

# FORUM

**for the discussion of new trends in education**

Spring 1980

Volume 22 Number 2

85p

## This Issue

### **Comprehensive Education The threat of government policy**

Caroline Benn puts government  
policy under the microscope

Mick Farley examines government  
policy for the 16 to 19's

Maureen Hardy on talking  
in school

Helen Simons discusses  
school self-evaluation

David Reay on hidden  
streaming

Discussion and Reviews

**Towards self government in schools**

# Editorial Board

# Contents

Vol 22 No 2

Spring 1980

**Michael Armstrong**, Southampton.

**Clyde Chitty**, Earl Shilton Community College, Leicestershire.

**Michael Clarke**, Little Hill Junior School, Leicestershire.

**Annabelle Dixon**, Chalk Dell Infant School, Hertford.

**Maggie Gracie**, West Moors Middle School, Dorset.

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

**Roger Seckington**, Earl Shilton Community College, Leicestershire.

**Byron Thomas**, Broughton Astley Primary School, Leicestershire.

**Peter Thomson**, Judgemeadow Community College, Leicestershire.

**Roy Waters**, ILEA Inspectorate.

**Harvey Wyatt**, The Woodlands School, Coventry.

## *Editors*

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

**Nanette Whitbread**, School of Education, Leicester Polytechnic.

ISSN 0046-4708

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

## *Business information*

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

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

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

<b>Caroline Benn</b>	A new 11-plus?	36
<b>Mick Farley</b>	16 to 18: Chaos or Planning?	42
<b>Maureen Hardy</b>	Talking in School	45
<b>David G. Reay</b>	Hidden Streaming in the Classroom	47
<b>Peter Davies</b>	Towards Self Government	49
<b>Des Parks</b>	Mixed ability science teaching in the Middle School	51
<b>Helen Simons</b>	The Evaluative School	55
	Discussion	58
	Reviews	59

## The Next Forum

This number will focus on three main issues, all of current concern.

First, on the educational advantages of smaller classes – now a real possibility because of the decline in school rolls. Annabelle Dixon writes from her own experience and research; another article draws on the ORACLE research results which point the urgency of of this reform.

Second, Clyde Chitty contributes an important article on the differentiation process in comprehensive schools through the option choice system. This is partly based on recent research both in England and Scotland. He, and others, discuss the need to move towards a common curriculum.

Finally Maggie Gracie and the staff of West Moors Middle School, Dorset (9 to 13 years) contribute a symposium on the value (and practice) of this type of school – important in view of recent attacks on the middle school.

# The Attack on Education

There is no doubt whatsoever that the public system of education is suffering the most sustained attack it has experienced since the Geddes Axe of the early 1920's. The attack is twofold in character, and this needs to be understood by all concerned. While the main thrust of government policy appears to focus on cutting public expenditure, the second prong of the encircling movement is perhaps even more dangerous. This is the overt attempt both to buttress the so-called independent sector at the expense of publicly maintained schools, and to strengthen selective processes within the maintained sector. The main target of both prongs of this offensive strategy is the system of comprehensive secondary education, only brought into being over the last ten to fifteen years.

The actual cuts in financial provision for education which local authorities are expected to make this year, amounting to over £500 million, are bad enough; but the government has given notice that even larger cuts are to be made next year. Not content with actually destroying the school meals service in its existing form, or with forcing parents to pay for school transport so that their children shall participate in what is a compulsory activity (itself a very doubtful principle), the government is preparing cuts which will inevitably bite even more deeply into the education service next year. Government spokesmen blandly maintain that these cuts will not affect the *quality* of education. In that case why is it that, all over the country, schools are already asking parents to provide their children with books and other resources? The real value of school capitation grants has greatly declined. This certainly affects the quality of the education service, as will the cuts in the teacher force predicted (and already taking place). Parental support for the purchase of books and other resources is in any case a principle entirely at variance to those which should govern a public service like education. It is the children attending schools in the poorest areas who will go to the wall under this system.

The cuts in education, however, should not be seen in isolation. They are part of a general strategy which seeks on the one hand to downgrade the public system and, on the other, to buttress and strengthen the independent sector. Peter Newsam, Director of Education for the ILEA, is right when he characterises the Assisted Places Scheme (and related measures) as involving a decisive shift of resources from the public to the independent sector (*Education*, 24 August 1980). This, it appears, is deliberate policy on the part of a government 80 per cent of whom (in terms of Cabinet members) were themselves educated in independent schools (and 30 per cent from one only – Eton). And *none* of whom educate their own children in the maintained system they 'administer' and legislate for.

In her important article in this issue, Caroline Benn submits government policy to a searching and detailed analysis. The fact that, in their first six months of office, two Bills have

already been introduced on education is a measure of the importance the government attach to policy in this sphere. Both Bills are designed not only to weaken the movement to comprehensive education (the first, now an Act, by repealing Labour's 1976 Act), but more particularly to buttress such selective procedures as exist, to strengthen them and to import new forms of selection into the system. As Caroline Benn points out, under cover of slogans about 'parental choice', new, covert selective procedures are proposed that amount to a new 11-plus, but take a form long discredited. The object is to build up the selective sector, whether selective in terms of wealth or 'merit' – a sector that already covers nearly 27 per cent of children of secondary school age (there are 412,000 in independent schools, 128,000 in the old direct grant schools, and a further 256,000 in maintained grammar schools). The latest official figure of 86 per cent of secondary age pupils in comprehensive schools concerns the *maintained* system only – a point that those who favour a complete system of comprehensive education, as *Forum* does, need to bear in mind.

It is, therefore, not only a question of defending the school system as a whole against the cuts – though that is essential. Equally important is the defence of comprehensive education against the attempts now being made to undermine it. This involves launching a powerful movement for the *extension* of comprehensive education with the aim both of exorcising premature selection and eventually of bringing in the independent sector as part of local systems under local and national democratic control. That must remain the perspective, even when the cold winds blow – indeed now more than ever. For this reason, *Forum* will continue to publish articles both monitoring official government action, such as those by Caroline Benn and Mick Farley, and raising for discussion central educational issues affecting the schools, as do the articles by Maureen Hardy, Helen Simons and others in this issue.

With this number, *Forum* greets the 1980's. This is, surprisingly, the fourth decade in which *Forum* has appeared – the late fifties, sixties, seventies, and now the eighties. This last has started ominously. As we go to press, Parliamentary discussion over Education Bill No.2 has only just got under way, though it promises to be a long drawn out affair. It may be that some of the more obnoxious clauses will be modified, though this is unlikely. What can be gained, however, is enhanced public knowledge as to precisely what is being proposed, and therefore enhanced public understanding of its implications. This, together with actual experience of the new dispensation later this year and in 1981 can only lead to a renewed determination to bring about the decisive changes that are needed both to construct a democratic system of education, and to raise its level. This is essential if the system is to meet the demands which will certainly be made as the micro-processor revolution gets under way during the decade that lies ahead.

# A New 11-plus for the old Divided System

---

**Caroline Benn**

Is Information Officer for the Campaign for Comprehensive Education.

---

For over thirty years national education policy in Britain has been pre-occupied almost exclusively with secondary education controversy. Those from other countries, where such obsession does not exist, stand amazed, although it is they, not we, who can more quickly answer the question, why. They point to a small group of selective schools with public schools at the centre.

Every country has its elite educational institutions, and some have those where men (and less occasionally women) of high attainment or from backgrounds of wealth and influence, are trained and later populate, disproportionately, key posts in industry, the professions, government and the military. In other countries, however, these institutions are usually in higher education – not in the secondary sector. Only in Britain is entry to secondary education (as early as 11 or even 8) so decisive in matters of access to power and life's chances (including access to higher education itself, particular Oxbridge). Governments which wish to change society through more equality in education thus concentrate their reform on secondary education. Governments which represent the interests of the sector served by these elite institutions, will try, as is now happening, to strengthen these institutions. This is the motive behind the present government's education policy. It is social engineering no less than that of other governments: in many ways, much more obvious.

Within six months of taking office two major education bills have come to Parliament. Both concentrate on secondary education – one passed in July, 1979, permitting authorities to reverse comprehensive reform by repealing the 1976 Education Act, the second, now being processed through Parliament, laying down new selective rules for entry to secondary schools and underwriting public subsidies to private education – or more strictly speaking, giving the Secretary of State permission to 'reimburse' the 'proprietors' of certain private secondary schools for whatever fees they charge. It is the proprietors who get the 'assisted place' money, not the parents or children.

## Education Bill No. 1

The July Act was trailed as giving authorities 'freedom' to organise education as they please, but that same promise was repeatedly broken in 1970-73, and few authorities will be permitted to change grammar schools into comprehensive schools now (although secondary modern schools might get to change their name). In any case, the Secretary of State for Education obligingly let slip the Act's two real objectives: to allow authorities with both grammar and comprehensive schools to keep *both*; secondly, to allow those already 'with

a comprehensive system . . . to *reintroduce* a degree of selection' (our italics).<sup>1</sup>

The effects of this first Act will not be immediate, particularly as there were rather few schools which were in the middle of being reorganised as a direct result of Labour's 1976 Act, because this Act was not particularly effective. It did not make the implementation of the comprehensive principle a legal duty of local education authorities (as any serious Bill to end selection would have had to do). Instead, it merely required local authorities to 'have regard to' this principle. Anyone familiar with the law knows the vast differences between giving an authority a legal duty (which must be carried out) and asking that same authority, when carrying out its normal duties 'to have regard to' this, that or the other (where only a good show is required). As far as comprehensives went, it meant that no authority had a duty in law to end selection, and that any authority could flout the law's intention in practice while obeying it in letter – for example, by setting up a working party on comprehensive reform and letting it sit for months, as some did.

The weak nature of the 1976 comprehensive Act was the last chapter in a history of failure to legislate effectively on comprehensive reform, beginning in 1965 with the crucial decision not to legislate at all. Although at that time government advisors and MPs urged legislation,<sup>2</sup> the Labour government accepted DES advice to issue a circular instead. Circular 10/65, although strongly worded, carried no legal requirement.

## Using the Law to the Full

The present Conservative Government will not be making the same mistake. It is legislating with a vengeance: first, to give local authorities new duties which will require them to allow selection to stay where it already exists, to increase where it is but little, and to return where it has gone; second, to relieve local authorities of traditional duties they have always had to provide certain safeguards and services for all pupils and all schools. The propaganda claim again is that by relieving authorities of their duties to provide meals, for example, they will be 'free'. The truth is that it permits cuts in expenditure to be made. Authorities are now being allowed to save money by ditching traditional responsibilities.

The pedagogical implications mean a move away from the traditional commitment to the whole child's welfare and a narrowing of educational concern to mechanistic 'instruction' – a trend the government and its supporters are pushing hard. Thus in June a government backbencher



positively urged his ministers to remove local authorities' responsibilities for transport and the provision of school meals 'so money can be spent on the real job of education',<sup>3</sup> the same backbencher also urged ministers to 'remove headmasters and teachers who do not teach their children properly or encourage their children to reach acceptable standards',<sup>4</sup> while another (a former comprehensive school-teacher) asked for 'an enquiry into behavioural trends and moral education'.<sup>5</sup> The first of these requests is already being met in Education Bill No 2's provisions relieving authorities of duties to provide meals and transport, while the second one — a new version of payment by results — may not be far behind. Nor the third, for one of the government's pre-election pledges<sup>6</sup> was a national enquiry into moral education, including a promise to look into the misuse of religion to teach 'communism'. What that meant has never been made clear, but hovering lately behind that facade of freedom is a nasty hint of witch-hunt — of persons, ideologies, and subject fields, as many in schools and colleges are increasingly aware.<sup>7</sup>

For the moment, however, the government is too busy making sure selection is retained and reintroduced to get down to other tyrannies. In this respect it starts well ahead thanks to the weakness of Labour Party policy. Half the local education authorities in England and Wales (59 to be exact) still have selection,<sup>8</sup> and the Conservative Under Secretary of State made it clear in July<sup>9</sup> that if the government 'is saying that certain authorities can keep their selective schools, one has to have selection'. This being so, it is not surprising that debates on the Government's two bills read like a trip back to the 1950's, with attention focused on secondary modern schools (the majority of schools still in many authorities, including Trafford, Tameside and Buckinghamshire) and whether or not parents want them, how good or bad they are, and how much transfer there really is to grammar schools. As a result of opposition questioning, the government even handed down its long awaited definition of a secondary modern:

'modern schools are secondary schools for pupils, who, under a selective system are considered to receive education best suited to their needs in such schools.'<sup>10</sup>

## The Changing Nature of the 11-plus

This inane tautology reveals the depths to which minds bent on the science of selection have now sunk. In fact, it indicates that the defence of selection as a science is gradually being abandoned by both the DES and the government. Ministers are at pains to draw distinctions between the old 11-plus selection of mass testing and the new 11-plus which is the opting out of comprehensive education of the selected.<sup>11</sup> It is vital to understand this difference and to realise that the old 11-plus — overt, universal, imposed and scientifically based — has been giving way over many years to the new 11-plus — covert, restricted, optional and socially based. It means that the 11-plus is less and less controlled by those who are democratically elected (education committees or Parliament) but delegated instead more and more often to individual headteachers of grammar, aided and fee-paying schools. Decisions are not publicly arrived at and publicly defended as they used to be, but more and more often privately arrived at behind closed doors with no explanation of criteria. The new 11-plus applies only to a minority of parents, since the majority are no longer involved. The new

11-plus is based on self-referral of the child by the parent, not upon universal testing of all children. It is justified in terms of the 'choice' of the minority of parents who refer children and upon the 'needs' of their children alone, not upon the majority's needs or upon the desirability of universal choice.

Selection now rests on a nearly 19th century myth of natural order in society and upon a natural elite — one's educational betters, if you like — whose path the government claims it has a clear national duty to smooth by giving them their choice. Choice is the new selection. The two words are used almost synonymously now by government supporters:

'I am not opposed to selection. Life is about selection from birth to death . . . to blur choice in education is to undermine what education is all about.'<sup>12</sup>

## The 11-plus is Dead — Long Live the 11-plus

Bill No 2 shows that education is all about selection and that selection is now all about opting out. The new 11-plus has become a necessity because the old form of selection is no longer acceptable. Parents will not accept that a one day test can determine school 'choice' for their child — especially when it means a secondary modern school. Attempts to return to the old selection in areas which have previously experienced or been promised comprehensive reform are proving very problematic for local authorities — whether it is an authority trying to turn a comprehensive school back into a secondary modern and grammar school, or an authority trying to reintroduce mass testing to determine allocation. Resistance is running very high. It isn't so much that the demonstrations against such plans are so sizeable,<sup>13</sup> nor well organised,<sup>14</sup> but the fact that when people campaign to retain comprehensive education, it is the majority who are speaking. Those who used to campaign for grammar schools represented only a minority, but when a majority organises, councillors must listen more carefully. Those in Tameside who did not and who brought back the old mass selection were turned out of office; those who try the same in other areas, including Bolton and Trafford, are likely to be next.

Since the government will be forced — indeed, it is already being forced — to pretend that the majority of parents can have a comprehensive education for their child, the effects of Bill No 1 will not, except in the short run, be to plunge everyone back to the old mass testing. But the effect of legislation in both Bills will be — as it is intended to be — to strengthen the new selection and to facilitate the opting out of comprehensive education by the knowledgeable, the wealthy, the educationally ambitious middle class, and the parents of those few children who come in none of these groups but whom schools will now be pressured to single out and send to join the others to provide that token working class cover necessary to oil the new selection's public relations. The same mass media coverage which went to *Black Paper* statements, however outrageous, will now be put to selling the image of the poor man's son or daughter who gets an invitation to the rich man's educational table. Yet even if every assisted place in the country goes to a working class child (which it won't by far) it will still leave over 96% of the working class where they were — with their education standards being cut. Equally important it will leave them in comprehensive schools which cannot

possibly be comprehensive in an ever increasing number of cases.

The middle class will benefit immeasurably from the new legislation, firstly, because their children are (and will continue to be) the majority in the schools to which the new 'assistance' millions are to be sent. Indirectly, their own fees will certainly be subsidised. Secondly, because the bias towards middle class benefit already exists in the public subsidies which local authorities and central government make available, and which this government intends to continue to make available, in the form of fee payment and tuition payment for certain groups of children who get public assistance for private education: the children of diplomats, the children of military officers, and those who are the beneficiaries of place-buying by local authorities in schemes which already exist (what Bill No 2 calls 'standing arrangements'). Thirdly, and perhaps most important, is the evidence we have that where parents select themselves for grammar education it is middle class parents who come forward more often.<sup>15</sup> The gradual change in the method of selection for many grammar schools and direct grant schools over the last two decades is certainly one of the reasons why these schools have become more and more middle class,<sup>16</sup> and almost certainly one reason behind the decreasing numbers of working class entrants to universities. The government's explanation here is conveniently blinkered, putting the blame on the increased number of comprehensive schools, when what is far more likely is that the same process of self selection applies in GCE entry within comprehensives as in entry to grammar schools.

## An Historic Bill

What is new is not this evidence about bias but the introduction of a national policy designed to deliver so specifically to the interests of such a privileged minority. But never before has a government committed itself so specifically against equality, a commitment which comes out particularly in the legislation on admissions and on assisted places in Bill No 2. This Bill requires local authorities to organise admissions to schools by the market mechanism of parental choice. But not to all schools; this is the point. The operation of preference is restricted to protect elite schools. That is to say, there is a duty imposed on a local authority to operate the market mechanism *only* in respect of comprehensive and secondary modern schools. The parental preference legislation does not apply in the sense that it must in law be conceded, to a) maintained grammar schools, b) fee-paying schools, c) aided schools (which reach agreements with authorities to control their own entries) or to d) any school at any stage, including a comprehensive, which admits by aptitude or ability (say, a sixth form of an 11-18 comprehensive in an area where there are also 11-16 comprehensives).

The very elite schools which are supposed to be in business by virtue of the market which demands them, are the very schools which the new legislation protects from the market. The Bill thus creates two classes of parents: those who have a choice of both selective and non-selective schools and those who have only got a choice of non-selective schools, which authorities are required in law to submit to the free-for-all mechanism, and selective schools, which the law protects from majority parental preference because it accepts that only certain favoured minorities will be acceptable to such schools by reference to 'their ability and aptitude'.

