

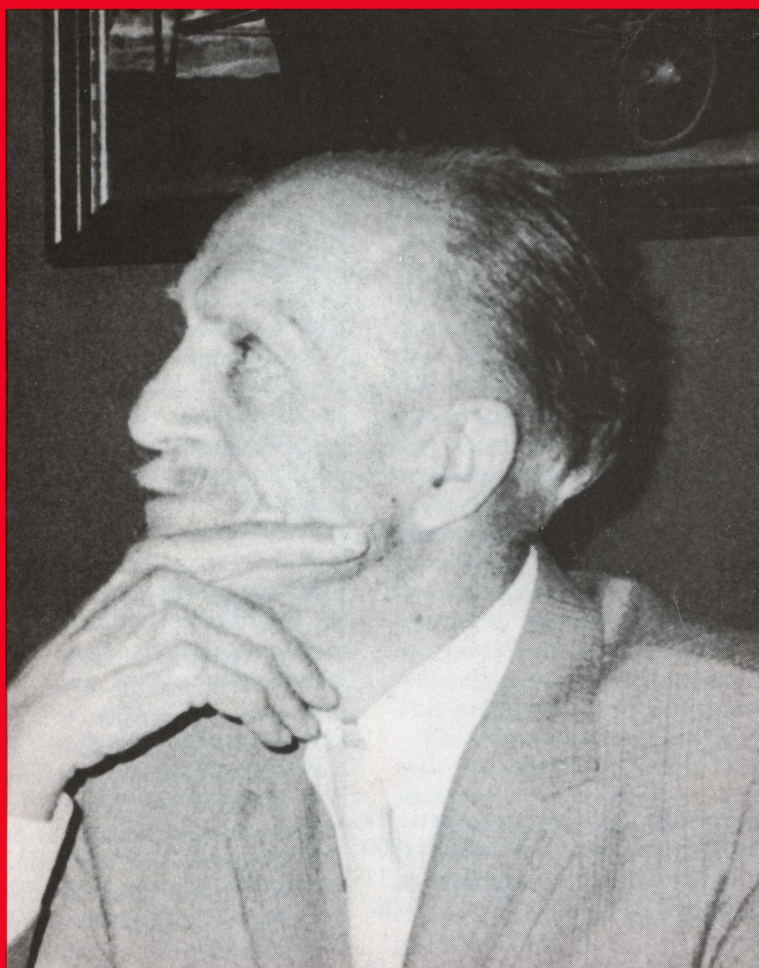
FORUM

for the discussion of new trends in education

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Raymond King

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The Next Forum

In view of the clear danger of the imposition of new forms of differentiation within the school system generally, this number will focus on the need and procedures for ensuring the unification of comprehensive secondary and primary schools. Michael Armstrong clarifies the theoretical framework behind the unification policy; Annabel Dixon writes on non-differentiation processes within the infant school, and Bob Moon (of the Peers school, Oxfordshire) contributes on the comprehensive school. Other articles will cover primary and middle schools. In addition, Nick May writes on sex differentiation and stereotyping based on a recent research project at the University of East Anglia, while Caroline Benn contributes an overview relating to the increased emphasis on differentiation processes within secondary schools. John Turner tackles new issues relating to the teaching of integrated humanities in the secondary school.

The Need for a Fight Back

Under the heading 'Prejudice Rampant', our last number carried an editorial, published before the General Election, fiercely critical of government policy in education as carried through by Sir Keith Joseph and his minions at the DES. The catalogue referred to the divisive new Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) now, it appears, likely to be extended; the implications of the March White Paper **Teaching Quality** in terms of centralised control and the clear objective of enhancing traditional academicism in the schools; the strengthening of the Assisted Places Scheme at the expense of the increasingly impoverished maintained sector; the assertion of new forms of central control in terms of earmarked INSET grants and other steps proposed for direct (and arbitrary) LEA funding, together with last minute confusions relating to the Youth Training Scheme with all its anomalies and, in some cases, directly anti-educational implications.

The outlook, in May, looked bleak, but now we have Sir Keith back again, as a leading member of a government with an enhanced majority (though not public support). What, then, of the future? Is there a real danger, as David Hargreaves warned a comprehensive school conference in the summer, of 'losing the whole show'; of a 'serious pressure group' arising 'calling for the abolition of the comprehensive system and return to tripartite system' (TES, 29.7.83)? And what should be our strategy and tactics in this situation?

Today 91 per cent of children of secondary school age in England are in schools officially designated as 'comprehensive' by the DES. The proportion is higher in Wales and Scotland. This is the firm result of the transformation of the system over the last 20 years. There can be no question whatever of a simple reversion to the discredited tripartite system of the past — almost the distant past — however much Secretaries of State and others may desire it. It is seldom realised that, in spite of her attempts to prevent it, Thatcher's four years in office as Secretary of State saw a more rapid development to comprehensive education than any other equivalent period, before or after. The swing to comprehensive education was an imperative necessity and was seen as such at the time. It is impossible to turn the clock back.

But the system is, of course, open to sabotage, especially from those in high places who hold the levers of power. And this is precisely what is happening. As John Glazier, of the Association of Principals of Sixth Form Colleges, put it in a letter to the *Guardian* (4.8.83):

'The State educational environment is beset by such deliberate underprovision and depredation not only in teaching and learning materials but also in plant and labour that few can doubt the small regard this Government has for the educational health of the population as a whole'.

This underprovision, he continues, is accompanied by 'the inexorable drumbeat of criticism and denigration aimed at state comprehensive schools by Government and Government-inspired sources over the past four years'.

All this is beginning to, and presumably is designed to undermine the morale of teachers, as John Glazier suggests.

This, then, appears to be a major objective of the present authorities: to soften up the teaching profession and the system as a whole by abuse and denigration, while denying the resources for effective functioning. At the same time a series of divisive measures and procedures are launched which aim to reintroduce structured forms of differentiation within both comprehensive secondary and primary schools. The final aim is a highly differentiated system operating under the cloak of 'comprehensive' education — a system sharply at variance with the aim and purpose (and the practice) of a truly *comprehensive* education. This aims, on the contrary, at the unification of schools and school systems.

These latter objectives are very firmly based within the school system itself, and have wide popular support; a fact which all those now seeking to destroy or disrupt the system need to be aware. We publish in this number, as our contribution to media reporting on comprehensive schools, three examples of what may be regarded as 'Good Practice' — there is little doubt that such examples could be multiplied up and down the country. But schools like these, with their concern for individual students, and the establishment of a curriculum relevant to all, rarely hit the headlines since they do not conform to the image of comprehensive schools created by the media. It is all the more important, then, that knowledge about the functioning and character of such schools be made more widely available — and such is our intention.

Central to the discussion about the role and nature of comprehensive education is the question of the curriculum, and especially the issue of the creation of a core curriculum relevant to all. We are glad, therefore, to publish Malcolm Skilbeck's extended article on this question, in which he draws, to some extent, on his Australian experience and considers its relevance here. This is an issue to which we shall return.

The Editorial Board, considering the present situation with its threat to comprehensive education, both secondary and primary, has decided to publish a series of three special numbers each focusing on different aspects of comprehensive education, as our contribution to further developing this concept and to resisting attempts to disrupt achievements already gained. The first of these (January 1984) will concentrate on the fight against differentiation within the schools, and on the measures required for unification. The second (May 1984) will focus on the curriculum, and the third (September 1984) on the enhancement of democratic procedures within schools and school systems. In our view, faced with an increasingly severe attack, the need is to fight back through the clarification of ideas and practices fundamental to furthering the concept of comprehensive education.

A Good Comprehensive School: Gordano*

Charles Hannam

Writing here on Gordano School as an example of good practice, Charles Hannam is a Senior Lecturer at the Bristol University School of Education. He is the author of *Young Teachers and Reluctant Learners*, *The First Year of Teaching*, *Parents and Mentally Handicapped Children*, and two volumes of autobiography: *A Boy in Your Situation* and *Almost an Englishman* (both published by Deutsch).

Schools are a bit like Tolstoy's description of families: the good ones are all alike and the unhappy ones very different. It would have been quite easy to write about a 'bad' school. It is so much easier to identify: the Head perhaps to the political right of Ghengis Khan, the staffroom about as friendly as a Siberian transit camp and the children more likely to be inspired by 'Mad Max' than 'Midsummer Night's Dream'. But I have been asked to write about a good school and that is much harder. What are my qualifications to have any sort of opinion? First, a long-standing conviction that only the Comprehensive School is able to approach education constructively. Secondly, I have known the school for a long time under three heads. Generations of my students have completed their teaching practice there, some are still on the staff. Third, one of my sons goes there but I should add that his only comment on the school was 'it's all right.' From a laconic 16 year old that is high praise indeed.

Gordano is probably no more fortunate than about three-quarters of the Comprehensive Schools in the country: it has a homogeneous community intake and it has been less exposed to political batterings by the local press than other schools in the area. It has not been exempted from the cuts and the deterioration that followed them inevitably. On the other hand there is enough resilience among staff and management not to be completely demoralised by them. Gordano School was created in 1956 when two local elementary schools were combined as one secondary modern and in 1964 Somerset converted it into its first comprehensive school. I suspect the progression from secondary modern to comprehensive has worked because of the pride the local community had already taken in its school and folk memories of the golden age of the grammar school do not persist. As elsewhere, the problems of the inner city schools just do not exist; there are minority groups such as Roman Catholics, middle class children from Clifton, but they are not a central part of the school's concerns. I do not want to imply that having a minority group in a school is any sort of misfortune, quite the contrary, but life is certainly more comfortable with a socially cohesive intake.

Being the first Comprehensive school in Somerset must have helped: the building programme was

extensive and the environment is a particularly pleasant one. Nevertheless on a wet and windy day walking from the languages department to the laboratories can't be much fun and the absence of corridors in some of the buildings must be more of an irritation to someone actually teaching there than a casual visitor. By now the cuts have taken their toll and some of the buildings are not as well preserved as they should be. There are special facilities for Drama, the arts, science and the other specialisms. Every teaching department is a coherent unit with departmental offices and reasonable resources areas. This is invaluable: staff can see themselves as part of a unit and can function effectively even if at times there is a growing shortage of 'hardware'. There is a genuine possibility of staff working together and this must add to the sense of purpose which the school is able to convey to the children.

In 1982 there were 1505 pupils and of these 250 were in the sixth form. The sixth form numbers may be threatened because of the Youth Training Schemes but there is no real danger of de-population which may destroy several good sixth forms in the Bristol area. The children are mostly recruited locally. Of numbers mooted for the 'ideal' comprehensive, 1500 seems just about right. There had been plans in Somerset to reduce the size by converting all the primary schools into 8-12 middle schools and some had already been extended with this in mind. Instead Avon put an end to these plans and built another Comprehensive, St Katherine's nearby. The numbers make a widely based curriculum possible: in the first year there is mixed ability teaching covering academic, creative and practical subjects. There is no rigid streaming or banding and ideally every child should find his own level. Many subjects have flexible setting from the second year onwards and there differences will be recognised. When choices have to be made in the 4th year a considerable amount of guidance is available both for children and their parents. From the consumer point of view, as a parent, I should add that the guidance seems lucid and concerned. I can think of schools where these decisions can be difficult for parents because the school assumes that it knows best.

The Upper School is open to all who can cope with the various courses designed to meet individual requirements and most examinations available in the system can be taken from the school. More positive than just success in examinations, the curriculum is constantly under review. "Gordano is a place where change can take place not only because of outside

*I would like to express thanks and indebtedness to Ms Lesley Mitchell, Mr Peter Scott and Mr John Weeks for all the help they gave me with this article. However I should also add that I must take full responsibility for the way I have used the information they gave me.

pressure but because staff feel it is necessary to meet the needs of the children and to increase their sense of achievement which in turn makes them want to work. If there are weaknesses in the curriculum staff are keen to do something about it and that in turn makes for a sense of belonging and well-being" (the Headmaster); it also means that many work much harder than in a school where morale is low. As before, I ought to add that this quality is not a uniquely Gordano quality, but I note that it exists and that fact, in any school under review, should be celebrated.

When I talked to the Deputy Head it was impressed on me that the House system is an integral part of the school; it was planned that way and it is central to the way the school is run today. Enemies of Comprehensive Schools will often stress their hugeness and impersonality. There is no *one* way of avoiding this fault but as Public Schools had houses the use of the term may have been intended to re-assure. What really matters is that there is somewhere where each pupil belongs and that staff are convinced that they are doing the right thing for their pupils. If the organisational structure of the school is acceptable to all, the entire school community will benefit. What is so important is that we should remember that perspectives vary and that the pyramid is a different place for the person on the top and for the one at the very bottom! If pupils of all ages are in the same house it could be a reasonable assumption that they will look after one another and that this is the place where the children are known for who they are as human beings rather than just their performance in the classroom. When the school was planned much thought went into breaking down the vast unit into manageable proportions and it seems to work.

When the children come to Gordano from their primary schools they have an induction year, separate from the rest of the school. A Head of First Year with an Assistant Head of the Year and a team of eight or nine Tutors are responsible for introducing them to the school, their welfare and make sure they do not feel isolated or lost. At the beginning of the second year pupils move into six houses and these are purpose built: the children meet there and have separate dining places as well as common rooms. The school staff stress that these units are one of the greatest assets to the general feeling of well-being in the school and that ideally no one can come into the school and stay there without being well known to at least one teacher.

The Sixth Form is in a separate block and of course the needs of pupils begin to change considerably and it would be right to assume much greater self-sufficiency as well as the need to have space for private study. The Upper School is for those who study for examinations, following either one- or two-year courses. One-third of the all-ability intake gain five or more 'O' levels in the fifth year and over half the school's intake go into the Sixth Form. The number of pupils makes a wide range of academic and non-academic choices possible. One of the nice things about the school is that academic success is appreciated but does not become an end in itself. Seventeen grade 'A's in 'A' levels are just a fact, but this is not thrust at one any more than Oxford entry successes. There are schools where success is thrust at one so persistently that it makes me positively long for **some** evidence of the commonplace. It says in the prospectus 'In accordance with the Education Act of

1980 the results for last year appear at the end of the prospectus. Parents should be aware that performance in examinations is not necessarily an accurate measure of a school's educational achievements . . . Some pupils who make excellent progress during their educational career do not always achieve examination success.' The impression I gain when I read the school prospectus is that it is an honest account of what the school does and the Trades Description Act is never violated! What is stated so positively is that success is entirely possible but in achieving it the price must not be too high. Ideally no one should walk away feeling a complete failure and no group should be isolated and alienated from the aims of the school. Inevitably it will happen and there are bound to be groups of 'reluctant learners' who will feel that neither the school nor society at large has much to offer them. Who can blame them? Schools cannot change society by themselves, inevitably they will reflect its values even if they try to protect the young from them at times. The trouble is that all of us as parents, teachers or recipients of education tend to expect too much and when we are disappointed we look for someone to blame.

