

FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION OF NEW TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Summer 1977

Volume 19

Number 3

85p

The Primary School

Educational Research and the Primary School

Brian Simon

The Informed Vision: a programme for educational reconstruction

Michael Armstrong

Room for Thought

John and Dorothy Paull

The Role of Play

Margaret Gracie

What has really happened in Schools?

D W Blades

Talking in School

Martyn Richards

Discussion

Maurice Dybeck

When will they ever Learn?

Alistair McIntosh

Thirty Years of Change

Michael Clarke

Assessment in the Primary School: filling in some gaps

Anne Riley

The Professional Philosophy of Teachers

K G Collier

Reviews

Eric Linfield, Margaret Miles, Guy Neave,

Patrick Bailey

Editorial Board

Michael Armstrong, Countesthorpe Upper School, Leicestershire.

Clyde Chitty, Roger Manwood School, London.

Michael Clarke, Little Hill Junior School, Leicestershire.

Annabelle Dixon, Chalk Dell Infant School, Hertford.

Margaret Gracie, Blaby Teachers' Centre, Leicestershire.

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

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

Byron Thomas, Broughton Astley Primary School, Leicestershire.

Peter Thomson, Community Education Worker, Central London Adult Education Institute.

Jack Walton, University of New England, Armidale, Australia.

Roy Waters District Inspector ILEA.

Harvey Wyatt, The Woodlands School, Coventry.

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

Nanette Whitbread, School of Education, Leicester Polytechnic.

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

Business information

Correspondence relating to subscriptions etc. should be addressed to The Manager, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield WS13 7AA. Tel. Lichfield 51159.

Reductions available on bulk orders of current number. (e.g. 10 copies for £6.)

Forum is published three times a year, in September, January and May. £2.50 a year or 85p an issue.

The Primary School

This is a bumper number of **Forum**. It is devoted to the primary school which has come heavily under attack during the last year; an attack which, in our view, has been misdirected and marked by ignorance and misinformation. Our aim is to set this picture to rights, and to advance a positive and viable perspective for the future.

For this reason also, and with this same purpose, **Forum** is organising a full day conference in London on June 18th. We feel we have a duty to support primary school teachers who, faced with a difficult and often arduous task, have certain very definite successes to their credit in the considerable changes that have come over the schools in the last 10 or 15 years. The aim of the conference is to crystallise and discuss advanced practice in the schools, to evaluate the position now reached in a supportive and rational manner.

We are delighted that James Britton, whose contribution to the thinking and conclusions of the Bullock Report (**A Language for Life**) is well known and widely acknowledged, and who has devoted special attention to the primary stage, has agreed to be the main speaker to introduce the discussion; as also that such well-known and experienced practitioners as Mary Brown (joint author of **The Integrated Day**) and Henry Pluckrose (with members of their staffs) will also be taking part. Our intention is that this Special Number, together with the conference, will contribute to a sane appraisal of developments at the primary stage, and so give added confidence to teachers in the value of their work.

In taking this standpoint we do not wish to give the impression that there is no need for criticism, and indeed for a cool appraisal of aims, objectives and procedures. That would be ridiculous. Indeed **Forum** has long held that what we may call advanced practice urgently needs underpinning by an agreed theory – without this it is always subject to sudden changes of fashion or blasts of criticism. Several of the articles in this issue tangle with this question in one way or another, for instance those by Michael Armstrong, Margaret Gracie, Alistair McIntosh and others. That this is an extremely complex question is clear enough – hence the need to focus specifically on this issue and to extend the width and scope of the discussion.

As an earnest of our concern with this question, readers may note that primary school representation on the Editorial Board of the journal has been considerably strengthened (following the retirement of several stalwarts who were in at the start of the journal). Nor is this all. It happens also that several Editorial Board members are at present actively involved in research in this field – if utilising different (and complementary) approaches. For instance Margaret Gracie has recently spent a year on secondment carrying through an observational study of an infant school classroom (her article draws on this experience). Michael Armstrong is spending the current year (also on secondment) acting as co-teacher and researcher in a primary school classroom in Leicestershire (Mary Brown's school), while Brian Simon has joint responsibility for a long-term (five year) SSRC funded research programme on 'The Nature of Learning in Primary School Classrooms' now being carried through in Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Sheffield (Anne Riley's article on new forms of assessment arises from this project). The Editorial Board itself, therefore, embodies close relations between theoreticians and practitioners (usually united in the same individuals) so that it is but natural that we should be specifically concerned to make what contribution we can to clarifying existing procedures and assisting in determining the way forward.

To those who are worried about standards it may be relevant to point out that our main concern in all this is precisely to clarify how primary education may best assist in developing children's abilities and skills as well as laying the foundation for their functioning as autonomous individuals. This is worth stressing at present when those who support advanced primary practice are often thought to have no concern for intellectual development. In fact the opposite is the case, as a study of the relevant articles will make clear. In our view the obsolete systems of the past, looked back to with such cloying nostalgia by Black Paper supporters and their neophytes, are rejected precisely because these systems and approaches acted chiefly to inhibit just such development on the part of the great majority of children. That is why it was necessary to take a new direction in primary education.

Educational Research and

Brian Simon

The high point in last Autumn's campaign against the schools (or teachers) was, in my view, marked by the hysterical first leader in *The Times* of 21st October 1976. This reached its climax with its reference to the 'wild men of the classroom' – 'mostly . . . men of the left' of the 'same breed as the men of Blackpool'. These, through the introduction of modern methods, were responsible for the 'decline in educational standards and respect for authority'. The clear implication was that this description fitted the bulk of primary school teachers.

This, at least, is how the matter was seen by Lady Plowden who, to her eternal credit, protested in a dignified letter at this 'slur on the many dedicated, gifted and experienced teachers' who, by developing new approaches, and in spite of contemporary difficulties and some misapprehensions, had produced 'a real quality of learning in the children in many schools' (22 October 1976).

In practice, what seemed to amount to an orchestrated campaign was mounted, in particular by the mass media, over the Summer and Autumn of last year. Over this period the unease generated by the Tyndale affair was compounded by the massive, and quite unusual, media exploitation of the Bennett research, the whole fuelled by Black Paper interventions as always given wide publicity. All this might lead to a consideration of the role of the mass media in this whole affair – and of the particular reasons why education became, for a period, the whipping boy for the country's economic and other ills, just at a time when large cuts in educational expenditure were determined on as government policy. It is to be hoped that others will undertake just such an analysis.

Now that things have calmed down somewhat, we may usefully attempt an evaluation of the situation. What is the actual situation in primary schools today? Are they full of 'wild men' on some kind of ego trip in the schools, or what? It will be remembered that the Plowden report referred to 10 per cent 'best' schools only – those most clearly meeting their criteria of advanced and positive practice. This was ten years ago now. The first subsequent survey of a systematic kind that looked at what Neville Bennett called 'teaching styles' (actually forms of classroom organisation and control, grouping procedures, degree of pupil mobility and choice, and so on) is Deanne Bealing's (now Boydel), carried through in one of the areas generally thought to have been at the centre of the 'primary school revolution' (in 1972). What did this show? Hardly that the schools were staffed by wild men (and women?) deliberately promoting anarchy in the schools. Quite the contrary. Bealing's survey indicated

that, in general, teachers maintain a firm control, whatever the form of organisation adopted. Certainly, what are now called 'informal' classroom arrangements preponderated, but in spite of the relatively informal classroom layouts adopted by the vast majority of the teachers in the survey, Bealing concluded that 'there was so much evidence of tight teacher control over such matters as where children sit and move that it seems highly doubtful that there is much opportunity for children to choose and/or organise their own activities in most classrooms'. This seems fairly definite, objective evidence, whatever may be thought about it.⁽¹⁾

The only other survey carried through at that time (1971) was that by Moran, which focused specifically on teachers working the Integrated Day where one might – ignorantly – imagine that the most permissive systems would tend to operate. But not at all. Moran also found that the most widely used 'type' of Integrated Day systems (he defined five of these) involved 'strict control' by the teachers, though other types did allow the child some degree of control, for instance, over the order in which activities are tackled.⁽²⁾ In fact, the attempt to operate this system without close overall control would make a nonsense of it, as a little thought makes evident.

Finally there is Neville Bennett's survey. What did this find? It came up with the information that, in primary classrooms covering Cumbria and Lancashire, only 17 per cent adopted what Bennett categorised as 'informal' styles – and only 9 per cent the extreme type of informality on his continuum which, in his view, 'corresponds closely to the Plowden "best schools" definition'! Over 80 per cent adopted either 'formal' or 'mixed' styles.⁽³⁾

Nonstreaming more ambitious

In general, then, the indications from objective studies are that, while there has certainly been a shift in general classroom arrangements, in breadth and scope of activities undertaken and considered appropriate, and in other ways, things have hardly gone very far – and certainly *The Times's* irresponsible leader is very wide of the mark. Nor does Dr Ashton's comprehensive survey of primary teachers' aims (1975) adduce evidence that permissive and anarchistic methods are popular among teachers. While the survey report draws attention to a sharp dichotomy between 'older, more experienced, more established teachers' who stressed the three R's and societal assimilation, and their younger counterparts who favoured

the Primary School

intellectual autonomy, there is little in the study supporting the view that permissive and anarchistic methods (in *The Times* sense) are popular among teachers – rather the opposite.⁽⁴⁾ Teaching in any case tends to be a conservative profession, and perhaps this is the main conclusion from all this, though this is not to deny that there has been a definite and pronounced shift in primary schools to embracing much wider educational objectives than used to be the case (or was possible) under the old streamed system with the 11 plus. The most important change, I suggest, has been the general swing towards unstreaming in the primary school, referred to below (Bennett found only 13 per cent of streamed schools in his area).

My conclusion is that the media, by picking on certain newsworthy (and circulation pushing) events and issues, have played a big part in putting across a false picture of developments in the schools (and primary schools in particular). In restoring a sense of proportion on this question, however, it is worth noting that some of the more rosy tinted views of the 'primary school revolution' have been derived at second hand from the extraordinary outpouring of American books on the English Infant school, the Leicestershire Plan (so-called, seen by American visitors as concerned specifically with *primary* education), and so on. This phenomenon, epitomised in Silberman's massive enquiry, or in Joseph Featherstone's famous *New Republic* articles (since published as *Schools Where Children Learn*, 1971), or Hertzberg and Stone's *Schools are for Children* (1971) is linked with American cultural and educational history, rather than British. None of these were systematic surveys – they aimed to give a general impression as to what was happening in British primary schools, based mainly on episodic reportage (of incidents) by visiting Americans. While this is an interesting phenomenon it is hardly relevant to any serious assessment as to what was happening in British primary schools. Exceptions are Lauren Resznick's systematic and fascinating study of classroom processes in four London infant schools – a model enquiry in its way, and revealing much of interest relating in particular to teacher-pupil interaction; and the serious study, by A C Berlak and others, again involving observation of actual classroom procedures as well as structured interviews with teachers and others, published recently in the *School Review* (University of Chicago).⁽⁵⁾ It is worth noting in passing that David Hawkins, who has played a considerable part in Leicestershire primary school developments, has never allowed himself to contribute to this impressionistic reportage about primary schools in

Britain.

What, then, has been happening in British primary schools? What point have we reached and how can the more positive features of recent developments be encouraged and carried further? What light can research throw on all this? These are the sort of questions that are now important and worth considering. But first it may be as well to 'place' this system historically – to remind ourselves of its evolution, and, indeed of the evolution of the concept of the primary school, since this has relevant and important features.

Age range and class size

It may be worth pointing out that the concept of the primary school, as a separate, independent entity, seems to be specifically a British phenomenon. Such schools do not exist, for instance, in Sweden, Denmark or Poland. I had the opportunity to visit (and sit in on) primary classrooms in these countries during the past year. In each of them the common, basic school takes children from 6 (or 7) through to 14 (or 15); though the primary classes have to some extent a separate organisation within the basic school. The second point is that, in Britain, the primary school (as a school or schools taking children from 5 to 11) is still a comparatively recent phenomenon. It was brought into being as it were as a by-product following the Hadow Report (1926) which, significantly, was entitled *The Education of the Adolescent*, and which was concerned specifically with the education of children over 11.

In 1926 only some 5 per cent of children below 12 were in separate primary schools or departments. By the outbreak of World War II just under 50 per cent of children of that age group were in separate primary schools or departments. Hadow reorganisation took roughly 40 years to complete, so that it was not until the mid-1960's that *all* the children in the relevant age group were in primary schools. That is only 11 years ago.

And yet, though only recently established, the traditional primary school is already on its way out in various parts of the country. New patterns are emerging – lower (or 'first') schools for children aged 5 to 8 (or to 9 in some areas) followed by 'middle' schools for the 8 to 12's (or 9 to 13's). There are even schools for those aged 5 to 10, and so on. It is reasonable to expect that these differential organisational forms will variously affect the nature of the education offered (and experienced) in these schools. This is a point worth considering in the future.

It is also relevant here to note two other factors which have profoundly influenced developments. First, primary schools feed secondary schools; their nature and practice is, therefore, inevitably to some extent determined by what happens to their pupils at 11. So their history includes the strong swing to streaming in the late 1940's and 50's when, with the completion of reorganisation, streaming spread (with 'barely credible rapidity' as Brian Jackson put it) throughout the country, so reinforcing traditional class teaching practices long after advanced thinking (and professional advice) condemned them – as did, for instance, the 1931 Consultative Committee's report on *The Primary School*. But, and for the same reason, their history also includes the extraordinarily rapid swing in the opposite direction (against streaming) which, after a slow start in the early 1950's, took off in the mid-1960's, moderately encouraged by the Plowden Committee, to which the *Forum* Editorial Board gave both written and oral evidence in this sense (See Vol 7, No 1); a movement on the whole 'legitimised' by the Barker Lunn report of 1970 (*Streaming in the Primary School* (N.F.E.R.)).

But, as Michael Clarke reminds us in his article in this issue, practice was also profoundly affected by the extraordinarily shortsighted policy (endemic in this country) of allowing large classes to persist in the primary field as a matter of principle. As late as the mid-1950's (in 1954) there were 40,447 classes with over 40 pupils, and of these, 1,145 with over 50 pupils (5 classes had over 60). This meant that nearly one million children were being educated in over-size classes. This also inevitably reinforced traditional class teaching approaches. Compare the situation in Sweden and Denmark where the opportunity was taken in the education boom of the 1960's radically to reduce class sizes for the age group to 20 or less, thus creating a quite different situation. But classes did come down in the 1960's (in 1966 there were 15,632 classes with over 40 pupils – still a total of over 670,000 children), and this presumably did to some extent facilitate the move from class teaching to group and individualised work, as proposed by Plowden. There has also been some improvement over the last ten years.

Of course primary schools also experienced the distrust of authoritarian procedures characteristic of the recent period. This expressed itself in an apparent decrease of headteacher control and a concomitant increase in teacher autonomy in the classroom leading to considerable differences in practice, sometimes within the single school. With this went the transformation of the inspector's role

to that of providing an advisory service to the schools – a deliberate shift on the part of many local authorities. This can be linked to the increasing professionalisation of teachers consequent upon the establishment of the three year training course in the early 1960's. All this formed the context within which the move to 'informal' educational procedures took place, and to these must be added important architectural moves including first, the provision of activity areas in new (and re-modelled old) schools, followed by Open Plan schools, the origins of which are still somewhat obscure. As part of the current backlash there is now a new bid by HMIs for a national role (though leading HMIs certainly encouraged the move to new approaches in the 60s), the appointment of local authority Inspectors (rather than advisers), proposals that governors should play an active part in determining the curriculum (we await the Taylor report on this), and so on.

Expanding curriculum

If we try to summarise what has been happening in primary schools we can, I think, make certain broad generalisations. For instance, as regards the curriculum (or forms of activity), there has clearly been a considerable broadening – a move away from concentration on the 3 Rs plus 'Intelligence', which was the rule while the 11 plus held sway (as it still does in some areas). This is not to say that the so-called 'basic skills' are ignored – far from it; the evidence available (particularly from the Bullock report survey) indicates that most schools focus on these in the mornings, so giving them priority, even if their teaching takes different forms than in the past. But the emphasis has shifted to 'finding out', to encouraging creative activities in various fields of the curriculum; to the 'new' maths, to environmental and nature study, to encouragement of artistic activities of various kinds, perhaps especially drama and dance; to the stress on language development highlighted in the Bullock Report, and so on. Relations between teachers and pupils have changed also – become more friendly, more relaxed, easier.

Certainly there is less class teaching of the traditional type – more group and individual work which seems to be becoming the norm; indeed Deanne Boydell found in her sample of informal classrooms that an average of 76 per cent of all teacher utterances were addressed to single children privately, giving individual

attention*. It may be that new 'system' is coming into being in an entirely pragmatic way, with the swing from streaming involving major concentration on individualised work which the teacher 'monitors' – her concern, if Philip Jackson is right (*Life in Classrooms*, 1968) being primarily the maintenance of equilibrium in the classroom (as other research also seems to indicate). If this is right, the main danger may be that a new systematisation is creeping in unbeknown and unevaluated; one which, far from stressing the child's activity and scope for development may restrict it through too tight a control within somewhat rigidly defined limitations. This, of course, is speculative, if based on some evidence, but may be worth drawing attention to.

Now that the roar and hullabaloo of last Autumn seems for the present over, or at least to have abated, and although various moves are on foot that may profoundly affect the schools (for instance, the massive testing systems being proposed by certain local authorities, the possible effects of the Assessment of Performance Unit, and so on), we can, surely, congratulate the schools and the teachers for not losing their heads (in spite of provocation), and, surveying the scene, consider possible moves ahead.