If it sounds familiar, it is. It is nothing more nor less than 11-plus selection, capable of adaptation to old or new form. This is an historic Bill for it means the 11-plus will be sanctioned in law for the first time. Up to now 11-plus selection has just been a practice; it has never been enshrined in any Act of Parliament. Bill No 2 changes all that at a stroke.

## Likely Effects on Comprehensives in Authorities which Wish to Retain Selection

Bill No 2 is designed to give maximum advantage to a minority of selective schools and to a minority of parents who opt out of non-selective education, as well as to prevent certain powers being exercised by local authorities which are necessary to run effective comprehensive systems. No authority, for example, will be able to fix a legal maximum size for its schools, a power authorities know will be necessary to retain any planning rights in a situation of falling rolls. Without this any school – selective or not – can act unilaterally to increase its size regardless of the local authority's policy. It can do this at admissions stage if it is a grammar school or an aided school (with rights over its own admissions) or it can do this at appeals stage whether it is selective or non-selective. The appeals mechanism is designed to help parents opt out of the local authority's system of admissions, however clearly it is laid down. Individual parents, if knowledgeable enough, can apply to any school and if their child is accepted, the authority must in law give way to this school's unilateral decision. This is a completely new legal right given to schools and designed to favour the selective school or the oversubscribed school. Any such school can accept pupils and the public will be called upon to fund the extra places, or over time, that school's growth at the expense of other schools, or, in the case of assisted schools, the cost of assistance. The legislation is once again a reinforcement of middle class advantage, for it is children from these homes, or children whose attainments are already high, who will be more likely to be admitted at appeals stage to grammar schools, fee paying schools, and favoured comprehensives (including those in neighbouring authorities to which such families can more easily afford to have their children travel) than pupils from working class backgrounds.

Any local authority which retains grammar schools or believes in selection will find it easy to cater to this minority's advantage and to build up selection and private-school place buying, all of which will be to the ultimate disadvantage of comprehensive schools affected by it. But it can also do something new: it can make existing comprehensives selective too. They might be designated as schools in languages or sciences (a move the government can be expected to underwrite in due course); or they could be comprehensives with sixth forms which admit pupils from schools without sixth forms when such pupils have an 'aptitude' for A level work. They might merely be those comprehensives which are oversubscribed. The new legislation makes it possible for all such schools to become selective schools over time in all their admissions. In other words, local authorities anxious to reintroduce selection have the power to turn comprehensive schools back into selective schools, as Conservatives promised would be permitted in their 1977 document **Better Schools for All**.

## Comprehensive Systems Harder to Run

The other half of the local authorities — those which want to run genuine comprehensive systems — will have an uphill struggle too. They will be forced to accept selection from 'assisted' schools (see below) and in some cases from neighbouring authorities (since the Bill also removes local authority control over boundary movement) where selective schools may be operating. They face the possibility that one or two individual comprehensive schools in their own area will break ranks and start to become selective at appeals stage or even at admissions (as, for example, an aided comprehensive could easily do). But most important of all, all local authorities will now be forced to operate admissions systems which recognise only one factor in law: parental preference.

Most local authorities wish to recognise this factor, since most already do, but most know that no fair admissions policy is possible in any comprehensive system if this is the *only* factor the law recognises. At its simplest level, what is to be done when more parents choose a school than it has places? The new legislation gives no guidance, a dereliction of duty which clearly signifies the government's disregard for the success of a comprehensive admissions policy. Anyone with a commitment to, or knowledge of, comprehensive systems knows that some other factor has to be brought in to decide in these cases. After siblings and medical reasons, the main factor taken into account by local authorities as fair — because it is the only one generally accepted as fair by parents — is that parents living nearest a school should have a right of entry over parents living further away. This is the basis of admissions to comprehensive systems the world over, prized by them as the means whereby area schools can build up community support and service. Yet the new legislation does not recognise the right of a neighbourhood to be served by a school. The law makes no mention of 'nearness' and it takes no account of the rights of parents living near a school over those of parents living further away.

Bill No 2 also fails to recognise that other major requirement of a fair comprehensive admissions system: continuity between primary and secondary sectors, or between the lower and upper tiers of school systems. It means schemes designed to link schools or for lower schools to feed upper ones, have no legal standing. They can always be overridden by the preference factor which a local authority has a legal duty to impose. Quite simply, it will make continuity far harder to maintain — just as it will make it harder to have community based schools.

Most paradoxical of all, the parental preference requirement will not mean all parents get their choice of school. If anything, it will mean fewer will get it than in systems where authorities can balance preference with neighbourhood and continuity. This is because where systems are run with reference to parental preference alone, polarisation can develop rapidly. Manchester has collected and published figures which show how this can happen,<sup>17</sup> but most authorities do not wait for statistics to prove it before taking action. They know that reliance upon parental preference alone means that knowledgeable and discerning parents flock to one set of schools, while children of less knowledgeable and less demanding parents fill up the others. The more choice is emphasised, the less there is. Because a situation is created where more and more parents choose

the same few schools, which build up, while others, in varying degrees and in increasing numbers, gradually spiral downwards. Thus every year in pure choice systems more and more parents are refused their preference, and more and more children end up in schools their parents do not favour, having less than is their due.

This legislation will make it far harder for local authorities to maintain that balance between preference, neighbourhood and continuity which is the essence of a successful admissions system for comprehensive education, for it is legislation designed to stimulate imbalance, not to keep the needs of all schools and all pupils in equal consideration. It is designed deliberately to enhance the advantage of a minority of parents and a minority of schools. It forces authorities, whether they wish to or not, to run secondary education systems which pit parent against parent and school against school in a consumerist free-for-all. New laws require schools to be packaged as if they were 'products' on a shelf, and advertisement angled. The law requires authorities to advertise their 'arrangements' for pupils to go to private schools, for example, and to publish information about all schools — not to enlighten parents (for most authorities already publish all kinds of general information) but rather to give the Secretary of State new powers to direct schools in the matter of specific information they must make available and the way they are to do so (e.g. academic results) in order deliberately to favour selective schools over others in apparently 'equal' competition.

Authorities will have to struggle hard to run secondary systems where each school and each child is valued equally against such an imperative to sacrifice both schools and children on the altar of the competitive 'shake out' designed deliberately to make some pupils and some schools redundant while others flourish. However, it is also not unlikely that over time legislation which encourages dog eat dog to any great degree would produce its own reaction, as it has in other countries where the over operation of market forces has resulted in over closure of schools or in the exclusion of parents from the schools of their own areas. The result could well be that strong neighbourhood school campaigns develop.

It is not unlikely either that legislation which gives so many new powers and privileges to aided comprehensive schools (already favoured under present laws) and sets them up as virtually independent schools financed by local authorities (in addition to giving authorities powers to let voluntary bodies take over county schools), or which allows new voluntary schools to be funded by public money, will bring about the clash over the misuse of aided status for social, academic and racial selection which has slowly been coming to a head.<sup>18</sup>

## 'Assisted' Private Education

It is certain that the legislation in Bill No 2 designed to assist fee-paying schools to cream comprehensive schools will result in reaction against fee-paying schools (one reason why the major public schools oppose this scheme).<sup>19</sup> If nothing else, the 'assistance' scheme puts the private sector as a whole, and public schools in particular, back on the national education agenda. There is no way in which they will ever get off it now. Independent schools have become 'dependent' schools as economic crisis and inflation have undermined their material standards. Their academic standards, it is said, have also suffered because so many of

them have not been able to cream high attaining pupils from the new comprehensive schools. Thus private education now looks for ever greater support from national legislation and public funds, just as private industry has had to do. Public attention has gone to such forms of public support as come from the classification of many fee paying schools as 'charities', but the charity subsidy is small in comparison to public subsidies for fees and tuition paid to thousands of pupils in hundreds of private schools. As the Campaign for Comprehensive Education has made clear,<sup>20</sup> the total public subsidy in 1977 was already running at over £130 millions a year. This was made up of central government subsidies of £36 million which subsidise boarding arrangements which have not been re-examined in decades, plus £40 million from local authorities to pay for places in local private schools with which they have been building up 'standing arrangements'. All such existing arrangements are protected by the new legislation which at the same time introduces a further such arrangement in the form of 'assisted' places. Assisted places will involve an additional £60 to £70 million a year for some 100,000 places which could involve between 200 and 500 private schools. The percentage they would cream from state education would be about 3% when the scheme was fully developed. This 3%, however would be all from the top attainment levels and would come in the main before 16-plus. By the time the percentage was calculated at sixth form level, it would amount to nearly a quarter of today's two A-level students in state education, who would then shift to private education, where, of course, about a quarter of the total A-level candidates already are. Sixth form education in many comprehensive schools in areas where 'assisted' schools cluster, would slowly contract; in some it would die.

## The Political Motive

It is important to make clear that assisted places is not a new form of subsidy any more than creaming is a new threat. Both have been taking place for many years and both are part of the new 11-plus. They represent just one more way by which selection has been kept going by the new opting out process, one more shift of resources away from comprehensive education and into selective and fee-paying education. The shift represented by 'assistance' however, has a particular political dimension, for at the same time as there has been movement into private education by some local authorities, there has also been movement out of it by others. That half of local authorities committed to the majority's educational standards in comprehensive systems have gradually been ending their old 'standing arrangements' with private education. They have chosen not to spend millions on fee-paying education which could be going to support and equip state schools. They have chosen not to undermine their comprehensives' academic work by creaming their pupil intakes. A government determined to implement selection in these authorities cannot do it quickly other than by over-riding local authorities' prerogatives and acting by central government fiat to pay individual fee-paying schools to accept pupils over the heads of these local authorities. That is the reason for 'assisted' places. It reimposes the old 'standing arrangements' over the heads, and against the wishes, of that half of local authorities which have chosen to run genuine comprehensive systems.

Assisted places legislation is also no different in intent,

therefore, from the attempts by the big powers like Greater Manchester and Greater London to impose selection (on the rates) over the heads of smaller powers like the Manchester Education Committee and the Inner London Education Authority. The Manchester case went to the High Court, but now there is less urgency in the matter where there is a government willing to give them permission to use the big stick, and willing to use it itself in the form of 'assistance'. Even while doing so, the Secretary of State proclaims: 'It is our belief that local authorities — not central government — are best placed to determine the most suitable form of secondary school organisation for their area'.<sup>21</sup>

## No Comprehensives Possible

Inexorably, the government is going to be caught in its own trap. For in order to get selection accepted again it is having to pretend that those not selected will nevertheless be able to enjoy a comprehensive education in the non-selective sector. But a genuine comprehensive education is what selection already prevents many comprehensives from providing, and, as the new 11-plus takes hold, it will kill this opportunity in more and more such schools. Already the Minister of State has had to give way on his famous statement that if you have grammar schools next to comprehensives, the comprehensives can't be anything but misnamed secondary moderns.<sup>22</sup> On July 16 he trimmed to say 'we cannot have 20% selection for grammar schools and believe the other 80% will be comprehensives' but we can have creaming of less than 20%. How much less? By odd coincidence the percentage the Minister said is acceptable is about the percentage of the maintained sector now served by maintained grammar schools — 5%. Unluckily for him, he went on to say that in his opinion a figure higher than 5% would have 'injurious effects upon other schools . . . more than 5% and the others cannot be comprehensive schools'.<sup>23</sup> Unluckily because, of course, nationally, comprehensives are already creamed far in excess of 5% and it is likely to go to 20% before this government is out. We find this hard to believe because we are not yet accustomed to looking at the totality of secondary education when we calculate creaming. We accept the view that 83% of all our children are in comprehensive education, when this is true only of the maintained sector, not *all* our children. When we look at 'all our children', the latest *Statistics* show that only 72% are in comprehensive schools (see Table). This is a far cry from the popular DES mythology to which all recent governments have subscribed: that the 'country' is now so nearly comprehensive that it doesn't matter, the issue is closed. The issue cannot be closed when less than three quarters of all secondary age pupils in schools are in comprehensives (and that is before we start discounting the bogus comprehensives and all those which are creamed by selective or fee-paying schools. In fact, the 'genuine' uncreamed comprehensive population is probably only about 50% of the country).

There is no possibility of a national comprehensive system when comprehensives are creamed by 15%, the percentage now in fee-paying and selective schooling, and when laws are being enacted to increase it. Assisted places will raise the figure, as will local reversals of comprehensive education, or extensions of grammar education. The operation of the market mechanism on comprehensive admissions, if it polarizes schools to such a degree that some comprehensives

become selective, or specialist, will do so further still. By 1984 it is very likely that the 20% situation wherein no genuine comprehensives are possible will be with us, if not long passed.

## Policy on Exams and Curriculum

Government policy inside schools is no less cheerless, even if less of a preoccupation of the government at present. Unstreaming is discouraged and denigrated while streaming by subject is touted as some kind of panacea.<sup>24</sup> On examinations, a slovenly tripartitism pervades such pronouncements as have been made – just as it dominated the 1977 policy document *Better Schools for All*. This document stated that there were three types of children – bright, average and the ‘bottom’ – and each needed its own examination. Conveniently, said the pamphlet, the GCE examination is there for the able, the CSE for the ‘less able’, and for the ‘bottom’, nothing at all except the possibility of a leaving examination. This, it was implied, could double as a kind of sliding 11-plus, a basic school certificate to be given to everyone and taken at any age from 8 to 16. The ‘bright’ would pass it early, the rest along the way (ensuring many failing year after year). At 15 the ‘bottom’ could use it as ‘their’ leaving exam. If they finally passed, they could leave early, thus hustling out of full time education the very pupils who might be said to need it most. This tripartite policy has already been acted upon – even if only indirectly – by the cancellation of planned reforms in examinations at 16-plus and 18-plus. The result of the scrapping of popular demand for a common assessment system will be that intense aggravation builds up around the 13-plus selection process inside schools between GCE and CSE, an agony as unnecessary and damaging to teachers and pupils as was the old 11-plus between schools, and one which will just as inevitably be rejected by popular pressure.

Things are little better on the curriculum front either. *Better Schools for All* also envisaged three types of curriculum for these three types of children, apparently ignorant of the fact that in well-established comprehensive systems there is only one type of curriculum – a full comprehensive curriculum – and all children have access to it from 11 to 13,<sup>25</sup> while for years 13-16, most comprehensive schools now have their own ‘core’ which they are busy extending and adapting.

The government’s thinking here is no further forward than the age of the ‘great debate’ and they now plan a ‘common core’ to be set down for all schools. Ministers trailing the notion in Parliament say they hope they will get a consensus for it, but it is not a question of a consensus. A common core is not a proposal that invites approval or disapproval (except where it would be accompanied by dictation of curriculum or teaching methods). You don’t ask for a consensus when you see *Oliver Twist*’s diet of ‘thin gruel’ – you ask for more.

A common core, as the government has said, is merely ‘a basic minimum’.<sup>26</sup> It doesn’t include a choice of languages, it doesn’t include ‘advanced’ or separate sciences (the two areas already omitted by ministers) and it won’t include access to a wide range of educational opportunities or subjects which a genuine comprehensive education should make the right of every pupil and which only such an education can provide. It is a proposal which will be

forced on schools as a *substitute* for genuine comprehensive education for all pupils in all schools, an attempt to get away with very much less than is essential – less educationally, less financially, less in terms of choice, and less in terms of opportunity for the majority.

## The Turning Point

This summary of government policy may seem bleak and dispiriting for comprehensive education, but it shouldn’t be. The sense of outrage which has greeted proposals to fund private education at a time when already deprived schools and pupils are suffering increasing deprivations and reduction of standards with government cuts – will ensure that the assisted scheme, and all other subsidies to prop up private education will not only be properly monitored at last but eventually monitored out of existence.

Elsewhere the proper response to government policy is to insist on what we have insisted on all along – a genuine comprehensive education for every child as of right. Every refusal of a parent’s choice, particularly at their own local school – selective or non-selective – will remind parents that they should have a clear right to enter such a school; every refusal to a parent for his child to be assessed on a common system which counts, every failure to provide a comprehensive range of subjects and educational programmes at every age, or access to a sixth year of education, will demonstrate to parents and teachers that comprehensive education is being denied.

We must set down in concrete form the essentials of such an education around which a popular campaign can begin. We must go on working out the teaching and learning methods which best serve such an education and the reforms in the curriculum, pupil grouping and assessment practices which are required to realise it.

In the end it is going to be the failure of this government to provide genuine comprehensive education for every child which will destroy its policy more than the rejection it will suffer for rigging the system to cater to every sort of privilege. As comprehensive education gets promised to more and more parents and children – and those promises have to be repeatedly and increasingly denied – the arguments for comprehensive education, and the demand for it, if they have not been appreciated and understood before, cannot fail to be now.

Table 1  
Secondary Education from 11 to 18 in England and Wales  
Percentage of Pupils in All Schools\*

Grammar Schools (maintained)	6.0	} Selective Schools	15%
Grammar Schools (direct grant)	2.5		
Independent Schools	6.0		
Technical Schools	0.5		
Other Secondary Schools	1.0	} Non-selective schools	84%
Comprehensive Schools	72.0		
Secondary Modern Schools	12.0		
	100.0%	Other	1%
			100%

\*DES Statistics, Vol 1, 1977, Tables 1(1) and 5(5). Comprehensive Schools’ population includes half the pupils in middle schools deemed secondary.

