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# FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION OF NEW TRENDS IN EDUCATION

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## Primary and Secondary

# Editorial Board



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# Whither the HMI?

During the autumn of 1978 two reports by different teams of HMIs were published. One surveyed **Mixed Ability Work in Comprehensive Schools** and the other **Primary Education in England.** Both reflect a preoccupation with categorisation of children by 'ability' levels, the secondary HMIs postulating four and implying five categories and the primary HMIs settling for three. These two reports are each critically examined in this number.

**Forum** has always refuted the theories of innate, measurable intelligence that were held to justify a divisive bipartite system of secondary schools, eleven-plus selection and streaming. The credibility of such theories was publicly shaken in 1977 when the suspect basis of Sir Cyril Burt's supposed research was revealed by investigative journalism in the **Sunday Times,** following Penguin's publication of L J Kamin's **The Science and Politics of I Q** three years after its appearance in the United States. Last November the **New Statesman** printed Oliver Gillie's account of the apparently fraudulent nature of Burt's influential work, including a report of Professor Dorfman's exposé in the **Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Forum's** standpoint has, of course, been substantiated by reputable psychologists in Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union long before these dramatic revelations.

Many teachers, too, have long known from experience that a child's intelligence or 'ability' develops through the process of sound education.

Her Majesty's Inspectors, however, still cling to modes of thought on which they were doubtless brought up. The secondary HMIs in particular seem just not to comprehend the rationale of non-streamed teaching and the educational objectives of many comprehensive schools. In this context **Forum** invites them to make known their credentials. How many of them have taught in comprehensive schools — or, indeed, in schools other than grammar or independent? What criteria did they use for determining 'ability' or in their evaluations of effective teaching? The primary HMIs are more explicit about the basis on which they made judgements, and seem to empathise more with the schools they surveyed.

These reports lead **Forum** to raise the question of what is the proper role of HM Inspectorate and to note with concern its recent manoeuvring into position from which to try to exert an influence it has not been accorded in this century. In this context we intend to keep watch on the activities of the Assessment of Performance Unit and the use made of data obtained by its nationwide sample testing. We need to take warning from Professor Eggleston's observations in this number on North American efforts to evaluate teachers, while heeding his call for intraprofessional evaluation. (We plan to return to these issues in a future number.)

In the spirit of the latter approach, two members of the Editorial Board take up the 1977 Green Paper's request for discussion of the desirability of a common or common-core curriculum, arguing the case in the primary and secondary contexts.

Conscious that current educational debate is within the framework imposed by expenditure cuts and falling rolls, we publish two articles that explore these twin problems and press the case for resources. These articles continue the discussion begun in our last number.

The last educational event of the autumn was the publication of the Education Bill. **Forum** welcomes the provision for elected teacher and parent governors of schools, and believes that the new power to set a limit on admission numbers should enable LEAs to control the effects of falling numbers so as to protect some schools which might otherwise suffer unduly. However, we are alarmed to find protection of admission 'based wholly or partly on selection by reference to ability or aptitude' enshrined in the proposed legislation, as this would give a new legality to eleven-plus. We also have grave doubts about the general extension of parental rights to express preference for particular schools as this could well undermine the comprehensive character of some schools, and even preclude some children from attending their local comprehensive if it were over-subscribed by more distant parents. This Bill seems to threaten rather than extend comprehensive education.

# Resources for education

**Maurice Peston**

Maurice Peston is Professor of Economics at Queen Mary College, University of London. He here examines a number of crucial issues in the economics of education today.

Perhaps the best place to start is with the statistics. Despite what is generally thought, actual expenditure on education in the past decade has grown as a share of gross domestic product and as a share of public expenditure. Total educational expenditure has grown from 12.7% to 14.4% of public expenditure in the period 1967-1977, and from 5.4% to 6.3% of gross national product at factor cost. What is called total final consumption expenditure on education has increased by 51% at constant prices in the decade, which is a good deal more than the 22% increase in real gross domestic product at factor cost. If we focus on the short period of the present Labour Government, despite our being in continual economic crisis, expenditure on education has risen as a share of public expenditure (13.2% to 14.4%) and gross national product (6.1% to 6.3%). Moreover, total final consumption expenditure on education has risen in real terms by 7.7% while real national income has only increased by 3.4%. What then is the fuss all about?

The answer to this question is partly to do with the experiences of the past year, partly to do with plans, and partly to do with philosophy and political argument. Current expenditure on education at constant prices (ie in real terms) actually fell in 1977 compared with 1976. Capital expenditure has been falling sharply since the beginning of the 1970s, and thus total expenditure reached a peak in 1975-76. The fall in capital expenditure is quite startling. Annual capital expenditure in the primary and secondary sector has fallen from £737 m in 1972-73 to £296 m in 1977-78, a reduction of some 60%! Now, one reason why this is more painful than it might have been is that it contrasts so strongly with the plans and expectations at the beginning of the decade.

For education to do as well as it has would be acceptable if we had not hoped for and promised rather more. Primary school numbers are projected to fall by about 30% between 1972 and 1982, while secondary school numbers reach a peak in the current academic year and then start to decline. Most people would have regarded it as reasonable for these developments to lead to some decline in expenditure, but would have wanted us to be in a position to do more to raise resources per head and to improve the average quality of buildings. The point is strengthened when existing expenditure plans are scrutinised. These call for a rise of 3% in total education expenditure over the next four years made up of a 4% rise in current expenditure and an 11% fall in capital expenditure. In 1981-82 educational expenditure is still projected to be below its level of 1975-76. Once again, it is a matter of judgement whether one says 'it could have been worse' or 'it might have been better'. I myself am particularly puzzled by the continued projected low level of capital expenditure in the primary and secondary sectors falling from £522m in 1974-75 to £296m in 1977-78, and then down to £233m in 1981-82. It is hard to see this as part of a great new policy to rebuild the inner cities. Let me move now to the philosophy of all this.

There can be no doubt of the profound change in public attitudes to educatiuon that has occurred in the seventies as compared with the sixties. The latter was a time of hope and optimism with expansion and reform the twin key notes. The former has become a period of doubt and pessimism based on relative contraction and reaction. Perhaps this was inevitable, but I am more inclined to believe that the characteristic approach of each decade was exaggerated. Each was rather speculative and irresponsible, placing too little emphasis on sound thinking and established evidence, which is, of course, altogether characteristic of political processes. But havng said that, it remains my view that, while too much was expected too soon, a positive and dynamic educational policy is essentially the correct one. Those who adopted that position may have erred, but we erred in the right direction.

The period of doubt in educational policy has also been a period of economic set back if not disaster. There are some who have attributed our economic troubles to excessive public expenditure by the UK government. But it is difficult to see how the commodity price boom, the use of their monopoly power by the OPEC countries, and the growing militancy of trade unions throughout Western Europe can be attributed to too large a school building programme or a high rate of recruitment of teachers. Once we found ourselves in a state of stagflation, it may have been the case that the only way forward required some degree of temporary

retrenchment. Certainly, that is the path that the government has chosen. Nobody, however, can be happy about a form of macro-economic policy that requires 1.5m unemployed, most of whom have the ability to work, and many of whom are young and will bitterly resent their earlier experience of the labour market for the rest of their lives. The seventies must have taught us the lesson that there has got to be a better way of organising our economic affairs. I myself have no solutions to offer, except to say that this must be a task of the highest priority, and is one which few of our public figures show much sign of recognising.

Even taking a pessimistic view of the future, what can be said about the development of the economic system in the 1980s and the whole of education? The answer to this question is surely that the demands on the educational system are bound to grow, as are the demands made by the educational system on the economy. The two together, therefore, must lead to a further boost in the relative share of resources taken by education, and the fraction of the labour force employed in that sector. (Perhaps I should add that similar and related arguments lead to much the same conclusion for the public sector as a whole. The proposition that the public sector is already too large absolutely and relatively has not been established, and I believe is simply mistaken). In formulating policy, therefore, the following are the points to bear in mind:

(i) As people become richer they demand more leisure and more leisure services. They want a shorter working week, working year, and working life.

(ii) Technology in manufacturing industry is shifting towards greater capital intensity, including human capital intensity. The unskilled are less in demand.

(iii) As real wages rise labour intensive activities become relatively more expensive.

(iv) The pace of change in the economy requires regular retraining and education of the labour force; the education-training distinction will become rather blurred, although it will continue to be significant; the programme to deal with, or rather mitigate, youth unemployment, while it may change in form, will be a permanent feature of our economic system.

(v) If education and industry are to be brought more closely together, there is an ideological problem to be faced. The values of the two systems differ as to their motivation and characteristic forms of behaviour. In particular, we must take care not to give in entirely to a way of life based on money incentives and inequality. Better still we ought to do all we can to reinforce the path to industrial democracy especially insofar as it promotes an improved quality of working life.

(vi) There is the paradox that, on the one hand, micro-circuitry and all that is supposed to lead to widespread permanent unemployment and, on the other, labour shortages in manufacturing industry have been at the root of all our troubles.

There is the related problem that, at any level of productivity and employment a preference for leisure must be at the expense of material goods and services, and a preference for what the public sector offers must be at the expense of private sector ouput. This presents particular problems for the financing of the public sector because of the free rider phenomenon, the change in generational demands, and the need to reduce inequality.

The other key issue is one for which in a curious way we are indebted to Dr Boyson. It concerns quality and equality within the education system. I do not mean by this so much the variations in total education received by different people, important though they are, but rather variations at a given level. Our good schools, it goes without saying, could always be better. Our worst schools are intolerably bad. Thus, it is necessary both to raise the quality of all schooling, and to raise the poorer end at a faster rate than the better. Some of this is organisational. There are local educational authorities which simply cannot cope, and the central government prefers to sacrifice the children most in need on the altar of the local authority autonomy rather than intervene directly. But the problem is much more one of resource limitation. The obvious comparison is with the private sector, where on average the resources devoted to each child are greater than in the public sector although the latter contains relatively more children in need of special help. Whatever the merits of the private sector, and they seem fewer and fewer as the years go by, it does provide a yardstick for public expenditure. Although I realise we are not comparing like with like, both because of the boarding element and the special amenities in the private sector, it seems perfectly reasonable that the public sector should be able to spend per head as much on the majority of children as the fee paying schools devote to the minority, and that they should have as ready access to good teachers, books and fine buildings.

The objection to the approach of the Conservative

# Evaluating teachers or teaching?

**J F Eggleston**

Jim Eggleston is Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham School of Education. He has contributed several articles on examinations and assessment to **Forum** and here turns his attention to the implications of evaluation for teachers and teaching.

During a recent visit to Canada I was engaged in discussions with teachers, administrators and researchers about the evaluation of curricula and teaching methods. The American literature on testing had prepared me to differentiate between the use of the word evaluation in the American sense, which is almost the equivalent of testing or examining; the acquisition of 'performance data', and the British sense which embraces processes of enquiring into possible causes and contexts as well as hypothesized effects of learning. The 'culture-shock' came from a different direction; this was the assumption by School-Board superintendents (shared by many teachers) that *teachers* could and should be *evaluated.* There was considerable discussion about the part which standardised achievement tests might play in the process.

Can teachers be judged in terms of their effectiveness or are traditional inspectorial methods for assessing 'good' teaching sufficient? The possibility that the effects of teaching are difficult to differentiate from variations of performance due to other 'causes' were considered during our discussions, so was the problem that the judgments of superintendents may be based on prescriptions which have at best hypothetical relationships to outcomes. But the focus was on the evaluation of *teachers* not on the processes of *teaching.* Evaluation was perceived as a process done to teachers not with them or by them.

The evaluation machinery was discussed in essentially bureaucratic terms; attainment tests, normative in design would be produced and standardised by the research departments of each *Province,* the superintendents are answerable to the *School-Board.* The community of discourse in which policies for evaluation are being defined in this context is political. Through bureaucratic devices teachers are being called to account. The teacher is sub-professional in this system.

It is hard to deny society some say in the structure and functioning of an educational system for which they provide the resources. The same social accountability could be exercised here as in the Health Service, Social Services and the Law. Variations between different groups, each of which serves society, can be seen in terms of the degrees to which their accounting systems are open to public inspection. One might speculate that the stronger the professional identity and cohesion within a group the greater that group's ability to withstand pressures to 'publish its accounts'.

Access to knowledge of the criteria used to determine professional 'effectiveness' may be denied the layman by groups with a strong professional identity. Such groups will claim that their work is too complex to be properly understood by layman and therefore judgments about the work of any member can only be made by his peers who are schooled in the right criteria and skilled in their application. Professional communities of discourse enjoy varying degrees of autonomy. The greater their autonomy the greater their immunity from examination in the political community of discourse. Such communities may develop languages which deny the layman access to professional knowledge. They also develop ethical codes to which their members are bound. Members of the community are usually equipped to try new procedures within the limits set by these codes. In a developed professional community, procedures (or treatments in the case of medicine) would be evaluated by members of the group. Success in the application of a range of treatments would not be used to evaluate the members of the group.

For various reasons, about which we can only speculate, teachers have not achieved the cohesion and autonomy of a developed professional group. Perhaps the intellectual calibre of the entrants to teaching is too low, the length of training too short, the specialisms within teaching too disparate, or teachers lack the will to take the necessary steps towards professional identity.

Nevertheless it may be a worthwhile exercise to

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*(Continued)*

right wing is that it is pure mischief making. It identifies a problem which though small relative to the whole system is not unimportant, especially to the people in the particular schools themselves. But then no solution is offered. Indeed, since these very same people advocate drastic cuts in public expenditure together with a restoration of the selective system, they merely exacerbate the difficulty. But for the rest of us who have to put things right the correct response is not to pretend that the problem is not there in the first place.

reflect on the possible structure of an intra-professional evaluation of teaching. The focus, I suggest, should be on the processes of teaching rather than on teachers. Political communities of discourse tend to use a conceptual framework which is too crude to be of much help to teachers. Two kinds of evidence have been called for by this community, evidence of pupils' performance in tests and evidence of teachers classroom performance. The setting up of the APU and a call for a return to the inspectorial role for 'advisers' are responses to the demand for evidence. Because of the lack of any articulated position occupied by a cohesive profession any challenge to these data will inevitably be seen as defensive.

# APU or HMI?

At a recent conference set up by the APU Science Team one of the many difficult problems discussed was that of determining the nature of the evidence of attainment which will come out of the national testing programme and the form it will take in order to provide target audiences with useful information. The complex sampling procedures which will be used may facilitate the publication of national Norms of performance and the exposure of, for example, regional differences, but unless teachers are given access both to the data and the test items it is difficult to see how the APU's work can have any short term effects on the processes of teaching. Given information about how pupils in the national sample performed on a particular test item – *and* how his pupils performed on this item allows the teacher to match his pupils' performance, item by item, with his expectations and to modify these expectations in the light of national performance. The potential product of the APU's work could form part but only part of an intra-professional evaluation of teaching methods.

The other method for the evaluation of 'teachers' which is being increasingly advocated is that of 'inspection'. Many species of observation may be included in this generic term but typically inspection results in an impressionistic judgment based on a one-off sample of teaching performance.

I can still vividly recall after 25 years my first General Inspection. Form 5b were wrestling with the structure and physiology of the vertebrate eye. Vitreous humour flowed freely over the laboratory benches. At one point the class lapsed into a metaphysical exposition concerning the existence of the 'phantom' made visible by gently poking the inner corner of a closed eye. What my Inspector made of this activity was and remained beyond my ken. He uttered four words during 45 minutes, 'good morning' and 'thank you'. There may be, lodged in the archives of the DES a more articulate report of the Inspector's observations, perceptions and judgments of the events of that possibly unique occasion. But any expectation I might have had that I would be the recipient of feedback rich in pedagogical insight was not realised.