Flexibility and structure

The key issue, it seems to me, is the problem of the relation between flexibility and structure which, while it affects (or lies at the basis of) all institutionalised education, including at higher education level, is particularly a problem for the primary school (as Margaret Gracie's article in this issue makes clear). For many years the cry has been for flexibility. This lay at the centre of the Crowther Committee's report (1958), of the Plowden recommendations (see para 538ff), and so on. It is worth remembering that the cry came partly from industry who now wanted people able to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances rather than head-down, mono-vocational products incapable of meeting changing needs.

The concept of flexibility penetrated the primary school, for instance through Open Planning and the Integrated Day (significantly not mentioned in the Plowden report). Further, the idea that all knowledge had some sort of linear development (or structure) was at a discount some years ago. The old, rigid timetables were deliberately

relegated as new teachers came into the schools in large numbers with new, wider educational purposes than the old (Dr Ashton's survey brings out clearly this general differentiation).

Is it time now to take a new look at this problem? In an assessment of the Plowden report ten years ago we identified this as the key issue even then, but one on which little guidance was given in the report itself. How, we asked, in the flexibly organised class, 'in which children are working, say, on a number of "centres of interest"', in groups or as individuals – can the situation be so structured as to ensure that each child has a variety of experience of such a nature that he masters the necessary mental operations underlying intellectual development? How may it best be ensured that different children have sufficient opportunities to use language in ways necessary to their overall mental development? What are the best forms of grouping within a class – should groups form and reform for different kinds of activity and if so on what basis? For instance, how can activities with mathematical materials, or scientific apparatus, most usefully be introduced in the flexible situation? (*Forum*, Vol. 9, No. 3). It seems that questions such as these are just as urgent now as they were ten years ago – in fact, more so.

Research can help us here. We should look to those psychologists who are profoundly immersed in education and understand its problems (unfortunately we have few of these), since this issue concerns basic questions relating to the nature of learning – and of human formation. The stress on the need for structure comes from two important sources in particular – from Jerome Bruner (and those developing his work in the schools), now quite well known in this country, and from the researches of Elkonin and Davidov in the USSR who have developed new experimental approaches to the learning of language and mathematics specifically based on analysis of the way mental operations are developed on the basis of the 'complex functional systems' referred to by Luria. This latter approach has been developed from the work of Vigotski whose *Thought and Language* (trans and pub, 1962) has had a profound effect in the West. I am referring here to the child's intellectual development only, of course, but this surely is of considerable importance.

There is not space to go into these approaches further, but the conclusion appears to be that the child's learning, at least in the areas mentioned, does need to be carefully structured if he is to have the opportunity for full development on the intellectual plane – and why not? In other words, while pupil choice, classroom mobility,

* 17 per cent were addressed to children in a group setting, and 7 per cent in a whole class setting ('Teacher-pupil contact in Junior Classrooms', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Nov. 1974, Table I).

etc, clearly have a lot to be said for them in terms of the child's overall development (which is the main thing to be considered), and in terms of the development of specific skills and abilities, yet the child also needs (or deserves) a degree of stability and guidance to encourage systematic learning in important areas of knowledge.

Surely we should take note of such developments. No one seriously claims that young children can discover (or set up) these structures for themselves – can ensure that they go through the various stages now seen as necessary for the formation of particular abilities and skills. Individualisation and group work (which cries out for research) *may* prove the most effective means of developing this approach, but this remains to be shown. In particular, perhaps, we need to begin to question received views (derived partly from Piaget) that individualisation is necessary as the prime approach due to the unique characteristics of every child with his own specific development. This idea may be culture-bound – children, it can be argued, have more in common than in what differentiates them one from another. The potentialities (and procedures) of group work need to be explored much more systematically than has been the case in the past, in particular procedures for maximising the effectiveness of group activity in relation to defined criteria. But an important point is that the school day in this country (in sharp contrast to both Western and Eastern Europe) is certainly long enough to embrace various approaches at different times, as indeed is the normal practice now (there is time for both play activities concerned with promoting autonomy and for activities directed specifically at certain specific areas of cognitive learning). What is required is some systematisation (or development of a rationale) relating to the specific objectives of different forms of activity as they succeed each other during the day, though not, of course, in a rigid manner.

But, while considering these and related points, let us not by any means succumb to demands that the objectives of the primary school be reduced once again to 'the basics', as has happened in parts of the United States and as Black Paper propagandists insistently demand. In any case there seems little chance of that now. The maintained primary school today caters for a wide variety of social groups and strata, several of which will certainly not stand for the imposition of an arid and rigid school life on their offspring. As I write this (early March) the National Consumer Council has just published the results of a survey indicating that over 80 per cent of parents are either 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied by what goes on in their

children's schools. The elements of science, nature study, environmental studies, creative activities, music, dance and drama – all these need to be extended rather than contracted (the Bennett survey indicated minimal focus in these areas, a very real 'cause for concern' which the mass media did *not* pick up). These are legitimate and necessary areas of activity for primary school children – and are strongly supported by teachers, as Dr Ashton's survey showed.

Finally – and too briefly – what help can research offer? Possibly quite a lot (as partly indicated above); especially if it pursues the present tendency (with the co-operation of teachers) to penetrate inside the classroom and, with the aid of various techniques, to record and analyse what goes on there. This is a new approach for educational research, strange as though it may seem – a new way in, even if its value is questioned by some. Examples include the work of the Ford T project, originally based on the University of East Anglia, which sets out to assist teachers to evaluate their own teaching; such developments as the Northampton Primary Heads Research Group which undertakes teacher based research with guidance and support where needed; intensive classroom studies, the researcher working alongside the teacher (now commencing in this country) and large scale systematic studies involving classroom observation. This is by no means a comprehensive list of current research initiatives, but it does indicate, as Philip Jackson proposed in his seminal book, that a number of different approaches are now being used to study the primary school classroom, including approaches involving teachers in research activities (see Anne Riley's article). The opportunity exists, now that the crisis atmosphere of last Autumn has receded, to move into serious study and perhaps a creative re-thinking of the problems of primary education – to giving it that attention, at last, that it certainly deserves. This is the direction of development that existing conditions require.

References

1. Bealing, D., 'The organisation of junior school classrooms', *Educational Research* 14, 1972.
2. Moran P. R., 'The integrated day', *Educational Research* Vol 14, No 1, 1971.
3. Bennett, Neville, *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress*, 1976.
4. Ashton, P., et al, *The Aims of Primary Education: a study of teachers' opinions*, 1975.
5. Resznick, L. B., 'Teacher behaviour in the informal classroom', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* Vol 4, 1972: Berlak, A. C., et al, 'Teaching and Learning in English primary schools', *School Review*, Vol 83, No 2, February 1975.

COMING to the CONFERENCE?

FORUM has been published now every term for nearly twenty years playing its part proudly in the movement towards a fully comprehensive system of education. From the start FORUM has sought to involve itself in the evolution of the new kind of primary school which it regards as fundamental to that end. Now again, in this the year of the Great Debate, with support, we seek to chart the way ahead.

JOIN US IN

FORUM on the PRIMARY SCHOOL

at
THE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
EUSTON ROAD, LONDON N.W. II

on

SATURDAY, 18th JUNE, 1977
10.30 - 4.30

A.M. - - - - SPEAKERS - - - - P.M.

JAMES BRITTON
(University of London Institute of
Education, internationally known for his
work on language and learning.)

HENRY PLUCKROSE
(Headmaster of Prior Weston Primary
School, in the City of London.)

MARY BROWN
(Headmistress of the Sherard Primary
School, Leicestershire.)

Chaired by
ANNABELLE DIXON
(Deputy Head of Chalk Dell Infant
School, Herts & member of Forum
Editorial Board.)

Chaired by
BRIAN SIMON
(Professor of Education, University of
Leicester & Joint Editor of FORUM.)

Now we need you !
Conference fee to
include Lunch

£3

Send your booking slip
NOW

To: Forum Manager,
11 Beacon Street, Lichfield, WS13 7AA.

Please reserve me a place at the Primary School
Conference on June 18th.

I enclose a P.O. / Cheque payable to Forum
value £3 together with s.a.e.

Name

Address

.....

The Informed Vision: A Programme for

Michael Armstrong

The Informed Vision is the title of a collection of essays by David Hawkins, first published in America in 1974. David Hawkins is a philosopher, in particular a philosopher of science and of mathematics who, since the early '60s, has also been deeply involved in the practice and theory of primary education, first as director of the Elementary Science Study, an American equivalent, roughly speaking, of the Nuffield Junior Science Project, and later as founder and director of the Mountain View Center for Environmental Education at the University of Colorado in Boulder where he is professor of philosophy.

The Informed Vision is, in my opinion, the most important book on education and its foundations to have appeared for many years. It marks the beginning of an undertaking, long overdue, to reconstruct a radical philosophy of education, in the tradition extending back through Dewey, Montessori, Froebel, Tolstoy and others to Rousseau, in such a way as to provide a stronger and more secure foundation of theory for the best 'progressive' practice of our day. (The word 'progressive' is seriously misleading but has still to suffice, in the absence of an agreed alternative, as a shorthand expression for a particular educational tradition.) But more than that, it offers us a new vision, an informed vision, of a kind of education, a way of learning and of teaching, which might help to lead our society further along the road towards a common understanding and a common culture, a goal which after more than a hundred years of popular education seems almost as elusive as ever.

I want, in this review, to set out what seem to me to be the main ideas that find expression in these 'essays on learning and human nature'. The outline I shall present is general, bald and relatively abstract, whereas the essays themselves are rich in example and subtle in detail, as often concrete as abstract. Elsewhere in this number of **Forum**, as in previous numbers, attempts are made to illustrate and to extend, consciously or by implication, the argument of this book (see for example Margaret Gracie's article in this number). My hope is that many more attempts will be made as the argument develops and theory and practice begin to inform each other.

Most of the themes that dominate **The Informed Vision** emerge in the title essay, the first in the book. For David Hawkins an informed human vision is the ultimate goal of education. Education is not, not first and foremost, a utility, a means of growth, of 'producing a population increasingly ready to embrace and further the new industrial technology which development requires'; nor is it primarily a means to economic or political power,

either for individuals or for classes. It is, in its essence, a way of informing and enhancing the human vision, of sustaining a sense of involvement and of commitment within our world, of 'being at home in the world', a quality which also implies 'that we very well understand the opposite condition of non-involvement, the many moods of alienation'. The most important kind of estrangement in our own world, 'derives from the fact that the extraordinary technological and material evolution of the last century or two expresses a way of life and thought that has been genuinely available only to a minority among us. To the rest it is, in essence, an alien affair'. The consequence is twofold: the majority are deprived both of a proper sense of involvement and commitment in our world, and of access to the means of power which depend upon a knowledge they do not share, while the select and privileged minority who do possess the knowledge, divided as they are from the rest of society, are inevitably 'subject to all the corruptions of caste and status'. 'A world so deeply committed to science', and to other forms of symbolic knowledge, 'cannot survive with a vast majority of its population intellectually and aesthetically alienated from' these forms.

It is the purpose of the essays that make up this book to describe and to defend 'a style of education that would permit correction, in our culture, of this basic defect'. Hawkins seeks an analogy for the style he has in mind in Colin Turnbull's account of education among the Pygmies in his book **The Forest People**. 'It is an education which begins in play suffused with enjoyment and evolves into an apprenticeship premised on commitment'. He acknowledges the vast difference between our needs and those of the Pygmies. 'What we must learn is in part more remote from the immediate environment, more abstracted and dependent on symbolic skills. And that is the challenge to our education; to recover for our world', a world of abstraction and symbol, 'the ways of learning that are concretely involving and aesthetically rewarding, that move from play toward apprenticeship in work'.

Educational Reconstruction

It is characteristic of any achievement of learning of this order that it possesses a quality of spontaneity which Hawkins, quoting John Dewey, defines as 'complete absorption in subject matter that is fresh, the freshness of which holds and sustains emotion'. Spontaneity of human expression 'is no mere display or outburst: it is a synthesized achievement compatible, as Dewey goes on to say, "with any amount of labour provided the results of that labour emerge in complete fusion with an emotion that is fresh"'. Among the conditions that foster and nourish such an achievement two are pre-eminent. One is the child's 'freedom for active involvement', for exploration and for choice; the other is the teacher's provisioning of an environment rich in exploratory potential. To reinforce 'the natural probings and explorings of children' is, as Dewey saw, 'the basis of all true education'. But that is only one side of the story. Content is no less important than method and 'absorption in subject matter requires a major effort of provisioning for that subject matter'. In its preoccupation with the child's freedom for active involvement 'progressive education' has sometimes neglected to show an equal, matching concern for provisioning 'the world of children's exploration with subject matter they could explore well, could penetrate deeply.'

Exploration with explanation

Education, then, requires the freedom to explore 'the order and organisation of the world' through 'complete absorption in subject matter that is fresh' and in the company of teachers who have made ample provision for that subject matter. But the emphasis on exploration does not preclude the value or necessity of explanation. 'There comes a time for harvesting, gathering, organising, even programming, and here individual learners must be drawn together under a common discipline. In our schools, this time comes much too early. Or, better, it is too little preceded and followed by periods – long periods – of individualised and diversified work of a more exploratory and self-directed kind... We must learn better to instruct children, when, after absorption in subject matter, they communicate by their behaviour those directions which they are prepared to find meaningful because they themselves have begun to define and seek them. And then there is the opposite transition, when formal instruction has brought children to new levels of understanding and interpretation; to open again the door

to less directed probing and testing at these new levels – and thus to consolidate what has been learned, to use it for further learning.'

Of all the themes presented in this opening essay the foremost is that of autonomy. In essay after essay Hawkins insists that it is 'a fundamental aim of education to organise schools, classrooms and our own performance as teachers in order to help children acquire the capacity for significant choice' and that 'learning is really a process of choice'. 'If children are deprived of significant choice in their daily activities in school then the most important thing that education is concerned with is simply being bypassed.' Traditionally, autonomy has been viewed as one of the ends of education but not as part of its means, or at any rate not an essential part. It is from this mistake that much of the failure of traditional education derives. Thus 'it is often conceded that a superordinate aim of education should be the cultivation of competence in children to fashion well their own lives. But it is NOT supposed steadily that such competence is gained through exercise of it. It is supposed, rather, that self-organisation will appear magically AFTER years of schooling subordinated to a quite different principle, according to which children are DEPRIVED of autonomy. They are deprived in the interest of what is conceived to be an efficient imparting of information and guidance. During all this time, and in the interest of such efficiency, children are essentially deprived of any significant exercise of autonomy in choice, discrimination and judgment. They are coerced, however politely, into a frame of organisation intended to promote their acceptance of information and exercise in specific curricular topics, these being justified on the ground that they are necessary to competent adult functioning. This induced organisation is thought of as a kind of scaffolding to be torn down after the process is finished and the product certified as complete. But it is in fact a powerful moulding of character, and of a kind of character antagonistic to the superordinate aim which education professes to serve. The scaffolding gets built into the structures and cannot be removed'.

Already advantaged

Hawkins suggests that the children who succeed under such a programme do so because they already possess a capacity for individual choice, acquired OUTSIDE of school. 'But children are very unequally endowed by

previous condition and experience with this capacity for independent choice, which the schools do little to help them cultivate. No one can catalogue all the conditions of such relative success but it is a conspicuous statistical fact that the successful come commonly, though not universally, from a background which could be called the folk-culture of the already well-educated. The deeper conditions of academic success, which schools often unconsciously work against, are in fact supplied from another cultural source. But for vast numbers of children the mismatch between their own developing capacities and the experience available in school is so great that they are unable to avoid the induced pattern, with its constant accompaniment for them of failure and boredom, withdrawal, manipulation or rebellion'.

Alternative learning theory

To remedy this deep defect in 'standard educational practice' and theory we require a radically new theory of education, reflecting an alternative conception of learning and of knowing, 'the theory of a design which seeks to optimise the eolithic component in education, to optimise children's capacity to conduct their own learning and to become their own teachers . . . The key proposition in this theory is that learning, in its most significant educational dimensions, is not something of a different kind from self-government, self-organisation, choice, but is a species of that very genus. Learning in an educationally important sense is an active process of self-organisation and reorganisation which takes place through the mediation of choice among significant alternatives available to the learner'. Hawkins opposes such a theory to classical Learning Theory, and, in an essay entitled '**Mind and Mechanism in Education**' and again in the long philosophical essay which closes his collection, he discusses the relationship between the alternative conception of learning and knowing which he proposes and the philosophical and psychological theories of Kant and of Piaget. Tentative and schematic though it is, this discussion is of great importance in the development of an adequate theory of 'progressive' education. However I do not have space to discuss it further here. I would like, rather, to draw attention to some of the implications which Hawkins extracts from his conception of the primacy of autonomy in education, implications which are often ignored in traditional discussions of 'progressive' education.

'Progressive' thought has seemed on occasion to make a mystery of autonomy as if it were a quality of mind that was self-generating, self-sustaining and self-sufficient, an innate and inexplicable flowering of intellect and character. Nothing could be further from Hawkins' intention. The proper exercise of autonomy in learning is inseparable, he insists, from communication with others – adults, teachers, other children – and communion with things – the subject matter of their common concerns. 'No child, I wish to say, can gain competence and knowledge, or know himself as competent and as a knower save through communication with others involved with him in his enterprises. Without a Thou there is no I evolving. Without an It there is no content for the context, no figure and no heat, but only an affair of mirrors confronting each other'. This triangular relationship, between teacher, pupil and task, he explores in one of the few essays in this collection that is already relatively well known in England, an essay entitled '**I, Thou and It**'.

