

FORUM

for the discussion of new trends in education

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A BILL

To amend the law relating to education.

OPEN ENROLMENT

NATIONAL CURRICULUM
NATIONAL TESTING

OPTING OUT

LOCAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

This issue

Comprehensive Counter Attack

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The Next Forum

A full report of the mass 'Demonstrative Conference' against the Education Bill organised by FORUM on March 19 at Friends House, Euston Road, London, will be the main feature of this number. In addition Jennifer Nias writes on her research into interactional patterns among staff in primary schools, Cecile Wright contributes from her ethnographic study of black children in infant and primary schools in Sheffield, and Maxine Tallon reports on her investigation of pupils' experience of the secondary curriculum. Keith Morrison examines the politics of skills-based primary teaching. Further articles focus on issues raised by the so-called 'Great Education Reform Bill'.

A Malign Bill

'A Bill to amend the law relating to education' was introduced in Parliament on 20 November, had its Second Reading on 1 December, and is now in Committee for amendment. It is a Bill no one wants — except Thatcher and her subservient Cabinet encouraged by a little coterie of Black Paperites in the Hillgate Group. It is designed to destroy 'the statutory system of public education . . . organised . . . as primary education, secondary education, and further education' as 'the duty of the local education authority for every area' created by the 1944 Education Act. It is an integral part of the present Government's attack on local democracy and the principle of collective responsibility for community services.

The 16,500 responses to the consultative papers revealed the concern the proposals aroused despite the absurdly short time allowed. Baker's disregard for these representations and his suppression of his civil servants' analysis of them are indicative of his dismissive interpretation of the consultative process. This augurs little safeguard in clause 11's requirement for 'a period of not less than one month for the submission of evidence and representations' on any Orders the Secretary of State proposes regarding the national curriculum, programmes of study, attainment targets and tests; or in the provision under clause 46 for him to consider objections to a proposal for a school to opt out of the LEA for grant-maintained status under central government.

This Bill represents a massive shift to centralist control of education with extensive powers assigned to the Secretary of State to promulgate Orders and Regulations on detailed implementation, elaboration and amendment. He is to select all members of the Councils which are to advise him on the National Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; and of the two Funding Councils which are to allocate central funds to universities and other higher education institutions according to whatever 'conditions' and 'directions' he may determine. The 175 new powers would vest the Secretary of State with Napoleonic authority.

Yet it is represented as giving parents more choice and devolving power to the Governors of schools and colleges of further and higher education. Financial delegation to Governors of budgets derived from the LEA's overall budget is a stratagem to undermine the LEA's ability to plan a coherent education service for the collective benefit of its community. But the law already permits enough sensible and sensitive delegation for flexibility without this.

Further undermining comes by preventing planned admissions policies for LEA schools, creating City Technology Colleges and a new category of grant-maintained schools removed from the LEA sector on a ballot of present pupils' parents. The chimera of increased parental choice is conjured up to popularise the anti-democratic stratagems of this fraudulent Bill.

Open enrolment, opting out and CTCs all threaten comprehensive schools. Choice for some prevents

planning for all. National testing, far from raising standards, will label half the children as below average four times in their school career.

It is a malign Bill. It enshrines a culture of ruthless competition among children, parents, schools, colleges and universities to the detriment of a responsive education system striving to serve the community as a whole. Enactment would foster stratification among schools and colleges, resulting in closures without regard for the social needs of neighbourhood or wider geographical region. It seeks to secure the prevalence of that culture in the governance of grant-maintained schools and post-school education by insisting that business and industry Governors out-number all others.

An instrumental purpose runs through the Bill from the very first page. The focus is shifted from the developing child, from education as a liberating experience, to a production model. Gone is the 1944 Act's concern for the community and people.

Not that educational reform is not needed. After 40 years and various supplementary Acts there is undoubted scope for beneficial reform. All forms of selection should be outlawed within the compulsory phases of schooling and the principle of comprehensive access carried forward beyond that with support from maintenance grants. But this Bill, along with the Assisted Places Scheme, would open the way to *de facto* selection by encouraging over-subscription to certain schools, creating CTCs and empowering the Secretary of State to permit 'a significant change in the character' of a grant-maintained school later under clause 64.

