FORUM

for the discussion of new trends in education

Summer 1982 Volume 24 Number 3 £1

This Issue

Curriculum, Assessment and Approach for the 11 to 16 age range

The Myth of Giftedness

Editorial Board

ISSN 0046-4708

Editorial Communications: typescript articles (1500-2000 words) and contributions to discussion (800 words maximum) should be addressed to The Editor, 11 Pendene Road, Leicester LE2 3DQ. Tel: 0533-705176.

Business information: correspondence relating to subscriptions etc. should be addressed to Judith Hunt, FORUM, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield WS13 7AA. Tel: 054-32-51159.

Reductions available on bulk orders of current number. (e.g. 10 copies for £8.)

Forum is published three times a year in September, January and May. £3 a year or £1 an issue.

Contents

Vol.24 No.3 Spring 1982

The Next Forum

Our next (September) issue, which marks, incidentally, the twenty-fifth year of the existence of **Forum**, is the last of the series of special issues on the implications of comprehensive education. The focus is the 16 to 19 age-range, now under extensive discussion.

Joan Simon contributes a critical examination of the initiatives both of the present government and of the Manpower Services Commission. John Fairley writes on the training and apprenticeship aspects, while Michael Austin, Principal of the Accrington and Rossendale Tertiary College writes on his experience of the tertiary college solution. Ian Morgan writes from the same angle on curriculum issues, Hilary Steedman on contemporary developments in Europe, and Clyde Chitty examines the Labour Party's policy document **Learning and Living**. Other contributors raise related questions, particularly the relation between education and training and the need for an overall solution thoroughly in keeping with comprehensive principles. This special issue aims to make a critical but positive contribution to current actions and discussion.

A Critical Stance

This is the second of three numbers focusing specifically on the implications of comprehensive reorganisation on different stages of the educational system. The January number concentrated on the primary phase; this on the 11 to 16 age range; the next (September) will focus on an area now under wide discussion, the 16 to 19 age range. This latter number, now under active preparation, will discuss key issues relating to this crucial, and hitherto much neglected phase, when a high proportion of the age groups concerned are still deprived of any form of educational opportunity. The present government's plans announced earlier this year, and the initiatives of the Manpower Services Commission in this area, will be thoroughly dissected.

The 11 to 16 age range covers the central years of comprehensive education. It is this generation, in particular, which is now suffering from the massive financial cut-backs engineered by the government through the reduction of the rate support grant and in other ways. As we go to press, reports of demonstrations, strike action, and many other forms of protest fill the educational press — some reports have even penetrated the mass media so quick till now to provide massive coverage of the supposed failings of comprehensive schools. The strength of parental support for some of the actions speaks for itself, in its vindication of the popularity of comprehensive schooling. The best, and most productive answer by the schools, in these circumstances, is to keep their heads, to participate in such protest actions as seem necessary, but in particular to define and coolly develop the best of modern educational practices, based on the experience and new traditions of comprehensive schooling.

For this reason we are glad to present a number which tackles critically a number of crucial issues now facing the schools. Derek Roberts, in his article appropriately entitled 'Our Single and Most Significant Decision' recapitulates the clear advantages gained from mixed ability teaching at his school, based on his experience over more than 16 years; a form of organisation also favoured by Peter Mitchell, head of Quintin Kynaston school (ILEA), which is pioneering new forms of assessment and, in particular, developing very close relations with his feeder primary schools in a way that has been all too rare until recently. Both authors, in their concern for individual children, give a clear indication of what is possible throughout the country as a whole, given genuine comprehensive reorganisation.

But artificial difficulties remain — especially the divisive nature of the existing examination system. Here Desmond Nuttall summarises the dismal story of the 16 plus, the *single* examination which comprehensive schools urgently need to reach more closely towards comprehensive objectives. He calls for a national campaign to ensure, before it is too late, that this exam really does meet the needs of comprehensive schools, rather than impose the old divisions in a more covert form. His warning of the possible outcome of present 'discussions' is reinforced by Patricia Broadfoot who suggests that, unless prevented, a 'profile' system may be brought in solely for the 'less able', again reinforcing traditional divisions between the so-called 'academic' and the rest. As to the components of a 'national curriculum', even if desirable John White's critical assessment of recent DES and Schools Council initiatives shows how much still needs to be done to begin to clarify curriculum issues of central importance.

If the articles in this number tend to be sharply critical, this only reflects the present scene; and is a stance which becomes an independent educational journal like **Forum**. For this reason we are particularly glad to include the second and major part of Caroline Benn's very thorough and indeed devastating critique of the concept of 'giftedness' and the uses to which this concept is being put today. The 'giftedness' lobby, she points out, got under way in the mid-60s just when comprehensive education began to be implemented. In its central argument for the diversion of special resources to a small minority it parallels the arguments used by supporters of the divisive system of the past relating to 'intelligence'. These latter arguments had to be demolished before the movement for comprehensive education could get underway. Similarly the 'giftedness' arguments need to be demolished if we are to generate the force not only to defend the gains made, but to push ahead to the realisation of a genuinely comprehensive education for all — which is **Forum's** objective, as well as that of the Right to Comprehensive Education (RiCE). In her detailed analysis of the contradictory, and often dishonest amalgum of arguments that fuel the 'giftedness' movement, Caroline Benn does just this.

It may interest **Forum** readers to know that we now have more subscribers than at any time over the last twenty five years. If adversity breeds success, we may, perhaps, hope for a turn in the educational scene in the years to come.

Prospects for a common system of examining at 16+

Desmond L. Nuttall
Before becoming Professor of Educational Psychology at the Open University, Desmond Nuttall did research on public examinations at the NFER and the Schools Council and later became Secretary to the now defunct Middlesex CSE Board. He was a member of the Waddell Committee's Educational Study Group and is a member of the Schools Council Forum on Comparability.

Our dual system of examinations at 16+, GCE O-level and CSE, mirrors the dual system of schooling — grammar and secondary modern — that prevailed at the time these examinations were established. Small wonder, then, that the progressive forces that fought for and achieved a comprehensive system of secondary education also pressed for an end to the dual and divisive examination system. By 1976, after one of the most searching and elaborate feasibility studies of an educational innovation ever mounted, the Schools Council pronounced itself convinced of the need for and feasibility of a common system of examining at 16+ and asked the Secretary of State for Education to authorise its establishment, with the first examination to be held in 1981.

Real advantages were seen in the new examining system. Above all, it would end divisiveness in the upper reaches of the secondary school, allowing schools freedom to group pupils as they wished, not as the examination structure dictated. It would recognise that ability and attainment were on a continuum, with no natural separating point, and by avoiding the premature selection for CSE and O-level streams at age 13 would acknowledge the different rates at which adolescents mature and develop. At a more mundane level, but still an important one, a new system would simplify the organisation and administration of examinations within the school: there would be fewer examining boards to deal with and a simpler examination timetable, and the expensive and dubious practice of double entry would be eliminated. For the world outside, a single grading scheme would be easier to understand and lead to greater fairness, in effect at last giving the CSE parity of esteem.

These advantages were foreseen by the Schools Council in its submission to the Secretary of State; since then, other merits have been noted, not least by HM Inspectorate. The dominating and deleterious effect of examinations on teaching and learning in the secondary school has been comprehensively documented by HMI, and the potency of the introduction of a new system for improving this unhappy state of affairs has not escaped their notice. For example,

> 'It is important that the framework provided by the external examinations system should not hinder schools from implementing programmes that they acknowledge to be necessary for the development of individuals and of whole groups of pupils. There is, however, as is widely demonstrable in the work of many schools, no reason why education should stop as soon as an examination syllabus is embarked upon; indeed, a clearer and widely agreed definition of curricular objectives could assist the development of improved instruments of assessment, including public examinations.'[1]

and again,

> 'There is clearly a need for schools and others to consider ways in which examinations themselves might contribute more fully to wider educational purposes. To devise methods of examining which encourage the best approaches while not imposing repeated and isolated practice of certain techniques is not easy. In order to bring together curriculum and examinations there is a case for the participation of more teachers both in devising syllabuses and in assessing their pupils, particularly in those aspects of work which cannot easily be tested within a timed written examination. The benefits of a balance of board based and school assessment would apply to all pupils and not merely to the average and less able. The introduction of 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.'[2]

Sheila Browne, the Senior Chief Inspector, put it more pithily;

> '. . . the exercise to establish criteria for the common exam system at 16-plus offers yet another chance — perhaps the last this century — to embody in the exam system aims long aspired to.'[3]

I have given some prominence to the views of HMI because of their importance in the current decision-making process on 16+, something that I discuss in more detail below. Many others shared HMI's view that a new system allowed a new start, in curriculum regeneration, in broadening the range of assessment methods especially for those who would have taken O-level under the old system, and in giving more information about an individual's performance, possibly through a profile as well as a global grade which itself might be tied more clearly to specified standards of performance rather than to percentage norms.

When the proposals went to the Secretary of State in 1976, the delays started and the dead hand of the DES smothered the lively infant examination. The Waddell Committee was set up to repeat the task of evaluation already undertaken by the Schools Council, and took two years to come to essentially the same conclusions.[4] A new Conservative administration slowed progress and watered down the proposals to an extent that they began to look more like a common grading scheme for two ex-

aminations, rather than a common system of examining, with the prospect of introduction in 1987 at the earliest. But perhaps the most important development was the insistence that all syllabuses and schemes of assessment should meet national criteria approved by the DES.

So shall we see all the advantages claimed for a common system in the version to be introduced in the late 1980s? Sadly, the answer is likely to be 'no'. Even in the early feasibility studies, it was recognised that in some subjects, most notably mathematics, a common set of examination papers for all candidates would be inappropriate and that some differentiation of assessment was necessary. The Waddell Committee pressed the need for differentiation in a much more extensive range of subjects, and the way in which the GCE Boards have been given responsibility for the higher grades and the way in which the national criteria are being developed make it highly likely that differentiated assessment will be the norm rather than the exception. Differentiated assessment is likely to mean a differentiated curriculum, with all the problems for organisational and curricular planning, and selection at 13+, that is part of the existing dual system. Joint planning of syllabuses by GCE and CSE boards may mean more common material and more possibility of flexible arrangements in the 4th year, but the proposals are inherently divisive.

This divisiveness within the system is perhaps less important socially and educationally than the divisiveness between the examined and the 'unexaminable'. The flexibility of CSE has meant that almost all pupils who wanted to could take one or two subjects, but the new system is to be much more rigidly limited to the top 60 per cent of the ability range in each subject than is the present system. Contrary to popular belief, this doesn't mean that 40 per cent can take no examinations: the constraint is subject by subject, and many will have abilities that place them in the top 60 per cent in some subjects and the bottom 40 per cent in others. (For me, maths would appear in the first list and art in the second.) But it is still much more divisive than the present system, under which about 90 per cent of 16-year-olds take an examination in English, and makes a nonsense of the notion of a core curriculum for all.

Administratively, the advantages may still be there: simpler entry procedures, a common timetable of papers nationally and a shorter examination season are all likely, but the possibility of choice between examining groups (if permitted by increasingly cost-conscience LEAs anxious to call the tune as well as paying the piper) could still mean that schools have to deal with two or three boards.

But it is the establishment of national criteria, ostensibly to help the user and to ensure comparability, that is perhaps the most worrying feature of all. The drafts, produced by small working parties, that are currently in circulation for national consultation with the teaching profession have, in many cases, extremely disturbing implications for both the curriculum and assessment.

In the first place, the criteria are coming dangerously near to defining national examination syllabuses. The freedom to teach in accordance with the needs of the individual pupils within their community will be severely curtailed, and the prospects for Mode 3 schemes will be negligible. Much concern has rightly been expressed about how the national curriculum projects such as Nuffield science and SMP would fare in meeting the national criteria; individual teachers should ask themselves how what they teach — or would want to teach — would similarly fare. If the answer is 'badly', as I fear it often would be, we need to search for ways of defending the criteria so that they are liberating and flexible rather than constraining, narrowing and centralist.

The same is true for the criteria governing assessment techniques. Current draft criteria tend to favour techniques that are convenient for large-scale administration — the conventional written paper — and frown upon school-based assessment. But criteria *could* be written that liberate assessment, and ensure that wider educational aims are fostered.

But this still leaves the problem of change and development. The existence of national criteria will make it very difficult to keep the curriculum in tune with current needs. If new criteria have to be negotiated and approved nationally every time there is an exacting new development in the curriculum, curriculum development could soon dry up. This is a very real danger if the criteria go as far as describing the performance required at each grade level, or at least at key grade levels, as desired by the DES. They acknowledged the difficulty of creating grade criteria, or even just grade descriptions, but failed to see how retrogressive and inhibiting grade criteria could be. Mercifully, the chances of useful grade descriptions being written is slight within the existing type of grading scheme.[5] There is no sign, sadly, that any experimentation in grading or reporting performance is to take place.

This analysis is sufficient to convince me that the promise of a comprehensive and liberating examination system to match a comprehensive education system has been lost, and that the system we are likely to get, after years of stultifying bureaucratic and political manoeuvering within the DES, is divisive, retrogressive, incapable of developing, obsolescent in that it is not likely to meet today's curricular needs, let alone tomorrow's, and anti-educational, in that it will not be sensitive to the needs of pupils, teachers, classrooms, schools and even society itself.

But there is a lot still to fight for. The national criteria have not yet been decided, and teachers still have a real chance of turning the criteria round to make them a positive and liberating force. The DES have, of course, got to approve the criteria but their most significant educational advisers are the HMI. If the quotations I gave earlier are a true reflection of HM Inspectorate's view, then it may take a smaller nudge on the door of Elizabeth House to ensure that the criteria are constructive and forward-looking than the last few years of DES decision-making, or non-decision-making, on examinations at 16+, 17+ and 18+ would lead us to fear.

But the struggle to make the examination less divisive and less obsolescent will be a hard one, and there's not much time left — boards are already beginning to devise syllabuses and schemes of examination to meet the draft criteria. We need a hard-working group to show how national criteria can be phrased positively rather than negatively, and a national campaign to fight for what was good in the original proposals. But I suspect that there are many who, like me, would once have joined such a campaign with enthusiasm but who now see the only solution as abolition of the whole 16+ examination system and the development of new school-based

Our Single and most significant decision

Derek Roberts

Some readers may still remember Derek Roberts's brilliant and devastating speech at a packed **Forum** conference on Non-Streaming in the Comprehensive school in 1966. This was based on his experience at the David Lister school at Hull. He opened Campion school at Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire in September 1967 and here evaluates developments since then.

Whenever the popular press makes reference to 'mixed ability' there is usually more than a hint of educational doom. Politicians with a penchant for simplistic solutions to complex problems hasten to establish a causal link which allows identification of the 'real reasons' for our present woes. If inflation can be exclusively linked to the supply of money and if economic stagnation is seen as the inevitable outcome of too much government spending, then it is not surprising that our inability to compete on the world stage can be attributed to the fall in educational standards. There is political capital to be made out of propagating the myths and then peddling a few cures. 'Falling standards', like sin, is bound to have everyone against it and in the causal confusion a prejudice or two can be slipped in, suitably dressed up as undeniable truths. Britain really was Great when we still had Grammar Schools so selection and success are obviously inextricably intertwined. Recovery of our rightful place in the world and promotion in the league of economic growth can only be assured by the preservation of narrowly defined 'good schools' in which all good pupils should be taught. The correlation between parental bank balance and offspring's educational potential is assumed to be high. The identified intelligent few born in the wrong social class can be assisted to the good schools by a new Education Act which assumes that many schools and their pupils must be of lesser worth. When the accepted wisdom of the people in power is founded on the concept of competition and the necessity of selection, comprehensive schools which take in all abilities are at odds with the fundamental belief and the unstreamed comprehensive school looks like the error twice compounded.

Eighteen years of working in unstreamed comprehensive schools have persuaded me to take a very different view. Almost as many years in the selective bit of the selective system before that provided the professional experience against which the later years and the new experience could be measured. The experience has left me with much more certainty than the commentator in the *Times Educational Supplement* who headed his report of the recent NFER review of Mixed Ability Teaching with the title, 'Mixed Ability classes bear little fruit'. The Garden of Eden itself could hardly have survived such comment.

Practical experience doing the job necessarily reveals possibilities and problems which are too complex and too liable to variation to be graded simplistically as good and bad. Every structure and organisation can be expected to offer advantages and disadvantages. The weighing of one against the other is a personal but professional response which cannot easily be generalised and is difficult to measure. The NFER report with all its sampling of teachers ultimately records their 'feelings' and there is no Richter scale for interpersonal comparisons. Difference of view there might be, but there are no inherent contradictions as in the confused society which schools are expected to serve. We are exhorted to compete and yet to pull together; rewards and incentives are lauded as the mainspring of worthwhile endeavour amidst calls for general sacrifice. Lack of achievement in schools is the constant theme yet apparently too many qualify for University, Polytechnic and College places. Compared with such contradictions the problems of the unstreamed school pale into insignificance.

For a variety of reasons I was moved to join the first comprehensive school planned in Hull, initially to be powered by Albert Rowe. He engendered a revolution within a revolution as he rejected internal selection within the comprehensive school. The shock of immersion first produced techniques of self-salvation and then a fundamental rethinking of what I was doing as a teacher. The enforced need to provide for individuals rather than 'homogeneous' forms and the vital necessity of using every possible means of stimulating interest, providing experience and presenting information resulted in a new approach to my job which I was quite sure raised pupil expectation. It allowed some to make remarkably good progress in the traditional academic sense, lifted the level of the overwhelming majority of children and kept those with obvious difficulties still involved and part of the common experience. Unstreaming was adopted predominantly for 'educational' rather

(Continued from page 61)

approaches to assessment.[6] Perhaps we shall achieve this solution before the end of the 20th Century.