He begins his discussion by considering 'a kind of electronic analogy for what goes on in a child's mind. Think of circuits that have to be completed. Signals go out along one bundle of channels, something happens, and signals come back along another bundle of channels; and there's some kind of feedback involved. Children are not always able to sort out all of this feedback for themselves. The adult's function, in the child's learning is to provide a kind of external loop, to provide a selective feedback from the child's own choice and action. The child's involvement gets some response from an adult and this in turn is made available to the child. The child is learning about himself through his joint effects on the non-human AND the human world around him. The function of the teacher is to respond diagnostically and helpfully to a child's behaviour, to make what he considers to be an appropriate response, a response which the child needs to complete the process he's engaged in at a given moment.'

Intervention strategy

'Progressive' teachers sometimes give the impression of forgetting 'the unique importance of the human role'. 'We tend to say "Oh well, if children just have a good, rich, manipulable and responsive environment, then everything will take care of itself . . ." But, of course, that's a dangerous illusion. It's true only in those periods – in good schools frequent periods – when children don't

need the external loop. When they do need it and there's no-one around to contribute the adult resonance, then they're not always able to carry on the process of investigation, of inquiry and exploration, of learning, because they need help over a hump that they can't surmount through their own resources. If help isn't available the inquiry will taper off, and that particular episode, at least, will have failed to accomplish what it otherwise might have'.

Of all the many kinds of intervention a good teacher is required to make, the most important is the kind of intervention that encourages, or helps to sustain, a child's absorption in subject matter, in the various objects of children's and teachers' inquiries. It is here that we can see most clearly 'how the "It" enters into the pattern of mutual interest and exchange between the teacher and the child', and why it is that Hawkins attaches supreme importance to the interrelationship of teacher, pupil and task.

'The investment in the child's life that is made in this way, by the adult, the teacher in this case, is something that adds to and in a way transforms the interest the child develops spontaneously. If, as sometimes happens, a child gets particularly interested in a variation on a soap bubble theme that you've already given him, you can just happen to put nearby some other things that might not at first seem related to soap bubbles—some geometrical wire cubes, tetrahedra, helices, and wire with a soldering iron. The resulting soap films are almost bound to catch the fancy of many human beings, including children. What have they got? Well they've got a certain formal geometrical elegance, they've got colour; when you look at the films in the right kind of light you see all those marvellous interference colours. Such a trap is bristling with invitations and questions. Some children will sample it and walk on; but some will be hooked by it, will get very involved with it. Now, this kind of involvement is terribly important, I think. It's aesthetic, or it's mathematical or it's scientific. It's all of these potentially, and none of them exclusively. The teacher has made possible this relation between the child and "It" even if this is just by having "It" in the room; and for the child even this brings the teacher as a person, a Thou, into the picture. For the child this is not merely something which is fun to play with, which is exciting and colourful and has associations with many other sorts of things in his experience: it's also a basis for communication with the teacher on a new level and with a new dignity.

'Until the child is going on his own the teacher can't treat him as a person who is going on his own, cannot let him be mirrored there, where he may see himself as investigator or craftsman. Until he is an autonomous human being, who is thinking his own thoughts and making his own unique, individual kinds of self-expression out of them, there isn't anything for the teacher to respect, except a potentiality. So the first act in teaching, the first goal, necessary to all others, is to encourage this kind of engrossment. Then the child comes alive for the teacher as well as the teacher for the child. They have a common theme for discussion, they are involved together in the world'.

They have proved, as Hawkins puts it at the end of his essay, 'that we're all in "It" together'.

Authority of teachers

The I-Thou-It relationship is the indispensable complement to Hawkins' insistence on the primacy of autonomy in learning, and it is this feature of his work, above any other, that helps him to escape from many of the stereotypes that bedevil discussion of 'progressive' education. Thus his emphasis on adult intervention belies the common accusation that 'progressive' is synonymous with 'permissive'. Indeed Hawkins is at pains to point out that 'authority is one of the primary sources of learning. To be an authority in this sense (the sense of being one whose activities or contribution to your existence you value because it has proved itself to BE valuable), to be a teacher whom children honestly respect because you give them something which helps them on the way and which they know they couldn't get for themselves, is to be a teacher. If you are not that kind of authority, you are not a good teacher, you're not functioning properly as a teacher'.

Worth of content

Similarly, his deep concern for subject matter, 'the order and organisation of the world' which children and teachers investigate together, makes nonsense of the presumption that 'progressive' education is inevitably weak on content or curriculum, on 'the public forms of experience' as Hirst and Peters have it. 'Adults involved in the world of man and nature bring that world with them to children, bounded and made safe to be sure, but not thereby losing its richness and promise of novelty . . .

Adults and children, like adults with each other, can associate well only in worthy interest and pursuits, only through a community of subject matter and engagement which extends BEYOND the circle of their intimacy. The attitude of deprecating subject matter, and of deprecating curriculum as a guide to the providing of worthy subject matter, reflects therefore the half-truth badly used.'

Even his insistence on the necessarily informal, unpredictable and incommensurable nature of education, of learning and teaching, is balanced by a recognition of the appropriate moment for formality, didacticism, rote-learning. 'One has to fight against the belief that because the central priority is self-directed learning there is never any value in instruction or didactic teaching. There are times when a group of children is very ready to be instructed about something, or to engage in a set task which might even be rote learning under certain circumstances. Their readiness to do this means that it has become for them a significant choice and it is therefore by no means violating the principle of choice to say there is room, and sometimes a significant amount of room, for quite formal instruction.'

There is, then, a salutary note of caution in many of the details of Hawkins' account of education, which helps to guard his argument against the misconceptions to which 'progressive' education is particularly prone. Yet, when all is said and done, this cannot, as indeed it should not, blunt or blur the radical and demanding nature of his vision. Perhaps the magnitude of the task he assigns to education is displayed most clearly of all in the notion of 'reconstruction' which he developed in *Forum* (vol 16, no 1) in an essay which has been the subject of a good deal of subsequent discussion in recent numbers of the magazine. That essay is not included in this collection but in a comment on Dewey's essay on *The Child and the Curriculum* Hawkins makes clear once more the reconstructive goal of popular education.

'Dewey starts clearly enough with the popular opposition of the child VERSUS the curriculum, of spontaneity versus discipline, of life's golden tree versus the greyness of all schooling. Having set up the opposition in a plausible and attractive way he then puts us on ample notice that he is going to undercut the opposition, is going to force us to go past it, to take it as a starting point for the enlargement of our own understanding, for seeing that "the facts and truths that enter into the child's present experience, and those

contained in the subject matter of studies, are the initial and final terms of one reality"'. What this leads to is a rather awesome demand. It is nothing less than the demand for a radical expansion and reorganisation of academic subject matter according to a principle which is unprecedented in the annals of knowledge and education. This reorganisation is nothing so simple as a rewriting of textbooks or anything of that easy sort. It lies rather in a commitment to redesign and enrich the ENVIRONMENTS in which children live and learn, so that they in their own native style and tempo are directed BY THE INDUCEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT – and thus only indirectly by adult command – to move toward the assimilation and reconstruction of culture. The curriculum, Dewey says, is not something we should transmit directly to children, spelled out so to speak in syllabus and timetable. It is such a view of education which has in reality created the very opposition between the needs and talents of children, and the demands of the curriculum, in the first place. The curriculum, rather, should be what guides TEACHERS in the art of designing the kinds of environments which induce curiosity and involvement with subject matter, and which lead among other things TOWARD the stage in which the logical ordering of subject matter is prized and valued for its power to extend and enhance experience. But this task is no minor matter. To UNDERSTAND mathematics, or physics, or geography, well enough to know ways of reconstructing them, of rooting them so to speak in the child's garden, is a major intellectual undertaking for the best minds we have. Only a good and reflective physicist can see the beginnings of his own basic schemes and abstractions nascent in the experience of childhood, and only an inventive teacher, supported by such knowledge and insight, can undertake the reconstructive process which Dewey's analysis reveals as necessary.'

In the prevailing climate of fashionable opinion, in which the aims of popular education are being progressively circumscribed and qualified, the all embracing quality of David Hawkins' claims for education at first seems fanciful and utopian. It is the particular strength of *The Informed Vision* that it goes such a long way to demonstrate that the nature of childhood, of learning and of knowledge, and of our present cultural predicament, demands of education no lesser a commitment.

Room for thought

John and Dorothy Paull

John and Dorothy Paull have spent the greater part of their teaching careers in Leicestershire, in various capacities. At present John is Deputy Head of Warren Hills County Primary School, Coalville, and Dorothy is Head of Sheepy Magna Primary School.

Michael and Anthony discovered that Fred the gerbil was not his usual bouncy self one morning. He was very cold and rocked to and fro in the palm of Michael's hand, eyes shut, whiskers still. Nigel, Joanne and Jennifer came to offer advice. Perhaps Fred would like a warm soft bed. Nigel put some straw in a cardboard box and installed Fred. Jennifer thought he might be hungry, and Joanne was sure he would enjoy some milk. The girls fetched a dish of milk, some sunflower seeds and a handful of fresh grass. They placed the food and drink temptingly on the table, and Fred was gently lowered to the same level. He leaned forward to explore his breakfast but wobbled unsteadily, eyes still tightly shut.

Michael said, 'He can smell it, and he wants it, but he hasn't the strength to get it.' Everyone agreed, so Michael carefully broke the sunflower seeds into tiny pieces, offering one to Fred. The gerbil's tiny hand-like paw clasped at the unseen titbit, and he nibbled hungrily, still balancing precariously on the table. Gradually he ate more and more, obviously getting warmer, and little by little his eyes began to open. Michael thought that sunshine was needed to aid recovery, so he found a table in direct sunlight and settled the gerbil there. Anthony volunteered to stand guard lest Fred became more mobile. Throughout the morning visitors flowed by the invalid's bed, offering solicitous inquiries and observations about his health.

'Is he going to die?'

'How old is he?'

'His wife was just like this before she died, you know.'

'I really think he's much better.'

By lunchtime there was a visible improvement, and everyone was relieved. Returned now to his normal living conditions he set about building a new nest, and by the afternoon he seemed almost himself again.

This incident, superficially trivial, typifies the responses and reactions of one particular class of children with whom we worked, and underlines the depth of relationship that can develop between children and other living things in a classroom situation. It may seem to have little relevance to a child's academic development. However we have frequently found that a child's involvement with perhaps an animal or an inanimate object, has acted as a spur to development in language and mathematics. The

excitement generated through a deepening interest often carries over into areas of work where children may not have previously experienced success. Confidence is strengthened and familiarity and expertise within one area help progress in another. Take the stick insects, for example.

Jennifer stopped in amazement as she caught sight of the activity in the insect container. A large brown stick insect was laying eggs. 'Heck she's dropping eggs like bombs over here, Mrs Paull!' She collected all the eggs and put them in a plastic box.

This happened near the end of the summer term. Anthony took the creatures home for the summer holiday and I took the egg box. At the end of the holiday Anthony and I returned the eggs and the container. He reported sadly that the six insects had eaten each other's legs, 'and they all died.' He now took charge of the eggs. Three weeks later an excited cry of 'They've hatched!' cut through the hum and bustle. Several children moved toward Anthony who proudly displayed three tiny stick insects parading around the egg box. The children quickly prepared new living quarters, and the insects were gently placed on a food supply. They seemed so fragile, yet so purposeful, as they intrepidly explored the world. Someone suggested that they were searching for mother! The remaining eggs were placed in the base of the new home. Next day nine insects were busily eating. Two still had their egg cases attached to the rear legs, and we had to play midwife to one that struggled valiantly to extricate itself. Holding onto the egg case with a pair of tweezers we waited as the insect strained forward.

'Oh, there's one leg free – only one to go – go on, Sticky, PUSH!'

'He's done it – goody. Look – now he's bending over backwards.'

'He doesn't look very happy. I think he's drying out.'

He really didn't look very happy. His back legs were not functioning, but after such a Houdini feat, who could wonder?

Anthony fetched a tape measure which he placed underneath the base of the transparent container. One insect was obligingly motionless and he was seen to be 1½ cm long.

'How could all that be wrapped up in such a tiny egg, I wonder?' someone asked. It was now 12 o'clock and almost time for lunch.

'I bet the dinner bell goes before it hatches. I'm not going till it does,' Kim said. At a few minutes after twelve there was still no progress, and Kim and Jennifer transferred the eggs into a small container which they took into the lunchroom.

During the playtime after dinner, Helen, Fiona, Alyson and Linda found some 'small, green, black, and yellow caterpillars' on a bush near the playground. Back in the classroom they set about making a home for the creatures. There was a graceful display of acrobatics by the caterpillars. One was poised with two-thirds of its body lying parallel to its head. Another was doing a handstand with only its front three pairs of legs on terra firma, the rest of its body almost perpendicular. Its neighbour formed a perfect letter C. These positions were carefully noted by

the children who sat held in fascination. The new home was located on the table where the girls were doing their needlework.

'Mrs Paull, how can we let them have enough air?' Later, Helen removed the lid for a few minutes. 'There! That's a change of air for them,' she said, smiling. Off she went, home. Soon Fiona picked up the box and set off towards the door.

'Are you taking them home for the night, Fiona?'

'No, I'm going to give them a change of air.'

'Oh, Helen did that before she left.'

'I'm taking them outside to do it, because they need FRESH air!'

She returned a few minutes later, gave the caterpillars some more greenery to eat and went home with the satisfaction of a job well done.

These girls were new to this class and had not previously showed much active interest in the creatures in the room. The stick insects had intrigued them and they had watched them for some time, talking closely to each other. So with the memory of the stick insects fresh in their minds they were attuned to the insect world that lunchtime. Not only that, they were working and living together in a classroom where such things were valued. The physical arrangement of the room reflected the teacher's and the children's interests.

The classroom atmosphere, created mainly by the teacher's personality and choice of materials, affects the way in which children observe and investigate their world. It contributes to the growth of their perception of the special qualities of common place things that previously may have been taken for granted or gone unnoticed. This 'atmosphere' should be as much a teacher's concern as the content of the school curriculum. Yet the significance of setting up a rich and ever-changing classroom environment is often undervalued in schools. Concentration of teaching effort is often solely directed towards the concept to be learned, setting the reality of subject matter apart from children.

There is not an inevitability about the shape and arrangement of a room. We should, as teachers, be sure to create both a stimulating and restful environment for our children, and not one which is merely a reflection of that which is being taught.

FORUM REDUCTIONS ON BULK ORDERS

for current number only

Five copies for £3.50

Ten copies for £6.00

Twenty copies for £10.00

Single copies cost 85p each

Orders enclosing remittance to:
Business Manager, FORUM,
11 Beacon Street, Lichfield,
Staffs. WS13 7AA.

The Role of Play

Margaret Gracie

After teaching at Bushloe High School, and later at Countesthorpe College, Leicestershire, Margaret Gracie was appointed Warden of the Blaby Teachers Centre in the county. She has recently spent a year carrying through an observational study in an Infant School, an experience she draws on in this article. She is also a member of the Forum Editorial Board.

Along with many other teachers, my long term interest in education is to help children become autonomous thinkers, able to plan, execute and evaluate their own studies. Most of us have the assumption that autonomous thinking is an ability which develops gradually and can be fostered in school by many years of systematic skills learning. I would like to argue here, however, that although certain skills contribute to thinking ability, practice in autonomy is at least as important, and the lack of this practice may be an important reason for our evident failure to reach the objective. Secondary school teachers are familiar with the paradoxical resistance students can mount against curriculum innovation and changes in teaching methods. In recent research, Roy Nash¹ explored the ways in which the pupils' expectations influence the teacher and contribute to the maintenance of traditional roles in the classroom. He reports that children prefer the teacher who 'keeps order', 'teaches you', 'explains', 'is interesting', 'is fair' and 'is friendly'.

'Many of these expectations pupils have implicitly recognise a passive conception of their role. For example, the children think they should be kept in order. They do not believe they should be given the opportunity to control their own behaviour. Again they say that they should be 'taught things'. They don't demand to be given the opportunity to find things out for themselves . . . The conception of teacher behaviour they consider correct is one that considerably restricts their own autonomy and their range of purposeful action. If the experience of school does generate such limiting self-definitions it is surely not achieving its aim.'

Roy Nash suggests that it is the child's previous experience of school which leads to his preference for traditional modes of instruction. This is certainly a hopeful line of enquiry since teachers are capable of changing the child's previous experience of school. Alternative explanations for the teenager's lack of interest in independent learning: adolescence, changing interests and the generation gap between pupil and teacher imply that the teacher cannot alter the situation. But if the typical experience

of school from five to thirteen is seen as a process which progressively cuts out choice and individuality and persuades children that the important learning has already been done by others, we cannot be surprised if the child's concept of school acts to prevent him exercising autonomy. We can go on to explore the ways in which this negative concept is formed, and ways of changing it.

The following extracts may help to demonstrate the optimistic view that the child's experience of school can help to change his expectations.

'Tommy is the headmaster, Robin is the school-teacher, and I am the naughty boy. Robin asks us what are two and two. We say they are six. He gives us the belt. Sometimes we run away from school and what a commotion! Tommy and Robin run after us. When we are caught we are taken back and everybody is sorry.'