The regard which the educational researcher must pay to such fundamental concerns of empirical enquiry as sampling, reliability of data collecting instruments, distinctions between evidence and conclusions, the requirement to publish data and conclusions and to defend the relationship between the two in public were conspicuously absent from this enterprise. The focus must have been on my ability to engage the class in tactical manoeuvres. My intentions might have been inferred, my strategies to a limited degree have been discernible, the effect of the lesson on my pupils visible only from their performance as participants. Any cognitive gains which may have occurred, any developments of attitudes to the business of learning biology were not manifest in any way observable by the Inspector. At no point during this inspection was I asked to give an account of my intentions.

Was I teaching the vertebrate eye to give my pupils experience of scientific ways of thinking? Was I merely presenting facts about the eye and of its functions? Was I mainly concerned to develop my pupils' abilities to develop mathematical algorithms from physiological data? Did I intend to advance my pupils' development in the use of descriptive language to describe accurately biological processes? Was my ourpose to give my pupils a sense of awe when brought face to face with the fitness for function of the mammalian eye? No such issue was raised. The equally significant question of the effects of the lesson on my pupils was also not called into question. Had they learnt what I was trying to teach them? No evidence was available, none called for.

An intra-professional evaluation of this lesson, or hopefully a more representative sample of teaching processes, would require more than observations of teaching tactics and limited evidence made available from the use of highly generalisable standard tests. Minimally an evaluation of *teaching* requires statement of a teacher's INTENTIONS, PROCESSES (at both strategic and

tactical levels) and OUTCOMES. Such an evaluation would require of teachers not only a comprehensive and articulate *description* of intentions but a rational defence of intentions including not only objectives, which are increasingly being defined by teachers in behavioural terms in the Tyler-Bloom mode, but the range of facts to be learnt, the principles which guided their selection and the conceptual structures which give them meaning. Also in this category are processes of inducting children into ways of thinking. The rational basis of the teacher's curriculum may be examined and the psychological validity of his knowledge and assumptions about learning explored insofar as they relate to intentions.

In my lesson on the vertebrate eye one of my intentions was to give my pupils an opportunity to speculate and to examine these speculations against observable facts, part of a process of inducting them into what I believe to be a scientific way of thinking about the natural world. The problem of how vertebrate eyes focus objects at different distances on the retina provided such an opportunity. My limited knowledge of 5b's minds suggested that given certain conditions they would enjoy some success in this enterprise. Any evaluation of the teaching processes which I used must take into account these intentions. The intentions may be examined in terms of my knowledge or beliefs (a) about science (b) about the minds of 5b. They may also be examined for congruence with the strategies and tactics which I used as means to secure these intentions. It would also be legitimate to enquire of me if I could predict any observable gains so that my intentions might be related to outcomes.

Processes of teaching may be seen to operate at two levels, strategies and tactics. The former are usually the results of armchair thinking about the content, form and sequencing of a lesson or series of lessons. The latter are recorded as a blow by blow account of a lesson: the script of transactions 'written' by the participant as the lesson proceeds. Selecting content, determining the form a course or a lesson will take, and the sequence in which facts will be presented and ideas explored, are processes open to logical and psychological enquiry. An evaluation of teaching would include such an enquiry. Particularly, the relationship between intentions and strategic processes would be examined for congruence.

Process-tactics can only be explored empirically. Some kind of a record of a lesson (or lessons) must be obtained. It is important to distinguish between the observed transactions and judgments based on these observations. Congruence between intentions and tactics is potentially vital. If there is to be a slip between the cup and the lip it will probably occur in process-tactics. We know that teachers tend to dominate classroom transactions and that a high proportion of questions they ask are 'closed'. We may ask, is this behaviour consonant with their intentions? This is a legitimate question in the evaluation of teaching. It would be alien to this task to regard these tactics as 'bad' teaching. We may also ask is such behaviour effective?

The remaining aspect of evaluation of teaching to be considered is outcomes. In what ways do pupils change as a result of exposure to teachers who can defend their intentions and deploy their resources in strategic and tactical moves which survive logical and psychological examination? The observation of the effects of teaching might of course be a strategy in itself; more or less systematic feedback of pupils' performance might be a strategic weapon in the armoury of the responsive teacher. Outcomes will include both obtaining evidence of the extent to which that sub-set of intentions, called objectives, has been secured but also side-effects given, either bonus or deleterious. It is highly unlikely that formal testing will provide the array of data which will be required to relate intentions to outcomes. The means for a more systematic probing of pupils' minds will be required to complete an evaluation of teaching.

These then are, as I see it, the raw elements of an evaluation of teaching. The conduct of such evaluations requires that teachers during their training are equipped to undertake them. This means not only that they have the means to engage in the logical and empirical examination of their work, in order to reflect intelligently on their intentions, processes and their outcomes, *to satisfy themselves*, but also that they become willing to share the data and conclusions of such evaluations with other members of the profession. The teacher becomes researcher engaged in a constructive critique of teaching processes. An intra-professional evaluation in which teachers undertook to equip themselves with the means to examine systematically teaching processes might divert the political community of discourse away from the crude over simplifications of educational problems. More important however would be the effect on teachers and teacher trainers by providing the beginning of a rational and empirical basis for practice.

# The national primary survey

**Colin Richards**

Colin Richards is a member of staff of the School of Education, University of Leicester. He has taught in a number of primary schools and is editor of the journal, **Education 3-13.** Here he presents a critique of the recent HMI Report on primary education.

**Primary Education in England: A survey by HM Inspectors of Schools** (HMSO 1978) is a most significant document. Its unexceptional style, its seemingly moderate tone and its plain, rather subdued format belie the strength and trenchancy of its critique. Despite its bland reception by news media, it is in fact a formidable critique of primary practice and some of its underlying beliefs and assumptions. Of course, critiques of schooling have been plentiful during the last decade, but few have gone much beyond a simple minded perception of 'good' and 'bad' and fewer still have examined schooling fairly, honestly, knowledgeably and at an appropriately specific level. Such qualities are necessary if critiques are to be *both* credible (relatively easy to achieve at a time of public and professional unease) and productive in terms of enhancing teacher professionalism (a much more difficult process to realise). It is my contention that the report of the primary survey possesses these qualities and provides much needed opportunities for professional self-evaluation and renewal.

Certain background features need to be noted in any adequate appraisal. It is important to realise that a feasibility study for the survey was carried out as early as Autumn 1974. Thus the survey predates the 'Great Debate', the publication of **Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress** and the explosive events of the William Tyndale Junior School. It was conducted in classes of 7, 9 and 11 year olds in 542 schools between Autumn 1975 and Spring 1977 — a period which coincided with increasing public and political criticism of the education service. Its findings were processed surprisingly quickly, and have now been released in an educational atmosphere happily less characterised by polemic and recrimination than the stormy days of 1976-77. It is a successor to the survey carried out in the mid-sixties for the Plowden Committee, though it avoids the former survey's dubious classification of schools into nine 'types', its unrealistic aspirations to be comprehensive and its unwillingness to disclose in any detail the basis for its judgements.

The report itself invites reactions on at least two levels. To most newspaper correspondents, parents and managers reassurance is likely to be the dominant reaction, reassurance that primary teachers give priority to the 'basic skills', that reading test scores for eleven year olds are 'consistent with a rising trend in reading standards between 1955 and 1976/77', that the vast majority of classes are characterised by a quiet working atmosphere whenever it is required and that adequate guidance to children about what they should be doing is given in nineteen classes out of twenty. I, too, am reassured, not by these points in particular, but by the sensitivity and 'political' sense of the Inspectorate in making the points so prominently (thereby doing much to dispel public fears as they exist at the level of Black Paper polemic) and yet at the same time raising very important problems which are far from reassuring at the professional level. In very many places in the report immediate reactions of reassurance give rise to misgivings at a closer, more thorough reading. To take but two examples, how reassuring is it that a tenth of primary children (several hundred thousand) may well be in classes where a quiet working atmosphere is not established whenever it is needed? Or again, are those of us who support mixed-ability teaching reassured by the facts that while only 6% of all eleven year olds are in streamed classes, *17%* are streamed in schools large enough to do so?

## Curriculum

The report highlights the centrality of the curriculum in primary education. Over two-thirds of the report is concerned with curricular matters: content, scope, continuity and standards of work. Compare this with Plowden where the curriculum is a major focus in no more than four chapters out of thirty-two! Concern for what children do, and should, learn is stressed at the relative expense of organisation and teaching methodology, though these are discussed (rather tediously and, in the case of teaching styles, rather unsophisticatedly) partly because of the 'political' necessity of dealing with the vexed area of teaching methods and standards.The report represents a welcome readjustment of focus: though important, teaching styles, school organisation

and classroom organisation have for too long preoccupied us in primary education and deflected us from the still more central problems of deciding what particular skills, knowledge and attitudes primary children should acquire and of incorporating these into planned teaching/learning sequences. The report graphically and forthrightly documents the neglect of these central concerns in many classes, especially in relation to science, craft, history and geography. Its comments on particular curriculum areas are an interesting balance of commendation and criticism and of description and prescription: usually (though not always) unequivocal judgements are made and clear positive remedies advanced. It would seem that an attempt is being made to assert a degree of leadership from the centre in the determination of appropriate content. Readers of this journal must judge for themselves whether such a bid is timely and desirable.

# Coverage and match

In particular important points are made about the range of work undertaken. Based on observation and discussion with teachers and children structured according to very full schedules (valuable summaries of which are in the annexes to the report), teachers are seen as 'making markedly individual decisions about what is to be taught based on their own perceptions and choices or a combination of these' (paragraph 6.9). A list of curricular items found to occur *individually* in at least 80% of classes and thus presumed to be of considerable importance to teachers is described, but *less than a third* of classes are found to be undertaking work related to *all* of these items. How far does this represent legitimate professional discretion and adaptation? Or how far is there at least a measure of dereliction of duty? The Inspectorate imply the latter and assert that 'ways of providing a more consistent coverage for important aspects of the curriculum need to be examined' (6.9). Some readers may see this as a clear sign of firmer, central coordination to come; some may regard it as an essential step towards greater curricular equality for primary children. There is a fundamental issue here; how far does the present, apparently idiosyncratic selection of work by considerable numbers of teachers enhance or restrict pupils' opportunities for worthwhile learning? The Inspectorate has its answer. Chapter 6 may well turn out to be the most significant part of the whole document.

Curricular match and mismatch is another prominent theme, examined curriculum area by area and related to three ability levels — the most able, average and least able as identified (with all the imperfections that classification implies) by their teachers. Making matching judgements is a chancy business in view of our present lamentable lack of knowledge of how to assess most of children's capabilities. At least the Inspectorate does try to spell out the basis for its overall judgements, though the validity of some individual HMI judgements could well be suspect in view of the short time-scale and task-laden nature of the survey inspections. However, the broad conclusions seem reasonable enough. Material is more appropriately matched for the less able than for the other ability groups and for reading and maths than for other curricular areas. There is a widespread tendency to underestimate the capacities of the most able and to provide them with inadequately challenging work, this being particularly the case in inner city schools. Clearly as far as match is concerned teacher intuition is not sufficient (nor, however, some would argue is HMI 'experience' in passing meta-judgements!). Faced with this problem, how can inservice work help teachers to assess children's capabilities? Is sufficient research being funded in this area? Isn't it just as important (if not more so) than the establishment of national norms of performance?

One means suggested to improve curricular match is the greater use of semi-specialisation in primary schools wherever expertise is lacking. Provision of advice is seen as important but not enough in many cases: a specialist may be required to teach either the whole class or a group for particular topics. Such staff deployment which could well involve specialist teaching in a variety of areas makes inroads into the traditional class-teacher pattern. Allied with this is the view that more importance and urgency be attached to increasing the influence of post-holders in areas of the curriculum. Providing them with clearer role-specifications, with further inservice training and with increased responsibilities and executive powers are recommended. Such staff redeployment coupled with school-based staff development do seem essential (though scarcely sufficient?), if the identified problems of curriculum scope, mismatch and neglect are to be remedied. Aren't the changes envisaged (let alone those needed) far more than what the Inspectorate terms 'some fairly modest re-adjustment of teachers' roles' (page viii)?

# A core-curriculum for the Primary School

**Michael Clarke**

Michael Clarke is Head of a Junior School and a member of **Forum** Editorial Board. As a contribution to the current debate on a common core curriculum he considers the issue in the context of the primary school.

A core-curriculum is often seen in terms of a particular body of knowledge. It has been rejected by many teachers on the grounds that it would be difficult to reach a consensus of agreement on what that body of knowledge should contain. I don't see the Primary school curriculum in those terms, but believe nevertheless that there should be a core-curriculum. For me, children's education is so important that all children ought to be certain of encountering a basic minimum of experiences. We cannot leave children's education to the whims and fancies of individual teachers.

The recent HMI's survey **Primary Education in England** states, 'It would seem that in individual schools, either some difficulty is found in covering appropriately the range of work widely regarded by teachers as worthy of inclusion in the curriculum or that individual schools or teachers are making markedly individual decisions about what is to be taught based on their own perceptions or choices or a combination of these. Clearly, ways of providing a more consistent coverage for important aspects of the curriculum need to be examined.'

In my experience, allowing teachers to follow their own dictates is not likely to produce a balanced work programme in any one year, nor a coverage of essential experiences for a child's primary education period as a whole.

During one particular year, the general subject teaching in my present school was history biased. Due to such influences as television programmes and national events — Jubilee Year in this case — certain staff working together, created an enthusiastic atmosphere of historical enquiry which snowballed and involved everyone. The work done was lively, interesting and useful. When working in this way a school year can appear to be a very short time. The end can arrive bringing realisation that one has been carried away by the interest that has been engendered. A review of work done that year showed that science had been left out almost entirely and geography teaching had been minimal.

It could be argued that other areas of work had been covered under the heading of History. This was undoubtedly true, but the extent was difficult to ascertain and therefore the element of certainty was lost.

This single example is in line with the findings of the HMI Survey on Primary Education in England and it showed me how easily an imbalance can be produced. What happened to a whole school and therefore became obvious, could happen in different ways to a number of different teachers and perhaps go unrecognised.

There are many theories about the nature of the learn-

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For readers long inured to half-truths and disguised value-judgements paraded as the 'facts' of primary education, the report valuably questions some widely-held assertions. Thus, it throws doubt on the degree of recent change in primary schools, on the superiority of formal teaching in terms of test results, on the close association of a narrow curriculum with 'high' standards in the 'basic skills', on the largely unsubstantiated claims made for vertical grouping in the cognitive area, on the necessity for promoting individual development through so-called 'individualised' learning, on the belief that primary school teachers do not need a thorough knowledge of subject-matter, and on the necessary connection between teacher professionalism and a very high degree of personal autonomy in curricular decison-making.

Apart from occasional ambiguities and its rather too generous treatment of questionnaire responses, the report is commendably frank and relatively 'open' compared with many DES documents. It discloses much about the Inspectorate's work and thinking as well as about primary practice. Unfortunately, it leaves some important curricular problems untouched: the nature and facilitation of school-wide curriculum planning the problems of internal and external continuity, the vexed question of accountability. As a result of the survey primary education has greater self-knowledge and the inevitable discomfort attached to such knowledge. The survey serves to highlight the incredibly complex, demanding — some would say 'impossible' — nature of primary teaching and underlines the necessity for a professional 'Great Debate' to take up the points it raises. Along with other 'support' services, the Inspectorate too needs to re-examine its role and its practice: the weaknesses disclosed in schools can scarcely (or fairly) be attributed to teachers alone.

ing process. Individual schools will base their teaching methods on those theories to which their staff subscribe. Central control over method would be unreasonable and would be restricting to innovation and progress. But I do believe there should be some control over experiments in education and early assessment of their effects.

