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for the discussion of new trends in education

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This Issue

In Primary Classrooms

Secondary Options or a Common Curriculum

Editorial Board

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The Next Forum

The September **Forum** features a collective article written by the staff of the West Moors Middle School in Dorset describing and analysing the process of education in a purpose built 9-13 middle school.

Discussion of the tertiary college as a means of catering for the educational needs of 16-19 year olds will be continued by Roy Haywood, having been opened up in this number by Dennis Holman on Cricklade College.

Valerie Collier contributes a study of comprehensive re-organisation and the process of change in seven schools within the East Midlands.

An American visitor follows up our earlier discussion of the Assessment of Performance Unit (Vol 22 No 1) with a survey of teacher opinion, and Patricia Broadfoot writes on assessment.

If the NFER's long awaited research report on mixed ability teaching is published in time we shall carry a thorough review of it.

Education, Economy and Society

The recent Education No.2 Act and the Public Expenditure White Paper clearly threaten the fabric of our post-war education service and will undermine the progress that has been made in the past fifteen years towards that comprehensive system of primary and secondary schools which is a prerequisite for opening up real educational opportunity now so urgent in the era of the silicon chip.

Widespread opposition to reductions in educational expenditure has drawn attention to the very real damage resulting from the detailed and extensive onslaught on the education service. Attacking the cuts as axiomatically wrong has, however, obscured the need to argue the case for more, not less, education on economic and social grounds. This argument is more fundamental than the individual battles concerning capitation, school meals, class size, nursery provision and so on – important as these are in the immediate term.

A basic question is whether investment in education works. Is it demonstrable that spending on schools and colleges pays off in terms of economic growth? The answer given by most economists is that the hard evidence points to capital investment rather than investment in people as being 'productive'. But economic studies cannot measure the consequences of not providing an education system, though they recognise that education, while 'non-productive' like hospitals and communication systems, provides the essential economic infrastructure in industrial society. The whole educational infrastructure depends upon the continuing existence and efficiency of everything from nursery schools to higher education; and no economic argument can demonstrate that one part of educational provision is less necessary to the maintenance of economic life than another. The cuts are not only objectionable for reasons rehearsed in **Forum** and elsewhere: they threaten to bite deeply into the infrastructure with effects as economically and socially destructive as failing to maintain the railways or the telephone system.

Present government policy is, therefore, not just harming many individuals by restricting curricular opportunity in schools or failing to provide pre-school education – restrictions most damaging for the children of the least skilled manual workers. It also demonstrates acceptance that the economy will decline, or at best stagnate, for several years at least – as, indeed, the Chancellor has admitted. The huge 9% cut in educational spending by 1984/5 cannot but exacerbate that anticipated economic decline whose social consequences are becoming evident.

What are the alternative perspectives if expansionist, future-oriented policies were put in train? The long established and now rapid movement whereby technology replaces workers has already had major effects that bear directly on education. The silicon chip, even if seen as merely an extension of mass production and automated production, is a dramatic development. Whether the microprocessor is different in degree or in kind, the difference is undoubtedly very great and should not be underestimated just because, for most of us, it has so far only meant cheap digital watches and calculators. Micro-processors provide a very cheap means, in real as well as relative prices, compared with previous innovations which required extremely expensive investment in plant to replace men and women with machines. And even the chips are becoming cheaper as their mass production is improved.

The very real prospect for the 1980s is, to take one example, that routine and not-so-routine clerical work will be taken over by such devices as word-processors, spraying typescript on paper faster than the eye can follow. Clearly, there are potential gains and losses. The key question is, who is to gain? Employers able dramatically to reduce their labour costs through low-cost investment in the new technology, or the whole of society?

A caring and civilized society must surely seek to use the resources provided by the chip to make for continuing reductions in the working week, the extension of paid holidays and study leave, and perhaps earlier retirement. This could open up the prospect for everyone to engage in continuing education – not just retraining to up-date the skills of a (depleted) workforce, though new skills will undoubtedly have to be learned.

If education is not necessarily the direct producer of the national cake, it is now logically a part of that cake. As such, it becomes one of the consumer services that advanced industrial societies can provide. It could be cheaply, even freely, and certainly openly available in the leisure society so long promised and now, for some, actually here. Leisure is currently enforced as unemployment for growing numbers, but paid leisure is increasing for millions – even comparability studies recognise that the oft noted 'long' holidays of teachers are being approached by other workers. Education as part of the national cake, a desired commodity, would not be the prime candidate for cuts but an area for expansion, especially the supposedly 'non-essential' area of adult education.

There is evidence that in failing to recognise this the government is out of tune. The MORI poll published after the April budget showed education cuts as only marginally less popular than the least popular cuts, those in the health service. Far less than ten per cent of respondents favoured the cuts in either service. It is now well established that many people are willing to undertake long, demanding and sometimes expensive adult education, often for its intrinsic benefit.

Confidence and ability to participate in continuing education is enhanced by successful experience in the kinds of schools that **Forum** seeks to promote. The stultifying calls for a narrowing of school and college curricular to the so-called 'basics' and 'vocational' courses are further evidence of the present government's blind ineptitude and disregard for human progress.

Education has a strong and urgent claim for higher not lower priority: a claim based not only on grounds of principle but in terms of economic and social necessity. By denying that claim the present government endangers the very fabric of society.

Two articles in this issue – one on the findings of the ORACLE research project and the other recording teacher-pupil interaction in a large and relatively small infant class – point the need for a dramatic reduction in class size if children are to get the help they need with their learning. Two others, by Clyde Chitty and Professor Denis Lawton, argue that all secondary pupils are entitled to access to a common ground and planned breadth of curricular experience of a much richer nature than the DES is currently advocating. These, like much that **Forum** prints, indicate what could and needs to be done if the education service is granted the means now so short-sightedly denied it.

Inside the Primary Classroom

Brian Simon

The first volume from the ORACLE research programme (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) was published last month.[1] This focuses on the interactional process within a sample of primary classrooms. It is the first detailed observational study of its kind.

This research programme, generously funded by the Social Science Research Council, arose partly from **Forum's** close involvement in the swing towards unstreaming in primary schools in the mid-1960s. On this issue the **Forum** Editorial Board presented both written and oral evidence to the Plowden Committee, published in our booklet – **Non-Streaming in the Junior School** (1965) – of which well over 5,000 copies were sold. We argued there that research should focus on the wide variety of new organisational and teaching techniques found appropriate to the non-streamed situation, rather than on the simple comparison between streamed and unstreamed systems, which the NFER was then engaged on.[2] We expressed the view that the swing towards unstreaming was not only desirable on a number of grounds, but also that it was irreversible. This was contested by the NFER researchers;[3] it has, however, proved to be the case. The national survey of primary education, carried through by HMI and published last year, reported that only a very small minority of primary schools streamed their pupils. Later surveys, including the ORACLE sample, reinforced the conclusion that the streamed junior school is now very much a rarity.

Interest, then, focused on the question as to what new forms of classroom organisation were coming into being, and what were their relative effectiveness in terms of pupil learning. This first volume concentrates on the first of these questions, and reports the main findings in the sample of fifty-eight classrooms in three local authority areas, each having fully comprehensive systems of secondary education. The relation between different teaching 'styles' and forms of classroom organisation and pupil learning outcomes forms the subject matter of the second volume, to be published later this year.

Since the research programme was conceived and designed, in the early 1970s, primary education became a highly charged political issue as a result of **Black Paper** criticisms (from 1969) of 'permissive' or 'progressive' teaching techniques and approaches, the mass media exposure accorded to the Tyndale teachers who espoused an extreme version of so called 'progressive teaching', equivalent mass media exposure accorded to Neville Bennett's small-scale research project published as **Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress** (1976), culminating in Jim Callaghan's Ruskin College speech in October 1976 which warned against the use of modern methods in the primary school. An image was, it seemed, almost deliberately being built up of the primary schools dominated by way out anarchic teachers where the pupils did what they liked when they liked, and where the virtues of hard work and structured learning had no place. In the first **Black Paper** Timothy Raison was quoted as attributing the student unrest of 1968 and 1969 to the 'revolution in the primary school'.

In this situation the findings of the ORACLE research, based on close classroom observation in the academic year 1976 to 1977 are of some interest. Generally speaking they show that, for the ORACLE sample at least, the public image of the primary school created by the mass media is or was very wide of the mark. This comes out clearly from two of the main findings, and, such is their importance, it is worth devoting space to each.

First, the 'typical' pupil in the ORACLE sample was found to be 'fully involved and co-operating on his task' (that is, working) for well over half the time in the normal teaching/learning sessions. But in addition he was 'fully involved and co-operating on routine activities' (that is, activities related to his task) for another twelve per cent of the time while he spent nearly five per cent of his time 'waiting for teacher' – to ask a question, have his work looked over, etc. This means that for three quarters of normal lesson time the 'typical' (or average) pupil was, in one way or another, engaged on the task in hand. This represents a high work rate; few adults, I suspect, reach this level. Admittedly, facts like these tell us nothing about the *quality* of the pupils' work but they do indicate that concentration or involvement on 'approved' tasks is high in the classrooms observed.

Information of this kind was obtained by observers who coded pupils' activities every twenty-five seconds on an observation schedule developed in earlier research projects. The observer focused on individual children in a pre-arranged order. At each coding the curricular area in which the pupil was engaged was noted. This made it possible to reconstruct the curriculum in the main classroom sessions for the 'typical' pupil in the study. And this brings us to the second of our two main findings.

Far from any neglect of the 'basic skills', as was generally averred, it was found that these form major components of the curriculum now as in the past. Roughly one third of the 'typical' pupil's time in the ORACLE classrooms was spent on skills relating to literacy, one third to numeracy, while the remaining third was spent on 'general studies', including topic and project work in the field of history, geography and environmental studies, and on science (only four per cent of the time) and arts and crafts.[4] In other words we found, with the HMI survey, a heavy concentration of the basic skills. This raises wider questions which we cannot go into here, but at least it appears to give the lie to ignorant pronouncements about the unstructured and permissive dominance of the primary school curriculum.

The study has also revealed some rather disturbing or,

better, thought provoking, facts about the interaction process in junior classrooms. Although some class and group teaching took place, the dominant mode of interaction between teachers and pupils were individualised on a one-to-one basis. In classes with an average size of thirty, as was found to be the case, this means that, while the teacher engages in interaction with pupils very actively for most of the lesson time, each individual pupil receives very little of the teacher's time. The 'typical' pupil, it was found, interacts individually with the teacher for only 2.3 per cent of lesson time; as a member of a group he interacts with the teacher for even less time (1.5 per cent). Most of his interaction with the teacher the pupil experiences takes place when the teacher is addressing the class as a whole – as a member of the teacher's audience, amounting to 12.0 per cent of lesson time. Thus, although the whole thrust of the Plowden Committee's prescriptions is towards the individualisation of the teaching-learning process, in practice pupils work entirely on their own for the vast majority of lesson time, experiencing only very short, limited, individual interactions with the teacher.

The evidence raises a key issue relating to the use of grouping and group work in primary classrooms. Although pupils are normally seated in groups, while other forms of grouping also exist (eg curriculum groups in mathematics or language), in practice it seems most pupils are normally engaged on their own individual tasks. Co-operative group work, where pupils co-operate together to solve a problem, construct a model, etc., was found to be very rare. Many pupils never experience it at all.

The other feature worth referring to here is linked to this. The teachers' interactions with pupils, her questions and statements, appear to be primarily didactic. There is little of the probing type of questioning which encourages enquiry and discovery learning, of which stimulates thought and imagination; most are questions of fact or concerned with supervising the child's work – that is, making sure that the pupil has a clear grasp of his materials and knows how to set about completing his task. Generally the same seems true of teachers' statements; thought-provoking, stimulating or enquiry-based types of statement are rare. Most are concerned with telling the child what to do. Surprisingly it was found that teachers maximised thought provoking (or 'higher order') questions and statements when they were teaching the class as a whole. In the individual one-to-one situation interaction was primarily didactic. This clearly calls into question the traditionally accepted dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'progressive' teaching. Those teachers who engaged in more class teaching maximised enquiry-based questioning and statements; those who maximised individualisation were primarily didactic in their interactions (telling).

The teacher who individualises the classroom seems to face an impossible, or at least a very difficult situation. She necessarily must engage in a succession of short interactions with individual children in turn; ensuring that they know what to do and are able to complete their work successfully. In this situation, with classes at their present size, it seems that she simply does not have time to engage in prolonged one-to-one interactions with individual pupils of a thought-provoking or enquiry stimulating nature. In the whole class teaching situation, where she can concentrate her mind and those of her pupils on a specific issue or topic, such questioning, of course, becomes possible and entirely practical. Thus it is in this situation that such teaching is maximised. The potentialities of co-operative group work and teaching, it appears, are not yet being exploited in the ORACLE classrooms, although some teachers did so. It seems that this is an area where further research and development, in the form of assistance to teachers as to its organisation, might be very rewarding.[5] Above all a radical reduction in class size to an average of, say, about twenty pupils or less (as is the case now, for instance, in Sweden and Denmark) would open quite new possibilities in terms of raising the level and the quality of individualised interaction in the classroom.

The material concerning teachers was gained by the observers using a teacher observation schedule, which paralleled that used with the pupils. Analysis of the data derived from the Teacher Record (as it was called) made it possible to group teachers in terms of the way they organised, and interacted with, their pupils. There emerged four distinct teacher 'styles' having different characteristics reflected in the names the research team gave them. Briefly these are (i) *individual monitors,* who maximised individualisation within the classroom – these tended to be young and female, (ii) *class enquirers* who maximised class teaching, though on average using it for only thirty per cent of the time; these tended to be older teachers and male, (iii) *group instructors* who maximised the use of grouping, but whose interaction with their groups was primarily didactic, and (iv) a complex group called *style changers* who were further sub-divided into three groupings.

Each of these four main groupings of teachers were differentiated from each other not only by their audience – the way they organised their classes – but also by their use of the different interaction categories on the Teacher Record. There were, in other words, real differences in their interaction patterns, as well as differences in the way they organised their classes. The second volume will relate these differences in teaching style to differences in pupil outcomes (learning) over a variety of measures.

In sum, ORACLE found the classrooms investigated to be orderly and well managed,[6] the pupils highly involved in their work which itself focused largely on the basic skills of numeracy and literacy. It has established the existence of a variety of teaching 'styles' and forms of organisation in the (largely) unstreamed classroom. It found a high level of individualisation (the primary mode across *all* styles) and a relatively low cognitive interaction level between teachers and pupils. Its data throws doubt on the usefulness, or viability, of differentiating teachers on the progressive/traditional dichotomy – the ORACLE teachers fell into neither of these two simple categories. The material gained supports the view of the primary school classroom as a complex organism and of teaching as involving a wide variety and high degree of skill. Above all the evidence points to the need, if the Plowden prescripts as to the teacher's role are to be implemented, for a massive and radical reduction in the size of primary classes.