'Three girls are in the reading corner, and one of them, Joan, is choosing a book. She can't settle and seems to be trying to coax Susan and Jane into playing a game. Suddenly they are playing schools. Susan instructs Jane, "Now you read this", handing her a book. Joan and Susan read a harder book together. Soon they change the book and Susan points to the words on the cover, "Mr . . . don't pretend you don't know it . . . Mr Grumpy". Some more changing of books and reading aloud until Susan finds the flash cards. She held up the card 'be'. Joan put up her hand and Susan ignored her, knowing that Joan can easily read 'be', and helped Jane to read it, giving her the card to hold when she succeeded. Susan told Joan, "Sit on your bottom, and then let Joan fetch a cushion". "Oh! Sit on your bottom! You know what you'll get. Don't you?" They continued with the flash cards until the word 'news'. Susan and Joan both read well, and Joan tries the answer 'knows'. Susan, knowing that 'know' is one of the cards, hunted through the pile to demonstrate Joan's mistake.'

The second extract is in some ways exceptional with Joan modelling her teaching style closely on her own teacher's. At other times, the same children played at

traditional schools, even though they had no such experience, using appropriate concepts of school to explore reality and fantasy.

Although Infant and Nursery schools have a tradition for allowing individual development and freedom of expression, it does not follow that every aspect of early education helps to promote a concept of school which will enable the development of autonomous thinking, and since a child's first experiences of education must be significant in this process, the constraints on autonomy at this level need further investigation.

There is an important factor operating against the child's ability to reason for himself: *the teacher has already mastered the skills which the children are learning*. This puts the teacher in a very powerful position. Even if she allows freedom to choose activities, set the pace and determine how long to stick with an activity, in the fields of learning reading, writing and mathematics, the teacher alone determines the structure of learning activities and evaluates each child's progress. At first sight, there appears to be no problem for one can hardly expect a child to learn to read on his own or rediscover mathematics with no guidance. The teacher's knowledge and experience is however a problem as it makes it hard for her to present a model for the excitement of discovery. Because she knows so much she encourages the passive role of learner which grows through the years at school into the pupil's rejection of the contribution he can make to learning.

Marginal counter strategies

The infant classroom is already full of constraints on independent learning which the teacher finds beyond her control. Reading schemes provide a built-in drive towards competition and external standards: lacking any other scale, children use their progress through the scheme as a general guide to how well they are doing. The teacher may try to establish non-competitive working relationships, but the children working in small groups have a different system: they do praise each other's work, but they also compare and criticise, particularly in terms of quantity and neatness. The classroom may contain aids to self-evaluation, the number line, lists of common words and phrases, letter shapes and mathematical apparatus, but the child is propelled to seek final evaluation from the teacher because, after all, she knows how to count, spell, read, cut, sew and paint best. A teacher can try to minimise the harmful effects of constraints like these. She can

choose reading books on an individual basis from a large range, or write her own, or choose an un-numbered or uncolour-coded scheme; she can discourage spiteful and boastful evaluation of work; and she can constantly encourage the development of the child's ability to assess their own progress. But can she minimise the pervasive constraint, the gap between her mastery and the children's ignorance of basic skills?

Pitfalls of play

There is an area in the classroom where children do exercise autonomy. When they play and when they paint, the children have few constraints on their power to formulate ideas, experiment with them and evaluate the results. While observing the children in one infant classroom over a period of several months, I arrived at two conclusions about the role and context of play in the real world of the classroom. First, play follows the patterns indicated in the literature of educational play. It is important for its instrumental role in developing learning skills: social relationships and the nature of social reality (the Wendy House etc); pre-reading, pre-mathematical and pre-scientific skills (clay, sand, water, constructional materials); and therapeutic (any type). Secondly, although it occupies a large proportion of some children's time, it occupies little of the teacher's time because she has organised her room so that she can concentrate her attention on reading, language and mathematical work. This leads to a more important conclusion: that the absence of the teacher in play activity creates an implicit set of priorities in the child's mind, 'play is less important than work'. But since play may well be the vehicle for establishing a positive attitude towards independent learning, the low priority for play snatches back this opportunity.

The only way to give play a higher status in the classroom is for the teacher to spend more time in this area of activity. Again, her role in play is important in establishing the child's autonomy. When a teacher intervenes in the play situation, it is usually to further the instrumental value of play in developing concepts. In practice, this often means that the teacher diverts the child's line of enquiry and imposes her own direction to fit with her concept of the potential development of the child. The result is again to deny the child the only avenue that remains for the exercise of his autonomy. Is there not a role for the teacher which will emphasise the child's role

and create that shared learning relationship drawing the teacher and child together in the excitement of discovery.

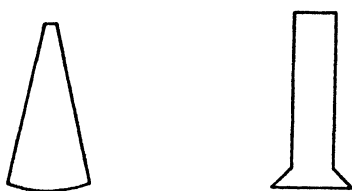
Sharing in play

I'd like to recount one chance event and one planned intervention which helped me to suspect what this role might be. During the course of my observations, I sometimes had the opportunity of joining in children's activities just for fun. One day, the class took to a craze for making animals from Lego. I don't think I played with Lego as a child, and I have had little opportunity to catch up on this skill. I can make a house or other rectangular objects, but I couldn't see how to make a more fluid shape like an animal. I asked Terry to show me. Terry was a little unwilling. I don't think he trusted my motives. He is rather slow in the academic sense and was maybe already used to teachers who asked questions to see what he knew rather than being interested in the answers. However, he mumbled and pointed and transferred the principle for this kind of construction, and I made an elephant. I was pleased and excited with my elephant, even more pleased when other children admired it, showed it to their teacher and put it on display with theirs. I even found it hard to allow it to be taken to bits a few days later. I had been drawn into sharing the excitement of learning, experiment and mastery with the children, and it was some time before I realised that I had learned something more than making a Lego elephant, *that even five year olds know things that they can teach to adults* (and other children), and in this way reverse roles and experience shared learning and the confidence of knowing which is basic to encouraging independent and autonomous thinking.

In this small chance experience I was able to demonstrate to children that a teacher can experience the pleasure and excitement of learning and can give serious consideration and respect to their ideas, interests and knowledge. I felt that chance was not enough and that there must be ways of seeking out this kind of opportunity in the classroom. Sometime later, I visited a reception class on a regular basis with the hypothesis that a teacher could *intervene in play to establish a reciprocal learning relationship*.

In this class, play occupied most of the children's time in the afternoons. Usually I joined a quiet group playing games or using the dolls' house, but one afternoon I decided to join the very conspicuous noisy play area on

the carpet with building materials. The 'naughty boys' gravitated to this area, and I suppose I had unconsciously avoided them before. Several boys were building towers with a good range of wooden blocks. I started to make my own tower, and nobody spoke much. Although there was no articulation of a problem, one boy started to try to connect several towers with flat pieces of wood and then continued to build on top. His idea engaged everybody, and we eventually achieved a stable construction. There was no need for me to induce a verbal explanation – we had all been drawn into making discoveries and sharing strategies and we all knew what had been achieved. We were stuck for a while, until another boy introduced a hosiery cone. There was a vast supply of 'cones', in two shapes:



I remember trying to interest the group in a problem that interested me, balancing 'cones' like this:



and seeing how high I could go. There was a moment when the group applied the previously learned principle of inserting flat bases at intervals and continuing upwards. But somebody had a new line of enquiry. He started hooting and moaning down the cones. It was most exciting hooting and moaning into each other's ears, and looking back, I didn't have any sense of being different to the children enjoying this experience. It was very noisy and I can remember glancing up to the teacher, as a child might do,

What has really happened

D. W. Blades

Mr Blades has spent the last twenty years teaching in primary schools in Leeds. He is now (since 1969) Deputy Head of Raynville Primary School, Leeds.

When I looked at some copies of *Forum* from 1961, I was astonished to see how many changes have taken place in the Primary School in the past fifteen years. Subjects such as 'Streaming in Junior Schools' and 'The Eleven Plus' were prominent in the articles. Many of the attitudes and methods which are now common were hardly mentioned. There was a hint in one article of moves towards an extended mathematics syllabus, but there was no whisper of French being considered a suitable subject for the Primary School and 'Open Plan' had not emerged from the backwoods of Oxfordshire. The Plowden Report was still unborn and for guidance teachers had *Primary Education* (an HMSO publication) which was a very dour volume indeed.

Yet after all the great changes of the Sixties, where have we got to? At the moment apparently we are up to our necks, with our backs to the wall, being assailed on all sides because standards have fallen, the children are undisciplined, the teachers incompetent and the country going to rack and ruin because we don't teach tables any more.

But what has really happened in schools such as the one in which I teach, which is not extreme but which is regarded as forward-looking and progressive? Firstly there has been a great improvement in the relationship

between teachers and children. Corporal punishment is gradually fading away and the tenseness which used to develop in schools in which the 'Eleven Plus' played too big a role has now vanished with the examination. The curriculum is now wider and more interesting with the introduction, or perhaps, reintroduction of Science.

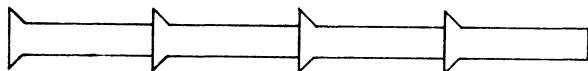
Mathematics has changed out of all recognition in most schools. In 1961 I was teaching at a school where the children did 'Practical Mathematics' on two days a week, and when teachers doing the Diploma at the local University visited us they often asked when the children did real Arithmetic. Now of course such practical work is the normal thing in Primary Schools although the initial wave of ardour in which tables, number facts etc, were ditched with gay abandon in some schools has now abated in the cold light of dawn. 'Sums' may not have been restored to their former place of glory but at least they have now been given a sensible place in the syllabus. Many of the aspirations of the avant-garde mathematicians foundered on one simple immovable obstacle; that many primary teachers did not understand mathematics well enough to be able to grasp the significance of the new ideas.

Reading has undergone a change, which, although not as traumatic as that of mathematics, has been as signif-

seeing no reaction and carrying on. Now someone combined the problems: could we wedge 'cones' together horizontally to make a big tube to hoot and moan through. This was the only stage where we talked about what we were trying to achieve because we had to co-operate in making the long tube and take turns at hooting and being hooted to.

Child's Ear

Child's Mouth



The tube often sagged and broke, but it was wonderfully noisy!

On reflection, it was easy to see what the children and I were learning in conventional terms, some principles about balance, construction and sound, but I think they may have learned more: i) how to frame and test hypotheses, ii) that an adult can share and contribute in the process, not by cutting off to articulate the concepts but from participating in the learning of the group, and iii) that adults and children can have equal status in the learning process.

1. Nash, Roy: 'Pupils' Expectations for their Teachers' in *Research in Education*, Number 12, November 1974 and *Teacher Expectations and Pupil Learning*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976.
2. Opie, Iona and Peter, *Children's Games in Street and Playground*, O.U.P. 1969.
3. Unpublished material collected by the author.

in Schools ?

icant. The writers in the 1961 **Forum** were teaching reading through reading groups, a procedure which seemed necessary when you had forty-five children in your class. Now children are heard to read individually, for often the reading group held back the best readers whilst not helping the poorest. The books which the children read are much more colourful and far more interesting. ITA has been and in most places gone, whether because it proved too expensive or because many teachers could not see the logic of teaching children one set of symbols so that they might read a second set.

Interest in the teaching of reading has increased in the Teachers Centres and Colleges of Education so that it is rare now for a new teacher to come into school without having had some lectures on the subject. Even so, not many years ago I had to explain to a young teacher the meaning of the term Reading Age and show her how it had been calculated. Hopefully the Open University's new Diploma in Reading will equip many more teachers to become advisers on the subject within their own schools.

The opening up of the timetable so that the day is no longer chopped into segments of time is one of the most far reaching changes to have affected the Primary School. Unfortunately in large schools it is not always possible to be as free as one might wish as there has to be some organising of PE periods and music lessons if there is not to be chaos. Coupled with the freer timetable and the infusion of practical work into mathematics, one is now

more likely to find children moving about a school, working in the library or measuring the playground, all with the minimum of supervision. It is sad that children who have been trained to behave in a responsible way like this have to move into Secondary schools where they are then treated as potential criminals.

After all the great changes in the curriculum and attitudes what lies ahead? Well anyone who thinks we can ignore the present storm of criticism is very much mistaken. If employers and others say that the children are not educated up to high enough standards, then we as teachers must do something about it. It is no good bleating that our 'Infants schools are the best in the world' if children are still going into the world at sixteen without the skills they need.

Language would seem to be the area which is likely to receive the most attention in the next few years. Returning to the teaching methods of the Thirties is no solution for they also failed to deliver the goods. If those methods were so wonderful why is it we receive so many badly spelt letters from parents and why did I in the Fifties spend my National Service teaching so many illiterate soldiers?

What must be done is to restore some of the emphasis on spelling and punctuation while retaining the enthusiastic English which is now produced in so many Primary Schools. There must be a balance between freedom and constraint which will enable children to learn and flourish. Like most teachers I will not admit that there has been any real relaxation of standards but I do think that we are not doing well enough. However some of our critics are deluding themselves if they think that all was well in the past. Even in the days of 'Payment by Results' the headteacher could withdraw from the examination any child he thought was unfit to be tested although the reason had to be stated in the school logbook, so that some of our grandparents had 'Almost an idiot' and 'Mentally backward' inscribed beside their names.

Closer co-operation between the different levels of education is also needed although this will need a change of heart on the part of those headteachers who believe that they are the reincarnation of Moses and that no one can dictate to them what they will do in their school. Slowly in my area this co-operation is growing from the grass roots as teachers realise that it is unfair on the children to send them on without the knowledge and skills expected by their new teachers.

The pendulum is swinging, fortunately it will not swing as far back as last time and progress will be continued.

The next number of **Forum**, vol 20 no 1 (September 1977), will be a Special Number on **Multi-Racial Education**. It will set out to reflect the best of current practice, and contain articles from experienced teachers, pupils (and ex-pupils), and others closely concerned with this issue.

Talking in School

Martyn Richards

Martyn Richards is currently Secretary of the Primary Sub-Committee of the National Association for the Teaching of English. He has worked with Primary children for eighteen years as classteacher, Local Authority Adviser, and headteacher.

'If we could observe all the occasions when a child uses language to recreate his experiences as they really were, we should have caught a glimpse of a representational world that the child has built up to fit reality as he knows it.' (Dixon 1967)

The Primary child's day is textured with talk. Webs of words are spun around the child's activities – his own words, his teacher's words, the words of classmates, the words of books.

Much of the talking that goes on will be clearly task-centred, obviously serving to push joint activity towards successful completion. But some, again, will seem inconsequential, casual, intellectually undemanding – not unlike the easy gossip that fills so great a part of the adult's day. A closer look however reveals that a term like 'gossip', with its connotations of purposeless time-filling, is an inappropriate description. It is too coarse-grained a classification to catch the variety of types of talk in operation, types of language use which meet important needs for adults as well as for children.

Simple anecdotes, for instance, recapturing incidents from the child's past experience, may at first seem peripheral to the activity they accompany. Yet the search in language for a context of the 'known' in terms of which to understand the 'new' can be a crucial step in a child's learning (Barnes 1969). A learner cannot assimilate new information if he has nowhere to put it.

Again children, like adults, must talk their way to mutual trust, laying the vital foundations for successful joint enterprise. They will joke and laugh, share anecdotes and fantasies, give and receive instructions, recreate and celebrate in words their joys and excitements. A groundwork of confidence is established which permits the honest sharing of tentative thoughts and feelings, and the possibility of learning from each other's insights.

This is not to say that all talk is necessarily valuable talk. Teachers strongly influence a classroom learning environment, the kinds of tasks on which children are engaged and the ranges of language use which result. Teachers intervene actively in the learning process to ensure that each child's understanding is developing in fruitful directions, noting whether the learning experiences she offers are of sufficient challenge to make demands on

children's latent language powers, or whether perhaps they are too complex for children to make contact with. The talk the teacher hears, and participates in, gives her a window onto the understanding of each child, and hence the opportunity to adjust her teaching better to meet his needs. She knows how she wishes the learning to develop. She monitors the children's changing understanding and acts accordingly.

The Primary classroom is a social environment, created for the making, sharing and refining of thoughts and understandings. Most of what children learn in school is learned through language – through writing and reading, listening and talking. And especially through talking. But talk, in the Primary years, does not stand alone. Primary teachers are concerned that the language their children use carries meaningfulness derived from direct experience. Words are not bandied about in an experiential vacuum. Talking and doing are inextricably linked. Language clarifies the nature of the experience in hand, the experience infuses the words with meaning.

Exploratory talk

Right at the heart of learning lies the process of reconstruction, recreation, of experience in talk (Britton 1970). When a small child tells his teacher, as his friend (and these today, may be one and the same) about the experiment he has performed, the paper-round he does, the lino-print he is making, he must reflect back on his experience, identifying those elements which seem to him to be significant, ignoring the rest. He must search for the words to encode these elements 'as they were', pressed perhaps to draw on latent linguistic competencies not previously articulated (Rosen & Rosen 1973). He must organise his telling sequentially, in a form comprehensible to his listener, attempting to adopt his listener's perspective, to predict his need and interest. It

is a complex process of bringing experience to life again in words, drawing from the intricate tangle of the event a thread of meaningfulness – offering, as a hypothesis, ‘this is how I saw it’. This is no easy task for a young child, whose stage of development makes ‘standing in the place of the other’ difficult. The reply of the teacher or friend may press the child to further reformulation, may offer him a contrasting or complementary perspective, may link his verbalised meaning with others previously distinct. At a later time the understanding may be put into words again, in a different context for a different audience. Understandings are not born of ‘big bangs’, sudden flashes of insight taking the learner in one step from ignorance to knowledge. Rather there is a constant revisiting, reshaping, reorganising in the light of subsequent personal experience, and the experiences of others – the continual enrichment of the representational model of reality by which we make the past meaningful, the future predictable. And the ubiquitous instrument is talk.