Having rejected a 'body of knowledge' and methods as areas which should be controlled, I will discuss the core under three headings:

1 The terms in which it can be formulated;
2 How it could be implemented;
3 How its effects can be examined.

# Formulation

The difficulty here lies in finding the degree of precision or detail in which to describe the curriculum content. The checklist of areas of experience contained in the HMI working paper **curriculum 11-16** is a good starting point.

| | |
|---|---|
| The aesthetic and creative | The physical |
| The ethical | The scientific |
| The linguistic | The social and political |
| The mathematical | The spiritual |

However, these are obviously too generalised to be a working guide. I would want to see coverage of those important aspects of the curriculum in terms of
a) basic skills,
b) specific experiences,
c) factual knowledge.

For each of the general areas listed above I would want to identify appropriate skills and list categories of specific experiences.

I imagine that teachers would be able to agree fairly readily on a list of basic skills appropriate to the primary stage. The obvious ones in the Linguistic and Mathematical areas would cause least difficulty but there could be some covering other subjects: eg map reading in geography, the use of various tools in art and craft etc.

Specific experiences could be categorised to allow schools to choose the particular activities which their locality and facilities could accommodate. Using traditional subject headings the following are examples of what I mean.

PE — recreational activities covering:
individual, pair, team } Sports

Activities requiring mainly:
strength, agility, endurance etc.
Activities involving water, machines, balls etc.
Music — experience with:
voices, rhythm instruments, pitched instruments
jazz, pop, classical etc.
music for listening
music for action.

I believe that children should have the opportunity to engage in the rich variety of situations which together comprise any subject area. I feel that schools have failed if a child says 'I hate sport' or 'I hate music' etc. This would indicate that he or she hadn't been given the opportunity to find a form of music or a sport which suits him or her. Only by engaging in a wide range of activities can a child find where its talents and fundamental interests lie and use this knowledge to make appropriate choices as the necessary process of increasing specialisation takes place.

I have already stated that I do not believe that there is a particular body of knowledge which all children should acquire, but I do believe that it is important for children at the primary stage to begin to build up a personal store of firmly known facts. It is only by doing this that they have a foundation of knowledge on which to build by making comparisons and contrasts with what they already know.

Recently I took a group of children on a nature walk. They could tell me how to identify trees, ie by their leaves, bark, etc but they couldn't actually identify a single tree. Modern project or topic methods seem to me, to be prone to producing this effect. They tend to give children an overall impression of the work being covered but often fail to make certain that some facts are assimilated and remembered.

# Implementation

The curriculum of a school is put into operation through the medium of teaching methods and schemes of work, which ought to be seen and planned within the framework of a school's general philosophy. This is the point when theory is translated into practice and to a

large extent that practice takes place in isolated areas. Individual interpretations of the theory occur and are probably the greatest cause of 'markedly individual' practices.

Particular teaching methods should be analysed to determine what results, in terms of social behaviour and work experiences they ensure, allow and preclude. In this way teachers can be made aware of the points which are most vulnerable to individual interpretation. They can then also be better prepared to fit the most appropriate method to any particular area of the curriculum. The observation in the report **Primary Education in England** that a mixture of didactic and exploratory methods produced the best results, would appear to show the importance of this.

A particular danger in implementing curriculum is that philosophies and aims become translated into systems. The system is often put into operation without an understanding of the reasoning which created it, resulting in the superficial aspects of that system becoming the criteria for judging the philosophy.

The work of Z P Dienes is a good example of this process at work. The philosophy and psychology behind his approach were often not known or understood by those who used his equipment which was designed as an example of what might be used to implement his ideas. These teachers looked upon that equipment as a complete kit and when insensitive use of it failed to produce the expected results, the ideas which fostered it were rejected.

We must guard, then, against the superficial and tangible aspects of the core curriculum, becoming seen to be the total. Teachers must not be allowed to grasp at the obvious but should be encouraged to reach for the fundamental. Which points to the need for better training facilities for all levels of the teaching profession. Our work is now too complex for any initial training to be adequate and as the recent government Green Paper stressed, teachers must now be prepared to accept the presence of other teachers and advisers in the classroom situation. There must be more co-operation and analysis of work by teachers working in similar situations, eg. age groups and subject groups within a school, head teachers of similar schools etc.

# Examination

I use the word 'examination' in its widest sense and believe that it is a necessary part of any system which requires some degree of certainty in the execution of its aims. The danger, as we all recognise, is that the particular form in which the examination process is put into operation, might be such that it does not elicit the information we require, ie that which is appropriate to our aims.

Schools require a number of assessment procedures which cover the range of aims included in the core-curriculum. Without them teachers again would have pressures exerted on them which could divert their work into inappropriate methods.

Our school has recently been involved in research covering, amongst other things, assessment procedures. These were necessarily imposed from without and included items not intended to serve our requirements. Most of the assessment procedures on such aspects of work as creativity, use of resources other than books etc allowed teachers to interpret results in the light of their own aims and glean some comfort from them. However, when presented with a number of sums as part of a maths assessment, they felt that they were not in that position. Here was a positive basis for comparison to be made between teachers; one which parents and managers would also be able to appreciate. As a result some teachers concentrated on the direct teaching of 'sums' rather than those experiences aimed at giving children an understanding of mathematical processes.

Just as one finds teachers picking on the tangible trivia from a system aimed at implementing a philosophy, so one finds them picking on indisputable items from a test and using them as a measure of their ability. The latter then usually produces teaching methods aimed at giving short term results to correct apparent faults.

Examination, then, is necessary, not only to give us an idea of the standards of work we can reasonably expect from children but also to monitor our work in all its aspects.

# Conclusion

The core-curriculum then, must be designed to ensure that all children have the opportunity to engage in certain essential areas of experience. The problems are:

1 That an insufficient measure of agreement can be found on what those areas are,
2 Individual interpretation of the 'core' once formulated,

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# Language in the British Primary School

**James Britton**

Professor James Britton here develops the theme of his lecture at **Forum's** conference on the Primary School held in London in June 1977, which was reported in **Forum** vol 20 no 1.

Every thoughtful primary school teacher would agree, I believe, that it is a very difficult matter to assess the quality of learning that is going on in any classroom. But if it is difficult for the teacher, who is *there*, what of the parents and the public, who are not? No wonder they are so easily misled by the dogmatic pronouncements of the Black Paper campaigners. This may be one of the main reasons why popular opinion tends to fall in behind such views. Clearly, five minutes in a formal teaching situation is enough to demonstrate that useful information is being retailed: but to judge the quality of *learning* on this basis is like estimating the state of nurture of a nation by considering the size of its butter mountain or its reserves of dried milk. As every teacher knows, when you tell thirty children something, only some of them will have been told.

The 'British Primary School' has not lacked for enthusiastic supporters in many parts of the world. Long before the Plowden Report came out this was true, but the 'image' and the Report have certainly sustained each other, and have made, I believe, an effective contribution to the work of innovators in other systems. Of course, when overseas visitors spend time themselves in our schools they often report that the 'image' and the reality fall far apart. It must be recalled that the survey of teaching procedures carried out for the Bullock Committee gave pretty convincing evidence that informal or 'progressive' methods had barely a foothold in our primary schools so far as language work was concerned. Yet the detractors continue to ignore this evidence. A recent **Times** reports publication of a document prepared by the Monday Club which reiterates the familiar charge: 'Literacy and numeracy standards among 10-year-olds were a national disgrace, the paper says. It attributes the alleged decline in standards to too much "progressive" teaching, and it calls for national standards to be set in both literacy and numeracy.' The focus of the reactionary attack is now on the primary school because the one view it shares with its protagonists is a belief that the most promising solution of our undoubted secondary school problem would be to get things right in the preceding stages.

The Bullock Report has also been influential in other English-speaking countries, but it is, I believe, a less radical document than Plowden. The Bullock Committee was set up to represent all factions, yet both Mrs Thatcher and the Chairman she appointed were eager to secure a unanimous report, presumably on the grounds that the issues that really matter lie at a more fundamental level than those that divide us. I don't think a reading of the Report bears out that view: what comes over, I believe, is a somewhat watered-down form of a 'progressive' view, with some important anomalies and ambiguities. In particular, I think it offers cold comfort to radical innovators who, in their classrooms, are beginning to devise solutions to the most difficult of the inner-city secondary-school problems.

The year the Report came out, 1975, was the year of my retirement and I spent most of the next two years teaching in Canada and Australia. I returned to what seemed, from the point of view of educational climate, a very different England. The 'Great Debate' was in full swing, launched by a speech from the Prime Minister which had a good deal to say about literacy but made no reference to the Bullock Committee's views on that topic. 'Literacy', in fact was one of the words on everybody's lips, and 'evaluation' was the other. I soon began to feel that the Bullock Report was a beacon that shone ever more brightly as the skies around it darkened. Not that 'literacy' and 'evaluation' as concerns are in themselves agents of darkness, but they require wise handling and are all too easily mishandled for ulterior purposes. A narrow focus on literacy may result in the rejection of the spoken uses of language from which literacy must grow; notions of evaluation become

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3 Individual interpretation of the aims behind given methods,

4 Pressures exerted by the interpretation of the findings of appropriate or inappropriate forms of assessment.

One could say that faced with that formidable battery of obstacles, the exercise of trying to implement a core curriculum is doomed to failure and therefore not worth attempting. I would still like to see it take place –to unify the work of teachers and to identify the worthwhile results of the last twenty years of extensive experimentation.

threatening when they see it, not as a way of generating information useful to the system, but as a means of enforcement, whether upon teachers or upon pupils. On both literacy and evaluation, the hidden protagonists are two sharply divided views of teaching and learning.

The Plowden Report was clear about the importance of talk as a means of learning. It placed a high value on 'the direct impact of environment on the child and the child's individual response to it' (para 544), recognised the unique role of language as an organiser of experience, and so found that there was 'every justification for the conversation which is a characteristic feature of the contemporary primary school' (para 535). The Bullock Report in its earlier chapters is equally forthright and pursues the ideas a little further: '(i) all genuine learning involves discovery, and it is as ridiculous to suppose that teaching begins and ends with instruction as it is to suppose that 'learning by discovery' means leaving children to their own resources; (ii) language has a heuristic function; that is to say a child can learn by talking and writing as certainly as he can by listening and reading' (para 4.10). To a teacher in the old tradition, as to the public, it is common knowledge that a child learns by listening to the teacher and reading the textbook, and there is no need to look any further. But this view is based on a misunderstanding of the processes involved: 'Once it is understood that talking and writing are means to learning, those more obvious truths that we learn also from other people by listening and reading will take on a fuller meaning and fall into a proper perspective. Nothing has done more to confuse current educational debate than the simplistic notion that 'being told' is the polar opposite of 'finding out for oneself'. In order to accept what is offered when we are told something, we have to have somewhere to put it; and having somewhere to put it means that the framework of past knowledge and experience into which it must fit is adequate as a means of interpreting and apprehending it. Something approximating to 'finding out for ourselves' needs therefore to take place if we are to be successfully told. The development of this individual context for a new piece of information, the forging of the links that give it meaning, is a task that we customarily tackle by talking to other people'. (4.9). Teaching by seminar, a strategy based on this principle of learning by talking, is sometimes ridiculed by its opponents as a 'pooling of ignorances'. But there is one sort of gain to be had from discussing a topic with those who share our ignorance, and our struggle to understand, and another complementary gain from discussing it with an expert, the teacher. Good teaching consists in relating these two processes in a productive manner. But this account of language in learning is incomplete until we have admitted also learning by reading, learning by listening to the teacher's monologue. Rightly phased, these can be crucial highlights: but that phasing implies that the reading and listening should be spaced out with intervals for the students' own talk, sometimes with the expert, sometimes with each other. Finally, learning by writing is most typically the 'harvesting' stage, when what has been talked about and thought about is worked on, solitarily, from the standpoint of the writer's own synthesis. A little hard evidence on the learning value of writing was shown in a report of an experiment by Howe (1975): half the students attending a lecture undertook to make notes, the other half not to; after a brief revision session, some little while later, at which the note-takers had their own notes and the others had the lecturer's notes, a series of recall tests demonstrated the superior recall of those who had undertaken the writing, that is, the note-taking.

The Black Paper retort to the paragraph I have quoted from the Bullock Report did not have to await the publication of the Report; it was voiced by a Committee member in his 'Note of Dissent': 'It is doubtful if children's talk in school does much to improve their knowledge, for free discussion as a learning process is notoriously unproductive. As for children learning by writing, this seems a very doubtful proposition. The writer can only write from his present knowledge and experience and in the case of children these are very limited' (p 558). A similar view is put forward by Jeanette Williams (in the juggernaut she calls 'a critique' of our Writing Research), when she complains that encouraging a child to use expressive talk and writing is 'in a sense imprisoning the child in a web of commonsense concepts' (Williams, 1977, p 47). We must infer that behind the two opposing views of the nature of teaching and learning lie very different conceptions as to the nature of our knowledge of the world.

George Kelly (1958, p 66) began one of his psychological papers: 'This paper throughout, deals with half-truths only. Nothing that it contains is, or is intended to be, wholly true. The theoretical statements propounded are no more than partially accurate constructions of events which, in turn, are no more than partially per-

ceived'. And he goes on to explain: 'When a scientist propounds a theory he has two choices: he can claim that what he says has been dictated to him by the real nature of things, or he can take sole responsibility for what he says and claim only that he has offered one man's hopeful construction of the realities of nature'. This agrees in substance with things said by Karl Popper, a philosopher whose conclusions in other respects have been very different from Kelly's. Popper (1976, p 79) showed that scientific hypotheses cannot be established as true: they can be proved false, but unless and until that happens they 'forever remain hypotheses or conjectures'. For his part, he draws no hard and fast line between our commonsense and theoretical or scientific concepts: 'I tried to show that our knowledge grows through trial and error-elimination, and that the main difference between its prescientific and its scientific growth is that on the scientific level we consciously search for errors: the conscious adoption of the critical method becomes the main instrument of growth' (p 115). Such methods, he claims, are widely applicable beyond the bounds of science.

I believe a concern for the mastery of theoretical concepts begins with a respect for the commonsense concepts from which they must grow: that the mastery itself is a process of modifying commonsense concepts, and that mature thinking involves moving *back and forth* along a continuum from theoretical to commonsense, from abstract to concrete, from the fruits of analysis to the data of experience.

Here is a 9-year old writing about his first 'scientific experiment' in school: '1. The *paper* crinkled up and then went smaller and black. It was very brittle and thin at the end. It turned to ashes so if we breathed on it hard it flew all over the place . . . 4. The *cotton cloth* burned and fringed at the same time. But the amazing thing was that the threads separated or in other words parted so that you could see through them like from the inside you can see through net curtains. 5. The *cotton yarn* at first looked like little worms crawling about and then the flame covered and smoothed it like a sheet covering your face.'*

Learning to observe and record is an essential part of the learning process in science. It involves sorting the objective from the subjective aspects of the experience recorded and the rejection of the latter for the purpose of mustering and organising the former. But our everyday speech and expressive uses of writing demand no such separation; what happened and how what happened affected us, our feelings about the events, are intertwined in our experience and we normally expect our listeners or readers to be interested in both aspects. Expressive speech or writing naturally carries both: the very words that denote the events are likely also to carry something of our feelings about them (as when we say, 'I hear Arsenal made mincemeat of Chelsea' rather than the announcer's 'Arsenal 4, Chelsea Nil'). Thus scientific recording requires the use of informative writing, not expressive: but the move from one to the other on a child's part involves the difficult piece of learning I have been describing, and that must be given time. To allow expressive writing (like that of the nine-year-old above) in the early stages enables the teacher to monitor that learning in progress, and plots for the student its gradual achievement. It seems to me that attempts to hasten the process threaten to divorce the scientific facts to be handled from the experiences that give rise to them. It is all too likely then that rote learning from the textbook will replace the development of a true scientific understanding. What is true for science is true also for all environmental and historical studies. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1944, p 187) once said of learning in history: 'If I put out the light of my own personal experience I cannot see and I cannot judge of the experience of others'.