Let me point to one of several good things that happen in school: the Drama Department. Since 1964 there has been a particular interest in Drama. Mainly because my son was involved in them I have seen several productions. That alone would not make the Drama Department good (or my son an actor!) but I have seen a relatively shy young man taking a lead part in 'Under Milkwood' and success in acting will not just remain confined to one stage production; the group will have learnt to work together, to be sensitive to each other's needs and that creativity can come from co-operation. The plays are vigorous, never play down to the audience and they are never pretentious stuff, intended to impress governors with the producer's erudition rather than meeting the needs of the pupils. The annual 'killing of the Bard' at the Grammar School is a thing of the past; I saw a production of 'When the Lights go on Again' and instead of the ticket office there was a sandbagged air raid warden's shelter and instead of tickets, ration cards entitling the holder to refreshments in the interval. Each year the Drama Department has six productions.

250 children play musical instruments, each year large numbers visit German and France. Inevitably the same children who get the best out of the school and who are musical may end up in a play or abroad and I suspect that the middle class children are more strongly represented in these activities than the ones with a working class background. It is good to note that the school has an Adventure Bursary Fund which helps those who have not enough money to go on school trips. When the School celebrated its 25th anniversary a special fund was set up. It seems to me quite wrong that schools should have to spend time and energy on fund raising of any sort but the cuts are with us and no amount of rhetoric will alter the fact that in an area around Gordano School many parents are prepared to contribute and that money raised in this way will make a great deal of difference to the quality of life in the school. It is not fair and clearly one school can raise more money easily than another nor is it fair that the school is not completely swamped with children who have welfare problems and who need remedial teaching. The way things are going that may still happen but just

now the school copes. What is admirable is that there are staff who can take advantage of the opportunities they have got and who have sufficient vigour and initiative to be deeply involved with the life of the school.

If a school as a unit seems to function reasonably well it might be a fair assumption that those who have power use it sensitively. It is well known that if all power is vested in one person, the whole school can become a disaster area. Reasonably distributed power can also limit the number of mistakes any one person makes. With a 'Renaissance Man' at the helm, I suppose an enlightened as well as successful Headship is feasible. The only problem is that when this 'great' man goes, what follows — particularly as few of us will agree what makes for greatness? In the early days of Gordano much of the influence lay with the heads of house. Houses were run on very individual and even idiosyncratic lines. By now, I was told, there has been much more co-ordination and a better management structure. The large school must pay particular attention to its organisation but there are different ways of achieving this and I was told that at 'Gordano no one rides rough-shod over anyone.' Sometimes someone has to 'ride' but it would seem to be done rationally and tactfully. Together with a tough management style go staffroom factions and nothing will make a school more of an unhappy place than a deeply divided staffroom. A split in the staff group is quickly sensed by the children and they become manipulative. My post-graduate students sense that the staffroom is a happy place and describe it as 'a caring place'. Only people with inner security can care for others and one only cares

effectively if one is adequately looked after oneself.

I have heard equally positive comments from teachers newly appointed to the school. It is not easy to pin-point the exact source of a caring environment or a reasonably happy staff-room; it emerges like a benevolent cycle which creates a climate where people can afford to care for one another and then they have enough of an inner sense of security to select new colleagues, not as potential allies in feuds but as colleagues who can make a positive contribution. The school has a good reputation and that means first that up to now staff have found it easy to move on elsewhere for promotion and secondly that there is space for promotion within the school. As teacher unemployment increases everything may change but at the moment the staff room is saved from that hard-bitten in-group who will tell you the minute when they will retire and who will demolish any vestige of idealism in an intending or beginning teacher with a few well-chosen aphorisms.

The main thing about any school is how the children are regarded: are they seen as a set of alien monsters or as reasonably competent people with the ability to make decisions for themselves and with as much freedom of choice as a large institution might allow. Gordano did not have to enforce Avon's 'no beating of children' rule, it had decided on the futility of corporal punishment long before that time.

We should celebrate the good fortune of one school and not just explain it as luck. It takes intelligence and much energy to hold on to natural advantages and to develop from there, to admit that improvement is still possible without being demoralised by the continuous attack on comprehensive education from the outside.

All Aboard the Omnibus

K.W. Dron

The Scottish study, *Reconstructions of Secondary Education* (1983) found that, on their criteria, the comprehensive schools that came out 'best' as a group were the traditional 'Omnibus' schools which have been taking in all local pupils over a long period. Mr Dron is the head of just such a school, and we are glad to include his article as an example of good practice in comprehensive schools.

If you care to read on you will gather that I think the medium-sized, omnibus-turned-comprehensive school — as found in many a Scottish burgh — has a great deal going for it. Nothing I say here, of course, should be taken to imply that everything in such establishments is perfect or that they are necessarily superior in all, or indeed any, respects to their larger city counterparts. Perhaps, though, they could justifiably claim to be more *natural* entities, having evolved (usually over many years), rather than been created at the whim of local government or — if that seems unfair — to meet the specific educational requirements of an area. Does it make any difference? Does the fact that a school has a long heritage make it easier to run successfully, and not just in the narrow sense of academic achievement? I think it does. Whether one can produce any evidence, or

whether it is all just a cosy, self-deluding 'gut-feeling', are other matters entirely, but one can try!

First, the background. Brechin High School is a six-year comprehensive school serving the small Cathedral city of Brechin (population circa 8000) and its surrounding rural district. Its roll at present is just below 800. The school's history stretches back more than 500 years to its origin as a 'sang schule' for the musical training of the choirboys in Brechin Cathedral. In 1429, thanks to the generosity of one Walter Stewart, Earl of Atholl and Lord of Brechin, its function was widened to provide a general education for the boys and it was named the College of Brechin. By the early 1500s further expansion had taken place and the College was catering not only for the choristers but for the sons of local citizens as well. When the Cathedral's Roman

clergy were ousted at the Reformation the Town Council took over the running of the College and renamed it the Grammar School of Brechin, in which form it then continued to exist for some 300 years. With the introduction of the Education Act of 1872 control passed into the hands of the new Education Board of Brechin which combined the Grammar School with the small Burgh and Parish schools and called it the High School of Brechin. Since that day, occupying various sites in the town as it continued to grow, it has been the secondary school for Brechin and district, taking its pupils from two large town Primary schools and more than a dozen small country ones.

In 1970 the school moved to its present, purpose-built home on the outskirts of the burgh, surrounded by its playing fields and splendidly equipped with all mod. con. including games hall, swimming pool, library, social areas, stage, language lab. — you name it. Prominently placed in the main entrance hall, however, as a constant reminder of the school's antiquity, is a large panel bearing the names of all the headteachers (now 'Rectors', originally 'Masters') stretching back in an unbroken succession to 1639 and before that, with several gaps, to 1485.

The school's links with both cathedral and city are thus strong and direct and they are perpetuated to this day. The minister at the Cathedral is *ex officio* the School Chaplain (by common consent if not by actual statute); the school's end-of-term services are held in the Cathedral, despite the fact that it is more than a mile away; from time to time the school choirs and instrumental ensembles take part in services there.

The connection between school and town is reflected in a continuing close relationship between the two which works in many practical ways to their mutual advantage. The community looks to the school for assistance in various projects and the school is happy to oblige wherever possible. Teachers and pupils thus find themselves making things (for example, at the moment, ornamental flower boxes for the town's 'Britain in Bloom' effort), acting as flag-sellers or charity collectors, providing usherettes for the local operatic and dramatic societies, clearing snow from the pitch of Brechin City FC, translating letters for neighbouring firms from their foreign customers or suppliers, putting on a concert for the local organisers of Christian Aid or some other charity, and so on. Sometimes it is a special effort. Lately the community took over the running of one of the town's two main halls which was threatened with closure by the Local Authority: as a 'thank you' gesture for help received over the years (as instanced in the next paragraph) the school is to present an amplification system. It is very much Brechin's High School: the citizens are proud of it, like reading about, feel free to praise or criticise it, visit it — and use it. In the evenings it is a hive of academic and, particularly, leisure activity with its facilities (notably the swimming pool and games hall) in constant demand.

Then, when the school seeks the support of the community, whether moral (by turning up at its annual performances of music, drama and opera and other displays) or financial, as in a recent appeal to raise money for a new minibus, the result is invariably heart-warming. Local firms, organisations and individuals willingly present annual prizes, encourage liaison visits and give practical assistance in a hundred different

ways. When an ornamental cairn and direction-finder was made in school for the local Civic Trust, for instance, and the intricate engraving was found to be beyond the resources of the Technical Education department, it stepped a local engineering firm to complete the job. When the Careers Master is engaged in his task of placing pupils in Work Experience situations it is all easily arranged by informal phone calls and there are rarely any difficulties or refusals. Similarly, from the employer's end, when jobs require to be filled, direct contact with the school is very often the first method of approach.

In the light of this long history of friendly co-operation it seemed only natural, when the school's new badge was being designed in 1970, that it should be based on the city's coat-of-arms (itself derived from a Christian symbol closely associated with the Cathedral) and that on it the Book of Learning should be flanked by a cogwheel and a sheaf of wheat, representing the school's industrial/agricultural background. So much, then, for the greatest advantage of all enjoyed by the small town school, intangible but powerful: just *belonging*.

What are the other benefits? First of all I think it can safely be claimed that the quality of life in a small town of rural setting helps its school to retain a large percentage of its teaching force over long periods. Admittedly this might not in every case be to the advantage of the school but it does make for continuity. Many parents of the present-day pupils know their teachers because they had been their (the parents') teachers too or because they had once been fellow-pupils — at Brechin High School. Relationships are thus already established. Again, and much more noticeably than in a large urban area, teachers occupy a prominent place in the community and are leading lights in many of its activities. The Head's own position highlights this. Very much the big fish in the small pool (whether he likes it or not!) he is invited to nearly everything, serves on innumerable committees and is frequently consulted — in other words, still enjoying to a considerable extent the place of privilege and power traditionally held in small Scottish communities by the triumvirate of doctor, minister and 'dominie'.

Former pupils too probably find it easier to identify with their old school and seem eager to perpetuate its name in their various sports clubs. As individuals they know they can come back, or write, for help or advice at any time — and if this can be said of any school, perhaps in the small town context there is more chance of their former teachers still being there. So they still belong, and are encouraged to feel that way.

A word now about how the transition to comprehensive education in the early 70s affected Brechin High School. Since it was the only secondary school in the town the process was relatively painless, there being no awkward problems of zoning or catchment areas to be ironed out. All the children already went to the same school anyway, so what was different? Certainly a physical division existed between the academic and the so-called 'non-certificate' elements, the latter being housed in a separate building some distance away, but although an unfortunate social stigma did attach itself to this annexe, it was still a component part of the High School. The courses were different, some (but not all) of the staff operated

exclusively in one section or the other, but it was all the one school, omnibus or multi-lateral — more properly bi-lateral — call it what you will.

The reorganisation was thus an entirely internal one which, once completed, certainly constituted a vast improvement, especially for the less able pupils who now found themselves getting a fairer selection of the teaching staff and a better share of the equipment and facilities. Gradually for them any possible sense of inferiority wore off, with academic and non-academic types lining up together in the same hockey team, ski trip or holiday abroad. Nor, let it be said, did the brighter brethren suffer. What seemed a sensible amount of streaming was retained and the school's academic performance, as measured by the external examinations, was unimpaired.

To sum up, we look upon Brechin High School as a community within the wider community, continually interacting with it. In days to come some further integration may very well occur in the shape of day-time leisure classes for adults and even adult participation (part-time) in Scottish Certificate of Education classes in school, along with the normal pupils. Thanks to the limitations of its catchment area — there are other similar burghs on all sides — the school is, in the opinion of many, just about the right size: big enough to compete, small enough to remain intimate. Its internal, horizontal division into Junior, Middle and Senior elements ensures adequate maintenance of pastoral care. The curriculum is wide and varied, those in the academic stream at the top of the school having the benefit of small classes, although this time-honoured tradition of the country schools is under ever-increasing threat because of economic pressures on staffing ratios.

Blessed with some lively and vigorous teachers, Brechin High School is forward-looking in many ways, and not just in curricular terms: its pupils can now enjoy (at appropriate times!) amenities like pool, snooker, 'piped music', tuck shops, discos and vending machines. At the same time many old rules have been relaxed but many traditional events, activities and institutions go on, amended or streamlined sometimes, perhaps, but basically little changed: the Captains and Prefects, the Sports, the Opera, the uniform, Morning Assembly, the Prize-Giving and the formal dances, plus an array of clubs and societies, some new but others of long-standing, providing links with past generations of pupils.

The word 'tradition' is used a lot in Brechin High School, and not just in Social Education classes where the history of the place is formally expounded. How much, you may ask, rubs off on the pupils of today? On the surface, maybe not all that much — the older ones, for example, are reluctant to wear the uniform, except on special occasions — but in reality, I believe, quite a lot. The stated aims of the school are the same as in most schools: the development of individual potential and preparation for future citizenship. But it is the third aim that in some strong but indefinable way seems to encapsulate the feeling that success relies greatly on the upkeep of good tradition:

'It is also our aim to be a happy school — a school to which our young people will enjoy coming, a school which will provide an atmosphere of mutual respect and common commitment between adults and youngsters, and a school which will be very much a community in which the attitudes of tolerance, self-respect and goodwill will be promoted'.

Reviewing the Common Curriculum: Sheredes 1983

Liz Thomson

Sheredes school in East Hertford has been well known for many years as the school where Maurice Holt, who contributed to our last number, established a successful common core curriculum for students up to sixteen. Liz Thomson, Leader of Longmore Teachers' Centre, writes here on recent developments at this school.