Notes

1 The research was funded by the SSRC over the period 1975 to 1980. The co-investigators were Maurice Galton and Brian Simon. **Inside the Primary Classroom** by Maurice Galton, Brian Simon and Paul Croll, with the assistance of John Willcocks and Anne Jasman, is published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, price £5.95 hardback, £3.95 paperback. The second volume, **Progress and Performance in the Primary Classroom** will be published this autumn, and three further volumes in 1981.

2 Finally published as **Streaming in the Primary School,** by Joan C Barker Lunn (1970).

3 See Plowdon Report, Vol 2, p 571.

4 These proportions refer to normal lesson sessions which involve interaction between the teacher and her pupils

Small is beautiful when...

Annabelle Dixon
Deputy Head of Chalk Dell Infant School in Hertford and a member of the Forum Editorial Board, Annabelle Dixon reviews the research on the effects of class size and analyses her own experience with a class of 33 and 23.

Realising the power of simple arithmetic recently, I calculated not only how many shoelaces I would probably have done up by the end of my years in teaching but the total in minutes, hours and days, only to find it came to something like a staggering three months. Somewhat taken by this ludicrous statistic I cast around for other classroom numbers I could manipulate; how many minutes did each child have in the classroom each day having taken out time for music, discussion, play times, PE, library, clearing-up, TV, Assemblies, etc? Suppose one divided that time by three to represent the familiar reading, writing and arithmetic? by four to include creative activities? Taking the latter instance, 30 minutes per day per area of work seemed about average for a normal week. Thus about one minute for each child of one's time for each type of work, if the day is so timetabled, and in any case, four minutes total for the whole day. For a class of 40, I can give each child a total of 3 minutes per day, for a class of 20, 6 minutes each, in which to cover the 3 Rs, plus any creative work. Although these 'results' are a piece of statistical nonsense in that one's time is not parcelled out in this way, taking the two extremes, the results merely substantiate what has always appeared to be intuitively self-evidence; that one has more time with a smaller class.

More time to do what? The question hardly seems worth the asking, so obvious would the answer be, but such research as has been carried out on the subject of small *versus* large numbers in classes throws an interesting and unexpected light on this aspect of the question to which I shall return in detail later on. Even so, whatever the findings and whatever the variety of methods of reaching those findings, one fact remains incontestable. In the private sector of education, one of the chief attractions to parents it seems, is that children are taught in smaller classes. Given that one of the priorities of a fee-paying school is that it maintains financial viability, it would obviously be more economical to have larger classes, yet in a recent Directory of Preparatory Schools in England and Wales (I have confined myself to this age group) a sample of schools taken strictly at random showed that 8 out of 10 schools made pupil-teacher ratio one of their 'selling points'. The ratio, as it happened, ranged between 1 to 12 and 1 to 20. This underlines the seeming paradox in the education scene of 1980: a government willing to spend literally millions of pounds subsidising the fees of those children who might not otherwise get the chance of a 'superior education' which, amongst other things, seems to imply tuition in smaller classes as a standard feature, and the same government unwilling to take advantage of a falling birthrate to spend those same or further millions on ensuring smaller classes for all. The paradox is only apparent as specific political principles give the whole picture a chill logic. Yet is this resistance also based on appeal to research, privately if not actually in public? Could the government find any statistics, however suprious they might turn out to be, to support their policy? It is true that for those who wish to do so, evidence that larger classes do not affect academic achievement is there to be found, if that is the sole criterion, yet support for smaller classes can equally be discovered. Apart from the problems of comparing such work, the whole picture of research in this field is very confused and hence difficult to use as a tool in public discussion.

In 1978 the Educational Research Service in the USA, which had undertaken a survey of this problem, summarised its work by stating that the 'research findings in the effects of class size on pupil achievement across all grade levels are contradictory and inconclusive...' Part of the contradiction seems to lie in the very definition of what constitutes large and small classes. In 1971 in England for example, publicity was given at the time to findings of the group commissioned by ILEA under Alan Little, whose conclusions seemed to imply that children in classes of 40+ did better at reading than those in smaller classes of 30 and under. However, because these smaller classes were then, unsurprisingly, found to be particularly weighted with children who needed remedial help, the comparison was switched to those in classes of 31-34 as against those in classes of 35-40; the assumption by the research team, if not actually the teachers, being that 31-34 pupils in a class were deemed to be 'small' classes.

In the USA, on the other hand, a three year survey funded by the Federal Bank of Philadelphia, whose main conclusion seemed to be that small classes of 28 and below benefited low achieving children but were of no especial benefit to average and above average children, also found that all children did less well in large classes, ie of 33 and over. (The suggested reason for this last finding was that it might be due to the teacher's hostile reaction to a class size

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as well as between the pupils themselves. Time spent on activities taking place outside the classroom, such as organised games, physical education, dancing, singing, etc, are excluded, as well as activities in which the teacher plays no active part, such as watching a television programme (though preparation and follow-up lessons were included under whichever curricular heading they fell).

5 See Sarah Tann's article on her research into grouping and group activities in Forum, Vol 21, No 3.

6 The 'typical' pupil was engaged in 'disruptive' activity or 'horseplay' for 0.3 per cent of lesson time.

larger than that agreed to by union contract rather than size – an interesting variable that has, as far as I know, never been considered by British researchers and must have raised no little hostility in the USA when suggested.)

Each piece of research in this area seems to have started with different assumptions, have tested different areas and/or neglected others and used different kinds of tests and means of assessment. To add further confusion, a very large survey, undertaken by Professor Glass and others and reported in 1978, used totally different methods of analysis than those used by anyone else; criticised though his methods of analysis have been, for Professor Glass makes use of a statistically very complex multiple regression analysis amongst other techniques, his findings were that as class size increases, so achievement levels decrease to the point where, by his reckoning, a pupil who had been in classes of 20 for 7 years of his school life could be as much as two years ahead of a matched contemporary who had been in classes of 40.

Could part of the confusion have arisen because small classes offered benefits which were not tested or thought important? It would seem to stand to reason that smaller classes offer far greater opportunities: and yet more than one large-scale piece of research has made the observation that teachers of a small class taught exactly the same way as if they had a large class. A Canadian study, for example, produced the somewhat wry evidence to show that class size made absolutely no difference to pupil participation, quality of educational resources, method of instruction or proportion of time the teacher spent working with groups or individuals. This might go some way to explain why the USA Educational Research Service, in the research already mentioned, also concluded that 'existing research findings do not support the contention that smaller classes *of themselves* result in greater academic achievement for pupils'. (my italics) They pointed out that many teachers (as in the Canadian research) did not take advantage of them to individualise instruction.

Many teachers, but not all teachers: the USA research project also pointed out that they had '. . . considerable and consistent evidence . . . (to show that) . . . certain teaching procedures and practices perceived by some educators as conducive to a productive learning environment, eg more individualisation, creativity, group activity and interpersonal regard, occurred more frequently in smaller classes than in larger classes'. It would be stretching coincidence to say that only such teachers were given smaller classes or that they didn't attempt something of the same kind with larger numbers; simply that they were the ones, for some reason, who saw the potential in having a smaller class and made use of it. The point to ponder is why some teachers didn't and haven't. It may well be that this lies behind much of the confusing research picture; if, for all intents and purposes a small class is treated in exactly the same way as a large class, then numbers are irrelevant and comparison tells you nothing more than the mere difference in size.

To return to the group of teachers who were observed as taking advantage of smaller class sizes: the point here is, I think, that the kind of learning environment that they tried to reproduce, which included more individual attention, creative and group activities, etc was observed far less frequently in larger classes. One assumes that this is because of the common sense restrictions of time, space and resources and indeed to try to work in this way with larger numbers pushes all three to their limits; not impossible, just much more difficult.

It is a truism to say that larger classes are frequently to be found in areas where there is a particular need for an interesting and rewarding learning environment and as much individual attention as possible. Even so, and it is a crumb of comfort, M Lawson writing in **The Times Educational Supplement** in 1973 'Are Small Classes Best?' makes the very pertinent point that it was in the self-same and deplored large classes that children had their first experience of freedom to experiment and make mistakes away from the close scrutiny of one adult; an infant teacher with few children only too often uses the extra time to pressurise the children into more 3 R work and misses the heaven-sent opportunities to develop language and observation skills and to give the children much needed time.

I know the problem at first hand, although no longer working in an area of some deprivation, for my classes are particularly well balanced socially at present. Because of admissions policy, I have a much larger class in the summer term than the autumn or spring term; last year it was thirty three (top infants and middle infants) and one morning, no particular one, I noted down what happened. I did the same at the beginning of this term when I had 23. I think the comparison speaks for itself.

The class of 33

Summer term: The day has started with a class discussion and the children checking in a 'record book' to see if they have any work to finish or outstanding that they should begin. Those that haven't are choosing from a range of creative activities.

John and Peter are using the dressing-up clothes. The word 'yashmak' came up in conversation yesterday and John decided to put one over his wedding dress but the elastic breaks. Could I mend it? I can't (I won't, to be honest, because I think he's always wheedling people to do things for him!) but I can find him a needle and thread. He's not so keen to try but I persuade him it's useful to learn. Make mental note to come back to him in a few minutes. He'll need encouragement and probably untangling.

I'm glad to see Jean and Mary have chosen to paint a picture of the class river trip to Greenwich. They don't usually paint much or attempt things they 'can't do'. Jean is having problems with the space and the size of the boat she has started. She takes a new piece of paper to add on after I ask her what she'll do about the problem. She's rather like John and needs pushing into solving problems for herself. She usually likes small intricate drawings so I offer her a felt tip to do the detail when the paint is dry as I think that will give her the effect she's after. Mary is happy doing anything Jean does, but in fact paints a very successful picture but is more pleased with Jean's praise than mine.

Ian is finishing some maths. He is trying to find six things in the room of which he can measure the width; I think he has the idea but I cannot for the life of me understand his results. They all seem to be between 2 cms and 4 cms and he has obviously measured big things like a table or bench. He has drawn pictures of what he has measured, and with a sinking feeling I realise he has measured his drawings . . . *mea culpa* – I should have let him try to tell me before he started exactly what he was going to do. I set him off again and watch him measure to make sure he can do it and wasn't avoiding the problems of large measurement. I don't think so, but he finds it hard to hold one thing in his head for any length of time and I'll need to come back to him soon.

Gareth is working on making sets with maths apparatus. I need to see how he is getting along as he is one of the least able but he's making a good job of it so far.

Donald and Sean are stacking up a pile of Mr Men books that Donald has brought in: Sean is measuring the length and then the width; I notice later that they've laid them out flat on the floor to form a series and then they arrange them according to the titles list on the back of the books. They don't need me but I'd like the boys to tell the rest of the class what they were doing next discussion time as I think they've really worked productively.

Peter wants me – he has left John to finish his story in the dressing up clothes on his own. The wood glue which is kept in my cupboard has run out and can he have some more? I must watch him using it, I think he lashes it on.

Two children at the sand tray are making too much noise and have to be quietened.

Seth comes to show me the woodwork helicopter he has finished painting; he wants to write about it and can he have a special booklet? I check to see he's tidied up the woodwork bench and tools as he's none too trustworthy – surprisingly tidy but the caretaker disillusions me later by showing me a great pile of sawdust pushed behind the door . . .

Sophie and Jimmy are using some paper with very large squares and are painting them in a sequence of colours. They tell me that it's a number pattern. Jimmy complains that the paints have been turned round and its making it difficult for him. I think he's able to work out a solution for himself and tell him so; he looks a bit peeved but a few minutes later comes to tell me he's worked out a way round the problem and is rather pleased with himself.

I go over to where a group of children are writing; Derek needs to know I'm keeping an eye on him and its a good opportunity for him to tell me the story he's just begun to write. Joanne has finished her story and reads it back to me before she and Sally go to play 'schools' in the home corner. She comes back to get some chalk. I must go over to see what their story is about when they've got it going and hear what the title is.

Damian and William are finishing off a 'moon landscape' a new 'class word' that came up in discussion time recently and want to draw an American flag. They go to the library to find a book about flags. I'm not sure that their landscape isn't rather slap-dash: they are both intelligent boys and could make a better job of it. I think I'll ask them what improvements they could make when they've finished the flag.

Graham comes up with his 'try' book: has he spelled 'what' correctly? He's made a good try and we discuss other 'wh' words. Fiona also wants to know if she's got a word right and joins the conversation. Richard is finishing off an illustration he has done to his writing about the river trip but he is too near the sand and is getting distracted. I move him to another table. The picture is a very detailed one of the Tower of London and he has remembered a great deal. I agree to show it to the others when he has finished it. I notice later that it is getting some imaginative embellishments like gunfire and a drowning prisoner (?) saying 'glug, glug, help' in purple felt tip.

I find I have noted down 'also had sundry conversations about caterpillars eg can they, do they, mate? Is it June tomorrow (Lesley) and can gerbils do experiments?' (from Carol who had just made them an exquisite 'problem' toy of two sunflower seeds and three pieces of straw). This has covered the first twenty-five minutes of the morning. Totting up the names I find I made direct contact with 22 children (as it works out almost the standard one minute per child). I must have seen and noticed what the other ten were doing and made sure they were 'gainfully employed' but I only made notes of those I talked to: thus, a third of the class did not have the benefit of 'individual attention' at least for 25 minutes.

The class of 23

This term I have 23 children and I made the following notes on a day chosen at random. (The day started in the same way as before.)

Elaine wants some squared paper as she wants to do a plan of the school kitchen (we visited them the previous day). I'll be interested to see how she tackles the task as it's the first time she's tried something like this. A new child, Justin, asks if he can make a model in clay; he says he's never made anything in clay before and I'll have to come back to him fairly frequently as if I know anything, he'll use it like plasticene and become frustrated and I think he needs success. Janine, a new girl is using the dressing up clothes; she tends to drift around and not make up any story or give herself any name etc; I tell her I'll ask her again in ten minutes to give her a chance. Robert reads back some writing he has just finished – he goes back to correct a few words I know he can spell. Denis asks for a booklet to write down all he knows about music. He is undeniably gifted and will probably make a lovely book. He's only just beginning to make friends but he's an isolate. Neil is making a number pattern necklace from beads; he's rather unsure about number and needs lot of experiences like this where both he and I can check and counter check. Roger needs some words to go on his picture of 'all things with sloping lines' following a class interest that I'm (hopefully) trying to develop. Gerald and Danny are making some buildings to go with a road layout. Pat and Helen and Sarah are making up a play called 'The Three Stars' and are making lavish jewellery out of scrap material. Jimmy is counting in 5s; this is a long term project, initiated by him and he's just got to 8,055. I check it. All correct but the writing is getting rather illegible. Jimmy agrees. Alice comes up with a word book – needs to know the '-ing' ending. Make a note to make a class point on this again next discussion time. Janine decides she can't think of a story and plays a Tens and Units game with Charmaine. Slight uproar as accusations of cheating fly to and fro. I watch the next round feeling like a referee. Anne comes to show me her writing. Justin finishes his clay model and is rather proud of the result. He then goes to finish a book he started yesterday. Damian and Tony ask if they can have a really long piece of paper to do a landscape of dinosaurs. I think they guess I'm going to ask them exactly *how* long . . . Eileen is just at the point where I think I can introduce the symbol for multiplication to her: She is delighted and wants 'lots more'. Norma is looking at a piece of tarmac under a magnifying glass. I check Serena's maths. She is using nothing but cows from the farm set – we both like the look of it.