The Primary teacher is aware that language used in this way, as a means for learning, may be unlike the more obviously communicative forms. It will typically be hesitant, tentative, exploratory. It is likely to signal the feelings and attitudes of the speaker, as is appropriate when the speaker’s own processes are the focus of attention, rather than the precision of a listener’s understanding. But language functions are not mutually exclusive (Britton 1971). Most speech has a communicative element even though its emphasis may be elsewhere. In Primary classrooms teachers are careful to create opportunities to develop competence across a range of language functions. Occasions will be found when children can speak about what they know well, from a basis of secure knowledge, for a lay audience, concentrating their attention on the listener. But even here the understanding of the speaker himself is likely, in some degree, to be reshaped under the new demand. The Primary years will also be rich in story, not only in hearing and enjoying the spoken and written literature of others, but also in the making by children of their own verbal artefacts, organising the resources of their language to give pleasure to the maker and listener alike.

It is in the ability to use language effectively for a full range of vital human purposes that language competence lies. There is no reason to believe (and many – noted at length in the Bullock Report – for disbelieving) that the ability simply to put words together in socially acceptable sequences, will equip a child to meet the demands that life places upon him, let alone to grow to mastery of his

experience. There is no package of multi-purpose skills adequate for each and every circumstance. The Primary school teacher appreciates the need for functional control of language, and organises her work so that such control may be developed. She knows that language learning of this complexity cannot be established through lessons *about* how language is used, rather that the learner’s powers grow as he is pressed, in challenging and purposive contexts, to draw more of his latent competence into performance.

Yet, because the Primary school is pre-eminently concerned to further effective learning, it is the heuristic function of talk (and of other language forms) with which the teacher is centrally engaged. The teacher tries to establish optimal conditions for effective learning-through-language in her classroom.

Relationships critical

The nature of the relationships within the class community is of critical importance. Language-for-learning-with, while primarily serving the speaker’s own needs, still takes place in a public arena, and benefits from a public involvement. Talk of this kind follows the pattern of the child’s thoughts and feelings, laying them bare to public scrutiny. The child becomes highly vulnerable to the responses of teacher and peers. He assumes the teacher to be a ‘trusted adult’ (Rosen 1973) interested in him, and in what he has to say, accepting his offering as his ‘reading’ of the situation. Not all teachers are able to play this role. Some are more like judges than trusted adults, and children quickly realise that they will be measured and graded on the basis of what they say. They are being tested rather than taught, and they soon learn either to keep quiet or to ape a form of words which, they hope, will convince the teacher that they ‘know’. In a non-judgemental role, the teacher can validate the child’s own perception, his own ‘reading’ of how things appear, as an acceptable statement of his understanding. The child can learn that knowledge is not a set of static contents, owned and occasionally dispensed, by experts. He may realise instead that he himself is a creator and recreator of knowledge.

Yet a child’s personal representations of reality do not develop in a social vacuum. Within the classroom – and in society at large – many views, ideas and feelings are expressed and explored in language. Some confront the child forcibly, others more tentatively. His own under-

standing grows as he takes account of the understandings of others.

The Primary community in which such sharing takes place will be a supportive, secure one, open to the fumbling thought as the first articulation of a new idea. The culture will be non-competitive: the 'dream of failure' (Henry 1972) which so many children internalise early in life, absent. The children's expectations, their sense of their own potential, will remain high. No one child is in a position to gain ego-points from another child's failure. This is the nature of the networks of relationships in thousands of primary classrooms, where teachers are able to share in, and develop, each child's understanding of himself and his world.

Rich variety

Implicit in such a relationship is an easy acceptance of the speech children bring to school, and of the concerns and experiences articulated with it. Experience and language are inextricably linked – a child cannot draw a thread of meaning from his own experience in language forms which are not his own. Few teachers nowadays criticise the child for his use of non-standard dialect forms. Most concentrate instead on offering classroom experience of a range of dialects and registers in use, making available models – not for direct copying, but to feed into the child's competence, to be drawn on at the point of need. Children will come to know the language of story and poetry, of reference book and guidebook, of historical documents, of recipes and instructions. They will hear the speech of adults other than the teacher, voices from different geographical and social backgrounds. The influence of such models is long-term, but the achievements of Primary children educated in such communities are remarkable (see, for examples, Rosen & Rosen 1973).

Finally, the patterns of classroom interactions will be such as to encourage the effective use of talk as a tool for learning – in the interests not only of thorough learning, but also of optimal development of language competence. Whole-class teaching is unusual, offering, as it does, restricted channels for communication. Nor will the Primary child be likely to spend long periods of time working on his own – again a context which may limit the opportunity for the verbal shaping of new understandings. While there will, quite properly, be occasions for whole-class and individual work, most of the activity will

be conducted in small groups, providing 'the best sustained context for effective instruction by the teacher . . . the principal form of class activity' (Bullock Report 13.15).

In concerning themselves with the use, and learning, of talk in their classrooms, and with the mastery of experience it makes possible, Primary teachers hope their children may acquire 'a language for life'. The alternative would be 'a sentence for life'.

References

- Barnes, D. *Language, the Learner and the School*, Penguin 1969.
Britton, J. N. *Language and Learning*, Allen Lane 1970.
What's the Use? Educational Review 23 (3), 1971.
Bullock Report *A Language for Life*, H.M.S.O. 1975.
Dixon, J. *Growth Through English*, N.A.T.E. 1967.
Henry, J. *Culture against Man*, Penguin 1972.
Rosen, H. *Written Language and the Sense of Audience*, Educational Research, 15 (3) 1973.
Rosen, C. and Rosen, H. *The Language of Primary School Children*, Penguin 1973.

Note

The views expressed are those of the author and should not be taken as representing those of the LEA. (Ed.)

A SUBSCRIPTION TO FORUM

To: FORUM,

11 Beacon Street, Lichfield.

* Please send three issues of **Forum**, starting with Vol. . . . No. . . . to the address below.
I enclose cheque/P.O. for £2.50.

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

NAME

ADDRESS

.....
.....

* delete as appropriate

Discussion

Genuinely Comprehensive?

At the request of the editors, I wrote an article for the May 1970 *Forum* on 'Pitfalls of Parental Choice' in a Secondary Modern School going Comprehensive. Now that the first two years of comprehensive intake have worked their way through my school I thought your readers might be interested to know how things worked out.

We were then put in a situation where parents not only had the free choice to opt out (and go to ex Grammar Schools) but that they were given free transport to do so. 38 per cent chose to do so of whom the vast majority of their children were in the higher intelligence group. Subsequent checks showed that we had, in fact, lost 45 per cent.

Despite these huge losses it was vital that we established our credibility as a comprehensive school providing courses for pupils of all abilities. Fortunately the LEA fully recognised our problem and we were, in effect, staffed and equipped *as if* we had the full intake. Thus when desirable it was possible to provide tuition for the few who were able to cope with the more advanced work in maths and science and a second language. The only thing these advanced groups lacked was the challenge of a large peer group. But set against this was the closer teacher-pupil contact, in some cases almost on a tutorial level. (My own son was in the group so I know this well.)

Taking 4 or more 'O' levels as the minimum criterion for success with abler pupils, 19 of the 46 pupils who went elsewhere achieved this level. This would seem to bear out the original assumption that most of the abler pupils went elsewhere. (19 represents 19 per cent of the total year group of 102). In my school five pupils achieved this standard. Though this is a small number it could easily have been less

bearing in mind the demoralising effect of losing most of this peer group elsewhere. The important fact is that in spite of these losses the school was able to put on full 'O' level courses fully comparable with those elsewhere.

This latter point was to be of vital significance in the following years when the LEA withdrew the free transport concession on options to other schools. Parents appealing against this argued (unsuccessfully) that their children had to go elsewhere because such and such course was not available at my school. The argument that we were only 11-16 and all the others were 11-18 was also used unsuccessfully, though in fact this was probably one of the principal reasons for the options.

In the second comprehensive year my school lost about 40 per cent of its year group through parental options. The criteria on which they were allowed to opt were: (a) availability of places elsewhere, (b) willingness to pay any extra transport costs involved. Places elsewhere were available, and extra transport costs did not arise since they occupied vacant seats in school buses already travelling for grammar school pupils during the phase-out, plus the 1970 free options. In subsequent years there have continued to be places available in one or other of the surrounding ex Grammar schools for most (but not all) applicants. Some unsuccessful applicants kept their children out of school in protest and one was eventually brought to court for non attendance.

Because of the availability of vacant seats, the transport situation remained in effect 'free transport' until 1974 when large buses were no longer necessary. At this point the Authority made a policy decision that any group of parents not already entitled to transport may use a school contract bus provided they paid their share of the extra cost involved, ie if the numbers entitled to travel only filled, say, a minibus they could pay the cost of putting on a coach instead. Some

opting parents felt that this was an unfair imposition and, like the 1970 intake, they too were entitled to free transport. In protest some of them kept their children out of school for a considerable time. One subsequent court case still lingers on.

In spite of these very substantial concessions to the wishes of parents who desired their children to go to an ex Grammar School it is significant that since 1972 the numbers opting elsewhere have been under 10 per cent. This is not so much a crow of delight that in a completely open market situation a small Secondary Modern can succeed. It is more a warning that success can only come if the LEA is meticulous in ensuring that equal educational opportunities exist at all schools. While it is inevitable that schools going comprehensive will look very different at the starting gate it would be disastrous if pupils in one school had less chance of completing the course than others.

We were fortunate in that the LEA gave us the support we needed to the extent of providing staffing, Burnham points, capitation and accommodation to a level which enabled us to be on equal standing with larger schools. It is highly unlikely that a school in a similar situation in 1977 would receive such support. Burnham points now have a ceiling; the DES are unlikely to sanction extra accommodation; and ratepayers are unlikely to look favourably on extra staffing or capitation. The days of pleasing everyone at once are over, but unless some form of equalising provision can be made, the prospects for a small school just going comprehensive in an 'open market' situation today are grim.

MAURICE DYBECK

“When will they ever learn?”

Alistair McIntosh

After taking a degree in Classics, Alistair McIntosh taught for seven years at Bradfield College, where he claims as his main achievement getting pottery accepted as an alternative to compulsory games. He moved to Leicestershire as Personal Assistant to Stewart Mason, then Director of Education, and is at present Principal Adviser in Mathematics to the Leicestershire Education Authority. He was Chairman of the Association of Teachers of Mathematics 1974-76, and is co-author, with M J Holt, of **The Scope of Mathematics**.

There are a great many things I want to say about primary mathematics: but some may not be true, in which case they will confuse the issue, and others may indeed be true, which will only confuse the issue even more.

However I can start from certain assumptions.

- 1 Most people are aware that there is a great debate going on.
- 2 Most people are not aware that it has been going on for over a hundred years.
- 3 At least as much sense (and nonsense) was being talked then as now.
- 4 It may help to give some glimpses of the historical perspective.

What follows then is largely a collection of quotations from the past 150 years of debate about mathematical education at primary level. The bases for selection were that I had read them (though much is excluded), had found them stimulating, and believe them relevant. I admit to a certain malicious glee at the sure knowledge that some will misconstrue my personal attitude to certain of the extracts. They will read approval where there is none, and disapproval where I registered agreement.

So my preface will end with assumption

- 5 It is more important that people should think than that they should think what I think.

* * * *

‘Standards of instruction to allow a school to be certified as efficient (1876/7).

50 per cent of those above 7 years will be individually examined (in reading, writing and arithmetic). One half of the children examined ought to pass in two subjects. One half of the children so passing ought to pass in arithmetic.

7–8 years: Form on blackboard or slate from dictation, figures up to 20. Name at sight figures up to 20. Add and subtract figures up to 10: orally from examples on the blackboard.

8–10 years: Simple addition and subtraction of numbers of not more than 4 figures: multiplication tables to 6 x 12.

10 + years: The four simple rules to short division (inclusive)’

(*Report of the Committee of Council on Education 1876/7*).

* * * *

The new code of 1877 set standards for payment by results in elementary schools.

Standard I was intended for 7 year olds. ‘Addition and subtraction of numbers of not more than 4 figures. Multiplication tables 6 x 12’. In 1875 11 per cent of children aged 10 and over were still in Standard I. In that year only 60 per cent of Standard I children examined in the East Midlands passed.

‘We set four sums for each standard and a child earns the grant, as a rule, when two are right’.

How well did they retain this knowledge, drilled into them in Standard I, when, four or so years later, they were in Standard V?

‘In a class of 58 children in Standard V, only 11 could encounter with success the difficulties of a sum in simple addition’ (1879).

‘62 per cent of Standard V children took 1 from 10,000 correctly’ (c 1910).

Comments of H.M.I.’s of the time:

‘I must confess to some surprise at the extremely poor result in arithmetic’ (Kent and Sussex 1875).

‘If children fail in other subjects they fail more often here (in arithmetic). It is a subject which seems beyond the comprehension of the rural mind’.

When will they ever learn?"

'In arithmetic, I regret to say worse results than ever before have been obtained – this is partly attributable, no doubt, to my having so framed my sums as to require rather more intelligence than before: the failures are almost invariably traceable to radically imperfect teaching'. (Stafford and Derby, 1876).

'The failures in arithmetic are mainly due to the scarcity of good teachers of it'. (Devon 1876).

'Ask a pupil-teacher how he can tell by simple inspection that 1980 contains the numbers (ie is divisible by) 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11; the pupil-teacher gasps for breath, and the head-master hides in the classroom'. (1896).

'The accuracy of the work in Standards I and II is all that can be desired, and in many cases marvellous: at the same time the oral test shows that the children are working in the dark. In these standards, at least, far too much time is given to the mechanical part of the subject. The result of this unintelligent teaching shows itself in the inability of the upper standards to solve very simple problems'. (1895).

'There is a prevailing opinion that the London elementary school children of today are slower and less accurate in computation than they were ten years ago. I have searched for evidence in support of this contention, but have failed to find it. I am, therefore, inclined to relegate the belief to that group of opinions which have reference to the annual deterioration of Academy pictures, the increasing degeneracy of each new generation of men, and other palpable fictions. But even if there has been a slight loss of accuracy, there has been a great gain in intelligence; and intelligence is an equipment incomparably more valuable than facility in calculation.' (Board of Education, *Special Reports on Educational Subjects*, Vol. 26, 1912, p. 16).

'It is the experience of many good teachers that . . . it is found to be unnecessary before the sixth year is passed . . . to do any formal Arithmetic on slates'.

(*Reports*, 1895/6).

'The conscious teaching then of number, as of other definite lines of thought, is to be begun in the schoolroom with a pupil whose age is not less than six years'.

(*Board of Education, op. cit.* p. 61, 1912).

'Instruction in many primary schools continues to bewilder children because it outruns their experience. Even in infant schools, where innovation has gone

furthest, time is sometimes wasted in teaching written "sums" before children are able to understand what they are doing. The NCDS Survey shows that 17 per cent of children start doing sums in infant schools before the age of 5½'.

(Plowden, *Children and their Primary Schools*, 1966, p. 195).

'There was no evidence that the amount of formal number knowledge attempted in the infants department bore any relation to attainment later on in the junior school'.

(Biggs, *Mathematics and the Conditions of Learning*, NFER, 1967, p. 267).

* * * *

'Recent statistical research (carried out by the Committee of Seven of the Northern Illinois Conference on Supervision) points to the probability that in our traditional curricula we teach the rules of arithmetic much too early and that great waste of time and effort on the part of both pupil and teacher could be avoided by deferring for some years instruction in such rules as long division. (Among the many striking results of the Committee's inquiries is the discovery that the optimum mental age for beginning to learn long division is 12 years 7 months).'

(Miss E M Renwick, *The Case Against Arithmetic* 1934 (?)).

'In general we feel that the results show that teachers of first year secondary school children should not, except in the case of very bright children, take their understanding of multiplication and division for granted'.

(Margaret Brown, in *Mathematics in School*, Vol. 6 No.1, Jan 1977, p. 10).

* * * *

'If a child be requested to divide a number of apples among a certain number of persons, he will contrive a way to do it, and will tell how many each must have. The method which children take to do these things, though always correct, is not always the most expeditious . . . To succeed it is necessary rather to furnish occasions for them to exercise their own skill in performing examples rather than to give them rules. They should be allowed to pursue their own method first, and then should be made to observe and explain it; and if it were not the best, some improvement should be suggested.

'Examples of any kind upon practical numbers are of very little use, until the learner has discovered the principle from practical examples. When the pupil learns by means of abstract examples, it very seldom happens that he understands a practical example the better for it; because he does not discover the connexion until he has performed several practical examples, and begins to generalise them'.

(*Intellectual Arithmetic*, by a teacher of youth,
1840, pIV).

'One general point we noticed throughout the interviewing (with 10-12 year olds) was that almost all children could produce successful strategies for solving problems, even when they did not recognise the operations involved'.

(Margaret Brown, in *Mathematics in School*, Vol. 5 No. 5,
Nov 1976, p. 16).