In any discussion about what constitutes a good school it is important to establish the criteria used to make such a judgment. The assessments I make are based on a belief that our responsibility is to educate children so that, during their schooling, they develop a wide repertoire of skills which enable them to become autonomous learners. Autonomous learning implies that individuals have the freedom, opportunity and capacity to make a choice about what and how they learn. It is often argued that schools are not the best places for this to occur; for the constraints are such that they prevent this kind of learning happening. Terms like banding, streaming, setting, options, withdrawal, all seem to contribute to a particularistic rather than a holistic view of the process. The success of a school is

often measured by such external factors as examination results and a desire to conform to standards and values which only reflect the achievements of a few. Comprehensive schools aim to meet the needs of all pupils and yet many are hoist with the petard of the exam system; to the extent that today more young people go through the motion of taking CSE's, 'O' levels, CEE's and 'A' levels, not to mention all the other achievement schemes and subject certificates which quite a number of LEA's make available to students at different stages in their secondary schooling.

How schools withstand such pressures and offer a balanced, relevant curriculum to their pupils is an issue which concerns many at the present time. Recent national and local initiatives have resulted in many

schools, either by choice or design, stopping to take stock of where they are and what they are doing, in relation to what they feel they should be doing for all their pupils. In this article I shall describe how one school in East Hertfordshire has conducted a curriculum evaluation and review and how the outcomes, in terms of recommendations for action, are influencing and affecting forward planning for the future.

The school in question, Sheredes, is well known nationally because of the way in which the first headteacher, Maurice Holt, established a common core curriculum from years one to five for all pupils.

How this was set up and the thinking behind it are clearly stated in Maurice Holt's publications.¹ Holt's concern was to provide a curriculum structure which would offer a common cultural base for the development of all pupils, including those who went on to study at sixth form level as well as those who left at the end of their fifth year. During the eight years he was at Sheredes, Maurice Holt set up a faculty structure which formed a basis for the common core — below is an outline of the Faculty and curriculum structure, as described in the school handbook (1981-82):

HUMANITIES	Hu	English, Hist., Geog., RE
EXPRESSIVE ARTS	EA	English, Music, Drama
SCIENCE	S	
MATHEMATICS	M	
CREATIVE ACTIVITIES	CA	All Art & Craft subjects
PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES	PA	Games and physical education
LANGUAGES	L	

All pupils take French in the first three years as part of the languages faculty, and in the third year may opt (option A) to start German or Latin as well. All languages are optional in years 4 and 5, where options B and C take up 20% of curriculum time and enable extra science to be taken as well as French, Latin or German. Keen scientists can thus obtain a double O-level certification in Integrated Science (which leads on naturally to Nuffield A-levels in Physics, Chemistry, Biology in the sixth form) without premature specialisation. Options B and C also offer the choice of personal skills like commerce and typing as well as individual art and craft subjects. The diagram shows the whole scheme for the first five years.

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

	Yr.	1	2	3	4	5	Subjects	Max No. GCE/CSE passes
CORE	Hu	.....					Eng. Hist. Geog. (+ RE, Moral Ed.)	3 (Mode 3)
	EA	.....					Eng. Music Drama	1 (music)
	M	.....					Maths	1
	PA	.....					P.E. Games	
	Ca	.....					Art, Crafts, Housecraft: Design	1 (Design)
	S	.....					Science	2
	L	.....					French	1
OPTIONS	A	.....					Latin, German, Wood, Metal, Fabric, Home Econ., Art/English linked course.	
	B	.....					Science, French, Art, W'wk, Typing, Auto Engineering, Commerce, N'wk, Practical Electronics.	
	C	.....					Science, Latin, W'wk, German, Cookery, Typing, Art, Tech. Drawing, Practical Electronics, Music, Human Biology.	

Maurice Holt was fortunate to start with a purpose built school which was designed to accommodate the seven Faculties listed above. He was also able to see the school through from its first intake in 1969, to its fulfilment with a complete sixth form in 1976.

The structure was, and still is, dependent upon a cohesive philosophical standpoint which operates from, and builds on pupils' strengths. The organisation and time-tabling arrangements mean that pupils work together in their peer groups for most of the school day and are not streamed or set in ability groups. Each year is divided into five form groups which are organised into six subject groups. The block time-tabling of four 70 minute periods per day facilitates team teaching in different subject areas; although such an approach is not mandatory — it tends to occur as and when the teachers concerned consider it to be appropriate.

The present Headteacher, Gertrude Seddon, has consciously developed the approach which Maurice Holt initiated. Her concern is to strengthen the notion of the school as a community and she is constantly seeking ways of developing this both within the school itself and by strengthening outside links in relation to the community as a whole. She is aware that Sheredes could be regarded as an anachronism — 'an island of the late 1960s trying to function in the 1980s'. Because of this both she and her staff constantly evaluate and question the nature of the education they are offering to all their pupils. In my contacts with the school over the past five years, I have been impressed by the way in which the staff work towards common goals; even though there is much discussion, argument and questioning in the process of doing so. It is interesting to note that although none of the original staff of the school, as set up in 1969, remain, the spirit of what Maurice Holt set out to achieve is still very much alive.

There is no doubt that the school makes enormous demands on the staff, many of whom carry more than one responsibility. Virtually all staff are involved in the pastoral care system, either as a Head of Year or Form Tutor. Heads of Year and Faculty Heads meet with the Headteacher on a fortnightly basis (alternating weeks) and the Senior Management team, Head, two Deputies and Senior Teacher, meet every Tuesday. The teaching staff in each faculty meet once a fortnight as do Form Tutors and Year Heads. The mechanism for consultation and negotiation is complex, but seems to be vital to the development of the cohesive philosophical standpoint which underpins ways of working in the school. Even so, complaints are made that the system operates on a 'top down' model and that more opportunities should be created for all staff to be seen to be involved in decision making processes. Inevitably compromises are effected, but the important thing is that complaints can be voiced and heard openly and criticisms are not disregarded or pushed to one side.

The initiative to review and evaluate the curriculum was taken in 1982 by Gertrude Seddon, who is concerned about the effects of educational cut-backs on the Sheredes style of working. Although the school does not have falling rolls, the cuts have still hit hard; depriving the school of part-time teaching staff, including foreign language assistants, who have helped to facilitate team teaching and the mixed ability approach to teaching and learning. Her main concern was to find out if the school would be able to continue

functioning in the way it had for the past thirteen years without severely affecting and eroding both staff and material resources. She used the opportunity created by the appointment of a new Deputy Headteacher, Peter Upton, to review the work of the different faculties, the pastoral system and the administration and organisation within the school.

Peter Upton joined the staff of Sheredes in April 1982. Shortly after this date he embarked on a series of meetings with staff to familiarise himself with the workings of the Faculty, subject, pastoral and administrative structures. As a newcomer to the school he had the opportunity to be more objective about its work; for he was able to assess its achievements and difficulties from the viewpoint of an outsider who had not yet become involved in the implementation of the various structures he was evaluating. The meetings and discussions with all those involved continued throughout the Autumn and Spring terms. The outcome was a review produced by Peter Upton which acted as a focus for further discussion between the Senior Management team as well as with all the other staff represented in the different structures. The review has resulted in a series of immediate and long term recommendations related to the work of the seven faculties and the administration of the school.

In March 1983 the annual staff conference was directly concerned with the outcomes of the curriculum review. Professor Dennis Lawton gave the introductory talk and suggested that all staff involved should bring to the conference a written list of three aspects of the school they would not wish to change and three aspects they felt could be improved. These provided a basis for group discussion together with the following topics: the role of form tutors; in-service training; inter-faculty co-operation; adequate provision for low ability children in the 4th and 5th year; the one year sixth; vocational education. The conference took place on Friday afternoon and evening and Saturday morning. As a group leader, I was impressed by the questions raised by the teachers present; their concern, not just for their own conditions of service, but most particularly for the quality of teaching and learning provided for the pupils.

So far the curriculum review has resulted in two major recommendations which affect the original structure of the common core curriculum. The first of these relates to the place of English in the present structure. As the diagram on p.9 indicates, English has always been represented in two of the seven faculties, Humanities and Expressive Arts. Maurice Holt firmly defended this controversial standpoint by saying:

'... if the Bullock Report's doctrine of "language across the curriculum" means anything, it means that English should suffuse all the discourse of the curriculum at least as an implicit presence. By making it a component of an interrelated area we can go further and give it explicit force. And a link of this kind with History and Geography would seem an obvious step to take. Such an area would form a Humanities faculty and might well include social studies and religious education. A separate faculty of the expressive arts would then link music and drama, and if English were also a component of this area, its formal influence would extend over a substantial part of the curriculum.'²

However, the recommendations from the curriculum review suggest that although English should be part of an integrated Humanities course for years one and two, it should be removed from the Humanities Faculty from years three to five. English would then be located solely in the Expressive Arts Faculty. The reasons for this change are stated in the following extract from the Faculty recommendations:

'Within the middle school English should be taught in conjunction with drama and music and that the core time of this faculty should be increased to be cognisant of this. The advantages of this system would be numerous, apart from administrative convenience to both staff and students, it would enhance the weakened status of the Faculty, provide a clearer exposition of the Faculty's philosophy, provide more opportunities for the development of a more effective co-operation within the Faculty and would also encourage a greater appreciation of the diversity of language within the curriculum.'³

The second major recommendation is that French should become part of the core throughout the five years of the school curriculum instead of being an option from year four onwards. Although this will create greater demands on the staff concerned, it is felt that the move will enable all students to maintain language skills and will bring into balance areas which are neglected in the present middle school curriculum. It will also mean that pupils will, if they wish, be able to take two languages as they will all have the opportunity to take either Latin or German in the third year and continue with a second foreign language in years four and five as part of the option system.

There is no doubt that the review is acting as a catalyst for change within the school. However, most of those involved will argue that flexibility and adaptation to changing contexts are vital to the growth and development of the school. Although it is now in its fourteenth year, Sheredes still supports the aim that Maurice Holt expounds in *The Common Curriculum* — that of equipping students for the life of learning which lies ahead. As he says:

'It is a non-instrumental aim since it seeks to promote understanding for its own sake . . . It is by no means a new view of education, and because a liberal education leads directly to individual autonomy, it ought to leave students in the condition of continually asking questions.'⁴

The students I have met at Sheredes bear witness to the above statement, for they have been encouraged to develop qualities of curiosity, co-operation and perseverance through the different ways of working developed through the common curriculum and the Faculty structure. But above all this could not have occurred without the support of teachers who not only question but reflect and are prepared to use their reflection as a basis for future action.

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Core Curriculum Revisited

Malcolm Skilbeck

In this important article, Malcolm Skilbeck raises fundamental issues relating to the meaning, and possible character, of a core curriculum for all, appropriate to the present phase of comprehensive development. The author is Professor of Curriculum Studies at the London University Institute of Education, as well as Director of Studies at the Schools Council. He was recently Director of the Australian Curriculum Development Centre at Canberra, and earlier Professor of Education at the University of Coleraine.

During the 1970s and into the '80s a recurrent theme in curriculum policy debates in many English speaking countries has been the need for and nature of a common or core curriculum. The case made by the Department of Education and Science, through both its administrative and inspectorial sub-cultures, for a national core defined as an amalgamation of subjects and areas of experience has been one of the best sustained and most comprehensive contributions to the debate.¹ But in Australia, Canada and the United States there have also been significant policy statements and, as the OECD study of basic education showed, even many countries with a long tradition of central direction of the curriculum were beginning to take a close interest in the same kinds of themes as were favoured in the English-speaking debate. These included the adequacy of the core for all students in secondary schooling, the balance of its component parts, the relevance of what has been taught viewed from changing socio-economic-political perspectives, and the ability or preparedness of the teaching profession to present core learnings in a manner that seemed to capture the interests or meet the needs of youth.²

Not surprisingly, initiatives by central government and by national agencies funded from government sources were seen by many educationalists as an excessive reaction to public criticism of schooling — especially of the back-to-basics kind — and to constitute an unwelcome intrusion into territory thought to be the exclusive province of local authorities, schools and individual teachers. In addition to these kinds of criticisms, more sophisticated attacks have come from academics. Thus, the move towards core curriculum was described as an 'impossible' enterprise since it presupposed a non-existent social consensus; the formulations of aims and directions were characterised as confused and impoverished; and the core learnings proposed were said to represent yet another attempt to impose on schooling the traditions, values and socio-cultural assumptions of the elites in power at the time.³

Contrasts were drawn between, on the one hand, the so-called grass roots movements of school-based curriculum development, local initiatives and the quest for variety, teachers as researchers, action research and participatory and communitarian development and, on the other, heavy handed recentralisation, reactionary politics and so-called power-coercive strategies of change.

In England and Wales, the National Union of Teachers, in its submission to the House of Commons

Select Committee on Education and Science denied the Department of Education and Science the right to determine national needs and declared its resistance to any curriculum policies which might seem to challenge the teacher's right to determine the curriculum. This was an echo of the arguments surrounding establishment of the Schools Council in the mid '60s.⁴

More recently, the Government's determination to finish off the Schools Council by withdrawing funds and establishing two new, separate nominated national agencies, one for secondary examinations and the other for school curriculum, has been widely condemned as further evidence of a determination to consolidate power over educational policy into central government and its agencies. Practically no-one in the country's educational service — publicly at any rate — has been prepared to concede that there may be a case that at least deserves examining, for replacing the Council with new agencies. Probably this is because of the manner in which the Secretary of State for Education and Science unilaterally declared his intention to terminate the Council, which had always offered itself as a partnership of central and local government and the teachers. Few curriculum analysts and commentators have begun the much needed task of constructing new interpretative frameworks, or considering the implications of the changes that are undoubtedly upon us. Even those who have, over the years, advocated a compulsory or common curriculum for all, have severely criticised the trend of events insofar as the Department of Education and Science has been a major instrument in forcing the core issue.⁵

We are overdue for a calm and reflective reconsideration of the relationships within the education service itself, between schools and local authorities and between schools, parents, and communities and local authorities and central government and between the various agencies and groups that can reasonably claim some role in curriculum policy making.