Notes

1. *Curriculum 11-16*, DES, 1977, p.8.
2. *Aspects of Secondary Education in England: a survey by HM Inspectors of Schools*, HMSO, 1979, p.249.
3. Reported in *Education*, 30 October 1981, p.340.
4. *School Examinations*, HMSO, 1978, Cmnd 7281-I and 7281-II.
5. See the carefully argued consideration of comparability in *Standards in Public Examinations: problems and possibilities*, Schools Council, 1979.
6. See, for example, *Outcomes of Education*, edited by Tyrrell Burgess and Betty Adams, Macmillan Education, 1980.

than 'social' reasons. The social benefits in the wider school society, including teachers, taught and their parents was a remarkable bonus. The personal cost was sweat rather than blood and tears.

The ultimate test of my evaluation of the mixed ability system came when I started a new comprehensive school from scratch in Northamptonshire. The very earliest 'unstreamers' began with faith, as any innovators must, but my practical experience with Albert Rowe provided sufficient evidence to leave me in little doubt that the new school should be unstreamed. I knew that the high standards of work I had expected of selected children within a selective school could still be produced. Certainly I believed that there would be more opportunity to develop and mature than under a system which not only strictly categorised children but did so within the additional restrictions of a rigid time scale. Eleven or twelve or thirteen is too tender an age to be called to final judgement.

The new school was unstreamed not as an end in itself but because we had objectives which we thought were more likely to be achieved through that particular form of organisation. As 'objectives' suggests a precision about human affairs which we hesitated to assume, we more often thought of our 'purpose'. We wanted to provide the possibility for more children to achieve more in the measurable academic sense than had been the case in the selective system we replaced. Academic excellence is often claimed as the aim of a school; in our case academic awareness was more appropriate as it could encompass the vast majority and could subsume excellence for some. Children have a diversity of talents and interests; to do something well is a fundamental human need and the full range of opportunities we could offer to their talents had to be on offer to all. It seemed that we were more likely to preserve the equality of opportunity and equal access to resources if we had unstreamed parallel groups. The identified 'lower streams' in our earlier experience had too often come at the end of the queue when teachers, rooms and facilities were being apportioned. They were also less likely to respond to activities provided outside the clasroom, being conditioned to accept that the best which was provided was not really for them. One part of our purpose related to academic progress and its relation to careers, another involved interests and activities which make life more than a pursuit of material things. An important part of our purpose was linked to the quality of our communal life together and the immeasurable qualities our leavers might add to adult society after school. Evaluation of all this is a tall order. We can produce, as directed by the recent Education Act, examination statistics which certainly need no excuses. We can reveal something of the range of ever changing activities without a hint of being comparative about the relative merits of playing scrum-half or second fiddle. The contribution to society made by those who were helped in some small way to develop compassion, tolerance, generosity and a spirit of co-operation cannot be measured as they act as a leaven over many years. We can, however, distinguish better from worse. It is not that we believed we could, or should, attempt social engineering via mixed ability grouping but we do believe that a school organisation which emphasises superiority and inferiority, which sorts people into categories on examination of one or two of their infinite variety of unique characteristics, and emphasises competition, may not provide the best preparation for the sort of existence which most churches at least still pray for.

It may seem immodest for me to evaluate what unstreaming has afforded in this school; only politicians are expected to say how right they were. Evaluation is professionally sensed even though the gains cannot be ranked in order. I am conscious that our emphasis on each pupil's unique individuality rather than regarding the pupil as a neatly categorised member of a 'Homogeneous Group' is the starting point for much that is valuable. Expectation can be positive for all. Teachers can concentrate their energies on shaping rather than grading; academic redemption is possible for those pupils who were guilty of the sins of omission for a good few years.

Our sort of teachers also actually prefer not to be streamed themselves; even the chance to make history by streaming the best teachers to teach the worst children does not appeal to them. Teachers' satisfaction matters: their very low absence rate and small turnover suggests a good deal. The presence of a large number of teachers' children dotted at random throughout out congregation suggests a little more. Pupils in general seem to like school; they do appreciate that in many ways they can individually change their lot. The system does not produce bottlenecks for improvers; we do not have to demote before we can promote. The pupils, in any case, know that their personal significance is not graded A, B or C. There are no tops and no bottoms. It is the possibility of widespread progress which keeps the battery of computers, the engineering drawing area, art and commerce rooms and the workshops in capacity use by pupils irrespective of the official times for lunch breaks and end of school. Library, Drama area, Music rooms all add their dimension and large numbers of energetic oafs get muddied in the traditional ways. Parents join us in very large numbers at parent evenings and frequently use our open door to meet individual staff in school time. We believe it is because our unstreamed organisation retains maximum flexibility that parents are encouraged to go on encouraging and supporting and hoping. The gates really are left open and all may enter in.

Employers pick up our leavers readily enough; in September 1980 only five out of over 200 leavers were still unemployed and even in September 1981 the leavers escaped the worst of the disaster the Government had contrived. Employers tell us they can understand the detailed and individual references we supply and they prefer them to a cryptic 17th in 5D (Middle Band).

The results of external examinations please those who still count them all important so unstreaming cannot have sabotaged academic success. Pupils who have been taught in mixed ability groups still manage eight or nine distinctions at Ordinary level and follow the traditional path to Advanced levels and University. They work alongside others who had not really quite ripened at sixteen and so needed resits even in English language as they progressed towards degrees in subjects that even Sir Keith Joseph would allow might be wealth creating. In 1967 at the time of the planting of this comprehensive school about eighteen per cent of the local children were filtered through to selective schools; unselected and unstreamed, about twenty eight per cent now gain five Ordinary level passes or better in a typical year. A sixth

Assessment and Record Keeping

Peter Mitchell
After acting as head of humanities at Thomas Bennett school at Crawley, Peter Mitchell was a research fellow in the Education Department at Sussex University. He has now been head of Quintin Kynaston school (ILEA) for several years.

Being situated in North Westminster, on the border of Camden Town, places Quintin Kynaston in an area of inner London with a broad social mix. The comprehensive school was originally formed in 1969 from the amalgamation of a boys grammar school and boys secondary modern school. In common with many inner city single sex schools Quintin Kynaston had over sixty feeder primary schools. In the circumstances continuity of learning between primary and secondary schools was difficult to pursue. In 1976 the school began a phased development as a mixed school; this fundamental change in the character of the school was accompanied by a primary link scheme. The link scheme guarantees a place at Quintin Kynaston for children transferring from the three nearest primary schools. Instead of in the region of twenty children transferring at 11+ we now have approximately half our intake from these three schools. We still have a large number of primary schools sending us children but it is now less than half what is was when Quintin Kynaston was a boys school.

With as many as ninety children a year coming from our three linked schools we have a sound basis for planning for continuity of learning between primary and secondary school. For two consecutive years the ILEA has supported research into ways of developing curriculum links. The findings will not be complete until the end of this school year but the two researchers have continuously fed observations back into the schools and influenced the way the scheme is perceived by teachers. Quintin Kynaston is now more able to understand the primary end of education not only because of dialogue with linked primary teachers but also because there are Quintin Kynaston staff who have taught in the three primary schools.

All children transferring to Quintin Kynaston are grouped by their primary school according to their verbal reasoning. The verbal reasoning test score, on which the grouping is based, is intended to be an assessment of ability which is independent from the curriculum studied. (The tests are standardised, across the ILEA.) On average a comprehensive intake would give each school an intake with twenty five per cent VR Group 1, fifty per cent VR Group 2 and twenty five per cent VR Group 3. This formula operates to prevent over subscribed schools receiving more than their share of any one grouping but cannot guarantee that under subscribed schools will have their numbers made up. At the time of transfer the VR group is entered onto the child's profile. The latter also includes a descriptive assessment of attainment covering, in particular, English and Mathematics.

These profiles used to be completed in February of the child's fourth year in the primary school but now, because the new education Act strengthens parents' powers of appeal, they are completed in November. There is now therefore almost a twelve month gap between the completion of the profile and the child's transfer to secondary school. In this amount of time a child's learning can have made significant changes and for this reason alone we have to ensure that there is no tendency to predict future performance on the basis of these profiles. Where we are able to support the profiles by dialogue with primary school staff, as we are in the link scheme, then we can draw up a more up to date pattern of achievement.

We teach all children in mixed ability classes in all subjects in their first three years in Quintin Kynaston. We try as far as possible to make each class as representative of all the abilities in the year as we possibly can. We use the VR group and the descriptive assessment as a basis for this. In addition we interview each child with their parents and use the findings from these discussions to add to the content of the profile. The Learning Support Department attend the interviews of all children

(Continued from page 63)

form of about 100 has been predominantly academic in the traditional sense and is normally en route for higher education. Examination results have always been private to the pupil and his family but we can deal in this currency if it dispels suspicion about what unstreaming might mean.

Ultimately the conviction that the decision to develop unstreamed has been our single most significant decision derives from the sense of atmosphere. It is difficult to define but there is ambient goodwill and friendly co-operation. Expectation is high in pupils, parents and teachers. There are many variables in the development of any school but we feel that unstreaming has allowed the positively helpful variables to make their maximum contribution. At a time when the proper debate on the unstreamed comprehensive school is still coloured by much prejudice it is perhaps timely to suggest that a school organised on those lines has quietly developed in rural Northamptonshire and neither pupils, parents, teachers, advisors, inspectors, Governors or local employers have suggested it should change. If it pleases most of them for most of the time it does suggest that Mixed Ability Teaching is quite likely to produce a very welcome crop of fruit.

whose learning is giving cause for concern.

Each year we find that despite all our efforts to balance forms one or two are badly skewed. We estimate that the VR groupings overlap significantly between primary schools and at the time of transfer some 1's and 2's overlap as do some 2's and 3's. To anybody who has argued for at least a mixed ability first year in a comprehensive school this will come as no surprise. I don't think, however, that it should be used as an argument against assessment. While we have children changing schools at 11+ it is important that we should work for continuity of learning and this implies a need for some means of describing children's achievements in primary school. By placing the children in mixed ability classes we are avoiding labelling them and at the same time reinforcing the idea that nobody has placed a fixed limit on their ability to learn.

In addition to the profile we receive a record of each child's work which covers reading development, written language mathematics, creative abilities and physical skills. The information covered within these categories is widely variable from school to school. Most schools use the London Reading Test which has helped our use of the reading ages included in each record. Unlike the verbal reasoning grade this is an assessment of attainment which is linked to the curriculum of the school. Attainment in maths is also assessed using the ILEA guidelines. As with the Profile the value of these records is enhanced by our links with the three primary schools. Information on attainment in maths is supplemented by link children transferring to Quintin Kynaston taking a maths test, devised by the Quintin Kynaston maths department. The test is designed to enable children to be placed on the school's maths scheme at a level in keeping with their current achievements. In language work the records are supported by the transfer of actual examples of the children's writing referred to in the records; personal, factual and imaginative.

By linking with three local primary schools we are able to expand and develop the primary profiles and records and to see that the learning we organise is based on an understanding of children's primary school experiences.

The fact that we find the formal attempts to grade children are unreliable predictors of future performance is a sound enough reason for organising learning in mixed ability teaching groups in the first three years. The wide social mix attending Quintin Kynaston also favours this type of grouping if the ambiance of the school is to give all children the feeling that they can progress in their studies.

We introduced mixed ability teaching in 1974 and without doubt it has been the single most important innovation in the school's development Not surprisingly we have found keeping track of children's learning the most important problem resulting from mixed ability grouping. There are those who would argue that any attempt at formal assessment is inimical to mixed ability teaching. This is usually because they assume that any factual estimation of achievement must lead inevitably to the categorisation of children into a rank order. Taken to its extreme this argument can lead to mixed ability teaching for social purposes only. Mixed ability teaching is not an educational aim but a means of facilitating learning by a particular form of grouping. Educational aims are essentially about learning and assessment has an important part to play in improving learning.

Mixed ability teaching was accompanied by the introduction of course planning. All courses in the first three years are co-operatively planned by teams of teachers. Over the years we have developed a systematic way of organising courses so that clear criteria are built into courses which form the basis for assessment. In common with much mixed ability teaching we have devised individual and group work which gives emphasis to the acquisition of the intellectual skills and attitudes which will help students (I am now writing about secondary school boys and girls!) in the management of their own learning. The criteria thus focused on are parts of the scientific inductive process which broadly involves the study of particulars leading to the making of generalisations. This transactional mode of writing is used across the curriculum and is an essential part of the way in which we attempt to reinforce learning as students move between courses.

Assessing the quality of learning in extended pieces of work is a more complex exercise than that undertaken by many mode 1 public examinations. In the latter the preoccupation with being able to ensure that marking is fair and uniform across widely distributed centres leads to assessment focusing on a limited range of learning with a high emphasis on factual recall. The efficacy of assessment which looks at the broad range of criteria covered by an extended enquiry depends to a large extent on the thought given, in the planning stage, to the type of learning students will experience during their studies. In all our lower school courses assessment is now criterion referenced which enables the level of achievement to be individual to each student. Our assessments are not concerned with seeing how students perform in relationship to a norm around which some succeed and some fail.

Twice a year all students are awarded criterion referenced mastery grades as well as personal achievement grades for each of their courses. The latter are an assessment of how well a student is achieving in relationship to what past work suggests is their potential. Once individual teachers have awarded the grades the course co-ordinators moderate them across the year. When we first began this exercise we found that mastery grades were being applied in a varied way but now we are able to confirm grades more quickly and move onto using the assessment and moderation to improve learning. Course co-ordinators make a report on the moderation exercise and then move on to the evaluation of courses. Assessing levels of learning is a necessary precursor to evaluation which looks at how worthwhile the course has been. Because the whole school is involved we have been able to use the twice yearly exercise of moderation and evaluation as an important contribution to staff development. The dialogue between teachers is supported by a school booklet 'Learning at QK' which expands on such terms as evaluation and suggests questions which should be posed if we are to look into the value of courses.

Eg: is the range of work available capable of meeting the needs of all abilities during the course?

In the light of teaching and moderating the course how realistic are course criteria for assessing progress in learning?

Because assessment has been designed to relate to

criteria built into courses it has not resulted in a narrowing down of the learning students experience. Its effect has been quite the reverse; our attempts to describe the learning process have highlighted deficiencies which have caused us to change the emphasis in the composition of courses. Enquiry work tends to emphasise the rational scientific way of processing knowledge at the expense of alternatives. Developing understanding through deduction, common sense and intuition have a part to play in classrooms with students from such varied experiences as we have at QK. Students will also be able to demonstrate their understanding in a variety of ways which go beyond the written product to include oral skills. In our assessment of student's work we attempt to do justice to the variety of ways they are demonstrating their understanding.

Students have an individual record sheet for each course taken. The front of the sheet covers written comments on all the main criteria covered in the course which lead to a written product. In this way we are able to specify particular strengths and weaknesses. On the reverse side we keep a record of observed behaviour. The sheets replace the conventional mark book; at the end of each year they are collected by departments to be maintained as a central record. The grades awarded to students for all courses are collated and made available to their tutors. Because of the emphasis we give to the process of learning, in all our courses, tutors are able to support students in the planning and organisation of their studies. The personal achievement grade is given to the students but the mastery grade is not.

An aspect of assessment which we find useful is pupil self-assessment. Learning to manage their own learning will come about partly because they experience opportunities to exercise real management responsibilities. They will only get full value from these experiences if they recognise the importance of their own role. Students maintain a study diary which is seen only by their tutor. This gives them the opportunity to reflect on how well they have been working and to specify courses where they have been experiencing difficulties.

In addition students write a conclusion at the end of each assignment which reflects back to the course criteria given to them at the start of the assignment. Again this is designed to give students a feeling of involvement in the progress of their own studies, and to provide feedback to staff which can be used in evaluation meetings.

The way we work in the first three years of secondary school is being gradually extended into the upper school. All English, Mathematics and Biology is now taught in mixed ability classes in years 4 and 5 and assessment includes an emphasis on course work as well as examinations. We are planning to extend the range of core courses in the upper school with the hope of being able to continue with emphasis on the careful monitoring of student's progress towards independent learning. Critics of mixed ability teaching, particularly in inner city comprehensive schools, claim that it is introduced for social and disciplinary reasons. It therefore places students at a disadvantage when taking conventional mode 1 examinations, when they are compared with students taught by more direct methods. I have tried to show that assessment can be a creative part of the way we improve students learning. If we neglect its contribution the relationship between comprehensive education and mixed ability teaching will be even slower to develop than it has been over the past two decades.

The Pros and Cons of Profiles

Patricia Broadfoot
Currently a lecturer in education at Bristol University, Patricia Broadfoot has taught in schools and colleges. From 1973 to 1977 she was engaged full-time in the Scottish 'Pupil Profiles' development project.

At a press conference held on 18 January this year, representatives of The Joint Council for 16 Plus National Criteria — the organisation of GCE and CSE Boards formed to draw up the outlines of the new 'joint' 16+ examination — warned the public and, in particular, the Education Secretary, Sir Keith Joseph, that failure to go ahead with the new examination, which had already cost the Boards £250,000 in development work, would lead to serious educational problems. The implication is that the new 16+ will solve many of the curricular and organisational problems inherent in a dual system of examining and currently being made worse by falling rolls. To this end, teachers' representatives are working under enormous pressure to produce the national criteria which will form the basis for the new examination in time for it to be instituted in 1987.