* * * *

'A footnote to Schedule I requires you (ie H.M.I.) to satisfy yourself that the reasons of arithmetical processes have been properly explained and understood. This is a department of school work which has been much overlooked . . . It is therefore desirable that you should very frequently ask the teacher of the class to give a demonstration lesson on the subject; and he should so work out an example on the blackboard as to make the reason for every step of the process *intelligible and interesting* to the scholars. You should point out that no instruction in the rules of arithmetic can be really valuable unless the process has been made visible to the scholars by numerous concrete examples, by actual weighing and measuring, by transactions with real coins . . . When children obtain answers to sums and problems by mere mechanical routine, without knowing why they use the rule . . . they cannot be said to have been well versed in arithmetic'.

(*Reports*, 1895).

* * * *

The Hadow Report on *The Primary School* (1931) is a document of unresolved conflict. Its brilliant vision of the primary school in general terms clashes sharply with the sometimes reactionary observations on arithmetic.

'The criterion (of the Junior School) must above all be the requirements of its pupils during the years when they are in its charge, not the exigencies of examinations or the demands of the schools and occupations which they will eventually enter. It will best serve their future by a

single-minded devotion to their needs in the present, and the question which most concerns it is not what children should be . . . but what, in actual fact, children are'.

(p. xiv).

'It must remain important to emphasise the principle that no good can come from teaching children things that have no immediate use for them, however highly their potential or prospective value may be estimated'.

(p. 73).

'The curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored'.

(p. 75).

'We believe that arithmetic in the primary school should mainly be concerned with the fundamental processes or "rules"'.

(p. 140).

'It is common knowledge that abstract numbers present no difficulties to children'.

(p. 140).

'It is not reasonable to expect a child in the primary school to justify the process he employs, say in subtraction'.

(p. 141).

* * * *

Curriculum Bulletin No 1: *Mathematics in Primary Schools* (1965) and The Plowden Report (1966) can be considered together. The one strongly influenced the other. Both make assertions which are impressive, but not quite convincing. Curriculum Bulletin No 1 is a much stronger document for mathematics: but Plowden contains some toughness which is often overlooked.

'(There is) unchallengeable evidence that sound and lasting learning can be achieved only through active participation'.

(*Curr. Bull.* p. xi).

'Although discovery methods take longer in the initial stages (between the ages of five and eight or nine) far less practice is required to obtain and maintain efficiency in computation when children have been enabled to make their own discoveries'.

(*Curr. Bull.* p. xi).

'When children explore for themselves they make discoveries which they want to communicate to their teacher and to other children and this results in frequent discussion. It is this changed relationship which is the most important development of all'.

(*Curr. Bull.* p. 1).

'Instead of being presented with ready made problems in a textbook the children find their own problems or are given them in a "new form"'.

(*Plowden*, p. 237).

'There is ample evidence that many of the claims for the new approach (to mathematics) are well founded'.

(*Plowden*, p. 238).

Evaluation of children's progress. The Report makes five suggestions:

- 1 Objective testing within schools.
- 2 Primary schools should hear regularly from secondary schools how their children compare over a period with children from other schools.
- 3 H.M.I. should help teachers to know what to expect from children in the circumstances of their neighbourhood.
- 4 Surveys of the quality of Primary Schools by H.M.I. at regular intervals.
- 5 Recurring national surveys of attainment.

(from pp. 201/2).

'The new approach . . . has not removed the necessity for a very carefully thought out scheme of work in junior schools, for careful individual records of progress, for practice in computation and for accuracy'.

(Plowden, pp. 237/8).

* * * *

Bennett's *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* is critically examined by Gray and Satterly in *Educational Research* Vol 19, No 1. They conclude that, at best, no valid conclusions can be reached on the basis of the published evidence. He has failed adequately to control for external factors such as the eleven-plus, the research design has serious flaws, and the statistical and educational significance he attaches to his results is both exaggerated and one-sided. Two relatively minor instances are given here:

'A possibly inconvenient result showing that high-achieving boys in informal classes do very well indeed in Mathematics is, apparently, "difficult to interpret since this group contains only four boys and is thus unlikely to be reliable". (p. 92). This is a perfectly proper caution. It comes as a considerable surprise, therefore, to find in the very next sentence that Bennett's interpretation requires our acceptance as reliable of a result based on only three girls in formal classrooms'. (Gray, p. 50)

'It could of course be argued that the sample studied is not representative of primary teachers as a whole. This may be true, but the H.M.I. study of teaching practices, contained in the Plowden Report, found little regional variation'. (Bennett, p. 54).

'The various categories were far from being evenly spread over the areas of different authorities'.

(Plowden, p. 102).

The fact is that Bennett makes a number of sensible and useful comments and is worth reading *provided* that one accepts only those assertions and opinions for which intelligible and corroborative statistics are given.

'It is surely time to ignore the rhetoric which would have us believe that informal methods are pernicious and permissive'. (Bennett, p. 163).

'The central factor emerging from this study is that a degree of teacher direction is necessary'.

(Bennett, p. 162).

* * * *

Postscript

Sixty to one hundred years ago, steps for the improvement of primary mathematics were being advocated. They included, as we have seen,

- 1 Don't start formal work too early.
- 2 Use materials and start from practical activities.
- 3 Give children problems and freedom initially to find their own methods of solution.
- 4 Children must have particular examples from which to generalise.
- 5 Go for relevance and the involvement of the child.
- 6 Go for reasons and understanding of processes. Never give mechanical rules.
- 7 Emphasise and encourage discussion by children.
- 8 Follow understanding with practice and applications.

It is doubtful if one child in a million has received a mathematical education consistently following these principles at every stage. Recent reports, and recent research, have done little more than expand on these rather aged methods, currently called 'progressive'.

Like Ballard in 1912, I can find no *evidence* that standards are falling. What should concern us far more is why the lessons of sixty years ago, consistently advocated and upheld since then, have not yet extensively been put into practice. The aims are almost universally agreed in principle: their translation into accepted and practical terms for the majority of primary teachers has not yet come about. The current outcry is against a revolution which has not yet happened. If we take, not a timid and unnecessary step back, but this belated and modest step forward, I am prepared to believe that standards would rise.

Thirty Years of Change

Michael Clarke

Michael Clarke has had many years experience, both as a class teacher and as a head, of teaching in primary schools. He is now Head of Little Hill Junior School, Wigston, Leicestershire. He has recently joined the Editorial Board of **Forum**.

Our education system is constantly changing and developing and will continue to do so. There will never be a final, once and for all re-organisation. A certain rate of change can be stimulating but a too rapid succession of changes can cause the performance of children and teachers to suffer. We should consider carefully what controls should be implemented to safeguard standards of work by pupils and the mental and emotional welfare of both teachers and pupils.

A review of what has happened in schools over the last twenty-five years can help to determine how those controls should be used in order not only to provide safeguards but also to ensure that progress continues. Pressures applied insensitively could cause regressive measures by teachers which could be just as damaging as uncontrolled experiments.

The processes at work in education can be analysed under the following headings:

- 1) Methods and their underlying theories.
- 2) The effect of implementing these on children and teachers.
- 3) The effect of social influences on schools as a whole.

I

In the early 1950's a post-war atmosphere of enthusiasm and hope promoted a desire for changes which would give children a more enlightened education than had been provided in the thirties. The dangers of a conformist approach were fresh in people's minds and therefore children had to be educated to take informed decisions and exercise intelligent choices. At this time also studies were being made of how children, as individuals, learned. These two trends led to the first break from sitting still, listening and writing as the general method of teaching.

Children at play are active and require objects to manipulate and other people to interact with. In this way they develop their senses, learn about the qualities of materials and how their behaviour affects other people. 'Play-way' was a term applied to methods based on these observations. The term 'play' was frowned upon by those who believed that school was a place where one worked and the term was changed to the more general one of 'activity'.

Children's natural activity is random in the sense that it is concerned with the immediate present and with whatever happens to be around. It is geared to fulfilling immediate needs and satisfying present curiosity. Interest in people and things motivates the action with the implied question, 'I wonder what will happen if I do . . . ?' Early activity methods – mainly in infant schools – consisted of providing children with objects and apparatus which allowed them to role play and have sensory experiences. Activity of this sort inevitably leads to children making discoveries. A child learns naturally by building up a framework of knowledge gained from his experiences. This is quite different from being presented with adult views and then analysing and memorising them. Natural learning is therefore carried on through creative activities.

Random activity might provide experiences relevant to future school needs and children might, or might not, connect one experience with another. This process would leave education to chance. In order that children should learn those things which they require to know in this particular society, control had to be built into the system. This led to the structuring of apparatus and situations, so that activity led to prescribed discoveries.

Children's play provides immediate feed-back on which subsequent actions are based. It is impossible to structure apparatus so that the only 'feed-back' from using it is the one required by the teacher. Frequent checks are necessary to ensure that the 'relevant' qualities are observed and assimilated. By building up these 'relevant' observations children learn the 'direction' in which to move next and become more able to help themselves. Programmed learning techniques embodying these principles were developed and reached their ultimate end in teaching machines.

In looking at learning in school the emphasis was still on the child as an individual. When a child plays, his activities start and stop according to his desires and immediate physical condition. Disturbing this natural process at crucial times can produce frustration and boredom. The next move was then to integrate the school day with each individual child's natural rhythm of activity.

In the process of playing a child explores all aspects of

his environment and thereby gains a total picture of it. The sophisticated divisions of study – maths, biology, geography, art etc are not apparent to a young child and hence integrated studies took the place of traditional subjects. Topics and projects became the vehicle for teaching much of the curriculum.

As long as children are engaged in rote learning they are dependent on a teacher to decide what is learnt, what material is used and therefore the speed of progress. If children are to benefit from the foregoing trends they must learn with understanding so that they can move forward on their own account at a speed consistent with their ability.

Children who are given freedom range widely in their choice of studies. Their own teacher might not have the particular knowledge required to satisfy particular needs. Team teaching – a system which allows a number of teachers to be simultaneously available to a group of children – gave a greater chance to children to find a sympathetic ear. Primary school teachers were thereby enabled to make wider use of their specialist skills while still giving children security.

II

Those changes followed a fairly simple and logical progression though the total pattern could not have been foreseen at the onset. The few teachers who first began to practise these new methods were hampered by the physical conditions which they inherited. Large classes (45-50 per class was common as late as 1955), cumbersome furniture, sets of class texts, are not suitable for 'discovery' learning through 'activity' methods. For these, apparatus and equipment, light adaptable furniture and a variety of books giving information attractively at a child's level, are needed. Publishers and manufacturers would not produce the necessary materials in quantity until they were convinced that there would be a worthwhile market for them. Class sizes could not be reduced until there were more teachers and buildings and these could not be produced quickly.

Early progress was necessarily slow. This is an obvious fact but one that must be remembered if we are to look at the effectiveness of modern methods at present.

Teachers unsupported

Teachers did not know what a very difficult task they were undertaking by adopting the sort of new approaches

previously mentioned. The needs of children were being researched but the needs of teachers were ignored. The latter were having to change their own attitudes and behaviour at the same time as attempting to change the children's. As a result of this, inconsistencies in teachers' behaviour were inevitable.

Schools were moving forward into new territory. The responses from children became quite different and teachers were unable to recognise signs of latent success. They made encouraging noises so as not to destroy children's enthusiasm or deflate their egos but there was seldom anyone who could do the same for them. The frustration and bewilderment which came from disorientation was intense. It caused loss of confidence which then made teachers tend to revert to what they knew well and so added to the inconsistency of their teaching.

Training for the new methods for serving teachers was left largely to chance. Staff meetings were held in those schools which were making a total changeover and the few teachers who were so inclined attended courses after school to debate new theories and swap experiences. Local working parties and study groups struggled to produce practical guidance for introducing new schemes and apparatus. The real need, however, was for support in the actual teaching situation.

Subtleties unappreciated

Formal class teaching, with its narrow range of superficial aims, could be observed and copied. That method did not take into consideration the thoughts and feelings of individual children – it did not usually involve any private interchanges between pupil and teacher. All that the teacher was concerned with could be seen and heard. Informal methods involve very much more, much of which is subtly unobtrusive.

Teachers often copied new methods by grasping at overt signs while they attempted to understand the underlying principles. The removal of school uniforms, multiple subject activities going on at the same time in the same classroom, christian name terms between children and staff, no timetable, colourful wall displays – these helped to create a different atmosphere but they were not really at the heart of the matter. Because they were overt signs, these were what the public took to be the sum total of informal methods.

Young teachers, coming into the profession, appeared to have found just as much difficulty in understanding

what informal teaching really involved. They seemed to take the incentives for learning as the most easily identifiable signs of modern methods. For them the day had to be filled with excitement and that became an end in itself. Potentially powerful learning situations were created but through inexperience little real learning may have resulted. Children became stimulated by the initial activity but disillusioned when no real achievement on their part followed.

Lack of stability

Young teachers had the usual problem of adjusting to their first post but this was made more difficult by the fact that so often the school they joined was in a state of readjustment to new programmes of work. There was little stability anywhere.

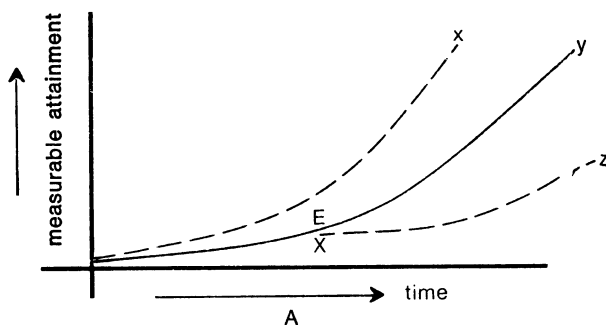
The effect of all this on children was that they could experience changes of method at any point of their career. By moving to a different school or district they could experience a succession of these. Nor, of course, did it require a change of school for this to happen. New members of staff in the same school could produce the same effect. Some children have experienced continual change for the whole of their careers. Under these circumstances children adjust to a process of change but they don't adjust their learning techniques to fit a particular method. The older a child is, the more ingrained are his habits of thought and behaviour and the more difficult it is to alter them.

Learning time scales

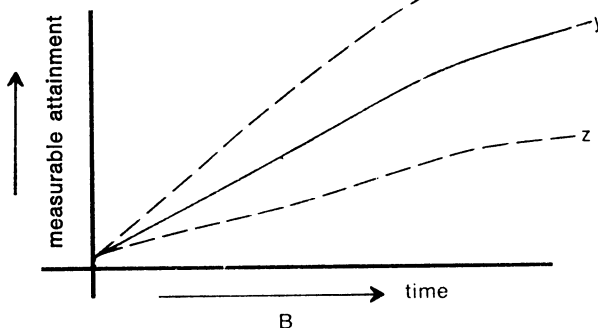
The change from rote learning and stereotyped, conventional modes of expression, to learning with understanding and free expression is an enormous one. The time which a child takes to acquire the techniques appropriate to each of these is considerable. For a nine-year-old who has until then been trained in a contrary approach I believe it is something like eighteen months. These techniques are only acquired to a usable degree by experience and not by explanation.

The pattern of progress for learning with understanding is quite different from that associated with rote learning. Graphs 'A' and 'B' illustrate the generalised theoretical model for each.

Learning with Understanding



Rote learning



y — average child
x — more able children
z — less able children

A teacher who follows model (A), might reach point E and consider that the children's attainment is low. If he doesn't realise what the long term development pattern is, or if he loses faith in the system, he might change to model (B). As a result the children will be bewildered initially but then begin to make the more rapid, early measurable progress associated with rote learning. From this he could conclude that rote learning is the better. For many children this is what happens on moving from primary to secondary schools. More evidence is required from longitudinal studies of children's progress through different classes and schools so that we can determine how much variation is acceptable.

III

During the period under review there was considerable pressure to give equality of opportunity to children of all abilities and both sexes. In schools this resulted in non-streaming and comprehensive secondary reorganisation. This was another major change requiring considerable readjustment for teachers.

Primary schools were able to achieve a unity which had not been possible before. The hierarchy of ability based on a narrow range of academic skills could be removed and children could be seen to be valued for what they had to offer whether that was manifested by achievement in art, craft, sport, drama, music or less clearly defined areas of activity like social awareness. The teacher hierarchy based on the ability range which they taught also disappeared.

Stressful demands

Teachers had to learn to teach a much wider range of ability within one class. This became increasingly difficult as categories of children which had been designated 'special' came into the normal school. A crucial problem was how to give every child incentives and due credit for achievement without bringing differences in ability sharply into focus. Failure to do this would – and did at first – cancel the effect of teaching methods designed to give children confidence.

The developments in methods were not only designed to teach children more thoroughly, but to treat them more humanely. The latter demanded that all the influences at work on children should be known and so the family situation had to be ascertained. Parents were invited into schools and Parent Teacher Associations were formed. Though this brought great benefits it also brought the possibility of more personal confrontation situations and for some teachers – particularly the young – that is a daunting proposition.

What emerges from this review is that not only have there been many changes in our education system but that

many of these have required fundamental readjustment on the part of teachers. What I believe has not been appreciated, is how long these readjustments take and what conditions are required to enable them to be made effectively.

Developments have been uncontrolled because the effects of any change in education are not seen until years after the changes are implemented, so control was not initially seen to be necessary. The only obviously measurable factor in a teacher's work situation is time. If one calculates the time spent on activities which are part of a normal primary school today which would not have been present in schools in the 'thirties' it is obvious that all we believe should take place cannot possibly do so. Planning a programme and preparing a classroom for an unstreamed class, with the necessary recording of individual progress, is very time consuming. Add to that the work needed for PTA functions, outdoor pursuits, educational visits, concerts, festivals, meetings for teacher co-operation, school meals administrative duties, in-service training, maintenance of equipment etc it becomes clear that something has to be done superficially. It is not surprising that it will be a part of school life which does not have immediate impact. The teaching of basic skills comes under that category.

