or anticipating such work will welcome the trend towards practical material from practising teachers. Where teachers have been a fairly long time at the business, and this can mean well over a decade, they may wonder why it has taken so long to reach this point. Up to now, with the important exception of some educational journals (this has been an important and recurring theme of *Forum*) there has been little written of the practical aspects.

Peter Davies's book is in three parts. It opens with a fairly short section on the whole streaming/de-streaming issue. Of necessity this is rather fragmentary, but as the author suggests 'this chapter was intended to draw the many isolated strands of evidence together'. Many will find this a useful brief survey. The assumption is made early 'that the case in favour of abandoning streaming is made and concentrate on the practical implications of this at school level. Theorising is pointless, however strong the case, if we are unable to translate our theories into effective practice at classroom level'.

Part II is the longest section with five chapters by subject teachers. It is refreshing to find a degree of

frankness in these chapters. The reader is led into some of the blind alleys and shares some of the frustration of developing the right techniques. It is also interesting to find examples of the materials used. I find in discussion with other teachers over effective practice there is always a demand for examples and details. Peter Davies opens 'Mixed Ability and the Subject Teacher' with a chapter on History. He gives a comprehensive survey from the beginning of his 'uncertainties about streaming' in the early to mid-sixties up to the present day pattern of mixed ability work in all years. It is perhaps something of a weakness generally in the book that current examinations at 16+ are not given particularly detailed consideration. Most of the experience of mixed ability work is still largely confined to lower secondary. The History chapter is an exception to this. The author concludes that the methods can be used as effectively in the fifth year as in the earlier years and having mentioned the dichotomy of demands made by 'O' level and CSE he states 'Hasten the day of the common examination for students of 16+ as long as the methods employed allow developments on Mode Three lines! Mixed ability groups and the fostering of natural, individual potential to its limit, will then be practical and selection totally abandoned'.

John Vickers makes a highly personal and sensitive statement regarding English. It is largely concerned with 'starting points' or motivation and conveys marvellously the excitement of the 'relationship between the teacher and his youngsters'. It is full of suggestions and has samples of youngsters' writing.

Those with a responsibility for planning the whole curriculum will know that all too often the move away from streaming in a school is often begun with the exception of French and Mathematics which frequently reserve the right to set.

Two thoroughly practical chapters by Tony Warnes on French and Peter Wilcox on Mathematics I found to be very helpful indeed. 'Most children are enthusiastic and interested in their work. We have very few discipline problems, perhaps because the children are interested, perhaps because of a degree of organisation and preparation for lessons, or because we have not created a sink group with all its attendant problems. We are satisfied with the standard of learning in the subject'. Both writers are heads of department and detail the sources, content and methods used.

Part III is by Peter Davies and tries to consider some of the macro-aspects of planning and organisation in schools. For teachers who have lived through the process of de-streaming it must seem amazing how schools up and down the country grope their way towards similar solutions. Blocking the timetable, lengthening lesson time, working with disadvantaged children by extraction, using subject report slips with NCR paper for duplicates and so on.

I would have liked more on mixed ability work in the 4th and 5th years with ideas on how to tackle the problem of preparation for the 16+ examinations, on the possibilities of integrated work and co-operative teaching and on the question of resources for mixed ability groups. It is, however, a useful contribution to this subject.

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## Multidisciplinary perspectives on children

**The Integration of a Child into a Social World.** Martin P. M. Richards (Ed.), Cambridge University Press (1974), 316pp. £1.95, paper. £5.00, hard.

This collection of original contributions, from a wide variety of fields of expertise, represents a comparatively new venture in books on child development. The inclusion of psychology, experimental psychology, sociology and social psychology in one text, is familiar. But Martin Richards suggests that a wider interdisciplinary approach is essential, because of the nature of the interaction between the child as a biological organism, with biological propensities and organisation, and the natural and social environment.

That there is interaction, rather than simply reaction, is one of the important theses of the book. It arises in the consideration of factors affecting the early relationship between mother and child by Jane Hubert in her chapter on 'Social factors in pregnancy and childbirth', and is discussed in chapters on cultural aspects of childbearing (by the Newsoms), the first steps in becoming social (by Richards),

infant-mother attachment (by Ainsworth, Bell and Stayton, by Bernal, and by Harré), the effects of the organisation of institutions on the caretaking adults and the children in their care (by the Tizard) and by Bruner in his exploration of the organisation of early skilled action.