Sadly, these well-meaning efforts are misguided. Not enough attention has been given to examining the real source of such problems and, as part of this, what the priorities in 16+ assessment should be. Even a decade or more of fruitless pursuit of examination reform by government working parties, the Schools Council, Examination Boards and teachers, has not yet led to the widespread realisation that a certification system designed for a highly-privileged minority cannot provide an adequate educational goal for the talents and interests of a whole population as it passes through secondary school.

A typical list of educational objectives, such as that offered in the Scottish 'Munn' report (SED, 1977) on the curriculum, will include the development of knowledge and understanding, cognitive, interpersonal and psychomotor skills, personal qualities and social competence. The 1977 DES Green Paper 'Education in Schools' mentions among other things, the fostering of enquiring minds, respect for people, world understanding, use of language, mathematics and other skills and knowledge of cultural achievements. The more recent curricular statements from the DES, HMI and the Schools Council are essentially similar in tone.

In reality the existence of formal, academic examinations designed such that only a minority of pupils can achieve success in them, is a mockery of such wide-ranging objectives. Whether it is passed or failed, the very existence of the examination must divert attention

(Continued from previous column)

from the pursuit of those qualities which research (SCRE 1977) has shown to have the most bearing on occupational and personal success such as persistence, courage, generosity, oc-operation and tolerance.

That examinations are 'exclusive, trivial, uninformative, expensive, misused and in many ways, anti-educational' (Burgess and Adams, 1980) is widely recognised. Secondary school teachers also recognise examinations as the most powerful constraint on their practice. It is a peculiarly English anomaly that cherished professional freedom is freely sacrificed to the control of bodies who have no formal responsibility and whose raison d'être must be as much commercial as educational. If this control is now becoming increasingly apparent with the explicit search for national 'criteria', there is still little sign that this domination and consequent distortion are being challenged. This is because examinations have become associated with the maintenance of curricular and pedagogic standards. Even though the standards concerned may be quite restricted and relevant to only a small proportion of higher-education-oriented pupils, examinations are a convenient, credible, impersonal yardstick of proven worth.

Nowhere is this belief in examination success as a reflection of educational merit more clearly demonstrated than in the recent legislation to require schools to publish their public examination results. But the limitations of such formal tests are equally well demonstrated in another recent policy initiative — the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU). The failure of the APU to find ways of monitoring on a systematic, national basis, those areas of the curriculum which do not neatly match school subjects — personal and social, aesthetic and physical development — has provided the clearest possible evidence that large areas of educational activity are not amenable to formal testing.

The context for change

One of the reasons why the examinations industry in England has found it relatively easy to resist the at times extremely powerful 'reform' lobby, including the Spens (1938), Norwood (1943) and Crowther (1959) Reports, is the very decentralised nature of educational provision in this country. As with comprehensivisation and now post-16 provision, it is up to individual local authorities and, in some cases, individual schools to decide their own policies. Trapped as they are in a mesh of, sometimes conflicting, pressures and explanations, schools and LEAs have been in their own way as powerless as central government to give a lead in the institution of more relevant assessment procedures. Rather what has happened is that alongside the tortuous debates about examination reform in recent years, there has been another parallel set of assessment initiatives independent of and possibly complementary to public examinations but not part of a direct attack.

Typically, these alternative procedures are a form of teacher-based report designed to be applicable to all pupils, to gather teachers' knowledge of pupils' many different skills, characteristics and achievements across the whole range of the curriculum, both formal and informal; to provide with the minimum of clerical demands, a basis for continuing in-school guidance and culminating in a relevant and useful school-leaving report for all pupils. In such a report, credit can be given for the caring shown in social service; for the leadership shown in outdoor pursuits; for all the qualities and interests and idiosyncratic achievements of the unique individual. Not only does this approach to assessment provide a realisable goal for all pupils to work towards, it also precludes facile comparisons between pupils and hence the detrimental psychological effects of persistent failure. At a more utilitarian level such comprehensive reports are arguably a much more useful basis for selection. Employers and those responsible for further education courses have consistently given enthusiastic support to any assessment or reporting procedure which offers more relevant information than the GCE and, to a lesser extent, CSE results which perforce they have had to use in the past. Clearly a report which contains information on manual-dexterity, oral communication, adaptability and reliability, tells a potential employer of a telephonist far more than a grade 3 CSE in geography.

New assessments for new challenges?

The generic name that has come to be used recently for this kind of report is a 'profile' — strictly, 'a set of data recording the scores of a student in respect of his performance over a range of items' (Mansell) but more generally referring to reports which give a detailed and comprehensive, but usually more systematic and open statement of achievement than either the traditional examination on the one hand or the personal testimonial on the other. Recognition of the shortcomings of examinations and the need for more comprehensive and relevant reports is not new however. As early as 1911 the report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education urged the use of a 'school record, rather than examinations, for school-leavers'. Since that time, calls for such provision have been persistent and equally persistently, ignored, largely for the reasons I have discussed. Are there any grounds then for thinking that the current crop of initiatives is doomed to any better fate?

The answer would appear to be positive for three principal reasons. The first is the raising of the school leaving age and the related rapid expansion of comprehensive secondary provision. In 1972 the government raised the school leaving age to 16 thereby creating at a stroke a much larger population of youngsters staying on for what had been traditionally a year for taking certification examinations and this new population of pupils typically comprised the youngsters for whom no formal educational target existed. The second reason is the so-called 'Great Debate' which brought out into the open public, and particularly employers', disquiet about the level of basic and work-related skills among school leavers. Third and most recent has been the enormous rise in youth unemployment which has prompted perhaps the most significant innovation in educational provision in recent decades — the activities of the Manpower Services Commission and its various training programmes. Not only has the simple pressure for jobs convinced teachers of the need to provide school-leavers with as much relevant information as possible, the increasing emphasis on training for young school-leavers is making further education an increasingly significant and visible part of the system.

This development is likely to affect the growth of

'profiling' in two related ways. First, this is a relatively new educational arena in which the emphasis is on training for those who have by and large already demonstrated that they can't or won't compete for traditional examination success. Thus activities in this sector are free of the expectations, anxieties and traditions which are a major barrier to innovation in schools. At the same time, if the training is to be explicitly 'work-related' the assessment must be so too. The second significant development in this respect is the recent emergence of a movement towards 'tertiary' education covering all the different kinds of post-16 provision. Despite Sir Keith Joseph's success in stemming this tide in Manchester and possibly, Sheffield, the combined pressure of falling rolls and tight budgets is likely in the end to prove more powerful. When it does, it is very possible that such a major institutional change will make possible change in assessment procedures on an equivalent scale.

The first step in this direction is the proposed new 'Voc' examination — the creature of Mr Jack Mansell, chairman of the Further Education Unit within the DES and a long-time champion of 'profiles'. The 'Voc' is the first formal proposal which has emerged from a visibly increasing interest in 'profiles' in policy-making circles in recent years, manifest in both DES research funding and the educational policies of several political parties. The 'Voc' is a particularly significant initiative because it is the first attempt to institute a 'profile-type' assessment as a national basis for certification equivalent to a public examination. If this attempt is successful, one of the most important stumbling blocks to the development of more broadly-based school assessment will have been removed, namely their lack of *national* validity.

Although GCE and CSE examinations are not nationally run, history and the extreme care which is taken to provide comparability between Boards and between years has given them a national currency. 'Profiles' on the other hand suffer from several major drawbacks which inhibit their developing into qualifications of equivalent stature. First their focus and raison d'être tends to be the 'less-able' for no other reason than that the need is most pressing for these pupils. This immediately devalues a 'profile' as a qualification. Second, the much more detailed and personal nature of such records means that they must be produced by teachers rather than tests and will thus inevitably contain a good deal of explicitly subjective material. Third, the 'profile' movement has been an ad hoc one, equivalent to the little ships of Dunkirk without the support of either the examination boards or central government. Until such support and national organisation is forthcoming, their currency is likely to remain severely restricted.

A fourth and related reason is the sheer anarchy of the movement which can be taken to embrace at one extreme the well-known, explicitly personal non-evaluative records developed by Don Stansbury (the Records of Personal Achievement/Experience are probably the most well-known) and, at the other, the checklist of fifty or so mastery-oriented, personal achievements on The Evesham High School 'Personal Achievement Record'. The range of procedures covered by the word 'profile' includes departmental reports, school reports, local authority reports, checklists and open-ended comments, comments by teachers, pupils and even parents, formal, norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests and comments on skills, knowledge, activities and characteristics recorded on duplicated forms, NCR forms, computerised forms, printed certificates and pupil record books. The wide range of assessment and non-assessment activities which come under the general heading of 'profile' is testimony to different priorities and purposes and philosophies, but within this diversity is a common and central commitment to some kind of relevant, individual and comprehensive statement. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the book edited by Tyrrell Burgess and Elizabeth Adams *Outcomes of Education* (Macmillan, 1980) which weaves descriptions of many of the most influential initiatives in this area into a more general proposal for a radical change in the organisation and evaluation of secondary schooling in which not only the final 'statement' but the whole curriculum is 'individualised' around personal talents and objectives.

The danger of half-measures

Although far from impractical in theory, it is unlikely that in the short term proposals such as those of Burgess and Adams will succeed in overthrowing the powerful interests of tradition and privilege. On the other hand it is looking increasingly likely that some kind of comprehensive 'profile' may come to be instituted, probably in the first instance, for the 'less-able'. Ironically, this half-way house may prove to be even more deadening and divisive than the status quo if experience in France is anything to go by. There, 'dossiers scolaires' were instituted as part of the 1976 'Haby' reforms intended to make a traditionally elitist and selective educational system more egalitarian, democratic and relevant.

The 'dossiers' which contain personal and medical as well as scholastic details, follow the pupil from his entry into primary school until he leaves collège or lycée. After the nominally unstreamed first two years of secondary school (collège) comes the first of a series of 'orientations' in which the pupil and his parents will be recommended a particular scholastic route based on the assessment of his performance as agreed by the Conseil d'Orientation which is comprised of teachers, a guidance counsellor, a school doctor, a psychologist, and representatives of parents. The parents or pupil are free to resist this 'orientation' at any of its stages and to demand the alternative of a public examination — nominally at least now largely replaced by the orientation procedure except at the 18+ level of the Baccalauréat matriculation examination. This apparently humane and rationale selection system has provoked as much furore in France as the re-institution of the tripartite policy of the 11+ would be likely to do in England. Although some of this hostility was from traditionalist supporters of examinations and from those who feared the computer-storage of such information (the computerisation aspect of the dossiers has since been rescinded) an equivalent amount has come from teachers frightened of the parental pressure which is likely to be a consequence of this new responsibility and from parents and pupils who feel this is just a more subtle and irrefutable form of selection more in keeping with the benign but faceless bureaucracy which is increasingly coming to characterise all aspects of public service.

The NFER on Mixed Ability

Harvey Wyatt
A member of the Editorial Board, Harvey Wyatt is deputy head at The Woodlands school, Coventry, a school that pioneered mixed ability teaching. Here he writes on the NFER's study 'Mixed Ability Teaching, Problems and Possibilities' (Nelson's Ltd, 1981).

To those teachers involved in the NFER's Mixed Ability Project between 1975-77, which covered twenty nine schools in five separate LEA's, this final report must come as a resounding disappointment. The bland and inconclusive nature of the findings are matched only by the belated nature of the publication, long after the main participants had forgotten of its existence.

Teachers in the authorities studied became involved on the premise that the research would offer them positive support in their practical working situation and help in developing their ability when teaching mixed ability groups. Indeed, the aims of the project were precisely expressed in the first NFER document sent to schools. The initial objective was to send the research team into schools to collect data on a range of issues related to mixed ability teaching. After this the aim was to establish inter-school groups studying particular issues in some depth, supported by the NFER team and local authority advisers.

The second stage, described as the outcomes, was to be a fourfold exercise. Firstly, materials and techniques were to be made generally available to schools in the five authorities. Secondly, a regular newsletter would be published by the NFER developing the ideas generated by the Project. Thirdly, there would be dissemination conferences to discuss findings and point the way ahead, as views emerged. Finally, a major report would be published by the NFER team.

In practice all that has happened is that, over six years after the Project commenced, the final report has been published. The materials and techniques were never developed or disseminated, nor were conferences mounted by the local authorities or the NFER. The much publicised newsletter disappeared after just two editions, neither of which could be described as advancing any new or profound ideas about mixed-ability teaching. Perhaps the most unforgivable aspect of the Project is that teachers were initially seduced into believing that this was an 'action' project, and were therefore enthusiastic to be involved in the research and development. They hoped to produce ideas and resources and in this hope they have been badly betrayed by both the LEA's and the NFER. The Project suffers from the same problem that bedevils much research work in that, having encouraged teacher involvement, they are then deserted by a lack of sound and detailed linear development. After the initial burst of frenetic activity between 1975-77, the 'action' element of the Project foundered. The comparative survey carried out regarding the extent of mixed ability teaching in 1980, compared with the original survey in 1975, appears as a belated postscript which was not mentioned in the original research plan. Perhaps this was added to give the report a hollow ring of academic respectability when it eventually appeared.

The Report covers a wide range of issues and they need careful study to identify any important trends. The issue of the aim and scope of the Project has already been questioned. The analysis of the sample of teachers involved in mixed ability in the twenty-nine schools is largely unexceptional. The conclusion that Heads of Departments are less involved in mixed ability teaching than the rest of the sample, could have conclusions other than those stated. For example, particularly in mathematics, science and English it may well be the difficulty in recruiting well qualified staff for examination work has forced senior staff into a straitjacket of upper school work, rather than their choosing to do so.

The chapter on school policy and the implementation of mixed ability teaching is well written and researched, but resorts to over-simplified caricatures regarding styles of management under the sub-headings directive, consultative and pragmatic. Experience suggests that policies are not so easily categorised. The Report warns that 'it is unlikely that changes in teaching styles and relationships as profound as those which appear to be

(Continued from previous page)

There are a lot of differences between English and French education and between the kind of profile envisaged in, for example, the 'Voc' and the French 'dossier'. Nevertheless it is important that those who deplore the inadequacies of the traditional certification examination do not rush hastily into substituting something that is no better and may even be worse. Several years of thinking and working in this area have convinced me that reform is needed if we are to offer a worthwhile education to all pupils, but that that reform must be a genuine attempt to sweep away not only the apparatus of examining but the organisation and concepts that have gone with it — pre-packaged knowledge to be passively reproduced, formal time-tables, extrinsic motivation and teacher judgement. Profiles can be part of the traditional picture or they can equally be part of the alternative — individualised study programmes, flexible teaching arrangements, intrinsic motivation and an assessment dialogue between pupil and teacher. Clearly, the word itself means very little. The danger is that if 'profiles' are allowed to mean all things to all men they will end up achieving very little.

required in mixed ability teaching, can be effected without extensive consultation, discussion, persuasion and support'. It is a pity that the same stringent criteria had not been employed in streamed schools in the previous half century. In addition the research team might have highlighted some examples of successful implementation to help those contemplating the change.

The subjective reporting on parental involvement, or the lack of it, is rather more disturbing. The report concludes that parents were seldom consulted and also confused by schools who used unfamiliar jargon to disguise their intentions. For example they quote one school that wrote 'pupils on entering the school are placed in one of ten parallel forms and pursue a common course for the first three years'. The report omits that the school was well known by its parents as a pioneer in the mixed ability movement over a fifteen year period, had been the subject of a BBC television programme describing its philosophy and methods, had a head who had spoken out nationally against streaming, and had preliminary meetings with parents to describe and explain its philosophy. Such selective reporting must bring the tenor of the rest of the study into question.

Sensibly, the report draws attention to the need for more materials and resource based learning, to individualise the learning process. Allied to the need for sensitive and industrious teachers, the authors identify a need for better technical support by improved provision of ancillary staff and better reprographic equipment. Again there are a number of excellent models to be found in schools that have had considerable success in this area and practising teachers would have benefited from carefully argued case study material, but it is singularly lacking.

In discussing ideas on the use of plant they itemise such factors as the formation of suites of rooms for departments, the establishment of resource centres, the creation of reprographic units and the departure of the traditional 'closed' classroom. Surely the logistics behind these sort of changes deserve greater depth and evaluation in an 'action' report.

There follows a catalogue of the advantages and disadvantages of mixed ability teaching. The reader would be advised to read them carefully as they are too numerous to list here. Suffice it to say that there is little about this list one has not already heard several times. By their nature most of the views are highly subjective and if the value or otherwise of mixed ability teaching is to be analysed properly the arguments on both sides will require much deeper research.

The greatest inherent weakness of the study is the fact that it is not a comparative one. Indeed it stresses strongly that it makes no pretence to be so. However, all things in education are relative and mixed ability teaching stands or falls ultimately only by comparison with other forms of teaching organisation such as streaming, setting or banding. In this sense the report either ignores or is dismissive of previous research evidence which supports the move to mixed ability teaching. Much of that evidence is small scale or localised but it is helping to fill in the jig-saw of information. It is on these grounds that the research of the NFER is most suspect.