Expressive speech and writing are forms of discourse which come naturally to us in situations of mutual trust, and as such they embody the teaching/learning relationship we try to establish with every child. Further, because there is trust there is also a willingness to take risks – and the exploration of new experiences, the acceptance of new information, the move to a new viewpoint, demand that a learner should take risks. (Briton et al, 1975, pp 81-2). A campaign for literacy can all too easily be used as a weapon in the hands of those who oppose these educational processes because they do not understand them.

Among the things currently being said about evaluation is the statement that evaluation is an inseparable part of teaching. I want to claim that while evaluation is part of a teacher's responsibility it should be kept as distinct from teaching as possible, and we should know when we are doing the one and when we are doing the other. Clearly, we can take the argument no further until we have broken down the term 'evaluation' and see the different things that it might refer to.

* With grateful acknowledgements to Mrs Heather Kay for permission to quote this extract.

Since education is a public expense, I believe it has to be accountable to the public, and that there must therefore be some form of national 'monitoring' to provide a comprehensible glimpse, as it were, of what goes on in schools. The Bullock Report goes into some detail as to how this might be done without interfering with the processes it sets out to evaluate. The essential features are that it should assess what teachers in fact try to teach (wherever this can be done), that there should be no single test or 'instrument' which might have the effect of distorting or restricting what they teach, and that no attempt should be made to measure the whole performance (in a given subject) of a particular pupil or a particular school. This form of national assessment is thus kept clear of other forms of evaluation and their purposes. From the evidence of the document **'Language Performance'** (DES, 1978). I am very happy with the plans devised by the Assessment of Performance Unit for carrying out this national evaluation of work in language.

Consider next the evaluation procedures required for the management of local resources – psychological services, additional teaching strength, specialist teachers, supplementary budgets and so on. I think we need to keep a careful watch at this level: do the testing procedures yield information which will be used to benefit children? – both because it is the right information and because resources exist to respond to it. Evaluation of innovative programmes – which might be within a school or Education Authority or more widely – is yet another distinct purpose and one that need not concern us here. Very little such work is done because very little is known about how to do it. That brings us to the heart of the problem for my purposes here – evaluation by the teacher.

Before tackling it, however, I want to suggest that in all these other forms of evaluation there is a danger that the procedures will be misused as instruments of enforcement upon teachers. This was notably the case with the behavioural objectives movement in North America. For many administrators the enforcement aspect was overt and systematic: teachers were to formulate their objectives in accordance with approved policies *in order to be held to them*. Similarly in this country, Rhodes Boyson has expressed the view that HMIs ought to return to their one-time role and go round classrooms checking that the teaching of the 3 Rs is satisfactory – as a direct counter-measure, I assume, to the spread of 'progressive' teaching methods. Claims of this sort at this time could, I believe, be multiplied. I think they are ill-based because enforcement by this means does not achieve what it sets out to do and because in the long run it lowers the quality of teaching. It is ineffective in the general sense that what happens in any classroom is the result of interacting teacher and pupil behaviours: the gap between any regulation, guide line or other sort of 'recipe' and the actual behaviour of the teacher is one that only the teacher can fill. At his most effective he fills that gap from *conviction* – indeed, so many second-by-second decisions contribute to it that anything more remote than inner conviction has little chance of being consistently applied. I would use this argument equally to oppose the notion of 'teacher-proof' project kits and enforcement by evaluative procedures. The long-term adverse effects are best described as the substitution of a 'regime of surveillance' for a 'regime of trust'. The productive value of a regime of trust between teacher and pupil can be matched by that expected from a relationship of trust between teachers and the public – and the intermediary agents, parents, principals and administration. Admittedly, it can be shown that not all teachers are trustworthy: but the loss we sustain when, in a more open regime, they are able to 'get away with things' is nothing, in my view, compared with the effects of loss of morale on the part of the average teacher and, more particularly, on the part of the best teachers in the system, when trust gives way to surveillance.

To deal briefly with evaluation in school, I think, as teachers, we have to accept responsibility for generating information about pupil performance which will be useful to parents, succeeding teachers, placement agencies, and, at a later stage, employers and admission agencies. If for the moment we can restrict the term evaluation (in school) to that process, I would stress that this evaluative function should be kept distinct from our teaching function. 'Teacher didn't want to *read* my story, she only wanted to *mark* it!' was the comment of a six-year-old in an infant school, and it is the distinction he recognised that concerns me here. We are more than ever supported today in a belief that children demonstrate a mastery in achieving their own intentions that they do not show in working to somebody else's purposes. Linguists have discovered that a young child's mastery of syntactic structure cannot be truly assessed from their responses to presented test questions, but only by observing their spontaneous utterances (Slobin and Welsh, 1971). With this support, primarily from cogni-

tive psychologists, we have grown more expert in our attempts to tap children's own intentions in school, and at arousing new intentions in directions in which we foresee their developing needs and powers. Yet it is my contention that the 'evaluative frame of mind' that we have allowed to become a part of the teacher's stance – the readiness to 'mark' rather than 'read' – prevents us from reaping the full benefit of these attempts. Courtney Cazden (1977) comments on one aspect of this evaluative habit of mind: 'But teachers, over the decades if not over the centuries, have somehow gotten into the habit of hearing with different ears once they go through the classroom doors. Language forms assume an opaque quality. We cannot hear through them; we hear only the errors to be corrected. One value of knowledge about language is not to make the language of our children more salient to our attention. Quite the opposite. That knowledge reassures, and it lets language forms recede into the transparency they deserve, enabling us to talk and listen in the classroom as outside, focusing full attention on the children's thoughts and feelings that those forms express.'

If we succeed in harnessing or arousing a child's intention – to write something, perhaps, or to read something – we shall release in him tacit powers favourable to his success, and it is in that process of satisfying his own intention that he will learn most effectively. But if we then 'evaluate' his performance – in my present sense of the word, that of giving a mark or grade or comment which will indicate a 'verdict' upon his performance – then we are in effect providing an alternative objective to his own satisfaction. In fact the evaluation becomes the real objective, his satisfaction no more than an ostensible one. The evaluating procedure, in fact, *drives a wedge between a child's intention and its satisfaction.* A typical intention for a piece of expressive writing on the part of a ten-year-old, for example, might be his wish to establish and maintain a relationship with the teacher who reads it: he will know whether his writing has succeeded by the way he feels about the growing relationship. The teacher's response will aim at maximising this aspect of the exchange as the best way of ensuring its learning value. In reading and responding appropriately he will have fulfilled his teaching function: for his evaluating function, he will, at the end of the term or the year, help the child select some of his writings (perhaps including this particular piece), and this work will be multiply marked (by the teacher and a colleague) to arrive at the informative evaluation of the child's progress which will go to parents, other teachers and so on. 'Responding appropriately' may, of course, include very helpful detailed 'feedback' – the comments of someone better able than the child to overcome the difficulties we meet in trying to say what we mean: but this, in my terms, is not 'evaluation' but 'guidance' – the heart of teaching.

That leaves one gap to be filled: since a teacher's intention is to teach, he must continually monitor his efforts in terms of the learning that goes on in those he teaches. This is indeed inseparable from teaching, but the information generated is for the teacher's guidance, is constantly sought, interpreted and applied, and may have no relevance to the child, his parents or any other agency.

# Beware panic reactions

I want in conclusion to remind readers that the 'enlightened' view of teaching and learning we profess is not an outmoded bandwagon, representative (as I have heard it said) of 'the decadent sixties'. It is in fact, not a bandwagon at all, nor a pendulum swing. It is a steady, slow growing movement that has roots in philosophy back to Dewey and beyond; and is deep-rooted in the intuitions of the most successful teachers over a much longer period than that. It is under attack in many countries today as an effect, I believe, of the worldwide inflationary recession. I am not thinking primarily of budgets, a setback we can survive: I think the psychological effects of the recession are much more intractable. Psychologists have often enough pointed out that one of the first effects of anxiety in a person is a reduction in the number of factors he is prepared to take into account in arriving at a decision; and I believe the same can be seen at the level of whole societies. People today are asking difficult questions in all directions, but the educational system is particularly vulnerable. Typical of USA, the question there has taken the form of 'How much for the dollar?'; but the formulation fits well enough what is going on elsewhere in the world. The narrowing of educational perspectives is variously reflected here in the views of the public, of parents, in the Black Papers, the administration at all levels, and in the views of many teachers themselves. However, I think we can already see signs of the worst being over:

# HMIs and Mixed Ability

**Brian Simon**

Early last autumn the DES published **Mixed Ability Work in Comprehensive Schools,** a discussion paper written by a Working Party of Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Part I of this paper, the Working Party's Report, is here subjected to critical analysis.

This 'discussion paper' presents the *views* of a group of HMIs about the effectiveness of 'mixed-ability' teaching in comprehensive schools. It does not appeal to, and indeed ignores, relevant research, including that actually funded by the DES and carried out at Banbury school. This has been generally supportive of non-streamed teaching in terms of effects as measured by objective (and other) tests. Yet the claim is made that the study is based on 'evidence'. This appears to be limited to 'the evidence on the effects and implications of mixed ability organisation afforded by reports following inspections carried out since 1970'; in other words, 'evidence', necessarily of a subjective kind, not available to public scrutiny. The paper has been compiled also from other similar material, some collected during a series of specific visits, first to 18 schools using mixed ability organisation for the years 11 to 14,[2] then (in the second year), to four of the 18 schools and four additional schools where this form of organisation was 'well established' and where 'there was reason to believe that good practice in the implementation of its principles would be found' (in this case more intensive, five-day, visits were made by teams of HMIs). The report as a whole (or the major part of it) is 'the outcome of the work of a team of HM Inspectors led by a Divisional Inspector' – all these of course (as is the usual practice) are anonymous. We are told nothing of their own educational experience as pupils, nor (more important) of their teaching experience. In our view the credibility of magisterial statements of this kind is put at risk in this instance, since it appears that the team of HMIs approached the issue with certain very specific pre-conceptions as to the nature of the child and of learning – pre-conceptions unlikely to be shared by those who have deliberately moved over to non-streaming in comprehensive schools.

The document stresses that it aims to be helpful; and this can certainly be accepted as the intention. Yet its net effect will probably be to deter any school from making the transition which, it is suggested, can only be successful if carried through by 'highly committed and exceptionally skilled' teachers. Teachers of 'average ability', it is held, are simply not up to the mark. This, surely, is the kiss of death, since it is doubtful whether any school (or head) which took this recommendation seriously would dare to embark on the change. But would the Banbury teachers, who can claim a degree of 'success' on publicly stated criteria covering both 'academic' and social aspects of education, claim such a star-studded status?

It is the main theoretical (or, better, ideological) stance of the report which is a chief cause of concern. This relates to the concept of 'ability' on which the whole analysis – and critique of practice – is founded. For the HMIs the issue is unproblematic. Children are

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*(Continued)*

as recession itself recedes I believe perspectives will widen again. But meanwhile, in the difficult five years, say, that lie ahead, it seems to me more than ever important that the ideals that created the image of 'the British Primary School', and the practices that supported it, should be kept alive.

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not so much children as segments of 'the whole ability range', and must be given an education 'appropriate' to their place in this range. The word 'Intelligence' is actually nowhere mentioned – perhaps because its use has been discredited among teachers – but all the thinking relating to it, in particular to its distribution, is reproduced in the report.

This is made clear at the start when it is stated that an eight form entry comprehensive comprises 240 pupils 'drawn from the school's whole range of ability' in each year group. This might seem a tautology until it is realised that from now on children (and teaching and organisation) are to be analysed in terms of this abstraction. The concept of 'ability' is nowhere defined or described. So obsessed are the HMIs with this concept that, in the first 18 lines of the second paragraph of the Introduction, this single word is repeated 17 times – comprising roughly 10% of all the words used! One might think so important a word deserved some attention as to its meaning – but no. Children are divided into four general categories: the 'least able', the 'less able', the 'more able' and the 'most able' – all presupposing a fifth category, pupils of 'average ability' comprising, it appears, the majority. During the report various judgements are made as to the effectiveness of provision for one or other of these arbitrarily defined groups, though never in a systematic way.

Now it is extremely unlikely that schools (or their teachers) which have moved fully to non-streaming for the ages 11 to 14 think of their pupils, or categorise them, in this manner. On the contrary, the transition to non-streaming is based on the concept that the child develops *in the process of his education,* and that it is highly undesirable from an educational point of view to pre-determine that development by forming teaching groups based on a judgement (however made) as to the child's *present* level at a given moment in time. Groups so formed (as in prismatic streaming) determine the child's scope for development by ensuring differentiated environmental stimuli. This is why Douglas, Vernon (and others) found, over 20 years ago now, that stream placement affected intellectual development, the differences between streams becoming exacerbated with time.

The HMIs do not recommend streaming – nor do they recommend any other form of organisation. What they do is specifically to warn against 'mixed ability' grouping unless accompanied by what, to all intents and purposes, amount to unachievable criteria in terms both of human and material resources (and of procedures). This is done on the grounds that the tasks given to children are often not 'appropriate' to their 'ability'. The concept of 'mixed ability' teaching put forward in the paper is one where there is a wide differentiation of tasks (teaching) in each classroom which, by definition, covers the school's 'whole range of ability'. 'Programmes for the various levels of ability', they insist, must be 'adequately differentiated.'

But this precept, which insists that teachers categorise their pupils (in their minds), misses the point of unstreaming, and indeed is in contradiction to its very purpose. This is to develop a social situation where the class of children work and learn together as a class, but where a variety of techniques are utilised including group and individual work as well as class teaching. Certainly there should be scope for the pursuit of individual (or group) interests, and each child encouraged to make his own unique contribution. But that contribution cannot be pre-determined on a rigid, classificatory model – the unexpected may occur and should be allowed for; particular children may develop particular interests and enthusiasms. In short, the situation must allow for growth, for developments which cannot be predicted. This implies a *flexible* structure and the use of both individual and group work as well as class teaching. This concept differs fundamentally from the deliberate structuring of 'programmes' for differing 'levels of ability' as *the* condition for success in the non-streamed situation, as proposed in the HMI paper.

In fact the HMIs offer little assistance, in the body of the report, as to how the various forms of teaching may be combined and in general, how to set about non-streamed teaching. (There is a short three page section on this topic.) Judgements are freely made about how the 'most able', 'least able', and other segments of the 'ability range' fare; but, as mentioned earlier no information is given as to how the HMIs categorise individual children or, equally important, how the teachers should do this. In their five days at the schools, what procedures were used? Did the inspectors ask the teachers to identify pupils within these categories, and then observe their work individually? Or did they make their own judgements about the 'ability' of each child in classes visited, and if so on what basis? In either case the criteria are suspect.

When Intelligence tests were first constructed, it is well known that they were validated against teachers' estimates of the children tested. It was then taken for

granted that intelligent children were those thought to be intelligent by the teachers, and tests had to be so constructed as to reflect these judgements. But this method of validation was subjected to much criticism, and rightly – teachers then (50 plus years ago) tended to rate as 'intelligent' conformist and docile children, who did what they were told, washed their faces and hands and generally met middle class norms. The rebellious, untidy children were rejected as not intelligent, yet of course this group may have contained children with unusual minds and approaches and a high degree of independence (or non-conformity) – qualities which may be thought desirable, even reflecting a degree of 'ability'. It was precisely to get away from the purely subjective approach involved that those concerned with intelligence testing actively sought and developed other criteria for validating tests (though these also have been subjected to criticism). But in this report the Inspectors blandly revert to the subjective approaches of the past, long ago rejected as misleading and having dangerous implications in terms of educational practice.