## Footnotes

- 1 House of Commons, June 19, 1979.
- 2 See Kogan, M., *The Politics of Education*, 1971, p 50.
- 3 David Thompson, June 19, 1979.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Harry Greenway, 16 July, 1979.
- 6 See *Politics Today*, 1977, and *Contact Brief*, November, 1974, Conservative Party Publications.
- 7 See 'Attack on the Left in Education, Case Studies of The Threat to Academic Freedom', *Socialism and Education*, Labour Party Education Association Journal, Issue No 3, 1978, and Issue No 5, 1979.
- 8 Information given during debate, House of Commons, July 12, 1979.
- 9 Rhodes Boyson, July 16, 1979, House of Commons.
- 10 Given first in a written Parliamentary answer, June 25, 1979.
- 11 See, for example, the speech of the Under Secretary of State, July 16, 1979.
- 12 Nicholas Winterton, June 19, House of Commons.
- 13 As in Erith, where the local press recorded the largest demonstration (summer, 1979) ever seen in the town. It was held to protest plans to end the local comprehensive school's life.
- 14 As in Cumbria, where the Education Committee was forced to accept the reference back of its plans to reintroduce 11-plus selection in all schools (summer, 1979).
- 15 See the research of G.E. Whalley, *DES Trends*, Issue 18, 1970; see also *Half Way There*, Benn and Simon, 1972, Chapter 7; and *Coexistence and Comprehensives*, NUT, 1973, *passim*.
- 16 See Census Reports 1961 (Tables 12 and 13), 1971; and the Report of the Public Schools Commission, 1970, Vol 1, p 51.
- 17 Dudley Fiske, 'Secondary Reorganisation in an Area', *Comprehensive Education*, Report of Conference, December, 1977, DES.
- 18 See *Teaching London Kids*, November, 1979; also *Comprehensive Education*, issues no 39 and 40, 1979; and the literature of Ealing Schools Defence Campaign, 27 Milton Road, London W7. This campaign has been formed to oppose Ealing Council's plan to sell off a well-established, multi-racial comprehensive to the Church of England to reopen as an aided, selective school.
- 19 See speech of John Rea, CASE Conference, April, 1979.
- 20 Subsidy Broadsheet, 1978, Campaign for Comprehensive Education, 17 Granard Avenue, London SW15.
- 21 Secretary of State, June 19, 1979, House of Commons.
- 22 Rhodes Boyson, *Black Paper Two*, 1971.
- 23 July 16, House of Commons, 1979.
- 24 See, for example, *Better Schools for All*, 1977.
- 25 See, for example, *Secondary Schools in Wales: Years I, II and III*, Welsh Office, HMSO, 1979.
- 26 12 July, 1979.

# 16-19 Chaos or Planning?

## Mick Farley

Before becoming NATFHE's Assistant Secretary (FE) Mick Farley taught in a variety of schools and in further education. He also spent some time as a member of the National Executive Committee of both NATFHE and the NUT.

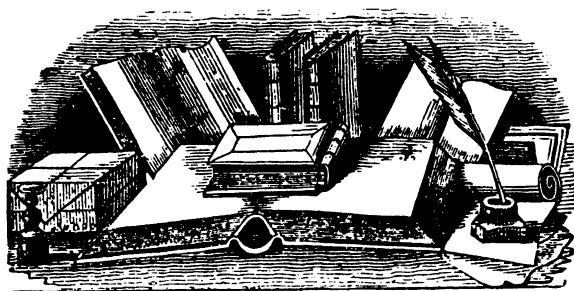
Most young people in Britain in the 16-19 year age group receive no education or training at all. Provision for this group in the UK falls seriously behind that found in other European industrialised nations. Worse, education and training beyond 16+ still largely increase inequality in Britain rather than reducing it. Demographic changes and the advent of youth unemployment now provide this country with a unique chance to move towards a level of provision at least equal to that found in the rest of Europe. Additionally, the activities of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), through its Special Programmes Division (SPD) and the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP), provide a remarkable opportunity to develop a comprehensive, suitably funded, co-ordinated and integrated programme of education, training and employment for all young people.

Such an overall strategy requires four major changes:

- 1 The allocation of increased national resources to vocational preparation in all its various forms, implying, at least, the implementation of the proposals advanced in 'A Better Start in Working Life'.<sup>1</sup>
- 2 The establishment of a common institutional framework to meet the needs of all young people, implying a move towards a comprehensive tertiary system of post-16 education and training.
- 3 The elimination of different financial incentives, implying the introduction of mandatory educational maintenance allowances (emas).
- 4 The elimination of divisions between education and training, implying the development of a unified system resting in a new single national Government agency having suitable regional and local sub-structures which could bring together all the existing agencies and interests involved.

These four changes, together with imaginative curricular development and examination reform, could provide a structure in which progress through different stages would be possible.

It is against this background of much-needed change that the present situation must be judged. Whilst the MSC has shown considerable initiative and speed in setting up the YOP, the inability of Government to ensure through the education service that monies allocated for specific purposes are used for those purposes has resulted in the Department of Education and Science (DES) remaining impotent to initiate major immediate change. Instead, and rather late in the day, the DES has had to content itself with issuing





consultative documents in conjunction with other Departments of State.

## The Consultative Papers

1979 will thus go down in educational history as the year of discussion on the education and training of 16-19 year olds. Not only did the Labour Government issue three Consultative Documents, "16-18", "A Better Start in Working Life" and "Providing educational opportunities for 16-18 year olds", but consideration was given to various examination reforms as well. In addition a variety of organisations and agencies, such as NATFHE,<sup>2</sup> the NUT,<sup>3</sup> the FEU,<sup>4</sup> and the NFER,<sup>5</sup> issued documents on the subject or advanced curricula models which could meet the needs of various groups within the age range. The Labour Government, prior to its General Election defeat had even introduced legislation which would have enabled at least a pilot scheme for mandatory grants to those in the age group staying on full-time at either school or college.

Although the proposed pilot scheme for such grants was an immediate casualty of the general election, the in-coming Conservative Government quickly decided to continue the consultative processes begun by its predecessor in the two documents "A Better Start in Working Life" and "Providing Educational Opportunities for 16-18 year olds". (The consultative period on the first of the three documents, "16-18", ended in March 1979.) However, the emphasis of the debate changed noticeably with the change of Government. Prior to May, the discussion had been free-ranging within the context of Labour's aim of providing a universal scheme of education and training opportunities for the whole age group. The advent of a Conservative Government hell-bent on cuts in public expenditure, refusing to continue with even modest examination reforms, threatening the FEU and withdrawing the pilot emas scheme, inevitably meant that discussion continued in a somewhat more sombre climate. Indeed the Conservative Party manifesto said, 'We shall review the relationship between school, further education, and training to see how better use can be made of existing resources.'

Education cuts, likely to be far in excess of the 'official' figures promulgated by the Government, will reduce even existing resources so that the possibility of developing a comprehensive system of education and training for everyone in the age group with a level of funding and student support which would enable all to participate fully and equally seems now to have receded. The Government's intention to put 'more money into the non-advanced 16 to 18 field', as the Secretary of State told the Trades Union Congress in September, and later in October the AGM of the National Youth Bureau (NYB), is difficult to reconcile with cuts in the Rate Support Grant (RSG) settlement generally. And indeed, Mr Carlisle was forced to admit at the NYB AGM that the amount going in to RSG for this age group would still fall short of that planned in the previous Government's last Public Expenditure White Paper and that he was totally impotent when it came to ensuring that local education authorities actually spent monies allocated within the national RSG settlement for a specific purpose on that purpose. Incidentally, the TUC delegation was told that the five per cent cut asked of local authorities in the next financial year is a minimum cut. The TUC predicts cuts of up to 15 per cent in some metropolitan areas. Whilst the general election has not caused consul-

tations to stop, the Government's 'determination to do something' about the education and training of the age group has certainly caused them to take on a different hue.

## 'A Better Start in Working Life'

Moreover, even 'A Better Start in Working Life' fell short of the objective of establishing a universal system of education, training and employment for the age group as a whole. Thus, whilst it argues soundly for vocational preparation, the organisational form proposed therein has serious defects. The Industrial Training Boards were not set up to undertake general and vocational education of the sort proposed: worse, reliance on them would seriously disadvantage those young people employed by firms outside the ITB system altogether. In this respect, it might be that a more appropriate organisational framework could be developed using the Special Programmes Division of the MSC as a base. Certainly, a method different to that proposed will have to be found in the long-term for adequately and directly funding a universal scheme. Moreover, if there is serious intent to press ahead with improving opportunities for this group of young people, who have been scandalously neglected for so long, adequate attention will have to be given to the major resource implications for such matters as staff and curriculum development.

'A Better Start in Working Life' recommends that within 3 years of the start of the programme there should be proper provision for about one-third of the young people in employment below craft level with the extension of this provision for all such young people by the end of the 1980s. The Consultative Paper suggested a voluntary approach but did leave legislation as an option if targets were not otherwise achieved. Whilst, as already indicated, the proposals in 'A Better Start in Working Life' fall short of setting up a universal system of education, training and employment for all in the age group, They would, if implemented, nevertheless represent a step in the right direction.

Yet already the present Government has made it absolutely clear that it will not even consider the possibility of legislative back-up in respect of the Paper's proposals, whatever is said during the consultative process. It is difficult to see how a Government which has already refused to introduce emas, which has cut the YOP budget and which has cut building programmes can, within such a context, devise a comprehensive plan to extend opportunities for this age group.

## The Macfarlane Committee

At the same time as continuing consultations on the two Papers, the Government has established a joint working party between the DES and the Welsh Office and the local authority associations to carry out a review of the educational provision made by local authorities. The group under the Chairmanship of Mr Neil Macfarlane, a DES Minister, is 'in no way intended as a formal enquiry into the whole range of provision for the 16-19 age group' but as a means of providing 'the education departments and the local authorities (an opportunity) to consider, within the wider context of the education, training and employment of young people, those aspects of educational provision for 16-19 year olds for which they are jointly responsible.'<sup>6</sup>

Now, although this will, presumably, involve looking at developments in employment and training insofar as these have implications for the education service, the Department of Employment and the MSC are not represented on the main Macfarlane Committee but will only be involved in a supporting officer group. Moreover, professional organisations, employers and trade union representatives have been totally excluded from the work of the Committee despite the fact that within its general remit is an examination of the relationship between schools and further education.

In any case, the establishment of the Macfarlane Committee with its rather narrow remit could delay decisions as well as covering some of the same ground as that already covered under the previous Government.

## Examination and Curriculum reform

But it is not only because of the Government's expenditure cuts that the climate of debate has changed. The retreat from 'A' level reform and the refusal to proceed with the proposals for a single examining system at 16+ contained in the White Paper 'Secondary School Examinations: A Single System at 16 plus' are other indications of the Government's general approach. That it could consider cuts to the Department's own budget which would lead to the closure of the FEU and the end of the Unified Vocational Preparation (UVP) schemes is a further indication, if one were needed, that it is going to be no easy task even maintaining the progress made over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the Government reacts to the report of the Keohane Committee on the proposed Certificate of Extended Education. The precedents, are not encouraging.

However, in the long-term, no Government seriously concerned to advance the interests of both the 16-19 age group itself and the country, can avoid substantial examination and curriculum reform at 16+, 17+, and 18+. If the present Government uses the situation it has now created as an opportunity to review the 16 to 19 curriculum in a far broader context, some good may yet come.

## Comprehensive Provision Post-16

Against such a chastening background, a few chinks do appear. The Government's commitment 'to do something' for the age group provides an opportunity, at least, to put forward positive suggestions, and its intention to 'put more money into the non-advanced 16 to 18 field' is, whatever the realities, to be welcomed. The continuing consultations also provide an opportunity to impress on the Government the desirability of moving towards the development of a unified system of education and training for the age group as a whole.

It is now more widely accepted, too, that moves towards a genuinely comprehensive form of educational provision, not only for the 16-19 age group but also for the continuing needs of adults, involves the development of a tertiary system of post-16 education. This view received a tremendous fillip last year with the publication of a major research Report by the NFER.<sup>7</sup> The Report sweeps away the educational objections to a break at 16+ and disposes of the arguments against a tertiary solution. The Report

should make a considerable impact on any Government intent on forging closer links between the vocational and the academic.

The tertiary concept received a further boost last year when NATFHE's Annual Conference adopted as its policy the development of a tertiary system, and took the view that such a system 'provides the only truly co-ordinated and comprehensive solution' to the education of the post-16 age group outside higher education. Even the NUT, previously a strong supporter of the 11-18 school, now, albeit reluctantly, seems prepared to accept that at least in some areas a tertiary solution might be appropriate. Thus, its most recent discussion document says the union 'also recognises the merits of sixth-form or tertiary colleges'. This cost-conscious Government might just be persuaded to head the main recommendations in the NFER Report, and so make at least some progress on this front.

Whatever is done at national level, it is already clear that at a local level greater co-operation and co-ordination will be forced by a combination of circumstances such as falling numbers (and, therefore, space) in schools and increased numbers (and, therefore, pressure on space) in colleges.

## 'A Basis for Choice'

One other publication, the FEU's 'A Basis for Choice', provides hope of progress in a slightly different area. This FEU publication, a Report of a Study Group on Post-16 Pre-Employment Courses, is an important one. It puts forward proposals for a course structure which would help to reduce the confusion now existing in the provision of one year pre-employment courses for students aged 16+. As a result the proposals could provide a means of increasing the chance of recognition of such courses by employers and others. On reaching 16, some young people have neither academic nor specific vocational commitment. Many do, however, desire to continue in broad-based education with a vocational bias. It is for this group that the FEU's proposals are especially important, and an interested and positive response from the Government would do much to improve the position of these young people.

## Progress?

If the Government can be persuaded through the consultations on 'Providing educational opportunities for 16-18 year olds' to move towards the implementation of the NFER recommendations; if it can be argued into following the proposals in 'A Better Start in Working Life'; and if it is prepared to put its weight behind the FEU Report, then some progress could yet be made in this area.

### References

- 1 A Consultative Paper issued jointly by the Secretaries of State for Employment, for Education and Science, for Industry, for Scotland and Wales. DES, April, 1979.
- 2 'Education and Training for the 16-19s - a discussion paper'. National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), 1979.
- 3 An NUT Discussion Document - National Union of Teachers (NUT), 1979.
- 4 'A Basis for Choice' - Further Education Curriculum Review and Development Unit (FEU), DES, 1979.
- 5 'The Sixth-form and its Alternatives' - National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), 1979.
- 6 Letter to NATFHE from Rhodes Boyson, MP.
- 7 *Op cit.*, 5.



# Talking in School

---

## Maureen Hardy

An ex-College of Education Lecturer who has returned to the classroom, Maureen Hardy is now in charge of Language Development at a new multi-cultural school, Sandfield Close Primary, in Leicester.

---

In a recent *Forum* article (Vol 21, No 2), Professor James Britton remarked that teaching by seminar is 'sometimes ridiculed by its opponents as a pooling of ignorance'. However he pointed out that '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 with an expert, the teacher'. From personal experience the writer would suggest that teacher led small group discussions can offer children these dual advantages. For thus the 'ignorance' of the children is vividly exposed in circumstances in which the teacher can react personally and instantly. Naturally, such reaction should be positive and designed to encourage the child's willingness to participate. Although difficult administratively, small group situations, when control problems are at a minimum, enable teachers to be sufficiently relaxed to react to the children in an individual and sensitive manner. Also, it is easier for the teacher to usefully display his own 'ignorance'; occasions when he admits that he does not know, but suggests how and where the required knowledge might be located. The small group discussion presents a valuable opportunity for the 'pooling of ignorance' to be turned to good account.

The writer is fortunate enough to work for a Headteacher who respects the value of such discussions and, as far as he is able, allows scope for the approach. Working in this way, I have become aware of many confused concepts which clutter the minds of children and hamper the development of clear thinking. The following examples arose in discussions with seven-year-olds: 'Why are there two seashores – one here (pointing to a picture) and one at the seaside?' . . . 'Its a Roman statue what the Vikings brought'. . . 'Water disintegrates into ice'. Perhaps not too serious at seven, but the problem rarely stops there. Discussions help teachers to detect precisely which underlying confusions are likely to muddle the reception of further information. James Britton remarks that 'When you tell 30 children something, only some of them will have been told'. Also, some will have increased either the blind confusions in their minds or their growing store of misunderstood facts. Accordingly, many children grow to expect teachers' comments not to make sense. Their comments may be passively accepted, actively rejected, but rarely rationally considered, a circumstance which leads to students learning for the current examination rather than endeavouring to see real relevance in the knowledge proffered by their tutors. Possibly a greater use of small group discussions in school might establish more positive attitudes towards future learning as well as being an aid to learning at each stage of a child's development.

To learn by the traditional means of listening, one must first acquire the relevant skill. Yet it is commonly acknowledged that our noisy environment does not encourage its growth. Even adults rarely listen attentively to each other – stating one's own views seems more important than listening to others. Mangled lecture notes are another sign of poor listening. I would suggest that supervised group discussions tend to encourage the development of listening skills. Children seem to listen to each other more readily than they do to a near monologue by a teacher; providing the conversation is kept brisk, lively and to the point; also, providing the teacher is able to supply information to fill the gaps in the children's knowledge and gently correct their misconceptions. Such talk prepares the children's minds to receive new information and the form of its delivery can be instantly adapted to fit their current flow of thought. Group discussion thus creates a situation conducive to learning. As the Bullock report (4.9) indicates and Britton emphasises, 'The development of the individual context for a new piece of information, the forging of links that give it meaning, is a task we customarily tackle by talking to other people'. The following example demonstrates the process in action:

- T. (Teacher) 'There are many mountains in Switzerland'.  
D . . . , what do you find on the top of mountains?'  
D. 'People camping.'  
T. 'Right on top? – Would you camp right on the top of a mountain?'  
J. 'I know, rocks . . . rocks.'  
T. 'Yes, rocks and what else? What do you find on the very top of mountains?'  
Chorus 'Flags, flags.'  
T. 'When people are the first to reach the top, then they put a flag there . . . but what is naturally there?'  
S. 'Streams.'  
T. 'Well streams do run down the mountain sides S . . . , but where does the water come from to make the streams?'  
D. 'From the sea.'  
J. 'Grass, Miss.'  
T. 'No, where does the water come from? . . . think . . .'  
K. 'From rain.'  
T. 'Yes, now when the rain is very high up, it is very cold; what happens to very cold water?'  
D. 'It disintegrates into ice.'  
J. 'I know all about it.'  
T. 'Just a moment J . . . ; good D . . . , but let us think for a minute. Very cold water freezes. Disintegrate is a good word, but do you know what it means?'

- D. 'It splits up.'
- T. 'Does water split up to become ice, D . . . ?'
- D. 'No, it freezes into ice.'
- T. 'Yes, the drops of water all stick together to become solid pieces of ice and snow and then afterwards the ice distintegrates or melts back into water — D . . . , what makes ice and snow melt, can you tell me?'
- D. 'The sun on it.'
- T. 'Yes, the warmth of the sun makes the ice and snow melt. Now J . . . , what did you want to say?'