Twenty three contacts with nineteen children – some I see more than once. Only four have had no individual attention, and with the extra time I have to dispense they will probably have some very soon. It's back to simple arithmetic . . .

Freedom of choice and the Common Curriculum

Clyde Chitty
A member of the Forum Editorial Board, Clyde Chitty taught at a London Comprehensive School before becoming Deputy Principal at Earl Shilton Community College nearly three years ago. Here he argues for schools to develop a five-year secondary curriculum for all their pupils.

The case for a common curriculum in secondary comprehensives has been so wildly distorted in recent months that it has become increasingly difficult for teachers who regard themselves as 'progressive' to espouse its cause. Part of the difficulty lies with questions of terminology: is the common curriculum the same as the core curriculum and what, then, is the common core? But the real problem, I suspect, is linked with the issue of freedom – and freedom operating on two levels: the freedom of teachers to plan their own syllabuses and courses without the threat of government interference; and the freedom of pupils as they get older – and particularly at the fourth- and fifth-year stage – to study the options of their choice.

Let me deal with the question of terminology first. In his book **The Common Curriculum**, published in 1978, Maurice Holt defined his curriculum model as 'a school-based programme of development which will initiate all the School's pupils into key aspects of our culture'. The emphasis here was on bringing pupils together and enabling them to share the same experiences. The 1977 Green Paper talked of 'a need to investigate the part which might be played by a "protected" or "core" element of the curriculum *common to all schools*'. (my italics)

Clearly there has to be some consensus of agreement on what a common curriculum for the secondary school should contain; and this is where controversy reigns. It was the introduction to a recent DES survey of local authority curricular policies that talked in terms of moving towards 'a nationally agreed framework for the curriculum' based on an assessment of national needs.[1] And this provoked a forceful letter to **The Times Educational Supplement** in which Gabriel Chanan claimed that national needs are merely a pious assumption masking a wholly unreasoned bid for greater centralisation of control over curricula'.[2] Since then, proposals for a broad compulsory core curriculum have been made in two discussion documents published in January of this year, one produced by the DES and the other the work of the Schools Inspectorate.[3]

Much of the open hostility which has greeted these recent publications – notably from Fred Jarvis on behalf of the National Union of Teachers – is understandable in the light of the present Government's known obsession with national standards and testing. I would certainly argue that each school must have the right to define the *precise nature* of its own 'common core', particularly in years four and five. And this must obviously involve taking account of the views of governors, advisers, parents and students, as well as teachers. My own experience at Earl Shilton Community College would tend to suggest that this need be no mere rubber-stamping operation: when it was proposed in our curriculum planning for the academic year 1979/80 that modern languages should be taken out of the 'core' to become an optional subject in the fourth year (thereby effectively reducing the number of subjects each student had to study), it was partly strong parental pressure to keep things as they were that caused us to change our minds. And despite his own very clear ideas on the way forward for comprehensive education, Maurice Holt accepts that each school's interpretation of the term 'common curriculum' will be influenced by the resources available and community pressures. In his words: 'A curriculum which offers common elements of the culture to all pupils in a school, where the school itself interprets the selection from the culture and the modes of implementation so as to make the most effective use of all its resources, can respond both to national guidelines and also to the local conditions and community'.[4]

From a slightly different standpoint, supporters of a common curriculum are sometimes attacked for seeking to establish a dull uniformity in our schools; for attempting to force outmoded, unwanted subject disciplines down all pupils' throats, thereby leading to apathy and indiscipline. After all, why should all children have to study set periods of maths and English and science until the day they leave school? What we need, or so it is argued, are new and exciting subjects *relevant* to pupils' needs in the last quarter of the twentieth century: child care, ecology, politics, international relations . . .[5] Of course, this is all something of a non-argument: in the first place there is no reason why a common curriculum should not embrace all so-called 'relevant' topics within the broad subject areas of science, humanities and so on. And where tensions exist between students and teachers – and this is certainly true of a number of secondary schools – these will not be ameliorated by filling the timetable with new and trendy options. A good teacher can make maths and history and geography come alive for fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds across the entire ability range; a bad one will fail to convince his pupils of the 'relevance' of anything he has to offer.

I accept that a nationally imposed compulsory curriculum would be alien to the English tradition of an education service that is centrally supported and locally administered; and that there needs to be a continuing debate about the content of the curriculum in the light of national needs in the eighties. I accept that the DES can be charged with limited vision for the 'areas of specific concern' picked out in its recent survey of local authority policies and practices: English, maths, modern languages, science, RE and 'preparation for working life'. What I find impossible to believe is that any of our problems are being solved by the abandonment of traditional forms of knowledge and understanding in favour of offering children an ever-

growing number of esoteric and ephemeral option choices.

For reasons that have much to do with libertarian fervour, many people clearly feel that there is something inherently wicked in the notion of a *compulsory* curriculum. The way forward suggested by this article may, from a superficial viewpoint, involve the 'erosion' of freedom – surely, in the context of education and politics, the most abused word in our language; what I would hope to show, however, is that *existing* practice in so many of our schools already denies true freedom to the vast majority of our pupils.

A special National Opinion poll commissioned by **The Times Educational Supplement** in April last year found that more than three-quarters of the secondary teachers questioned were in favour of a common curriculum for all pupils aged 11 to 16.[6] Yet, significantly, the large body of recent research on the subject shows that many schools simply pay lip-service to the ideals of a common curriculum and see no need to translate them into practice. In the words of one recent researcher: 'it almost seems as if a common course is now seen as the one desirable goal which, like virtue, all must *be seen to be pursuing* . . .'[7] (my italics)

Evidence from HMI

The reality of the situation is indeed high-lighted in the recently-published HMI report, **Aspects of Secondary Education in England**, based on a survey of 384 schools extending over the years 1975-1978. This found that only 11 per cent of the schools questioned offered a wholly common curriculum in the first three years, with the vast majority indicating that there was some differentation in the curriculum according to the sex and/or ability of the pupils. Admittedly, this survey included grammar, secondary modern and technical schools as well as comprehensives, but, on my calculations, the figure actually drops from 11 to just over 6 per cent (15 schools out of a total of 236) if all schools which belong in the selective sector are omitted. The survey found that curricular differentiation was particularly marked in the third year, and usually applied to pupils at the two ends of the ability range. Pupils in the higher streams, bands or sets were often given the opportunity to start one or more additional foreign languages – additional, that is, to French; while their less able contemporaries were encouraged to drop French altogether. Similarly, a select group of pupils might be studying separate physics, chemistry and biology; with the 'science' on offer to the bottom streams being restricted to rural science or incorporated into 'environmental studies'. If a price had to be paid for the introduction of new subjects in the third year, it was invariably less contact with the creative/aesthetic area of the curriculum (art, music and the crafts) for the able pupils concerned.[8]

The conclusions to be drawn from these findings reinforce those of another reputable project, the 13-14 Curriculum Study, which confined its research to 117 schools in the West Midlands in 1974. In **Framework for the Curriculum**, one of a series of books covering various aspects of the study, Penelope Weston describes the third year as marking the halfway point in a 'normal' five year secondary course – 'an in-between stage, with the generalised enthusiasm of the lower school behind and the new challenge of examination or 'leavers' courses ahead'. In the words of one head teacher quoted in the book: 'The third year curriculum is inevitably a compromise. Conflict between a common curriculum with stable primary groups and increased specialisation with the flexibility required is most acute in the third year'.

Paradoxically, the raising of the school leaving age to sixteen, which could have been used as a marvellous opportunity to plan a unified five-year curriculum for *all* schools, has, in fact, had the adverse effect of turning the third year into a time of decision-making and forward-planning for *all* pupils. And the need for pupils to make choices about their options in the fourth and fifth years can act as a very real constraint on the third-year timetable, as harmful, perhaps, in its own way, as the pressures exerted on junior schools by the 11-plus selection procedure. The danger is apparent in the complaint of another head teacher quoted in the study: 'There is a lack of time during the third year, when the maximum number of academic subjects have to be taught to make possible an informed choice of options for the fourth year'.[9]

In the fourth year, all pretence of a truly common curriculum is finally dropped by most schools in favour of one or other of a bewildering variety of option schemes. In some schools, all pupils study the same 'core' subjects and then choose from a wide selection of options *open to all.* These optional subjects are arranged in a number of option 'blocks', normally between four and six depending on the time allocated to each subject. This can lead to curiously unbalanced programmes if the distribution of subjects is purely haphazard; some schools, on the other hand, organise their blocks in such a way that all pupils have to continue with at least one subject from each of the major disciplines within the curriculum. This arrangement can come very close to the ideal of a common curriculum in years 4 and 5.

The larger comprehensives often run completely segregated courses with specific examination objectives. This means that pupils are 'banded' according to ability – O-level, O-level/CSE, CSE, non-examination – and both the 'core' and the options will be peculiar to each band. The system has obvious built-in inequalities, and for those pupils in the lower bands – taking CSEs only or no exams at all – the curriculum can often be very restricted and heavily weighted towards the practical and the vocational.

The HMI survey already referred to found that the only 'core' subjects studied by every fourth- and fifth-former in all the schools questioned amounted to no more than English and maths. In more than 90 per cent of schools physical education, usually including games, was part of the 'core'; and the majority also included religious education and careers. In most schools the survey showed options accounting for more than half the total curriculum. In those comprehensives providing all pupils with a free choice of options, the average number of subjects offered in the largest schools (those with over 300 in the fourth year) was found to be 24, compared with 19 in the smallest (under four form entry) schools.[10]

But what does 'a free choice of options' actually mean in practice? Is the choice ever really 'free', even when there is no 'banding' of pupils according to examination objective? How are decisions reached, and to whom can pupils turn for advice and support? A significant feature of the present scene singled out by the HMIs was that in nearly 20 per cent of the schools, curricular choices were made without the benefit of advice from specialist careers teachers about the possible effects of such choices. Even where advice was sought, more than a quarter of the schools indicated that this did not involve the local authority careers service.[11]

For the vast majority of pupils, and particularly the less able, there is in any case no real choice. In the words of the recent HMI survey:

'The organisation of options... is almost always complex and frequently necessitates compromise on the part of both pupils and school. Less able pupils are given in effect less real choice than other pupils. The examination courses they take are sometimes inappropriate and were not designed for the levels of ability for which they are used. The more able pupils may have opportunities to take additional languages and separate sciences but may suffer from the loss of practical, aesthetic or humanities subjects and course devoted to aspects of personal and social education . . . The introduction of options in the fourth and fifth years leads to the abandonment of some important subjects and to insufficient breadth in some individual pupils' programmes.'[12]

Pupil choice is, in practice, illusory. Various pressures are at work to ensure that all option 'blocks' succumb to hidden banding. Pupil A at one end of the ability range will be advised of the folly of choosing woodwork in preference to French; pupil B at the other end will be 'steered' gently into 'design for living' or 'environmental studies'. Where there is no rationale behind the organisation of the option 'blocks', there can be no guarantee that all pupil programmes will be balanced and purposeful.

Evidence from Scotland

The most impressive recent evidence on this subject comes from Scotland with the publication of **Choices and Chances: A Study of Pupils' Subject Choices and Future Career Intentions** by AC Ryrie, A Furst and M Lauder. This important new work is the first publication of a research project investigating the process by which young people move through the later stages of secondary schooling and into work or higher education. This first book tackles some of the questions to be asked about the course decision process at the age of fourteen – is this a time when there are *real* choices to be made, and what part do parents, teachers and the young people themselves play in the process? What are the expectations of the pupils at this stage with regard to leaving school, getting a job and going on to further or higher education? The process of transfer from third to fourth year (or second to third, in the case of Scotland) is described as 'the pivot of the secondary school system'; all the more surprising, therefore, that it should have remained until now a relatively neglected area of research.

Basing their view on the results of an extensive programme of interviews and on information gathered from schools, the authors conclude that the area for real choice in the curriculum is far more limited than it appears. They show that the options available to the less academically able pupils are more restricted than in the case of others; and that pupils generally do not exercise a free and uninhibited choice ranging over all the apparent options, but 'choose' along the lines of existing assumptions and expectations, in a way that considerably limits the actual scope for choice.[13] What may appear to be totally democratic is, in effect, an integral part of that traditional process whereby youngsters are sorted out and allocated to different routes through the system. The fact that the procedure is referred to as 'subject choice', placing the emphasis on *choice* rather than on allocation to levels or streams, is an essential element in the game being played. The differentiating process is simply less obvious, more subtle than would otherwise be the case.

As all the available material shows, less able pupils are the most obvious 'victims' of the system. Sometimes teachers are quite unscrupulous in competing for the 'better' pupils and trying to discourage the poorer ones. This comes across in comments from two teachers participating in the Scottish project:

'There's lots of competition to get the best pupils. Others are steered away. There's lots of propaganda. They don't want the stupid ones in their department.

It's a little bit like a transfer operation for footballers. Teachers bid for certain pupils. This is where problems come in in placing the less able pupils.'[14]

Much the same point is made by the headmaster of a West Midlands comprehensive school participating in the 13-14 Curriculum Study:

'I think once you start options you get exclusions by choice and you get exclusions, I think, by staff pressure. The child may in fact choose the wrong subjects and therefore exclude himself from an experience which may be valuable later on. But I think even more serious is the fact that once you have options . . . you're left with a number of children that nobody wants, as it were, and these children are pushed into any particular groups on sheer expediency.'[15]

Recent detailed research in two West Midlands comprehensive schools by the same team which published **Framework for the Curriculum** has produced the same conclusions as those reached by AC Ryrie and his colleagues working in Scotland. In **A Charter for Choice** by Ann Hurman (reviewed by Roger Seckington in the last number of **Forum**), the option system is described as 'an organisational lubricant', a method of selecting pupils at 14+. 'By officially handing over responsibility for choosing to the pupils and their parents, it eases the process of differentiation and selection which at 14+ becomes actual and recognised in terms of differences in courses and in examination targets'.[16]

A five-year curriculum for all

The problems associated with devising viable option schemes would obviously disappear if all schools were encouraged to plan a unified five-year curriculum embracing all their pupils. For too long, we have allowed ourselves to be frightened by the extreme libertarianism of some child-centred education which has nothing to do with the aims of a comprehensive school as I understand them. As John White says in his chapter 'Socialist Perspectives on the Curriculum', in the recently-published **Education and Equality**: 'too much freedom to do what he or she wants is not going to help the child whose desires and abilities are very limited to acquire new ones'.[17] And, as current research so clearly proves, the 'freedom' associated with free choice at fourteen is, in any case, a myth. It amounts to no more than a hidden form of selection, the subtle process whereby a move to a differentiated curriculum helps to prepare pupils for life in a class-ridden, status-conscious society.