Nothing in the Bill would benefit the 16-19 age group. Quite the reverse. The constraints of the national curriculum and associated testing, the marginalising and even crowding out of minority subjects, the restriction on initiatives for new kinds of certification, will all militate towards an impoverished and stereotyped curricular uniformity at this stage when fresh motivation and new challenges are often needed. The escape route from these constraints lies in opted-out schools, city technology colleges, Assisted Places — routes for exploitation by a vocal elite.

The retro-thrust of the Bill is towards differential social stratification over time. Hierarchical categories of schools and throughout post-school education and training are envisaged as the outcome. It is a Bill for restoring Victorian values in fancy new packaging.

Opposition is growing as its real contents are unwrapped and its pretences exposed. The potential hostility in the country at large is vast: it must be mobilised to break into the Government's formal majority in the Commons and win over the cross benches in the Lords. Intensive lobbying and extensive extra-parliamentary activity are urgently needed over the next few months. We urge all our readers to take part and come to our conference on 19 March.

Forum and its readers cannot opt out of political action when children and their education are made political pawns.

Renewing Commitment

Nanette Whitbread

The Joint Editor of *Forum* reviews the evolution of a primary and secondary system for comprehensive education and previous attempts to frustrate its popular momentum, in the context of the Education Bill now before Parliament. This article complements the Editorial Board's detailed responses to the Consultative Papers, included in this and the previous number.

Equality of educational opportunity was first proclaimed an objective for the state system in the 1943 White Paper on Educational Reconstruction which foreshadowed the 1944 Act. The inequalities to be eradicated were assumed to stem from social class and parental ability to pay school fees. As long ago as 1920 the Young Committee of the Board of Education had recognised that demand for both free and fee-paying secondary school places far exceeded supply, with 'practically all children ... capable of profiting by full-time education up to 16 or beyond'.¹ The nursery education lobby hoped the 1944 Act would include a much clearer obligation for universal provision than was the case as the call for 'nursery education for all' was drowned by that for 'secondary education for all', and lost as a priority. As more has become known about the importance of early learning experience, so the essential role that nursery education must play in equalising educational opportunity becomes even more evident.

The 1944 Education Act was a piece of radical legislation, immensely popular, rooted in consensus politics, and a testimony to democratic aspirations. Its significance lay in creating a framework for democratising education through a newly free secondary school phase for all and a mechanism that delegated responsibility for coherent planning to locally, electorally accountable LEAs.

Initially, implementation got off to a false start with a largely bipartite secondary school system and eleven-plus selection, derived from outmoded pre-war thinking and structures which themselves mainly derived from a false doctrine about hereditary intelligence sustained by Cyril Burt's fraudulent research. Common sense combined with professional observation and judgement brought together parents, teachers and educational academics in protest at the absurdity and inherent injustice of this artificial and predetermined rationing of educational opportunity at the age of eleven. Thus the false start began to be rectified as LEAs responded with local schemes for re-organising secondary schools as comprehensives, and the process accelerated with **Circulars 10/65** and **10/66** to gain such popular momentum that Margaret Thatcher's **Circular 10/70** was largely ineffective in restraining it.

A system of comprehensive secondary schools was recognised as the logical imperative for achieving the radical, democratic intent of the 1944 Act. It brought primary and secondary schools into an educational continuum and, with the disappearance of eleven-plus selection, freed primary schools to carry forward and develop an appropriate child-centred education in nonstreamed classrooms where children could co-operate or work individually as best suited their learning requirements.

Many secondary comprehensive schools realised that they could begin to ease or blur the hitherto sharp transition from the primary phase and seek to build an educational continuum. There was much interest in identifying good primary practices to blend with secondary, especially in the first two to three years before the pressures from external examination syllabuses brought in constraints. Benn and Simon found that by the end of the 1960s a significant majority (80.5%) of comprehensives operated a common course for all first years, nearly half of them for the first three years and nearly a third for two, along with a decisive move to nonstreamed grouping for at least the first year in over a quarter.² Interdisciplinary courses in humanities, combined science and across the expressive arts were developed for the same reasons and to foster security by avoiding encounter with too many different teachers and their arcane specialisms. In these ways the move to comprehensive education liberated secondary schools from some of the trammels of traditional subject-centred didacticism and opened the way towards a more humanitarian, heuristic approach to adolescent learning.