Clear thinking and problem solving can be fostered by such discussions. Also, the foundations of study skills can be laid when children are encouraged to formulate their own questions as an aid to enquiry work. Sadly, today, many children have to be deliberately stimulated to ask questions, the desire seems to have been stifled in infancy. In my experience, the type of questions children tend to produce initially are too broad to be of immediate use as an aid to study. For example, 'How was the sea made?', posed by a group of seven year olds, left the teacher at a loss to know how to attempt an explanation. The best suggestion the children produced was ingenious, but inaccurate — 'I know, when there were no drains in the town the water just got higher and higher'. However, the question was used as a pivot for discussing how and where answers to difficult questions might be found. 'How did the sand get made?' gave an opportunity for the teacher to lead the group through a series of smaller questions which gradually built up a picture of its development by the process of erosion. The aim was to present a method of problem solving in addition to the facts. 'How are starfishes made?' provided an opportunity to present models of simpler questions to which answers could be found from resources available to young children. The teacher's reply was 'I do not know. We can try and find out, but wouldn't it be more interesting to ask — What does a starfish do? — How does he live? — How does he move? — What does he eat?'

Sometimes the teacher asks specified questions and then guides the children through the process of finding possible answers by means of observation, reading or reasoning. Such methods are utilized in traditional class discussions, but then it is difficult for most teachers to ensure the participation of most of the class for most of the time. Inevitably, some discover personal distractions, whilst others are too shy to contribute. Small group discussions can foster useful study skills, such as those required for coping with CSE projects, College assignments and decision making in regard to everyday problems. Working with students in Colleges of Education, the writer discovered that many had to be taught such skills before they could successfully attempt their own dissertations or set about organising their school practice. Possibly a greater use of discussion sessions at an early age could promote the growth of useful attitudes towards learning and problem solving.

To be able to learn by the traditional means of reading, one has to learn thoroughly to comprehend what one is reading — many levels of comprehension have to be explored and many specialist vocabularies have to be acquired. Equally one has to learn where to find relevant books and how to use books effectively and further, how to organise one's findings into a coherent whole. Sadly, many adult students have to be taught such skills. Small group sessions can help in this direction. Indeed, many of the activities recommended for developing advanced reading skills imply the situation, e.g. such approaches as 'Group prediction',

'Group deletion' and 'Group oral SQ3R techniques' as described by Christopher Walker in his book **Reading Development and Extension** (Ward Lock, 1974). Working with groups of 'good readers', I have discovered how much their efficiency in studying and enjoyment of books can be increased. Their own questions form a sound basis for studying each section and they enjoy playing detectives to discover answers not obviously stated. 'We've read it and it's no good Miss' has been changed into 'much more interesting than we thought'.

Also small group sessions help children to gain social competence and confidence. They provide the opportunity for children to learn how to express themselves clearly and acquire the techniques of discussion. Many adult students lack the confidence to speak in discussions and some who try lack sufficient clarity to make either a valuable contribution or express their own learning difficulties. The chance to become articulate should be offered to all children. I have watched the facility develop at different levels with children who have been involved in small group discussions. One example illustrates the point. A clever, but shy, immigrant girl sat in on discussions for a term before she was persuaded to participate. Soon she became a useful contributor, as well as revealing gaps in her knowledge and experience. Accordingly, both the girl and the group benefitted from her new found confidence. It is doubtful if she would have gained this facility as quickly if only full class discussions had been available.

Naturally, too, group discussions are valuable to children whose first language is not the native tongue or whose grasp of the language is restricted. For the teacher is continually sustaining the children's efforts by repeating their comments and questions in a clearer form, thus incidentally and informally presenting models of clearer structures and alternative vocabulary. Also, the children are continually invited to enlarge upon and clarify their own comments, express their own observations and experiences. Again, the teacher becomes aware of particular gaps in their knowledge. I discovered a group of older juniors who did not know the meaning of 'asked' and 'answered' and another who were confused by words relating to position — 'above', 'below' and 'in between'. Difficulties with tenses are often frequent problems.

Administratively, group discussion sessions are difficult to arrange. A specialist language teacher may be sufficiently relieved from class duties to cope with this work, or a floating member of staff may be willing to relieve class teachers to undertake it themselves. A flexible team approach helps. Wherever it can be arranged, benefits can and should result. A further problem is one of accountability and evaluation, because talking time does not produce pages of neat copy for scrutiny by parents, Advisers and Inspectors. Evaluation is important, but a valuable approach to learning and teaching should not be overlooked because it is not easy to assess in itself. Assessment should become easier as the benefits are reflected in the child's approach to his more observable studies. More effective writing should result from a discussion than from a minimal instruction or a cold work card; better still, when the writing becomes the topic for the next discussion or is discussed as it is produced. Hopefully, talking time will thus become a stimulus for listening, reading and writing. To listen, read and write without real comprehension, as many children do, is to perpetuate ignorance. Supervised talk is necessary if concepts are to be clarified and real learning fostered.

# Hidden Streaming in the Classroom

---

**David Reay**

After ten years continuous teaching in primary schools, David Reay became Research Associate at the University of Newcastle in September 1979.

---

In 1967 the Plowden Report<sup>1</sup> suggested that group teaching in non-streamed primary schools was to be recommended, and that the groups should be formed of children who had reached the same stages in reading and computation. However the report also alluded to a danger implicit in such an approach, namely that clear-cut streaming in a classroom could be more damaging to children, particularly those of low ability, than streaming within a school, based on the assumption that the labelling of groups according to ability would tend to encourage children to conform to the label.

As a teacher of primary school children it has long been my view, and one shared by many of my colleagues, that designating teaching groups with labels that do not imply rank, such as colours or animal names, does not prevent children becoming aware of their own ability and more importantly, according to Plowden, that of their peers. The pace of interaction in a primary school classroom is often so rapid that it becomes reflexive. Under these conditions it would be difficult for a teacher not to communicate to children his or her views and expectations for them. As teachers' views are of great importance to the children in their care I felt it necessary to investigate systematically the belief that the impressions gained by children of their own and their peers' abilities are in close accord with the views held by their teachers.

One study, carried out by Roy Nash and reported in *Classrooms Observed*,<sup>2</sup> found that 'even children as young as eight gave themselves positions which correlated highly with those assigned them by their teachers'. Nash's results were based on a small sample with non-comparable classes. This article constitutes a report of a study carried out using Nash's techniques, into the level of agreement between individual pupils, their peers and teachers over class positions in English, mathematics and creative writing. The sample consisted of 107 third and fourth year junior school children from four non-streamed classes in the same non-streamed primary schools in the North East of England.

The investigation involved the collection of data from teachers about how they perceived the class hierarchy in mathematics, English and creative writing, together with attainment testing in maths and English using standardised and, in some cases, teacher-designed tests.

Teachers were asked to rank the children in their classes according to ability and attainment in the three subjects.

Children's perceptions of the class hierarchy were obtained as follows. Each child was interviewed individually by the writer in a room other than their own classroom and presented with a set of cards, each card having the name of

one child who was in their class. The children were asked to read aloud the names on the first five cards and then to sort the cards into three piles; the first to be made up of those 'a little better than you are at maths' (English or writing stories), the second to be made up of 'those who are about the same as you at maths, etc.', with the third group consisting of 'those who are not as good as you are at maths etc.' Once completed the middle group was arranged in order – best to poorest – with each individual pupil placing themselves into the position of the rank to which they thought they belonged.

This indirect approach of comparison with peers is viewed here as a more valid method of obtaining an accurate picture of the children's perceptions than merely asking 'What position do you hold in maths?'

Each child's position in each subject was obtained by adding the number of cards in the first group to his position in the rank of the second group for each subject investigated. Also recorded were the number of times each child was placed in the 'better than I' group and in the 'poorer than I' group by the others in his class. These discernments were totalled and ranked to give a rating of how their peers viewed each individual in each subject. Only one curriculum area was investigated at a time with an interval of at least a week between testing for each.

For each third year class the results of standardised NFER attainment tests in English and mathematics were obtained. Similar results were available for the fourth year in mathematics only, so therefore it was necessary to utilise the results of teacher-constructed end-of-year tests. Each child was given a rank position for each set of results. No objective test results were available for creative writing because of the obvious difficulties in obtaining these.

Coefficients of correlation (using Spearman's Rank Order formula) were calculated for the following pairs of ranked data:

- 1 Teacher rank/Self rank for each subject.
- 2 Teacher rank/Peer rank for each subject.
- 3 Peer rank/Self rank for each subject.
- 4 a) Teacher rank/NFER rank for maths and English, or  
b) Teacher rank/Teacher-set test. (4th year English only).
- 5 Self rank/NFER test rank (or teacher-test rank).
- 6 Peer rank/NFER test rank (or teacher-test rank).

A complete table of the coefficients of correlation derived from the original data appears in Table 1. All of the coefficients are positive and significant at the 0.01 level. Although high correlations indicate where and at what level a relationship exists they do not necessarily show causes nor is it possible to indicate that the results obtained are

directly due to any single factor. However it is possible to deduce from the overall results that, in the case of this study, the coefficients strongly support the view that there is a high level of agreement between teacher and pupils about the classroom hierarchy.

In particular the correlation coefficients in all classes between teacher, self and peer rankings in mathematics were over 0.75 and as high as 0.93. The average coefficient<sup>3</sup> for the four classes was 0.87. In the case of teacher self and peer rankings against NFER test rankings the coefficients were generally lower with an overall average of 0.70.

Due to the less clear-cut nature of correct and incorrect answers in English it was expected that the coefficients in this area would be lower than those for mathematics. The coefficients obtained for teacher, self and peer rank correlations varied from 0.68 to 0.95 averaging 0.85 and as such were much closer to those for mathematics than expected. The coefficients for the classes which received the teacher-designed test (classes 1 and 2) were higher than those obtained from the NFER test ranks at 0.84 and 0.78 respectively. Considering the nature of the timetable area under consideration the high levels of consensus between teacher-held and pupil-held perceptions of relative abilities were surprising.

Even more unexpected were the results obtained for creative writing, an area notoriously difficult to assess objectively. Coefficients for teacher, self and peer rank correlations varied from 0.64 to 0.88, averaging 0.81.

The investigation reported here was concerned with a very small area within a much wider field of study; that of teacher expectations and pupil performance, an area which includes consideration of such matters as the inter-relationships between teaching styles, self-concept, personality, attainment, formal and informal classroom structures and power positions among others. One of the shortcomings

of any statement of cause based on this research is the plethora of factors which could have affected the results. However it can be said with some confidence that the original hypothesis that there is a high level of consensus between the views held by third and fourth year junior school children, their teachers and their peers, about each child's position in the academic hierarchy of the class has been strongly supported within the sample studied.

The high levels of agreement between teachers and their pupils noted above, is somewhat to be expected in mathematics where what is correct and incorrect is generally, at the primary school level, unequivocal. However even in the 'grey area' of assessment, that of creative writing, levels of agreement about individual's relative abilities have been seen to be of a high order. Thus it seems that within unstreamed primary school classes there is a pervasive non-overt streaming according to ability and that the resultant hierarchy is perceived in essentially the same form by both teachers and children.

It appears therefore that attempts to camouflage ability will be unsuccessful and where the aim is to prevent detrimental effects on a pupil's feelings of self-worth, the attempts could be largely futile. Perhaps it may be more advisable for teachers to openly acknowledge such differences in ability as will invariably occur in non-streamed classes and to treat these differences as merely a reflection of wider society. Furthermore it then becomes important that attainment levels are seen to be fluid, always open to change and constantly encouraged to change and improve. In other words it becomes necessary to behave towards children in ways which attempt to overcome areas of weakness rather than to denigrate a lack of ability in a particular area. This is to teach in the way thoughtful and caring teachers have done and continue so to do.

*Continued on page 49*

**Table 1**  
**Rank Order Correlation Coefficients**  
**(all coefficients positive)**

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Data Correlated</i>	<i>Class 1</i> <i>n = 30</i>	<i>Class 2</i> <i>n = 29</i>	<i>Class 3</i> <i>n = 24</i>	<i>Class 4</i> <i>n = 24</i>
Maths	TR – SR	0.82	0.83	0.85	0.84
	SR – PR	0.75	0.86	0.83	0.83
	TR – PR	0.86	0.92	0.91	0.92
	TR – NFER	0.83	0.77	0.55	0.73
	SR – NFER	0.79	0.62	0.59	0.64
	PR – NFER	0.74	0.65	0.57	0.81
English	TR – SR	0.86	0.70	0.87	0.81
	SR – PR	0.68	0.71	0.89	0.70
	TR – PR	0.95	0.93	0.91	0.91
	TR – TTR or NFER	0.91	0.86	0.78	0.78
	SR – TTR or NFER	0.86	0.51	0.77	0.76
	PR – TTR or NFER	0.91	0.78	0.86	0.75
Creative Writing	TR – SR	0.78	0.64	0.81	0.80
	SR – PR	0.75	0.79	0.84	0.81
	TR – PR	0.86	0.86	0.88	0.87

All coefficients significant at the 0.01 level.

**KEY.**

TR – Teacher ranking.  
SR – Self ranking.  
PR – Peer ranking.

TT – Teacher test rank.  
NFER – NFER test rank

(teacher test data for Classes 1 and 2 in English)

# Towards Self-government

---

## Peter Davies

Now senior house tutor at Belper High School Derbyshire, Peter Davies previously taught at Malvern College and worked in residential education with the ILEA based on the Henry Compton school, where he also taught English.

---

The final years of compulsory secondary education see many teenagers becoming more and more bored in an environment which becomes more and more hostile as their disaffection grows. The rejection of contemporary values may be seen as causal in the decline of social morality, by others as essential to the moral development of the individual and so the health of society. It depends on which side of the fence you sit as to how you see the situation; one thing on which most of us are agreed, however, is that too many young people are 'lost' at this stage by schools which fail to either divert or control their interests. Better comprehensive schools recognise the need to become less places of rigmarole and ritual, of finely distilled rule and regulation presupposing the offensive nature of the clientele. Over the past decade we have seen the emergence of a number of schools which have tried to redefine schooling, not only in terms of rationalising the curriculum, but by examining the school fundamentally, as a social unit in which important steps in social education should be taken. One positive step we have taken along this path at Belper High School, is to involve students much more in controlling their own affairs.

The students of one house have 'built' a coffee bar. Not only have they improved their own social environment, but they have perhaps less wittingly effected a more caring attitude for 'the school' by those who use it. A dingy area of back to back lockers has become a comfortable common room, well decorated and furnished with durable upholstered sofas, spotlights, poster mountings and a mural constructed and painted by the students. Most of the money for the project, which had to meet County Council Architects' Dept. approval, was raised by organising disco's and concerts; none was provided by the LEA/PTA, or outside organisations, though parents with building skills were welcomed in the final stages of the project.

The problem the students faced were often complex and exacting, from ordering and paying for costly materials to dealing with gate-crashers at social events or interpreting building regulations. The temptation to take over when they got into problems, or rather when something looked like being a 'teacher's responsibility' was great. But we were guided by the belief that, before assuming such responsibility, we should question whether or not the students could undertake it for themselves. If they could we felt they should; if they might be able to, we felt they should too, though in such cases a teacher might act as an adviser, or a safety net — so to speak. As a spin off from the Coffee Bar project a House Committee was formed which now controls the management of the house facilities, not only the coffee bar with its rota of servers, cleaners and stocktakers, but also decisions about buying sports gear for 'local' use in the dinner hour, and the organisation of all social events. But what has been most educationally worthwhile is the positive development of particular individuals. It was with some satisfaction recently that I watched a lad who had been a particularly disaffected fourth year, handling a group of obstreperous outsiders at a disco. He managed well, and, incidentally, has recently joined a management trainee scheme!

## The Committee

Part of the social education process is to learn the skills of government so that the concept of citizenship is more clearly understood. I believe that these skills are best learnt first hand, from practicing managerial and democratic procedures. The House Committee has to find ways of effecting efficient methods of communication with all fellow students, following acceptable procedure for meetings — above all developing in-built recall systems (minutes and so on); school students are naturally dilatory and forgetful. It's important that they learn not to 'lose sight of things'. They should learn to ask the question *for* themselves *of* themselves, 'Did we agree to do such and such, by such and such?'. In practice we have found that they then take action which has been agreed upon and overlooked very seriously. Such inefficiency they despise in adults. It is much more unacceptable amongst their own number. Thus the insistence on keeping and reading minutes is more than simply a procedural exercise; it is essential to the life of the thing — it sustains the impetus. Similarly the democratic election of officers, a chairman, secretary and eight committee members, one from each tutor group in the house, is more than an exercise. It broadens the base of the self-

---

*Continued from page 48*

### References

- 1 Central Advisory Council for Education (1967), *Children and Their Primary Schools* (Plowden Report), HMSO.
- 2 Nash, R. (1973), *Classrooms Observed*, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- 3 Averages were calculated using Burroughs' technique. (Burroughs, G.E.R., 1975, 'Design and Analysis in Educational Research', Educational Monograph No.8, University of Birmingham School of Education, p.262.) This involves converting each coefficient to a Fisher's 'Z' score. These are totalled averaged and converted back to correlation coefficients. This method gives extra weight to high values.

governing unit and preserves its autonomy. The right to veto does of course exist, but it is something neither students nor staff have to worry about. This would not be the case with decision making about academic studies, where naive decisions might fundamentally alter the pattern of the curriculum. I believe the development of values pertaining to the skill of decision making to be a fundamental responsibility of the pastoral system in schools. For it is in the school as a social organisation that opportunities arise for naive decisions to be made, then seen as such; mistakes to be made at very little cost to the school but enormous gain to the individual. Decision making is, after all, more than the inspired application of knowledge, it is a matter of social and moral education.