Classroom Research

Jon Nixon

Reporting a Schools Council conference at which teachers discussed their experiences of classroom research, the organiser identifies three major themes which may point significant new connections between theory and practice.

On 16 November, 1979, twenty teachers came together for three days at Fircroft College, Birmingham, to discuss and prepare a report on the role of the teacher in research. They represented a wide variety of experience both in terms of the research projects with which they had been associated and of the posts that they had held in nursery, primary and secondary schools and colleges of education. All of them had been involved in some form of classroom research, either as part of a curriculum development project, to fulfil the requirements of a higher degree, or simply out of a desire to learn more about their own classrooms; and all of them had now come together to share their experience of classroom research and to define some of the key issues relating to their role within the research process.

The conference itself was more freewheeling and lively than this report conveys. Discussions flowed: several issues were addressed simultaneously, some concerns were embedded within others, multiple meanings were generated by certain issues. Perceptions were kaleidoscopic, rather than logical and sequential. For the purpose of this brief report, however, I shall reduce the rich diversity of talk and viewpoint to an outline of three of the major themes which kept recurring throughout the weekend.

The role of the teacher in research

The participants had done varied research: two teachers from neighbouring London comprehensive schools had used a modidication of the Ford Teaching Project 'triangulation' method in order to explore interaction within a series of drama lessons; a nursery teacher from Essex had mounted a small research project to refute the findings of Jerome Bruner's Oxford pre-school research group (her research showed that within her limited sample water play could be used as a means of increasing young children's concentration span); while a middle school teacher from Dorset with the support of her deputy head had kept a detailed diary over a period of several terms, in order to find out how her pupils learnt and how her own teaching had developed.

Many of those present saw themselves fighting against what they considered to be the dominant notion of research in education based on a model from the physical sciences. This model was not, they claimed, particularly useful when trying to understand the complex of infinitely varying transactions and interactions which comprises any lesson. Instead they looked to the traditions of ethnography and phenomenology to supply them with a methodology responsive to the classroom.

A few people at the conference, however, believed that the physical sciences model was appropriate. A teacher from a comprehensive school in Kent, for example, had conducted a 'pure' research project on the learning of chemistry concepts. This had led to changes in teaching methods not only in his own lessons but also in the lessons of other teachers within the department. Gail McCutcheon, the conference evaluator, commenting on the various views of research and the various approaches represented by the different cases, pointed out that 'what is needed is not "a true religion" about a model for teacher research, but rather an "'ecumenical" view'. In this respect it seems that the key question should be stated in the plural form: what are or could be roles for teachers in research?

Reasons for involving teachers in research

One reason pursued at length by the participants concerned the issue of professional self-development. By investigating and reflecting upon their own practice teachers, it was argued, may increase their understanding of the classroom. Understanding why a particular child is upset or withdrawn

References to Article: pages 73-75

1 **Local Authority Arrangements for the School Curriculum – Report on the Circular 14/77 Review** (HMSO, November 1979).
2 **The Times Educational Supplement** 14.12.79, p 12.
3 **A Framework for the School Curriculum** (DES, January 1980) pp 1-8; **A View of the Curriculum** (DES, HMI Series: Matters for Discussion 11, January 1980), pp 1-6, 13-22.
4 Maurice Holt, **The Common Curriculum: Its Structure and Style in the Comprehensive School** (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp 28-9.
5 The list of 'relevant' subjects suggested by Gabriel Chanan in the letter already referred to comprises: health, nutrition, child-rearing, ecology, technology, media, arts, relationships, economics, politics, law, community affairs, international affairs.
6 **The Times Educational Supplement** 23.11.79, p 9.
7 Penelope B Weston, **Framework for the Curriculum: A Study in Secondary Schooling** (NFER, 1977), p 46.
8 **Aspects of Secondary Education in England: A Survey by HM Inspectors of Schools** (DES, December 1979), pp 14-21.
9 **Framework for the Curriculum**, pp 15, 16, 82.
10 **Aspects of Secondary Education in England**, pp 21-37.
11 *Op.cit.*, p 21.
12 *Op.cit.*, p 37.
13 AC Ryrie, A Furst and M Lauder, **Choices and Chances: A Study of Pupils' Subject Choices and Future Career Intentions** (Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), p 130.
14 *Op.cit.*, p 77.
15 **Framework for the Curriculum** p 96.
16 Ann Hurman, **A Charter for Choice: A Study of Options Schemes** (NFER, 1978), pp 306-8.
17 John White, 'Socialist Perspectives on the Curriculum', in David Rubinstein (ed), **Education and Equality** (Penguin Books, 1979) p 166.

may not imply a different course of action on the teacher's part, but it does help the teacher make sense of that child's behaviour. The development of this kind of understanding might well be seriously undervalued within a political and economic climate such as ours, which seems to foster increasingly instrumentalist policies and short term planning.

In other cases, however, the understanding derived from classroom research may be acted upon. For it informs the teacher's judgement about such things as how children learn, what the critical moments in the learning process are, and how and when the teacher should intervene so as to facilitate this process. These kinds of enquiry may increase the knowledge and understanding of teachers in such a way that they are able to respond more sensitively to the needs of their pupils in terms of both face to face classroom interactions and more formal aspects of curriculum planning and school organisation.

In addition to increasing the understanding and informing the decisions of teachers, classroom research may also bring about a modification or elaboration of their theory of teaching and learning. Research was seen by many at the conference as an ongoing professional duty. It makes explicit the teaching acts; it informs them and enables the practitioner to understand the context within which they are embedded.

The studies produced by the teachers and presented at the conference, although of specific cases, contained insights and raised questions that are of general significance. If disseminated through appropriate journals and research networks, these reports and others like them could be of practical use to other teachers and a possible starting point for wider research. That way it would be teachers, rather than the academic research community, who would be defining at least some of the research problems.

Support for teacher research

Conditions in schools and in the wider context might, it was suggested, be arranged in such a way as to facilitate collaborative work of the kind documented in several of the case studies. Participants wanted to know more about alternative methods of doing research. They called for a greater number of courses aimed at educating (not just training) people in approaches to the study of schooling and for more conferences which would provide teachers with access to ideas and information about these various approaches. The need for practical support (such as typing, duplicating, access to tape recorders, and release from school to attend conferences and disseminate work) was also stressed.

Indeed, the attitude of senior staff and in particular the head was seen to be a vital factor affecting the success of the research reported at the conference. Where the head or deputy head failed to support or actually tried to subvert the research activity, the research did not work. Clearly, those involved in teacher research have a duty to educate heads and deputy heads concerning its potential value. A series of papers written jointly by teachers and heads about arranging a supportive environment for school-based research would serve a useful function in this respect.

More than one participant noted the irony of these appeals for support, financial and otherwise, at a time when the government seems determined to cut back public expenditure to the point where local education authorities will not be able to provide even the bare essentials of schooling. Nevertheles, it was reiterated that funds must be injected into research projects which tackle problems of real concern to teachers. This could only be done by involving teachers more fully in the research process. It was felt very strongly that professional research workers do not always respond to what teachers really want. Their work gains its validity from other researchers and that tends to make what they write inaccessible to the majority of teachers.

The significance of this conference lay in the fact that it was planned, organised and co-ordinated by practicing teachers and that the Schools Council felt it worthwhile to back a venture in which teachers were to make a considered statement on key questions relating to the relevance of educational research. The teachers who attended were intent upon forging a new mode of connection between theory and practice: alternative forms of research and of collaboration between teachers and professional researchers. The work of these teachers shows, I believe, that many of them are already pushing past the fixed forms and beginning to see through and beyond them the elements of new, dynamic formations.

The full report of the conference is available free of charge from the Schools Council. Anyone wishing to receive a copy should write to the Publications Department, Schools Council, 160 Great Portland Street, London W1N 6LL. Any other correspondence concerning the conference or possible outcomes should be addressed to: Jon Nixon, the conference organiser, at Woodberry Down School, Woodberry Grove, London N4 2SH.

Discussion

Schools and their Tutors

The HMI's Report of December 1979: **Aspects of Secondary Education in England**, has selected pastoral care as being a priority requirement for schools. If this concern is responded to within the schools it could result in even more hierachical structures rising. However, I consider that adequate and probably more significant and effective provision could be achieved by reviewing the lowest rank of the pastoral hierarchy: the tutor group.

Two questions need to be put by schools which operate a tutorially based pastoral care system. The first: what in curricular terms do schools *expect* to happen between tutors and children which could contribute to personal and social wellbeing? The second: what do they *intend* should happen? I want to look briefly at both questions, and then reluctantly suggest that neither expectations nor intentions are likely to be met in many schools because neither professional expertise nor resources are available in sufficient strength at tutorial level.

Schools expect that the tutor will be competent to handle the day to day concerns which arise for the children within his group. Indeed, they frequently assure parents that their child's tutor is the member of staff who knows him best, and therefore should be the first point of contact in the event of need. Children too are given to understand that the tutor has a special responsibility for their welfare. (At the beginning of secondary education this has special implications for the children coming as they do from primary schools where they became used to a form teacher who was readily available.) Maybe the secondary schools expect that as the subject teacher copes with the intellectual and academic development of the pupil, so the tutor will cope with the individual personality and social environment of the child.

In expecting tutors to be competent in this respect, schools clearly intend that tutors should carry out certain functions which stabilise the pastoral system. How many schools have clarified the functions? How many schools explain to newly appointed tutors how they are expected to respond to their roles? For a long time this portion of curriculum time has been given precious little consideration – infinitely less than would be given to an academic subject. Yet both are within the timetable.

If schools both expect and intend some outcome from the formation of tutor groups, how do they set about assuring that their aims are met? What are the basic structures and resources which they set up?

Although each institution differs, one can establish minimum structures which each will normally provide for the tutor. Most schools provide a venue for the group, they allot a timetabled slot, and in doing this they determine the duration and frequency of the meetings. Sometimes that is the limit of provision – the tutor is then expected to get on with the job.

Activities within this time and at this place become unclassifiable. The school stipulates that certain administration is attented to: registration, distribution of home/school communications, dissemination of information about school activities. There is nothing spectacular or even interesting about a lot of these transactions but they can occupy a large part of tutorial time. In fact, in many tutor groups that is the extent of tutorial activity and interaction; neither the tutor nor the school prepares for anything further.

One is forced to wonder where pastoral concern has vanished to in such a situation. The intentions may still be there, but the reality does not permit of any movement towards meeting it other than can be expected as spin-off from the various activities. Undoubtedly these activities are essential to the smooth running of the establishment and as such can be regarded as contributing to the wellbeing of the children. But the attitude of reliance upon chance benefit, and that is all too often what this amounts to, is hardly acceptable from professionals. In fact, most of the administrative business could equally well be performed by any teacher during the first lesson of the morning – though subject teachers would be very quick to resent this intrusion on their time.

In some schools the situation could be remedied by guidance from further up the pastoral ladder. Staff appointed to pastoral care posts, however, are frequently too busy dealing with the more urgent and demanding problems of discipline and crises. They are occupied keeping their fingers in the holes of the dyke rather than ensuring that the dyke is too well engineered and constructed to permit the leaks appearing.

In other words, something in the nature of preparation and skills training at the tutorial level is required. Tutors, and the senior staff, need to realise the full potential and nature of the tutorial commitment; at present this is a wasted asset within too many schools.

A tutor whose awareness has been aroused to the personal and social development of pupils, to the ways in which social interaction takes place within groups, to what constitutes moral and abnormal behaviour in individual children and groups of children, is more likely to understand difficulties, than one who is unaware.

If this awareness to possible responses is to become an accredited part of professional expertise in secondary schools, then at the very least attention needs to be directed towards introducing teachers to the concepts. Initial teacher training seems almost totally lacking in this respect. In-service training is partial with tutorial concerns usually taking a very minor place amidst the more general theme of pastoral care.

One beneficial result of the current educational climate could be that schools are forced into self-evaluation. Evaluation of tutorial systems could make a healthy start. It appears from the HMI's Report referred to that schools most successful in promoting pastoral care in the widest meaning of the concept are those which have given the matter careful thought. We all know where good intentions lead to. Let schools accept the challenge to explore the foundation level of their tutorial care in order to provide a genuine base for an understandable and articulated pastoral care system.

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Lewes

Campaign for Comprehensive on TV

The Campaign for Comprehensive Education presented the case for comprehensive schools on the BBC's Open Door programme on 16 April. Compered by Dame Margaret Miles in forceful fashion, we were shown schools from various parts of the country catering for different age groups, and left in no doubt of the arguments in favour of comprehensives, even though the layman might have ended up a little confused by the plethora of information and argument.

Barrowford County Primary school was used to demonstrate the only truly comprehensive situation in our system, at primary level. Various myths were then dispelled, in particular the belief that the 11+ has been abolished (11,000 children are taking it in 1980), and Kingston was shown as an example of a place where grammar schools are still retained, despite protests from parents. Retrogressive councils, such as Erith where they are trying to reintroduce the 11+ were cited and we were given a fine picture of parental solidarity for the school. The contradictory situation in many areas where a comprehensive situation cannot be said to exist truly despite the presence of comprehensive schools because grammar or independent schools are still operating, was stressed, Bedford being shown as an example. The money spent by Central and Local government (80 million on places and 40 million on grants and subsidies let alone the proposed assisted places scheme) should be spent on comprehensives. Less than three-quarters of secondary age children are in comprehensive schools, and even the Public Schools commission said in 1970 that the choice must be made between a grammar school system and a comprehensive one. General opinion in the country was said to be in favour of comprehensives.

Slanted coverage of comprehensive schooling by the media was criticised; sensational happenings at comprehensives hit the banner headlines whereas similar offences in our public schools are reported quietly and almost condoned. A scene from a Panorama programme of 1977 was shown as an example of the unfavourable coverage, chaos in the classroom which it had been admitted was unrepresentative. A report in 1979 had said that 4 out of 5 secondary schools were purposeful places where good work was going on and disruption was minimal.

Earl Shilton Community College in Leicestershire, a 14-18 school, was shown as a school which could be fairly assessed since Leicestershire is fully comprehensive. Academic comparisons were drawn, favourable to comprehensives, and more misapprehensions were corrected. A vet said that he was restricted at grammar school, and a university student testified that her reading problems had been sorted out at a comprehensive school. Fears that academic kids lose out when a grammar school goes comprehensive and that pupils don't succeed in inner city areas were shown to be groundless.