It would be remiss to conclude this critique without mention of these researches. With the introduction of comprehensive education in Britain there has been a gradual, almost imperceptible, shift of attitude regarding the major purposes of education. Firstly, there is a recognition by educationalists and politicians of the enormous waste of human talent and the subsequent alienation of children who do not achieve or aspire to academic excellence under a system of streaming.

In his book on mixed ability teaching Kelly[1] sums up this dilemma precisely, when he says,

> 'we should perhaps be asking ourselves whether, even if this picture which the evidence presents is an accurate one, we ought to be willing to purchase academic education of a few 'gifted' children at the cost of the social education of all pupils . . . Many schools have done so by abandoning streaming. They have accepted that social education of their pupils is every bit as important as the academic.'

Thompson[2] proved quite clearly in his research that even without the sophisticated changes in teaching method and style suggested in this survey, provided the school staff were supportive of the change from a philosophical and emotional stance, the system would work. Imagine how much more effective they will be now with twenty years of classroom practice behind them.

In the Inner London Education Authority report[3] one staff inspector got to the nub of the issue when he stated,

> 'the treatment of mixed ability systems in these schools is fundamentally an issue of hearts and heads. At one school for all their study of the problem, it is very much an affair of the heart . . . The collective brain of the staff of one school is very substantial, so is the collective heart of the staff of another . . . I am impressed and, indeed, humbled, before the concern of these teachers to get it right for every child.'

The Banbury experiment, researched by Newbold[4] also gives encouragement to those set on a mixed ability course. Although the overall conclusions are complex he states that,

> 'overall the principal conclusion from the study, conducted in a controlled situation with common objectives for homogeneous and heterogeneous ability groups at first and second year secondary level, is that mixed ability leads to social advantages without academic disadvantages — in fact there is evidence of academic gain for low ability children in mixed ability classes.'

These findings are further supported by the results analysed by Thompson at the upper end of his school in relation to improved examination performance.

The researchers developed and extended the findings of earlier research in the Barker-Lunn[5] survey, and the depressing findings outlined by Hargreaves[6] in his detailed study of secondary modern school streaming with its adverse effects in children's aspirations and motivation. Ball in a more recent study called **Beachside Comprehensive** again outlines the problems of streaming and its adverse effects on lower streams.

The NFER report appears to discount these findings. There is still a great need for more detailed research by well equipped organisations and it is unfortunate that the NFER study became so obsessed with pure data collection, with little attempt to take the argument forward and develop the information. It may have been a giant step forward for the NFER, but it was merely a little step sideways for the participating teachers.

Three perspectives on a national curriculum

John White
A member of the philosophy department at the Institute of Education, University of London, John White has recently published a book entitled **The Aims of Education Restated**. He discusses here the main recent initiatives relating to the 11 to 16 curriculum.

It is nearly six years since the Great Debate. How far have we moved during that time towards a national curriculum framework? The most recent official documents on the topic, by the HMI, the Schools Council and the DES, were all published within weeks of each other in late 1980 and early 1981.[1] As the culmination of years of hard thinking by these influential bodies, all of whom accept the need for some kind of national framework, one might expect from all of them clear, detailed, coherent accounts of where they stand.

Do we get them?

The Schools Council's working party which produced **The Practical Curriculum** was given the task of providing schools and LEAs with a lead on 'curriculum balance and content', bearing in mind the growing support for a general curriculum framework. One would have expected them to spend the bulk of their report on suggesting what should go into the framework and why. But three out of its four chapters are about problems in planning and implementing curricula within schools, monitoring them, and assessing their effectiveness. Useful though all this may well be, it is surely secondary to the main task bequeathed us by the Great Debate — to get a clear view of the overall structure. How like the Schools Council, I am afraid, to worry away at matching up its nuts and bolts when it has not yet worked out where its main girders should go!

True, its first chapter is entitled 'A rationale for the curriculum'. This starts well enough, talking about the 'overwhelming need, for each child and for the country as a whole' to find such a rationale, to identify an irreducible minimum for every pupil etc etc. But it loses steam after a page and a half, quickly resorting to mere lists of general and age-related objectives, sometimes magpied from elsewhere, and introduced without any indication of priorities or any supporting arguments. Secondary teachers may like to note that in none of the twelve curriculum aims suggested for pupils up to 16, is there mention of anything connected with literature or any other of the arts! After the lists, things go rapidly to pieces. A section on sandpit science in the infant school is glued on to a few lines about basing school curricula on forms of knowledge. Here, quite out of the blue, we find the suggestion that 'every pupil should sample the distinct elements of craft, design and technology'. And why? Because 'we believe that working with materials and designing and making solutions to problems are distinct kinds of experience and learning'. Quite so. Just like deep-sea diving or walking the high wire.

By the next section the author has given up the curriculum as a bad job, rumbles on about varying one's teaching methods, tells us that 'children may work individually or in groups, their contribution may be active or receptive, their work practical, experiential or theoretical . . .' and other such wonderfully forgettable bits and bobs. A few paragraphs each on values, skills and verbal and non-verbal expression follow on in equally disconnected fashion, bringing the chapter happily to a close — Oh, except for its eight 'checkpoints for action'. The last of these is 'Has the school developed or adopted a coherent written rationale for its curriculum?' Would that the working party had asked itself the same question!

The DES paper **The School Curriculum** is less of a laughing matter, if only because, unlike **The Practical Curriculum**, it gives schools and LEAs their marching orders. I have discussed it in more detail elsewhere, so will restrict myself to brief remarks.[2] First, while it avoids the schizoid inanity of its rival from Great Portland Street, it is intellectually decidedly shoddy. The first of its six suggested educational aims, for instance, is 'to help pupils to develop lively, inquiring minds, the ability to question and argue rationally and to apply themselves to tasks, and physical skills'. How are we to understand this curious lumping in of physical skills? As a cri de coeur from some stalwart of mens sana? As a panicky realisation that the first draft left no place for PE? More important is the document's failure to provide any elucidation of why it marks out the 'key position' to be given in English, maths, science and modern languages in the 14-16 year olds' curriculum. Although its list of general aims contains social, including international, understanding, respect for moral values and appreciation of human achievements and aspirations, all this is to be played down in the upper secondary school. 'The time available to schools is limited', we are told — with the clear implication that

(Continued from previous page)

Notes

1. Kelly A.V. 1978. *Mixed Ability Grouping: Theory and Practice*. Harper & Row.
2. Thompson D. 1969. *Forum* 11,2. 'An Experiment in Unstreaming'.
3. ILEA Inspectorate. 1976. *Mixed Ability Grouping*, ILEA.
4. Newbold D. 1975. *The School as a Centre of Enquiry*, Pubanco, Banbury.
5. Barker-Lunn V.C. 1970. *Streaming in the Primary School*, NFER.
6. Hargreaves D.H. 1967. *Social Relations in a Secondary School*, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

the so-called 'new claims' of paragraph 13 for such things as the development of economic understanding, education for international understanding, and political and social education, can be soft-pedalled. So, apparently, can the arts — unless, in both cases, we can take comfort in the **one line** devoted to the 'humanities' as compared with the **240 lines** devoted to the 'key' subjects.

At least if the DES is shy of putting down on paper its reasons for highlighting the latter, it is fairly obvious that it *has* reasons, and that these have to do with alleged 'national needs'. As if the nation needs French-speaking decent spellers who know a bit about the Gas Laws, but can do without any understanding of the ends of human life or of socio-economic arrangements which promote or obstruct them!

This brings us to an interesting reflection. Presumably teachers are not morally obliged to follow just *any* governmental guidelines — those of a dictatorship, for instance, but only those of a government committed to democratic principles. But how far can a government which pooh-poohs the social and political understanding which democratic citizenship demands be said to be so committed? In treating pupils apparently as no more than industry-fodder, how can it at the same time be viewing them, as any democratic government should, as morally autonomous ends-in-themselves? How far all this means that schools and LEAs would be right to *resist*, if they could, the imposition of the DES curriculum, I will leave unsaid.

The best buy of the three curriculum papers is the HMI's **A View of the Curriculum**. It is well written and full of sensible suggestions, both general and particular. Perhaps its chief virtue is that it distils the good sense found in the HMI primary survey and its **Curriculum 11-16** into a short space, thus highlighting the need to think of the curriculum as an eleven year programme, and one which avoids the discontinuities now so evident between schools for different age-ranges. The emphasis throughout is on coherence: on making primary school science, history and geography better structured, for instance, so that it gives a good foundation for secondary studies; on providing a broad, general curriculum up to a late age; on continuity between pre-16 and post-16 curricula.

What is lacking from the paper is an adequate discussion of the *aims* underlying its curriculum recommendations. The educated person who emerges from these pages is certainly knowledgeable enough in all sorts of ways (perhaps too many: I have yet to be convinced that a foreign language is a *sine qua non* for all pupils); but what is all the knowledge *for?* There is talk here and there of 'the responsibilities of citizenship', with somewhat fewer references to the enjoyment of ends-in-themselves (note the muted enthusiasm of 'No pupils' programmes should be wholly deficient in the arts and applied crafts'.) Industrial needs crop up now and then, as do those ever-elusive 'personal and social values'. But how all these aims are related to each other and what priorities there should be among them are left obscure. This is unfortunate, because, lacking a clear enough view of aims, the paper cannot take the more *a priori* route to the curriculum as one means among several of realising aims, but dwells too readily among the current familiarities of the curricular scene. Its main objectives throughout are different types of knowledge and skills: a curriculum framework rooted firmly in reflection about aims might, for instance, have made *the virtues* more salient.

Where do the three papers leave us in the debate about a national framework? The Schools Council and the DES proposals may help to turn teachers against the whole idea, the former because it leads nowhere, the latter because it leads backwards. But this would be a pity. There is no justifiable alternative to some sort of governmental control of the broad framework of the curriculum: in a democracy, the teaching profession has no special right to make decisions, like those about aims and curricula, which may be expected to help shape the character of our society and, as such, are rightfully the province of all citizens. It is true that this does not justify *central* government, as opposed to local government, control; but the close-knit nationwide interdependence of so many of our institutions is an argument against purely local decision-making; while the equally powerful arguments for devolution seem to point to wide scope for local initiative in filling in a nationally-agreed framework.

Egalitarian teachers often favour an autonomous, professionally-controlled, system because of the chance it gives them to teach according to their vision of the good society. Problems of accountability arise here, of course; as does the question whether the teacher-reformer does best to concentrate on his own patch and turn his back on more general defects in the system, or whether, if he wants reform on a mass scale, he should not favour mass solutions.

In all this I am advocating political control only of the broad framework of aims and curricula, not of syllabus details and teaching methods, as on the familiar continental pattern. Teachers are in no provileged position, vis-à-vis the rest of us, in determining the ends of life, but they *do* have a special expertise when it comes to marrying curriculum content to the particular abilities and motivations of their pupils. This points towards maximum teacher autonomy in interpreting the framework guidelines laid down from above.

To say that the task mapped out by the Great Debate of 1976 is only half accomplished would be an overstatement. It has hardly begun; and some initiatives have actually been retrogressive. It is time — high time — that a fresh start was made on planning a national curriculum framework in a far less half-hearted way. This can build on the virtues of the HMI paper, filling out its inadequacies by rooting more determinate proposals in the basic principles of egalitarian liberalism. It can study how curricular means of realising educational aims should mesh together with non-curricular means, like the ethos not only of schools, but also of wider social institutions. It can look abroad, to Japan, Scandinavia and elsewhere, to see the pitfalls and opportunities found in other attempts to set up egalitarian frameworks. It can work out the composition and terms of reference of whatever national board must surely be created to work out a curriculum plan with far more intellectual adequacy than the DES, the HMI or the Schools Council have so far been able to provide.

Who is to make a fresh start? I think this must, following my argument, spring from political, rather than purely professional, initiatives. To some extent, in the imperfect democracy we have, I can see no alternative to leaving these to the political parties: cur-

riculum policy is in no relevantly different position from, say, taxation policy or foreign affairs.

But only to some extent is this a party matter. I argued earlier that teachers are not morally obliged to follow government guidelines which contravene democratic principles. This prompts the reflection: should any *particular kind* of educational system be taken as constitutionally presupposed to a democratic society? We are ready enough to accept, perhaps in a vague way, that democracy requires educated citizens. But will any kind of education do? This will turn, of course, on what one is building into one's concept of democracy. There may be disputes about this. But none of our democratic political parties could easily deny — publicly, at any rate — the following propositions:

i. that each individual should autonomously work out his own plan of life and not be forced towards ends which others may think are good for him but which he has not independently judged to be so.

   This points towards a breadth of understanding of different life-options and to constraints on those who would wish to steer the individual towards a narrow range of options or indoctrinate him in specific ideologies.

ii. that if citizens of a democracy are to participate in its affairs they need to reach a certain level of political understanding and to possess, to some degree, such relevant dispositions as independent-mindedness, co-operativeness, moral courage and others. These, too, generate tasks for education.

iii. that insofar as democracy depends on *equality* in political decision-making power, there should be constraints on the systematic creation of disparities in educational attainments between different sections of the population.

These are only three suggestions, not an exhaustive list of democratic desiderata. The general point here is that we should now think of an education of this sort as a constitutional pillar of a democratic polity, along with a free press, freedom of association, a secret ballot and other similar things.[3] The *very* broad framework of the aims and content of education should be above party politics. Within that framework the parties may wish to influence aims and curricula in more determinate ways and I can see no democratic objection to that.

It is now nearly six years since Callaghan's speech which opened the Great Debate. Not much has been achieved. Will the next six years see as little progress? Or could it mark a genuinely radical overhaul of the aims and content of education?

Notes

1. *A View of the Curriculum* (DES, HMI Series: Matters for discussion 11) (HMSO, 1980); *The Practical Curriculum* (Schools Council Working Paper 70) (Methuen Educational, 1981); *The School Curriculum* (DES), (HMSO, 1981).
2. John White and others, *No, Minister: a Critique of the DES paper The School Curriculum* (University of London Institute of Education, 1981).
3. I am grateful to Pat White for letting me draw on material in a book she is currently writing for this point about the constitutional requirements on education. See also Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (Yale, 1980) Ch.5.

The future of the West Indian child in the British school system

Maureen Stone
A member of the Sociology Department at the University of Surrey, Maureen Stone is author of 'The Education of the Black Child in Britain' (1981) for which she conducted intensive investigations.

Historically, the school system in Britain has served a particular purpose in relation to the working class generally; whatever else it may or may not have done, or was intended to do, it certainly acted as an agent of social control over the majority of working class children. In the last twenty to twenty five years the racial composition of the working class in Britain has changed and teachers in urban schools have found that they must educate working class black children. However, part of the history of this overall process is the very success of the school system in reducing the alienation of the majority of working class white children and parents.

The West Indian group, as relative newcomers, are not playing the game. They are rejecting 'legitimate' demands to conform and are challenging an arrangement which, although subject to pressures at various points, functions, by and large, to the satisfaction of the major participants involved — the teachers and the state.

There are a number of issues to face in trying to understand the complexity of the problems involved in the education of West Indian children in Britain. In the past, consideration of these issues has focused on specific problems, such as the over-representation of West Indian children in ESN (educationally subnormal) schools. Although these particular issues are important in themselves and should not be ignored or neglected, it is equally important that they are seen, not as isolated and specific, but as part of an overall process.

I am concerned with looking at the response of the British school system to the presence of numbers of working class West Indian pupils within it. I will attempt to put this process within an historical context to explain past events (like placing black children in ESN schools), make sense of the present situation (MRE — multi-racial education) and suggest likely future developments.

First reactions — ESN schools

ESN schools were seen as educational establishments for training children who previously may have been hospitalised or otherwise institutionalised because of mental defects. These defects included forms of mild brain damage and idiocy. Educational subnormality is classed as a handicap in just the same way as blindness, deafness, epilepsy and other forms of mental or physical handicap. The legal history behind the definition of educational subnormality is as follows:

1899 — Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children's) Act: Local Authorities empowered to set up special schools and classes.

1913 — Mental Deficiency Act: Divided mentally defective into Idiots (IQ up to 25), Imbeciles (IQ up to 50), Feeble-minded (IQ up to 70). Local education authorities were responsible for the feeble-minded.

1914 — Admission of Feeble-minded to special schools restricted to those who had been certified.

1944 — Education Act: Authorised the education in special schools of children previously categorised idiot, imbecile or feeble-minded and now categorised as suffering from defect of mind or body.

1959 — Educational subnormality once more redefined as applying to 'Pupils who by reason of limited ability *or other conditions resulting in educational retardation* require some specialised form of education wholly or partly in substitution for the education given in ordinary school'.

1970 — Education (Handicapped Children) Act: Transferred the responsibility for the educational training of all mentally handicapped children to Local Education Authorities.

1976 — Education Act Section 10. Reversed the trend and stated that 'Subject to certain qualifications and from a date to be appointed by the Secretary of State handicapped pupils in England and Wales are to be educated in ordinary schools in preference to special schools'.

The 1976 Act was partly in response to the pressure which the West Indian Community was exerting over the ESN issue and the publicity resulting from Bernard Coard's pamphlet. Of course the directive did not mean that black children would no longer be ascertained or treated as ESN; all it meant was that they would not be sent to special schools (in such large numbers) — they would still be educated or trained as ESN pupils but within normal schools. This is simply management policy involving reallocation of children within the school system in terms of buildings, chairs and desks and has no implications for the quality of the education which the children concerned receive. In practice it is now fairly common to find ESN units attached to ordinary schools. This is seen as answering the problems posed by critics of the system. Instead of sending normal children to ESN schools, ESN schools (units) are brought to the ordinary schools. It should be clear that we are here dealing with the category of children defined

as ESN (M), i.e. mild as opposed to ESN (S) severe, ESN (M) children are said to have IQ's of between 50-90 and thus to be suffering from 'mild' handicap. It is interesting to compare the rate of increase in the population of special schools with the increase of West Indian children in the school population.