Ryan, in her critique of previous work on language development, emphasises the need to regard language acquisition as more than something to be studied as the *object* of the child's knowledge, and in the main part of her chapter describes a possible framework, consisting of questions arising from four kinds of difficulty that adults experience when trying to understand young children. This framework depends on the assumption that much of a child's speech and other vocalisations take place within a context of interaction with adults who are motivated to understand the child's utterances, and to interpret them. Ryan also points out that the process of language acquisition in itself constitutes a form of socialisation, and cannot be separated from non-linguistic conventions about the appropriate utterance of words learnt, or the non-verbal modes of communication which have already become well established, in the sense of ability to influence the behaviour of others, and to indulge in reciprocal interchanges of many kinds.

A second major theme of the book is the need to question theoretical positions, past and present. In several chapters, explicit criticism is made of past conceptions, which leads the writer to adopt his present framework. In particular, Shotter, Harré and Blurton Jones argue for a perspective and methodology which allows us to study individuals in their natural social settings. Thus Shotter uses the term 'negotiation' rather than 'interaction', to emphasise the personal quality of relations between people, as opposed to interactions between things. Blurton Jones stresses the advantages that comparative, archaeological and

anthropological approaches bring to studies of child development, in increased awareness of the range of possible behaviour and variety of explanation.

Many teachers, who may view cross-cultural and cross-species studies with some suspicion, will welcome the framework in which the individual, in interaction with others actively helping to form himself and his own behaviour, has become the subject of study. The final chapter, by Ingleby, will startle some, and be rejected by others, for in questioning our roles in the political world in which we all act, Ingleby may frighten some who conflate radical criticism with political undermining. It is not so easy to change from 'habits of thought and perception laid down during the many years spent socialising into a class and a profession'. Yet psychologists, and those who read their work, have to free themselves from intellectual orthodoxy in order to 'produce a psychology which is genuinely open to reality testing', whose results will be used by the many other professions which also have dealings with people.

This is a most interesting book, and will be useful to many who wish to follow up their studies of child development by becoming familiar with recent research and thinking in their chosen area. The two themes running through the book unite the different chapters in a stimulating way, making the book readable as a whole, as well as in its separate sections.

IRENE M. FARMER  
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## Chinese comparisons

**Childhood in China**, ed by William Kessen. Yale University Press, (1975). pp 234. £2.20.

This is the report of an American team that visited China in late 1973 to study early childhood development. The team was led by the editor, psychologist and pediatrician at Yale, and Urie Brenfenbrenner, Professor of Human Development at Cornell, was one of the other twelve members. The visit was organised by the US Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China and sponsored by three of the most learned institutions in the USA. The visit lasted 20 days covering Canton, Peking, Sian and Shanghai. Direct observation was made mainly of children in the 3 to 6 age group, but the report covers all levels of education and development up to University. Two of the team read and speak Chinese, but the report warns of its 'limited understanding' of China with 'slight warrant for interpretation'.

In spite of this academic modesty the report is penetrating both in generalisation and in the detailed 'vignettes' drawn from observation by various members of the team. It is inspired throughout with a sympathetic desire to understand the many puzzling things they found in China. The conditions are represented as spartan, both in the homes and in school, in sharp contrast with the lively and colourful personality of the children. The 'high level of concentration, orderliness, and competence of the children' is noted. 'We were constantly struck by the quiet, gentle, and controlled manner of Chinese children and as constantly frustrated in our desire to understand its origins'. It acknowledges that 'Chinese schools and . . . Chinese

children are defined by a long history of the culture's respect for order, restraint, deference to authority, and for service to the group above individual achievement'. Nevertheless in the introductory background chapter and throughout the report there is awareness of how much the culture is changing. It shows that the once unassailable claims of filial piety and the domination of the young wife by the husband's mother are visible only in pallid vestiges'.

Differences between the Chinese and American cultures are highlighted. 'We inquired about hyperactive and aggressive behaviour; we tried, not very successfully, to describe some of the behaviour problems in American schools. By and large, Chinese teachers did not understand what we were talking about; they had never seen a hyperactive or disruptive child in school'.