We were then taken down the road to Heathfield, the 11-14 High school at Earl Shilton where they were measuring worms and defining the word 'elephantine' in truly comprehensive fashion. Here mixed ability teaching was extolled, and Clyde Chitty outlined the problems posed by the present dual systems of examination at 16, the difficulties schools have in deciding early on whether to enter children for CSE or GCE, the undervaluing by parents and employers of CSE. He stressed that the whole system of selection holds us back.

Back at the Community College (no explanation of our sudden flight was given which was confusing) Roger Seckington outlined the expansion of a comprehensive teacher's job to include pastoral care, careers service and helping the school to serve the community. Local satisfaction with the open access 6th form where parents can come and do the odd 'A' level was evident, and a student could combine 6th form work with a professional course at an FE College, or even a job.

Tertiary education was seen as the area in which comprehensive education should expand, either in the 11-18 school or sixth form college. Nelson and Colne college offered very wide facilities (30 'A' level courses and 20 'O' levels as well as many others) with a more relaxed atmosphere than at school, according to the inmates. Comprehensive development in the 16-19 age range is of immense importance now, bringing young people together for working life, which is after all itself comprehensive.

JUDITH HUNT
Lichfield

Literacy

May I add to the discussion of the link between remedial education and adult literary provision commented upon by Margaret Herrington (Discussion, **Forum** Vol 22, No 22). While concurring with several of her points, I must query her rejection of any potential value to be gained from greater liaison between school teachers and adult literacy schemes. As she herself admits, one form of liaison *has* been successful: the many teacher volunteers who testify to benefitting from the training courses which are such an important feature of adult literacy schemes provide the evidence. They have been led to look at the literacy learning process from a new perspective, and to use insights gained to help children as well as adult students. This seems to me a welcome bonus resulting from the literacy campaign and the liaison between professionals from different teaching backgrounds.

Is it not also possible that teachers of adults might have something to learn from teachers of children? In my experience the answer is a definite yes. We are all involved in helping people, whether children or adults, to succeed in learning, and 'mutual respect' and 'learning partnerships' are surely as important for younger as for older learners. Differences there may need to be in the practical implementation of the philosophy, but these do not alter the validity of the general principles. The fact that 'we're all teaching reading' (as well as other language skills) *and* influencing each learner's image of his/her capacity to learn, is surely a starting point for dialogue. Would not most of us like to see literacy problems prevented or remedied before people reach adulthood, and should we not offer any help we can towards achieving this?

I failed to teach secondary school children to read in the early '60s. I wish there had been someone around at the time to help me see why, and how to remedy the faults in my practice. Now that I have a much clearer idea of how to help people learn, I often wonder how many of the early victims of my ineptitude found an adult literacy scheme. What better purpose for 'time-consuming' meetings than to share what we've learned? Surely adult literacy workers do not want to isolate themselves into an elite without any commitment to or interest in their fellow professionals in schools! Shouldn't we be helping to work ourselves out of a job? I've yet to meet an adult who didn't wish he/she had learned to read and writer earlier, or a school teacher who didn't appreciate all the help he/she could get.

CATHY MOORHOUSE
formerly Director, ILEA Language & Literacy Unit

What kind of Common Curriculum?

Denis Lawton
The Deputy Director of the University of London Institute of Education, where he was previously Head of the Curriculum Studies Department, subjects DES and HMI approaches to the secondary curriculum to critical analysis. His most recent publication is **The Politics of the School Curriculum** (1980, Routledge and Kegan Paul).

There is a strange paradox in education which has often been denied or ignored by 'progressive' educationists. The paradox is that if we want adults who are free it is not always the best policy to give children, when very young, complete freedom; similarly, if we want to educate a creative musician, it may be necessary to encourage two or three hours routine practice every day. Only recently has this paradox begun to emerge as part of the curriculum debate. If we want to develop well educated adults, then unlimited choice may be positively harmful. A well planned common curriculum may be much better than a system of 'options' even for the 14 to 16 age group, as Clyde Chitty has so well shown in his article in this issue.

Another aspect of this argument is that if the State makes attendance at school compulsory for ten or eleven years, then this loss of freedom ought to be justified in terms of the advantages gained during that time by the pupil. Educational optimists can simply assume that ten years spent in school is better than no schooling, but it is increasingly difficult to make that assumption. At one extreme de-schoolers and some sociologists claim that schooling is positively harmful; at the other extreme cynics suggest that schooling is simply a waste of time. If we want to maintain compulsory education, we must justify it in terms of educationally worthwhile knowledge and experience – that is, a curriculum.

This view of curriculum is much more like a set of pupils' rights of access to educational experiences rather than packages of knowledge and skills which someone thinks reflect 'the needs of society'.

The other strand in the current debate about a common curriculum which is subliminal, but extremely important, arises directly out of comprehensive school development. In the past, schools (progressive and traditional alike) have tended to emphasise individual differences rather than similarities between individuals, and common experiences. There has been much more attention paid to the needs of the gifted and the needs of the slow learners than to what it is that all children have in common. Of course, individual differences are important, but what about common needs? If we are all part of the same society, sharing many aspects of the same culture, then surely there are certain educational needs which are common to the whole community irrespective of religion, class or intellectual ability.

Clyde Chitty has shown the complete inadequacy of the options system for providing an adequate educational experience for the majority of pupils. Most option schemes represent an abdication of curricular responsibilities, passing the decision-making away from the school to parents and pupils who are not in a position to make a good choice. But if common, comprehensive, schools are to be meaningful they must surely transmit a common culture by means of a common curriculum.

But what does that mean? It does not necessarily follow that any proposal handed to the teaching profession on a DES plate should be accepted as an alternative to the present inadequate core plus options system. Let me first try to deal with the problem of terminology raised by Clyde Chitty. The idea of a core curriculum is an extremely weak concept. As the Secondary Survey showed, virtually all secondary schools have a core curriculum of some kind (if we are prepared to accept English and mathematics in that way). The DES proposal amounts to no more than accepting the fact that English and mathematics are already taught in most secondary schools up to the age of 16, and suggesting that this restricted core should be supplemented by science and a certain amount of modern languages etc. Percentage figures are attached but are probably not to be taken too seriously. I will suggest later on in this article why that proposal is, in my view, not only an inadequate proposal based on a weak concept, but a potentially harmful one.

The common curriculum idea is much more ambitious. It is a logical extension of comprehensive schools. It is based on the principle of social justice which states that if knowledge is something worth having, then all normal individuals ought to be given access to it. The problem then becomes one of defining what is most worthwhile in terms of educational knowledge and educational experiences. A slightly different way of looking at this is to say that the purpose of a common school must be to transmit a common culture by means of cultural curriculum. The problem then becomes one of cultural analysis to determine what it is out of all the man-made elements in our society which can be regarded as so valuable that they should be passed on to the next generation.

It may be important to emphasise that the common curriculum idea is quite different from the notion of a uniform curriculum. One of the dangers of the idea of a core curriculum is that it might become a uniform curriculum if teachers in a number of schools taught nothing but the minimum core so that effectively, the core became the 'uniform' curriculum. That is unlikely even with a core curriculum; it is quite foreign to the idea of a common curriculum which merely specifies areas of knowledge and experience which should be available to all without specifying levels of attainment. It is important to distinguish between levels of attainment and areas of core knowledge: for example, in science it might be desirable to specify a number of key concepts without which no one could be said to understand scientific thinking, but it would be clearly foolish to specify the kind or level of understanding

which would be acceptable for each of those concepts.

I have perhaps dwelt at too great length on the distinction between a core curriculum and a common curriculum, because it seems to me that there is an important difference between the DES 'framework' document which is a core curriculum, and some of the HMI work in recent years which has stressed the idea of a common curriculum. I am really thinking much more of the HMI **Curriculum 11-16** (1977) rather than **A View of the Curriculum** (1980). The 1977 document was much more positive and ambitious, whereas there are signs in the 1980 view that HMI are under pressure to get a little closer to the DES line on the core curriculum.

Let me elaborate a little on each of those two models. The DES framework or core is really based on the idea of minimum competency. Minimum competency and a crude system of accountability. The underlying model is that of curriculum objectives, possibly behavioural objectives. This is allied to a Conservative educational philosophy, stressing standards and selection. It has often been described as an 'output' or factory model of education. In the USA this approach has been associated with simplistic ideas of evaluation amounting to checklists of objectives and extremely crude testing devices. If you think that I am being alarmist in associating the DES core curriculum with that kind of transatlantic madness, then do not forget the existence of the Assessment of Performance Unit and the proliferation of testing programmes among local education authorities in the last few years. It is at least a danger which we should be acutely aware of.

The alternative model to the objectives approach is that of cultural analysis. Whether knowingly or not, I cannot say, but the HMI are much closer (especially in the 1977 document) to that curriculum model. Readers will recall that in **Curriculum 11-16** the HMI were highly critical of option schemes in schools, and recommended that about three-quarters of the school curriculum should be devoted to a common curriculum. The common curriculum was based on areas of experience rather than school subjects. The areas of experience were outlined as follows:

the aesthetic and creative
the ethical
the linguistic
the mathematical
the physical
the scientific
the social and political
the spiritual

The HMI approach was that unless a pupil between the ages of 11 to 16 had access to *all* those areas of experience, then his education was inadequate – his curriculum had not been properly planned. Now there are many things lacking in **Curriculum 11-16**. These eight areas of experience were assumed rather than justified by any kind of curriculum theory, or attempt to match epistemology with the aims of education. But it was very much on the right lines as far as a cultural analysis view of the curriculum was concerned. It was attempting to set out certain kinds of experience which it was felt were necessary for every pupil to have access to, given the kind of society that we live in, and given our social ideals of freedom and democracy. In other words, it is concerned with 'input' rather than 'output'. It is an educational model rather than a factory model. Much work remains to be done after 1977: only some of the Inspectors had examined existing school subjects with a view to outlining what they would be expected to contribute to the various 'areas of experience'. The approach is also a much more sophisticated one than is currently practised in most schools, and it might be necessary for a good deal of in-service training to take place at the school level to ensure that adequate rethinking of the curriculum took place. It would be a major transformation of school ideology to cease thinking of subjects in terms of 'ends' in themselves but only as 'means' to areas of worthwhile experience. Even that last sentence is a gross over-simplification since it might well be argued that there are some subjects which are in themselves 'ends' as well as 'means'.

The whole area of curriculum planning is, in fact, a very difficult one. Some of the Inspectors writing **11 to 16** and **A View of the Curriculum**, have shown themselves aware of these difficulties of theory and curriculum planning. Others, appear to have drifted away from the original cultural analysis model and have got dangerously near to the behavioural objectives approach. But the DES Framework document is much worse. I believe that the DES intends to have discussions on both the Framework and the HMI View during 1980, and to produce some kind of consolidated document by the beginning of 1981. It is essential that the teaching profession is aware of what is happening and unites in a complete rejection of the crude version of a core curriculum and the behavioural objectives approach; instead we should encourage HMI to go back to the 1977 **Curriculum 11-16** and progress from there, rather than to produce a compromise core curriculum which will become the testers' charter.

Education for social change

The Chairman of **Forum's** Editorial Board reviews **Education & Equality**, edited by David Rubenstein. Penguin Books (1979), 335pp, £2.50.

'The English have always preferred Liberty to Equality' (Sir Fred Clarke, c 1940). The two are at odds, and Equality would find a better bedfellow with neglected Fraternity, say contributors to this book.

Equality is not a condition of nature but a matter of policy, humanity, and ethics. The problems raised in these twenty four essays touch many aspects of equality – political, social, economic, racial, and sexual – and relate them to educational equality in respect of access, process, and outcomes.

Education & Equality is in my view just the kind of book we now need to provoke wider debate on the relation of education to the dynamics of social change.

There is clearly urgent need for change in the educational climate and for that reason this timely Penguin deserves to be widely read. The optimistic and expansive mid-century era with faith in education as an economic and social 'investment' has given way in the 'seventies to a widespread public mood of disenchantment with the outcomes and failures, with loss of faith in the system that makes a halt in expansion publicly tolerable. Educational renewal in the 'eighties depends upon 'humanising' education in ways both explicit and implicit in various contributions to this volume.

The Editor has ensured that the contributors are sufficiently aware of each others' work to make cross-references frequent and valuable. The reading lists supplied by the authors are mainly of publications of this last decade. Account is taken of the change in government that came on the verge of publication.

Howard Glennerster writes a key chapter, analysing five ways in which education has dealt, or might deal, with inequalities in society: traditional separate schooling, later admitting infiltration by selection; meritocracy through equality of opportunity; the liberal-progressive view with education as agent of change; mechanical Marxism – total social change; and realistic egalitarian policies, the ones he favours.

He examines the recent research that has been widely construed as discrediting egalitarian educational experiments and discounting education as a determinative force. He concludes that the meritocratic-mobility model has suffered badly, but points to four research projects of which the findings, for reasons he gives, ought to be considered profoundly egalitarian in their implications.

AH Halsey presents the results of the Oxford Studies in Social Mobility and a number of parallel and earlier researches as affording criteria of the degree in which we have reached the 'open society', and a measure of inequality in access to education. A disconcerting conclusion is that during the present century the relative educational chances of middle, lower-middle, and working class children have changed remarkably little. The findings however give no support to **Black Paper** contentions of a fall in standards.

Nigel Wright starts with the proviso that, in general, claims that 'standards have fallen' – or risen – rest on very shaky grounds, and reminds us that low standards have been stigmatised regularly since the Newcastle Commission. He comments on the evidence available, invalidates **Black Paper** evidence, and finally sets out graphically the massive increase in numbers gaining educational qualifications, 1955-75.

Brian Simon, on primary education, finds the cry 'back to the basics' totally irrelevant. He contrasts the new methods, approaches, and organisation, based on better understanding of child development, and how children learn, with the too frequent conditions a generation ago when overlarge classes with consequent 'frontal' teaching and 'lockstep' learning, and streaming for the 11+ from the age of seven in accordance with the received theory of 'intelligence', fastened a traditional system upon the schools. But he censures the extreme libertarians for failing to structure the child's learning for the better assimilation of new knowledge, and the extreme individualists for neglect of socialised learning.

His article brings to a focus a number of themes separately explored by other contributors. Rachel Pinder entertainingly describes progressive approaches and methods, as the ways in which teachers improve both their teaching and its contents, dismissing the progressive-traditional dichotomy. The progressive contains the basics better taught. Primary schools, vehemently complains Arthur Razzell, have had a particularly unequal and raw deal: fifty years of comparative neglect, yet first for the 'cuts'. The drop in the birth rate is a golden opportunity to remedy their inequality!

The 'IQ Myth', biological determinism, the fixed 'pool' of ability, ESN classification – especially for black children – are exposed by Hilary Rose and Steven Rose, along with the ideology of biologism which acquits the social order of responsibility for the inequalities it generates.