As a first step, we need greater clarity about some of the key terms in the curriculum debate than exists at present. First, the term core curriculum. Commonly used by schools to describe those courses which are required of all students in a given institution, core curriculum has a rather different meaning when used in national policy discussions. There, it refers to those programmes, courses or learning opportunities in which all students of a given age or stage in the education system are expected to take part.⁶ Notice that in both

cases it's the planned, intended or provided curriculum we are talking about and this is important since there is a considerable gap both at school and at system level between the intention of the policy makers, providers and teachers and the curriculum as experienced by the students. In recognition of this, **The Practical Curriculum**, published by the Schools Council hard on the heels of the Department's policy document, **The School Curriculum**, (and delayed in publication at the Department's request so that theirs could come out first) used the term 'effective curriculum', that is the curriculum as experienced by the student or, more precisely, what the student 'takes' from the learning experiences provided by the school.⁷ These are not just verbal niceties (nor are they precise concepts which can be readily interrelated in an analysis of the curriculum process from intention to realisation) but are matters of some importance when we try to work out what is meant by the term core curriculum.

Is the core — whether at school or national system — or local authority level — the planned, stated, prespecified learnings? Or is it the schools' realisation of these broadly stated learnings (often put in the form of generalisations about areas of experience) in its own plans and programmes, or is it the set of learnings held in common by all students as a result of their engagement with syllabuses, classroom materials and the activities of teachers?

If a theory of core curriculum is advanced, as in the Australian Curriculum Development Centre's **A Core Curriculum for Australian Schools**, which presupposes a central determining role for *schools*, there are several important consequences both for the theory of core curriculum and for the debate over control.⁸ First, in that document, core is essentially a proposal that schools in planning their curricula and organising their learning programmes, ensure that all students, over a prolonged period of schooling, should have access to defined areas and aspects of contemporary culture. If these are to be thought of as areas of experience, in the style of the HMI documents after Hirst, Phenix (and perhaps Cassirer), then it is experience as a socio-cultural category we are addressing.⁹ For example, although science exists and may be taught as 'a subject' with its own logical structure of concepts, its methods of inquiry and distinctive forms of validation, and its accumulated organised content of facts, theories, techniques and ideas, it also exists and may be taught as a set of cultural phenomena. Let us consider what that might mean.

First, we shall need to locate, define and describe science as a way of life, with a history, a set of social and economic relations, practical as well as theoretical problems to solve. Second, it means treating science as a human, social enterprise with a variety of relations with other human, social enterprises rather than as a self-contained intellectual system with its applications (e.g. in technology). That is, it constitutes a problem as well as a resource for other spheres e.g. physics and electricity generation through controversial nuclear power stations, or human genetics and the moral dilemmas of genetic engineering. Third, the cultural approach means seeing areas of experience as networks of subject-subject relations, not at subject-object relations. Simply put, the curriculum task is not to amass new subject matter or update the old, structure it and present it for

learning in the form of attractive materials. Our task, instead, is to concentrate on the expectations, meanings, aspirations, values and understandings of the learner, treating his or her engagement with subject matter as transactional — an engagement in which learning is not conceived as ingestion but as the construction and reconstruction of meanings and values. The material or subject matter of learning is, on this analysis and as Dewey long ago observed, a resource.¹⁰

Now what is the connection between all this and the debate over core curriculum? There has been a widespread assumption that advocates of core curriculum are, in various artful ways, trying to enforce the compulsory teaching of particular subjects in all the nation's schools. Unfortunately, some of the DES utterances would seem to support this interpretation. Even the Inspectorate's proposals for an 'areas of experience' approach gives the impression that we are still in the realm of the transmission of organised bodies of subject matter.¹¹ These interpretations are not at all surprising given the grip of academic and quasi-academic subjects on the school curriculum and the popularity of naive transmission and reproduction theories among both traditionally minded teachers and many contemporary sociologists of education.¹²

A necessary step, therefore, in clarifying our concept of core curriculum is to distinguish it, on the one hand, from a thinly disguised advocacy of central control over schools and, on the other, from a new version of the subject-centred curriculum. I hope to show, now, how these distinctions may be made.

The diagram illustrates one concept of core which assumes a central role for schools in curriculum making and acknowledges that subject *matter* is still a major resource in curriculum despite the criticism of the subject-dominated curriculum. Let us assume, first, that it makes sense in our educational system for the school itself to choose, plan, organise and teach its own curriculum. The school does seem to have the legally determined authority to do this, it is provided with resources, appropriate (if not always adequate) in the way of a trained professional staff, physical plant and equipment, materials, specialist advice and ancillary services, and it has the general expectation, frequently confirmed and reinforced, that this is indeed a proper responsibility. Let us assume, next, that while the school principal is the single most important locus of this authority, responsibility and power, his or her exercise of it is contingent on a complex series of negotiations and other relationships with the governing body, the parents, and the teaching staff and students. In other words, the school, for purposes of curriculum making, cannot be reduced to the principal or indeed even to the principal plus teaching staff.

Let us assume next that in making the curriculum and teaching it, the school will be variously influenced and constrained, not only by such specific items as — in secondary education — external examinations, the expectation of further and higher education, the educational achievements of feeder schools and so forth but also by an assortment of vaguely defined but nonetheless real social and cultural forces, such as beliefs and expectations about good order, about what is suitable — or more often not suitable — to teach and so forth.

Given these three assumptions, how do national

statements about the aims for and perspectives on core curriculum relate to the school? To put the question the other way round, would schools benefit in their own processes of curriculum review, evaluation and development from nationally formulated proposals regarding what all students, in all schools, should have available by way of a general curriculum framework?

Diagram: Core Curriculum and the School

(Core is constructed with 9 areas of experience, by schools. It is expressed as school-determined learning processes within these areas, and in terms of learning environments or situations.)

Level 1 Core Curriculum as a set of general aims and areas of experiences, nationally defined (broad guidelines):

- Arts and Crafts
- Moral and Values education
- Communication
- Scientific and technological studies
- Environmental studies
- Social and Cultural studies
- Health education
- Mathematical reasoning
- Work, Leisure and Life and applications
- Style.

Level 2 Interpreted and adapted by schools into specified processes of learning, for all students in each of the above areas.

Level 3 These learnings provided for in planned learning environments organised by and through schools.

Assessment: Single subject, external examinations at 16+, 17+, 18+, or Profiles, incorporating an element of external assessment and moderation?

Before answering this question, I should mention that in respect of a number of crucial variables (or what are believed to be crucial variables) in the educational process we quite readily accept national norms. Thus, in examinations, there has been a long-standing move towards greater consistency of requirement (as for example the work of the Schools Council's Forum on Comparability for 'A' Level Syllabuses). Now, there seems to be a very persuasive case for unifying the CSE and GCE 'O' level exams into a single system. Alternatively, critics of the examination system want a system of profiles but even where they are proposed at school or local authority level it is recognised that there is at least a problem of consistency of demand and presentation which, if not resolved, could spell defeat for the movement.¹³

In other areas, too, we don't hesitate to seek (even where we don't always achieve) national norms, most conspicuously in teacher/pupil ratios, standards of school lighting, heating, pupil space, playgrounds and basic equipment. Reactions to the annual reports by HMI on the state of educational provision have quite rightly centred on the inequalities and the real deprivation of educational opportunity consequent on the different rates of local authority spending for pupils in schools in England and Wales. Here, too, there seems to be a presumption of a desirable norm or a national minimum.

There is much to be said for giving schools greater freedom in the disposal and management of resources and the case has been frequently argued, usually by the more enterprising of our heads and the occasional Chief Officer. Yet we must not ignore the possible consequences of this freedom for all schools and all children. In some schools, greater freedom from

constraints for principals may mean less freedom for students in learning opportunities. In other words, the idea of a national norm, as Webb long ago pointed out, is in part to ensure a platform of provision and opportunity for all citizens or future citizens.¹⁴ The argument for freedom of choice for some cannot be addressed in isolation from its consequences for the freedom of opportunity for others.

To return to the core curriculum issue, we may see this move towards national statements on core as a series of steps or proposals. I shall state each of these in turn and comment briefly.

1. Core curriculum proposals are a response to public and political misgivings about the quality of schooling, in particular about standards of attainment in 'fundamentals'.

Comment: Much of the criticism is unsatisfactory yet it cannot be ignored by administrators. The criticism ought not, however, to be taken at face value, nor can we accept the popular definition of the fundamentals of learning since it is educationally weak and if acted upon would narrow and distort education. Educators need to take a yet more active part in school-community dialogue over 'what is basic and fundamental in the curriculum'.

2. Core curriculum can be usefully formulated by central policy makers in the form of broad guidelines about what subjects to teach, themes to emphasise, and ways of teaching.

Comment: This approach characterises not only **The School Curriculum** (and even more **A Framework for the School Curriculum**, the White Paper which preceded it) but also the steadily expanding, more subtle and more pervasive recent work of the Inspectorate.¹⁵ Widespread suspicion and hostility have been engendered and ought not to be left to fester. We have to re-open the core curriculum debate.

3. Following the publication of **Circular 6/81** and the earlier request by DES that LEA's should review and report on their curriculum policies, schools have been engaged in reviewing their curricula. These reviews do not require the formulation of core curriculum policies but schools are expected to work within the aims outlined for all schools in **The School Curriculum**.

Comment: **The School Curriculum** has an authoritative force but it's difficult to know whether serious notice is being taken of it by schools. **Circular 6/81** was a typical administrative follow through and is not the end of the affair. We may expect, in the years ahead, further moves from administrators and inspectorate to bring about greater coherence and consistency — if not a fully worked out core approach — in school curricula. There are weaknesses in the 'review and evaluate' strategy since review and evaluation even when honestly conducted can leave many problems and shortcomings untouched, that is discovered but not acted on; schools cannot be assumed to have either the capacity or commitment to move to the next step, which is development. This point is pertinent, too, to the emerging LEA review and evaluation documents.¹⁶

4. Further guidelines and circulars pointing up the value of a national core approach may be anticipated (if

the Department keeps up the momentum of the past five years).

Comment: On previous form, and in prevailing political and economic climates, these may be expected to generate further resistance or be treated with indifference by significant parts of the teaching profession. We need to work towards a better understanding of just how what have appeared to many commentators as irreconcilable — namely local initiative and responsibility and a national framework of aims and core learnings — may be interrelated in a single strategy.

In conclusion, the argument of this paper has been that there is value in a move towards a national core curriculum even though several difficulties and changes have been noted. The most serious problem, now, is that we have no forum, centre or institutional setting wherein the debate can be resumed and dialogue can occur. There are, by contrast, any number of separate sites each occupied by a distinct interest group. I have suggested elsewhere the need for a national forum, now that Schools Council (which did not, incidentally, ever manage to develop its own ideas about the whole, common or core curriculum) is to be replaced by bodies whose acceptability to important parts of the education profession has been jeopardised by the manner of their establishment.¹⁷

If we cannot be optimistic about the national forum idea, at least the education profession itself, through its numerous voluntary agencies and media of communication and debate, ought to take time over the next few years to address the still unanswered questions:

- Are there learnings which we can characterise as basic and fundamental for all students?
- Can we reach agreement about what they are?
- How do we best organise schooling to achieve them?

These questions, of course, even if consistently addressed, cannot be answered once and for all. Various attempts have been made in recent years but not even their proponents — of whom I have been one — would suggest that the attempts are any more than introductory sketches of philosophies, politics and programmes of core curriculum.

One of the greatest defects in the official versions of core curriculum has been the neglect of the dynamics of culture and, as a consequence of the processes as distinct from the templates of education. Perhaps it is this, rather than the fact of central government intervention that has constituted the sticking point for so many in education. If so, there is now a challenge to educators to locate core curriculum analysis in terms, not just of *areas* of experience, but of learning *processes* and the type of learning *environments* which may best sustain those processes.

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Comprehensive Schools: Threatened or Challenged?

Alan McMurray

Now Principal of Hind Leys College, Leicestershire, Alan McMurray has been teaching in comprehensive schools for nearly twenty years. He has been Deputy Head at Bicester School in Oxfordshire and, in 1971, opened, as Headmaster, Ernulf Community School in St Neots, Cambridshire, where he spent ten years. He looks here at the implications of the MSCs initiative in secondary education (TVEI) for comprehensive schools. He writes that the views expressed are entirely his own, and do not reflect those of the Leicestershire education authority.

The Manpower Services Commission's initiative for a technical and vocational curriculum in the fourteen to sixteen age range will have come as no great surprise — whatever we may think of the conspiratorial nature of its presentation — to those who have watched with growing concern over the last six years the moves by central government to gain control of the school curriculum. A series of conferences, papers and reports, following James Callaghan's initiation of the Great Debate, resulted in the publication of the **The School Curriculum** by the Department of Education and Science in March, 1981: in their foreword the Secretaries of State expressed their belief that the paper would have 'lasting importance for the quality of education in England and Wales',¹ a clear indication of the importance that educationalists should attach to the booklet's recommendations. We have since seen the demolition of the Schools Council, the publication of **17+: a new qualification**² — a highly prescriptive document if ever there was one — and, last autumn, Sir Keith Joseph's proposals for the re-organisation of teacher training, proposals which begged a number of fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of secondary education.

Now we appeal to have passed the stage of making proposals. David Young's initiative is, to all intents and purposes, a series of directives, accompanied by threats (which, in fairness, he has subsequently admitted to the House of Commons Select Committee on Education, were empty threats) and financial carrots involving sums of money of which Chief Education Officers can usually only dream. But what is of greatest concern is that these proposals emanate not from any recognised source of educational wisdom or authority but from an organisation whose prime area of concern has been seen until now as an adjunct to, rather than a constituent part of, the educational process. And just in case the point needs underlining, the scheme will be run by Mr John Woolhouse, whose expertise is in the field of industrial training.

The proposals are understandably attractive to schools, many of whom are hard pressed, not to say harassed, by parents, students and governors to provide the sort of education that will get Mary or Johnny a job, at a time when jobs are few and far between and competition for them is becoming fiercer by the day, and when students are becoming increasingly disillusioned with a curricular diet which in many cases was fed to their fathers and grandfathers before them. After all, educationalists have talked, conferred, written

and argued for years of the need for change in the curriculum, but nothing has happened: nothing, that is, until the arrival last November, significantly near to the beginning of Advent, of David Young, the messianic Action Man.