It is worth noting that the primary school HMI survey, discussed by Colin Richards in this issue, accepts the transition to unstreaming in primary schools which was a product of the mid/late 60s and early 70s. This simply reports that only 6% of 11-year-olds in the primary schools in the survey were streamed. At the time of the NFER first study 15 years ago over 60% of primary schools large enough to stream did so (*Plowden Report*, Vol 2). Nor does that group of HMIs bewail the transition that these figures reflect, or suggest that the move is fraught with the difficulties that the secondary HMIs see in comprehensive schools. Yet a third of the pupils the secondary inspectors dealt with (those aged 11 to 12) are only *one* year older than the top primary age group.

In sum, the HMIs approach to the question of secondary unstreaming is not as helpful as they suggest. The use of what are called 'traditional criteria' in their evaluation is very much open to question. Who have established these criteria? Presumably only previous groups of HMI's. Clearly important questions of value are involved. Hence the relevance of querying their own educational experience, and those of previous HMIs (who established these 'traditional criteria' in the past), when judgements are made on this particular issue. In addition the procedures used (so far as they can be understood), together with the lack of interest in research findings, lay the authors open to the charge of amateurism. This is reflected also in the nature of the language used – too often opaque, as if something is being concealed (or talked around), the real issues being avoided.

It may well be that present practice in the teaching of unstreamed classes is open to criticism on a number of counts, and that practices which cannot and should not be justified can be found (perhaps particularly the emphasis on worksheets lacking intellectual challenge and value). The paper points these out and also makes some positive points about the 'more broadly educational' effect of unstreaming (which, debatably, it separates from the 'academic' effects). But in essence the paper, which restricts the very possibility of successful practice to a 'strongly committed and exceptionally skilled' minority of teachers, amounts to a strong argument against any serious movement to non-streamed teaching. It thus lends support for the preservation of systems of differentiation, categorisation and classification of pupils through streaming, setting and the like, based on the idea that a child's 'ability' (the word is not used in the plural) can be accurately assessed at an early age.

It is precisely this idea that the movement to comprehensive education effectively (and necessarily) challenged. Unstreaming (and not necessarily 'mixed ability' grouping – which is only one of several forms it can take) logically follows in its rejection of early classification. For a static concept of the role of education there is substituted a dynamic one. Certainly, as **Forum** has always argued, this transition involves a fundamental rethinking of the nature of teaching and learning, and the adaptation of procedures to the new set of objectives. This requires exchange of experience as well as research within the classroom. It is to be hoped that the HMI paper will not inhibit this development, and that the basic evaluative criteria proposed will not be accepted without critical analysis.

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*Notes*

1 Part II of the paper is concerned with 'Mixed Ability teaching in comprehensive schools in Wales'; Part III contains a collection of papers on mixed ability work contributed by specialist committees of HMIs. It is hoped to return to Part III in a later number.

2 The paper defines mixed ability organisation for the purposes of this enquiry as one which, 'at least up to the end of the third year of the normal secondary course, the curriculum was taught wholly or mainly (ie with not more than two subjects excluded) in classes in which the span of ability ranged from significantly below to significantly above the average'.

# Banbury Phase 2

**Roger Seckington**

Roger Seckington follows his review article of David Newbold's study of the first phase of the Banbury Enquiry (**Forum** vol 20 no 3), and his review of the original volume of essays from the school (**Forum** vol 18 no 1), with a critique of the recently published account of the second phase: **Streams for the future?** the long-term effects of early streaming and non-streaming — the final report of the Banbury Enquiry, by Keith Postlethwaite and Cliff Denton. Pubansco (1978) pp 116 £1.75.

It has already been implied that because Banbury School was a rather special place general conclusions cannot be drawn from its research on the effects of early streaming and non-streaming. However important may be the findings of trained observers, who go into secondary schools up and down the country, nothing should detract from the value of this carefully researched Banbury Enquiry. Of course Banbury School is unique, not merely in the way that all 'establishments' are, but because its rather unusual infrastructure provided the basis for a research project to compare streaming and non-streaming. Are the lessons learnt at Banbury transferable to other educational establishments? Surely they are, and the very many comprehensive schools unstreamed in the early years can draw confident support for this type of grouping from the findings of this particular piece of research.

Some attempt has been made to reduce the impact of the report by suggesting that whilst mixed ability grouping can produce an effective learning situation, it can only be done when 'good' or exceptional teachers are involved. Does this mean that the halls which were still streamed in the early years had teachers that were less than good? Almost certainly not. Any teaching-learning situation regardless of the mode of grouping requires good teachers who know their job. However, it may be difficult to escape the general conclusion that mixed ability teaching is very demanding and consequently requires the best that teachers can offer. Conversely we may be concerned by the implication that streams or sets are less demanding of teachers. The study 'confirmed the view, long established amongst teachers, that the introduction of mixed ability teaching groups imposed a considerable strain on the staff involved. It was felt that this strain was reduced as time went on but, nevertheless, the teacher in charge of a mixed ability group was seen to be in a situation in which a successful outcome could only be achieved by the expenditure of a great deal of skill and not a little energy.' The message is clear, no unstreaming should be undertaken lightly for it requires a high level of commitment and forward planning.

Phase one of the study had shown that 'the relative effects of different grouping systems on academic progress were small compared with other factors'. Further it was suggested that the more able pupils did not under-achieve and that the less able pupils did better when taught in mixed ability groups. It was shown that during the first year different primary school backgrounds did influence pupil achievement. Friendship choices 'were less often limited to pupils of similar social class and academic ability' in the mixed ability situation. It was noted that less able pupils were happier in the mixed ability situation. Phease two is concerned with a more long term study of the 'effects made apparent by Phase One' as the pupils progress through the school. By the time they reached the fourth year all the pupils in the study were in similar teaching and pastoral systems.

A major argument for mixed ability grouping in comprehensive schools has been that it produces more social mixing. The study suggests that by year four the complete friendship pattern 'seems to be little affected by the grouping system through which the pupils have come'. However within any strong friendships of pupils who had started out in mixed ability groups there was more mixing by VRQ and socio-economic group. The authors felt that still greater mixing of this kind would have resulted from a longer period than one year in mixed ability groups.

The investigation made into subject choice has important implications for teachers. It is more difficult to operate a differentiated curriculum with mixed ability groups. Whereas a streamed school can decide that the lower streams will not have French or that they will have a different sort of science it cannot, if the first year

has a number of parallel mixed ability groups. In the mixed ability situation French has to be offered to all the pupils. This, of course, profoundly affects teaching techniques. One result of the investigation in this section was that sciences are less popular in the streamed system than in the mixed ability system, whilst languages are more popular in the streamed system. Unfortunately the study was not able to offer any explanation for that result. The report includes some speculation concerning the influence of teacher popularity, facilities available and, especially with languages, the style of teaching. The authors admit that 'detailed observation of teaching style were beyond the manpower resources of the project and it remains an interesting and indeed tantalising speculation'. There is meat enough for an entire and detailed study into this question alone for nothing can be much more important than understanding better 'whether the style of teaching which is possible in a particular grouping system might favour the good presentation of some subjects but hinder that of others'.

Most of the pupils observed in this study remained in mixed ability groups for one year whilst some did so for two years. During that time Banbury School, with its distinctive organisation into four halls, was able to match grouping systems; two halls being streamed and two halls mixed ability. The progress of these groups was followed through the school and time was found to study the results of their public examinations. It was found 'that there was some evidence of better *overall* performance on the part of less able pupils from the mixed ability situation, without any lowering of the overall levels of attainment achieved by the more able'. Supporters of mixed ability grouping may draw comfort from this because the major public worry is that more able students under-achieve when taught in mixed ability groups. There is no evidence that this happens and no major differences in levels of attainment were observed between the two systems. 'Since there is no evidence that mixed ability pupils perform less well' it was found that at 16 the systems showed few differences either in numbers or quality of students who took the routes into the sixth, technical college or work. A check was made on the accuracy of prognosis within the two systems in the number of correct prognoses at 'O' level and CSE. However, there was some indication 'that in the mixed ability system it is rather harder to assess the abilities of pupils, particularly those of middle ability'. A disturbing general point was the overall low proportion of correct prognoses in both systems. Assessment is a major concern at this time and it is generally accepted that we must find ways to improve our methods.

Pupil attitudes were also examined. It was found 'that pupils from a mixed ability background had better attitudes towards the school as a social community while attitudes to the school as a working community seemed not to be significantly affected by early grouping differences'.

This is an important study. It has been very carefully researched and the account of this research is detailed. Whilst the book may not make general reading for teachers it is to be hoped that it will find its way into staffrooms for it is richly informative. As the authors suggest, the outcomes of their research may not tip the balance of the debate on mixed ability grouping/teaching but 'there is much which will stimulate and inform'. Most important, this study provides positive evidence freeing discussions on this topic 'from the limiting effects of personal bias and unsubstantiated opinion'. There is much to encourage those who wish to adopt a mixed ability system, for this study clearly demonstrated that — at Banbury School — mixed ability grouping was successful and met the desired educational outcomes.

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## *YOUR NEXT* **FORUM**

The May 1979 **Forum** will critically examine problems and practices in nonstreamed classrooms and thus attempt to give teachers the help that was not forthcoming from the HMIs.

# Falling rolls in the Secondary School

**T F B Jaggar**

The previous number of **Forum** was a Special Number on the potential opportunities to be gained from falling rolls resulting from the lower birthrate. This article is a further contribution to that discussion. The author is Staff Inspector for Secondary Education in the ILEA, but the views expressed are his own and do not necessarily represent those of the ILEA.

It seems no time at all since we were grappling, not altogether successfully, with the difficulty of rising rolls. What a headache it was! The older among us recall the hall where two foreign assistants sat with their conversation classes in corners while a drama class improvised in four groups around them. Schools received visits from deputy education officers who explained how much they regretted having to insist on the arrival of an extra form-entry (by which they meant 35 children) for the next three years. Of course, the Authority would help; there would be a double-classroom hut on the netball courts! So there was more science taught in classrooms, the lower band could not have its three classes split into four for mathematics, the plan to reduce the size of French classes below 33 was abandoned, the library went into full-time use as a classroom. There was no problem with the reprographics room, it is true; reprographics then meant the Banda machine in the corner of the staff room! But the new huts reduced the overcrowded playground space still more and with 35 children per class, the front desks were almost up against the blackboard.

Nor was it just the space. It was all very well being told one could have an extra 1.4 staff for the additional class (at 1:24). What was needed was one-seventh each of a French teacher, mathematics teacher, English teacher and one seventeenth each of a historian, geographer, musician etc. What one would get would be an English teacher offering history as a second subject and a part-time biologist. No doubt it *would* be possible to redress the balance in following years when the succeeding additional classes arrived and there was some staff turnover. What about *this* year?

Then there was the allowances problem. Because of the triennial review, the points score would not go up till later and so staff would be asked in the meantime to undertake additional responsibilities without any extra reward. And how about the additional wear-and-tear on the building and the increased stress caused by cramming more people into a confined space? Wasn't there some research on rats which had shown the unfortunate results of overcrowding? The senior master said we'd never get them all into the hall for Assembly and the senior mistress could not see how lunches could be organised without an extra sitting that would run into period 5. The school keeper said there was no spare room in the cycle sheds. The secretary said the buses were already over-full and there would be increased lateness and bad behaviour at the bus-stops. The heads of departments meeting reckoned the increased capitation wouldn't meet the cost of new sets of books for every subject. The music master said we must buy two more violins, a cello, clarinet, trumpet and trombone. The games staff said the fields were already over-used so that the grass cover was deteriorating. The head of science thought the technicians would complain about the extra work and anyway she thought it was diabolical to teach even more science in classrooms. The geographer said he supposed no one had noticed there was only one specialist room and was he expected to carry the projector over to the huts in the rain. And so it went on. We all agreed that rising populations were a menace and that our own immediate problems were just a local example of perils besetting the whole world as Malthus was proved inexorably right.

So falling rolls was good news! It was what we were all longing for, surely. Well, yes, but one recalls the Swahili proverb: 'Hakuna masika yasiyo mbu' – there is no rainy season without mosquitoes. The cooling rain of falling rolls, with its opportunity for fertile germination of some splendid educational crops, is also breeding some very nasty mosquitoes which bid fair, if they are not eliminated or at least controlled, to have us all scratching ourselves with intense irritation. Indeed, the irritation is already there in some cases and anticipated fearfully in others, causing much distress to teachers, non-teaching staff, administrators, inspectors and parents alike. There are, in my view, five major areas of difficulty and opportunity, which may be summarised as accommodation, curriculum, administration, conditions of service and re-organisation. Let us look at them more closely.

# Accommodation

If other problems can be solved, we are presented with immense opportunities by falling rolls, though it must be confessed that if we are to seize them we shall have to accept an increased unit cost for accommodation ie a higher cost per pupil. There are three possible policies for improvement, which can be pursued separately or together. The first is to dispose of unsuitable or unwanted sites and buildings and to use the money for off-programme improvements to other buildings, work that has been postponed because of lack of central government expenditure. The second is to use some of the spare accommodation to enable the education system to be more responsive to community needs and to incorporate into the building parts of the service that have had to be housed elsewhere. The third is to improve basic standards of accommodation that have remained unchanged for many years. In many schools, pupil-teacher ratios have improved in the last fifteen years but good deployment of these additional teachers has been inhibited by lack of space. It ought to be possible to think now in terms of a basic standard at least 15-20% above the DES minimum teaching area. Criteria to be applied in reviewing the appropriate accommodation could include ensuring that science accommodation matched that in the better independent schools, that specialist art and music suites are of appropriate standards, that form bases are not permitted in unsuitable rooms, that resource centres are available adjacent to libraries, that teacher-planning rooms are provided, that social areas exist. Local Authorities might expect their administrators and inspectors/advisers to produce new schedules to replace those now in use.

# Curriculum

There are four main curriculum problems:

(1) the maintenance of a range of opportunity for the 14-16 age range, eg some schools have had to review their provision of courses in photography, film studies, computer studies, additional foreign languages and the maintenance of possible permutations of other subjects;

(2) the continuation of provision for pupils with special needs absorbs an increasing proportion of the total teaching commitment eg counselling, English as a foreign language, a separately staffed reading workshop:

(3) the maintenance of skilled specialist teaching in minority languages, in careers education, drama and other subjects in which the larger school can afford a specialist but the small school cannot;

(4) the provision of choice for the sixth form and the danger of the loss of those subjects with a limited clientele.

The maintenance of the curriculum can be threatened in the inner city by two separate manifestations of falling rolls. The first and most obvious is the arrival of fewer pupils in each succeeding group transferring from primary schools. A transfer group of 72 pupils will present a considerable problem to a school accustomed to organising its first year classes in groups of 30. But an inner city school may experience a further difficulty, the gradual reduction of the year-group as it moves up the school, because of movement out to the suburbs. If pupil-teacher ratios are applied rigorously, the school which has lost five pupils in each year-group of 180 from the second to the fifth years will lose at least one teacher. Yet there will be no educational reason to change the curriculum.

# Administration

There is one clear advantage from the drop in roll, the existence of capital equipment, such as reprographic equipment, projectors of various kinds, science equipment and the like. It will be easier for the school's administrative arrangements to satisfy the teaching staff. There are, however, two particular difficulties. There is a danger of an increasingly top-heavy 'management' structure; one has a nightmare of a school of 700 pupils managed by a head, three deputies, six year-heads, a head of upper school, a head of lower school, and a director of studies. The second difficulty is that of the management of declining total resources of finance and manpower at a time of rising expectations among parents and teachers. This can lead to considerable stress and tension.