The report faces the central question of all comparative studies: 'what implications can be drawn for American parents and American schools from observations in contemporary China?' The response to this question is that 'We have had to be content with describing what we saw as carefully as we can, in full recognition that we brought to our description . . . our own ideological and culture-limited ways of seeing and hearing and understanding'. But the conclusion is not wholly negative; some problems are selected as worthy of further investigation. At both the primary and post-primary levels it is noted that the method of instruction is to impart knowledge and reinforce its acquisition by repetition. Achievement is always commended; failure never condemned. Failure is in any case remarkably rare. 'Over and over again we asked ourselves how the very young Chinese child was brought to competence, social grace, and restraint. It did little good to ask Chinese adults about the problem, for two important reasons. For one, there was little professional interest in examining or discussing

potential sources of variation in children and, as might be expected from the presence of shared conception of children, there was little interest in the problem of variety as we were posing it. Everyone could join us in talking about sex differences, and differences as a result of variations in early schooling, and so on, but we could arouse little enthusiasm for talking about our first question – how do Chinese children come to be as they are?' Can it be that Chinese children behave the way they do because Chinese adults expect them so to behave? Teaching is seen not to be as instrumental for the purpose of changing behaviour. Chinese teachers 'have uniform expectations of what children at one or another age can do and . . . they behave with the virtually certain knowledge that the children would come to behave in the expected way – and, critically it did not much matter whether the children get there early or late'.

The puzzling questions that remain unanswered are: 'How do children learn the remarkably precise and by American standards advanced forms of dance, sculpture, and music? And how do Chinese parents and teachers manage the first signs of conflict among young children? We cannot even make a wise guess about the answers to either question; we can only testify . . . to the skilfulness of five-year-old Chinese in the performance of dance routines of memorable complexity and to the ability of such children to prepare, almost always from an established model, exact and convincing paintings and sculptures'.

The concluding note is 'we left China convinced that we had seen radically different ways of thinking about and meeting children from the ways we knew as Americans'.

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## Posing wrong questions

**Teachers Make a Difference**, by Thomas L Good, Bruce J Biddle, and Jere E Brophy. Holt, Rinehart and Winston (1975), pp 271, £3.75.

The American education system, like America generally, is beset by what the authors call 'nowness' – the concern to solve problems now rather than tomorrow. This has meant vast amounts of money being used to sponsor largely unresearched schemes claiming 'instant solutions' to educational ills.

The money used to finance Project Headstart and the measures designed to 'wage war on poverty' in the inner-city were a case in point. Whilst undoubtedly full of good intentions, the intervention proved to be futile. Black kids and poor kids still failed in school. The accompanying disillusionment provoked, on the one hand, cries of 'federal money wasted' and, on the other, a fairly rigorous attack by Jencks and Co on the popular myths pedalled by liberal educationalists. Jensen made even greater capital out of the apparent failure of positive discrimination to produce equality of opportunity by reaffirming notions of racial inferiority as the most realistic explanation of educational deprivation.

Educationalists in Britain have mounted a similar attack on structural inequality by educational strategies – comprehensive reorganisation, ROSLA, curriculum innovation, EPAs, community schools, etc. And in a similar way, as the effect of these is seen to have precious little impact on the distribution of educational opportunities generally, the same disenchantment is setting in.

In **Teachers Make a Difference** the authors set out to do two things. One is to argue that carefully controlled

research projects should precede the wholesale implementation of new educational ideas, so that if they work, they can be implemented in a planned and scientific way, and if they don't, they can be avoided. The other is to challenge the disenchantment of those who depict schools as alienating institutions and who accuse teachers of being mediators of failure. In both instances the book is an affirmation of confidence in the creative potential of good schools and good teachers.

It seems quite possible to Good, Biddle and Brophy that, although most students can't be expected to find their school experience a 'joyful high' all of the time, they should at least become 'minimally involved in the school', so that it is judged to be 'an acceptable place to spend time in'. The crucial element in achieving this deceptively modest aim is the one ignored by most educational research and innovation – the part played by the teacher. Not only do teachers at the interface have considerable and practical effect on what children learn and how they feel about school, but some teacher-traits are more effective than others and can be positively correlated with student achievement, morale and commitment to the school.

After a fairly pious introduction and patchy critique of current educational 'bad men' in America, the book drones into a tedious and tendentious advocacy of socio-psychological and psycho-metric means of monitoring and evaluating teachers' behaviour in the classroom. Fairly obscure (even by American standards) research projects are paraded as working models and the problem of valid research procedure is discussed in a way likely to turn off most readers anxious to discover *how* teachers make a difference.