The strength and impact of the Technical and Vocational Initiative upon the education service should not be underestimated. Unlike other initiatives for curriculum change that have appeared over the last three decades, it came at one and the same time from both the centre and the top, if such a gymnastic feat is indeed possible. It came from the centre in that it appeared to represent no sectional interest other than an honest desire to try to give young people 'a better chance' in a world of rising unemployment — and who could object to that? It came from the top in that it came from MSC, a source apparently considerably closer to the centre of government than the DES; and indeed, so it was rumoured, the initiative had the personal support of the Prime Minister. Unlike any previous initiative, it was backed by a level of support in which money appeared almost to be no object. As a result, many educationalists found themselves faced with an offer which they could not refuse, nor indeed would they wish to do so. Here was a viable and acceptable alternative curriculum for that vast majority of young people for whom the grammar school derived curriculum had long since ceased to have any relevance: the word 'vocational' had overnight acquired a new respectability. As if that were not enough, here, too, was a virtual blank cheque to provide teachers, computers, workshops and much else besides. But at what price? There seemed not to be one.

Maurice Holt has underlined the fallacy of the argument that the only alternative curriculum that is appropriate and relevant to the needs of the majority of students in particular, and of society in general, is a technical and vocationally orientated curriculum.³ For MSC to imply that such a curriculum is the key to employment, in our present economic and political situation, is not only absurd but also morally indefensible. Let us make no mistake about it: any proposal for curriculum change which deals with anything less than the total student population — and these proposals are intended eventually for no more than a conjectural 60 per cent — is a divisive proposal. It becomes even more divisive when it is preceded by a tightening of resources that compels LEA's to seek the most economic means of achieving an objective: it seems quite probable that authorities will find it more

logical and more viable to concentrate the provision of a technical vocational curriculum in one school for a particular area, rather than spread that provision thinly and unevenly throughout a number of schools. By implication, other schools will have to be identified to concentrate on an 'academic' education for the top 15 per cent and a 'general' education for the bottom 25 per cent. At a stroke, the tripartite system will have been revived and since in many under-resourced authorities the temptation will be considerable to add the 'general' group to the 'technical/vocational' group, tripartism will be no more than a brief staging post on the return to bipartism. The price, in short, will be comprehensive education.

In the debate on the secondary school curriculum, one of the most significant of recent contributions has been that of David Hargreaves in **The Challenge for the Comprehensive School** where the irrelevance of the cognitive/intellectual curriculum for the majority of young people is analysed in telling style.⁴ There is now a general acceptance among people in education of the place in the curriculum, alongside the traditional skills of communication and numeracy, of an understanding of science, technology and other influences that have shaped and are shaping our society, and of an awareness of the visual and aural arts. To these we must now add an understanding of the building of individual and communal relationships, of the skills and qualities necessary to enjoy, let alone survive in, an increasingly complex society, and of the role of the latest technological developments in a multi-media age.

The MSC's Youth Training Scheme syllabus for the off-the-job element of the scheme repays further attention. The syllabus gives due weight to basic skills in literacy and numeracy, to skills in the use of computers and information technology, to learning skills, to skills of personal and social development, as well as other more overtly training skills. Both this and the curriculum of the CPVE are novel examples of compensatory education, only here the term refers to the inadequacies of the schools and not of the students. There is no reason why such a curriculum, rather than it should be compensatory, should not form a very significant core of the curriculum of a comprehensive school: to this could be added the important and necessary dimensions of the arts, of technology, of community issues and of the sciences that David Hargreaves so rightly advocates. The final element of this curriculum would be the pursuit of personal interests, whether securing an accredited qualification in typing, learning to paint in gouache or studying the development of the novel in the 19th century — the list is limited only by the resources available.

Many variations on such a curriculum are possible, and each will have its own advocate. But these could become little better than 'the mixture as before' unless we make some fundamental changes to the structure through which the curriculum is made available. Are there not lessons to be learnt, particularly in the context of the education of young people from 15 upwards, from adult and further education? Is it only the examination system and a fixed school-leaving age that prevents us from breaking the lock-step of the 'fourth year course', 'the fifth year course'? Why should not the student who needs real intellectual stimulus embark on a fourth-year course at 14+ leading him to 'A'-level

or its equivalent, thus allowing both him and his teacher time in which to explore all those significant areas which are squeezed out at present? Why should the student who suddenly becomes interested in photography not pursue this new-found enthusiasm for an entire week, to the exclusion of all those daily doses of English and Mathematics which we seem to regard as essential for his survival? Why do we insist that after studying 'Heat', students must immediately proceed to study 'Light' and then 'Sound', without a break in between in which to throw a pot or write a programme? A modular pattern of courses would have an immediate effect on the morale and motivation of students: they would acquire a greater sense of control over a curriculum in which they were able to negotiate large areas, and in which there was a greater sense of purpose and fulfilment, rather than merely filling the time available. From here it is a short and easy step to a pattern of continuing education, such as can now be found in many community schools, where the resources of the school are made available to everyone, whether they wish to study Human Biology at 17, take up photography at 37 or plan for retirement at 57.

As the fundamental pattern of our society changes, as the age at which young people mature appears to become earlier and earlier, it seems sensible to explore different structures for the provision of compulsory education. It is from the age of 14 onwards that individual differences and needs become more marked, and so far our schools have failed to meet these individual needs. Our aim has always been to try to raise the school leaving age. But why for everyone? Should we not explore the implications, both philosophical and organisational, of ending compulsory education, as we understand it at present, at the age of fourteen, to be followed by a negotiable arrangement whereby each young person completes a minimum of three accredited modules of study, experience or training before the age of eighteen? This would establish once and for all the concept of continuing education, of schools as a permanent educational resource for all members of the community at all stages in their lives.

The organisational problems of such a responsive and flexible pattern are considerable, although much important pioneering work has been undertaken in some of the newest community colleges in Leicestershire, with their provision for community teacher contracts. It has none of the simplistic solution of the TVEI, where young people will be sorted, trained and graded, like a well-known make of flour. But it is the pattern and purpose of the true community comprehensive school to make the total culture of our society accessible to everyone in a context that promotes social harmony and common purpose. The TVEI, with its selection both of students and of curriculum, with the divisive organisational patterns that will inevitably develop, is the antithesis of this concept of accessibility. 'I fear the Greeks, particularly when they come bearing gifts'. TVEI is their Trojan horse: it is a beautiful and attractive gift, which has already seduced and bemused many; but when we are least expecting it the supporters of grammar schools, selective education, privilege and elitism will come pouring from its belly and the citadel of comprehensive education will be lost.

(For references for this article, see page 14.)

Controversy, Social Education and the 'Core'

John Hull

Now head of Resources and the Humanities Faculty at Bransholme Senior High School in Hull, John Hull previously taught history at the David Lister School, Hull. He contributes here to the discussion on the 'Core' curriculum, based on experience at Bransholme.

The narrowness of 'core' provision in comprehensive schools is surprising. 'Core' subjects represent what schools consider, as a matter of policy, essential to all pupils. The vast majority of schools include only Mathematics, English, Physical Education and, less often, Religious Education and careers teaching within the 'core'. Most schools in statements of their aims place great stress on the social and personal development of their pupils. The implication is that such development lies beyond the normal scope of the curriculum and will be fostered largely by the pastoral system.¹

Recently both HMI and the Schools Council have stressed the potential contribution of the curriculum in developing attitudes and qualities in pupils.² The addition to the core of a course specifically designed to foster social and personal development is required.

This course should be built around controversial material. In this teaching strategy controversy provides the link between the cognitive and affective domains. Social and moral issues, decisions about right conduct as an adult or citizen are controversial. In considering controversial issues the pupil practises the skills of the cognitive domain to his mastery of which so many other subjects have contributed. Yet here these skills are practised in their most valid context as the pupil analyses issues which demand that he should respond, assess, exercise value-judgment. It is in exercising the responses of the affective domain that we most effectively contribute to personal and social development.³

Handling controversial material should also call forth a better sort of teaching. HMI have pointed out that there is far too much 'highly directly teaching'. Too often lessons consist of 'sustained exposition by the teacher' and 'extensive note-taking'.⁴ A course included within the core which is expressly designed to elicit pupil response and to which teachers from a variety of disciplines contribute brings immense benefit. Teachers come to measure their success not merely in terms of facts learnt but in terms of the variety and level of pupil involvement.

The subject specialist who contributes to this core course will also deepen his understanding of the role of his subject in contributing to personal and social development. The general claim made by many a subject specialist that this subject increases social awareness, promotes active citizenship etc., may be assessed more realistically. The historian, for example, will in the context of the core course be able to see

whether pupils studying his optional subject really are more aware of the issues of today's world.

The introduction of such a course immensely broadens the core curriculum. HMI have argued that the curriculum should involve contact with eight areas of experience.⁵ A core social studies course ensures contact with: the ethical, the social and political, the spiritual. Indeed the RE specialist becomes a valued member of the teaching team. As pupils encounter controversial issues he will find his entrée to present the religious dimension in his approach to an issue already established.⁶

For two years now a Humanities Core course has operated at Bransholme High School. Pupils in the first year of this 13+ senior high school have followed a common curriculum including Humanities taught as an integrated course. In the 14+ year they embark on the core humanities course having selected their optional subjects.

Around ninety pupils at a time are timetabled with four teachers for three periods per cycle. Frequently the four teachers and their groups join for plenary sessions. The course is divided into fourteen units each lasting between four and five cycles. (The school operates a six-day cycle for timetabling rather than a unit of a week.)

The first unit deals with marriage. A local minister officiates at a mock ceremony. Pupils play the roles of bride, groom, best man and bridesmaids. Teachers play the roles of bride and groom's parents. In succeeding lessons the rite of marriage, the purpose of marriage, different cultural views of the institution and the religious understanding of marriage are discussed.

The second unit is concerned with political education. This difficult topic is set against the even more difficult context of the nature of man. Pupils watch the film version of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. They then review the story line of the film and broach the difficult questions of human nature and man's need for government: Is man basically sinful? Do we require government to protect us from our own inherent wickedness and violence?

We next involve pupils in a game. Presented with lists of policies pupils are asked to allocate them to the major parties. The basic divisions of left, right and centre are allowed to emerge. Quite sophisticated concepts are grasped because the concepts are seen as helpful in solving the problems interestingly encountered in the quiz. Pupils and teacher together mark the quiz. The marking scheme penalises unclear thinking in allocating quite obviously opposite policies to the same party.

Pupils were warned of this at the outset. They groan when noting mistakes but enjoy the marking process. These ideas are consolidated by holding a mock election. Pupils are voters and teachers act as candidates. An RE contribution on the nature of man neatly takes its place.

The third and fourth units take the theme of war. The third unit explores the horrors of war. It is intended to dispel notions of glamour. The disturbing BBC drama-documentary 'Culloden' provides an effective introduction. Discussion on the nature, means and conduct of war leads to watching and discussing the film 'The War Game'. This film looks at the impact of nuclear war. The RE contribution to this unit is an assessment of Christian teaching about war.

The fourth unit moves the stress away from the mass implications of war and instead stresses the effect of war on individual participants. Pupils watch the film 'King and Country'. They see the effect of trench warfare on the mind of one soldier. We then use a booklet entitled 'Solitary Confinement in Lincolnshire 1917'. It was produced by the Schools Council Moral Education Curriculum Project. Vividly the pupils are required to consider the treatment of 'conshies' in the First World War. They are confronted by the question: 'What would you have done?'

We conclude the unit with a brief study of the Vietnam war reading the story of 'Sace' from the Schools Councils Humanities Project on War and Society. The story shows the dilemma and corrupting environment of a young conscript fighting in Vietnam. Newspaper articles are used to show that the effects (e.g. malformed children born in areas of Vietnam where chemical defoliants were sprayed) of the war are still very real. The RE contribution points to the vital role of conscience. At what point does the individual say, 'No, I cannot do that'?

In the fifth unit we build on the idea of war. We look at the danger of war today within the context of the Cold War. Stimulus is provided by watching the excellent cartoon version of 'Animal Farm'. Quickly an idea of Soviet history is perceived. With maps and time charts to be filled in pupils are introduced to the main events of the Cold War. A concluding debate is held. Teachers play the roles of Soviet and US spokesmen outlining their country's view of the Cold War. Each spokesman makes lavish use of world maps, analyses of weapon balances and cartoons which appear on an overhead projection screen.

The threads of the preceding two units are drawn together in unit six. In this unit we study the plight of 'prisoners of conscience'. The faithful film portrayal of Solzhenitsyn's **One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich** is shown. Material from Amnesty International's publications is used to show the extent of political repression around the globe and to inform discussion. An RE contribution spotlights the religious belief that law derives from a higher authority than man.

The seventh unit returns our attention to the great power conflict. This time we study the ideological rather than the strategic conflict. To make potentially daunting abstractions more real this unit is based upon descriptions of life for fifteen-year-old pupils in Soviet and US schools. In an interview from typical but imaginary contemporaries of our pupils, describe the uniform, curriculum and discipline of their national

schools. It is quite remarkable how many political subtleties and differences are revealed by the way the super-powers choose to educate their future citizens. Our pupils readily see these differences. Next a teacher who has visited the USSR shows slides and answers general questions about daily life in the country. A parallel contribution is made by a teacher who has visited the USA. Finally pupils attempt to list the differences in life in the two states. The RE teacher here introduces a discussion of the role of RE in the English school. He challenges pupils to decide whether they prefer the American exclusion of RE from the curriculum, the English inclusion of it, or the Soviet explicit rebuttal of the religious case.

The eighth unit returns our gaze to our own society. We consider social problems through the eyes of those who cope with them on our behalf. The police give a gripping talk on the problems they face. Such organisations as Help the Aged, the Samaritans and the NSPCC welcome the opportunity to be involved in schools.