Year	*No. Children in ESN (M) Schools*
1950	15,173
1955	22,644
1965	42,620
1970	51,768
1974	53,343
1975	52,944
1976	53,772

From what is known about patterns of West Indian immigration to Britain, it would seem that the really steep increase in numbers from around 1965 corresponds in some degree with increasing numbers of black children in British schools. Other evidence suggests that Local Education Authorities with large numbers of black children make greater use of ESN provision than those without. This can be demonstrated in the following comparison:

LEA (A) has a school population of 167,000 children and only 226 children in ESN schools;

LEA (B) has a school population of 170,000 children and 1,000 in ESN schools.

Thus, with just over 3,000 more children in its school population, LEA (B) has four times the number of children in ESN schools. Why? The authors of this particular piece of research (Younghusband *et al*, NCB 1970), did not identify the LEAs or the type of children but suggested as possible explanations that the category ESN had come to be used 'as a term of convenience' and that the chances of being so labelled vary with (a) amount of provision in the LEA area — a large number of special schools equals a bigger population of ESN pupils and conversely; and (b) whether or not the ordinary school would or could 'tolerate' these children.

Although we do not know for sure which LEAs these are, it is a fair guess that they are in urban areas with comparatively large numbers of West Indian children in their general school population. This, then was the very beginning of the process and marked the initial response of the school system to the presence of West Indian children. Many teachers and social workers argue that sending children to ESN schools is a form of 'positive discrimination' in that it makes available to the child and the family resources which would otherwise be denied them. Yet again, others have suggested that since the difference in the level of academic performance of children in the lower streams of the comprehensive schools is only marginally higher than children in ESN schools, it really makes little difference where the child goes. Both these arguments are to some extent true, and to the degree that they are true they are dangerous.

The process of ascertainment itself is an intrusion on the child and the family. The child's basic rights are circumscribed and she is labelled for life. What a price to pay for 'positive discrimination'! Insofar as the work in the lower streams of the comprehensive school is the same as that done in ESN schools — that represents a call for pressure from parents for standards of teaching and instruction in the comprehensive schools to be raised, and is not an acceptance of the lowering of standards to match the so-called 'special' schools. These kind of arguments simply highlight the contradictions of the liberal compensatory position and are a measure of the confused and muddled thinking which characterise people in a panic situation.

In terms of understanding the process which underlies the reaction of the school system to the presence of black children, we have to see the ESN schools issue as a panic reaction where procedures were adopted as a means of getting rid of large numbers of black children because the schools and the teachers did not know what to do with them. In the late sixties and early seventies the processing of large numbers of black children into schools for the educationally subnormal was explained by some as a temporary measure to meet the needs of children who had been 'left behind' in the Caribbean and who found difficulty in adjusting to a new family and a new school system. It was argued then that when these children had passed through the school system the problem would disappear. The fact is that although total numbers have fallen, West Indian children as a group are still over-represented in ESN schools. Since the 'left behind' child no longer figures significantly in these statistics, we have to look for other explanations.

Once it became established practice to channel large numbers of black children into these schools, the habit became difficult to break. So even though a certain degree of caution was introduced into the process, thus reducing overall numbers, the relative situation remains unchanged. We have therefore to accept that many professionals working in the school system — psychologists, teachers, social workers — regard the ESN schools or some variation of them as the natural place for black children. In the mid-sixties and early seventies the first reactions of the professionals within the school system was to adopt existing legislation and existing provision to solve the problem of the West Indian child's presence in ordinary schools. Although less marked now, this remains a continuing feature of the overall response to the presence of West Indian children in this country's schools. This is best seen in the context of power and authority — the tough part of the process. There is another 'soft' reaction not involving the use of legal or medical sanctions, but even more pernicious for that reason. The use of laws means the ability to question and challenge the implementation of those laws. The sort options are more invidious in that these possibilities are removed. To see the 'soft options' in action we must turn to examine another part of the process.

Schooling as Therapy

The past ten years or so have seen the development of a variety of special units in schools. In the main these have been in secondary schools although they are also seen in primary schools, especially in Education Priority Areas (a euphemism for decaying inner city areas of poor housing and bad schools). Again, these units are a special feature of urban schools, although they can also be present in suburban or even rural areas. In urban areas, where there are large numbers of West Indian children, it is a notable feature of these special education projects ('special' keeps cropping up!) that they cater mainly and even sometimes solely for black

children. The reasons given for placing black children in these units are generally in terms of helping them by providing a secure environment with which they can cope. The problems which black children present to the school system are seen as lying mainly in their personality make up and in their home background, both of which are regarded as deficient. Schooling as therapy puts the view that the children will be helped to develop more mature personalities and learn to cope with the demands of social life in the metropolitan society. Others argue that children are 'cooled out' in these special education projects and that the schooling they get is even worse than in an ESN school. It is certainly true that these units also provide sanctuaries for the teachers and contribute towards their professional development and career prospects.

In contrast to the view that the problems experienced in urban schools are due to individual and family pathology (either of the black child and family or of the working class generally), is the view which sees these tensions as inherent in the school system and reflective of the contradiction in liberal education reform which seeks to do good to the working class and blacks. This view, represented by such people as Stuart Hall, argues that schools represent elite culture and that teachers are the guardians of such culture. There are times when, for a variety of reasons, the whole system is exposed to a degree of stress and a form of challenge and it reacts to protect itself and to ensure its stability. These responses include special education projects. Parents are encouraged to see them as being helpful to children because they remove the child from a stressful school situation with which it is clearly not coping. Many people will say that children do not have to go to sanctuaries or sin bins; they are not forced to. However, the manner in which the offer is made may make it an offer which can't be refused. If, for example, a child is threatened with expulsion or exclusion from school, desperate parents may accept attendance at a special unit on the basis that anything is better than nothing. Although the overriding concern of the parents is to get a 'good education' for their children, the fact is that acceptance of such an offer means an end of any such hopes.

The situation facing many parents and children in the inner city schools is a desperate one and the removal of children from a difficult and troublesome school environment may seem attractive — indeed for a small minority of children it may be the only solution. However, before it is accepted as a useful and helpful resource for a number of black children facing difficulties of one sort or another in schools, we have to ask something about the role of these units and the part they play in the overall process we are trying to describe. Parents, children and the West Indian community have to understand that these units have little to offer academically to the children attending them. Since most children and parents want a 'good education' from the school system it is clear that they will be lucky to receive any education at all, let alone a 'good' education in these units. The educational resources are poor and facilities, compared with those available in schools, meagre. The only way in which they are better provided for is in staffing, because these children are seen as needing the kind of attention which normal children can do without. This increases the atmosphere of a therapeutic community rather than a learning environment and is confirmed by discussions with staff which emphasise the level of their intervention; this is at the level of the child's personality and the aim of the intervention is to effect personality change. This fact is inescapable. Through interference in pupils' personalities the staff in these units hope to make them more conforming, less boisterous, more amenable to discipline and generally promote a 'better fit' between the individual and the school system, although this adjustment should extend into other areas of life.

The next part of the process — MRE — is more general in its approach and unlike the other two, aims to change aspects of the school as well as aspects of the person. It is The Great Cure All.

Multi-Racial Cure All

The multi-racial education movement has origins in curriculum development and in claims to social justice and relevant education for minority group students. It developed in direct response to numbers of black and brown children in British schools. Critics of the school system argued that it was guilty of increasing the 'disadvantage' of minority group children. Since it did not reflect their cultures or their existence, it was argued that the curriculum was racially biased and needed reform to reflect more accurately the fact that present day Britain is now a multi-racial society. The NFER has been very active in promoting and encouraging MRE — its sponsored research is presented in an uncritical way and its own working party has become bogged down in a dispute over details which appear (from published material) to be somewhat irrelevant. There is an assumption about the goodness of MRE. Concern focuses on overcoming 'right wing' or unsympathetic opposition. In this article I want to suggest that MRE is conceptually unsound; that the theoretical and practical implications have not been worked out, (people may be unaware of them), and that MRE represents a developing feature of urban education aimed at 'watering down' the curriculum and cooling out city children, while creating for teachers — both radical and liberal — the illusion that they are doing something special for a particularly disadvantaged group.

Many of the ideas in MRE draw upon the social-pathological analysis of the black personality, lifestyle and family arrangements. Although explicitly rejecting labels of inferiority, it argues instead for 'difference'. In interviews with teachers who were working MRE projects it became evident that they saw themselves as an enlightened minority desperately trying to hold back the engulfing waves of prejudice and racism both amongst their pupils and (very much) amongst their own colleagues. It is easy to see how, faced with situations where such feelings are entrenched and children are presenting problems, some schools and teachers can come to believe that MRE will solve all their problems:

i. It will help minority group children to develop pride in their identity and their group.
ii. It will encourage white classmates to see their black classmates in a more positive light.
iii. It will encourage teachers to examine their own attitudes to minority group children and change these attitudes where change is needed.
iv. It will reduce alienation of minority group

children — especially West Indian children — thus making them more amenable to discipline and more accessible to control.

v. By developing new curricula and new teaching methods it extends the concern of the school into the home and community and thus makes schooling more relevant to groups which are hard to reach.

vi. The new curriculum will also be more successful in motivating minority group pupils and in promoting positive attitudes to school and teachers.

It will be seen that these objectives are vague and undefined, and that they totally ignore the issues of power and control in the school system. They simplify and idealise the developmental aspects of schooling. They ignore class and treat race and culture as a social psychological abstraction. Between 1975-77 I investigated the self-concepts and self-esteem of West Indian children in London, some attending Saturday Schools (as well as their weekday schools), some taking part in MRE Projects and others following the normal school curriculum. There was no difference in self-concept or self-esteem between children in the different groups — all had average scores. Those attending Saturday Schools had higher aspirations than other groups and stressed the value of hard work in achieving these ambitions. All groups disliked the power of teachers. Attitudes to parents were positive; they were seen as loving, kind and helpful by the overwhelming majority of children in all groups. It seems that the West Indian family is alive and doing quite well despite all the rubbish which has been written about the break-up of the black family.

As to claims of MRE representing the culture of minority group pupils, what I want to suggest here is that West Indian and other minority group children are, insofar as they are working class, part of the continuing problem of urban schooling. The school system has never 'reflected the culture' of the majority of children in this country who are working class. Why then this concern to reflect the culture of small sections of that class? Whatever role the school may have, it certainly represents a form of socialisation to which most children are exposed for significant periods of their life. Inevitably this process of socialisation prepares children for various roles in adult society — one of the most important being the work role. The reality for most black children is that they are meant for a wageless existence or low wage in unpopular or menial jobs. What has the MRE to say to this fact? It says that by presenting black children with other images of themselves they can encourage a positive self-image which in turn creates higher aspiration, higher achievement and an opportunity to break out of the 'cycle of deprivation'. Examples of this approach may be Black Studies Classes or Calypso music, but no attempt is ever made to see what effect it has. Such work as is done is usually aimed at improving, extending or developing it. Given these responses, the question arises as to whether MRE represents anything more than a misguided liberal strategy to compensate black children for not being white. It is certainly misguided. Indeed the kind of material published under the MRE label is patronising and ethocentric itself so that it probably has the effect of encouraging the very attitudes it seeks to change.

MRE is seen as a cure-all to the problems which minority group children present in schools in Britain. Great claims are made as to its efficacy, but these claims are unsupported by any evidence. The factors which determine a person's economic and social role in society have little to do with self-image. The recent DES report on teaching in primary schools stated that teachers in urban schools did not stretch their pupils. Many of these children are West Indian and the reason why they are not stretched is an increasing reliance by teachers on personality and other social-psychological theories which stress individual and family factors as being responsible for failure of certain groups to achieve. This means that teachers are encouraged to act as social workers to these children. MRE is very much part of this development. It rests on claims to improve individual and group relationships and encourages schools to intervene in areas of culture and personality in a way which may be detrimental to both. The aims of multi-racial education are tied in with the desire to compensate working class children for being culturally deprived (of middle-class culture) and black children for not being white. Again, it takes schools and teachers away from their central concern, which is basically teaching or instructing children in the knowledge and skills essential to life in this society. It effectively reduces choice and creates dependence on experts and professionals which undermines the individual's capacity to cope. My argument is that matters of personality and culture as such are not a concern of the school but of the individual and the community. It does not really matter very much if schools increase their range of books to acknowledge the existence of minority groups in Britain. It does matter if teachers think that by doing this they have done all that needs to be done to educate black children. They must give up their concern or even obsession with black self-images — we've managed so far and will continue to manage. MRE is not a cure-all. It is not even part of the answer, it is a mere distraction.

What of the future? The West Indian community as a whole must demand better state education for its children. The community education projects which now exist should really provide cultural and social activities for children, it should not be necessary to provide teaching in basic subjects on Saturday afternoons when children are compelled by law to attend school full time during the week. However, as schools continue to fail in their obligation to teach children the basic skills of literacy and numeracy whilst seeking to extend their influence into areas of pupil personality and culture, the community will have to make good the deficit by continuing to provide remedial education. The West Indian community must not be taken in by the claim that schools are trying to meet the needs of black children by developing special projects; MRE and so on should be seen for what they are — a means of developing professional training and influence in order to promote social control objectives. Parents, children and the community must argue for a restricted professional role for teachers where teaching and instruction form the major part of their activities. Children feel more secure with this approach, they know what to expect; the aims of teaching are more clearly stated and therefore more open to challenge and modification. This is in contrast to the subtle and underhand approach of the personality change agents.

The Myth of Giftedness (Part II)

Caroline Benn

Summary of Part I from January, 1982, **Forum.**

The modern giftedness movement began in the 1960s to provide a discreet counter to the rapidly growing comprehensive education. Increasingly, what began as concern with identifying human genius, became an indirect way of furthering the cause of academic selection in the formal educational system, a quite different exercise.

In Britain enormous effort has been put into studying and encouraging giftedness, but few stop to analyse the assumptions upon which it is based. When we do, it is obvious that there is no agreement about what it is, how widespread it is, or what to do about it, even if we did agree.

What there is, however, is evidence that it has been consistently misused by those who want to retain a segregated, elitist school system, and to turn back the comprehensive reform.

Part II
Fundamental Confusion over Definition

The late Edward Boyle said he personally knew of 167 definitions of giftedness in children,[1] which gives us a clue to our first problem: two people can be very concerned with giftedness but have completely different objectives.

One problem is that few seem aware of the different historical traditions that make up giftedness work. Some studies have concerned the qualities associated with those already bringing themselves to our attention as highly talented; others look at the fields in which people excel; still others are only concerned with intelligence measured by intelligence tests, either testing those excelling or trying to unearth those whose talents may not be known. A fourth approach comes from those who look for a wide variety of gifts — not merely IQ — using a wide variety of methods.

The different nature of these approaches, particularly their different populations, is rarely recognised by those working in the field and certainly not by those popularising giftedness work, which is put forward as a single, coherent activity, when it is not. The failure to distinguish the different approaches — particularly the two main historical traditions of what could be called 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' giftedness — explains much of the confusion we meet in the modern giftedness movement.

Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the apparent conflict over the personal qualities associated with giftedness in children. The seminal study of giftedness was that by L.M. Terman of Stanford University in the United States, who published his results on genius in the 1920s.[2] He chose children already seen to be very exceptional and built up a profile of their characteristics, following them later into adulthood.

Their personalities — and the personality of children emerging from one after another of later studies of those already seen to be excelling — is remarkably consistent. Cyril Burt later characterised Terman's children as taller and healthier and more emotionally stable than other children, conspicuous for their originality, self confidence, desire to excel, forethought, perseverance, sense of humour, and cheerfulness.[3] A British study half a century later is similarly summarised as showing children 'more adjusted, more stable in their relationships to other children and teachers . . ., not in conflict with their peers; with a zest for life; good physical health; wide interests and unusual hobbies'.[4]

Confusion arises because this profile conflicts so sharply with what has now become another popular image of a gifted child, especially in Britain. The gifted child is a 'misfit';[5] gifted children are 'less emotionally mature . . . than peers';[6] they are 'lonely, arrogant and indifferent'.[7] Dozens of articles on giftedness spread the idea that gifted children are 'bored', or 'underachieving', 'lazy' or 'indifferent'.

The cause of the apparent conflict is the failure to distinguish between giftedness research that describes children already excelling, and that other tradition which seeks to show that children not excelling could

---

(Continued from previous page)

To conclude, I have outlined how over the past 25 years the British school system has responded to the presence of West Indian children. Firstly the law and established procedure for ascertainment to ESN schools was used. Then there was a move away from such overt control methods to the use of units, sanctuaries and Sin Bins to provide a 'special' education experience for black children. Lastly, the development of MRE, the great white hope which will solve all problems by producing the ideal plural society. In practice what all these developments have meant for black children adds up to their being defined as suitable cases for treatment, whether the 'treatment' is in ESN schools, special units or multi-racial education. The effect of this is that black children are not generally regarded as academic material but rather as case material for social workers and teachers trying to be social workers. However, it is not sufficient to identify a process — some intervention is also required. Unless such intervention is forthcoming the future for the West Indian child in British schools looks bleak indeed.

have a variety of gifts, which may be hidden, and, moreover, may have little to do with genius, or academic ability, but a lot to do with other sorts of excellence, particularly spatial or social skills or creativity of various kinds. In the United States, where modern giftedness research began, these two main traditions were well separated, as Cyril Burt observed, while in Britain they were not.[3] British giftedness work before the 1960s was entirely concerned with Terman's approach — exclusive giftedness — and not until the 1960s was 'inclusive giftedness', the other American tradition, much discussed. However, in following Terman's exclusive tradition, British psychologists did not stick to Terman's narrow preoccupation with 'genius' — never more than .03 per cent of the child population. They interpreted it more widely. Without apparent embarrassment, Burt explained in the 1970s[3] that this was because British psychologists adopted

> '. . . a lower border line, usually determined by the requirements of the secondary (grammar) school.'