Primary schools have had a more gradual and longer experience of becoming and being comprehensive as elementary schooling for the working class gave way to primary education for all within a five to eleven age span whenever and wherever post-Hadow and then post-1944 reorganisation occurred. Moreover, they have been progressively encouraged to develop active, child-centred approaches to teaching and learning over five decades through the key Hadow (1931, 1933), Plowden (1967) and HMI (1959, 1978) Reports. Primary teachers resented the contradictory pressure to teach for eleven-plus tests and were to the fore in the movement to end that iniquitous system. Plowden found that only a third of primary teachers approved of streaming and the Report positively encouraged nonstreaming, noting that it became 'more practicable as group and individual work within classes has been developed.'³ Here was a lesson the comprehensive secondary schools were able to pick up when forging the newly possible educational continuum.

The creation of comprehensive secondary schools was an innovation. Never before had the whole statutory age range been educated together. There was no blueprint. There could be no guidance as HMI had no relevant experience. It was a challenge to teachers, Heads and LEAs to create a new kind of secondary school that would realise the objective of the 1943 White Paper and satisfy democratic aspirations.

It was a challenge many were eagerly waiting and preparing for. Raymond King, *Forum's* original chairman, later recounted those planning years and

early beginnings and how 'the first professionally conceived blue-print', **A Democratic Reconstruction of Education** came to be published as early as 1942 and informed other publications in the early 1950s.⁴ Harry Rée wrote of the 'optimism and generous expectation' that launched the early comprehensives and how 'a new coherent philosophy of comprehensive education' was developed in the light of experience.⁵ There has always, and rightly, been lively debate about how best to achieve the aims of comprehensive education; for education can never be unproblematic. While tactics vary with circumstances, the strategy pursues a common end. **Forum** articles have charted the debates for thirty years.

The pioneers recognised that comprehensive education had significant implications for curriculum and teaching methods as well as internal school structures. It was precisely to encourage discussion and disseminate best practice, as well as to argue for the universal extension of the reform to all LEAs, that **Forum** was founded. As more schools and teachers became engaged in this transformation of secondary education through the 1960s and 1970s, **Forum** articles reflected the spreading recognition of the kinds of implications involved, especially that nonstreamed classes are the logical corollary. The debate encompasses the place of individualised learning, small group teaching and learning, setting, how to identify and support those with particular learning difficulties, when and to what extent to offer curricular choice. It has moved on to include ways of combatting racism, how to recognise and avoid indirect discrimination by race or sex and how to motivate youngsters in the context of massive youth unemployment.

Before 1972 schools could not realistically plan complete secondary courses for all to 16, but ROSLA at last opened up the possibility. Pressure to pre-segregate teaching groups from 14 or earlier for GCE, CSE, etc. conflicted with the lower secondary experience and the evolving philosophy of comprehensive schools, and led to the demand for a common system of 16+ examining. The GCSE is not the reform that is needed and will not resolve the problem, as several contributors have argued in **Forum**.⁶ GCSE still reflects much of the old bipartite philosophy but incorporates some positive features, such as investigative approaches and coursework assessment, which the comprehensive experience introduced into GCE and CSE or that teachers argued for as desirable innovations.

Because of the false start with bipartite structures, LEAs often had no other option than to establish split sites when re-organising for a comprehensive system. These brought constraints and obstacles which hindered development, made the management task more complex and working conditions for students and staff unsatisfactory. Falling rolls and local demographic shifts have brought further planning problems and upheavals to disturb the evolution of sound practice within local comprehensive systems. Inner cities have tended to suffer most.

Such a radical innovation as comprehensive education has, of course, taken some blind alley turns. Some might have been avoided if American experience had been heeded more critically. The overlarge, impersonal and bureaucratic institution was one such, its rationale resting on pessimistic assumptions about the staying-on

rate for a viable sixthform. Obsession with curricular choice leads to extensive option schemes which undermine the concept of a common curriculum entitlement and mislead some students to close doors of opportunity. Without doubt, the darkest blind alleys have been streaming and excessive setting alongside the bleak cul-de-sac of the closed remedial department: these run counter to comprehensive principles and simply institutionalise inequality.

The next urgent step is to extend genuine comprehensive education beyond 16 and across the administrative divide between school and further education sectors, both of which unforgivably neglected the 16-19s. Elitism still blocks the way, and YTS is the new blind alley.