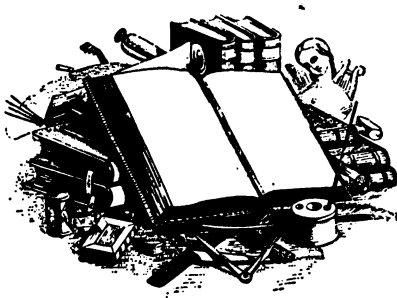
Apart from the fact that the book is pedantic and boring, its main weakness for me is its one-dimensional view of teachers' classroom behaviour. Of course it's true to say that too much educational research has been school or society based and that we still know very little about the interplay between

teachers and pupils at classroom level. But to assume that the negotiation between pupils and teachers exists in a vacuum devoid of historical, social, economic and political context is naïve. And to assume that in this negotiation teachers' behaviour can be programmed to produce pre-defined outcomes is a dangerous nonsense. It ignores the whole hidden curriculum of assumptions which teachers have and which schools transmit, and it raises crucial questions about the interests which define goals and prescribe outcomes. Most seriously, no mention is made of the definitions pupils might want to make of their school experience.

I'd be much more interested to see how teachers could 'make a difference' if they were encouraged to start with the children, challenge the institutional notions of what school is for and question the assumptions which make it seem reasonable that pupils should find schools, on teachers' terms, acceptable. If the authors really want teachers to feel that they have a part to play in reducing educational failure, they should pose themselves rather different questions about the relationship between the education system and the society it reflects than those raised here.

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## False models

**The Comprehensive School 1944-70: The politics of secondary school reorganisation**, by I G K Fenwick. Methuen (1976), pp 187. £6.90.

This is a doctoral thesis on 'politics' as understood in politics departments of universities which, condensed and somewhat written up, has got between hard covers: 163 pages of text for close on £7.

To produce a thesis one must find a subject and be original about it, in this instance seek a foothold for some political theorising. Why not the reorganisation of secondary education which surfaced into national politics in a somewhat peculiar way? This might be a useful field to apply some up-to-date systems analysis, or operate in the light of the proposition that 'organised interest groups representing teachers and the political parties in education' are 'by far the most important element' among the 'agencies mediating between government and governed'.

Research can consist mainly in going through the press – notably the professional and major educational journals (not *Forum*, of course) – also reports of Conservative and Labour party conferences and *Hansard*, as if this had never been done before. The bibliography is limited to four 'politics' studies 'which may supplement my own account'.

This reviews pronouncements by the the national committees or conferences of the NUT, NAS, secondary associations and, curiously, the NEF; also, in relation to the Labour party, the NALT. Some points about the development of attitudes in these circles are of interest.

The stance of the two major political parties is likewise considered.

But, according to the doctrine, statements by the Association of Education Committees must 'stand for' the attitude and influence of elected local authorities – as if these never exercised pressure by getting reorganisation plans through the ministry and by realising them locally; and were not themselves directly open to pressure from 'the governed' on their very doorstep. While there are one or two thumbnail sketches of local political controversy at particular points, no picture emerges of the realities which prompted reorganisation, nor its spread which provided the ground bass for the political and professional obligato at national level. The focus is directly on this.

Two initial chapters deal, questionably enough, with the government of education and the background to policy making; reorganisation is described as 'a violent breach of policy'. This, of course, was the Ministry of Education view. To accept it means failure to appreciate the Ministry's role as a major factor on the political scene, or, for that matter, why conservative authorities led the way in reorganisation.

Supporters of comprehensive schools figure as a kind of underground, forced to seek a foothold in 'group machinery'. As this implies the specific supporting groups are left out of account; though these were pressure groups in the more exact sense of the term and, with the educational groups also involved, epitomised a vital conjunction of popular and professional concern in many localities. But this does not fit into the model adopted.

After a survey of attitudes in the selected circles during the period – described as an 'historical account' – the final chapter turns to theorising. Evidently 'immediate group pressures' by teachers' organisations (whose interests were naturally divided) were not decisive, nor until 1964 was either

political party. So what happened?

Attention is directed to the concept the study set out to illustrate, 'the para-governmental activities' of 'organisations which mediate between governors and governed'. These we are told – 'the teachers' organisations, associations of local authorities, and, above all, political parties – structured the attitudes of parents and ministers producing different results and policies at different times'! And the theme is elaborated upon with some theoretical formulations as required in theses.

Perhaps, a penultimate phrase suggests to remedy the lack of a positive conclusion, one of the main contributory factors was 'a secular trend towards higher educational expectations on the part of the mass of parents and voters'. Perhaps the next 'politics' thesis might try taking this aspect into account, instead of overlooking the educational and local government issues and penning 'the governed' below 'para-governmental' stairs.