Here is the key: by stretching the tiny percentage Terman called genius a long, long way, pioneering British psychologists made it take in that far larger population selected for grammar schools. In doing so, they changed the nature of 'exclusive giftedness' altogether — away both from rare genius as well as from the 'inclusive' giftedness that presupposes most of us have gifts; and used it to validate an essentially social, educational arrangement that involved anything up to twenty per cent of the age group.

Later, when the 1960s giftedness movement began, 'inclusive' giftedness became confused with 'exclusive', which allowed the argument to surface that because children whose talents had not been released often seemed bored or unhappy in school, any child who is bored or unhappy may be gifted — in the sense of being a rare genius, an argument that was promptly used for propaganda purposes against comprehensive and in favour of selective and private education. The argument was designed to appeal to, or arose from, parental fear or ambition, about children in state or comprehensive schools. In this propaganda (in the media and some giftedness writing) misfits or bored pupils *never* occur in private or selective schools. If your child is bored, he is probably a genius whom the village school is overlooking; if he is not getting on at a comprehensive, he may have the 'problem' of giftedness.[7] It certainly cannot be because he lacks inner resources; what he lacks is the proper type of school; thus the popular libel, rarely countered by gifted researchers, of a sensitive, genteel child, languishing in a comprehensive, only to be miraculously enlivened when fees are paid.

The problem for those who misuse giftedness work in this way, however, is that it means they have to argue for extra resources in the formal education system to be devoted to children who are not showing any talent at all. In the cold light of county hall committee rooms, even in the days of more available funds, this is hard to do.

More definition problems in 'fields of interest'

There are different problems, but no fewer, when campaigners try to approach giftedness by the fields in which children excel. A typical definition (from NAGC sponsored research) is[8]

> *'Any child outstanding in either a general or a specific ability . . . academic, aesthetic, linguistic, mathematic, athletic or musical.'*

This narrows the definition, but it doesn't solve the problem of agreeing what 'outstanding' is. This is crucial in definitions which, like these, tend to line up giftedness with interest in the formal school curriculum. Popular reporting too often suggests that giftedness in any case is about doing well in formal schooling. Hence the *Guardian* speaks of the gifted as those

> 'who have a deep love of their subject in school.'[9]

Giftedness approached this way is merely a development of the old grammar child's 'subject mindedness', a theory spawned in the 1943 Norwood Report which argued for 11-plus, and social segregation of such pupils in selective schools (and claimed the majority were not 'subject minded'). Popular understanding still equates giftedness with subject love and, even more specifically, with love of subjects in the GCE curriculum![9] But so does the work of professionals researching giftedness; see, for example, the HMIs' analysis of giftedness education in comprehensive schools,[10] which is approached through the traditional subject timetable and where section headings have the titles, 'What is Giftedness in History?' followed by 'What is giftedness in Geography?', Chemistry, and so on.

The modern giftedness movement of the 1960s was commandeered from the outset by grammar schools fighting to retain their privileged segregation. For example, the High Master of Manchester Grammar School, Lord James of Rusholme, contributing to a book,[11] not on grammar schools but on gifted children, simply repeated by rote the 'save our grammar school' argument 'that it was possible to identify high ability . . . by eleven . . . that we were thinking . . . of academic ability and not a few spectacular abilities such as that in music' . . . and that this 'meant some schools devoted to meeting' the gifted's academic needs.

Many giftedness campaigners disown a narrow, scholastic approach and point to programmes like the NAGC's Explorers Clubs, where young children are encouraged to come to pursue every kind of activity: from swimming to clay modelling to insect collecting. But here there is a new problem: giftedness defined through informal pursuits like those in many camps or projects for gifted children, differs little from a lot of good extra-curricular activity going on in many other places. What is the line that can be drawn between enthusiastic expertise in a hobby and a gift in the same field? There isn't one. Even if there was, who is to draw it? And for what purpose?

The last refuge: '11 plus ability'

The wide range of definitions, their imprecision, the confusion over types of giftedness, shows just how difficult it is for anyone trying to provide segregated and better education for a minority inside the formal school system based on *general* evidence of giftedness to succeed. This is why most formal programmes always head back to that area of giftedness activity exclusively preoccupied with the old IQ test. However many definitions of 'gifted' which parents may cite, or however often researchers denounce the limitation of IQ tests, or their use at all for giftedness work, it is to formal intelligence

testing that those who wish to use giftedness in formal education, must return. Those who survey giftedness practices in local authorities report that most giftedness programmes rely on 'performance on . . . tests of general intelligence;[12] and that giftedness turns out to be

> 'after all, children who through high intellectual ability, do well in our school system.'

In other words, we take those who do well in selective systems, define them as gifted, cite the methods which selected them as those that must be retained to meet the needs of the gifted. This is a very convenient circle, but it offends many who work in the field of giftedness. They never intended their work to end up justifying a system of social isolation for gifted pupils; in fact, most conclude this is harmful.

Unfortunately, their own lack of vigilance has meant that this is where their work does end. The old 11-plus may be dead, but the new 'giftedness detection' turns out to 'need' the same selective process. What's more, as a review of a recent book on gifted work (by R.M. Povey) makes clear,[13] these tests still have to be *mass* tests: 'group tests, despite their unpopularity and association with the 11-plus, are again prescribed as the only practical method' of deciding who is gifted in formal education. Not only that, but for a lot of independent research on giftedness, it is also the normal grammar selection process that is used to select the pupils concerned.[14]

The reason everyone returns to 11-plus testing is because it is the only way giftedness can be used to retain selection in the formal system, because testing is the only way the formal system can justify decisions to spend more and better money on education for a small minority.

The next problem: What cut-off point?

Narrowing giftedness to that which intelligence tests measure is only the start of problems. Much thornier: what level of intelligence counts as gifted?

This is crucial not only because it sets the level of resources that are needed, but also because we now have, ostensibly, a comprehensive system, and even its worst enemies admit that it can't stand too much 'creaming' and remain genuinely comprehensive. Percentages 'cut' in or out will make or break such a system. Two per cent creaming takes half the university potential from the comprehensive sixth form, a point often made when arguing against the two per cent now going to 'assisted places'. 0.5 per cent would take the Oxbridge students; ten per cent would take virtually all the A level students.

Which is it to be? If we look to what researchers or giftedness experts advise, once again we find total disarray. There is not only no agreement about what cut-off counts as 'gifted', there are also two different methods of cutting off.

One is to draw a line at a point in the IQ scale, and the problem is that practically everyone draws a different one. Devon's gifted project mentions a cut-off of 160 IQ;[15] others, including Burt in his later days, use 150 IQ,[16] 140 was used by Terman and many others; HMIs in recent surveys use 130,[17] as have researchers like Ogilvie and Tempest,[18] and the BBC[19] in their popular science programmes; The Plowden Report on primary education put giftedness at 125 or over, as have others;[20] Robin Pedley put it at 128[21] when discussing creaming; and Mia Kellmer Pringle, in discussing gifted pupils with difficulties, set giftedness out in her title page as between 120 and 200 IQ.[22] These are just a small sample trawl, but it produces a result which ranges from fifteen per cent to one of 0.1 per cent of the population — a difference so big that wholly different school systems would result from adopting one expert's cut-off rather than another's. Whose do we choose?

A more popular method of designating cut-off has been to take crude population percentages, where there is even less agreement on cut-off (and none on the method of determining it). The French geniocracy movement and others say it should be .05 per cent;[23] Nottingham authority's erstwhile gifted project set it at one per cent;[24] The British Gifted Child Association usually claims two per cent are gifted, although it often allows far more in practice, as do other national gifted movements — for example, in New Zealand it is five per cent;[25] R.M. Povey puts it at beween two and three per cent,[26] as did Conservative Party researchers in the late 1960s,[27] although more recent policies suggest up to ten per cent should be considered;[28] in 1915 Cyril Burt set it at three per cent,[29] but widened it later; Eric Ogilvie cites percentages between two and fifteen per cent as those which teachers cited to him;[30] and as many have pointed out, American giftedness researchers[31] (especially those in the 'inclusive giftedness' tradition) set the figure far higher at twenty per cent, thirty per cent, fifty per cent and upwards, depending upon the gift being considered. When speaking of that inclusive tradition which tries to unearth talent not known (different entirely from studying already excelling pupils) or for ways to enrich talent (different again), Cyril Burt himself had to admit that 'the number of gifted children in the population would amount to at least eighty per cent'.[32] In fact, we all have some special gift.

Giftedness defined by this 'inclusive' tradition is clearly compatible with a comprehensive system; giftedness defined by Burt at any time, far less so; giftedness defined as what grammar selection produces, not at all. And a range of definitions which runs from 0.3 per cent to eighty per cent of the child population — all ostensibly discussing the same capacity — shows conclusively that not only are we discussing different capacities, but that all cut-off definitions are quite personal, even arbitrary. Yet the giftedness movement persists in arguing as if there is something scientific about them and HMIs, LEAs, teachers, researchers and governments appear to agree we can count on them. Our gullibility allows us to put up not only with continuing grammar creaming as necessary for 'giftedness work' but to put up with two per cent in one place, five per cent in another, and sixteen per cent in a third place as all being in the same cause, when, in fact, these differing percentages are merely the levels of selective education different localities have managed to hang on to in their local political manoeuvres to retain segregated schooling.

Social Class and Giftedness

Just as those who try to justify selective schooling on the grounds that it is fair to all social classes, so too are claims made that gifted children are either largely work-

ing class or that there is no distinction in race, class or sex among those designated gifted. When examined, these claims fall even more quickly than those based on the existence of a 'scientific definition'. For when the gifted are designated — by whatever means — many studies show they turn out to be heavily biased towards the middle class.[33] 'Bright children are likely to be from families of higher occupational status'[34] when singled out in giftedness programmes, says Kellmer Pringle; Joan Freeman, another researcher looking at the social context, found 'no less than sixty nine per cent of the . . . fathers were in professional and top managerial professions'.[35] Freeman's subjects were drawn from the books of the British Gifted Association, and her research was cited by John Izbicki of the *Telegraph*, who then asked his readers:[36]

> *'So, what does the mother of the high IQ-gifted child look like?'*

His answer is important for the *Telegraph* leads mass media propaganda against the comprehensive idea, and in favour of the gifted. Izbicki tells readers she reads a lot, has her own interests, may go out to work and

> 'probably had a tertiary education and possesses a university degree'

while her child will 'probably have had extra tuition outside normal school hours, such as music lessons'.

What could be clearer? Gifted children do not turn out to be from the working class, as we are so regularly assured by newspapers like the *Telegraph* but in real life have mothers with degrees. This means they will be almost entirely middle class (and affluent with it, if they are also having private lessons). Thus, when we finally track down the mystery of who has these God-given gifts, they so often turn out to be those born into privileged circumstances.

As well as being so often predominantly middle class, we find gifted children are also very male. In one study parents were asked to select their own gifted children, twice as many selected were boys;[37] in another research project only one girl was included in the research.[38] Almost all research on giftedness or genius has been with white children.

Do these findings occur because nature has designated white, male, middle class children to be gifted or because our society and culture gives more advantages to them, or because parents aspire more highly for first born children, which is why the majority of those who appear in so many giftedness programmes also turn out to be first born?[38] A great deal of the giftedness movement's fuel would appear to be parental ambition and this is not sufficiently acknowledged by those who work in the field, if it is acknowledged at all. We are reminded of a question once put to the Minister for Education in the Soviet Union, who was asked about Russian schools for the gifted (much misunderstood and over-played in western gifted movements). He said such schools were less favoured than formerly, and when asked why, answered, because it became obvious that they were not so much schools for gifted children as schools for the children of gifted parents. How much is this true of the parents who register their children with the western world's Associations for Gifted Children?

Giftedness as Political Propaganda

So far in the main we have been discussing 'respectable' academic research and 'respectable' giftedness associations. But giftedness is also used as political propaganda by a Conservative mass media as a stick with which to beat comprehensives. Unlike the genteel gifted supporters clubs, these are not afraid to be ultra crude. They do not say it is a question of paying more attention to giftedness, but crudely and untruthfully claim that

> *'bureaucrats running our state system are . . . hostile to the gifted children.'* [39] *(Daily Mail)*

or that

> *'politically motived egalitarians . . . would readily sacrifice high academic achievement for the sake of mediocrity and ignore the gifted'.* [40]*(Telegraph)*

This kind of talk is constant and no giftedness campaigner ever steps in to correct it. Nor do any counter the propaganda using giftedness to lobby for private education and misusing 'parental choice'. Thus the headline:

> **'Gifted Child . . . Given No Choice'**[41]

from one of a spate of stories about 'bright' children not given the school they wanted, in this case one with a high IQ in a comprehensive system who had chosen a school many miles from her home. It was full, and she was offered one nearer, a school promptly denigrated by the media as 'a local comprehensive with a poor academic reputation'[42] although there was no evidence presented that the school in question could not have done justice by the girl. The offer of the school was quickly made into a refusal to recognise 'giftedness' as part of a deliberate policy of denying parental choice[43] — a particularly ironic media comment, since the city in question, Manchester, was the only major city at that time to be both fully comprehensive *and* to run 11-plus transfer entirely on parental choice (a method it since discovered polarised schools badly). National clamour on behalf of the girl finally produced a private benefactor offering a place for 'gifted children' which turned out to be nothing more than a place in a mediocre girls' private school in the west country.

Giftedness equals feepaying

This kind of media propaganda was designed to reinforce the argument that feepaying schools were the only ones that could 'help' the gifted. In the late 1970s stories of parents of gifted children hunting for private schooling to avoid the fate of the comprehensive school became stock in trade.[44] Even in the *Guardian* we read about agonised parents 'burdened' with a gifted child who asked telling questions at the age of seven, but was unfortunately being educated in the local primary school.[45] Although the parents were 'dead against' feepaying, they soon found it necessary to send him to a prep school as a boarder. In this case they were advised to do so by the LEA educational psychologist. It is quite clear from this article and many others[46] that school psychologists, paid for by the state, often play a key part in recruiting pupils for private schools or private gifted schemes.

While the Conservative mass media were doing their political best in the 1970s, national Conservatives were

doing theirs. Rhodes Boyson in particular was fuelling parental anxiety about the state system, and although he himself had once been the head of a comprehensive system, he could still say he was terribly concerned for

> *'bright children from working class homes who had . . . no prospect of . . . a lucky escape from comprehensives to private education.'*[47]

By the end of the 1970s the specific propaganda objective was to convince citizens that the failure to state subsidise private schools was the root cause of working class disadvantage in education. From here it was but a short step to the 'assisted places' scheme, which came hard on its heels. Many who opposed this scheme were the very giftedness campaigners who had allowed their work to be misused without comment for years on end.

Evidence of Comprehensives' Attainment ignored

This is not to say that all comprehensive schools, particularly those still struggling in a selective system, were equipped by the 1970s to deal adequately with all kinds of talent, but neither were most grammar or private schools. What we do know is that some comprehensives were doing very well with the very students the giftedness movement wanted to single out: the top two per cent of the attainment range; and that this evidence was ignored. For example, research (from a member of the NFER team which had undertaken the major national project on comprehensives in the late 1960s) analysed the academic attainment of pupils in the schools which the NFER had used for the last stage of its national research.[48] He followed them from the age of fourteen, when the NFER work ended, through their GCE O and A level examinations. Taking the top two per cent as a separate group, he found all had achieved excellent GCE results (averaging three A levels each) and all but two had gone on to the universities of their first choice. Further, he found that among those succeeding best were the working class pupils. It may not have been conclusive research, but it was certainly pertinent to the national debate raging in 1977. Yet, apart from *The Times* which gave it a passing mention, no media outlet reported these findings at all.

Sometimes it was salient facts in individual stories that went unreported, including one about a remarkable boy, son of a council worker, who was spotted as a mathematical genius at eleven, encouraged to complete his A level by twelve, his other GCE passes and an Oxbridge place by fifteen (which he later took up and then went on to a career in mathematics). When reporting his spectacular progress at school, no newspaper, including the *Telegraph*, which ran a long column on him,[49] thought it worth mentioning that the school in question was a large neighbourhood urban comprehensive school — Elliott School in the ILEA — the same school the *Mail* later denigrated in one of the nastiest series of articles ever published in the name of educational journalism.[50]

Additional misuse of giftedness theme

But the misuse of giftedness was to get worse still, when the media began writing about schools 'full of immigrants' who required so much attention to their remedial needs that this was being done 'at the expense of gifted children'.[51] As usual, no names were given and no colour was cited, but the implications were thoroughly racist.