On the problems and prospects of the secondary school under comprehensive reorganisation during years of constant and controversial innovation, Clive Chitty writes with insight, understanding, and tolerance, both of successful experience of schools in London and a community college in Leicestershire. He has well-considered advice to offer on such matters as curricular options, mixed ability teaching, pastoral systems 'in their separate orbit', and the divisive problems of two 16+ examinations. David Smith writes knowledgeably on Slow Learners. The creative article by Timothy Robers on a 'community of sharing' at Bosworth College is an asset to the volume.

Denis Marsden surveys the growth, present incidence, and proposals for reform of secondary school examinations, which, he cogently argues, keep the comprehensive school in chains, legitimate inequality, prevent change, and lead employers to substitute credentials for job training.

Educational inequality for the 16-19 age group, writes Les Brook, is principally a question of whether a million young people get anything at all. He advocates an education-and-training based system for this group, enlarging with significant differences upon proposals in the Acts of 1918 and 1944.

Nanette Whitbread supplies a succinct and well-informed summary of proposals and developments in Higher Education since the war. In addition to her penetrating commentary, I was impressed and gratified to read passages on the vital importance of educational processes and

Opening Up Options 11-14

Jill Tully
The Deputy Principal of a Leicestershire High School and Community College describes a recent innovation that blurs the traditional distinction between extra-curricular activities and the formal curriculum for eleven to fourteen year olds.

Welland Park College is a Leicestershire High School taking virtually all 11-14 year olds in the small market town of Market Harborough. In general pupils are industrious and well-motivated and we have fewer than our fair share of the problems which beset some inner city schools. Nevertheless during 1977-78, for a number of reasons, senior staff and the curriculum committee were seeking ways of developing and extending the range of the curriculum.

The Problem

For a very few children, invariably those who were causing *us* trouble, we had begun to devise individual timetables. There was a larger group, not necessarily the 'remedials', who seemed socially and emotionally ill-equipped for the daily trek through the timetable. We wanted to cater for their social and educational needs on an individual basis.

Music tuition for instrumentalists, and German, which we had introduced as a second language, could only operate on a withdrawal basis at the expense of the 'normal' curriculum. We were looking for a more satisfactory way of introducing minority subjects.

And what of the majority, perhaps 80% of our pupils? They represented several hundred differing needs and aspirations and we wanted to create some possibility of individual choice. Not least we wanted to provide some education in choice-making and its consequences in a situation where all was redeemable before the more serious decision making of Upper School options.

The physical constraints of the building, with its fortress classrooms and lack of open areas had tended to work against any real integration of timetable subjects or co-operation between individual teachers. We could see little opportunity for further expansion within the curriculum framework and so it seemed that one solution might be to encourage far more voluntary, interest-based, out of school activity.

Towards a Solution

To do this we needed to bring structure and formality to the range of clubs and societies which, as in most schools, took place out of school hours. By shortening the lunch hour and adopting a 7 x 40 minute period day, we were able to finish formal tuition at 3.20 pm. Assembly and form periods were moved to the afternoon so that the majority of class teaching was concentrated in the morning when it was felt the most effective learning took place. (This particularly suited the English, Maths, and French departments, who had wanted to see their pupils daily for short periods instead of less frequently for longer, as had happened before.)

3.20 pm onwards, or lunchtime, was *Option Time*, when each member of staff was required to offer a minimum of 2 x 40, or 1 x 80 periods a week. Each course should last for a minimum of half a term but could continue throughout the year. Anything feasible was acceptable and money was made available from capitation to finance projects.

All children were required to opt for two 'out of school' sessions a week. These were to be compulsory and records of children's choices were to be maintained by form tutors. In theory, on any one day, at least two fifths of our pupils would stay on after 3.20 pm, whereas three-fifths would go home.

We felt that while new first years would find difficulty in coping with options in addition to all the complexities of a new school, they might well benefit from 'study tuition'. The ability to work independently seemed to be a skill which many children needed to learn and we might also provide for some a more suitable environment than was available at home.

So option time for first year pupils was spent in private study sessions and this facility was made available for the older children too. Incidentally, because private study groups could be relatively large, we should be able to keep option groups as small as was felt desirable and in any case smaller than an average class.

These proposals were worked out in their detailed application by the curriculum committee, approved by staff

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methodology at the higher stage. She envisages lifetime education, on which Ken Coates writes his contribution, and would like to see cross-fertilisation of higher education types in a genuinely plural system, which undoubtedly would help to promote it. So would Pete Ashby, writing for the millenium. She touches on the inequalities affecting women and ethnic minorities, topics which are more extensively dealt with by Valery Hannon and Dorothy Kuya respectively.

Within the space allotted it would be neither feasible nor fair to deal here with the comparative contributions on foreign systems by Nigel Grant, Guy Neave, and Peter Mauger, or the two or three articles with overtly political titles or intent, except to commend the objective and educational quality of John White's 'Socialist Perspectives on the Curriculum.'

Here is a summary of the topics. Let the debate begin.

RAYMOND KING

and governors, then submitted to parents during the early summer of 1978. They came into operation in September, 1978.

The Opposition

We foresaw that our proposals might not be universally welcomed but did not anticipate the strength of the reaction. Eventually, teachers, parents and governors gave their support but each group produced a minority strongly opposed to the scheme.

Staff expressed a number of reservations, generally feeling that if our main task of subject teaching were adequately performed there would be little energy left for additional schemes. Also, individual departments were already creating opportunities for choice by running a variety of courses which third year pupils could opt for within timetable time.

A number of administration difficulties were envisaged which were indeed too lightly dismissed. Some of these were:-

Increased movement due to more frequent lesson changes
Incorporation of existing activities into the system
Enforcement of attendance
The role and timing of detention for example.

Parents' meetings produced a vocal group of opponents who gained a lot of publicity but little support. (Eventually the group's main protagonist became a stalwart member of the Parents' Association Committee.)

The hostility, shared by one or two governors was partly based on a simple calculation. Children would receive 120 minutes less of formal tuition per week and, even with options, would spend up to 40 minutes less in school. It seemed we had our priorities wrong and were organising a skive for teachers to boot!

To those who honestly felt that the first task of a school was to produce literate and numerate pupils some of the options offered seemed trivial and irrelevant and no substitute for 'proper lessons'. Why spend time on Wargaming and Bridge when you could be doing sums?

The other quite genuine concern was over the element of choice. It was felt that children of this age were not capable of dealing with, and should not be allowed, this kind of freedom.

The Practice

A preliminary survey produced a promising list of offers from staff, ranging from remedial Maths and Handwriting, through Photography and Metal Enamelling, to French Drama and English Literature. German was included; PE and Musical activities functioned separately. Pupil's suggestions were incorporated where possible, although we could not help over abseiling, for example!

The collating of information, allocation of children to groups, circulation of lists, together with the organisation of Private Study proved a huge administrative task and resulted in a shaky start in September. By this time most children had forgotten their original choices anyway.

It also became obvious that teaching option courses *and* a newly-structured timetable was placing heavy demands on the resources and energies of teachers, but hopefully some of the strains would disappear as we adjusted to the new situation.

In spite of reduced class-contact time, English, Maths and French found that their syllabus was adequately covered as before and were happy with the 'short, sharp bursts' strategy.

Many teachers reported satisfaction with the relationships and quality of work which developed in their option groups, presumably because they were usually small, friendly and well motivated. Children were enjoying themselves and appeared to welcome opportunities to extend themselves or catch up with extra help.

Ideally the atmosphere generated here will spill over into ordinary lessons with advantageous results for pupils and teachers. At best teachers will be seen as people, as photographers and darts players as well as geographers and mathematicians. At best children will see education and learning in a broader light, as a source of interest, even pleasure, encompassing the whole range of human experience.

It is certainly pleasant to tour the school between 3.20 pm and 4.00 pm each day, to see some children wandering home and others settling down to a wide range of activities. Luckily nearly all our pupils live within walking distance so we have no 'bussing' problem.

Options have extended into the weekend with Saturday Art classes and in the summer a motor cycle training course was conducted by Road Safety Officers from County Hall. As the potential of option time becomes more fully realised people are beginning to exploit it more adventurously and 1979's list of courses looks considerably more exciting and varied than its predecessor. For example there will be options for pony riders, electronics enthusiasts and Woodwork, English and Resources staff are combining their skills to produce an animated film.

Administrative procedures have been simplified considerably. Lists of available courses are published at the end of each term. At the beginning of the following term there is an enrolment night (or nights) almost exactly as Evening classes are enrolled at the start of their sessions. Each course teacher sits at an appropriately labelled desk and compiles a register as children queue to sign on. On being accepted, a student is given a receipt with all the relevant information on it. This must be signed by the child's parents, so they will be fully informed about chosen courses, days and times, and then returned to the form tutor who will use it to complete his records.

After a year and a few 'conversions' most staff are committed to the scheme. A working party reviewed the whole programme in the summer of 1979 and among others the following modifications were agreed:

(i) First years should be allowed to join the scheme after the first term as we did not want to stifle their obvious enthusiasm.

(ii) PE and Music should be incorporated to avoid conflicting commitments for children.

(iii) Options should be voluntary – something we should probably have been brave enough to insist on form the start. In the end, identifying a small, unwilling minority and forcing them to participate seemed a pointless and time-consuming exercise. Teachers and well-motivated children could only suffer from the presence in their groups of resentful conscripts. We anticipate that only a few children will opt out entirely and while form tutors are keeping an eye on them here is always the hope that in time they will be encouraged back into the scheme.

It is encouraging, at the start of each term, to see an enthusiastic and cheerful crowd of youngsters, queuing peacefully to sign on for more school. Currently almost 97% of our pupils are involved; a third of these are com-

One Tertiary College

Dennis Holman

The Principal of a purpose-built tertiary college explains its rationale and the opportunities it offers to sixteen to nineteen year olds, whether full-time or part-time working students.

Cricklade College is unique in Hampshire as the county's only tertiary college. Opened in September 1974 in new purpose built premises it was designed to cater for the full and part time education of 16-19 year olds of Andover and the surrounding rural districts. It has responsibility re-organisation there was one local co-educational grammar school of some 550 pupils with a sixth form of approximately 110. Those seeking other courses had to travel to Salisbury, Basingstoke or even further afield. There are now 700 full time students, nearly 500 day release students and a thriving adult studies section and community life based on the college.

Cricklade has become an important focal point for many activities and organisations not least because of the attractive 270 seat theatre. It shares a 10½ acre site with a magistrate's court (!) and a large sports centre (including swimming pool) which is the responsibility of the Test Valley Borough Council. Good use is made of this facility by students during the day – joint usage always having been envisaged in the original planning of the campus.

Tertiary Philsophy and Benefits

In the present economic climate small sixth forms, still common in many parts of the country, are inevitably the focus of LEAs seeking to rationalise provision for the 16-19 year olds. With declining rolls already in the lower end of secondary schools it will be tempting for many authorities to try to group together their pupils/students in larger units and a tertiary solution appears attractive. A concentration of facilities and efficient use of these resources is important from the rate payers' point of view – but there are considerable benefits for the young boys and girls who are brought together. The tertiary system brings with it educational advantages.

At the start of this academic year (79/80) there were fifteen such colleges in England and Wales – and a handful of others in the planning stage or being seriously considered. Those already in existence vary considerably from the smallest one (Strode – in Somerset) to the large colleges at Exeter, Richmond and Nelson and Colne – but I believe all would claim that the combination in one institution of the work of a college of further education with that of the sixth form provides a whole which is greater than the mere sum of its parts. And, of course, there are no 'parts'; the terms are used for convenience of explanation.

The tertiary college is a genuinely comprehensive college providing a full range of opportunities for all who wish to continue in full or part time education beyond the compulsory school leaving age. It is therefore a simple concept for young people and their parents to understand. It has, naturally, the advantages which all colleges catering for volunteers of 16 years of age and over would claim: such as the motivation which a fresh start can give, the

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mitted to more activities than the 'recommended minimum' of two sessions.

Children's views

The evidence collected from the 'consumers' suggests that children view options in two ways:

a) They are frivolous and detract from the serious business of education:

'I preferred it when you went home at 3.50 pm and learnt things worth knowing.'

'The options I don't like are silly things like darts and bridge. I always thought that options were to broaden your outlook on life and to get you a good job.'

Comments like this came noticeably from bright, highly-motivated girls. Partially in response we are offering a substantial number of highly academic courses.

b) Options add variety, enjoyment and interest to school. They offer opportunities for broadening one's experience and for academic improvement. This viewpoint is more representative of pupils as a whole (including bright boys):

'You can do something you like with or without a friend. It is also very useful if you are going to do a job which your lessons don't completely cover. Options don't have to teach you anything. You can do them just for fun.'

'You can do something that you can't learn again like French cooking. I usually pick out one which will help me, like writing, and one which will be enjoyable – soft ball, games etc.'

For some of our children anyway we are helping to make education a relevant and worthwhile experience. In the immediate future the possibilities are boundless. We are trying to involve parents and others in the community and should like to extend the range of weekend activity.

Possibly the dividing line between the formal curriculum and option time will increasingly become blurred. We don't know how the school's curricular structure and organisation will develop for we do not see options in any way as a completed project but as an intermediate step to something else.

commitment which comes from a positive decision, the close working partnership between students and staff in an adult environment – and there is certainly no reluctance to "stay on" – quite the reverse in fact. Each tertiary college has developed its own distinctive ethos and approach based upon what was best in the practices of its predecessors.

The mixed and balanced economy offered in the college curriculum gives a new dimension to the establishment. Despite lip service to the contrary we preserve a distinction in this country between vocational and academic education. There is a split in our thinking and our institutions (Universities/Polytechnics; 'Sixth Form' colleges and technical colleges) – although the distinction is not always clear in the minds and motivation of our young men and women. A tertiary college will hope to break down barriers and the presence of such colleges will at least foster a continuing school/sixth form and technical college dialogue, which will perhaps in the future help to achieve full and genuine co-operation between the two parts of the system. We may even see common regulations for the 16-19 year olds some time.

As a new kind of establishment bringing together staff whose backgrounds and experiences were different, the tertiary college has had to re-think its approach. Central to its concern is the student. Great importance is placed upon the quality of the teaching and the unobtrusive guidance/support for its students, affording them sufficient freedom to discover the self-discipline required of independence but ready to intervene where necessary, for time is short.

The tertiary college is impartial. The competitive nature of some operations can lead Heads and Principals to develop vigorously their marketing skills at the expense of the individual. Institutional choice can often lead to a sixteen year old making an inappropriate course choice. It matters not to a tertiary college which course the aspiring student takes and therefore dispassionate advice may be offered concerning the most suitable study pattern for the individual youngster. Parent, student and teacher are able to come together, to discuss the most important elements in the next stage of the educational process without other considerations obtruding.