If teachers were to learn to use modern informal methods effectively they needed more time to concentrate on that aspect of their work. I feel that we are in no position as yet to judge what might be achieved by those methods, and will not be until we have had a period with the right conditions for them to work effectively.

Those conditions would seem to be:

- 1) A reasonable degree of stability in staffing.
- 2) 'In-class' support for teachers – evaluating their methods and effecting changes.
- 3) Compulsory in-service training.
- 4) An analysis of how much schools can reasonably be expected to undertake, under a given set of conditions – staffing ratios, social composition of pupil population, and other relevant factors.

Assessment in the Primary

Anne Riley

Anne Riley taught for several years at Desford Upper School, Leicestershire. She is now working as Research Assistant on the SSRC Programme on Primary Education located at the School of Education, University of Leicestershire.

Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation is a five-year research programme based at the School of Education, Leicester University. The programme is concerned with three main areas:

The ways in which children's behaviour and performance changes as they move from one age group to another.

A study of teachers' objectives in relation to the social and personal behaviour of the pupil.

A study of transfer to middle and secondary schools; in particular, of the kinds of problems of adjustment facing children as they move from one kind of a school system to another, and the effects of transition on attainment.

Within the context of this research programme we are engaged in developing assessment procedures which are appropriate to current educational practices within primary classrooms, so that a more representative picture of children's progress and attainment can be obtained than is possible with present testing procedures.

Assessment fulfils a variety of needs in education, it provides information on the attainment and characteristics of individual children in a variety of contexts, for different audiences – parents, teachers, other schools and institutions. It is used to provide feedback to pupils about their performance, to compare the performances of individuals and groups of children within schools and to national standards, and, perhaps most importantly, to help teachers match learning situations to the abilities of individual children.

The only way to assess is to study what children actually do; this may entail the use of a number of strategies to gain maximum information about an individual's performance. The teacher may look at work produced within the class situation, at performance on standardised tests, may gain information by talking and listening to children, or recording instances of observed behaviour which are particularly illuminating with respect to various skills, abilities or attitudes. Assessment must be made, however, with reference to a context. It must first be asked what teachers hope their pupils will attain since this will determine to a large extent the nature of the activities presented, the classroom organisation and general

strategies adopted by that teacher. These aims or goals may rarely be made explicit by individual teachers or by the school as a whole. However, when confronted with formulated aims teachers can, and have, reached decisions on their order of importance. These aims, once made explicit, can provide a basis for the choice of areas to focus on in terms of assessment which are most relevant to primary classrooms.

In a recent Schools Council Research Project, 'The Aims of Primary Education: a Study of Teachers Opinions', directed by Dr Ashton,¹ primary school teachers were involved in formulating their aims and after much discussion, these were reduced from about a 1,000 to 72. These ranged across aspects of the aesthetic, emotional/personal, intellectual, moral, social, physical and spiritual/religious development of children. A questionnaire was developed from these aims and administered to a sample of primary school teachers throughout England and Wales. It was then possible to rank the aims in order of importance from the teachers' responses. If these statements of aims are a true reflection of the opinions held by primary teachers in general, they provide a meaningful basis for deciding which aims to consider in relation to developing new assessment procedures.

Beyond the 3 Rs

It was clear from this survey that although the basic skills of reading, writing and number were regarded as of major importance, other intellectual aims (such as the development of the ability to convey meaning through speech, and to acquire information from a wide variety of sources) were also considered important. Aims of this type are not assessed by conventional standardised tests. In the Leicester research programme it was, therefore, considered appropriate to investigate and develop new forms of assessment procedures to match more closely some of these important but neglected primary teachers' aims.

Groups of teachers from Leicester and Leicestershire are now working with the research team on developing

School: filling in some gaps

assessment procedures relating to five of the aims identified by teachers as being of major importance. These are:

1. The child should be able to listen with concentration and understanding.
2. The child should develop some inventiveness and creativity in some fields.
3. The child should know how to acquire information other than by reading.
4. The child should know how to convey meaning clearly and accurately through speech for a variety of purposes.
5. The child should know how to compute in the four arithmetic rules and use mathematical techniques in his everyday life.

The assessment procedures relating to each of the aims are now being developed within the context of the research programme to monitor children's progress. However, these techniques can have a much wider application.

With the phasing out of the 11 plus examinations in most parts of the country and the increasing emphasis on group and individual work many teachers feel a great concern for monitoring progress and keeping meaningful records for individual children. They are aware that few techniques are available other than standardised tests and diagnostic procedures which are often lengthy and very specific. Notable exceptions include the assessment and monitoring procedures of Dr Wynn Harlen in the 'Progress in Learning Science' project* and of Joan Tough in the 'Communication Skills in early childhood' project*. Where teachers are concerned to develop children's abilities in areas additional to the basic skills, the evidence they can bring to show children's progress and attainment is restricted. It is hoped, by developing new assessment procedures, to cover those aims listed above and to help rectify the balance, and provide a more objective basis for assessment than is otherwise available.

Three forms of recording

At present, there seem to be three basic approaches to recording children's progress. The first is the construction of a checklist of activities experienced by the children so that the teacher has a record of the learning situations children have encountered. For example, when recording mathematical skills, a list may cover aspects of pre-notation – sorting, shape, colour; notation – counting to 10, addition, subtraction of figures to ten and so on. This

approach carried to extremes, results in a long 'checklist' of activities which a child has encountered, but does not provide any information on the level of attainment. Some checklists developed by schools may include this by cross tabulating activities against such categories as 'Introduced to,' 'Has practised' and 'Knows'.

The second approach, which is perhaps most prevalent in primary schools, is the use of 'anecdotal' records. These must necessarily be selective otherwise they would be too long to read. They cannot cover all aspects of a child's performance, and tend to focus on problems rather than progress over a wide range of skills.

The third approach makes use of a 'checklist' of abilities. This is generally a series of statements which attempt to describe abilities in such a way that a teacher can observe children's behaviour and relate this to the checklist. These abilities may be manifested in a wide variety of contexts. For example, communication skills could be observed when children are talking in groups, explaining ideas, describing objects, relating events or reporting information. The checklist of abilities is used as a basis for assessing a child's performance and progress may be monitored by recording at intervals the abilities indicated by a child's performance to have been mastered. This presents a particular problem initially since these abilities are difficult to define in such a way both as to be meaningful in terms of observable behaviour, discriminatory, and applicable to the various activities and contexts encountered in the primary school classroom.

The research group

Ultimately teachers may evolve ways of monitoring and recording progress which incorporate elements of all three approaches. However, the approach chosen by the groups of teachers working with the research team was the third – a checklist of abilities. This seemed to provide the greatest opportunity for application in a variety of classrooms, and for gaining meaningful information on the level of performance of individual children.

In developing this work initial contact was made with schools, by letter, inviting teachers to attend a meeting where general information was given on the research programme and the context for the development of new assessment techniques. We then asked any teachers who might be interested in taking part in the development of these procedures to attend a second meeting. A list of

aims from Dr Ashton's survey was given to the teachers and they indicated the areas they were interested in following up. On the basis of these choices five groups were formed to consider the aims listed above. The teachers were asked to try and clarify what they understood by the aim chosen for study, to identify and list the abilities associated with this aim, and types of activities where the abilities could be observed.

Structured activities

After preliminary discussions on the checklist of abilities the teachers in each group offered to set up relevant activities during which they would expect to be able to make an initial assessment, using this checklist, of the children's performance. As anticipated, the principal problem here was insufficient time to observe all the children within the class. Also, some activities proved to be applicable only to a limited range of abilities from the checklist. As a result of these experiences the teacher groups decided that in order to help focus more specifically on the abilities identified, a series of 'structured' activities should be developed, each activity to provide a suitable context for the assessment of a particular ability. It is hoped that these structured activities will help teachers in the initial stages of using the checklist to focus on relevant observable behaviour exhibited by pupils. Once teachers were proficient in using the checklist then they could apply it to any class activity.

Techniques exemplified

The best way to illustrate these techniques is to give an example of an aim, its checklist of abilities and the associated structured activities. The example chosen is that 'the child should be able to acquire information other than by reading from a wide variety of sources'. This aim covers a wide range of abilities which are exhibited in a variety of contexts. Assessment can, therefore, be made in a number of situations. In this case the relevant abilities were arranged in a hierarchy with three levels as detailed below:

Abilities associated with:

- 1 the preliminary acquisition of information: observing, questioning, examining, listening;
- 2 the recalling, recording and ordering of information acquired;

- 3 the extension of information: experimenting, evaluating, developing hypotheses.

Each of these levels was then broken down to give the following checklist of abilities.

Level 1: Observing and questioning

The child is able to:

- a. observe in a limited way, the teachers often pointing out relevant aspects;
- b. make his own independent observations;
- c. ask relevant questions;
- d. use appropriate language and terminology and appear to understand their meaning.

Level 2: Recording and ordering information

The child is able to:

- a. report in an appropriate way eg orally, by writing, model-making, pictorial representation;
- b. bring together information from a variety of sources, recording this logically and in sequence;
- c. where relevant, extend the activity or add to information by expressing his own ideas.

Level 3: Extending an activity or information

The child is able to:

- a. test, or try out a suggestion made by another person;
- b. make his own suggestions for extending an activity or adding to information;
- c. test or try out his own suggestions on his own initiative.

The structured activities that have been developed to accompany this checklist do not in fact cover all the abilities listed since a more restricted set of activities was considered more appropriate at this early stage. However the checklist could be used for assessing relatively long-term class activities such as science-based topics (for instance, the development of seeds). This activity could be organised as a series of units which parallel the checklist of abilities. The structured activities which have been developed consist of 'Spot the difference' cartoons which focus on the child's ability to observe accurately, and a 'Story-picture' sequence which is intended to focus on the child's ability to acquire information from different sources, (ie a story which is read to them and a series of pictures). In order to focus on the ability to ask relevant questions, the children write down the five questions they

would most like to ask if they could meet the people in the story.

The development of such assessment techniques has provided the opportunity to involve a large number of teachers in the research programme both at the developmental stage and in the operative stage. The new procedures are now being used by 60 teachers involved in the major research programme, apart from the five teacher groups involved in the developmental exercise. There are tremendous opportunities here for bringing together theory and practice, and although differences of opinion do arise, in general these are resolved in a constructive way and the techniques are proving acceptable to both teachers and researchers. The expertise of individual teachers who have been brought together in the development of this approach provides an extensive pool of ideas and opinions as well as practical experience of the classroom environment, both in terms of its flexibility and limitations. This expertise has been invaluable in the development of assessment procedures which are relevant to the 'real' situation.

This does not mean that these techniques have necessarily always been accepted as they stand; they have aroused considerable discussion and debate within the schools where the research is being carried out. The discussions and the differences of view which have emerged have hopefully sensitised teachers involved in this work to look at children's behaviour in more detail; and to sharpen the focus of their observations so that, where basic skills attainment may be lower than the teacher would like, they are not blind to the other talents held by these children. Conversely these procedures may also enhance awareness that children proficient in the basic skills may need to improve their performance in other 'intellectual' areas.

References

1. Ashton, P. (1975) *The Aims of Primary Education: a study of teachers' opinions*, Macmillan Education.
2. Harlen, W. (in preparation for June 1977). *Match and Mismatch*, Oliver Boyd.
3. Tough, J. (1976) *Listening to Children Talking: a guide to the appraisal of children's use of language*, London: Ward Lock.

Note

This article reports one aspect of the research procedures developed in Brian Simon and Maurice Galton's Social Science Research Council Programme 'Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation'.

On Primary Schools

New readers may be interested to know of recent **Forum** articles on primary education still available in back numbers.

Ray Pinder: Remedial Strategies in the Primary School (vol 19 no 2)

Brenda Engel: Educational Evaluation in the USA

Wynne Harlen: Assessing progress by teachers, for teachers
(vol 18 no 3)

R. W. Forward: Cooperative Teaching in a Junior School (vol 18 no 2)

David Hawkins: A Third Source of Learning

Maureen Hardy: Attributes of the Integrated Day
(vol 18 no 1)

Eric Davies: The Small Primary School

Rachel Gregory: The Educational Advantages of the Small Primary School

Byron Thomas: Ladders or Trees?

Peter Thomson: Teachers and Community in a Small Primary School
(vol 17 no 3)

Douglas Hubbard Family Support and the Young & John Salt: Reader

Ernest Choat: Curriculum Design in the Primary School
(vol 17 no 1)

David Hawkins: Two Sources of Learning

Peter Prosser: Science and the 9-13 Middle School
(vol 16 no 1)

Order from Forum, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield

The Professional Philosophy of Teachers

K G Collier

K G Collier, whose article is based on examining in-service courses for practising teachers was formerly Principal of Bede College, Durham.

Many teachers attend in-service courses and it may be that only an unrepresentative minority sit external examinations on their studies. Nevertheless it has been highly encouraging recently to mark a few hundred scripts written by serving teachers – many of them with ten or fifteen years' experience – on their classroom principles. The internal evidence of these scripts pointed to a high level of professional commitment in their writers and long reflection on their professional responsibilities; there was a solid grasp of classroom realities and a vivid use of first-hand experience to illuminate general concepts. These comments are necessarily in some degree subjective; but a panel of experienced judges would, I believe, concur as to the impressive overall quality.

To illustrate from a question on the special needs of backward children: while the multiplicity of causes of retardation, and the consequent importance of adequate diagnosis, were well understood, the striking feature of the essays was the evidence of dedicated attention to such children and detailed knowledge of the kind of work they could be given. There was reference to a great variety of approaches: the adaptation of reading schemes to age and experience, the use of individual work-cards and small-group exercises in all subject areas, the minute grading of steps to ensure success and the building up of confidence, the necessity of patience on the teacher's part and the importance of the teacher/pupil bond.

The discussions on the academic learning to be derived from such a technique as a class expedition were marked, not merely by a full appreciation of the preparation and follow-up required, but by detailed accounts of the information the teacher needed to obtain beforehand, the kinds of first-hand observation the pupils might profitably make, the advance discussion with pupils of what to look out for, and the methods of consolidating the learning gained.

The scripts relating to a question on firm discipline and friendly relations in the classroom again showed very considerable insight into the basis of sound discipline on the part of the teacher: fairness, consistency, conscientious preparation and performance, concern for the individual pupil, mutual respect.

There were, however, certain other features of the scripts which contrast rather markedly with the above in insight and clarity of professional judgment.

On authority

First in relation to discipline and authority. The question already mentioned asked in addition *why* firmness should be combined with friendly relationships. In these answers there was a strong tendency to identify the assertion of authority with authoritarian repression. In an extreme case a candidate claimed that 'with the new methods of teaching, punishment has become irrelevant'. Few have thought through the underlying assumptions about the indispensability of some system of order in any human community, the inevitability of some element of coercion, adapted to suit the age and outlook of the members, and the principles governing the control of any such exercise of power. This is not to contradict the comment made in an earlier paragraph: what I am saying is that this sample of teachers had an impressively articulated understanding of the importance of a certain kind of relationship between teacher and pupil but a very inadequate understanding of the relation between this aspect and the element of coercion.

On value-orientation

A related weakness is seen in the answers to another question, which asked for comment on quotations from two well-known educationists: 'It is essential for educators to define the kind of man they want to create, the values he should have'; and 'The object of education is to secure for everyone the conditions under which individuality is most completely developed.' There was here an analogous tendency to identify the idea of a teacher's 'defining the kind of man he wishes to create' with either a Platonic elitism or a totalitarian stereotyping process. In many of the answers the candidates, having dismissed the first quotation and committed themselves to the second, pro-

ceeded in the same paragraph to describe their 'completely developed individual' as being 'well balanced, at peace with himself, tolerant of things with which he might not agree, capable of respecting the freedom of himself and others'. There is a failure to appreciate not only that a teacher's role, as a representative of his society, necessarily entails his attempting to 'create a certain kind of man', but that it is impossible for him to avoid fostering certain value-orientations in his pupils and putting a brake on others: the phrase 'developing individuality most completely' masks the values the teacher favours. It could be argued that the use of the word 'create' has touched off a misconceived response; but I do not believe the scripts, on analysis, would support this view.

On cognitive skills

A third feature of these scripts, which is related to the above two, concerns the nature of the intellectual development that the writers are aiming to bring about in their pupils. The question on backwardness contained an alternative referring to gifted children, which had few takers: it seems as though the prevailing philosophy is much more clearly sure about, and more deeply committed to, the education of the unfortunate than of the exceptionally able. Other questions, on streaming, on the use of class expeditions, on the CSE examinations and on the importance of adequate organisation in the classroom, gave opportunities for candidates to convey something of what they were aiming at in intellectual training: for example, the ability to make reasonably precise first-hand observations, to draw appropriate inferences from evidence, to understand what kind of additional evidence is needed for checking an inference, to organise information on a particular topic into a co-ordinated perspective, and so on. These skills, which are the foundation of the life of the intelligence, and which apply as precisely to a young child's solving a crossword puzzle in a reading exercise, or building up a logical picture of how milk arrives on his doorstep, as to an undergraduate solving a problem in physics or history or building up a picture of atomic structure, scarcely

figured. The usual assumption, often unspoken, was that the intellectual side of education, once a pupil had acquired the basic skills of the three Rs, and with due homage to Piaget and the need for first-hand experience, was a matter of acquiring information.