## The Committee and the Curriculum

Students have been involved in one area of curriculum organisation, and, although this involvement is peripheral it has important implications. At Belper we offer a programme of 'pursuits' rather than the more traditional 'outdoor games' for all fourth and fifth year students. The normal choice of Hockey or Football in the winter, athletics or cricket in the summer is thus supplemented by a wide range of activities, from war-games and yeast cookery to kite-making and caving. The range of activities available depends largely on staff skills, and, increasingly, on numbers of staff available. During the planning stage the student committee is invited to suggest which activities would be most worthwhile and popular. At the end of each term students make several choices of 'pursuits' in order of preference. Since students pursue a particular activity for only one term it is usually possible to give everyone his first choice at least once a year. The administrative procedure of distributing, collecting and collating choice forms is now handled entirely by the student committee, and the 'fairness' of choice allocation is carefully monitored by them. Dissatisfied students come back to the student committee rather than to the member of staff involved, although he is, of course, always available to help. This has the important effect of involving all the students with their committee; whereas the social facilities administered by the committee may by choice be ignored, pursuits as part of the curriculum are mandatory and each student feels the effect of the arrangements made on his behalf. It becomes a lesson in politics which is hard to avoid. There are always students who, because of special circumstances have special needs, so that a member of staff always looks over the draft list and suggests alterations to the committee. As a result of this participation and consultation students' sensitivity to particular needs and interests amongst their peers has developed increasingly. They will now suggest students to us for Outdoor Pursuits because they feel, for instance, that planning and participating in a weekend camp will provide release from a particularly distressing home situation. Similarly they will explain that another student has less need for a place on an over-subscribed option than others because he has exposure to the same activity through the church youth club, of which he is a member. Not only is their 'local' knowledge useful but they are beginning to make sophisticated decisions by means of the objective application of their own moral judgement.

## Planning the Induction of New Intake

As students prepare to leave for the community and work, or enter the sixth form, they are invited to take part in the planning of an induction course for the new intake who are to fill their place the following September.

Planning the course makes a fine post examination activity for 5th years. The aim of the game is to identify the sort of problems facing a thirteen year old as he or she arrives raw to the sort of social environment and educational challenges of the new school. The experiences of 'schooling' are very immediate to a retiring fifth former and he is able to consider retrospectively which activities have been most enriching, most significant to his development. He is able to identify with the problems of entering a high school community and engaging in the best of its pursuits, problems associated particularly with what Paul Willis<sup>1</sup> has called 'the counter school culture', problems of diminishing achievement.

Those planning the induction course spend a morning with the middle school students when they visit the school in July and those who stay on to the sixth form become attached to a particular tutor group as 'student tutors'. During tutor time once a week they operate the induction course they have planned and make themselves available as often as possible to the new intake within their pastoral unit. The nature of the induction course depends on the strengths and weaknesses of the planners but planning always starts with a tightly structured discussion so that the students develop carefully defined aims. The objective seems to require little definition. The self-governing institutions within the school are keenly valued and their preservation depends on engendering that sense of values within the new intake. So, over the three years that students are with us we see the wheel come full circle; the subjects of social education becomes its protagonists. It is not the prefectorial system with its privileges and prerequisites but structures such as these which seem to me to provide the key to the development of mature, responsible young adults.

### Footnote

1 'Learning to Labour'.

## A Subscription to Forum

To: Forum,  
11 Beacon Street, Lichfield.

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

I enclose cheque/P.O. for £2.50.

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

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\* delete as appropriate

# Mixed Ability Science Teaching in the Middle School

---

## D.J. Parks

After teaching in secondary modern schools for nine years, Mr Parks moved in 1968 to a purpose built Middle School in South Yorkshire. In 1972 he was appointed Deputy Headteacher of Boothville Middle School, Northampton's first purpose-built Middle School, and later became Head of Kingsley Park Middle School, Northampton, a new school which opened in September 1977.

---

This article is written at a time when there is renewed interest and concern about the teaching of science in the middle years. No doubt the recent survey of the primary school curriculum carried out by HMI's has served to highlight this situation and remind us of the weaknesses that continue to surround the teaching of science in the primary sector. Adding further complexity to this scene has been the abundant growth of secondary science courses in recent years which, in the main, have made heavy demands upon secondary schools' time, money, facilities and resources with the result that a varied response has developed. The picture is not altogether a clear, coherent and purposeful one which offers a basic science provision to pupils in their middle years. In this increasingly technological era this is not a very satisfactory state of affairs and it is in need of our urgent attention.

Traditionally the teaching of science in the middle years has taken place first in the primary school and then in the secondary school, two very different educational establishments. It is hardly surprising therefore that science teaching objectives, provision, procedures and approaches have differed. In recent years we have witnessed the growth of middle schools catering for the 9-13 year olds and with them has come the opportunity to look afresh at procedures and approaches to teaching science to this age group, and more especially to consider this period of growth as a whole rather than two separate and often disparate phases in a child's education. It is my belief that the teaching of science in the 9-13 middle school should be a central feature of the curriculum. Science can do much to enhance a child's learning potential; properly organised so that it attempts to meet individual and group needs science education can extend and enrich the knowledge, experience and learning potential of all abilities. Moreover, it is possible, and I believe worthwhile, to carry out this teaching in mixed ability groups for much of the time.

It is essential from the outset for middle schools to produce a science course which embodies both structure and guidance and yet provides room for individual teachers and pupils to engage in scientific enquiry of a more open-ended nature. It is equally important that part of this framework gives a clear statement of scientific objectives along with suggestions for class or group organisation and suitable teaching methods designed to meet the needs of all the ability range. This initial step is far from being an easy task and requires the teachers involved in some very careful planning and preparation. The 9-13 middle school has to be very sensitive to the needs of the upper school – and hopefully vice-versa – without it leading to any kind of dictation by the upper school on what should be taught and

how. In my experience it has not been difficult to agree with the upper school in what constitutes a good foundation course in science for the middle school, at least for the 11-13 group. As we know there have been several well-established secondary science courses available for many years now, not least of which has been the Nuffield Combined Science Course (NCS). It is around this course that my original work in the middle school revolved.

Many middle schools have originated from existing secondary schools, some of which have been endowed with laboratories, materials and resources geared to teaching NCS. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find that this course has become an accepted and established basis for science work for pupils aged eleven and upwards in the 9-13 middle school. This does not mean, however, that such a course is strictly adhered to in content, teaching method and procedure; indeed there is often the need to tailor the course to a particular middle school's requirements. In fact my more recent experience has been to make use of 'Combined Science' (Green, Petford, Short and Walker, 1975). This is an integrated course for the first two years of secondary school, designed for use with pupils of a wide ability range and based on NCS.

When a decision of this kind is made there is a danger of 'science' only really beginning at eleven when of course what is imperative is that science begins at nine. It is my belief that there is a need to provide a structured and systematic science course at eleven or at the very latest twelve. The problem then arises as to how the children can be led into the course work so that it is seen as a natural progression from their earlier science studies, and the middle school science course appearing as a continuous, progressive and cohesive development. To achieve this calls for time, flexibility, patience and resourcefulness, embodying a variety of organisational strategies, teaching methods and approaches which are clearly designed to help children understand basic scientific concepts, gain knowledge and learn basic skills and techniques which are seen to grow in usefulness and sophistication.

I have said earlier that science in a middle school should start in earnest at nine. A clear advantage the 9-13 middle school has over the primary school lies in its additional resources and facilities available for science teaching, which can be immediately put at the disposal of the nine year olds. In the first place there is usually a teacher or teachers with some expert knowledge in science who can help both teacher and pupil. Then there is usually access to a laboratory with a wide range of materials and apparatus available for use either in the laboratory or in the classroom, supplemented by written, audio and visual material. These



are valuable scientific resources which must be utilised from the outset and can help to take a nine year old far beyond the odd bit of science he or she might otherwise do.

More often than not a child entering a middle school at nine years of age joins children of a similar age and is taught in a class of approximately thirty children of mixed abilities by one teacher in several areas of the curriculum; a situation most children of similar age would experience in a primary school. A feature of many middle schools I know is the year group structure where, for example, all the nine year olds are together in a particular part of the school and are simply divided into equal class groups, each class having a class tutor and one of these having the position of Year Co-ordinator or Year Leader, whose prime responsibility is to co-ordinate the work of the year group of teachers and pupils. Each year group is usually made up of three to four classes. Supporting this year team are specialists in such fields as Mathematics, Science, Art/Craft, Music, P.E./Games, Remedial Education and Home Economics/Needlework. In some cases these specialists work alongside both teacher and pupil on a regular weekly basis, in others less regularly or not at all, but in this case are available to give help and advice. This situation opens up all kinds of teaching and learning opportunities, not only in science but in other curriculum areas as well. However, the object of this article is to focus our attention on science, and this situation means that a combination of the teacher talent, detailed knowledge of pupils, individual interests and expertise of the year teams can be brought together to pursue scientific enquiry supported by a science specialist and a wide range of material resources.

With careful planning and consultations a unit of work can be organised which makes full use of the manpower and resources available to the school. Opportunities can be organised for scientific work to be carried out on a year basis, class basis, small group basis or individually either at the same time or spread out over a period of time. Moreover, this work can be done in the classroom, the corridor, the laboratory or the school grounds, whichever place is appropriate.

Even at this early stage it is important for teachers and pupils to have a clear idea of the work in hand, with some basic objectives and plan of work. This can be structured yet allow for some open-ended enquiry if necessary. Indeed at this stage it would be easy to define a clear syllabus of science work which all the children 'cover'; resources and materials can be built up over a period simplifying the planning and preparation of work.

To some extent this should be done and a useful start can be made by using such materials as the 'Craigie Science Kit', topics from Science 5/13, and radio and TV science programmes. With some careful selection much interesting and basic ground work in science can be done which will help to form an important and useful background of scientific knowledge and skills, and a firm grasp of certain elementary scientific concepts. A good foundation in fact for the more detailed, structured and systematic approach from 11 onwards.

There is a lot to be said for investigating scientific topics on a small group basis within the classroom situation and ensuring that within the course of one year the class gains similar scientific experiences; this idea could even be extended to a year group if resources allow. For example the topics dealt with in the Craigie Science Kit could usefully be explored by all the children in a year group over the period of a year. The Kit offers sufficient support to

both teacher and child to enable them to exist on their own, without the help of a science specialist, although it has been my experience that a specialist on hand can enhance the pupil's work, especially in the early stages when a class teacher is just beginning to get to know the material.

An approach of this kind does provide some common ground throughout the year group and is particularly relevant to the first two years of the middle school. The work takes place in the familiar surroundings of the classroom or just outside, pupils work in small groups, they are free to experiment, explore and find out. This does much to encourage pupils to work together irrespective of ability, it promotes scientific enquiry, patience, resourcefulness and initiative. Pupils talk and work together in a rather special and exciting way and each is able to report and record to the best of their ability.

Alongside this work can be the pursuit of scientific enquiry as part of a topic or theme being studied by the whole year. The topic may be part of the school's humanities curriculum and particular scientific concepts or ideas singled out for treatment by the whole year. This approach calls for careful and detailed planning and the provision of greater resources. It might start with a talk, demonstration, film or slides and then each class under the guidance of their teacher pursue certain lines of enquiry which have been clearly identified by the year teams but allow for some individual treatment by the teacher. This work could span over several weeks and at the end certain scientific information, skills etc, can be seen to have been covered and hopefully absorbed by the whole year group. Clearly this approach becomes very much a class activity directed by the teacher with the pupils involved in discussing, writing, reading, drawing about similar things. At the same time there is always the opportunity for pupils to pursue independent lines of enquiry.

Clearly this procedure is a fairly formal and structured experience, verbal interaction between pupil and teacher follows certain predictable paths and the interaction between pupil and pupil is limited. There is emphasis on pupils absorbing information and understanding concepts, sometimes certain skills and techniques are learnt and more often than not pupils make concentrated use of their senses. Scientific terminology is inextricably wrapped up in the work covered, pupils begin to build up a scientific vocabulary and are encouraged to use it. It must be remembered that this practice is a shared class experience and if all pupils are to benefit then it calls for all the teaching skill and expertise he or she can muster. It is not a soft option.

Radio and TV science programmes can be extremely useful in helping pupils gain experience of some basic scientific skills and concepts. With the help of the middle school specialist a class teacher can plan work and gain access to materials and apparatus which can be kept in a corner of the classroom and used either in small groups or by the class as a whole. In this way a group of pupils can concentrate on a scientific topic and if time and opportunity is allowed a wealth of supplementary investigation can take place. In all this work it is possible for the science 'specialist' to 'feed in' to the situation additional help, information and experiments as the work develops, and also perhaps take a limited but active part in the proceedings.

Throughout these early middle school experiences it is essential to keep firmly in mind that children 'learn by doing', and whenever possible practical opportunities should be encouraged. I never cease to be amazed and



pleased by the type of child who struggles daily with the written and spoken word, who is easily baffled by the apparent complexity of number work but comes of age so to speak in a practical experimental situation. Such children often need the verbal support, guidance and interest of the teacher but more often than not they develop a firm grasp of the basic scientific principles or concepts underlying the experiments.

There are, of course, many useful outcomes from purposeful planned scientific enquiry; it is fascinating both to listen and sometimes be a part of pupil to pupil interaction, to witness the give and take of mutual endeavour, the sharing of thoughts and ideas, the weighing up of evidence and the presentation of findings. What I believe is of particular interest is the opportunity it presents to the teacher to help and encourage pupils to verbalise their thoughts and experiences, so often the key to securing a firm grasp of a concept or idea — a sound understanding, which is what we are really after.

A good deal of the kind of science work I have described is clearly planned and prepared in advance with some very clear and positive guidelines laid down for the pupils. I must however reiterate that this approach does not preclude any chance of open-ended enquiry, indeed within the framework offered there is ample opportunity. What usually limits this is simply time, there isn't enough of it!

I must make a special mention of the real need, in my opinion, for pupils to develop an interest and concern for their local environment. The immediate surroundings of the school usually provide a wealth of scientific information, and opportunity can be provided in the middle school for pupils to gain experience and understanding of many basic scientific concepts and skills. It helps considerably to have a teacher on the staff responsible for 'environmental sciences' who can provide help and information to staff and pupils.

In the first two years particularly the procedures and approaches to mixed ability science work I have outlined form a useful beginning to middle school science. In fact there is no reason why this cannot continue, albeit in a limited form in the last two years. However, I feel that at around eleven years of age most pupils are ready to participate in regular laboratory science work of a more structured, detailed and systematic nature. Indeed a useful start can be made in the second year (10 year olds) by arranging for them to spend some time in the laboratory simply acquainting themselves with facilities, procedures, equipment and learning simple laboratory skills. (A suitable interchange of staff can allow a science specialist to take classes in the laboratory.) The pupils can soon be involved in simple laboratory work by exploring such concepts as hot and cold, wet and dry, hard and soft, floating and sinking etc. The pupils may only have been in the laboratory for one session per month (approximately 1 hour 10 mins) for the one year, but this can provide a very useful familiarity, simple expertise and confidence for the more regular laboratory work that follows in the third and fourth years.

I have already mentioned that there are several secondary science courses suitable for use in these two years. It is important, however, to state that they should not be followed blindly or form the basis of all the science work done from eleven upwards. For many reasons middle schools could not do this even if they wished, restraints in time and facilities would prevent it, but more importantly middle schools must concern themselves with helping all pupils to understand what they are doing and stretching them to the limits of their abilities. This is not an easy task

and middle schools must have a degree of flexibility if they are going to achieve these twin objectives.

Adopting a specific science course to form the basis of middle school science in the 11-13 age group is helpful for several reasons. To begin with it provides a useful framework for both teachers and pupils; materials and resources can be built up over a period; additions and changes can be introduced to topics to enhance their interest and appeal; teachers increase in their knowledge of the course and skill in presenting it, course evaluation and pupil assessment can proceed carefully and systematically. There is value in pinpointing more precise areas of investigation designed to develop more detailed powers of observation, measurement and initial thinking. There is the challenge of study in depth which can usually stretch the ablest child. An initial factor at this stage of the middle years is time. Additions are made to the curriculum which require the use of time hitherto devoted to other areas of the curriculum.

So many curriculum demands are being made upon the middle school that in order to try and meet most of them time must be apportioned wisely and used efficiently. Inevitably this leads to more structure and organisation and having an agreed science course available which requires a minimum amount of time does ensure that science receives due recognition. It is perhaps important to stress that pupils need a minimum of two hours laboratory work per week with follow-up work completed at home if they are to gain a good in-depth knowledge and understanding of basic science fundamental to their science work in the upper school. And by laboratory work I mean pupils 'learning by doing' where chalk and talk, lecture/demonstrations are kept to a minimum.

Clearly laboratory work of this kind calls for a good level of science knowledge and expertise and usually at least one science specialist would be required to carry out the work. It has been my good fortune over the past ten years to have worked in middle schools where several teachers have shown interest and expertise in science and have formed a science team to serve the school under the guidance of the school's science specialist. A procedure was adopted whereby a meeting of the team decided on the topic to be dealt with (the topics need not follow the order in the textbook), agreement was reached on the length of time to be allocated, on the main objectives in terms of scientific skills and concepts to be taught and on methods of assessment. The preparation of materials etc., was then carried out by the laboratory technician under the supervision of the science specialist.

The basic approach to a topic is of course laid down in the textbooks. 'Combined Science' does offer some useful and interesting starting points which are usually followed, but flexibility in the introduction of the topic is possible and open to each individual teacher's interpretation.

After the introduction a series of practical experiments follow giving rise to findings and information which lead to specific conclusions being made. These patterns then give rise to further investigation and at appropriate points throughout the work pupils are asked to answer specific questions designed either to produce information or test their understanding of the experiment or concept.

In the early stages of the laboratory work it is particularly important to spend time and thought on the basic organisation of the practical work so that the children hopefully know precisely what they are going to do. Time spent at this stage pays dividends later and allows the teacher to concentrate on the findings and conclusions drawn.

The textbooks are useful here and pupils must get in the habit of reading them carefully — some will always rely on the teacher if possible and not always the needy cases!

A laboratory session is usually planned to include a short introduction or recapitulation of the previous lesson's work followed by experimental work sufficient to be completed in the time available; for those who complete quickly suitable extension work should always be at hand, either found in the textbooks or provided by the teacher. Notes, measurements, readings, answers to questions are recorded in jotters as the children carry out their work. The lesson ends with the pupils clearing away and a short discussion with the class on the principal findings. In the practical work the pupils generally work in pairs and sometimes in groups of four, carrying out the same experiments.

An important aspect of all practical work is to see that the pupils have access to significant information and are trained thoroughly in basic procedures to be practically self-sufficient, thus releasing the teacher to concentrate on findings and outcomes. The teacher needs to be able to move around the laboratory, guiding, prompting, encouraging and above all asking pertinent questions of pupils in order to stimulate thinking and enquiry. It is so important as far as is possible for the teacher to become part of the scientific quest and not to get bogged down in making sure a pupil's experiment is set up properly. It is also important to have a few simple objectives in mind; these can take the form of seeking answers to specific questions concerning the experiments. Later a class discussion can help to formulate some useful statements or discoveries. With this approach the whole class can focus their attention on the same material. After discussion of the outcomes their recording of experimental data and diagrams will be similar, their descriptions of experiments different in some respects and their written answers to questions varying in quality and correctness according to their ability and level of understanding. Pupils build up a body of scientific knowledge and skills and concepts which can at intervals be tested for retention and understanding. More thought in fact, needs to be given to the assessment of science work, this is an interesting aspect but outside the scope of this article.