The ninth and final unit of the fourth year course links a current social problem to the earlier study of recent world affairs. We study persecution and prejudice. In the first lesson pupils watch the film 'In the Heat of the Night'. The film sets them talking about the nature of racial prejudice. Pupils take part in a Prejudice Quiz. They answer questions about the facts of British population and recent immigration. The inverted marking scheme penalises those whose lack of knowledge is greatest. The point that prejudice thrives on lack of accurate knowledge is made. We use booklets entitled 'People Talking' produced by the centre for World Development Education (CWDE). The booklet is a collection of five interviews, well illustrated, with recent immigrants. The value of the booklet is that (in an area of very low recent immigration) pupils are forced to view immigrants sympathetically as individuals and not to see them as a de-personalised mass. Finally we watch excerpts from an ITA video on the SS. Pupils see that prejudice may be manipulated into hideous persecution.

The tenth unit focuses pupils' attention on world development. The idea of economic disparity is introduced by playing the 'Trade Game' produced by Christian Aid. Teams simulate rich and poor nations. The rich grow richer and the poor poorer. Next pupils see and discuss a filmstrip called 'Our Cup of Tea'. It shows the unequal economic relationship between rich and poor states. They see a second filmstrip produced by CWDE and hear a tape prepared to go with it on the Brandt Report. In these last lessons the aim is to build on the experience of the game as a stimulus to discussion. Finally pupils play the CWDE 'Grain Drain' game and realise the difficulties of building on an economic base which lacks industry. The RE contribution here is concerned with the Christian call to help others illustrated with reference to relief agencies.

The eleventh unit makes useful links between the unit on world development in which pupils noted the religious traditions of India and Sri Lanka (the tea producers) and the preceding unit on prejudice and race which touched on the religious faiths of recent immigrant communities. This unit deals with some of the major world religions. Pupils are encouraged to see the universality of man's pursuit of meaning to life.

The twelfth unit is concerned with science and society. A science specialist on the team of teachers prepares a series of lessons which show how scientific progress may raise ethical questions. The scientist must refer to a framework of values. The precise examples change to maintain contemporary relevance.

The thirteenth unit really is a consummation of the issues and ideas already raised in this course. The pupils have been bombarded with topics which call forth response. They have been asked to formulate and refer to some framework of values.

In this unit entitled 'Life Stances' teachers take the real risk of explaining openly their own essential beliefs. This strategy was originally suggested in the booklet 'Humanities for the Young School Leaver: An Approach through Religious Education'. Pupils are allowed to see that real and serious differences exist among their teachers as to the meaning of life and man's code of conduct.

To begin pupils work in groups on the idea of belief. They discuss a questionnaire designed to discover how their own beliefs have changed. In a very elementary exercise in epistemology they are asked to characterise types of knowledge and belief. Next they consider lists of historical changes and are asked to distinguish 'good' from 'bad' change. Their criteria for this exercise are uncovered. They are asked to discuss moral judgment and whether History has a purpose. Now pupils are confronted with a variety of discussion situations which raise moral questions and are asked to consider whether there are immutable laws of behaviour. Finally a team of teachers forms a panel. Each teacher outlines his/her own life code. Pupils are encouraged to press questions.

The fourteenth unit is entitled 'Life after Death'. It logically follows a discussion about life's ultimate meaning. Pupils earlier in the course have studied the sacraments of baptism and marriage. Their course is now completed by a consideration of the meaning of the funeral service. The services of other religions and those suitable for an agnostic are discussed. A local clergyman attends the lesson. He answers questions about the service and talks about death itself. He describes the needs of a person near death as he has come to know them in his experience. He talks of comforting the bereaved.

This core course has evolved to meet the specific needs of pupils in Bransholme High School. Its constituent units have been planned to exploit links with optional subjects and to ensure a complete core education for all pupils. Undoubtedly this new course will alter and develop. The need which it is designed to meet is, however, common to all schools.

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Computers in Primary Schools

Alan McKechan

Now Deputy Head of Hillbourne Middle School in Dorset, Alan McKechan has spent all his teaching career in primary and middle schools. Over the last three years he has taken a special interest in developing computers across the curriculum of a 9 to 13 middle school.

'Too little, too soon' is one criticism of what is currently on offer under the Department of Industry's pound-for-pound scheme to place a microcomputer in every primary school. The suggestion¹ is that it would be better to wait for cheaper and more powerful computers supported by a greater variety of programs (software).

Certainly the initial software to be given to primary schools is limited in quantity; schools wishing to purchase commercial programs will have to find money from funds generally used for books and equipment. Three or four quality programmes might leave little change from £100, and in these times of restricted finance a great deal will depend on the ability of the Local Education Authority to help. Already differences in ability are becoming apparent. Some authorities have purchased the copyright for programs so that they can be freely distributed to their schools and others may even assist by buying further hardware such as disc drives.

Quality is a more important criterion than quantity for judging software; a few flexible programs that can be used at different levels or in an open ended way may convince schools that, even with the present disparities and difficulties, something educationally worthwhile is available with this technology. What rationale might guide schools wishing to be involved?

By accumulating experience it may be possible for teachers to exert more influence on how the microcomputer is used in education. The majority of teachers will have as much time to write software as they have at present to write their own text books but it will be important for them to take part in the design of programs and to make suggestions of areas where the micro might help with difficult processes or concepts.

Schools that see one of their main goals as helping their children to cope with change may be attracted to the computer as another way to break down the barriers between the school as an institution and the world

outside. The child may also welcome the fact that school is attempting to give him more access to the real world.

A recent survey, reported in **Computing** (24.3.83), claims that there are around half a million computers in homes in this country and that by 1984, 10 per cent of UK households could own one. A school may start working with microcomputers in order to offer equal opportunities to the children without home computers. Already there are advertisements for residential 'computer camps' in national newspapers under the heading 'Give your child an unfair advantage'.

One advantage of the initial scarcity of computer hardware is that it may encourage teachers to look for programs that can be used with groups of children and that will generate activity away from the screen and keyboard. In this brief and selective assessment of how the microcomputer may enhance the curriculum I shall concentrate on this type of software rather than the single-user variety.

One type of program where pupils work co-operatively discussing and solving problems is the simulation.² It may also create work with other resources. The micro enables the simulation to present a realistic level of complexity for the children to handle. Current examples range from the decisions needed to run a candy floss stall with English weather variations to those required to locate and excavate the Tudor warship the Mary Rose.

Another kind of program which shows potential in the Language/Humanities field is one that allows storage and retrieval of information (a database). With British Telecom's viewdata system called Prestel on trial in a number of public libraries, schools that emphasise the skills of learning will need to add to their pupils' study skills the efficient use of databases. Apart from social reasons for teaching all children to use these new resources, they are helpful in adding to the quality of children's thinking, particularly in giving experience of framing questions.

I have used the database type program with primary historical material such as 19th century census returns. The main difficulty of using this resource with young children is that analysis of the handwritten information can be so tedious that they are likely to lose interest in their question before finding some answers. With this information stored on a computer file not only is there an improvement in legibility but questions such as 'How many people were not born in the locality?' can be answered quickly. This immediate feedback often generates further research: for example, asking the same question of the present day school population. By integrating such a program with other resources such as reference books, old maps and photographs of the area and first hand information from field trips it is possible for even a seemingly unpromising area to yield a great deal of local history and contribute to children's awareness of the past.

Fortunately, one of the programs that will be given to primary schools is a database type called Factfile.³ This will enable even young children to create and use stores of information in virtually any curriculum area. Teachers may find this very helpful for children working on personal topics where, in spite of all the discouragement, some children still produce work that is largely copied or paraphrased from textbooks. With a computer file information cannot be copied directly; the

data must be selected and entered under chosen headings so that higher order reading skills are more likely to be used. The files of information created by children and teachers can be permanently stored on cassettes or discs and added to the school resource centre.

Another program on offer to primary schools that can store information is called ANIMAL. With this the microcomputer takes the role of a pupil and the children try to teach it questions to enable it to differentiate between various animals. The questions and animals are stored by the computer for use in the next round of guesses. The computer 'learns' from the children who, through discussion and use of reference books, refine their questions and learn to classify.* A more versatile version of this program, called SEEK, allows any chosen objects to be sorted and draws a tree diagram on the screen showing how the objects have been classified by the questions. One application is in science where children can devise their own identification trees.

Almost all the programs above would probably justify their use in the primary school curriculum in terms of language development alone. The microcomputer may also have an interesting role to play in mathematics teaching, particularly after the Cockcroft report which highlighted as missing from many lessons such vital elements of learning as discussion, problem-solving and investigational work. Some software could help to make these activities a more regular part of classroom activity. LOGO is one example but it is more than just a mathematics program; it is a programming language and therefore raises the question of the place of computer programming in the primary or middle school curriculum.

Most microcomputers are programmed in a language called BASIC which although in some respects appears easy to learn does not allow *all* children to do interesting things with simple programs. LOGO, however, does enable even very young children to control and explore the power of the computer.

Recent reviews⁵ in the **Times Educational Supplement** have focused on what is proper LOGO and certainly Papert,⁶ who developed LOGO, sees it as more than open-minded geometry or learning to program. One of the logo movement's slogans is that it is a language for learning, that is for learning to think.⁷

Apart from the child's own body movement, one of the objects to think with is a 'turtle' which is a precision controlled floor robot or a triangular pointer on a screen. Either turtle can trace its path in response to simple commands like FORWARD 50 (move fifty turtle units in the direction it's facing) and RIGHT 90 (rotate clockwise ninety degrees). The response can be immediate or can be used to teach the computer a new word or command. For example by repeating the commands above four times the computer can be taught to draw a square. The computer now understands the command SQUARE or whatever else the child wishes to call his procedure. In this way the pupil effectively

*I am developing a version called SORT, where the objects to be sorted may be chosen. For a copy (BBC micro) send a blank cassette and s.a.e. to Hillbourne Middle School, Kitchener Crescent, POOLE, Dorset.

creates his own computer language extending its vocabulary as necessary.

It is possible to see how a rich mathematical environment can be created to allow children to explore and communicate geometry and in addition, because complex constructions can be built up from simpler procedures, for the child to learn a valuable problem solving process. Also, errors within a LOGO program are seen as a profitable part of that process, so the child adopts a positive attitude towards mistakes.

Languages like LOGO and PROLOG⁸, which stress the development of thinking, show considerable potential for use in primary schools. An aspect deserving the attention of teachers, is whether the logical skills used in working with them transfer to activities away from the computer created environment.

Papert's work with LOGO was the subject of a recent Horizon documentary, 'Let's Talk Turtle' (BBC, 14 February 1983). An earlier Horizon programme, 'Now the Chips are Down', has a reputation for increasing government spending on microelectronics almost overnight. It will be interesting to see what impact 'Talking Turtle' has on educators and how far they might move towards Papert's vision of a truly child-centred curriculum. Undoubtedly LOGO and other software will be used initially in a structured way but is it still possible that they may be agents for some curriculum change?

The programs mentioned above are largely suitable for group work and could help teachers to initiate this mode of teaching. The micro is able to focus the group's attention on the task and sustain interest whilst allowing the teacher to work with the rest of the class. Also the emphasis on thinking processes should aid schools wishing to move away from a content determined curriculum. Such changes will undoubtedly cause problems. Teachers may resist using the computer as a teaching aid because their pupils, or some of them, will know a great deal more about the hardware than they do. Some children are so attracted to these machines that they endlessly seek to explore them and may tend to dominate the computer's use in curricular or extra-curricular activities thereby creating a computer elite. In my experience, computer club members are mostly boys which may help to perpetuate a sex-bias in the use of computers. If, as governments tell us, information technology is a key to economic recovery then there is a danger of only preparing some children to take full advantage of it.

Even if the staff are able to make any necessary role changes there is a risk of computer use further decreasing the amount of first hand work done in some classrooms. For example, a mathematics program may show operations with Dienes blocks on the screen as an aid to understanding but this may tend to preclude vital practical work with this apparatus. Teachers should be aware that the micro could diminish the amount of enactive learning in schools.⁹

If the computer is to be really integrated into classroom activity there is the problem of moving what may be a separate monitor and cassette player with a host of trailing leads around the school. Schools without too many steps or distant mobiles will probably manage with a trolley.

For the full potential of this technology to be realised then the impact of even a single computer must be seen

as an opportunity for curriculum development and not just a superficial change similar to adding overhead projectors to the classroom. All staff involved will need time to prepare, explore and reflect both on the technology itself and the ideas it contains.

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Kenneth Coram

Kenneth Coram, who died earlier this year, was one of a group of innovative head teachers who lead the movement towards non-streaming in the primary school in the 1960s. Head of Bandle Hill Junior Mixed school at Stevenage, Ken joined the Editorial Board of **Forum** in 1968, remaining a member until he retired in 1976. Together with George Freeland (one of **Forum's** founders) and Eric Linfield, Ken was one of a team of very experienced teachers with a wide knowledge both of primary and secondary education.

Ken took a very active part in Editorial Board discussions and in the conferences **Forum** organised, particularly around issues relating to differentiation and the content of education. His article 'A New Town Goes Comprehensive' (Summer, 1971), concerned with Stevenage, gives a vivid picture of this transition at a key moment of change.

Our sympathy goes to Mrs Coram, who writes to say how much it meant to Ken to serve for a few years on the Editorial Board, and the stimulus it gave to his thinking. 'He was keenly interested in all that went on in education and the progressive ideas set up by **Forum**'. At the Funeral Service Mr J. Attfield, retired head of Barnwell comprehensive school, Stevenage, spoke of his pioneer work at Bandle Hill Junior Mixed school and his serving on the Editorial Board of **Forum**. Later at the Memorial Service at the Friends Meeting House various tributes were paid to his work in education and the town.

Ken Coram was always full of life and energy. Cheerful, stimulating and above all consistently humanist and forward looking in his ideas and actions, he was one of the architects of the transformed educational scene of the 60s and early 70s. It must now be our objective to maintain and develop the indisputable gains made in these years by teachers such as Ken Coram against all the contrary pressures, however seemingly powerful these may appear to be.

B.S.

Teacher Education for Co-operative Curriculum Review

Patricia Ashton

This article is the joint work of Pat Ashton, who was Senior Research Fellow to the IT-INSET project at the Open University, and of John Merritt, Euan Henderson and Derek Mortimer who were the Project Directors. This project (Initial Training and In-Service Education and Training of Teachers) was funded by the DES. Patricia Ashton now directs the new Centre for Evaluation and Development in Teacher Education at the School of Education, University of Leicester.