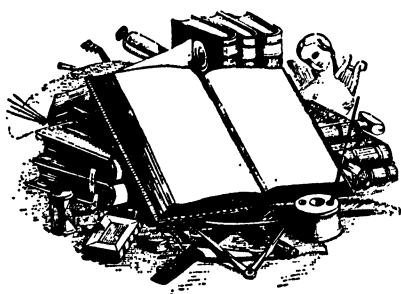
In my comments on authority and on defining one's professional values I have been drawing attention to what are not necessarily, I believe, weaknesses of professional practice but a deficiency in the articulation of a professional philosophy. In my experience many teachers have striking qualities of psychological intuition and moral judgment, which go far beyond what most of us can articulate. But I believe the weakness in thinking through our underlying values and principles is important and I suspect that it is connected with the partial breakdown of authority in many secondary schools.

In relation to intellectual training, however, I believe the weakness is not so much a matter of failing to make sound intuitions explicit as of a serious misconception of the processes of intellectual education and a tendency to identify the latter with the acquisition of information. The long-standing ambivalence on the subject, which may have its roots in social class differentiation and mobility, and has been greatly exacerbated by the knowledge explosion, is at the heart of the continuing controversy over the system of public examinations.

In-service needs

These comments could be read as a reflection on initial teacher-education, and in some degree this could be justified. But as the James Committee pointed out, the curriculum of the three-year course for the Teachers' Certificate (and the new B.Ed.) is already over-crowded, let alone that for the postgraduate certificate. Nor can it be said that these weaknesses are merely a reflection of poor academic standards in the Teachers' Certificate course: the remarkable rise in the general standard of the final Certificate examination in the last 15 years is sufficient refutation of such a criticism. What appears to be needed is a sharper consciousness at the in-service level of the areas to which attention has been drawn.

Reviews



Management with a Human Face

The Role of the Head, edited by R S Peters. Routledge & Kegan Paul (1976), pp 136, £2.95.

This new symposium should interest and fascinate all headteachers, past and present; additionally, it will be an extremely useful guidebook for all those educators who, like your reviewer, believe in some form of participatory democracy in schools, and for aspiring managerially-orientated teachers too. Schooling can be seen as a control system in any society, differently structured from the family or the state, but an important element in the overall power system. We enjoy a very privileged position as educators in England and Wales, struggled for by our grandfathers, where the division of power between central and local authority, between the DES, LEA, and the managers/governors of every maintained school means that the curriculum can be continually adjusted without central edict. This may be changing in current comprehensive complexities but the role of the headteacher plays a vital part in the system.

To what extent have headteachers appreciated or realised their role in a

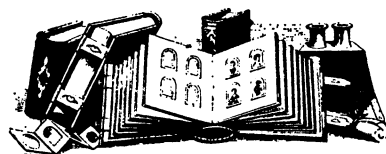
developing democracy? Reading sociologist Bernbaum's analysis of the historical background and of his survey of 315 headmasters, who answered questionnaires or were interviewed by him concerning their role, one understands more vividly the spectrum of personalities involved and their varying views of their task. His work on secondary headteachers and Hoyle's work reported elsewhere on primary headteachers needs to be more widely known; similarly, Kogan's work on CEOs and Ministers of Education adds a dimension to the understanding involved. The contributions of the headmasters Coulson, Colgate and Watts at the end of the book reveal the nuances of the interactions and organisational problems involved in running a specific school, for important differences of administration and personal relationships are involved in the primary comprehensive and secondary comprehensive fields. The individual pupil's needs and parental and societal expectations continually interact in the varying professional milieux.

The most illuminating but controversial sections of the book concern themselves with the head as manager, competence and the head, the role of the head in participatory government and the secondary head considered as a professional administrator. Robin Barrow writes provocatively on 'the nature of competence appropriate to the running of a school' and future headteachers may expect changes in the criteria for appointment when the message of pages 88-90 is fully recognised. William Taylor's concluding paragraph to his interesting critical study of the head as manager puts the position fairly and squarely - 'The capacity on the part of the head and senior staff for sound judgement is more likely to be fostered by an extended and appropriately conceived liberal and professional education than by late-in-the-day efforts to provide specific management knowledge and

expertise . . . the concept of educational administration includes a good deal more than is usually encompassed by education management.' These problems of administration and management on the one hand and, on the other, the task of keeping abreast as a scholar and visionary make the dilemmas for those who are responsible for leading the teaching force in the nation's schools. Meredydd Hughes presents a fascinating study of the contrast between the chief executive and leading professional models of headship and in any future edition one would like to see an extension of the sections written by practising headteachers. As an ex-headteacher, now more of a team player, I personally prefer the leading professional model of headship; one can associate this with principles of administrative responsibility on a shared and rotating basis. However, the role of the headteacher in England and Wales abounds with complexity; this book will help in the process of clarification and avoids the pitfalls of legalistic interpretation.

As an ardent feminist all my life, it seems a pity that we have had no contribution from any headmistress; was any infant or nursery school head asked to submit an essay, I wonder? Limitations of space prevent me from selecting further examples from this important and well-argued collection of papers.

ERIC LINFIELD





Brilliant Argument

The Countesthorpe Experience, edited by John Watts. George Allen and Unwin (1977), 217 pp, £2.50 paperback.

The Countesthorpe Experience is an eminently readable book and it is devoutly to be wished that it will be widely read, especially by people who have never heard of Countesthorpe and who are not versed in comprehensive school lore. The book consists of a well thought out arrangement of different experiences; reflections, descriptions, critiques, reactions, and it includes some students' writing. The contributions are imaginatively grouped under nine headings, such as, for example, 'Caring and Teaching', 'Students' Reflections', 'Teaching in a Democratic School', 'Public Responses' and so on.

Half way into the second half comes a unique section called 'Where We Differ' which consists of twenty-three pages of trenchant, and at times brilliant argument, set out in an exchange of letters between Michael Armstrong and Professor Bantock. The protagonists hurl their dialectic thunderbolts to and fro, but they never lose their cool and the high level of thinking is sustained throughout. There are three Armstrong to two Bantock letters so perhaps Armstrong can be said to win. I tend to think he does, but then I happen to be on his side anyway, and,

as anyone must, who lives and works in a comprehensive school which has come to terms with the real challenge of universal secondary education up to the age of sixteen, he admits the difficulties inherent in 'pursuing the progressive goal'. 'But', he says, 'I have also begun to catch sight of the richness of its promise.'

The nub of the Armstrong-Bantock correspondence is the need distilled from early Countesthorpe experience to unite, or some would say reunite, the pastoral and academic functions of the teacher. It is the search for this synthesis which is the life blood of the Countesthorpe 'team'.

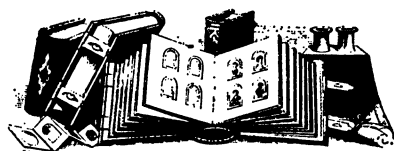
There are all sorts of good historical reasons for the subtly increasing separation of care and teaching in many comprehensive schools; for example the emergence of a new career pattern as the non-graduates, mostly ex-elementary or secondary modern teachers, tended to get promotion as heads of 'Years' or 'Houses' while their graduate colleagues, mostly ex-grammar school, picked up the heads of department posts. The care side was stressed too, in the pupils' interest, because most of the schools were very big and there had to be someone to whom every individual could turn. To be fair, most schools do try to see that 'caring' tutors do also teach their groups, but it is not easy to arrange, and it often does not happen. At Countesthorpe the 'team' was designed to shatter the constraints which had developed as a result of the well-meant and possibly inevitable evolution of the pastoral care syndrome.

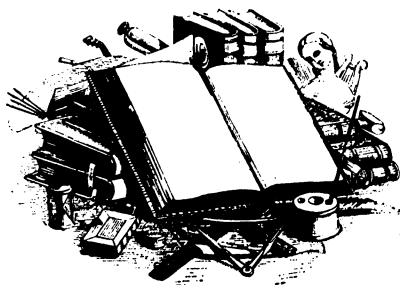
The Countesthorpe 'team' is not like the traditional team teaching group. It consists of five to eight teachers, usually covering mathematics, English, and social studies, who are responsible, pastorally and academically, for some hundred to a hundred and fifty students who become their 'school within the school', and with whom they take part in a 'continual conversation . . . not a dialogue, discussion, or argument but

something more free-ranging, intimate, expressive and egalitarian, that is to say a "conversation"'. Thus, and I quote again, 'the boundaries between academic and pastoral, between different subjects and disciplines, between work and play, between teacher and taught, become of necessity elusive and shifting within the team situation'. The team occupies about half the students' time; the other half is for specialist studies. (It is important to remember that Countesthorpe is a 14 to 18 school.) The challenge to the teachers is immense and the response of some of them is sincerely described in various parts of the book.

If the team concept beats as the heart of the school, its democratic philosophy, its external relations, the Head's interpretation of his role and his views on discipline, keep it going, and all this is communicated in a variety of ways to the reader.

There is much that I like about this book. I like the way the school is seen in the context of what is going on in other countries, and against the social and educational background climate in which we now live, and which is all the time being affected by the comprehensive movement. I like the way it recognises imperfections, but exposes how others have exploited them. I like the way the editor, ie the Head, takes responsibility but does not write the book, and I like the gesture of dedicating it to Tim McMullen. MARGARET MILES





Hidden Values

Planning and Educational Inequality: a study of the rationale of resource-allocation, by Eileen M. Byrne. NFER (1974), pp 386, £5.85.

What resources do local education authorities have at their disposal? How do they use their resources? What are the assumptions, explicit and implicit, upon which their decisions about resource allocation are based? How are policy decisions about the use of scarce resources made? We know the public processes, but how for instance do personal predilections, personal leadership qualities or their lack, just plain administrative and financial competence, affect these processes? To what extent are educational developments constrained by local history and especially by the public and private expectations which grow out of that history? And how do these things affect the educational chances of individual children, as surely they must? We would all like to know the answers to these and related questions and Dr Byrne goes further than any previous research worker in giving them to us.

Reading Dr Byrne's book, one is somewhat staggered by the number of ways in which she approached her research. In outline, she looked at the

ways in which three representative local authorities – Lincoln, Nottingham and Northumberland – applied their educational ration of resources during the period 1945-65.

Dr Byrne begins by identifying the problems to be studied, by describing her research methods and explaining her reasons for selecting the three authorities. She then analyses the whole complicated process of educational resource allocation within these authorities during the decade in question, directing her enquiry towards Secondary education specifically. Attention is paid to the effects of three markedly different historical backgrounds upon the allocation and take-up of educational resources; to the socio-cultural and political contexts within which the three authorities worked; and to the influence of key office-holders upon policies and events. The growing influence of central upon local government is traced like a steadily thickening thread throughout the discussion. There is a lucid discussion of local government finance, and other technical matters, which the reader needs to know about in order to grasp the full force of the main argument.

In three concluding chapters, Dr Byrne examines public expenditure on the teaching force within the three authorities, pointing out that teachers are the most important of all educational resources. She then reports on a survey she made of a 31.5% sample of the total number of Secondary schools in the three authorities, looking at resource allocation from the receiving end and finding that, despite a major increase in public expenditure during the research period, the basic curricular needs of many schools were still not met. Finally, Dr Byrne examines the question, did the extra educational expenditure give school leavers greater skills, improved educational opportunities and employability? For a great many the answer appeared to be no and Dr Byrne argues that this

situation reflected the assumptions upon which resources had been allocated in the first place.

If anyone still seriously believes that education will necessarily be improved just by injecting more money into an existing system they should certainly read Dr Byrne's highly factual, closely argued book.

PATRICK BAILEY
University of Leicester
School of Education



Straitjacket Sixth

The Curriculum of the Open Sixth. General Studies Association, £1.50.

There seems to be an iron law about educational change. It operates in most countries with the possible exception of Sweden, Norway and perhaps, richer parts of the United States. Roughly formulated, it goes like this: the more we innovate, the less we know; the more we change, the less we look into that change. Which probably accounts for the feeling of those who, setting their faces against the supposed horrors of any type of innovation, be it comprehensive, open sixth forms or new examinations, reckon – like latter day Popes:

'Innovations let fools contest,
Whate'er 's established, is best.'
They have a point. Often the only information we have – and the only research that is encouraged – oozes from the dried cud of past practice and the spinelessness of Research Institutes. It is therefore extremely important that the monopoly of knowledge is not maintained nor held up by the timorous squeakings in overheated committee rooms.

The Curriculum of the Open Sixth, published by a group of teachers, members of the General Studies Association, is particularly valuable. First, because we have heard a lot about curriculum reform and the need to cater for the 'new' sixth former. Second, because the information we already have about structures of that area of the school is already ageing. Third, because we need to link up what is happening in schools in the way of curriculum reform and catering for 'non-traditional' students, rather than placing curriculum innovation on one side and change of sixth form structures on the other, and hoping that the two will somehow, mate.

Despite the hideous sampling difficulties involved in attempting to survey the comprehensive schools, 151 out of their projected 365 schools replied. To the niggling, it would have been interesting to know of any response bias, but this is really not the point. Number crunchers should be heard and not seen! Their conclusions are somewhat disheartening though, as they also point out, there are notable exceptions. Schools are not providing adequately for the new sixth former, nor are they undertaking the type of curriculum planning this group of students requires. This raises a number of questions. One wonders, for instance, whether such *vis inertiae* stems from trepidation amongst teachers, or the lack of adequate inservice training, alternatively the lack of information on how other schools have tackled the problem. If the latter is the case, then there is no excuse. Those interested have only to read the case studies included in

this report. Nor, the groups suggest, can the Certificate of Extended Education be regarded as the 'total solution', though one suspects that the desperation with which the Schools Council is pursuing this educational dead parrot indicates its intention to have it regarded as such. Sixth forms are failing to furnish a wide range of non-examinable courses and failing also to devise courses for mixed groups of students. This is serious. For without such provision, the 'Open Sixth' reverts to being an administrative nomenclature. Educationally, it will remain a hidden 'closed' sixth. As with any reform, changing the terminology is fine. But it is neither sufficient nor indeed morally justifiable, if one's intention, in creating a nominally Open Sixth, is to cater for all children and their differential needs.

Yet, all the indications are that the Open Sixth is desperately important, not only for the 'non-traditional' sixth former, but also for the late developer. It is, in fact, the point at which such adolescents catch up. It is, effectively, the point at which the major differences between the traditional output in terms of social class and attainment found in Grammar School students entering higher education are altered in the comprehensive school. Equality of educational opportunity, as a large number of European studies are now tending to show, is increasingly linked not to the input stage of the school and the conditions there pertaining, but to the developments at the output stage. Without the Open Sixth and the structural change this involves, such a target is realised only with great difficulty. Furthermore, without curriculum change to underpin the philosophical, sociological and psychological assumptions explicit in the Open Sixth, structural transformation can only act as a palliative.

The lesson one might draw from this most useful survey is that in the long run yesterday's most radical propositions become today's most

pressing needs. This is as true in education as it is in politics. In the medium term, it would seem most sensible if curriculum planning, instead of skipping from one milk and water proposal to another, proposals limited and circumscribed by a selective school system on the point of collapse, opted for a series of simultaneously entertained 'scenarios' – to use the twee jargon current in the Civil Service – to isolate the particular aspects of reform necessitated by various forms of structural change. This is all the more pressing because with secondary reorganisation, we are not dealing with the problems of individual schools, or even types of schools. We are dealing with subtle variants within a total *system* commonly called 'Comprehensive Education'.

GUY NEAVE

*Institut d'Education,
Université Dauphine, Paris*



The following BACK NUMBERS of FORUM are still available price 85p each.

- Vol 1 No 3 Experiences with a backward class; General Subjects in the Junior School; Teaching English.**
 - Vol 6 No 3 Symposium on the Robbins Report.**
 - Vol 8 No 2 Special number on the Probationary Year.**
 - Vol 9 No 3 Plowden symposium.**
 - Vol 10 No 1 The Sixth Form in the Comprehensive School; Curriculum planning in a large school.**
 - Vol 10 No 3 Focus on Groups — teaching in groups.**
 - Vol 11 No 2 Two Years after Plowden; Self-directed learning.**
 - Vol 11 No 3 Freedom of Choice — for whom? A new Education Act?**
 - Vol 12 No 2 From secondary to primary.**
 - Vol 12 No 3 Teaching Unstreamed Classes.**
 - Vol 13 No 1 Teachers for Comprehensives; Mixed ability science.**
 - Vol 13 No 2 Assessment — for Whom? Recent trends in examining.**
 - Vol 14 No 2 Innovation in Education.**
 - Vol 15 No 1 Democracy and Innovation in Education.**
 - Vol 15 No 2 16 to 19.**
 - Vol 16 No 1 Resource-based learning.**
 - Vol 16 No 2 Schools CAN make a difference.**
 - Vol 16 No 3 Going Comprehensive in England, Wales and Scotland.**
 - Vol 17 No 1 The 'new' sociology and education.**
 - Vol 17 No 2 New Directions: reconstruction of knowledge.**
 - Vol 17 No 3 The Question of Size for primary and secondary schools.**
 - Vol 18 No 1 Mixed Ability Teaching: French, Maths, Science.**
 - Vol 18 No 2 Flexibility and Mixed Ability.**
 - Vol 18 No 3 Examination or Assessment in primary and secondary phases.**
 - Vol 19 No 1 In Defence of Education**
 - Vol 19 No 2 Comprehensive Remedial Provision for primary and secondary.**
- Order from: Forum, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield WS13 7AA.**