With its comprehensive facilities and opportunities, the tertiary college can cope well with the needs and interests of students of all abilities and, for many, a blend of academic and vocational elements is an ideal mix. The tertiary range is attractive and provides an easier opportunity, where necessary, for a student to change course without the trauma of moving establishments soon after settling in. The college with a broad spread of interested young people preparing for a variety of careers and qualifications provides a purposeful community wherein they can have some common intellectual currency during their formative years. No one would claim that complete integration of all courses is possible or even desirable, but considerable cross fertilisation can and does take place.

A two year course which combines two A-levels with a secretarial course is not uncommon; foundation art course students may add A and/or O-level subjects to their main programme of studies; students on what are conventionally called academic courses can broaden them by adding vocational interests in their minority time programme. The tertiary college regards these studies and activities outside the formal examination programme as an essential component of the educational programme for all its students. The range of such complementary, contrasting or general studies is considerably greater than any school can offer. It enables the specialist staff and facilities of vocational courses to be exploited and many minority interests to be catered for.

Perhaps it is necessary to emphasise that fears about standards have proved groundless. There were some who felt that academic scholarship would suffer and that the sporting, cultural and social life of the new colleges would not match the traditions of the sixth form. Experience has shown that the A-level results of full-time students are usually well above the national average and young boys and girls of outstanding ability benefit from the company and competition of their peers. Similarly, a wide range of activities has blossomed and sport, music, drama have all flourished.

A tertiary college is a community college, providing for local needs. With its monopoly in the locality, it has many part-time students. The day release boys and girls in engineering and motor vehicle work – or catering or business studies courses – ensure that the college is closely involved in the work of the area it serves. There are also older part-time students who make full and effective use of the plant in the days and evenings in a wide range of vocational and non-vocational courses. A tertiary college feels that part of its responsibility is to provide a programme of sporting, recreational and cultural activities that contribute in some measure to the quality of life in the surrounding town and/or villages. And inevitably this outward looking nature affects the atmosphere of the college, as does the marked adult presence. Large numbers of regular users are beyond the 16-19 age range and the ethos of the tertiary college is therefore genuinely adult, with benefits for the younger members who respond to this environment in a responsible and mature way.

And there are, incidentally, advantages too for staff. The social and academic life of the college is enriched for all its members by the diversity of staff required. The lecturers in their turn may often have interestingly varied time tables from the wider spread of courses on offer. A tertiary diet can be stimulating for an individual (and enhance future job prospects!).

Criteria for success

If one accepts that the tertiary college has something different and special to offer and that its comprehensive nature distinguishes it from other forms of organisational provision, then there are benefits from the right kind of buildings. Our main teaching block, constructed on the principles of integrated environmental design and the fact that we are not a large college (some 700 full time students this current year and under 500 day release) has been, for Cricklade, very important in the development of a college atmosphere. To a considerable extent, students and staff have been presented with a situation which encourages the mixing in a way in which an establishment on split sites could never hope to emulate.

But few tertiary colleges can expect to begin in new buildings and of at least equal importance is the underlying approach. A positive effort to keep separatism at a minimum is to be sought. A matrix structure for the internal organisation of the college or a modular time table to which all departments adhere for much of their work assist this integration. A general studies programme which can be blocked and when then contains students from a wide range of course backgrounds at certain set times of the week (more than just a Wednesday afternoon too!) is a very important element.

And would it were possible to make the part-time –

day release – student more fully involved in the varied activities of this nature, recreational or cultural. A mixed personal tutor system can have a broadening effect upon staff as well as assisting the blend of students in a way in which the more exclusive course tutor arrangement does not. There may be a sacrifice of administrative efficiency and communications problems can sometimes result, even in a medium sized college, but the benefits are real for the total experience of the student in his/her college life.

Inevitably, however, everything depends upon the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff. A caring community – to use a well-tried phrase – comes from the commitment of all lecturers to pastoral care responsibilities, to their horizons being wider than their subject specialisms and to their willingness to become involved with students. In short it requires time – and such time as can only arise from a broad professional involvement in teaching. Perhaps the criteria for success are no different in a tertiary college from those needed in any other educational establishment?

Reservations?

Well I do not think that, in all honesty, I can admit to many.

Where a monopoly exists then it cannot be denied that an individual is deprived of choice of establishment. Some people cling to this argument but, without private means, there is little choice in the educational system at any other level.

What about size? Will tertiary colleges inevitably be large (and impersonal)? I hope note. The transition from school – a reasonably stable environment, for the last five years for most of our new arrivals – can be a shock. Most relish the change. But the majority will be in the college for only one or two years and we need to do all we can to see that all settle speedily and well so that they take full advantage of their new life.

Is it not expensive to create such establishments? The tertiary college has the greatest potential for the economic use of resources. Average class sizes will be better than schools can muster and the unit cost of specialist facilities such as libraries, resource centres, laboratories and engineering workshops is very much reduced if there is a concentration of numbers.

What of opportunities for students to exercise responsibility? There will be involvement in community activities and the Students' Union Council, with elected officers, has considerable scope for running its own affairs and managing a not inconsiderable budget.

Although our colleges are few in number and our experience is of relatively short duration, I believe that they have already shown they are able to provide wider educational opportunities for the 16-19 year olds than is possible in other forms of organisation. They have shown their potential for using resources to considerable educational advantage. And if in the future it is possible to develop a coherent national policy for this age group – at present responsibility is divided – then the tertiary college points the way. The current national practice of regarding education and training as disparate processes, whereas they should be complementary aspects of the same educative plan, is to be deplored. The tertiary college could have an important role in the future for this vital development.

Primary Curriculum Planning

Responsibility or Right?

David Keast

The desirability of more democratic and co-operative curriculum planning in junior schools, involving Scale 1 teachers in this collective task, is argued by a contributor from the School of Education at the University of Exeter.

There is increasing evidence that pupil achievement may be associated with effective curriculum planning. The HMI Survey and Neville Bennett's research demonstrates that when and where the curriculum was well thought out and implemented throughout the school then standards of work were raised. For those teachers who have spent hours in the staff room after school chewing over aspects of a particular subject policy it is heartening to know that there can be pay-off where it matters most – in pupils' learning. It seems that the manner in which schools arrive at their policies is all important. The HMI Survey and research by Michael Bassey indicate the relative ineffectiveness of teachers with posts of curriculum responsibility in influencing their colleagues. This evidence has led to attempts to 'strengthen the role' of teachers with such responsibilities. It is argued here that in defining the responsibilities of some teachers it could be that the rights of other teachers are being denied. Similarly, it may be that INSET attempts to 'strengthen the role' could be misleading and unproductive.

A move towards 'more clearly defined roles of responsibility' and all the other slogans that are associated with management by objectives in a systems approach seems to be inappropriate for Primary Schools on a number of counts. First, most Primary teachers see class teaching as their major source of job satisfaction. It is unlikely that many Primary teachers will want to spend much of their time on management type tasks which will divert them from their main *raison d'être.* Anyway, two or three free periods a week hardly provide enough time for maintaining an efficient classroom. Secondly, in all but the largest Primary Schools there are unlikely to be enough scale two or three posts. Even if it were possible to allocate the posts

to correspond with curriculum priorities (instead of legacies, such as 'boys' welfare') there would inevitably be areas of the curriculum which would be nobody's responsibility. Thirdly, Head Teachers of Primary Schools recognise that they have overall responsibility for their schools and view delegation with mixed feelings. It is one thing for a Head to encourage teachers in the Infant department to manage the curriculum and organisation for their children but it is another matter to authorise teachers (individually or in groups) to plan and implement the curriculum throughout the junior years. This is not to suggest that Heads of 5-11 schools are uninterested in Infant department curriculum matters but that, possibly, delegation is more apparent there than in aspects of the curriculum at the Junior stage.

The Primary Survey suggests some sort of job specification for teachers with curriculum responsibility and the tasks include: (1) drawing up a scheme of work in consultation with colleagues in the school and in neighbouring schools, (2) giving guidance to colleagues, (3) assisting in the teaching of the subject where necessary, (4) making resources available and assessing the effectiveness of the resources. These are, of course, the duties that one would expect a teacher with special responsibility to take on. There is the important recognition that the scheme of work should be drawn up 'in consultation with colleagues'. In his survey of Nottinghamshire Primary Schools Bassey asked the question – 'Who decides on the outline syllabus?' The evidence indicates that the decision is usually made by an individual rather than a group of people, the individual being the Head or a teacher with specific responsibility. Only for such subjects as Language and Mathematics was there evidence of a collective approach to policy making and then only in 40% of the schools in the sample.

So far the notion of curriculum planning has been allied to concepts of delegation and responsibility. An alternative view would be to see curriculum planning as the right of the individual teacher. Surely each teacher should want to have a say in 'whole school' matters when each teacher is *ipso facto* a fully participating member of staff. If teachers see it as their right to contribute to the debate on curriculum matters of the children they will be teaching in, say, two years time, or whom they taught a year ago, then we are half way to solving problems of continuity and progress.

This is not only a plea for democratisation of policy making on political grounds but also a response to a realisation that there is a danger of decreasing the individual teacher's commitment to the school as a corporate community: the scale 1 teacher would, of course, be particularly vulnerable. For the next five years, and probably longer, Primary Schools generally will be in a state of contraction with the obvious implications for teachers who are now currently on Scale 1. Unless these teachers are encouraged to see their contribution to curriculum planning as a right and given the opportunity to participate differences between 'haves' and 'have nots' in schools will be reinforced.

The thesis here, then, is that the ameliorative action to make curriculum planning more effective by strengthening the roles of teachers with special curriculum responsibility may be non-productive or even counter-productive. The move towards school-based INSET recognised the difficulties of teachers putting ideas into practice when they return from courses. It is difficult to see how individual teachers who have attended a course to 'clarify their roles' can be expected to return to school and change the perceptions of colleagues.

The central problem is how to encourage schools, regardless of their size and resources, to draw on available expertise in corporate attempts to identify curriculum priorities and decide on and implement appropriate means of helping children learn.

The task of collective policy making can only be possible when a staff-room climate exists which allows uninhibited discussion. Once this is established, more formalised groups and whole school meetings will be more productive and if such meetings are regular their 'openness' should override the ritualism and predictability of many staff meetings. The role of the Head is vital in encouraging both the climate and the opportunities for such meetings. Teachers with posts of curriculum responsibility have a leadership role to play in generating this climate. It is for them as teachers with particular expertise to participate in discussions with colleagues, both at a conversational level and in more formal meetings. These teachers, through their willingness to share knowledge and involve colleagues, can help the school become a 'thinking school' which can collectively examine current practice.

Because Primary Schools vary so much in size and resources any policy making must be hinged on a curriculum framework which has been argued to be appropriate for that school. The staff collectively should agree on their own priorities taking into account the expectations of the community and LEA. Whoever has the expertise in the priorities identified will naturally play a leading part in the formulating and implementing of the policy but in every school it should be possible for each teacher to feel that he has the right and opportunity to contribute.

The teacher who admits to 'not letting the school's syllabus interfere with my work' is indicating that he is not prepared to identify professionally with 'somebody else's' plans. This attitude stems from situations in which 'somebody else' has drawn up the syllabus or policy. When teachers are given the right and opportunity to participate in school policy making it is more likely that agreed policies will be implemented.

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D.E.S. (1978) **Primary Education in England** HMSO.

The Editorial Board wishes to express its thanks to Bill Pinder and Kate Havard for designing the new style of **Forum** and developing it for us during the past year of publication of the three numbers of Volume 22. We hope our readers are as pleased as we are and we welcome comments.

The line drawings on pages 78 and 79 are by children at Drayton Park Primary School. Readers are invited to send suitable children's drawing for possible inclusion in future numbers to the Editors.

Reviews

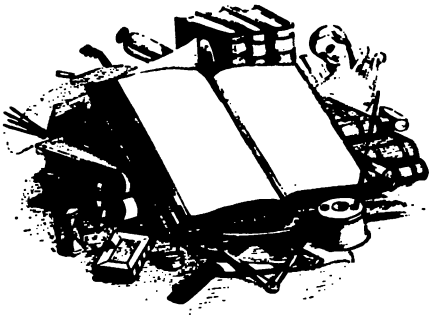
What's best at 16-19?

The Sixth Form and its Alternatives, by Judy Dean, Kath Bradley, Bruce Choppin and Denis Vincent. NFER (1979), pp 328.

In this four-year research project (1974-78) a sample of about 4,500 students aged 16+ were followed through a period of continued full-time education and on into employment or higher education. A wide range of educational establishments was involved – twenty-seven schools with sixth forms and eighteen FE colleges, sixth-form colleges and tertiary colleges. During the final year of the project there was also a survey of the opinions and experiences of heads and staff of 11-16 schools, and of fifth-form pupils.

The principals and senior staff of the schools and colleges catering for 16-19-year-old students do not differ markedly in their declared aims for that age range, the most frequently stated aims being the development of desirable personal qualities (social responsibility, intellectual capacities, maturity) and the preparation for careers. However, the answers to a second question, in which they were asked to name the most valuable educational experience offered to the 16-19 age group in their own establishment, reveal some clear differences. In particular, much the most frequent claim made by the colleges is the provision of an adult or near-adult environment: this feature is claimed by few schools, most of them pointing instead to the benefits of leadership opportunities in contact with younger pupils.

What about the opinions of the students themselves? There are some interesting responses from FE students who had opted out of 11-18 schools. Not surprisingly, more than half of these state that the course they wanted was not available in the sixth form of their school, or that they wanted a practical course directly preparing for a career. However, the other reasons most frequently given for leaving an 11-18 school at 16 and entering a FE college are a dislike of school and the desire for a more adult environment. Among students who were quite happy to stay on in the sixth forms of their own schools, there does not seem to be any general appreciation of 'leadership opportunities' as such, but when asked at the outset of their sixth-form careers how they would most like their sixth-form lives (whether at school or college) to differ from their fifth-year experience, two-thirds or more express a wish to be treated more like adults, to have fewer restrictions, better relationships with staff, more private study periods, and so forth. When asked two years later, at 18+, whether they would now support a school system or a college system for the 16-19 age group, two thirds of the students state a preference for a college system, and the reason most often given for this preference is 'adult atmosphere'.



The authors eventually come down on the side of the tertiary college, and on the evidence here presented this is a valid conclusion. But this interesting, readable and otherwise quite thorough book unfortunately suffers from what is nowadays an all too prevalent omission: upper schools for the 14-18 age range are not considered at all. Indeed, of the 27 schools included in the survey, only 4 (one 12-18 and three 13-18 schools) had a normal age of entry higher than 11! In the current debate as to whether there should be a compulsory break at 16 for all adolescents whether they plan to continue in full-time education or not, the question is habitually begged by assuming that there is a vast difference between the proper educational environment for a 15-year-old student and that for a 16-year-old. But why should this be? It is disappointing to see the authors of this thoughtful book fall, by omission, into such a familiar trap.