Shifting teacher education out of the lecture hall and into the classroom has obvious appeal. Above all, initial training students want to feel confident and to gain experience on the job. Most INSET, at least of the non award-bearing variety, is probably undertaken because teachers want to teach more effectively. Where else can practical competence be achieved but in the classroom? So the movement towards giving students and teachers the opportunity to *do* is gaining ground. School-based work in which classroom practice is both process and product figures increasingly prominently in initial training courses and INSET provision.

But simply doing, simply engaging in classroom practice, though the *raison d'être* of teacher education, is not enough. If reading, studying, thinking and discussion make up the cart which previously came before the horse of classroom practice, they must now come after it. In much school-based consultancy type INSET, the input to classroom practice is that of acquainting the teacher with new ideas, methods and materials in a particular curriculum area. Initial training courses use school-based work variously for practice and analysis of specific teaching techniques, for studying learning in a particular part of the curriculum or again, for exploring the use of specific teaching materials. All of these inputs, however, should and often do engage student or teacher in analysis, further study and discussion of his classroom practice in the light of the new material.

The new programme, known as IT-INSET, is school-based. It takes classroom practice as central to development as a teacher. Thought and study are built in as part of a cycle completed by classroom application. The concentration is on the improvement of specific skills. In addition, IT-INSET is school-focused, taking pressing daily concerns identified by teachers as its subject matter. It also fuses initial with in-service training.

The DES funded a project based at the Open University from 1978 to 1981 to promote and evaluate experiments with IT-INSET. Twenty colleges and polytechnics opted to take part. They arranged for a number of their tutors, each with a group of up to about six students, to work together with volunteer teachers in their classrooms. The teachers each chose an area of concern, such as the quality of children's work in a particular area of the curriculum, the felt need to introduce new teaching techniques, the wish to introduce a new area of work or a problem of organisation, and the teacher-tutor-students team

worked on it together. They taught the children co-operatively and then, crucially, got together to compare observations, to analyse, to make judgements and reach decisions and to plan for the following week. The programmes varied in length but typically lasted for half a day a week for two terms. About half of these colleges and polytechnics are now expanding their IT-INSET programmes and new ones are beginning.

The overall goal of IT-INSET is to enhance skills for co-operatively evaluating the quality of pupils' curriculum experience and for making appropriate modifications. The quality of a child's education in his particular class or a particular subject cannot be improved without a stringent weighing of the strengths and weaknesses of the present curriculum; without that, curriculum development reflects change but not necessarily improvement. The quality of a child's educational progress through a school cannot be improved without all of the teachers working with each successive age-range (in Primary schools) or within each subject (in Secondary schools) looking co-operatively at the sum total of their efforts. If students are to acquire the skills for co-operative curriculum review then there could be nowhere better than alongside teachers engaged in the same quest. The teachers are working for the specific benefit of their own pupils and can convey to the students the urgency of that demand together with something of their accumulated expertise. The students can aid the task and bring to it the thinking, ideas and materials they are in daily contact with at college. The tutor can add his area of expertise and experience and, in addition, can revitalise his college based teaching with current involvement in the work of children.

The IT-INSET programme is designed therefore, to bring practising teachers, students in training and tutors together to work jointly on improving their skill in evaluating and developing the curriculum. The curriculum is taken to encompass all of the experience of children in classrooms. The maths curriculum for instance, is seen to include the learning of appropriate concepts and skills, but also inter-personal relationships among children and teachers, the engagement of children in their mathematical activities, the interest, clarity and effectiveness of books, materials and teaching methods and so on. All of these make up the experience of learning maths and contribute to children's understanding of maths and to their attitudes towards it. If the maths curriculum is to be developed, then all that makes up children's actual experience of it

must be examined. This demand points to the first area of evaluation skills with which the IT-INSET programme is concerned. Skill must first be developed in *analysing classroom practice*. Perception must reach beyond the normal scanning of the classroom for signs of difficulty or misbehaviour to seeing as much as possible of the quality of children's experience. The classroom team can help each of its members get better at this; each can take a turn at uninterrupted observing, all can share observations and alert one another to events that any one individual has overlooked. The data about the classroom must then be analysed; by means of sorting, categorising and looking for relationships between events, sense must be made of the complex sum of activity.

As a major contribution towards evaluating the IT-INSET programme, teachers, tutors and students wrote descriptions of the classroom activity in which they had been involved during the Project. Their reports were analysed for indications of the levels of skill they had developed in the areas with which the Project was particularly concerned. More than 90 per cent had built classroom observation into their work but over a third had only collected observations. Almost half had begun to sort and categorise what they saw but no more than one in seven were beginning to construct theories to account for their classroom evidence. Most claimed to see considerable value in exploring children's classroom experience more deeply; continuing IT-INSET programmes need to pay greater attention to ways of increasing participants' skills in this area.

It will be evident that it is fundamental to the philosophy of IT-INSET that evaluation of the curriculum must begin with teachers observing their own classroom practice, analysing and developing their own understanding of it. Such personally developed understanding however, can be enriched by critical appraisal of 'external' theory, combing it for further ideas and information, testing its contribution to understanding what happens in the classroom and considering further questions which it may raise. *Applying theory* is the second area of skill which IT-INSET programmes seek to develop. This area, however, was almost conspicuous by its absence in the course of the Project. More than two-thirds of the teachers, tutors and students made no reference to external theory in describing their work in the classroom. A quarter of them named a writer whose work they had considered but only a handful had reviewed their own understanding in the light of other theoreticians and researchers. Many participants complained that their work had been bedevilled by a shortage of time for consideration and perhaps they merely demonstrated their view of priorities when they used the time they had to discuss their own classroom activity. Nevertheless, work on the curriculum will be the weaker if it does not take account of accumulated thought and research and IT-INSET programmes must continue to address this issue.

If the curriculum is to be developed profitably, fuller awareness of the experience it currently offers must be accompanied by judgements of the value of the learning it affords. The skills for *evaluating the curriculum*, of making judgements, justifying decisions and weighing competing priorities constitute the third area of expertise with which the IT-INSET programme is

concerned. In describing their work on the curriculum, about four in ten teachers, tutors and students commented on the value of the learning for pupils and a further four in ten offered their grounds for those judgements. Even though only one in ten seemed to have developed a set of criteria to apply to the curriculum in general, considering the value of children's learning seemed to be a fairly well established practice.

Evaluating the curriculum must be a precursor to *developing the curriculum* to the benefit of children, the fourth area of skill which IT-INSET programmes seek to improve. The kind of developments which actually confer benefits surely must follow from the identification of weaknesses and omissions in the existing curriculum. There needs to be a cycle of purposeful evaluation followed by specific and appropriate development followed by re-evaluation. A mere 5 per cent of IT-INSET teams demonstrated this continuing cycle in reporting on the work. Twenty per cent however, did indicate the changes they made followed on their evaluation. A further third gave some reason for the changes they made to the curriculum. The remaining third either made no changes or gave no reasons for those that they made. If teachers, tutors and students are to become more skilled evaluators and developers of the curriculum then they must be given the time that it takes to learn to work together and to have the essential penetrating and comprehensive discussion. None had all the time they wanted and most had far less.

The purpose of bringing together teams of teacher, tutor and students to undertake evaluation and development of the curriculum is for each member to learn with and from the others. The team approach also provides practice in the professional co-operation which must take place if schools are to reconsider their curriculum on a wider basis than the single class or subject. *Team work* constitutes the fifth area of skill with which the IT-INSET Programme is concerned. About three-quarters of the participants did work co-operatively though less than a third managed to operate fully as a team, using their varied strengths to serve best their joint purposes. Nevertheless, the level of co-operation of initial training students, experienced teachers and college tutors in working with children which was achieved is surely a significant development. It seemed to be one which appealed to those involved more than almost any other feature of the IT-INSET programme.

Progress was made, albeit rather unevenly, in all of the five skill areas of analysing practice, applying theory, evaluating and developing the curriculum and teamwork. The sixth area remains almost virgin territory. This is the one of *involving other teachers* in the school. IT-INSET is intended to provide teachers with experience of co-operative curriculum review and also to generate that process in their schools. This did not happen in almost two-thirds of cases. Reasons are not hard to find but the major expenditure of time and effort in individual classroom IT-INSET programmes is failing to reach its INSET potential while colleagues remain relatively unaffected.

If school-based IT and INSET is to prove effective in

(Continued on page 25)

Raymond King: a personal appreciation

Roy Waters

Raymond King was a member of the FORUM Editorial Board from the journal's inception in 1958. He was Chairman from 1964 until his death at the age of 85 in March this year, as announced in our last Number. He remained alert and vigorous until the end, attending all meetings (three a year), participating actively in the vigorous discussions which are the norm at these meetings. Always a loyal member, he appreciated the work of the journal and contributed greatly to it in many ways — including several articles.

Described at the lasting meeting by one of the Board members as 'a hero of the comprehensive movement', Raymond was closely involved in the reconstruction of education on democratic lines in the late 1930s and especially in the early 1940s as one of a group of far-sighted grammar school heads. In a series of pamphlets and lectures he popularised the idea of comprehensive education and gave body to the conception when little thinking on these lines had yet been done. Appointed head of Wandsworth grammar school in 1954 he began its transformation into one of the leading comprehensive schools in London (or indeed anywhere) shortly after.

Roy Waters, a colleague of Raymond's at Wandsworth and member of the Editorial Board, contributes here a personal appreciation of Raymond as head of this pioneering school.

Since I was asked to write about Raymond King I have made several abortive attempts to do so, and I find that the best I can do is to try to present a brief series of personal snapshots. They are entirely inadequate either to honour him or to express my own feelings of admiration and regret, but I offer them as a most sincere personal tribute.

It was in April 1954 that he interviewed me at Wandsworth Grammar school for my first teaching post. He was immediately imposing. Already somewhat gaunt and austere, with a strong Yorkshire baritone voice, intelligence and integrity radiated from him, warmth showing when the corners of his mouth rose high into his cheeks as he barked with laughter. I had been interviewed earlier in the day by another head who had testily insisted on being given his title of Dr., and I had delayed accepting his offer of a post until after the Wandsworth interview. Before it was over, as Raymond's liberal vision of education became apparent through the line of his questioning, I began desperately to want this post more than any other. I started in September.

It was a bustling time. The school was to go comprehensive in twelve months and the playing fields had already been ploughed up to take the new buildings. The staff, most of whom had been there since before the war, were deeply saddened by the loss of the fields and the passing of the grammar school era and yet, as a newcomer (together, incidentally, with Russell Burgess who, under Raymond's benign encouragement, created from a sound but modest base what was, in its time, the country's finest school choir), I can remember no one who was bitter or cynical. Perhaps such few as there were had left earlier. Moreover Raymond had inspired not only the grammar school staff but also the Tory-led governors to join him in fighting for the new ideal. Among neighbouring heads he was for a while disobligingly known as the Robber King, so fiercely did he fight for the best for the school which was destined to represent the finest comprehensive practice as envisaged by the philosophy of the 50s. Department professors

and College principals were successfully wooed and a stream of inspired new recruits subsequently joined the staff: the nation's educational system is now permeated with his protégés. I remember the staff room frequently half full of young teachers excitedly talking shop at six in the evening when the school keeper (an appointment as happy as that of most of the teaching staff) came round to chivvy us out.

Raymond checked up on us. I can see him now, hovering outside a classroom where a class was shouting with laughter at the inspired miming of one of their number, making sure that profitable learning was in progress. But once satisfied he gave us a free hand and total support. There was a school production of *Caucasian Chalk Circle* in 1959, when the Lord Chamberlain's writ still ran. The fascist Ironshirts improvised dialogue as they stalked Azdak, surrounded him, and beat him up. Azdak was brilliantly, by an Indian sixth former. The leading Ironshirt was told at rehearsal to use the most brutal language he could think of, and his response was: 'Get down on your knees, you dirty nigger!' a frisson went through us all, but it was perfect in the context. But on the first night, in front of an audience, the Ironshirt could not bring himself to say anything so offensive. He chose a softer word. 'Get down on your knees, you dirty bugger!' The audience gasped at a word never before used on the public stage. But throughout the subsequent storm Raymond defended us to the hilt. I was already his devoted servant, but that bound me to him for life.

He attended every performance of plays and concerts, Mary, his wife, serving elegant interval canapés and drinks to distinguished guests, including the occasional critic from the National dailies. While carrying off the role of eminent headmaster's wife with dignified charm, she could relax into informality as readily as Raymond himself. Many of their friends will remember the two of them, sitting demurely side by side in the middle of the vast Wandsworth hall, crowded for his farewell party, reciting *There's a hole in my bucket* with mock-heroic relish. There was to the end a sense of boyish humour

lurking beneath his natural gravitas, occasionally rising delightfully to the surface.

He had his idiosyncracies, but these grew from his virtues. He was unfailingly courteous, and I have seen him, when perusing a timetable displayed in a corridor, quietly step back as a first-former in a hurry interposed himself between the timetable and his headmaster. On another occasion, as he made his way into assembly, a small boy thrust a vest into his hand, hissing: 'Lost property'. After the ritual, Raymond came to the announcements. 'I have been given a piece of lost property', he said. 'It appears to bear the name-tape of S. Michael.' The entire assembly (a school which, at the height of the first post-war bulge, accepted 15 form entry) held its breath. Would anyone dare to laugh at this inadvertant reference to the high street haberdashers? The entire assembly breathed again when it realised that decorum had prevailed.

Remedial departments are going out of fashion in the post-Warnock era. In the 50s, where they existed at all, they tended to be very much poor cousins in the departmental hierarchy. In his initial planning, before the school opened, Raymond created a structure of what he called 'normative' help (again staffed by a brilliantly-led team of specialists) which actually worked — one group of pupils barely able to read or write at eleven were recording their poems for the Third Programme by the time they were fourteen. I remember Raymond recounting to me with great good humour how, one morning, the school had been combed for a pupil missing from one of the normative groups who was eventually found to have been in his own classroom all the time, squatting inside a Punch and Judy booth which stood in one corner, offering for explanation that he had felt like being on his own for a while. It became standard practice for pupils in the class who felt that things were getting on top of them to withdraw to the company of Punch and Judy, but it was not the story so much as Raymond's excited interest and pleasure in this

insight into how his new pupils functioned and how they might be helped that remains vividly in my memory. He had a lively appetite for new ideas.