There are not a few errors. For one, a student of politics, or his supervisor, should know that Mrs Thatcher was unable to withdraw a Ministry circular, even if it was 10/65. JOAN SIMON



# The Woodlands Conference

## Forum reporter

**Forum** held a school-based workshop conference over the first week-end in April at the Woodlands School and the College of Education in Coventry. There were some thirty residential members from as far afield as Scotland and Wales, Durham and Kent, and a further twenty mainly fairly local non-residents. They came from well established comprehensives, some partially unstreamed and some about to tackle unstreaming, and from schools scheduled to go comprehensive. The conference was organised by Harvey Wyatt, Deputy Head at The Woodlands, with the help of twenty-three of his colleagues, four heads of department from other Coventry schools, the LEA Project Officer for Slow Learners, the Head of ROSLA Courses from a Staffordshire school and some of the college staff.

Dr. Donald Thompson, The Woodlands' Headmaster, opened proceedings on Friday evening with an account of why and how he had transformed a rigidly streamed ten-form entry boys' comprehensive into a totally non-streamed school where no subjects are set, while also giving it many of the overt features traditionally associated with grammar schools. He revealed himself as a pragmatist who had acted in reaction against such features as there being so few GCE successes, extensive early leaving, truancy, vandalism and disruptive behaviour among the lower streams. By cautious stages, yet determinedly exploiting his advantage as 'the new broom' in 1962, he had taken the school through banding and high-flier groups to complete nonstreaming without originally intending to reach this stage. Innovations in teaching methods had followed some time after and at first in a piecemeal way. Harvey Wyatt, then head of Geography, was a pioneer with new styles of teaching in the non-streamed classroom.

These largely revolved around worksheets, departmental resource centres and a central reprographics unit. Conference members were able to study and discuss these in groups of six to a dozen with school staff on Saturday and the first part of Sunday morning. There were also group sessions on Mode 3 examining with mixed ability teaching, and on remedial provision.

Harvey Wyatt's talk on Saturday morning, explaining the 'Supportive Organization' for departmental curriculum development, was a crucial informative follow-on to Dr. Thompson's historical overview. These two lectures set the context.

Specialist teachers found it very interesting to see how different departments had evolved their own ways of setting up resource centres, designing worksheet material and devising particular ways of teaching mixed ability classes appropriate to the subject's demands. These sessions were greatly valued for their practicality, and teachers much appreciated being given these behind the

scenes insights into the day-to-day working of another school. A significant feature of The Woodlands is how departmental teams pool resources material produced by individual teachers so that these are readily available for colleagues to use, now and in the future. Cataloguing systems feature importantly in this and enable new teachers to find a wealth of support material to utilise. The relevance of all this for CSE Mode 3 was evident.

The two very practical optional group sessions run by Mr. McColl, LEA Adviser for Remedial Work, on ways of meeting the needs of the academically less able boys attracted many conference members. This is often regarded as the problem area in mixed ability teaching and members found food for thought on how they might reconsider their roles in meeting the demands of this situation.

A session taken by two Housemasters on pastoral care generated many questions and much discussion. The Woodlands was purpose-built for a House system with physical House bases, and there was speculation about how essential this may be for the sense of identity and belonging which is a feature of the pastoral organization in this nonstreamed school, and whether a similar pastoral system would transplant to architecturally different schools.

The residential setting, with the conviviality of the college bar on Friday night and Coventry Teachers' Centre on Saturday night, provided opportunity for ongoing discussion, argument and anecdote. This informal exchange of ideas among teachers from at least thirty different schools across the country was an added benefit.

The final plenary session, chaired by Roger Seckington for **Forum** Editorial Board, was lively and controversial. There were features of authoritarian traditionalism and orderliness that perplexed and disturbed some. Yet most were undoubtedly impressed with the efficient organization that facilitated the creative, school-wide curriculum development and inspired such obvious enthusiasm and purposefully imaginative enterprise among staff. Here was a school of strange contrasts which shattered stereotyped images of traditional and progressive.

All appreciated the willingness of The Woodlands staff to expose their work to this kind of critical examination by fifty teachers from other schools. This was a unique experience which made for a useful and stimulating week-end. Conference members left on Sunday afternoon feeling they had gleaned many practical ideas which they could relate and interpret in the context of their own schools. They were in no doubt of the value of such a practical, school-based conference.

**Forum** wishes to record its gratitude to Donald Thompson, Harvey Wyatt and the rest of The Woodlands staff for this venture.

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