In any topic there is usually interspersed a lecture/demonstration carried out mainly when experiments are interesting but perhaps difficult to execute or hazardous to perform. Use of this procedure is often very useful to draw aspects of a topic together and stimulate general class discussion by focusing attention on specific issues.

Sometimes a topic lends itself to the 'circus approach'. Here a number of different but related experiments are spread around the laboratory. Pupils working in pairs start on one experiment and then work their way round the rest. On each occasion they complete notes and diagrams in 'rough' form for write up later. When they have completed the 'areas' of experiments they will have usually investigated a number of important and related concepts. This approach offers more variety and flexibility; pupils — and teachers — have to handle a number of different skills and concepts in a concentrated period of time, mental switches are necessary in order to respond to the phenomena encountered. This procedure is often more relaxed and interesting than the set experiment, one is not so much conscious of having to complete a set piece of work, simply because the work is usually spread out over two or three sessions. One is able to linger a while and sometimes pursue a line of enquiry thrown up from the work in hand.

In recent years my experience of course work in science during the last two years of the 9-13 middle school has been the result of an agreement between a group of middle schools. A principal objective of this has been to provide a basic foundation course in science for the upper schools to build on. It is perhaps only natural that one might be inclined to concentrate on 'covering' the agreed syllabus in order that your pupils are not at a disadvantage when they enter the upper school. To do this may result in other, example those connected with understanding scientific concepts and the scientific process.

Recently my interest in science teaching led me to complete a study of a series of science lessons taught in a manner similar to that described for the 11 year olds upwards, by a group of five teachers who were part of a science team in a purpose-built middle school (Parks D.J. 1977). The study concentrated on a systematic analysis using a science observational schedule of the verbal transactions that took place between teachers and pupils. It is perhaps not surprising to find that similar patterns of interactions did occur between the teachers and their pupils, although there were some important differences. However, a general pattern emerged which showed that a lot of what the teachers and pupils said was concerned mainly with scientific facts and principles, experimental procedure, and to a lesser degree problem-solving. Little or no interactions centred around constructing hypothesis, speculating, making inferences from observations or designing experimental procedure.

Perhaps these outcomes were predictable when you consider the close structure of the lessons and their basic objectives. But there again one must not believe that such a study provides a clear and precise analysis, it can only serve to indicate certain trends and outcomes, related to science lessons taught in the manner described.

The scientific process requires opportunities for open-ended investigations; perhaps further rethinking of the science course is necessary in the light of this information in order to incorporate an approach which gives more attention to this aspect. On the other hand it might be satisfactory to accept the limitations of such an approach to science because the limited objectives can be handled easily by the majority of children and are considered to be a prerequisite to genuine scientific enquiry. Whatever view is taken any science course will have its limitations. What must be remembered however is that although this information is useful it cannot be assumed that it indicates clearly and precisely the outcomes of a two year science course.

What I do feel emerges from this description of science in a middle school is that children are involved in scientific investigation and discovery from nine onwards. They are subject to a wide range of scientific experiences, gain a body of scientific knowledge, learn certain skills and techniques and gain some understanding of basic scientific concepts and engage in the scientific method.

In addition the pupils will experience a continuity and progression in their work, which will add both meaning and purpose to their activities. Perhaps the most important outcome is that hopefully all pupils will develop an interest in science which will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

#### References

- 1 Parks D.J. (1977) 'Styles of Teaching Science to 12-13 year old pupils in a middle school' (Unpublished dissertation submitted for the degree of Master of Education, Liverpool University).

# The Evaluative School

---

## Helen Simons

After teaching in secondary schools, Helen Simons worked with the Nuffield Group for Research and Innovation in Higher Education. She is now Lecturer in Curriculum Studies and Evaluation at the Institute of Education, University of London.

---

Many of those who argue for school self-evaluation rest their case on the need to provide different indicators of what goes on in schools to those being sought by central and, in some cases, local government. The Assessment of Performance Unit monitoring programme in England<sup>1</sup> and the Michigan Accountability scheme in America<sup>2</sup> are two examples. Such schemes, it is argued, take a narrow focus on pupil achievement abstracted from the context and process of learning. While measurement tests may show how well a school is doing on a certain criteria in comparison with a *national* norm, they fail to indicate how well a *local* school is providing educational services to the community. They fail, as Stake (1976)<sup>3</sup> points out, to provide *relevant* evaluation on the *quality of educational provision*.

'The evaluation should be relevant to education, not to rote performance. Unfortunately, we do not have a technology of measurement oriented directly to education. Although they are good instruments for other purposes, none of our Evaluative Criteria,<sup>4</sup> none of our classroom observation checklists provide us with an objective measurement of educational quality.'

Stake goes on to suggest that information relevant to educational quality lies in a different direction — one that is sensitive to the particularities and complexities of learning and schooling.<sup>5</sup>

The process of school self-evaluation outlined here substantially takes this position and suggests that, as a first step towards providing relevant information to the community, the school study itself. The major aspiration is to describe and share professional practice with colleagues.

I do not want to quarrel with the case for evaluation in a context of accountability. Such arguments seem reasonable given the political pressures and the privacy of schools in the past, and provide an external motivation. Rather I want to suggest that school self-evaluation, which is a long term process, is best developed as a continuing part of professional practice. Long term it may provide an index of accountability. Short term it may need to be separated from accountability demands.

The central issue here is external or internal motivation. In the arguments advocating self-evaluation from accountability, the view is often expressed that nothing along these lines will happen at all in the schools without an external stimulus.

That may be true of some. And there are problems of time and priorities which I recognise. But I believe that there are many schools which have given considerable thought to evaluative questions and to reviewing their policies, although they may not have made these inquiries explicit in evaluation reports or shared them professionally with colleagues.

Even if an external stimulus is needed to encourage schools

to document their work the professional case rests upon whether schools can use the stimulus to produce a positive climate for continued development. So often, externally imposed demands set up a defensive reaction leading to the production of what is sought or required without actually affecting the professional practice of the school. Such responses, too, are often short-lived, disappearing when the external stimulus fades. Internal motivation, on the other hand, is likely to prevail over external threats to teacher and school autonomy and to produce a quality control which is genuinely professional.

Such an emphasis on professionalism is not, of course, unrelated to accountability. By becoming more professional in the business of describing and analysing the school's policies and practices, the school is being accountable. Professionalism should be the major justification, however, not response to a short-term political demand.<sup>6</sup>

## Process of School Self-Evaluation

What then does such evaluation look like in practice? Does it differ from reports to school governors? Or information about the school given to parents? What problems confront teachers in conducting such evaluations? And what support is needed?

During the past two years I have had the opportunity to work with several groups of teachers (over two hundred in all) from both primary and secondary schools clarifying the concept and the conditions in which school self-evaluation might best be implemented. While attending courses on the subject many also conducted and produced a written evaluation of a policy issue in their school. The description below owes much to their judgement of what is feasible and desirable. It is only one perspective of school self-evaluation — one which focuses on the broader issues concerning the whole school, such as language or mathematics policy across the curriculum or allocation of resources and teachers to subjects, and which encourages a high degree of participation.<sup>7</sup>

The assumptions underlying this particular perspective are detailed elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> One major assumption which this and other forms of self-evaluation share is that teachers are often in the best position to describe the practice of the school in qualitative terms. They are evaluating all the time and have the detailed contextual knowledge and skills to produce relevant descriptions. It is a question of time, priority and appropriate procedures for making such evaluations explicit. What follows is an outline of how

school self-evaluation might proceed. Precise details are, of course, best decided in the particular circumstances of each school.

The process is one in which the school takes the initiative for deciding the criteria on which they wish to be valued (and these may include both external and internal criteria, the issues they want to evaluate and the methods and procedures for doing so). The evaluation in the first instance is to help inform school policy. Later it may be shared with colleagues in other schools or provide the basis of a report for governors and parents. Initiative for the study may come from anyone within the school, although experience indicates that a group initiative is likely to be more sustained than an individual one and the results considered more seriously.

The climate in the school is ideally one in which everyone is a potential contributor to the study and everyone is committed to reviewing the findings as a basis for decision making. To this end it is useful if a full staff meeting decides what issues to study, who should conduct the evaluation, the time it should take, the data sources that should be consulted, who has access to what data on what grounds, when the results should be discussed and with whom they should be shared.

While all staff and pupils are potential data sources, only a small group, selected or elected at a staff meeting, need take responsibility for conducting the evaluation and presenting the findings. If the process becomes a regular activity, membership of the group could change for further evaluations.

The study may be small and take only a few days or a week for actual data-gathering, though sometimes this may be spread over a few weeks or months to allow for a cycle of development. Termly tests, for instance, might be useful data, so might observations at beginning and end of term. Starting small is important if evaluation is to be instituted as part of a continuing process. Large scale evaluations involving massive data-gathering and long reports tend to be seen as a one-off exercise which, once completed, need no further attention. The aim underlying these suggestions is to ensure maximum participation, minimum intrusion on time and no delay in presenting findings.

Much information which can form a data base (exam results, timetables, school documents, for instance) already exists in the school: it is a question of compiling this in a form which is easy to assimilate and discuss. Where data has to be collected useful methods which need not take a lot of time are interviewing, observing and reporting of critical incidents and dialogue – provided such incidents and dialogue are relevant to the chosen issue. The issues focus is important for several reasons: to give frame to the questions, to avoid a focus on personalities and to limit the scope of the study.

## Observations in Practice

In practice systematic evaluation is not as easy as it sounds. It is not always easy to make explicit the grounds on which judgements are made or describe the complexity of classroom events or changes in policy, particularly when the criteria for assessing the value of such descriptions is not widely shared. Teachers who conducted a school self-evaluation concluded that much professional support is needed to sustain the process at two levels: course support on the concepts and techniques of evaluation and personal support in the form of general awareness on the part of the

whole school and the LEA of the difficulties involved in doing an evaluation and the time it takes to develop the appropriate skills. Several factors contributed to their conclusion but four observations seem particularly relevant to the professional argument.

In the early stages of conducting an evaluation teachers queried the validity of using the observational and questioning skills they normally employ in teaching and sought more formal methods. When interviewing, for instance, instead of following up issues from informal discussion and questioning, they tended to formalise the questions in advance and closely adhere to the initial framework. When writing up observations many did not write what they actually observed but produced a more formal account of what they already knew about the pupil, class or problem.

Several chose to use the questionnaire technique: it distanced people from the problems associated with interactive methods when everyone knows each other in a specific role; and it was perceived to cover more ground, to be more objective and to give the study more 'scientific' validity.

Formal expectations of evaluation had another effect. Teachers were not sure initially that a study conducted by them in their own context would provide a sufficient basis for decision-making. They were inclined to regard their efforts as 'too subjective' (in contrast to those of the outsider whom they perceived to be 'objective') and a study of the particular to lack the potential for generalising.

The difficulty was partly one of lack of familiarity with using these skills in an evaluation context. Once they had conducted the evaluation and discussed their study with colleagues both within and outside the school, the position changed. One example may serve to illustrate the point. Two senior teachers in different schools each conducted an evaluation of the problem of disruptive children in the school. Each produced a case study detailing the exact nature of the problem (through descriptions of critical incidents, numerical indices of types of disruption, dialogue between teachers and pupils); outlining the academic and social progress of the pupils given different kinds of provision, and raising issues for discussion and options for future action (drawing on interviews with parents, teachers and pupils and the other data). The evidence for judgements was clear and the descriptions of the extent and nature of the problem vivid. The intakes were different, the forms of provision were different but the issues were similar. Quite how similar and therefore quite how useful one school study could be for their own and another school's decision making could be assessed precisely because the issues were raised in a specific context.

A third observation relates to checklists. Checklists for observation and collection of data are now widely advocated as a useful procedure for evaluation. Compared with many techniques of research, they are economical and easy to use, providing a quick reference on progress or a reminder of questions to follow up. What needs to be stressed about checklists, however, is that they are an aid to data collection and evolution and not a substitute for it. Once checks have been made the information still has to be dealt with. Teachers reported that one of the problems with specific checklists of pupils progress (and this applies equally, I think, to the school as a whole) is that they do not adequately reflect the complexity of knowledge they have about the pupils (or the school). Here they wanted to write a description and/or provide an explanation.

A second problem with general checklists,<sup>9</sup> reported by the teachers is that there are often no guidelines for how to use the information once obtained. Perhaps the precise use of checklists generated by those outside the school is seen to be the prerogative of the school. But the point is that some strategy for its use was seen by the schools to be needed.

While some of the difficulties associated with expectations and methods of evaluation changed with practice, all teachers who undertook an evaluation agreed that more experience was needed in processing and analysing evaluation data. Having collected a range of data, how precisely does one isolate issues, focus on themes, select appropriate evidence, edit transcripts and observations, interpret and present data in a way that will be both credible and interesting to those reading the evaluation and useful for discussion? The problem is by no means limited to teachers conducting school self-evaluation. Well-established researchers are constantly confronted by problems of distillation and presentation of data.

There are other factors related to the interpersonal nature of the exercise, the shaping of criteria, the sharing of judgements and of decision making which may create difficulties in practice. These are discussed in a related paper<sup>10</sup> and reinforce the suggestion made here that time and support is necessary to build up confidence in the process.

Questions remain as to who would provide such support — teachers, advisers, researchers, for instance; whether it should be on or off-site, exactly what form it might take and how credibility might best be established. But the need seems clear. Just as the need for self-evaluation seems clear. For in the long term, to return to the accountability context, such evaluation seems the best professional insurance against the worst effects of external accountability schemes that have been noted by House (1976)<sup>11</sup> and others in America and increasingly by educationalists in this country, and the best investment for improving professional practice.

In 1975, Stenhouse,<sup>12</sup> writing of the teacher researching his/her classroom practice concluded, conflict of roles notwithstanding, that

'It is difficult to see how teaching can be improved or how curricular proposals can be evaluated without self-monitoring on the part of teachers.'

The same holds true, I believe, for the school as a whole.

#### Notes and References

- 1 For an outline of the Assessment of Performance Unit see the DES Report on Education, No 93, August, 1978. For comment on some of the dangers associated with external assessment, see MacDonald, B. (1978) 'Accountability, Standards and The Process of Schooling', in Becher, T., and Maclure, S. *Accountability in Education*, NFER.
- 2 For a description of the Michigan Accountability Scheme in practice see Read, L.F. 'An Assessment of the Michigan Assessment' in House, E.R. (1973) *School Evaluation: The Politics and Process*, Chapter 6, McCutchan Publishing Corporation.
- 3 Stake, R.E. (1976) 'Making School Evaluations Relevant' in *North Central Association Quarterly*, Vol 50, No 4, Spring, pp.347-52.
- 4 Evaluative Criteria refers to a list of criteria which accrediting agencies like the North Central Association in America provide as a guideline for schools to produce a self-evaluation prior to an accreditation visit. This is part of a regional institutional plan for the accreditation of schools.
- 5 Stake, R.E. (1976), *op.cit.*
- 6 This does not mean that schools should not provide whatever evidence is sought by groups outside the

school, simply that the purposes may be different, at least at this point in time.

- 7 School self-evaluation can, of course, start at any level. In the perspective outlined here evidence of pupil achievement or teacher performance is included if relevant to the policy issue being studied. For a discussion of evaluation of pupil learning and teacher performance see the papers by Harlen, W. and Elliott, J. respectively in Harlen, W. (ed.) (1978) *Evaluation and the Teachers' Role*.
- 8 Simons, H. 'Process Evaluation in Practice in Schools' in Lacey, C. and Lawton, D. (eds.) *Accountability and Evaluation*, Methuen, in preparation.
- 9 See, for example, 'Keeping The School Under Review', ILEA, 1977.
- 10 Simons, H., *op.cit.*
- 11 House, E.R. (1973) 'The Price of Productivity: Who Pays?', Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation, University of Illinois, Urbana. Mimeo.
- 12 Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, Heinemann Educational Books. See Chapter 10, p.165.

**CiE**

**Cambridge Journal  
of Education**

The Journal is sponsored by the **Cambridge Institute of Education** and edited by Dr David Bridges of Homerton College. Vol.9 Nos.2/3 (Michaelmas 1979) is a special number on **In-service Education and Training** under the guest editorship of Mr Howard Bradley of the University of Nottingham. The issues include articles by John Merritt, Ted Wragg, Euan Henderson, Joan Dean and Ray Bolam and the topics range from the induction year to 'what is an M.Ed.?' — from the evaluation of school-based **INSET** to the re-entry problems of teachers returning from secondment.

*Copies of this special issue are obtainable (price £2.20 including postage) from:*

The Secretary, Cambridge Institute of Education,  
Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 2BX

*The annual subscription rate is £3.*

# Discussion

## Remedial Education and Adult Literacy: A Comment

In their article, 'Remedial Education and Adult Literacy' (Vol 21 No 3), M. Bain and F. O'Hagan seem to argue that there is a certain bundle of teacher *attitudes* which, when taken in conjunction with certain observably deficient *methods of organising* remedial provision in schools, contribute in large measure to the not infrequent phenomenon of sub-literate school leavers. These attitudes include a limited perspective on reading development (i.e. incorporating basic decoding skills but excluding the language experience approach and the higher order skills) and also a tendency to devalue, personally, those pupils who are poor readers. The deficiencies in the system of provision are those stemming from a reliance on a 'few trained personnel' rather than a 'communal responsibility with remedial staff playing a key role in organising, assessing and advising'. They then discuss ways of tackling this set of problems and argue for the 'necessity of liaison between remedial education and adult literacy'.

The logic of this remedying connection is far from clear but there are at least two observations worth making about the nature of the problem as they see it. A considerable proportion of students in the Adult Literacy Scheme are not simply seeking help with higher order reading skills;<sup>1</sup> they are seeking to remedy deficiencies in their basic decoding skills. Clearly the fact (according to M. Bain and F. O'Hagan) that:

'staff have been well trained to concentrate on initial assessment and diagnostic work in phonics, word attack and word recognition skills' has not produced a situation in which all school leavers can be assumed to have acquired such skills. The suggestion that remedial staff turn their attention to higher order skills should not be allowed to divert attention from the substantial band of poor readers who still need to work on basic decoding skills during their secondary education.