# Conditions of service

It is easy to understand the anxiety of teaching and non-teaching staff in a system with a roll drop and especially in a particular school where it is sharply apparent. Will some be expected to move to other schools and, if so, how will this be decided? Will it disturb their family arrangements or promotion prospects? Worse still, is there a possibility of redundancy? There are less immediately personal but more general professional concerns. As rolls fall, will not schools'

Burnham points scores drop, thus reducing career opportunities? A teacher in a 12 fe school, told that the entry may drop by a third, may regard with equanimity the prospect of working in an 8 fe school but what about those in a 3 fe school faced with the same proportional drop?

# Re-organisations

It is in this area, perhaps, that anxiety is at its most acute. Teachers who have invested large parts of their working life in a school see its possible closure as a kind of death. An amalgamation may not seem a markedly happier solution where it is a response to falling entries rather than a positive step to comprehensive improvement at a time of growth. Teachers tend not to be impressed by the suggestion that competition for customers will be a powerful incentive towards a rise in the standard of service to the consumer. They are more inclined to see the existence of surplus accommodation and unfettered parental choice as the introduction of the voucher-system by the back door. A peculiarly nasty dilemma appears to confront them. Either some schools close with all the worries this entails or all remain open with inevitable competition for decreasing numbers of customers. Hence calls for planned reductions in the size of all schools despite continuing parental demand for places in some of them, a demand hard to resist under present law. But the scale of the reduction in the transfer-group in the next eight or nine years in the inner city areas make it virtually impossible to envisage maintaining all the existing schools, especially as this would involve keeping children in bad buildings while leaving good buildings seriously underused. So there comes a general acceptance that something must be done but a specific refusal that that something shall involve one's own school.

# Solutions

How can we turn the problem of falling rolls into an opportunity? Much can, in fact, be done, though it will require acceptance by the public and its elected representatives that, although total costs may fall, costs per pupil must rise.

1 A review of accommodation standards is needed, using criteria of the kind suggested earlier in this article.

2 Some way must be found to permit a redefinition of the number of pupils admissible at transfer at each school, a redefinition which both respects the wishes of parents for access to good schools but prevents the overcrowding of those schools. The size of the entry should be defined on accommodation standards closer to those expected by those who pay for independent schooling.

3 In metropolitan areas, co-operative systems must be developed between schools and between schools and colleges to ensure that the 16-19 curriculum is adequate.

4 The allocation of teaching and non-teaching staff needs to be notified earlier to schools and planned on at least a two-year, and preferably a three-year, basis. This requires acceptance by Local Authorities of a 'base Budget' that stretches beyond one financial year. The advantages are manifest: a curriculum planned for the first form can be guaranteed into the second (and preferably the third) year; a fourth year curriculum can be guaranteed into the fifth; moreover, those concerned at the school with administration and the deployment of resources would be able to plan seriously with some hope that the bases of their calculations were firm.

5 Certain categories of provision need to be only partly roll-related ie there has to be an acceptance that some basic facilities are required whatever the school's size eg a librarian, a media resources officer, a school secretary of appropriate grading.

6 Help in curriculum analysis and planning systematically needs to be provided for staff in all senior posts. It would be useful if this help included a self-instructional manual.

7 In-service courses of staff development are needed to enable teachers to become more knowledgeable about and more expert in the teaching methodology of their second subject.

8 The Burnham points system for posts of responsibility requires review. Pending that, a system of 'shadow' allowance structures has to be instituted, a system which allows a school gradually to move towards an approved, educationally rational structure rather than to move mechanically towards the 'right' points score automatically when a member of staff carrying an allowance leaves.

9 A redeployment agreement has to be reached. It must meet three criteria:

a) it must base the redeployment on the curriculum needs of the school;
b) it must prevent unjustifiably different pupil-teacher ratios arising in different schools;
c) it must be sensitive to the professional and personal needs of the staff.

# The common curriculum

**Clyde Chitty**

Clyde Chitty previously taught in London and is now Vice Principal at Earl Shilton Community College in Leicestershire. He is a member of the **Forum** Editorial Board and contributes our second article on the issue of a common core curriculum.

A teacher or parent returning to this country after an absence of, say, ten or fifteen years could well be forgiven for thinking that our secondary school curriculum is a pretty unchanging animal. True, we now have the Schools Council responsible for a plethora of projects over the past decade; we now have a divided 16 plus system of O-level and CSE examinations to give added point to our work in years 4 and 5; and the vast majority of our pupils are now educated in schools which call themselves 'comprehensive'. But what has actually changed as far as our attitude to the curriculum is concerned? The answer, I would suggest, is: very little.

## The divided curriculum

To begin with, we have to accept that there are still many comprehensives where a child entering the top stream or the top 'band' in the first year will be offered the same basic curriculum that he or she would have faced in a grammar school. And at the other end of the age range, the bottom 'band' in the fourth and fifth years will be kept amused following variations of the 'life-adjustment', non-examination courses taken up with such enthusiasm by numbers of well-meaning secondary modern teachers after the publication of the Newsom Report. The development of comprehensive education has not been accompanied by a radical re-think of the curriculum. In the absence of any clear educational directive from above, most comprehensives have simply tried to assimilate the two curriculum paradigms inherited from the previous order.

There may, it is true, be schools offering a common curriculum in the first two years, but this arrangement is rarely accompanied by genuine non-streaming; and a policy of setting for certain subjects – particularly French and mathematics – paves the way for the variations of the third year when the divided curriculum can become an established fact.

The somewhat limited definition of a common curriculum or common course used by Caroline Benn and Brian Simon in their survey of comprehensive schools carried out in 1968 took the form of: 'All pupils pursuing the same basic subjects, even if at a different pace or depth'. And even at this general level – taking no account of streaming or banding – only 41 per cent (249) of the 606 comprehensive schools in England and Wales included in the survey claimed to offer a common course beyond the second year. But the actual picture was even more gloomy, for a considerable proportion of the schools claiming to provide a common course for *all* pupils did not in fact provide a foreign language for *all* pupils.[1]

Ten years later, the situation shows little sign of change. In **Framework for the Curriculum,** a recently-published survey of what happens in our schools in the third year, Penelope Weston suggests that a common course is often seen as the one desirable goal which, 'like virtue, all must be seen to be pursuing, whatever the context and circumstances of the school'. But in reality, the third year is often a sort of 'bridge', when

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*(Continued)*

This redeployment agreement ought, if possible, to be accompanied by an improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio, which could, perhaps, be based on a curriculum model for various age-groups and which could also be adjusted to permit 'cover' to be built in to staff timetables whether departmentally or by the appointment of permanent 'resident' supply teachers.

10 Reorganisations should be based on principles that include:

a) no commitment to retain all secondary schools no matter how sub-standard their premises;
b) finding a middle-way between allowing 'market forces' to operate and preparing on a grandiose scale a plan that takes no account of parental wishes or the state of the law;
c) keeping a balance of types of provision;
d) ensuring that the system preserves for teaching and non-teaching staff satisfactory career prospects;
e) seeing that the process of re-organisation includes full consultation;
f) seeing that the staff concerned are advised; helped and treated with proper consideration;

If these proposals were implemented, and some Authorities are already well advanced in this task, then falling rolls might turn out to be a blessing, not a curse.

the pretence of a common course is finally dropped and preparations are made for the examination-directed curriculum of the fourth and fifth years. The raising of the school leaving age to sixteen could have been used as a marvellous opportunity to plan a unified five-year curriculum for *all* schools; instead, it has had the adverse effect of turning the third year into a time of decision and forward planning for *all* pupils. The pressure is there to encourage differentiation as early as possible. In the words of one head teacher quoted in the book: 'The third year curriculum is inevitably a compromise. Conflict between a common curriculum with stable primary groups and increased specialisation with the flexibility required is most acute in the third year'.[2]

Most comprehensives would view an extension of the common curriculum into the fourth and fifth years as a quite unworkable proposition. They might talk of a 'core curriculum' – the basic nucleus of subjects commonly held to be essential or required by law and usually consisting of English, mathematics, religious education and physical education – but this will account for only a small proportion of the total time available. The work in the rest of the timetable can then be organised in one of a number of different ways.

Some comprehensives run completely segregated courses with specific examination objectives. Pupils might be asked to choose a given number of subjects within their particular course, but the system has built-in inequalities, and for those taking CSEs only or no exams at all, the choice can often be very restricted and heavily weighted towards the practical and the vocational. A system of free choice, on the other hand, enables pupils to choose from a wide selection of subjects open to all, and a rigid banding structure gives way to more flexible ability groupings geared to the different examinations. A third possibility – which perhaps comes closest to the ideal of a common curriculum in years 4 and 5 – is the Required Option system where pupils are expected to continue with at least one subject or course of study from each of the major disciplines within the curriculum: science, humanities, languages and design.

The larger comprehensive schools used to receive much praise for the range of subjects they could ofer to pupils from the fourth year onwards, an aspect of their work which compared well with the situation prevailing in the majority of grammar or 'modern' schools. In his book **The Comprehensive School,** first published in 1963, Robin Pedley cites with approval the diversity of courses available to fourth-year pupils at a large comprehensive in South London with its eighteen forms ranging from 4S and 4K for the scientists, down through 4N for the engineers and 4R with the emphasis on catering, to 4Y for the Easter leavers.[3] As recently as 1975, I was arguing in this very journal in defence of large schools on the grounds that they could offer wider subject programmes and cater for minority interests, particularly at the fourth-, fifth- and sixth-form levels.[4] Such an argument would seem to me now to be less than convincing. If we accept that the comprehensive school should maximise the life-chances of every pupil, we need an alternative to the differentiating principle which has dominated our thinking for so long. If our schools are to be truly 'comprehensive', they will meet the needs of their pupils, not by fitting them to a bewildering variety of courses, or curricula, or activities, but by introducing them to a set of common experiences.

# What is a common curriculum?

A wholehearted plea for a common curriculum to the fifth year is made by Maurice Holt in his book **The Common Curriculum,** published last Summer, where the term is taken to mean 'a school-based programme of development which will initiate all the school's pupils into key aspects of our culture'. The emphasis here is on offering something in our schools which is worth having for its own sake, and which is presented in a unifying way 'so as to bring pupils together rather than separate them'. Only in this way, Holt argues, can the hitherto untapped potential of the comprehensive school be realised. Only in this way can we bring unity and coherence to its curriculum and organisation.[5]

Of course, none of this will be achieved without fierce debate, and the controversy over a common curriculum often centres on the issue of 'freedom': the 'freedom' of pupils to choose which subjects they wish to take, particularly after the age of fourteen, and the 'freedom' of teachers to get on with their work unhindered by the threat of standardised syllabuses and methods. In reality, the first of these may not be worth having; and the second does not have to be eroded.

In his book **Towards a Compulsory Curriculum,** John White argues forcibly against a libertarian position *vis-a-vis* our pupils. His starting-point is that a rational

educational system must have the pupil's good in mind. Since, however, it is not possible to determine in any objective sense what the Good is, the least harmful course we can follow is to equip pupils so that they can determine *for themselves* what the Good shall be for them. This entails seeing that they know about as many activities or ways of life as possible with a view to their opting for their own preferred way of life. A common or compulsory curriculum is, therefore, a prerequisite for autonomy: 'We are right to make him (the pupil) unfree now so as to give him as much autonomy as possible later on'.[6]

On a more practical level, the pupils at Sheredes School in Hertfordshire, where Maurice Holt was headmaster from 1969 to 1977, clearly did not see themselves as being inhibited by the lack of choice seemingly implicit in a common curriculum. We are told that the fact that 80 per cent of curriculum time in years 4 and 5 was compulsory did not lead to pupil disenchantment. In 1975, for example, only six fifth-formers out of the 150 in the year group took up the option of leaving at Easter; and of the remainder, well over 80 per cent obtained five or more subject grades in O-level or CSE.[7]

There remains the problem of teacher autonomy. Does every school have to adopt the same common curriculum, and will the outcome be centralised tyranny? John White would argue that a common curriculum means a *nationally imposed* compulsory curriculum, though this proposal runs counter to the English tradition of allowing schools to work out their own syllabuses and teaching methods. Against this, Maurice Holt accepts that each school's interpretation of the term 'common curriculum' will be influenced by the resources available and community pressures. In his view: 'A curriculum which offers common elements of the culture to all pupils in a school, where the school itself interprets the selection from the culture and the modes of implementation so as to make the most effective use of all its resources, can respond both to national guidelines and also to the local conditions and community'. And this would seem to be in line with the thinking of the 1977 Green Paper which states: 'This does not pre-suppose uniform answers: schools, pupils, and their teachers are different and the curriculum should be flexible enough to reflect these differences. But there is a need to investigate the part which might be played by a "protected" or "core" element of the curriculum common to all schools'.

# What should be the common curriculum?

If we opt for the flexibility urged upon us by the Green Paper, it might be worth concluding with a brief look at some of the models we now have to choose from.

An HMI working paper on the curriculum, published in March last year, lists *eight* areas of experience to be covered during the period of compulsory schooling:

| | |
|---|---|
| The aesthetic and creative | The physical |
| The ethical | The scientific |
| The linguistic | The social and political |
| The mathematical | The spiritual |

The document then goes on to provide an example of a viable common curriculum:

| Subject | Periods |
|---|---|
| English | 5 |
| Mathematics | 5 |
| A modern Language | 4 |
| A science | 5 |
| Religious education and a social study | 4 |
| Art/Craft/Music | 4 |
| Careers education | 2 |
| Physical activities | 3 |
| | 32 |

This is based on a 40-period week and clearly assumes that a common curriculum should occupy two-thirds or more of the total time available. In this case, the eight remaining periods will be used to provide two option blocks, which permit pupils to add further subjects – possibly a second foreign language or a classical study or another science – or to devote more time to subjects already being studied.[8]

This bears a striking resemblance to the curriculum pattern we have adopted in years 4 and 5 at the new Earl Shilton Community College with a 20-period week and four 75-minute periods in each day.[9]

| Subject | Periods |
|---|---|
| **English** | **3** |
| **Mathematics** | **2½** |
| **A modern Language** | **2** |
| **A science** | **2** |
| **Humanities and religious education** | **2½** |
| **Design** | **2** |
| **Physical education/ Music and Drama** | **2** |
| **Option 1** | **2** |
| **Option 2** | **2** |
| | 20 |

The Sheredes model groups the compulsory five-year curriculum under six faculties: humanities (linking English, history and geography), expressive arts (linking English, music and drama), mathematics, creative activities (linking all art and craft subjects), science and physical activities. A seventh faculty, that of Languages, offers French to all pupils for the first three years and gives third-year pupils the opportunity to take up German or Latin as well. From the fourth year, however, Languages are optional.

Options are limited to two in years 4 and 5, accounting for 20 per cent of curriculum times, as shown below.[10]

| | Year 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Subjects |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | Eng. Hist. Geog. |
| | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | Eng. Music, Drama |
| | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | Mathematics |
| CORE | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Design |
| | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | Science |
| | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | P.E. and Games |
| | 2 | 2 | 2 | | | French |
| | | | 1 | | | German, Latin and other subjects |
| OPTIONS | | | | 2 | 2 | Science, French and other subjects |
| | | | | 2 | 2 | Science, German and other subjects |

The options permit science enthusiasts to take the Schools Council Integrated Science course (SCISP) which leads to two O level passes, as well as a foreign language, and language enthusiasts to take two languages in addition to the mainstream science in the core. Further option subjects include: typing, office practice, technical drawing and automobile-engineering.

# Conclusion

Each school will clearly choose the model that suits it best; it matters little provided there is no concession to the old grammar/modern split. Despite our in-built resistance to change, there has in the last few years been growing acceptance of the concept of the common curriculum: indeed, one of my major fears is that recent support from the middle ground in politics and from HM Inspectorate might well give the idea the kiss of death. It needs to be seen, not as a bureaucratic response to the current criticisms of our schools, but as an exciting and challenging prospect. Above all, we need to launch a major campaign among parents and teachers to convince them that such a programme of liberal education is really what comprehensive schooling is all about.