When I first met him, Raymond had been a headmaster for 29 years — since before I was born. Yet I never once, when eager young teachers made ingenuous suggestions, heard him say (as he must often have thought): 'Oh yes, we've tried all that before: it doesn't work'. Instead he encouraged, guided, led the youngsters through into deeper perceptions. He remained a true teacher throughout his career. He was also a master at producing unexpected and totally innovative solutions to problems. He had both erudition and experience and his imagination was constantly using these to fuel quantum jumps into innovative schemes.

I wish I had known him before the war. Colleagues who were with him then speak glowingly of his youth hostelling expeditions with pupils and staff in Germany. He was a committed internationalist throughout his life, attending European conferences into his eighties. Though I missed the inter-war years, I was privileged, through membership of the Forum editorial board, to continue to meet him regularly throughout his retirement. His only concession to age was deafness in one ear, so that one became accustomed to a characteristically inclined head and cupped hand. More gaunt than ever, his voice retained its full resonance and his smile its warmth. Prompted by his editors, he nonetheless chaired the meetings with magisterial assurance and his frequent interjections displayed how firmly he remained in the van of current educational thought.

I am not alone in believing Raymond King to have possessed greater intellectual and moral stature than anyone else I have known, nor will I be alone in remembering his encouragement and deep kindness. I heard of his death with sorrow, but I rejoice in having known him.

(Continued from page 23)

the professional development of teachers, there must be a systematic and informed acquisition of skills. So far IT-INSET programmes have shown that this can happen though not sufficiently consistently. There has been very strong support for continuing to develop the programme by the participants and by most of the advisers, senior college people and headteachers involved with them. The DES has lent their support in the shape of a further three years' funding, 1981-1984, to continue work on the programme under the aegis of the newly established Centre for Evaluation and Development in Teacher Education in the University of Leicester, School of Education.

Note

The full report of the IT-INSET Project and its evaluation is published as follows:

P.M.E. ASHTON, E.S. HENDERSON, J.E. MERRITT & D.J. MORTIMER. *Teacher Education in the Classroom — initial and in-service* Croom Helm (1982).

Raymond King Memorial Lecture

The English New Education Fellowship, of which Raymond King was for many years the Honorary Secretary, has arranged a memorial meeting and lecture to celebrate Raymond's outstanding contribution to education throughout his long life.

This will take place on:
Thursday, 3 November at 6.30 pm
at the
Waterloo Room, Royal Festival Hall, London.

The title of the lecture is:
**Secondary Education for All in the 1980s: the
Challenge to the Comprehensive School.**

To be delivered by:
Brian Simon
(Co-editor, *Forum*)

Reviews

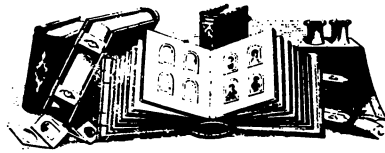
The Curriculum Industry

Practical Curriculum Study by Douglas Barnes. Routledge Education Books (1982), £9.75 paperback.

The time was when a Head, if asked what the school curriculum was, would have pointed to the timetable on the wall. If the question was pressed a little harder, say by H.M. Inspectorate, the Head, given notice, would have produced a compilation of the Departmental syllabuses, a collection that would have seldom been more than the sum of its parts, a bag stuffed with as many and diversely-coloured rags as possible. Times have altered; and the curriculum has become an object of interest and study almost to the point of neurosis. Philosophers, Paul Hirst out first, have set up criteria for the coherence and comprehensiveness of a curriculum, while other critics, much more cut-throat, have judged what is taught in schools from the competitive world of employment, mostly giving it the thumbs down. Curriculum studies have become a growth industry: there are professors of curriculum and piles of publications that few schoolteachers or Heads have time to read, if they ever get to see them. Maybe it is all very necessary.

My first fear was that in *Practical Curriculum Study*, Douglas Barnes, hitherto a teachers' thinker, with his feet firmly on the ground, might have been caught up in the curriculum machine and left his old devotees behind. After all, are teachers, even Heads of Departments, really going to take into account all that paraphernalia of planning objectives, branching schemes, critical analysis and so on, when preparing a course of work? Well, perhaps they should. Certainly, if there is a case for more thoughtful designing of curriculum components, Barnes makes it here. And I was soon reassured that Barnes had not forgotten what it feels like to be a teacher or a school student in the classroom.

The evidence of Barnes' old touch being there is nowhere clearer than in the ample use of case-study material from schools and colleges, not simulated, but actual. This material is provided as subject matter for tasks that are set at each stage of the book. The book, states Barnes, 'is intended for use in colleges of education, teachers' centres and workshops for experienced teachers.' It is a weighty book, but Barnes claims it 'is designed to institute a debate amongst its readers and not reduce them to silence' (p.309). There is danger of it reducing to silence some of those who might gain most from it if the book is simply thrown at their



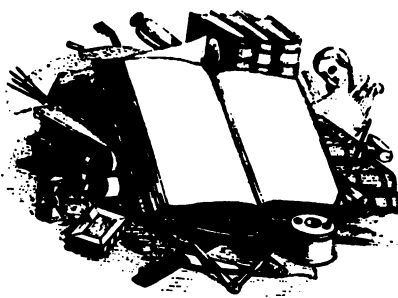
heads. It needs the mediation of a good tutor and calls out for a group approach to much of the problem-solving in its set tasks.

My own inclination would be to use the first chapter, on Course Planning, with Heads of Departments and draw senior staff into the second and third chapters on, respectively, Curriculum Content and Curriculum Analysis and Evaluation. In the end, we all need to face the issues of the final chapter on Control of the Curriculum.

It is, then, a source-book for in-service with senior staff, and above all with the Heads. We have been going through a period in which the role of the Head has often been redefined as that of chief executive. Fortunately, whatever the temptations of pure administration for those who regard their teaching time as over, the professional element of headship has survived, firmly wedded to its managerial other half. The Head is more likely to be of irreplaceable use if the central task is identified as that of curriculum management. For the Head who is asking — 'What is this school meant to be doing for the benefit of its students? How is it currently trying to do it? How could that be improved upon?' *Practical Curriculum Study* could be an invaluable guide-book. It draws upon a wide range of appropriate studies and it clarifies the relevant questions. Of course, in case anyone was hoping for them, there are no answers at the back of the book.

JOHN WATTS

Director, Wessex Inservice Scheme for Secondary Headteachers; formerly Principal, Countesthorpe College



The One Year Sixth

17 Plus: The New Sixth Form in Schools and FE by Judy Dean and Andrew Steeds. NFER — Nelson (1982) £6.75.

'17 Plus' makes a valuable contribution to the current debate on 'new' curricular provision. It serves crucially to dispel some of the many myths surrounding students involved in 17+ courses.

The book is based on an NFER project started in 1978 to review existing post-16 provision and identify appropriate students in comprehensive schools and sixth form colleges. It was undertaken, however, at a time of 6.5 per cent unemployment among 16- and 17-year-olds and an infant Youth Opportunities Programme — and before the impact of the New Training Initiative, the growth of pre-vocational courses and the CPVE (17+) discussions.

Dean and Steeds describe the background to the 'new sixth', although it is, in fact, neither 'new' nor merely restricted to the schools sector in many areas. The 'subject-based' versus 'course-based' argument is rehearsed with the fear that the Keohane proposals would not remove uncertainty over the CEE and that C & G Foundation courses encourage young people to make a career choice too early. In fact, their research vindicates the Institute's claim that the Foundation courses provide a general preparation for employment. But with a rapidly declining proportion of 17-year-old school leavers entering employment, the rationale behind pre-employment courses and the YTS now becomes highly suspect. If students stay on at school either for the intrinsic value of education, which is shown to be a small proportion even at A level (and I suspect this has always been the case despite the tone of the Crowther report), or because it is instrumental in providing a route through the qualification hierarchy to a job, and this is increasingly denied to them, then schools will be faced with an increasingly disillusioned clientele and not just post-16.

During the research period over 30 per cent of students entering sixth forms were not studying A level, although this will undoubtedly have increased significantly since then, but most of these students were on traditional O level or secretarial courses. This is despite the dissatisfaction expressed by teachers, and shows that student and parental demand (particularly from higher socio-economic backgrounds) for O levels ensures their continued provision and causes staff to hesitate before creating new alternatives. One implication must be that schools should involve parents and employers in the 'secret garden' of the debate on post-16 provision so that such pressures are based on current and accurate information.

Dean and Steed show that vocational courses are far more single-sex dominated than single subjects. It may be possible to diminish this segregation by a common induction period and an increased emphasis on such topics as medical engineering in TEC or accounts and sales in business courses. The implications for the MSC New Technical and Vocational Education Initiative for the

fourteen to eighteen group could be significant if we are not to allow stereotype perceptions at thirteen to dominate future career patterns.

Dean and Steeds also found that a number of apprenticeships are available for 17-year-olds, although some firms continue to operate an age bar. They also confirmed that unemployed young people are not usually in that situation as a result of unrealistic career aspirations. Nor can we attribute a greater degree of maturity to an extra year at school as teachers frequently claim; it is probably less than would have been experienced at work.

Students on vocational courses were more satisfied than those on O level courses as they were seen to be relevant and applicable, whereas O levels were often seen in instrumental terms without intrinsic value or interest. Given the high O level failure rate, some students will feel they have achieved nothing worthwhile whatsoever. Perhaps the answer is to offer some O levels within a vocational package as some courses already do.

Courses which gain student approval are relevant, contain new work, have an adult atmosphere, include work experience, are integrated, have realistic careers advice and have small groups. However, at a time when the employment scene is changing so rapidly and so radically, there seems an element of irresponsibility in the superficially attractive idea of 'giving the students what they want', particularly when their wishes are so closely related to the current employment market. With these reservations, it would seem that the courses best suited to one-year students are those which are vocationally oriented without being job-specific, and which concentrate, equally and seriously, on the continuing development of the individual. Then what?

DEREK DE'HOOGHE
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A Nottinghamshire Study

The Transition from School to Work by Michael West and Peggy Newton. Croom Helm (1982), £12.95.

The title would perhaps indicate a broader research base than the text in fact draws from. The book is an in-depth study of the first thirty months of the working life of fifth-form leavers from two differently structured comprehensive schools — Woodbank, a streamed ex-grammar and Brookvale, a mixed ability ex-secondary



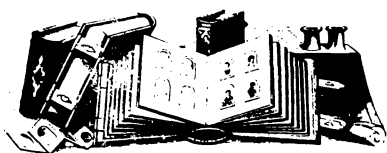
modern. Catchments are similar mining communities in Nottinghamshire. Unfortunately, the local nature of the source information is not mentioned in either title or jacket notices. For readers from beyond Nottinghamshire more detail on the catchment areas would have been helpful.

Within the context of a local study the authors are thorough, the sections can be dipped into 'reference book fashion' and the chronological development of the contents is put together well. The findings, given emphasis by some penetrating quotes from young people in the survey, are an indictment of streaming and offer heavy criticism of the developmentalist approach to careers education coming down firmly in favour of the differentialist method. One is left feeling consistently anxious about Woodbank School and sorry for its staff and students but it is vital to remember that the sample, just two schools, is too narrow to draw any far-reaching conclusion from — even if one is apt to agree with the findings.

The book chronicles the disaffection felt by many young workers where aspirations were raised by school. It highlights a desire among young workers for training and shows a lack of such provision for many of those surveyed. Schools were blamed for providing too little information on job content and on the quality of working life, but for me an equal horror story was the lack of formal induction by employers into work and the fact that so many young workers, particularly female, relied solely upon the informal induction provided by workmates.

It is unfortunate for the authors, as indeed for us all, that the recession has deepened and caused some of the findings to appear less relevant, based as they are on the relatively low unemployment years 1976-1979. Comparisons made with the prosperous late 60s serve to sharpen this contrast with the present. The study had clearly taken considerable academic effort and is directed at an area in which comparatively little research has been done. I look forward to more of its type, particularly post YTS.

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The Scottish System

Reconstructions in Secondary Education: Theory, Myth and Practice since the War, by J. Gray, A.F. McPherson and D. Raffe. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, 375pp, £14.95 Cloth, £7.95 pb.

In a short review there is no space to do justice to this fascinating book, which comprises a dense and thorough investigation, using social science techniques, of developments in Scottish education since the war. Of special interest to **Forum** readers is the chapter on 'The Reorganisation of Secondary Education' (chapter 13) and the following chapter on 'The Early Impact of Comprehensive Reorganisation' which contains a careful comparison of the relative 'success' of fully comprehensive schools with the selective system. The results are ambivalent, but generally supportive, as the authors put it, of 'many of the optimistic claims made by advocates of comprehensive education' (p.266); though it is found that the most positive results are those achieved by schools forming part of 'an older and traditional form in Scottish education, the omnibus school'. Mr Dron's article in this issue focuses precisely on one such school.

The book is worth reading for this analysis alone, conducted with scrupulous attention to the design of any such comparison, unlike other such later publications in this field. But it ranges far wider than this. The authors investigate the reality — and the part played — by what they call 'the Scottish myth', concerning the 'lad o'pairs' and his (sic) success within the Scottish system. This myth has played an important part in policy making, as the authors make clear; it seems, however, that it hardly accords with reality.

Other sections contain detailed studies of the rise of certification — a movement common to both Scottish and English education since the war, and its relation to employment and unemployment; of 'selection and rejection' within the system, and their impact on pupils (one chapter is entitled 'Truancy: Rejection is Mutual'). Another chapter investigates social class inequalities in educational attainment since the war, and it is within this section that comprehensive reorganisation is assessed. A final section (or part) focuses on reconstruction.

No comparable English or Welsh evidence exists on many of the topics discussed, as the authors themselves make clear. This is regrettable and the authors express the hope that 'one consequence of our own attempts will be to persuade people that it may be both possible and worthwhile, to say much more about the functioning of the secondary education system south of the Border than is currently the case'. This is a fair comment, and a criticism of DES and research policy generally.

BRIAN SIMON

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