Further, the exhortation to non-remedial teachers to 'become more aware of the reading tasks they set their pupils' is unexceptionable; but an *analysis* of the reasons for lack of awareness would have been more useful. Experience with teachers who become literacy tutors suggests that deficiencies in the training of secondary teachers may be partly responsible; teacher volunteers frequently remark that they've learned more about reading development and 'difficulties' during a short tutor training course than in their three years at college. Clearly then, for those teachers at least, training did not adequately prepare them

for the range of actual literacy performance they regularly encounter in the classroom.

However, even if we accept the Bain/O'Hagan analysis of the problem in school it is difficult to follow the logic of their appeal for greater liaison between the remedial teachers and the Adult Literacy Scheme. What would this liaison mean or achieve? Several possibilities spring to mind but one type of liaison, i.e. involving consultations about school leavers who may be potential candidates for the Literacy Scheme, must be subject to hard criticism. It is true that a minority of pupils are prepared to join the Scheme when they leave school but the bulk of sub-literate school leavers firmly reject the idea of another dose of what they regard as the same. For the poor school achiever the moment of leaving school is the time when his perception of the value of literacy is at its lowest. Hence even though the state of the job market may subsequently force him towards the Literacy Scheme as a means of improving his employability, evidence from one local area suggests that such entrants often do not even get as far as their first lesson.

Within two to four years of leaving school, however, the attitudes of some poor achievers change dramatically, usually because they have had time to evaluate for themselves the implications of their sub-literacy. To attempt, therefore, to keep school leavers on some sort of educational 'continuum' is arguably wasteful of time and effort.

Furthermore, most school leavers are not ready for the sort of reciprocal relationships (particularly in the one-to-one arrangements) which adults provide for each other in the presently organised literacy scheme. Such relationships, which involve mutual respect and the gradual development of a learning partnership, seem to be a particularly tall order for many late adolescents who find it difficult to relate comfortably to adults, and who need everything to happen quickly. The authors' view of liaison which involves self-evidently good 'consultations' between literacy organisers and remedial teachers, also invites caution. To implicitly argue that 'we're all teaching reading anyway' simply *ignores* the essential differences between schools and adult provision. To propose time-consuming meetings which have no specific purpose serves only to divert attention from the 'emphasis on preventative measures' which M. Bain and F. O'Hagan (and the rest of us) so desire.

MARGARET HERRINGTON  
90 Holmfield Road, Leicester.

1 H.A. Jones and A.H. Charnley, *Adult Literacy: A Study of its Impact*, p 74 reveals that at least 30% were near beginners.

## Socio-linguistics and Intelligence Theory

Rosen, commenting in *Language and Class*<sup>1</sup> on the rapid dissemination and acceptance of Bernstein's sociolinguistic theory, notes that the theory acted as a convenient substitute for the intelligence theory: 'It was just when this theory (the intelligence theory) was looking sadly tattered . . . that the theories of Bernstein began to become available.' (p.3) He continues:

'Whereas in the fifties children had their IQs branded on their forehead, in the sixties more and more of them had the brand changed to "restricted" or "elaborated".' (p.3)

This was a change of brand in an even more literal sense than some might suppose, for the affinities between the two theories are much greater than is often imagined. First, both theories are essentially deterministic, holding that children already enter school differing fundamentally in terms of educability. The fact that Bernstein argues that this arises from the preschool environment, while the psychometrists claim that it results from some amalgam of heredity and environment, should not obscure this. Bernstein's concern as to whether the child should be forced into the mould of the school, or whether the school should in many respects be shaped round the child merely highlights the similarity. His preference for the latter approach points inevitably and unambiguously to different types of education for children from different types of background despite his stance against compensatory education.

Second, Bernstein perpetuates the 'two minds' concept which was fundamental to the actual application of the intelligence theory for the purposes of secondary education (though not necessarily to all versions of the theory itself). Whereas the psychometric selectors operated with academic and non-academic minds, Bernstein offers a world full of 'meanings', but only those equipped with elaborated as well as restricted code have access to the 'universalistic meanings' which Bernstein believes are the real stuff of education. Those who have only restricted code are, he believes, limited to 'particularistic' (here-and-now) 'meanings'. These unfortunates are quantified without reference to any source as 29% of the population.<sup>2</sup> Here, too, there is a danger of deflection from the substance of the theory. One of the many factors contributing to the inherent instability of secondary selection was the fact that in most LEAs the overwhelming majority of children aged 11 and upwards were in practice treated as sub-academic – as something less than altogether normal. (Of course, this is still the case in those LEAs that have resisted comprehensive reorganization, and even in some that have adopted it). By very roughly reversing the proportions of those traditionally considered normal and those treated as something less, Bernstein is able to write as if he were dealing with a minority problem; but this in no way alters his underlying assumptions. Like many psychometrists, Bernstein dichotomizes the school population and this inevitably implies a strong case for two



radically different kinds of school provision. Third, Bernstein's sociolinguistic writings are riddled with cultural value-judgements.<sup>3</sup> Lower working-class children appear both in his writings and those of many psychometrists as in some sense educationally dysfunctional, though he does not go as far as those American proponents of the verbal deficit theory who treat them as pathological.

Superficially, Bernstein's environmentalism seems to offer hope, and this may go some way towards explaining the widespread support that his theories found across the whole spectrum of the Left, at least until c. 1974. However, his environmentalism is largely limited to a concept of two dichotomous family-types, which he tends to equate with two social classes: family structure determines access to codes and, by the time a child starts school, its mode of perception has been firmly set in one direction or the other. Little reason for optimism here! Finally, just as the psychometrists have failed to provide any satisfactory definition of intelligence, Bernstein has similar difficulties in defining his codes, and has thus removed the key concept in his theory from scientific scrutiny. In short, his sociolinguistic theory does not represent a significant or useful advance on the intelligence theory. Indeed, it is equally dangerous because it amounts to an open invitation to teachers to label children 'restricted' or 'elaborated' on the basis of whatever criteria they may choose to employ.

JCB Gordon

*Language Centre, University of East Anglia.*

1. H Rosen, *Language and Class: A Critical Look at the Theories of Basil Bernstein*, 3rd. ed., Falling Wall Press, Bristol 1974. See especially pp.2-4.
2. See B Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control*, Vol.1, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1971, p.81.
3. See JCB Gordon, 'Folk-Linguistics and the Essence of Verbal Deficit Theories', *UEA Papers in Linguistics* 7 (April 1978), 11-21.



# Reviews

## Cyril Burt: Psychometrist Extraordinary

**Cyril Burt: Psychologist** by L.S. Hearnshaw, Hodder and Stoughton (1979) pp xi, 370, £8.95.

How did this critical biography, of the man who was psychometrist extraordinary to the educational system for most of this century and eminent in his profession, come to be written? This is quite a saga in itself as Leslie Hearnshaw, formerly professor of psychology at Liverpool University and historian on the subject, explains in his preface. When Sir Cyril Burt died, aged 88, in 1971, it fell to him to produce two tributes. Both were eulogistic, the only mitigating factor being that he then knew virtually nothing of Burt's 'huge post-war output'. Subsequently invited to write a biography he gained access to all his subject's personal papers, including diaries, but still had no suspicion of lack of integrity when he began to write. Hardly had he done so when Dr Oliver Gillie raised the charge of fraud, in September 1976 in a *Sunday Times* article. Pulled up short Burt's biographer now worked out an extended plan of research, looked more closely at Burt's own papers and was gradually convinced that charges of fraudulent activity 'were, in their essentials, valid'.

It is fortunate then, for the pursuit of truth if not for his own reputation, that Burt regularly kept a diary and filed an extensive correspondence. Had there not been evidence from these sources – to support other indications that post-war 'researches' were little more than arrangements of data to allow for the desired conclusion – it is likely that any damaging criticism of Burt would still be being labelled ideologically motivated or politically biased. At the least false claims would still be circulating. Indeed they are in Philip Vernon's *Intelligence, Heredity and Environment* (1979) for, as a prefatory note explains, he was still unconvinced when this went to press of the ultimate charge – now upheld by a biographer of 'impeccable credentials' – that Burt perpetrated 'systematic fraud from about 1950 onwards'.

This is a serious matter for psychologists in general and psychometrists in particular. But it is not of primary moment to the educational world where Burt's views and the policies depending on them have long been set aside, even if his ideas linger in the air and find some support. It is, of course, interesting to learn that the famous claim trumpeted by Black Paper II in 1969 – that standards of achievement in schools have been steadily declining since 1914 – is one of the more barefaced cons. But it is not news, teachers and others said as much at the time. And there is no material dif-

ference, at the receiving end, between claims of the kind psychometrists have often made, which turned out to be false and have been withdrawn, and falsifications deliberately introduced by fabricating data and fiddling the figures.

The crucial point is how psychologists could have continued to stand limply aside, even when educationists protested loudly and cases involved points of scientific and social importance or hit the headlines. Undoubtedly this abdication, coupled with the availability of a political coterie eager to disseminate his product, prolonged Burt's opportunities of propagating an ideology for years after the educational system had seen him off the premises.

The explanation seems to be that psychometry was, and is, an enclave apart from other branches of psychology, where abstruse statistical techniques or devices are deployed of which the average psychometrist understands little or nothing. Here is the context in which Burt was able to consolidate his views, on lines which discouraged any criticism, and project them on the profession and the public. Intervention from colleagues was the less likely because pronouncements issuing from his territory were beamed at the educational world, rather than impinging adversely on his own, and because nothing of scientific moment emerged to claim attention elsewhere in psychology or spark off discussion.

Hearnshaw touches on some of these points but fails to grasp the nettle, preferring to take refuge behind a 'medico-psychological' analysis of his subject which explains nothing of moment. Maybe Burt was in 'a marginally paranoid condition' but why did psychologists, of all people, fail to recognise the complaint when educationists easily detected a megalomaniac arrogance and dogmatism in his pronouncements? Although the comment was, at the time, attributed to ideologically motivated bias in favour of 'egalitarianism'.

This well worn charge, often deployed by Burt, is raised afresh by Hearnshaw, and crudely at that. He himself builds up a formidable indictment of Burt's work, not only latterday lapses but earlier departures from scientific procedure, ending by placing him on the historical shelf. But it soon becomes apparent that, if reconciled to disposal of the baby, he is intent on saving the bathwater. It is to this end that he seeks to discredit educational criticism of 'intelligence' testing which have been the most consistent, take due account of advances in other areas of psychology and have been amply vindicated.

On the other hand Burt – described as a highly intelligent man despite his crippling personality problems – evidently recognised the force of such criticism and took uncommon steps to meet it. The first and for long the only outright challenge to the theory and practice of psychometry, by the editor of *Forum*, Brian Simon, was *Intelligence Testing and the Comprehensive School* (1953). It did not make a dead set at Burt but it was at precisely this point that he began to overstep the margin between what counts as legitimate and illegitimate statistical manipulation. In due course the sociologists weighed in and in 1963 the Robbins Report dismissed 'the belief that there exists some easy method of ascertaining an intelligence factor unaffected by education or background' as 'outmoded'.

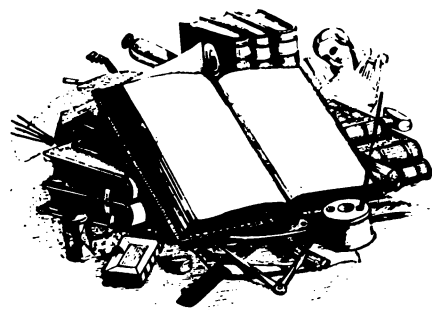
So Burt renewed his efforts to refashion the world in the image of his own dogmatic credo — or, as his biographer bluntly puts it at the close, chose to 'cheat rather than see his opponents triumph'.

Hearnshaw also pulls a fast one, it might seem, in that, after holding up critics of 'intelligence' testing as idiot egalitarians, he reiterates the main points they make as his own. Indeed he is markedly ungenerous to all his predecessors, from Simon over a quarter of a century ago to Gillie who gave him so timely a warning in 1976. Consequently there are frankly contradictory passages in his book. The chapter on 'educational developments' with which Burt was associated strings points together without reference to any historical treatments of the subject. More generally the fact that topics are taken up separately with hindsight operating throughout, rather than adhering to an historical approach, makes for considerable confusion and repetition.

Nonetheless much work has gone into disentangling Burt's machinations and there is a good deal of interest. And it is useful a psychologist has gone on record that psychometry is essentially arid, telling us little or nothing 'about the nature of intelligence' or, for that matter, anything else; that its biological base is unsuitable to diagnosis of human capacities and that it fails to notice advances in other branches of psychology. Burt, of course, persistently ignored these in favour of backing his own 'psychometrically based conclusions with stubbornness and conviction'. Indeed it was his 'besetting weakness' — it would have been best to stay with 'sin' — to 'rely on statistical manipulations rather than empirical investigation, forgetting that poor data cannot yield sound conclusions'.

After this what need to say more? It only remains to underline the point Hearnshaw works hard to obscure, that strictures of the kind apply not merely to the man but the genre.

JOAN SIMON



## Accountability in Education

**Accountability in Education**, Tony Becher and Stuart Maclure, NFER Publishing Company (1978), pp 256.

The seminar sponsored by the Educational Research Board of the SSRC held in September 1977 in order to clarify the 'conceptual background to accountability' brought forth two products; agreement by the SSRC to set aside £200,000 for research initiatives and this book of papers presented to the seminar.

One extra paper which was commissioned after the seminar, written by Ernest R. House of the University of Illinois, gives more than the 'North American perspective'. This paper was the result of a mature reflection on other contributions, which identifies their essence. The pivotal statement of the whole debate is here.

'The major shift in values is from the individualistic values, the traditional emphasis, to societal goals and values, from the individual to the government. The long-standing consensus on traditional aims has been broken and the pattern of educational government is at issue.'

The opening bid in the collection is made by Stuart Maclure in which he maps out some of the ground to be covered and succinctly sets the scene, historically, Sir David Eccles to the APU via Mr Callaghan's Ruskin contribution to educational policy making. William Taylor, in his paper on 'Values and Accountability', apparently undeterred by his own assertion that 'anything they (educationalists) write about goals and values could be hacked to pieces by any philosopher, political scientists or sociologist who deigned to give it attention', provides a sixfold classification of aims and values statements which occur in the educational record. Taylor also examines five definitions of 'accountability', each distinguished either by the methods used or the purposes served or both. Apart from an embarrassingly uncritical reference to Collier's 'mythology' of the British Character under societal values, I found the classification of values helpful and offending no taxonomic principles.

Taylor's conclusions include themes which are repeated with variations in the papers which follow. The first is 'the complexity of the variables involved means that attempts to make individual schools and teachers accountable for pre-specified outcomes in relation to given resources are unlikely to succeed'. I am sure that there are subsets of specifiable outcomes to which this statement applies but some caution must be exercised. A recent NFER publication, *Sources of Difference in School Achievement*<sup>1</sup> concludes that at least within the 'O'-Level population who take the London Board's examinations, there is a significant school and teacher effect. His second conclusion, that 'stressing product rather than process may erode the moral basis of a curriculum and pedagogy which should properly exemplify, sustain and develop understanding and skills in relation to such values as tolerance, respect for persons, liberty within the law, democratic pluralism and community participation' seems to me to be a statement of belief rather than a

conclusion based on the preceding paper. I fail to see why to find out if a pupil at 'O'-Level understands Ohm's law and can apply this law in assembling an electric circuit for a specified purpose should erode 'the moral basis of curriculum'. Have not at least those moral philosophers who conclude that autonomy is a desirable end product of moral education stressed the rational components of moral behaviour? Are not these rational components accessible as products of an educational system?

This talk of process as though it were an end-in-itself seems to me unhelpful. On the other hand, Taylor's view that a 'workable concept of accountability embraces . . . systematic self-monitoring by individuals and institutions, regular review of curriculum and methods . . . wider public discussion of educational objectives' would I am sure command universal support.

Values are also considered in Trevor Pateman's paper 'Accountability, Values and Schooling'. This contribution did not add a great deal to Taylor's thesis and House, in his later chapter, simplifies and clarifies the issue by a synthesis of the two sets of value dimensions. Of his own extended treatment of the case for the existence of children's needs, Pateman raises the question of how it relates to accountability? A 'good' question. In what in my opinion is one of the two most lucid papers in this collection, John Nisbet examines 'Procedures for Assessment'. As he sees it 'the concept of accountability has so many aspects and its introduction has so many purposes, that it needs a variety of methods. The question at issue, therefore, is not which is the most suitable method, but what are the conditions which determine the appropriateness of various procedures for assessment'.

I am sure Nisbet is right to draw a parallel between the rationales and methods of curriculum evaluation and procedures for accounting. He raises the fundamental questions:

Who is accountable to whom?

Accountable for what?

and

Why — for what purpose do we want accountability?

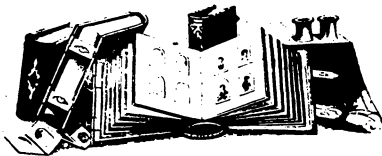
Nisbet's criteria for selecting methods of assessment, especially *fairness* ('not promise more than they can provide'), *verifiability* and *communicability* are, clearly, of critical importance but by no means easy to secure.

The impact of 'Policy Implications of Monitoring Processes', a paper by Maurice Kogan, points to possible changes in the relationship between 'stake holders' in education when certain kinds of accountability procedures are adopted. The visible theme of the relationships between assessor and assessed is well developed, but the relationship between knowledge and authority remains subliminal. What counts as knowledge about an educational system? Can this knowledge be communicated? Are there circumstances in which any 'stake holder' has the responsibility to deny others access to such knowledge?

It is left to House to point to the unwarranted 'authority' apparently possessed by certain kinds of knowledge, especially 'test score' — ' . . . there is a strong tendency for power to shift to the purveyors of test scores'.