*References*


1 Caroline Benn and Brian Simon, **Half Way There,** second edition.(Penguin, 1972), pp 215, 216, 526, 528.
2 Penelope B. Weston, **Framework for the Curriculum: A Study in Secondary Schooling** (NFER, 1977), pp 46, 82.
3 Robin Pedley. **The Comprehensive School,** revised edition (Penguin, 1969), pp 98, 99.
4 Clyde Chitty, 'In Defence of Large Schools', **Forum** vol 18 no 1 Autumn 1975.
5 Maurice Holt, **The Common Curriculum: Its Structure and Style in the Comprehensive School** (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p 22.
6 J P White, **Towards a Compulsory Curriculum** (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p 22.
7 Maurice Holt, 'Non-Streaming and the Common Curriculum', **Forum** vol 18 no 2 Spring 1976.
8 **Curriculum 11-16.** Working papers by HM Inspectorate: a contribution to current debate (DES, December 1977), pp 6, 7.
9 A fuller exposition of this model can be found in Roger Seckington's article 'Non-Streaming: Retrospect and Prospect', **Forum** vol 20 no 2 Spring 1978.
10 This diagram is taken from Maurice Holt's chapter 'Curriculum development at Sheredes School' in Jack Walton and John Welton (eds), **Rational Curriculum Planning** (Ward Lock Educational, 1976), p 60.

# A small comprehensive

**Colin Fulford**

Colin Fulford, Head of Upper Nidderdale High School in North Yorkshire, shows how a small 11-16 comprehensive can provide a common core curriculum and a choice of options that keeps career doors open.

The school has a roll of 335 at present which, by any standards, is obviously small for a comprehensive school. This figure is however, the highest in the history of the school. Recent increases have been as follows:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1972 | 152 | 1976 | 300 |
| 1973* | 212 | 1977 | 320 |
| 1974 | 248 | 1978 | 335 |
| 1975 | 281 | | |

*Comprehensive education introduced

Numbers have risen for several reasons: ROSLA, new families settling in an attractive area, the setting up of a comprehensive school in lieu of a secondary modern school, and new buildings for the school to be completed by September, 1979.

What particularly attracted me to the headship of this school was the challenge of the conversion of a secondary modern to a comprehensive school within the confines of small numbers. I was aware of the disadvantages of small schools, concerning staffing, finance, time-tabling problems, etc, but was won over to the idea, at least in the area where this school is situated.

Several conditions outside the school appeared advantageous:

(i) The school enjoyed the backing of most of the local population. In fact, several groups had been instrumental in saving the school from closure when the question of comprehensive re-organisation had been raised in the West Riding prior to local Government re-organisation. There had been a move to close the school on the grounds that it could not contribute in a comprehensive system.

(ii) The North Yorkshire Authority had promised that the school would be given a favourable pupil-teacher ratio so that parity of opportunity could be provided for its pupils, and this promise was honoured.

(iii) There was an interest in education in the area, most people understanding its importance.

(iv) Many of the new families moving into the area for environmental purposes brought with them a determination that they would do their utmost to support the school to the benefit of their children.

All classes throughout the school are small, the largest having 28 pupils, the average being considerably lower.

In the first two years there are small groups of five pupils which are withdrawn for remedial work for eighteen out of forty periods. They rejoin the main stream of the school for the other periods.

The pupils follow the normal subjects in the first three years. Both French and German are taught to all pupils from the outset and there is a generous allocation of time for science. Craft subjects have a fair share of time, with boys having two periods of Metalwork, two periods of Woodwork, girls two periods of Domestic Science, two periods of Needlework. Attempts have been made to break through the traditional subject barriers allocated to boys and girls – for instance, all pupils do technical drawing for the first year.

In the third year careers work and social education are introduced. Careers lessons are introduced in the final year so that pupils can receive guidance before Options Choices are made. Speakers from Training Boards, Services, Local Industry, come to speak to the pupils. For the weaker pupils in languages, European Studies is now available as an alternative. This involves less concentration on formal languages but increased study of civilisation and customs in Europe.

Several guidelines are in operation relating to optional choices made in the third year. Mathematics and English remain compulsory but to make sure doors are not closed for the future all students must choose one craft, one science and one humanities subject. Three other subjects are then chosen to make up the 'aimed-for' total of eight subjects.*

* The subjects studied to GCE 'O' level this year are Art, English Literature, French, German, Geography, Computer Studies, History, Metalwork, Music, Needlecraft, Chemistry, Physics, Religious Knowledge and Woodwork. The subjects taken to 16+ level are English, Mathematics, Biology, Housecraft and Technical Drawing. CSE level subjects are Art, Automobile Engineering, Engineering Crafts, Woodwork, Metalwork, Needlecraft, Physical Science, Environmental Science, Mathematics, Computer Studies, Geography, History, Religious Knowledge, Music, French, German, Secondary Science, French Studies, Typing and Commerce.

The school is fortunate to have link courses available in collaboration with the Harrogate College of Further Education. The Automobile Engineering, Engineering Crafts, Typing and Commerce Courses are provided in this way.

Much of this is, of course, not novel, and, indeed, may be said to be commonplace. What is important is the fact that a 335 pupil 11-16 comprehensive school is not only in existence, but appears to provide a satisfactory springboard for any future career. The staff can cover the range of subjects as indicated in the option choice, and fully prepare pupils for employment, further education and for the sixth form schools in Harrogate.

# Subject choice

The 'aimed-for' subject commitment in the fourth year is eight subjects, but this may vary on either side. A few pupils can be provided with a nine subject timetable, because we are able to add pupils to existing classes without forming large classes.

Some pupils, however, may have only a six or seven subject timetable. These are those pupils who will benefit most from additional teaching in mathematics and English which can then be provided. Extra lessons in science and craft subjects are also provided, where possible, with the aim of ensuring that pupils studying a smaller number of subjects do concentrated work in these areas.

The school has the advantage of small classes so that pastoral work is largely the responsibility of form teachers. The pupils are known and recognised by all staff members so that many of the problems to be faced in any school are dealt with informally.

The staffing establishment, however, includes provision for a pastoral scheme. This includes the post of Year Tutor for the first year who visits the contributing junior schools, and organises the Parents' Intake Evenings and visits by the 'intake' children in the summer term preceding their start at the school in September. There is, also, a Tutor for the second and third years who works closely with the Deputy Headmaster when Option Choice time comes in the third year. The third Tutor covers the fourth and fifth years and he works closely with the Youth Tutor and Careers Officers.

The school has strong links with further education establishments in Harrogate and the surrounding areas. Many pupils move on to these establishments at sixteen years of age. In 1978, 45% of fifth year pupils went on to the Harrogate College of Further Education, the Harrogate College of Arts and Adult Studies, or to one of the four sixth forms in Harrogate. The transfer of pupils at 16+ requires co-operation of the highest order if the full benefits are to be achieved by the pupils. I have been fortunate in being able to count on full co-operation from the principals and staffs of the two colleges and the head teachers and staffs of the four schools with sixth forms in Harrogate. The pupils visit each school in turn to see the facilities for themselves, and the Sixth Form Tutors come to see the pupils in this school. It is imperative that these means of advancement are seen to be there since they are a vitally important motivating force within an 11-16 comprehensive school.

The school plays a full part in the life of the local community. Many senior pupils take part in community work, visiting the sick and the old as well as handicapped people. Other pupils help in the infant school and play groups, particularly pupils who are thinking of a career in child care. The metalwork groups have made flower holders for the town's floral displays and are now making new gates for the churchyard. One could go on, but space forbids.

Outside the classroom, the pupils follow a wide range

of activities. On the sports side, they take part in the usual major games – there is great interest and participation in sport in general. We are part of the local leagues and have to compete with much larger schools and inevitably more games are lost than are won. The important part is that the players enjoy their victories, endure their defeats, but show a tremendous spirit of sportsmanship at all times. Unusual sports can be introduced as circumstances permit. All the boys and girls in the junior part of the school go horse-riding at a local riding school. This is an obvious course of action to follow, because there is great local interest in riding. On May Day of this year, the school held a highly successful gymkhana. Orienteering is also popular, and is helped by the fact that the school is in a rural area. The school has its own canoes, and many of our pupils get first-class training because an important outdoor pursuits centre is situated near the school. There has recently been a big upsurge in outdoor pursuits, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is growing each year. This year our first pupils have been on outward bound courses to test themselves even further. There is a strong Canal Club, where the pupils and staff meet to discuss trips, plan meals, etc, and twice a year twenty pupils or so make the trips.

One of the strongest props of the school is the Friends of the School Association. This is so named to include everyone interested in the well-being of the school and its pupils. The Association raises money for the school and supports the school on several occasions during the school year. The Annual General Meeting usually has a speaker on an educational topic, while social and fund raising events occur each term. Parents act as stewards at the sports day and swimming galas so becoming functionally involved in the life of the school.

Last year, 1976/77, was an important one for the school in that the final intake of secondary modern pupils were entered for external examinations, in strength, for the first time. The results were gratifying. The girl with nine 'O' levels was an exception, but there were two pupils with seven 'O' levels, others with six and five. Everyone connected with the school breathed more freely when the results were announced. The school, saved from extinction, had shown what was possible.

1977/78 has been a year of consolidation. The examination results this year were awaited with great interest because the pupils were the first comprehensive intake to have completed five years in the school. The results for these last two years were as follows:

**Last Secondary Modern Cohort**
(total of 88 boys and girls)

| BOYS | | GIRLS | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **'O' + Grade 1 CSE** | | **'O' + Grade 1 CSE** | |
| No. pupils | No. subjects | No. pupils | No. subjects |
| 0 | 8 | 1 | 9 |
| 1 | 7 | 0 | 8 |
| 0 | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| 1 | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| 2 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| 3 | 3 | 0 | 4 |
| 6 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| | | 5 | 1 |
| — | — | — | — |
| 16 | 44 | 14 | 44 |
| — | — | — | — |

**First Comprehensive Cohort**
(total of 145 boys and girls)

| BOYS | | GIRLS | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **'O' + Grade 1 CSE** | | **'O' + Grade 1 CSE** | |
| No. pupils | No. subjects | No. pupils | No. subjects |
| 0 | 8 | 1 | 8 |
| 5 | 7 | 1 | 7 |
| 1 | 6 | 1 | 6 |
| 3 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| 1 | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 5 | 1 | 6 | 1 |
| — | — | — | — |
| 18 | 74 | 22 | 71 |
| — | — | — | — |

There are some people who still regard us with suspicion, remembering the history of the school and its pupil intake up to five years ago. We have to be patient with such doubters. We have to let our school leavers do the talking for us. I am looking forward to the completion of the new school because we will then have a new image in the widest sense of the term. We will no longer be an old school under a changed name, but a completely new start can be made. I thank the local authority for their confidence in providing the security of a new building, and look forward with high hopes to the future.

# Resource-based learning

**John A Graystone**

The author was a member of the Independent Evaluation Team, based at the School of Education Research Unit, Bristol University, which monitored the Avon Resources for Learning Project. He has taught at Lawrence Weston Comprehensive School in Bristol and at Kingsthorpe Upper School in Northampton. The article is written with the assistance of Rob Powell, a member of the Evaluation Team,[1] previously, and now, a teacher at Bicester School, Oxon.

'I'm not confident myself that I'm competent to sit in the middle of a classroom of kids all doing different things . . . ' (an Avon teacher).

All of us remember our schooldays, and many will remember hot summer afternoons spent copying endless sentences off the blackboard, writing out dictated notes or gazing out of the window as the teacher carried on a long monologue – the days of high standards for some at the expense of low expectations for many!

If such teaching methods are inappropriate for classes that are streamed, how much more so are they for those that are unstreamed.

In this article we intend to describe a system of classroom management which is geared to the needs and abilities of individual pupils, and which involves the effective use of resources. Though particularly relevant to mixed-ability classes,[2] the system has been used successfully with various forms of pupil grouping.

## The Avon Resources for Learning Project

The Avon Resources for Learning Development Unit (RFLDU), a direct descendant of the 1966 Nuffield Resources for Learning Project, was set up in 1974 as a teachers' co-operative within the County of Avon:

(a) to produce a coherent collection of learning resources which could be used for independent learning in the five basic subjects of the lower school curriculum – English, Maths, Social Studies, French and Science,
(b) to involve teachers in the movement towards independent learning through co-operative planning and resource production and,
(c) to support those teachers in their experiments with advice, help and in-service education.[3]

The Unit consists of five subject editors (all of whom are experienced teachers), a director (previously a Bristol headmaster), an assistant director (previously a head of faculty), as well as two graphic designers and three administrative staff.

In addition an Independent Evaluation, based at the University of Bristol School of Education Research Unit, was funded by the DES. Its main brief is to inform those decision-makers who might wish to set up a similar Unit of the consequences of so doing. The Evaluation Team has adopted an 'illuminative approach' which entails the study of the process of the RFLDU's work and in this article we are focusing on one major aspect – the RFLDU's experiments with teaching and learning styles.

## The operation of the RFLDU

The main activity of the RFLDU initially was the production of resource materials – 'it is not possible to have resource-based learning until teachers have the resources' – but it soon became clear that teachers faced problems in how to use these materials particularly with mixed-ability classes – there were several examples of teachers who had purchased the materials but left them unused in cupboards or who used them purely as a replacement for textbooks. The difficulties faced by the teachers have a familiar ring:

- how to stretch the more able
- how to help the less able
- how to provide pupils with the confidence to work on their own
- how to organise the resources efficiently
- how to plan the layout of the classroom
- how to manage the lesson
- how to set homework
- how to monitor pupils' work and progress
- how to maintain motivation

Clearly, more was needed than just the production of materials. The members of the Unit, all with a minimum of five years' teaching experience, were able to experi-

ment with resource-based learning and to provide appropriate in-service education aimed at overcoming these difficulties.

# Resource-based learning (RBL) and classroom management

RBL can and does mean 'all things to all men' but for the purposes of this article can be taken to include learning that is:

- mainly from the stimulus of resource materials rather than the teacher
- individualised rather than class-based
- independent of, rather than dependent on the teacher.[4]

For the members of the RFLDU the key term for the effective and efficient use of resource materials is 'classroom management'. A system of classroom management was developed at the RFLDU through experimentation in several ways.

1. The 'experimental class' – a mixed-ability class from a local comprehensive – has been taught at the Unit in English and Social Studies for three hours per week for two and a half years (and in Science for one term).
2. The 'demonstration lessons' – members of the RFLDU went out into local secondary schools and taught classes.
3. Regular meetings – these were held at the RFLDU or in schools between local teachers and members of the RFLDU to provide constant feedback and discussion.

The 'system' was not fixed but could be adapted to suit the needs of the subject, the type of pupil, the grouping of pupils, the department and the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher. Though, for example, the Social Studies system differs from the Maths system, it is possible to describe some basic elements which are common to both and indeed to all five subjects.[5] The system is aimed at organising the lessons in such a way that the teacher is freed from performing non-teaching and administrative duties such as hunting around for paper, resources, appropriate materials or workguides, and thus is able to spend more time with individual pupils or pairs of pupils in one-to-one teaching. As one teacher said:

'The greater the freedom, the greater the degree of organisation involved.'

The members of the RFLDU emphasise that the system is only one approach to the problems of mixed-ability teaching and is in no way a definitive solution.