The Giftedness Association was never irresponsible in their own work, but they never countered this propaganda, and at times they too weighed in with less than happy arguments. One, from a TV programme they made,[52] spoke of money being 'lavished' on the handicapped but little being done for the gifted. The argument not only knocked the handicapped, but ended up with the mechanistic solution that the top two per cent needs as much as the bottom two per cent, which appears to argue that the gifted are a set-group, not individuals, are of the same order as those who might for some reason not be achieving what we know they could in literacy, might be identified in the same way, and will 'naturally' occupy the same percentages in any school.

Perhaps the least honest of all the propaganda lines is that the gifted are exceptionally disadvantaged in the way poor children from poor homes are. All type of researchers and campaigners use this theme of the gifted as 'the newly recognised . . . disadvantaged';[53] or as the *Telegraph* has us believe, the most 'underprivileged of all children';[54] or from another paper, the children most 'at risk'.[55] It is constantly suggested that far from being a great joy to parents, gifted children are a terrible personal tragedy. Parents with lively and bright children are brainwashed into believing they are cursed. Women's magazines speak of their bearing 'onerous burdens';[56] articles in the *Guardian* of their terrible 'plight';[57] even professionals speak of them as a 'penalty' and 'handicapped';[58] but as always the *Daily Mail* tops the propaganda bill:[59]

> *'Informing parents that they have a gifted child causes almost as much despair as telling them that they have an educationally subnormal child.'*

Does ANYONE know a parent who would prefer to have a child of theirs without its talents or their subnormal child not normal? Common sense tells us that these arguments are dishonest and that we demean ourselves, our profession and the education service by continuing to let them go unchallenged. The Gifted Movement should disown all propaganda that depicts gifted pupils as a socially or physically disadvantaged group and permits the truly disadvantaged to be depicted as oppressing them.

But the giftedness movement has one more misuse that needs our attention too. When an HMI spoke at the end of the 1960s to the Giftedness Association and mentioned the need to educate gifted children for social as well as academic purposes,[60] it wasn't much noticed that he talked about the gifted being 'our leaders' and the ones upon whom 'the future of the country depends' because he was advocating a good moral education. 'Heaven help us', he is quoted as saying, 'if gifted children are brought up without integrity', But would this theme always stay so innocent? Apart from a response we might want to make — why should any child be brought up without integrity, or a good moral education — doesn't democracy depend upon all of us, not just leaders? Today this leader theme is far less benign, and even more prominent. In a recent contribution to the Gifted Association's newsletter, the head of a multinational company, E.R. Nixon, spoke about the need for giftedness work to identify and train leaders because

'it is leaders who can and will protect our freedom, maintain our stability, nurture our culture, and create our wealth.'

Is it really?

From the original idea of the need to encourage that mysterious human quality called genius, giftedness work seems to have let us wander inadvertently in sight of the portals of the master race.

Educational Consensus and Conservative Policy

The giftedness movement could never have been misused to this degree had not giftedness campaigners lapsed in their own self-criticism, and had there not been an educational consensus at the top that comprehensive reform had taken place when it had not, dating from the DES Yellow Paper of 1976. Various speeches from James Callaghan and Shirley Williams, all suggested that the uncompleted reform was somehow complete but still to be found waiting. Shirley Williams was the one to mention the giftedness issue, whereupon the Conservative spokesperson, Norman St John Stevas, noted with satisfaction that Mrs Williams 'had admitted gifted children cannot be suitably educated in comprehensive schools,[62] and that she really was a Conservative at heart.

By the start of the 1979 Conservative government full comprehensive change had been abandoned at the top and a new consensus agreed — not around Black Paper policies (which were totally hostile to comprehensives) but on the old terms of the liberal policy of Edward Boyle and younger Conservatives in the 1960s, who had always been prepared to accept comprehensives so long as they were not genuinely so in the sense that private education and some grammar schools could be retained alongside. In 1967 these Conservatives had said quite clearly that comprehensives were alright for most, but that they could not cope with the 'high fliers'.[63] For these, selection was needed. What happened in the 1970s was that the Conservatives, under Mrs Thatcher, made this official Conservative policy. As education spokesperson, she did not, as expected, reverse all comprehensive change. Instead she claimed comprehensives would do for many. The only problem, she told the House of Commons, was that they could not provide for the 'unusually gifted'.[64] Gifted children, she said, had to have other 'options'.

When Conservatives spelled these out, they turned out to be supporting public schools, retaining most grammar schools, encouraging LEAs to buy places in private education, permitting selective comprehensive schools to develop, and later, introducing the Assisted Places Scheme (which replaced direct grant schools). Locally, many Conservative areas also started giftedness programmes. In Surrey they involved proposing the straight 'buying' of private school places;[65] in Nottinghamshire the development of special programmes in certain favoured comprehensive schools; in Devon extra classes;[66] in the ILEA special giftedness centres.[67] There were also proposals from private schools, such as that made by Wellington School, Somerset, to 'share' its sixth form with local pupils having IQs of 140 and over, as a way of making its contribution to giftedness education in the community.[68]

The result of all this activity by national and local Conservatives, and private schools, is there for all to see: giftedness has become the political preserve of the Conservative Party and the private school lobby. Do we hear from our supposedly vigilant media any talk of this 'political football'? Of course not. The most we get are a few anxious articles about the worry giftedness workers now feel because it is so obvious that giftedness programmes are only being pushed in 'strongly Conservative areas' or are wholly identified with Conservative Party politics.[69] As they are.

Giftedness is now used to justify 'Assisted Places', retention of the 11-plus, and public funds diverted to private education. Labour opposes most selective policies done in the name of giftedness, and so do many liberals; and there is widespread mistrust of spurious giftedness schemes (as opposed to giftedness work) among teachers. There is also willingness to act. When a Labour Education Committee was elected in May, 1980, in Nottingham, one of its first acts was to cancel the Conservatives' giftedness classes in comprehensives saying,[70]

'We wanted to make sure every school is able to stretch the gifted, not just five comprehensives in predominantly middle class areas.'

Nottingham, in effect, opted for the inclusive form of giftedness, and if giftedness work is to survive in a comprehensive system, it has to show itself compatible with the comprehensive principle. This has not yet been accomplished.

Human gifts too important to be left to the Giftedness Association

We must not end by dismissing all programmes designed to enrich and extend children in comprehensive education just because giftedness has been so misused for political and social ends. Where selection is not involved, and where the enrichment is open to all, such programmes (whether labelled 'gifted' or not) could well turn out to be very valuable. What will make them valuable is what makes so much of the writing, and the programmes of giftedness work valuable now, including many projects from the NAGC, they help children. What is good about them, is that they are not just good for the so-called gifted, but for ALL children. Many of the NAGC's schemes and articles could be applied to all children in any case;[71] and others — like the Schools Council Enrichment Programmes — are valuable because they also could enrich teaching and learning for everyone. Advice given out to gifted parents is advice that ANY parent needs — for example, that 'one factor which contributes most to the development of the clever child is conversation with parents'.[72] It is a sad waste of energy and effort to keep good giftedness programmes locked up for the benefit of the few, when all children could benefit, and should.

Ours is not an argument that there are no children with unique talent. Quite the reverse. It is because we believe in human genius that we oppose all attempts to regiment it, or to commandeer it for the purpose of preserving what is basically a school system designed for a social elite. Nor do we regard general 'giftedness' as a distinct property any more than we accepted '11-plus ability' as such. Giftedness is what education itself helps to create and release, and the purpose of the education

system is to help foster as many gifts as possible in as many children as possible.

Selection for giftedness which is developed indistinguishably from segregation of pupils in grammar schools or special express streams, is not an exercise in identifying genius or of releasing gifts in all types of pupils. Indeed, it stunts our chances of helping the gifted. We give up our commitment to looking for gifts in the vast majority, once we have accepted the argument that giftedness is limited to the hunt for the few. We also fail the few, particularly the true genius. For true genius cannot be limited to the world of IQ testing and formal education. By definition, it cannot be defined. Nor can genius or talent be limited to a child's world; it is open to all ages.

The way we help giftedness is by encouraging a flexible, alert, high-standard, stimulating, and supportive comprehensive education service for everyone at every stage. A comprehensive system is the only way we can openly ensure attention to all equally and at the same time protect and reveal the full range of human gifts. Encouraging human genius, and developing human gifts, are just one more reason why we must continue to work to get a genuine comprehensive education safely started in Britain, and to promote it relentlessly when we have.

Notes

1. NAGC Newsletter, spring, 1972.
2. L.M. Terman, ed., *Genetic Studies of Genius*, 1925.
3. Cyril Burt, *The Gifted Child*, 1973.
4. E.M. Hitchfield, *In Search of Promise*, NCB, 1973.
5. *Daily Mail*, 9 August, 1978.
6. *Women's Journal*, April, 1977.
7. 9 June, 1977, *Guardian*; see also 2 August, 1977.
8. Quoted in E. Ogilvie, *Gifted Children in Primary Schools*, 1978.
9. 18 August, 1978.
10. HMI, *Gifted Children in Middle and Comprehensive Schools*, 1977.
11. 'Gifted Children, is there a problem?', in *Gifted Children*, edited Gibson, 1976.
12. Ann Start, *The Gifted Child*, NFER, 1972. See also D. Hopkinson, *The Education of Gifted Children*, 1978, who spoke of the great investment Britain had made in the 'construction of an elaborate . . . intelligence scale' which 'no doubt' will be 'used to identify the gifted' (p.44).
13. Review in NAGC Newsletter, 1980, of R.M. Povey's *Educating The Gifted Child*, 1980.
14. The well known Brentwood experiment in teaching gifted children, for example, involved children 'who had already been selected for secondary education', NAGC Newsletter, November 1979, 'The Gifted Child in Essex'.
15. *Find the Gifted Child*, Devon LEA, 1977.
16. Burt, *op.cit.*, p.152.
17. HMI, *op.cit.*
18. *Teaching Clever Children*, 1974.
19. *Tomorrow's World*, 11 March, 1979.
20. See, for example, Burt, *op.cit., passim.*
21. *Comprehensive Education*, 1968.
22. *Able Misfits*, 1970.
23. *Daily Telegraph*, 12 February, 1978; see also NAGC Newsletter, November 1978.
24. *Guardian* report 18/8/78.
25. See NAGC Newsletter, November 1978.
26. R.M. Povey, *op.cit.*, Introduction.
27. 'Education and the Citizen', Conservative Political Centre, 1967.
28. *Better Schools For All*, 1977.
29. Burt, *op.cit.*, p.50; research from 1915.
30. E. Ogilvie, *op.cit.;* and also interview with Ann Corbett, TES, 22 June, 1973.
31. R.F. DeHaan and R.J. Havingquist, *Educating Gifted Children*, 1957.
32. Burt, *op.cit.*
33. See research reported in the following: E.M. Hitchfield, *op.cit; New Society*, 4 October, 1973; A. Gath and D. Gath, 'Bright Children in Trouble', NAGC Report, 1975, September; M. Kellmer Pringle, *op.cit;* and Cyril Burt, *op.cit.*, p.152.
34. M. Kellmer Pringle, *op.cit.*, p.79.
35. Joan Freeman, 'Giftedness in a Social Context', *Educating the Gifted Child*, ed. Povey, 1980.
36. 'What Makes a Gifted Child', 8 August, 1977.
37. E.M. Hutchfield, *op.cit.*
38. M. Kellmer Pringle, *op.cit.*
39. *Daily Mail*, 9 August, 1978.
40. John Izbicki, 2 October, 1978.
41. *Daily Mail*, 18 September, 1978.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. See, for example, *Women's Standard*, 11 May, 1981; and *The IQ Quest, Guardian*, 2 August, 1977.
45. 'Bright Future', *Guardian*, 14 June, 1977.
46. See, for example, 'Industry Backs Explorers', NAGC Newsletter, March 1979; also NAGC Newsletter, November 1979.
47. Quoted in the *Daily Mail*, 18 September, 1978.
48. T.S. Robertson, 'Pupil Progress in Ten Comprehensives', *Comprehensive Education*, No.36, 1977.
49. 12/11/70.
50. 'The Comprehensive Jungle', *Daily Mail*, 15 March through 17, 1972.
51. *Mail*, 25 November, 1978.
52. BBC, *Open Door*, 7 December, 1978.
53. From NAGC Newsletter, March 1979.
54. 12 October, 1978.
55. *Teachers World*, 18 January, 1974.
56. *Woman's Journal*, April 1977.
57. 2 August, 1977.
58. *Teacher*, 8 March, 1974.
59. 9 August, 1978.
60. J. Burrows, Annual Gifted Lecture, 5 December, 1969.
61. NAGC Newsletter, April 1981.
62. *Times*, 23 September, 1977.
63. 'Education and the Citizen', *op.cit.*
64. 12 February, 1970, House of Commons.
65. Described in *Guardian* 5 June 1976.
66. See description in *Guardian*, 29 April 1977.
67. See *Guardian* 8 August 1978.
68. The scheme was proposed by Wellington College in Somerset, see *Education*, 19 August, 1977; it was opposed by local teachers.
69. *Guardian*, 8 August, 1978.
70. Quoted in the *TES*, 5 June, 1981.
71. See, among others, B. Buckley, 'Beware, Baby at large', in NAGC Newsletter, November 1980; 'Every Child is Gifted', S. Brownjohn, in NAGC Newsletter, April 1981; 'Problem Solving', NAGC Newsletter, April 1981; 'Underachieving Children', NAGC Newsletter, September 1975; and books like *Your Exceptional Child*, Brian Jackson, 1980.
72. P.J. Congdon, 'Helping Children of High Intelligence', *Handbook for Parents* (no date).

Reviews

Teacher education project

Communicating in the Classroom, Edited by Clive Sutton, Hodder & Stoughton (1981) £3.95.

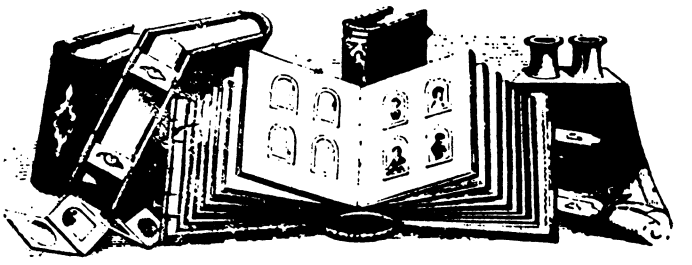
Any textbook for teachers which contains a final chapter analysing textbooks for readability has courage, not to say foolhardiness. And, indeed, a quick test on a random passage from an earlier contribution shows the text to be comfortably into the 'very difficult' category in places. Perhaps such books (this is presented as 'a guide for subject teachers on the more effective use of reading, writing and talk') over-estimate the ability of classroom teachers to absorb complex ideas when their primary daily function may be the communication of other complex ideas. But those who persevere will be rewarded with a sense of guilt about their own lessons, and a determination to drag them out of the rut.

The handbook is one product of the catholic, and very necessary, Teacher Education Project. Those who know Dr Sutton's work in the education of science teachers will be familiar with the approach. Plenty of things to do, jokes to enjoy and children's work to relish. In the STEP series this approach seemed to work, because it was primarily directed at the potentially narrow subject specialist fresh out of university and eager to transmit knowledge, often at the expense of education. The series helped to show that the task of teaching is actually a complex and mysterious act of human sharing. Here, however, the 'entertainments' perform less of a service, for the reader may find himself distracted from concentrating on a difficult, at times dense, text.

As an introduction to the recent work on classroom communication — particularly by such as Barnes (over-represented) and Adelman (sadly under-represented) — the book works. It deals with some of the lesser-known, non-standard texts, directs those interested towards sources for further reading, and acts as a summary and a stimulant for weary educators at all levels of schooling.

The contents include two chapters on writing, two on talking and one on reading and listening, while others touch on the thorny subject of 'good' English, multicultural education, and the shape of lessons. All of these issues need to be raised regularly with jaded classroom teachers whose lessons, within the constraints of the conventional timetable, can all too easily become routine for all concerned. I shall leave it lying around in the staffroom and hope that a number of people pick it up.

NIGEL GANN
Solway Community School, Silloth, Carlisle



Educating the educators

Evaluating the Evaluators by Maurice Holt, Studies in Teaching and Learning Series, Hodder & Stoughton (1981), pp.187, paperback £3.45.

Maurice Holt's opening chapter gives lucid expression to all the doubts which many teachers must have disturbingly half-sensed about the growth of formal evaluation. By the end of the compelling first thirty pages the whole problem of such evaluation and the danger arising from it have been brought into sharp focus. A subtitle of Educating the Educators suggests itself and the hope arises that some society for the propogation of greater understanding might send complimentary copies to Education Committees, to all those who administer, advise and inspect and, most important of all, to those who formulate what passes for policy in the heights of the DES.

Holt's preface, which is meant to be read, stresses that he, like any other evaluator, is biased. The strength of his personal feeling and the need to defend what he counts of dearest worth are obviously the mainspring of this book. There is an urgency about the argument which he develops with a wealth of references and illuminating touches from first hand experience in school. Holt is in a rare and advantageous position; he combines great sensitivity to the possibilities in a school from working within and yet his more recent role as an education consultant has allowed him to mine the research and examine the philosophy to an extent beyond the possibility for most practising teachers. His bibliography is worth more than a glance.