Over the last ten or twenty years it has been repeatedly demonstrated that the 'more adult atmosphere' now claimed as the greatest advantage of separate colleges for the over-16s *can* exist in a 14-18 school, with very beneficial effects on the education of young people on both sides of the imaginary 16+ divide. Certainly, a good comprehensive upper school needs above average teachers: these are available and many are keen to serve in such an environment. The other necessity for a successful 14-18 comprehensive is finance, supplied by a far-sighted local authority with government understanding and support. Is this the simple reason why there is almost a national conspiracy to write and act as if 14-18 upper schools (I am told we have some 68 of them in England) did not really exist?

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What curriculum for Comprehensives?

Aspects of secondary education in England. A survey by HM Inspectors of Schools. HMSO (1979), £6.73 nett, pp 312.

A substantial survey of this type is bound to receive rather mixed reviews and there were some immediate side-swipes in the daily and weekly press. However I am inclined to the view that by detailed observation and moderate comment a number of crucial issues have been highlighted. There is nothing dramatic about the findings or conclusions, but the very common-sense nature of the material should lend it weight and encourage individual schools to measure themselves against some of the general criteria. Perhaps it is who is saying it that matters as much as what is being said.

The survey was conducted in 384 schools. The sample does lack balance. Only just over 40 per cent of the sample were full range comprehensive schools and just under 40 per cent were grammar and modern schools. The sample of 13-18 and 14-18 schools does seem particularly small.

Inspections were 'particularly directed toward four aspects of education – the development of language skills, written and spoken, the development of mathematical understanding and competence, the development of scientific skills and understanding, and the personal and social development of the pupils and their general preparation for adult living'. Each of these aspects is given a major chapter in the report. Consideration is also given to curricular provision, staffing and deployment of teachers, assessments, public examinations (at about age 16) and pupils' behaviour.

Although 'for most pupils in all types of school and for most of the time the curriculum emerged as substantially the same programme of subjects' we are a long way from a common curriculum or even a concensus on curricular provision. 'The introduction of options in the fourth and fifth years leads to the abandonment of some important subjects and to insufficient breadth in some individual pupils' programmes'. 'Emphasis on options resulted in larger classes in the essential subjects of the "core", and the more options permitted to each pupil, the less time was left for these subjects'. 'The principle that some choice is desirable is scarcely open to question. Much more doubtful is the apparently widely accepted corollary that the more choice there is the better'. There is a clear call for an examination of the size and composition of the 'core' and for a simpler organisation of the curriculum especially with regard to option systems.

The position of some subjects in the curriculum is causing disquiet. Fewer students are taking French beyond 14 years. 'Commerce is rarely studied by able students'. So we are urged to take stock. 'The process has been one of aggregation

rather than revaluation of changing circumstances accompanying the growth of comprehensive education'.

It is often claimed that comprehensive schools are overmanaged. Evidence from the survey did not support this nor 'that teachers are spending too much time on duties other than teaching'. Indeed the duties associated with special responsibilities and pastoral care are rarely given adequate time.

Much in-service work and discussion should result from the important chapter on language. Due credit is given to the Bullock Report. As yet most schools have ill-formed language-across-the-curriculum policies.

This section may not help us towards a clearer policy, but is provocative on 'the impoverishment of reading', 'the overwhelming quantities of written classwork and homework', 'of the uneven and often sparse marking', 'the part that talking can play in learning' and the use of worksheets. The reader is drawn back to worksheets time and again and a clear impression is given of a rather overplayed technique often using ill-designed sheets in a manner that is counter-productive.

At a time of extended debate on the public examination at 16 many will welcome HMI support for the introduction of a single system. This conclusion was reached in the light of the curricular decisions that have to be made at about 14 years often leading to inflexible academic structures and the dominance of examinations in the planning of courses. 'This problem arises partly from the over-riding importance given to the examinations which occur at the end of most courses, but mainly because the abilities and aptitudes of all members of the group have not been identified'. A sympathetic awareness is shown of the pressure put on schools by the present examination system and the hope is expressed that 'a new system of examining would afford opportunity as well as reason for the development of more broadly based methods of assessment which match changes in the curriculum'.

The sense of balance is maintained with the comments on pupils' behaviour. Whilst not minimising the problems the general picture is 'highly reassuring' in the 'majority of all secondary schools'.

Aspects of secondary education in England was produced at a time of major cuts in spending on education. That, combined with falling rolls, may do much to push this survey on one side. Our concern for the immediate struggle of 'getting-through' may obscure the important questions posed and comments given. I hope LEA and schools will find time to think about, talk about and act upon some of this material.

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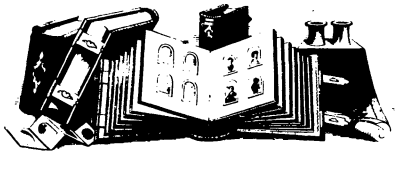
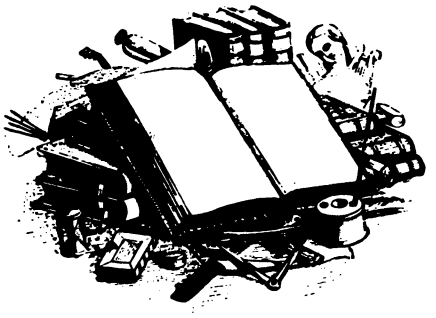




Educating the Working Class

Antonio Gramsci, Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics, by Harold Entwistle. Routledge & Kegan Paul (1979), pp 207, £7.95 hardback, £3.95 paperback.

This is an important, unusual, and in many ways a fascinating book. Gramsci was a leader of the Italian Communist Party after its formation in the early 1920s. He was imprisoned by Mussolini in 1926 and only released just before his death in 1937. He was profoundly interested in education, as his well known essay published in selections from the **Prison Notebooks** (1971) shows, and tangled with many issues which are very much the subject of debate today – for instance, the question of child-centred education, of community based education, of the content, methodology and the structure of education. Generally, he saw education as a crucial means of human formation and fully recognised its importance.

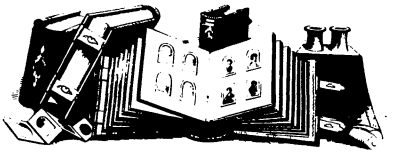
Gramsci wrote widely on education and acted as an educator himself. His writings, which include letters to his wife on the upbringing of their children and to the children themselves, are scattered among various publications with which Entwistle is familiar, so that he is able to present the first serious interpretation and evaluation of Gramsci's outlook to appear in English. Of particular interest is the way in which Entwistle brings out the significance of Gramsci's ideas for current controversies. He makes it abundantly clear for instance, that Gramsci would utterly have rejected the standpoint of the 'new sociology' as regards the curriculum.

According to Entwistle, Gramsci saw education as a tough, demanding progress of induction into science, culture and knowledge. Critical of contemporary child-centred or 'progressive' theories with the emphasis on spontaneity he saw a relation between these and the anti-intellectualism of Fascism; Entwistle shows how Gentile's educational reform of 1923, which formed the basis of fascist educational policies, was based on such ideas. But it is against an exaggerated emphasis on this approach that Gramsci argues, posing instead the need for precision and order in the educative, or formative process. In Gramsci's view a broad humanist education should be provided for all within the common school; this, at least, should be the final objective even if not immediately realisable. At the upper secondary level Gramsci saw education as a dialectical, two-way process by which the teacher is also a learner and vice versa in the dialogue required of a true education.

It is Entwistle's main point that this, apparently conservative, prescription for schooling needs to be seen in its relation to Gramsci's insistence that such an education 'is a necessary preparation for the education of working-class intellectuals, for the creation of a new humanism and, hence, is a condition for the exercise of working-class hegemony'. Political education was a function, in Gramsci's view, specifically of adult education, outside the formal school system, and should be related to political action and movements. In part 2 of his book, Entwistle explicates Gramsci's approach to the key question, as he saw it, of the formation of 'organic intellectuals' emerging from the working class itself, and able to exercise leadership.

The book is well written but requires close attention by the reader. Gramsci's ideas are stimulating and have a clear relevance to current debates in the field. This book will repay study by anyone seriously concerned with the role, function and nature of the educational process, and with its relation to social and political change.

B.S



A confusion of liberal ideas

Education, Democracy and Discussion, by D Bridges, NFER (1979), pp 182.

The author states that his book explores the relationships between discussion, as a method of learning, teaching and decision-making, and beliefs about how judgement and understanding are developed; about the status of authority in relation to knowledge, and about the social and ethical values of the liberal democratic tradition.

In fact the book focuses on the ethical value of the discussion process – a process upon which Bridges believes democracy depends – and the importance of discussion to democratic decision-making. Bridges asserts that the concept of discussion is not ethically neutral: it is logically associated with the existence of a certain (democratic) moral climate amongst the participants. Thus he uses the three terms democracy, discussion and decision-making somewhat synonymously.

Discussion is defined as 'the putting forward of more than one point of view upon a subject', the purpose of which is 'the improvement of knowledge, understanding and/or judgement'. Preconditions for such a discussion and for reaching a judgement are that the participants must be prepared to examine and be responsive to the different opinions . . . to mutually adjust their views . . . and to adjudicate or

decide upon the merits of the opinions offered. Such discussions are believed to be central to democratic government: they are claimed both to improve the quality of the decision made, and to have a positive effect on the discussants. Thus the 'educative merits' of discussion are said to derive from 'the value which lies in such participation for the moral, political and intellectual development of those engaged'.

However, the assumptions on which these 'Liberal democratic traditions' are based are themselves never examined, nor are alternatives to (participatory) democracy or (rational) decision-making models explored. The virtues are believed to be self-evident. The characteristic of the 'moral climate', on which the success of the discussion appears to depend, are listed but the means by which they may be established or developed are omitted. While there is little mention of evidence to show why such a moral climate is so important to the processes of discussion, there is no mention of the empirical work on discussions which shows how and why particular social and cognitive skills are also important to discussion processes. Further, the relationship of discussion and learning is never considered. In fact the first concept of the title's 'Education', is not mentioned, nor is 'learning' defined. The possibility of a differential relationship between discussion and the multiple aspects of learning (acquiring knowledge, developing understanding, increasing ability to apply knowledge, improving retention of knowledge, developing method of analysis/syntheors/evaluation/presentation of evidence or ideas, or simply practicing the skills of oracy) are never investigated.

Although it is of limited value to criticise a book for what it does not purport to be – a practical guide for classroom use – it would have been valuable if the 'learning and teaching potential' of discussion had been given equal weight with that of 'decision-making', and if the 'intellectual' and 'procedural' skills had been given the same attention as the 'social and ethical' preconditions. The most useful sections, and unfortunately the shortest, were thus on procedural and intellectual skills (p 29-31), and the possible teacher strategies for improving the quality of discussion (p 111-113).

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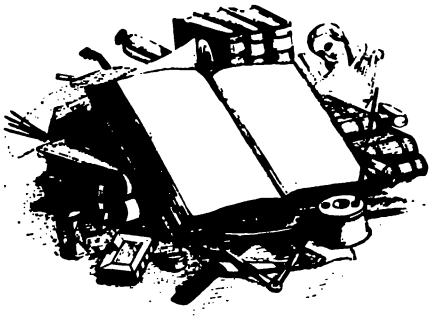

An alternative to examinations

Outcomes of Education, edited by Tyrrell Burgess and Elizabeth Adams, Macmillan, £9.95.

This admirable book adds a much needed dimension to the education debate. It is at the same time imaginative and practical, challenging and down to earth. The editors' writing is not only refreshingly free of jargon, but is vividly realistic. For example they look for a new approach 'freed from the banalities of national performance testing, core curricula' etc; they talk of the annual statistics of the DES being 'mined with a good deal of sophisticated statistical tomfoolery', and they ask how to compare the value of a grade B pass obtained by a 'note-taking earnest plodder' with that of a 'facile layabout who swots it up the night before'.

The form of the book is subconsciously influenced by the educational trinity syndrom (three 'r's, three 'a's, three types). In this case, however, the various groupings of three do not apply to educational theory and they do help to concentrate the mind on the contents.

The three prongs of the work's general framework are purpose, method, and targets. The purpose is implied in the title ie to find ways of demonstrating to pupils, teachers, parents and employers the results or 'outcomes', of five years of compulsory secondary education, ways which should be more humane and effective than the present examination dominated system. The method is to divide the work into three parts; an analysis of the existing problem, some looks at currently operated schemes which could help towards a solution, and proposals for action.

In the first section the editors demonstrate the inadequacies of the present system. They quote effectively from a succession of reports from that of the Consultative Commission of 1911, through Norwood, Crowther, Newsom, Beloe et al, weighty statements about the limited validity of external examinations and the need for individual, on-going, school records, pupil profiles, and other such forms of assessment.

Not only does the system ignore the needs of that considerable section of the school population which is ungraded, but it also fails to meet those of the very intelligent, even though they, of course, learn to play the system. Furthermore it fails to test the kinds of quality, skills, and attributes listed in the Green Paper as the aims of education: enquiring minds, respect for people, world understanding, language, appreciation of economic controls, and cultural appreciation. 'They learn to pass and not to know and outraged science takes her revenge; they do pass and they don't know'. Other disadvantages are the enormous financial cost of the whole examinations empire, and the waste of good teaching and learning time on the logistics of actual examination organisation.

Part two is made up of contributions from practitioners who are operating various schemes for continuous recording of achievement and a useful reference to practice in some other European countries. There are examples from all three stages of schooling – primary, secondary and higher – but not unexpectedly most come from secondary schools where the difficulties are greatest. To me the most telling examples came from a primary school and a polytechnic. Could this be because freedom from the 11+ constraint has enabled and encouraged primary schools to develop individual assessment schemes, and because the DipHE is not yet too heavily shackled by traditional university examination regulations, while secondary schools are still in thrall? Running through all the schemes is another trinity, this time of the democratic principles which lie behind the proposals; that *all* school students must be involved, that a wide base of skills and attitudes is used, noting competencies as well as knowledge, and the individual right of the student to supplement the information is recognised.

The proposals are set out by the editors in the third and final section. At the end of the third year of secondary school all pupils, in consultation with their tutors, should devote time, now often spent deciding on options for examinations, to filling in a statement about themselves; this should cover their own view of their achievement so far, what they think they will want to do in two years time, and the ways in which they would like to work towards that aim. The statement will be added to, revised, and discussed with teachers and parents throughout the two years. These statements cannot be compiled out of the blue in the last week or two at school. 'Like existing examinations they will be the culmination of a programme of work which has covered the previous two years'. It is claimed that such a statement showing a student's experience, competence, interests and purposes, will give employers and higher education institutions a much more adequate picture than examination grades.

The role of the teacher/tutor in the process, which is one of mutual co-operation, is vitally important and if the scheme is adopted a different and more flexible organisation of teaching time will be needed. But the schools cannot do it on their own. They will need massive and visible support from the Department of Education and Science and the LEAs; local validation boards and some sort of national recognition will be essential. The proposals deserve a positive response from those able to give this recognition and to whom the book is addressed.

MARGARET MILES

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