In the actual planning, (done by a department, an individual teacher or groups of teachers from several schools) the main steps are as follows:

1. A topic or theme is selected and the time allocated.
2. The overall aim of the topic as well as the more specific objectives are agreed.
3. The relevant resource materials, booklets, textbooks, tapes, filmstrips, reference materials, etc. are collected and given a number for identification.
4. The materials are divided up and examined to see if they adequately cover the agreed objectives.
5. If it appears that certain objectives are not adequately covered, the material is supplemented with either teacher-prepared or commercially produced materials.
6. Task cards (or sheets) which direct pupils to certain resource items and tell them what tasks to do, are written and numbered. The tasks set should aim to cover the agreed objectives. The task cards can contain a list of resources and equipment required, and a clear description of the tasks to be performed and can be made as long, short, easy or difficult as required.
7. Learning routes are devised.
   A learning route is a chain of numbered task cards linked to each other along which a pupil progresses. The route is carefully planned so that the pupil progresses from one task card to the next in an order decided by the teacher. The learning routes can vary – there can be a common core with extensions, several separate routes or common tasks followed by separate routes.
8. 'Contract cards' are written one for each pupil on which there is a space for the pupil's name, the date when the pupil started a particular task card, the task cards completed and presently being done, and for teacher and pupil comments. A large index card is suitable. The contract card is usually completed during consultation. The 'consultation' forms a central and exciting part of the whole scheme. It may, of course, take several forms but can cover some of the following: a business side, i.e. commenting on

work done, reference to past 'agreements'; the recording of any assessment; a prospective view, i.e. deciding the work to be done next; the setting of objectives to be achieved; helping pupils over difficulty or in more advanced ways of thinking.

9. Check sheets or tests are written. After one or several task cards have been completed the pupil is required to answer a simple 'closed answer' type of mastery test before being allowed to progress.
10. A 'master plan' can be devised. A 'master plan' contains a list and description of all the task cards, an analysis of each in terms of educational objectives, and the learning routes. It can be used by the teacher or pupils during the lesson.

# How it works in practice

Such lessons will of course differ from teacher to teacher, subject to subject and topic to topic. A simple outline is as follows:

- a lead lesson is given, in which the system is explained. Great emphasis can be placed on pupils realising that instructions come from the task cards not the teacher and that the teacher does not want to be asked unnecessary questions or 'quickies' (if inattention is the bugbear of classteaching, then unnecessary questions are the bugbear of RBL!).
- the teacher then issues task cards to each pupil. Depending on the 'forward planning' either, for example, pupils work on the same first task card – a 'starter' work card – or on different ones.
- as the pupils begin to work the teacher will make a point of seeing each pupil or pair of pupils, to explain which task cards should be done next or to decide on the relevant learning route. (The learning routes can be prominently displayed in the room.)
- during the first lessons the teacher can generally supervise and answer the 'unnecessary' questions that will inevitably arise as the pupils, unfamiliar with this method of learning, seek assurances. In future lessons, the teacher should find that 'quickies' decrease as pupils come to gain confidence and more time can be spent in individual or paired consultations.
- as lessons progress the teacher can attempt to 'mix methods' by employing class teaching or group work in order both to maintain motivation, and to cover particular aspects of the topic which may demand a different approach.

From the pupil's point of view, he or she simply enters the classroom at the beginning of the lesson, examines the contract card, collects the relevant task card and the necessary resources and equipment and then carries out the written instructions. When the contract is completed, the pupil completes the necessary check-sheet or mastery test and arranges to see the teacher. The 'consultation' can then take place.

# General Comments

From observing lessons, talking with teachers and attending department meetings, it is possible to make some general comments:

- The system described above is, on the whole, a conservative one in that the teacher maintains control of knowledge and decides 'what is important to be learnt'. The pupil has little choice over content but a degree of freedom regarding depth of work and time spent. The pupil may have some choice firstly, if there is basic work combined with extension tasks, secondly, if the teacher allows the task cards to be non-prescriptive, e.g. by giving open-ended tasks, or thirdly, if the negotiations during the 'consultation' encourage pupil choice. In addition, pupils may be able to engage in projects which are geared to their ability.
- Task cards remove the necessity for the teacher to produce new resource material because pupils can be directed to a wide variety of sources including single copies of magazines, books, etc.
- A central focus of this type of system is 'the consultation' and 'the contract' between teacher and pupil. From observing teachers it is clear that emphasis needs to be placed on equipping teachers with skills relevant in a one-to-one relationship.
- The behaviour of the teacher and the tasks that the teacher carries out in the lessons will vary depending on the subject. In Maths, English or Social Studies it may be possible for the teacher to spend much of the lesson seated at the teacher's desk with pupils constantly coming up for their consultations, whereas in Science, because of the use of scientific equipment and the safety problem, the teacher may be continually on his feet at the pupils' places of work. In French the teacher may often be working with groups of pupils.

- The importance of the teacher adopting a *mixed* approach is necessary both to maintain motivation and to fit the content. Any one system or style of teaching to the exclusion of all others makes for poor motivation and this applies both to traditional class teaching and to various forms of RBL. The adherents of both methods, who often tend to fall into two entrenched camps, have much to learn from one another. Also some skills necessarily involve group work or class discussion.
- The system described has evolved through trial and error based on practical experience and is currently being used by teachers in Avon. Each department (or teacher) will have its own particular interpretation of the system depending on its own unique situation, and will modify and change the system. Thus, as with many innovations, the final result may prove to differ greatly from the original. One of the tasks of the evaluation team is to monitor this change.
- The effective use of such a system of teaching has implications, not only for the organisation of the department but also for that of the school. Brian Simon points out that 'unstreaming implies a new approach to the whole educative enterprise; one which must pervade the school as a whole'.[6] In the same way the introduction of effective RBL may require lessons of an appropriate length, and the teacher having exclusive use of a room, or, indeed, a specialist room. Thus the school timetable plays a crucial part in an innovation such as RBL.
- The system outlined here has involved much experimentation which is both costly in terms of time and energy and also inappropriate for the teacher at the chalk face. The RFLDU has recently attempted to produce ready-made management packs in the five subjects and to undertake a 'consultancy' role within Avon. This involves an in-service approach which is school-based and which attempts to start from where the teacher is and move onwards, with 'professional self-development' being the major aim. With the current interest in school-based and school-focused in-service training the evaluation team is monitoring these developments, which, if successful, would appear to have important implications for the structure and financing of in-service education in general.

*Notes*

1 The article, written in January 1968, describes the RFLDU approach at one stage in its development and the author recognises that it has progressed since. It expresses the views of the authors alone and not necessarily those of the central team of the RFLDU.

2 Some of the points raised by Professor Wragg (**Forum**, Spring 1978) are covered – particularly those dealing with 'teaching strategies' and 'evaluation'.

3 *Resources for Learning Development Unit: A Brief Description.* June 1977. Obtainable from RFLDU, Redcross Street, Bristol BS2 0BA.

4 For a lengthier discussion see John A. Graystone, *The Role of the Teacher in RBL* – paper presented to BERA Conference, September, 1977, published in *Research Intelligence*, Vol 4, No 1, pp. 27-35.

5 There is a risk in attempting to generalise about all five subjects that 'all are described but none understood'. Those interested in individual subjects should refer to the following booklets which have much more detailed information about task cards, contract cards, learning routes and master plans. All are obtainable from the RFLDU at 50p each (including p. & p.).
*Resource-based Learning in Science*
*The French Project*
*Managing Independent Learning in English*
*Maths Handbook*
P. Waterhouse, (1977) *A Handbook of Classroom Management for Independent Learning* (for Social Studies).

6 Brian Simon, 'Unstreaming', **Forum**, Spring, 1978, p. 35.

# Reviews

**Towards the Comprehensive University** by Robin Pedley. Macmillan (1978) pp 111, £1.95.

'The time is overdue for opening up everyone's view of life so that they may cease to be prisoners of a social caste system.'

It is not logical to suppose that the principles of comprehensive education can or should stop with the end of compulsory schooling.'

'a falling birthrate gives us a heaven-sent opportunity to improve conditions!'

These are Robin Pedley's premises for arguing that the battle for the comprehensive principle 'has shifted from schools to further and higher education.'

So far so good. **Forum** readers will doubtless agree that there are sound educational and social reasons for extending the comprehensive principle beyond sixteen, and that this cannot be achieved by the schools alone beyond the minimum statutory school leaving age. But Pedley seems to have little understanding of either the complexity of education and training in vocational courses for the 16-19 age group or the facilities and staffing needed. Nor does he seem to realise that mature adults join 16+ and 18+ examination courses to qualify them to compete for admission to higher education.

Predictably in a book under this title, Pedley rehearses and condemns the emergence of the binary policy, deplores the narrow remit which ensured that the recent Oakes Committee on **The Management and Control of Higher Education in the Maintained Sector** would not propose an end to it, and notes with approval that the 1969 Select Committee concluded that 'the binary system is unfortunate.'

Recognising that to extend the comprehensive principle beyond sixteeen into adult and higher education requires a continuum for that principle and its application to part-time and full-time students, he ignores the varying lengths and articulation of vocational courses and the significance of the part-time mode for duration in years. Having thus simplified the post-sixteen problem he produces a neat but impractical solution.

Specifically, his proposals are for phasing out 16-18 teaching in Colleges of Further Education in favour of comprehensive 16-18 part-time and full-time provision in comprehensive sixth forms and Sixth Form Colleges. Colleges of Further Education then become Comprehensive Colleges of Adult Education catering for part-time and full-time students over 18 from the local community. He is cautious about the dividing line between these and higher education, commenting that 'the upward range of studies which adult colleges can be expected to offer needs to be fairly flexibly defined' but 'unbridled entrepreneurial expansion' into higher education must be prevented. (One discerns shades of university elitism).

The envisaged 'Comprehensive University' is a collegiate concept of all post-18 provision for 'each natural social area' comprising a population of about 500,000 and yielding 8000 full-time and 9000 part-time students. There would be a hundred of these, each with a democratically representative Governing Council and a Senate.

Thus LEAs would be responsible for comprehensive education up to eighteen while beyond that age demarcation there would be a 'unified system of adult education' comprising bipartite colleges in a 'new partnership' constituting the Comprehensive University, financed by 'an enlarged University Grants Committee' for all post-18 education.

Somehow the vexed question of 16-19 education and vocational training poses no problem for Robin Pedley. Nor is it clear how the varied provision now being developed for adults in community schools/colleges, especially in rural areas remote from Colleges of Further Education, would be made.

Nevertheless, if we accept his premises as we must, we should welcome this Aunt Sally as a provocation to work out a means for achieving the aims of extending the comprehensive principle.

NANETTE WHITBREAD
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**Comprehensive Education** – a Report of a DES Conference (HMSO, 1978, £3.25).

This is a collection of papers from the Secretary of State's conference in York to which certain comprehensive schools were invited. 'Handpicked' might be a better word, for although it was a national event, it was not open to the public or to schools not invited, even to observe.

The value of the book is in the schools' and officers' own accounts of why they do as they do in such matters as timetabling and tutor groups and support services. Nothing particularly new, but some useful snapshots of practice.

There are also some unmemorable HMI contributions, and one from Manchester's Chief Officer, Dudley Fiske, of which the more said the better. Using allocation figures from Manchester's schools over the last decade, he demonstrates that arranging school entry by parental choice alone is a flop – even by the criterion of parental satisfaction itself, and a threat to the stability of any secondary system.

This paper stands out because it is almost the only one to grasp a real nettle, of which the comprehensive field has many. It is also one which gives some guidance for the future.

For the real trouble with these papers is that they suit 1968 better than 1978. We should be well beyond discussion about whether 12 is the 'right age' to transfer from primary schooling, or whether 1300 or 600 are 'too large or too small' for schools, or about which type of comprehensive system can best take schools without sixth forms (being discreetly pushed these days).

This is 1978. We should be actively exploring the ways by which authorities can reorganise to provide a full and a

single 16 to 19 education service based on pooling the work of schools and further education in various combinations. We should be asking 'too large or too small for *what*?' and defining the minimum range of courses and facilities each age group should have on offer whatever the size of comprehensive school, or age of break in the system.

These matters are not canvassed, nor is there any consideration of the continuing 11-plus in Britain, or of the growth of creaming and other selective practices, and the crippling effect all this has on a developing comprehensive system, particularly at 6th form level. The taboo placed on this nettle in all official discussion on the comprehensive issue continues to defy credulity.

It means it is very hard to discuss comprehensive systems as such, and all too easy just to see schools in isolation, as happened a lot of the time at York. Yet here too schools meet the problem of national policy. Thus, when speaking of courses for the 14 to 18 age group, one Chief Officer had to admit that'even the best course arrangements to meet all needs do not seem likely to be achieved until examination courses and syllabuses are nationally reoriented to give a better fit with modern society'. (M. Henley, Northamptonshire)

This is not only nearly 1979, it is also the year in which a decision was to be taken on this very matter. What an opportunity, with so many comprehensives gathered together, to direct discussion to this reorientation and the principles of this 'better fit'. But, sadly, another boat was missed.

Yet the idea of having such a conference was a good one, if only because it let us see what is written between such lines as that on page one where we are told it would be 'unrealistic' to expect schools to provide for pupils' full personal needs. We are aware that we are watching schools become product oriented, tooling up to meet customer demand. Away slips the vision of schools where the 'whole child' is educated. Maybe this was never the reality in the non-selective sector that it was supposed to be in grammar schools and public schools, but it is widely assumed to be a British hallmark. Is it too being rubbed away, as the comprehensive reform gets taken smartly in hand by the men from Head Office?

CAROLINE BENN

**The Primary Teacher in Action,** by Deanne Boydell. Open Books (1978), pp 135, £1.95.

As a useful introduction to the main topics of current research and discussion in primary education Mrs Boydell's book serves well. She looks at five main areas: a teachers' aims, classroom organisation, individual attention, groups and the 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. She is at her best in giving clear details about the various research procedures adopted by the more well known investigators in the field and could well give the first year teacher-training student some useful idea of the complexity and planning that lie behind most research. Others unfortunately might find her rather uncritical approach and her mannerisms of writing style so uncongenial as to look elsewhere for the same information. Where Mrs Boydell occasionally dares to be critical she hastens to add a placatory rider which doesn't necessarily have any logical connection to the criticism she has just made, and she is prone to single sentence self-evident pronouncements – eg 'Thinking is an integral part of teaching' – which serve to irritate rather than illuminate.

Correctly or otherwise, one is given the impression of relatively little personal experience in the classroom; there is a slightly hectoring tone, particularly in the introduction, towards teachers, who would well be advised to go straight to Chapter 2 rather than be put off at the beginning and thereby miss the book's more useful contribution towards current issues. That the distance from the coal-face is rather further back than the pit shaft is borne out for me by the surprise evinced by Mrs Boydell in the finding that a very high percentage of teachers streamed within their classes solely on the basis of personal assessment and (sometimes) reading age and that 'high level cognitive contributions involving ideas, explanations and problems only accounted for about one-tenth of a teachers' total conversation' (with his or her pupils). Take with this the largely ignored finding of the Bennett survey that half the third and fourth year junior teachers in the whole of Lancashire and Cumbia *still* smack for disruptive behaviour and one's experience and observation is confirmed. Either all the progressive primary teachers silently fled the country about twenty years ago or there were very, very few of them anyway.

Mrs Boydell accurately reflects topical concerns and just as accurately omits what should be being generally discussed as being of prime importance to teaching but which receives so much less attention. Not styles of teaching but styles of learning: so much is now known about cognitive development, about attention, perception, memory and language acquisition and yet the deliberate optimisation of this knowledge in relation to teaching style and classroom organisation has received but isolated attention. It is the new rootstock of progressive education which, whatever its dilutions and however misunderstood by its own practitioners, has always had its true foundation in child development. If one style of teaching seems to base itself more closely than any other on what is known about learning and developmental processes, to treat 'teaching styles' as if they could all offer equal justification and therefore be a matter of personal fancy should be exposed as the fallacious argument that it is.

ANNABELLE DIXON
*Herts*

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