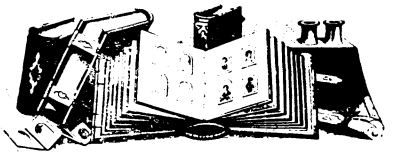
Maurice Holt's major thesis that formal evaluation is the enemy of the best in education is of prime importance in the present age of crude comparison between schools and the pursuit of a simplistic accountability. The infinite variety of the human condition which schools can enrich is in great danger when only that which can be measured and expressed in statistics is counted of true worth. The ideas of cost effectiveness which proved a poor touchstone for a politician in charge of the Department of Industry are doubly dangerous when transferred to the DES where the product is people. Scholastic costs and works accountants not only have an impossible job; Holt suggests they damage the finished product.

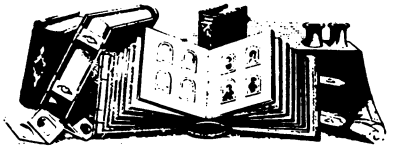
Holt considers the home ground of the new religion of Evaluation. He accepts that the historic expansion of the United States with the associated influx of people of diverse nationality gave American education a prime interest in evaluation. When education was seen as a means to the solution of simply identified problems, evaluation tested pupil response. If education programmes were restricted to simple objectives, success or failure could be revealed by testing. The doubts and fears of a society which found itself opposed and challenged by technological advance elsewhere re-emphasised evaluation in the last twenty years. In the USA national testing and state-based local testing like so many American faiths became enshrined in a growth industry. It crossed the Atlantic as a new and dangerous multinational.

The ideas of formal evaluation inevitably recommended themselves to British politicians faced with the problems of economic decline. Holt's chapter on the English response and particularly on the Assessment of Performance Unit makes fascinating reading. He links the Bullock Report and the APU to the 'back to the basics' false simplicity and to the political need to pinpoint 'standards' which were 'declining'. The danger to the curriculum from the APU approach is even more marked at local than national level. He suggests that LEA's, hooked on testing, will aid the DES, in Edgar Stones' words, 'to drag us kicking and screaming into the nineteenth century'. Holt's chapter on the English response and the linking of local to national testing reinforces his thesis that all testing corrupts and absolute testing corrupts absolutely. He sees his purpose as alerting all connected with schools to the threat from formal and external testing to a curriculum which should be a broad and coherent reflection of our culture. Holt progresses to evaluation within schools and finds self evaluation not without danger. He considers that it often becomes a self-conscious activity which risks destroying the essential creative judgements made by those directly involved in curriculum action. The 'evaluation eighties' will deform education as Holt sees it or at least divert energies to the least profitable employment.

Maurice Holt's writing has the great strength of his personal conviction and is informed by his vision. It is the sort of book I would hope Sir Keith might meet if he ever took the road to Damascus. I can give it no higher recommendation!

DEREK ROBERTS
Campion School, Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire





The differentiation process

Routes and Results: A Study of the Later Years of Schooling, by Alexander C. Ryrie. Hodder and Stoughton (1981), pp.135, £9.30 hardback, £4.95 paperback.

This book arises from a research project entitled 'Awareness of Opportunity' which has been in progress in selected Scottish secondary schools for more than five years. During that time nearly 1,200 young students in eight comprehensive schools — four of them in Lanarkshire and four in the Borders — have been followed from the age of fourteen, when decisions about subjects are made, until after they leave school.

The project's first report, *Choices and Chances* by A.C. Ryrie, A. Furst and M. Lauder, dealt with the process of subject choice. It appeared in 1979 — very conveniently at a time when I was preparing an article for **Forum** on the complete inadequacy of the options system for providing a worthwhile educational experience for the majority of our pupils. I was able to use the report to support my case that the area for real choice in the curriculum for years 4 and 5 is far more limited than it might at first appear. The authors showed 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.

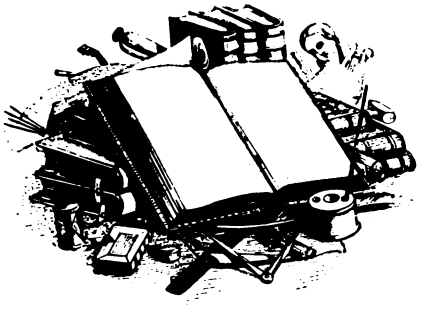
This second volume follows the young people through the later years of schooling, concentrating mainly on the question of how decisions affecting their future are made. It focuses attention on the rigid curricular paths followed through the fourth and fifth years (third and fourth years in Scottish schools); on the way in which the decision whether or not to leave school at sixteen is largely determined by the schooling process itself; and on the narrowly academic character of the post-compulsory stage of secondary education.

Right at the outset, the author poses the question: how does it come about that young people all go into comprehensive schools by one door but come out at many? It is commonplace to assert that schooling has a very important effect on life chances. We accept that what happens to a person in later life depends to a considerable extent on the door by which he emerges from school. But just *how* the process of differentiation takes place is not so obvious. Having posed the question, the book goes on to suggest some interesting answers.

Once subject choices have been made at fourteen, most of the students in this report find themselves allocated to 'certificate' or 'non-certificate' groups and to 'sets' for almost all examination subjects. After the first two or three weeks of the fourth (third) year there is virtually no opportunity to change subjects, and students have to continue for the next two years with the courses which have been decided upon. A good number of students abandon 'certificate' level work in one or more of their subjects without taking up anything in its place.

The account of sixth-form opportunities presented in this report is particularly gloomy. In the eight schools studied there is no real place for the less academic youngster after the age of sixteen, even if he has no job and is willing to stay on at school. The courses available and the expectations and requirements of those courses are clearly unsuited to such young people. Mr Ryrie points out that 'an emphasis on academic attainment and ability has long been a characteristic of Scottish education'. In this respect, he believes, much more progress has been made south of the border where more and more comprehensives are developing open-access sixth forms with a wide range of courses in an attempt to provide for the various needs of young people in a changing world.

CLYDE CHITTY



Packaging and marketing

The Public School Revolution — Britain's Independent Schools 1964-1979 by John Rae, Faber and Faber (1981), pp.188, £6.50.

A recent newspaper profile of John Rae, headmaster of Westminster, ended with a list of the career options open to a man of his age and position; one of these was the headship of a sixth form college. It is fascinating to speculate, in the light of Dr Rae's book on the recent history of the independent schools, how he would have written the same story in the light of the experience of a year or two in such a post. What a contrast between schools in which nearly all financial resources are fixed by an LEA backed by a parsimonious government and those where shrewd enterprising can bring rich rewards! One of the most striking aspects of Dr Rae's account of the years 1964-79 is his telling of the success stories. Oakham, once an obscure direct grant school in Rutland, seeing its larger neighbours Uppingham, Rugby and Oundle taking the lion's share of available talent, went in for a huge increase in places (almost sixty six per cent) backed by a building appeal, co-education and a full programme of holiday lettings. Now Oakham is well equipped, cultivates 'excellence' in music and is one of the most successful boarding co-educational schools. Few of these avenues for development are open to state school heads who find their equipment, staffing or premises inadequate and who wish to improve them.

A good part of the response of the independent schools to the various 'challenges' of the period is shown by Dr Rae to have been in the direction of image building, fund raising and a new professionalism in financial management. A Headmasters' Conference list of 'myths' about what goes on in public schools was to be one of the reasons for founding ISIS — the Independent Schools Information Service — to handle the media in a professional way.

At the same time the word 'independent' was found to have a better flavour than 'public'. Fund-raising has become big business for at least two companies and over £60 million has been raised for independent schools over the last fifteen years. Dr Rae shows us the development of an industry; prospectus writing, catering, building appeals and fighting the abolitionists are all in professional hands. Packaging and marketing are essential skills for those who run the modern independent school.

While much of the foregoing is perhaps news to those who normally think little about independent education, other parts of the book have a more familiar ring, in particular the account of the 'revolution' in style within the schools. Limited amounts of co-education, the decline of beating and compulsory chapel, choice of games, alternatives to CCF and a certain amount of scope for wearing non-uniform clothing seems to have been the chief responses to what was a fairly general outbreak of long hair, refusal to sing hymns and kicking of rugby balls into touch. This occurred, of course, during the sixties. Now, we are told, a better spirit has returned, students are more conformist and a relaxed atmosphere prevails. At the same time, however, academic standards are becoming a greater concern as the contemporary change to comprehensive schooling in the state sector produces a crop of pupils whose middle class parents were only happy with a state system which was likely to select their children for a grammar school. Thus, vague references to 'character building' are replaced in publicity material by accounts of 'Oxbridge' and GCE successes.

Dr Rae is widely regarded in the independent school world as a dangerous 'leftie', largely because he is prepared to admit that opponents of schools like his might have a case. This book shows that in spite of a certain disquiet he is unprepared to come to grips with the problem of the separation of a well resourced system of education for those who hold much of the nation's power from the needy and neglected state sector. A move to a maintained sixth form college might concentrate his mind wonderfully.

JIM THAWLEY
Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth II Sixth Form College, Leicester

Language and class

Verbal Deficit: A Critique, by J.B. Gordon, Croom Helm, (1981), pp.181.

The theme of Gordon's book is familiar but its treatment is unusual and important. The focus of attention is the basic idea that the language of working-class children (sometimes lower-working-class children) is fundamentally impaired in such a way that they are likely to fail within the educational system. This notion has run through many versions some so crass that only blind class bias could have given them credibility. Perhaps the most notorious nonsense was perpetrated by Bereiter and Engleman who started from the premise that 'disadvantaged' infants were virtually without any language at all. But we should not forget that the Bullock Report gave respectability to the most refined version and underwrote the work of Joan Tough which is based on a deficit model.

The debate about verbal deficit, as Gordon points out, has moved to the forefront of discussion about the education of the majority of children. It takes on additional significance when we are considering the education of children of West Indian origin. What Gordon does refreshingly and, I believe, uniquely is to trace with great detail the history of the idea of verbal deficit showing its relationship to the prevailing social, political and economic context. At the same time he dismantles the underlying ideas, showing their theoretical weaknesses and brings his theme up-to-date with, inevitably, a critique of Bernstein's work. He has managed to keep the educational context alive no matter how much he is obliged to analyse linguistic and psychological ideas.

Readers will find some neglected pages of educational history here and we need that historical awareness in these times. Bullock wasn't interested in history. At the same time the analysis is linguistically sophisticated; yet it is lucid for the layman.

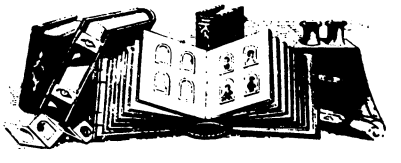
Gordon's critique of Bernstein contains both a use of other critiques and his own analysis which painstakingly traces the changes and obscurities in the thesis. He concludes that it is lacking in testable coherence and that none of its central concepts is sufficiently and adequately defined. He might have made more of the work of Gordon Wells and looked at some very interesting shifts in Bernstein's most recent formulations. The transcripts of children talking with adults I find disappointingly thin. However, he firmly points in a direction which teachers must follow. The living practice of teachers and pupils and of working class people needs to be brought to the forefront of discussions on verbal deficit. There has been too much hypothesising at rarefied levels of abstraction and too little documentation and analysis of real people talking to each other and real pupils and teachers in classrooms. With all due respect to those who have pioneered the study of language in classrooms, very few (an honourable exception is Douglas Barnes) have been concerned with **learning** and that's what the debate should be about.

The book is a short one but manages to compress a great deal of documentation and analysis within its pages. It feels longer than it is.

The parading of verbal deficit as an explanation of the failure of working-class children has sadly diverted us from analysis of other important matters. We need a fresh consideration of literacy, its transmission, the prevailing assumptions and the ideology of current practice. It could well be the most important factor in school failure and success. Be that as it may, what we do in school will be in many ways influenced by whether we regard the language of working-class children as one of our misfortunes or as a solid base on which to build. Gordon's books may well persuade some people to put verbal deficit behind them as a discredited myth. It is more likely to provide shot and shell for those who have already made up their minds.

It is interesting to note that, although Gordon conducts his exploration as a researcher/analyst, he leaves us in no doubt that he is a supporter of the comprehensive school and sees his work as sustaining the development of it. And he is not unaware of its imperfections and the limitations imposed on it by our society.

HAROLD ROSEN
University of London, Institute of Education



A fringe activity?

Group Tutoring for the Form Teacher by Leslie Button, 1. **The Lower Secondary School** (1981), Hodder & Stoughton Paperback, £5.25p.

Dr Button wastes no time in putting his finger on it. 'In some schools', he says, 'the year head, with special responsibility for pastoral work, is expected to be aware of the different needs of, say, 200 young people. This is quite impossible. The role of the year head should be to support the form tutors and to serve as a team leader'.

With the aid of a research programme sponsored by the Leverhulme Trust Fund and the Health Education Council, Dr Button has provided the beleaguered year head with some powerful ammunition for the next tutors' meeting. It takes the form of a complete pastoral programme, structured to cover the five years of secondary education, and resourced to provide the form tutor with the aims, objectives and necessary materials for virtually every tutor lesson along the way.

The philosophy of the programme envisaged for Years 1 and 2 is simple. Its basic tenet is that children will achieve their full academic and personal potential only if they are members of a caring and supporting tutor group, to which they feel confident enough to admit their weaknesses as well as to underline their strengths. With these firm foundations established, the programme shows how children can be led to take greater responsibility for their own progress and to develop the communicative powers necessary to articulate their hopes and fears to peers, parents and teachers. My own experience in handing over the entire organisation of a day long induction programme for newcomers to existing Second Year pupils serves to confirm Dr Button's confidence that a year group should, for example, be able to organise its own Parents' Evening as part of the pastoral programme.

There is no doubt that a tutor already committed to this type of work will find the book crammed with good ideas. What worries me is the impact that it will have on the non-committal pastor, who is content to register the sheep, but then prefers to let them graze unmolested until the bell goes for Period One. These, after all, are the people who precipitate the symptoms of post-pastoral tension in Year Heads. How, I wonder, will *they* view the introduction of a programme whose lessons often require children to take one another's hands at 8.50 in the morning and solemnly renew their mutual support contracts? Try putting that little number across at your average tutors' meeting . . .

Dr Button suggests that two thirty five minute periods per week are enough to do justice to his material. A modest proposal, but symptomatic of the cap-in-hand attitude that all programmes attempting to equip children to deal with life seem to have to adopt when tapping at Curriculum's mighty door. Surely, the pastoral message shoud be at the centre of the curriculum rather than having to hover apologetically around the fringes. As we found when redesigning our integrated course at my last school, it is perfectly possible to construct a core course which occupies the subject areas of English, Religious Education, History and Geography but which operates in such a way that it provides young people with the self-knowledge and social skills which Dr Button seeks to pass on through an additional programme.

There is a danger that pastoral work will be viewed as a fringe activity forever, unless its supporters commit themselves to an aggressive campaign for fundamental curriculum reorganisation instead of continuing to ask politely for a few extra pastoral minutes. Dr Button's programme would make a useful handbook for such a rebuilding; sadly, however, it is unlikely to strike at the foundations of the existing structure.

NIGEL MIDDLETON
Head, Heathfield High School, Earl Shilton

The following **Back Numbers** of **Forum** are still available price £1 each

Vol 8 No 2	**Special number on the Probationary Year.**
Vol 9 No 3	**Plowden symposium.**
Vol 10 No 1	**The Sixth Form in the Comprehensive School.**
Vol 11 No 2	**Two Years after Plowden; Self-directed learning.**
Vol 11 No 3	**Freedom of Choice — for whom?** A new Education Act.
Vol 12 No 2	**From secondary to primary.**
Vol 12 No 3	**Teaching Unstreamed Classes.**
Vol 13 No 1	**Teachers for Comprehensives; Mixed ability science.**
Vol 14 No 2	**Innovation in Education.**
Vol 15 No 1	**Democracy and Innovation in Education.**
Vol 15 No 2	**16 to 19.**
Vol 16 No 1	**Resource-based learning.**
Vol 16 No 3	**Going Comprehensive in England, Wales and Scotland.**
Vol 17 No 2	**New Directions:** reconstruction of knowledge.
Vol 17 No 3	**The Question of Size** for primary and secondary schools.
Vol 18 No 1	**Mixed Ability Teaching:** French, Maths, Science.
Vol 18 No 2	**Flexibility and Mixed Ability.**
Vol 18 No 3	**Examination or Assessment** in primary and secondary schools.
Vol 19 No 1	**In Defence of Education.**
Vol 19 No 2	**Comprehensive Remedial Provision** for primary and secondary.
Vol 19 No 3	**The Primary School.**
Vol 20 No 1	**Multiracial Education.**
Vol 20 No 2	**Non-Streaming — Why and how.**
Vol 20 No 3	**Testing and Teaching.**
Vol 21 No 1	**New Opportunities:** the lower birthrate.
Vol 21 No 2	**Primary and Secondary.**
Vol 21 No 3	**Mixed Ability Teaching and Learning.**
Vol 22 No 1	**The APU Threat?**
Vol 22 No 2	**Comprehensive Education: the threat of government policy**
Vol 22 No 3	**Secondary Options or a Common Curriculum.**
Vol 23 No 1	**Middle Schools: their special value.**
Vol 23 No 3	**Standards at Risk.**
Vol 24 No 1	**Comprehensive Principles for the Eighties.**
Vol 24 No 2	**Primary Schools within a Comprehensive System.**

Order from **Forum,** 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield WS13 7AA.

Published by PSW (Educational) Publications at 11 Pendene Road, Leicester LE2 3DQ
Printed by Russell Press Ltd., Gamble Street, Nottingham NG7 4ET