Barry MacDonald, 'Accountability, Stan-





## An Australian Innovation

**Learning to Teach: Teaching to Learn** by Gwyneth Dow, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1979), £8.50.

dards and the Process of Schooling' and Michael Erault, 'Accountability at School Level - Some Options and Their Implications' both describe methods of accounting which seek to avoid the danger inherent in the 'systems approach - input/output model'. MacDonald sees no virtue in the 'defect-ridden technology' which is currently being applied to accounting, which is 'deterministic in educational values' and 'technocratic in form'. He hopes to see a 'school initiated process model of accountability aspiring to educational critique' - similar to what he has called elsewhere a democratic model for evaluation.

The emphasis on 'process' rather than 'product' is central to MacDonald's view. Absent from his account is any explicit reference to the formidable difficulties of obtaining objective data on processes or the possibility that the descriptions, anecdotes and formal critiques of processes (his proposed methods) might result in verbal agreements which are not translated into actions, or if they are, that the actions might not yield the desired outcomes. He apparently fails to acknowledge that there might be agreement that the processes of schooling in operation are consonant with the values of society, but pupils fail to secure instrumental goals essential to their freedom of choice in the system.

I found Erault's discursive paper somewhat uneven in treatment. His practical experience of accountability may have led him to present rather detailed procedural statements which cloud some of the important issues he raised, particularly in relation to the different audiences potentially involved, and the relationship between 'evaluation' and 'action'.

Despite my reservations, I am persuaded that the original aim of this conference was to a substantial degree achieved. This book could be read with profit by those involved in school accountability and that seems to be almost everyone.

J.F. EGGLESTON  
University of Nottingham

- 1 **Sources of Difference in School Achievement** by Alan Brimer, George F. Maclaus, Bernard Chapman, Thomas Kellahan and Robert Wood, NFER 1978.

## Our September Number

We apologise to our readers, and authors, for the large number of misprints in the last number. This was due largely to teething problems with our new format, now overcome.

The editors

This important and absorbing book describes an experiment in post-graduate teacher education inaugurated in 1973 in Melbourne by a small team of university tutors led by the author. Dissatisfied with the traditional pattern of theoretical studies in main subjects and separate educational disciplines, coupled with a thrice-yearly spell of teaching practice, Mrs Dow and her colleagues set up an alternative course - Course B - which, she claims 'was a total reconstruction of teacher education based on integrating theory itself and relating it to action, on working towards a close partnership with schools, and on experimenting with student autonomy'. This is a large claim, but her story of the course - 'an account of educational principles in action' - carries conviction.

The course was based on 'the overarching principle [of] . . . the cross-fertilization of theory and practice'. This meant the rejection of 'mass methods of instruction by precept' in the so-called educational disciplines; the development of a thorough-going integration of schools into the work of preparing, supervising and assessing practical teaching; and the creation of relationships which would allow - even compel - the students to participate, on level terms and at all stages, in the planning, execution and assessment of their own courses.

Before the course began, a Schools' committee was set up, with representatives from schools, university staff and students involved in Course B. This committee had policy-making powers over the conduct of school practice. As the course developed, close personal relationships grew up between school and university staffs, and between them and the students. This was a slow and sometimes painful process, probably because all three were for the first time getting to know each other intimately, and were therefore having to come to terms with each other's reality.

It was these close links with schools (only three at first, but extending year by year) which made possible the other two parts of the 'total reconstruction of teacher education': the theory/action relationship, and student autonomy. From the beginning every effort was made to develop theory out of experience, at first from the students' recollections of their own school and university education, then, as the course developed, from their experiences during school practice.

After an initial fortnight in the university, when much use was made of educational autobiography (contributed by staff as well as by students), there was continuous teaching practice two days a week throughout the year, and it is this experience that provides the richest source material for Mrs Dow's book. Students were asked to keep a personal diary which would 'prompt them to consider what they saw in schools, what they did in schools and how well it worked, what we did in the course and how well it worked - in short to discover the sources

of their own learning throughout the year [and] . . . it was agreed upon as a means to help us to evaluate the Course . . .'. Extensive extracts from some of these diaries provide one of the chief delights of the book, and are, indeed, integral to what it has to say. For they demonstrate convincingly the validity of a number of radical departures from usual practice, and the establishment in their place of positive alternatives: joint staff/teacher/student assessment instead of competitive grades or marks (no confidential reports were kept); students were expected to (and mostly did) study from inner motivation without the 'stimulus' of competition; and, above all, theoretical discussion of educational problems arose out of and/or was related to personal experience.

These diaries reveal the often painful progress from subjectivity to detachment, from practical experience to theoretical interpretation, in a way that no brief review can convey. Mrs Dow has integrated them tellingly into her text, which is itself a gem of lucidity, intelligence and shrewd comment. In the course of her account, and with powerful evidence to support her, she has made a strong case for a fresh look at many of the practices (and some of the theories) that are currently taken for granted in teacher education.

PETER WRIGHT  
Leicester.

## A Common Curriculum

**Regenerating the Curriculum**, by Maurice Holt. Routledge Education Books (1979), pp 196, £6.50.

In this book Maurice Holt outlines the changes that have come about in our thinking about the secondary school curriculum. Earlier in this century the curriculum was determined by the Regulations of the Board of Education: 'knowledge fields were reasonably stable and pluralism in society's values was reasonably absent . . . In effect, there was no dispute about what should be taught, or how to do it' (a pardonable oversimplification perhaps, in the context of Holt's main argument). That curriculum was firmly based on the idea of separate subjects, and when curriculum reform first began to get under way - not until the 1960s - it was simply a matter of updating the separate subject syllabuses. Innovations were worked out by a central body, then offered to schools in general to adopt, or adapt, or (in most cases) to reject, as they thought fit: for example, the Nuffield Science Project, the School Mathematics Project, and many Schools Council projects subsequently.

In the adverse economic climate since 1974, government and public opinion has remembered that 'education . . . is too important (and expensive) to be left for teachers alone to decide'. The 1977 Green Paper was the first government statement on the curriculum since before the war. Moreover, it is now beginning to be felt that the traditional view of the curriculum as simply consisting of separate subjects,

and as being 'no more than the sum of those parts', has been inadequate. The pressure is towards a common curriculum for the five years of compulsory secondary education, or at least a very substantial common core with a small element of choice appearing in Years 4 and 5 as an intrinsic feature of the compulsory 'faculties'. The HMI document 'Curriculum 11-16' speaks of eight 'areas of experience' (aesthetic/creative; ethical; linguistic; mathematical; physical; scientific; social/political; spiritual). This idea and other broadly similar ones have been put forward recently as a basis for the working out of a coherent 'whole curriculum', and Holt sees this quest as unmistakably right and necessary.

The author has much of value to tell us and makes many shrewd comments on various aspects of the contemporary educational scene. There is a fundamental difficulty in his main argument, however, which he certainly recognises, but which may be thought to need clearing up more convincingly before his basic confidence and optimism can be widely shared. On the one hand, as he so rightly insists, 'curriculum innovation is a process focused on the school itself'; 'the school will need to enjoy substantial autonomy if it is to carry out the job of cultural synthesis'. On the other hand, again in Holt's own words, 'the pattern of change has now a directed quality about it'; 'schools are more likely to follow than to lead'.

The author does indeed suggest procedures and developments whereby this dilemma could be resolved. External 'agencies for change' (inspectors, advisers, the Schools

Council, professional centres, hopefully a staff college) might, with varying degrees of probability, nourish the schools with fresh ideas and contribute to the recurrent education of teachers, inspiring them all to look 'beyond the boundaries of subject and specialism' and to see the aim of the curriculum as 'extending to every pupil an understanding of his cultural inheritance'. The extra teacher time which some of us expected to result from falling rolls *might* be (or might have been) used to free staff to collaborate on curriculum development projects! Reluctantly, it must be said that the teaching profession looks very unlikely, in the present political climate, to receive the stimulus and encouragement here envisaged. In these circumstances, if a common curriculum were to come about, it would be very much more likely to be imposed from outside, or from above, than to result spontaneously from the innovating capacity of schools. There may well have to be limits to autonomy. But more positive good comes, surely, from creative if untidy schools (and scholars!) than from merely neat and passive ones.

The jacket design of this book, showing a tiny building marked 'school' held in one enormous hand while the other enormous hand is winding it up (yes, from above!) with a clockwork key, is aptly sinister. We may or may not be enthusiastic for a common curriculum right up to 16, but I think neither Mr Holt nor I would want it at that price.

ANDREW FINCH  
Longlade College, Leicestershire

## SOCIALISM AND EDUCATION

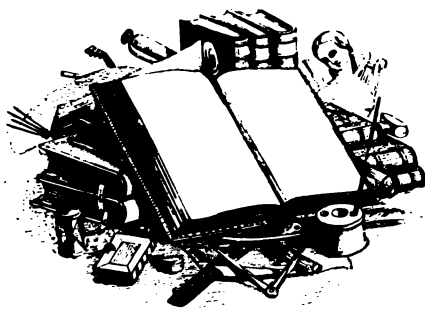
(Journal of the Socialist Educational Association)

Published termly at 30p (+15p p&p)  
Annual Subscription: £1.35

### Recent Issues:

Vol 5 (3) Left Wing Educationalists Under Attack  
Vol 5 (4) European Education  
Vol 5 (5) Political Education in Schools  
Vol 5 (6) Attack on the Left in Education  
Vol 6 (1) Education and Race  
Vol 6 (2) Disruption and Special Units  
Vol 6 (3) Women, Education and Labour

Available from Ron Wallace, 129 Ripon Road, Stevenage, Herts.



# THE NEW ERA

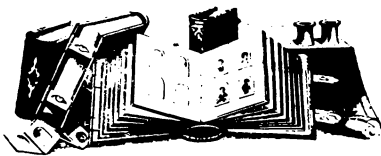
## Your link with world education

For nearly 60 years **The New Era** has provided a medium for educationalists in many parts of the world to share and discuss experiences concerning the development of children and young people, teaching methods, moral education and education for living in a world community.

Published six times a year by the World Education Fellowship, **The New Era** has an international list of contributors. Plans for 1980 include an examination of home/school relationships in England, the United States and Australia; a report on the World Studies Project; a discussion of children's literature and internationalism; and comment on the threat to education posed by the cutbacks in education in many parts of the world.

**The New Era** costs only £5.00 a year post paid — a small price to pay for a world view of education. Post your subscription now (giving your name and address in capitals, please) to: *Joan Watson, Distribution Secretary, The New Era, 54 Fontarabia Road, London SW11 5PP.*

Alternatively, send 50p for a specimen current copy, post paid.



## Differentiation Comprehensives

**A Charter for Choice**, by Ann Hurman.  
NFER Publishing Company (1979),  
pp 335, £8.50.

Curriculum provision in secondary schools throughout the last two or three decades has often reflected a difference in style and organisation as between the early years and the final stages of the compulsory educational process. A break, more often than not, comes at about 14 years of age. In the early years or 'lower' school, which usually covers the first 3 years, pupils have a fairly common curriculum provision. At 14 the pupils, from then on often referred to as students to mark the transition to a more adult style, are presented with alternatives. They have to choose which route they will take through the fourth and fifth years.

**Charter for Choice** examines the reasoning behind the development of 'options' in the fourth and fifth years and exhaustively investigates the mechanics of choice. In a short opening section Ann Hurman summarises aspects of curriculum development in the post-war years with particular reference to the comprehensive movement. The merging of the differing styles and purposes of grammar and secondary modern curriculum patterns into a genuine comprehensive provision providing an equality of opportunity within the concept of secondary education for all has been the task of these post-war years. Comprehensive schools face a situation which no other type of school has yet had to face – ideally that of catering for the entire age group and of preparing pupils for the whole range of career and/or higher education hopes, expectations and prospects.

The second, and by far the longest, part of the book is given over to a detailed examination of option schemes in two comprehensive schools, one 11-18 and the other 13-18. Teachers who have worked in comprehensive schools over the last decade or two will be very familiar with the ground covered. I guess their collective empiric or instinctive conclusions will not be very different over the nature of choice and how the process is presented.

The main thesis of the book is that choice, certainly free choice, is largely a myth. Although schools may boast a vast range of courses and options, sometimes running into many thousands of possible combinations, for the individual student the range is usually much more limited. There is a clear link between ability and option choice. Students are not only choosing between one subject and another but also the level at which a subject will be studied. The plethora of options available in some schools does little to disguise the differentiated structures inherited from the tri-

partite system. Schools may be hiding behind the edifice of an options structure that is little more than 'a method of selecting pupils at 14 plus!'.

Part 3 is concerned with analysis and comment on the research findings. If option systems are a response to external pressure, particularly that of public examinations, and often represent a reluctant move away from a common curriculum, schools should, at the very least, constantly review the balance between 'core' and 'options'. The teachers in the two schools studied 'were generally in favour of the notion of offering choice to pupils in the fourth year'. But Ann Hurman suggests that 'what is important is not the number of combinations which are theoretically possible but the way in which the school directs the process of choosing'.

Balance in the curriculum is a critical concern. Educationists are increasingly insisting on a whole curriculum approach and far from excluding one subject so that a student may concentrate on another 'the curriculum must introduce all students to all inter-related kinds of knowledge'. Much of the Great Debate was about trying to define areas of essential curriculum and to define a compulsory common core. Ann Hurman brings the reader to the point of an examination of a common curriculum having put options in perspective. Her book is rather lengthy, but one must respect the detail and care of the research. It will be more valuable for anyone starting out in curriculum studies.

ROGER SECKINGTON

*Earl Shilton Community College, Leics.*

## Thatcher's Actions

**Comprehensive Schools: Does Mrs Thatcher know what she is doing?** National Union of Teachers, 12 pp.

Designed to tell the public what is at stake if the government's present plans are realised, this NUT pamphlet registers total opposition to attempts 'to halt the progress in full comprehensive organisation and to entrench elitism in education'. Concentrating on the threat to equal opportunity, as an essential aspect of the union's campaign to safeguard and improve standards of educational provision, it points to legislation intended to retain selection and differentiation which extends to a scheme to hand over an estimated £62 millions of public money to independent schools. But this issue is hardly taken up as it undoubtedly will be in due course. Rather the progression is to ask 'who wants selection?', refute critics of comprehensive schools from the pages of **Fifteen Thousand Hours**, set out the facts about supposedly falling standards and deal with 'Parental choice: fact and fiction'.

In the process an earlier union protest is recalled, **What is Mrs Thatcher up to?** (1972) which described her mode of handling the education service when Secretary of State. This brings to mind, in turn, the Forum pamphlet **Indictment of**

**Margaret Thatcher**, published in September 1973, which analysed in detail a strategy and tactics designed to hinder and hobble secondary reorganisation. Times have changed! In June 1970 how shocking Thatcher's behaviour seemed when she first took over at the DES. The failure to consult partners in the education service, the claim that she was mandated by the Tory manifesto and this alone, the dogmatic pronouncements on educational matters, the narrow legalistic devices resorted to to carve up local authority plans for secondary reorganisation – even while loudly proclaiming that they were being 'set free'.

In September 1979 the nation as a whole has become accustomed to this kind of thing. And education is now only one of the vital departments of national life to be submitted to treatment of this kind. Nonetheless the NUT pamphlet might have noted that it is not a simple case of turning the clock back, there is a more ambitious and more dangerous cast of the dice.

Does Mrs Thatcher know what she is doing? There seems little doubt that she is intent on altering the whole climate of national life as it has developed during this century. It is no longer a question of reinstating the 'direct grant' list of grammar schools, as was once the aim. Instead the proposal is that grants go direct to independent schools, and not only for entrants from provided primary schools but even those from preparatory schools, for which there seems no excuse whatsoever in her philosophy.

At the same time, inevitably, provision for those in real need is withdrawn as the policy designed to provide a secondary education in tune with late twentieth century developments is set aside. 'The educational justification for comprehensive schooling is so conclusive that it must remain the context in which local education authorities can meet the educational needs of children', says the NUT. To substitute 'a form of sloganising under which education provision can be distorted is a damaging act by government'. It is difficult for anyone who takes education seriously to disagree.

J.S.

### A Subscription to Forum

To: Forum,  
11 Beacon Street, Lichfield.

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

I enclose cheque/P.O. for £2.50.

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

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**The following Back Numbers of  
Forum are still available  
price 85p each**

Vol 8 No 2	<b>Special number on the Probationary Year.</b>
Vol 9 No 3	<b>Plowden symposium.</b>
Vol 10 No 1	<b>The Sixth Form in the Comprehensive School.</b>
Vol 11 No 2	<b>Two Years after Plowden; Self-directed learning.</b>
Vol 11 No 3	<b>Freedom of Choice – for whom? A new Education Act</b>
Vol 12 No 2	<b>From secondary to primary.</b>
Vol 12 No 3	<b>Teaching Unstreamed Classes.</b>
Vol 13 No 1	<b>Teachers for Comprehensives; Mixed ability science.</b>
Vol 13 No 2	<b>Assessment – for Whom? Recent trends in examining.</b>
Vol 14 No 2	<b>Innovation in Education.</b>
Vol 15 No 1	<b>Democracy and Innovation in Education.</b>
Vol 15 No 2	<b>16 to 19.</b>
Vol 16 No 1	<b>Resource-based learning.</b>
Vol 16 No 3	<b>Going Comprehensive in England, Wales and Scotland.</b>
Vol 17 No 2	<b>New Directions: reconstruction of knowledge.</b>
Vol 17 No 3	<b>The Question of Size for primary and secondary schools.</b>
Vol 18 No 1	<b>Mixed Ability Teaching: French, Maths, Science.</b>
Vol 18 No 2	<b>Flexibility and Mixed Ability.</b>
Vol 18 No 3	<b>Examination or Assessment in primary and secondary schools.</b>
Vol 19 No 1	<b>In Defence of Education.</b>
Vol 19 No 2	<b>Comprehensive Remedial Provision for primary and secondary.</b>
Vol 19 No 3	<b>The Primary School.</b>
Vol 20 No 1	<b>Multiracial Education.</b>
Vol 20 No 2	<b>Non-Streaming – Why and how.</b>
Vol 20 No 3	<b>Testing and Teaching.</b>
Vol 21 No 1	<b>New Opportunities: the lower birthrate.</b>
Vol 21 No 2	<b>Primary and Secondary.</b>
Vol 21 No 3	<b>Mixed Ability Teaching and Learning.</b>
Vol 22 No 1	<b>The APU Threat?</b>
<b>Order from</b>	<b>Forum, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield WS13 7AA.</b>