In seeking to transform primary and secondary education in accordance with comprehensive principles schools have to exorcise the ghosts from the past, accept new challenges and anticipate change. The ghosts of Burt and bipartite still haunt the comprehensive system, influencing teachers' expectations of working class children and HMI's preoccupation with three notional 'ability levels'.⁷ This heritage of attitudes is incompatible with the Warnock report's demand for an end to labelling, for recognition of a variety of special and changing individual needs, and for integration of almost all children into the main educational process. The Rampton, Swann and Eggleston reports each showed schools failing many black children partly through inherently racist low expectations, and demand attitude change to ensure equal opportunities within education. Changes in the ethnic composition of British society have brought a challenge that only a comprehensive school system can hope to accept.

There is increasing recognition that whole school policies are necessary in respect of special educational needs and multiracial education. The Bullock Report argued for the development of language policies across the curriculum more than twelve years ago. Now the microchip revolution is making similar demands for computer education and information technology to penetrate the whole curriculum. To effect such developments challenges the traditional, relative autonomy of primary classroom teachers and secondary subject departments; it requires the democratic participation of whole school staffs in policy-making. This is not only entirely compatible with, but a vital factor in ensuring, that comprehensive principles inform and pervade all policy and practice within a school, including the hidden curriculum whose messages are so powerful.

The new demands made on schools since the 1944 Act raised aspirations have always carried resource implications of some kind. Significantly, however, throughout the Joseph/Baker era HMI publications have been required to carry a disclaimer that 'nothing' therein should be regarded as implying commitment by the Government 'to the provision of additional resources'.

Those actually teaching and managing comprehensive schools have always recognised that proper resourcing is crucial. To offer a full secondary curriculum to all is inevitably more expensive than narrower, differentiated, selected courses to pre-selected categories — an academic lacking aesthetic and practical

experiences and a non-academic lacking status subjects and the more costly equipment. A comprehensive system is about offering quality to all so that each may achieve the highest standards possible and enjoy a rich educational experience. Therein lies the challenge. But the prerequisite resources have seldom been made available. Evidence has been growing throughout this decade of cumulative shortages which HMI have identified as undermining standards, restricting the curriculum and the kinds of work children can do, while increased reliance on parental contributions widens disparities between schools.⁸ The main responsibility rests with central government through its policies of deliberate constraints on local government in this past decade.

The philosophy of comprehensive education is anathema to the new, official ideology of political Conservatism as imposed by Thatcherism. So, too, is the principle of community collectivism through local democracy which is the rationale for local government in Britain. Hence the omnibus Education Bill is intended to destroy both the comprehensive education system and the planning role of LEAs, using the huge but unrepresentative parliamentary majority to do so. Its dual purpose has, however, aroused a wide spectrum of opposition as it denotes a marked departure from the 1985 White Paper, **Better Schools**, which accepted and relied on 'the existing legal framework which gives freedom to each LEA to maintain its existing pattern of school organisation and, if it wishes, to propose changes in that pattern.'⁹ How popular the comprehensive system is within local communities has been evident whenever an ideologically inspired majority on a local Council has attempted to re-establish a selective system. Now the proposals in the Bill combine centralist control of a national curriculum and opted-out Grant Maintained Schools with a populist appeal to direct, unaccountable, parental-control of individual schools and choice for a few at the expense of planning for all.

Forum's response to the four main Consultation Papers on the proposed legislation concerning schools was published in the previous number and is available separately so the arguments will not be repeated here. It is evident that the central proposals for national attainment targets and assessment of performance at 7, 11, 14 and 16, along with the thrust for differentiation, originate in the Black Papers' attack on comprehensive and progressive education. That ideology inspired Sir Keith Joseph's speeches, the direction he gave to the GCSE, his promotion of the Lower Attaining Pupils' Project, and the creation by him and Margaret Thatcher of the Centre for Policy Studies with its education study group under the direction of Caroline Cox, who was involved with the National Council for Educational Standards set up to develop the Black Papers' critique. Significantly, Burt was a key figure in the Black Paper group in his latter years: perhaps he is in psychic communication with the Hillgate Group, so many of whose proposals are contained in the Bill.¹⁰

The evolution of local comprehensive systems of primary and secondary schools as the logical means for securing the objective of the 1944 Act is not in question. It is that democratic objective to which the Bill is opposed. A spurious agenda of faults and failings requiring radical solutions has been devised to lend

credibility to the destructive exercise of dismantling the structure. The Bill is irrelevant to the tasks still to be tackled and the problems still to be solved.

There is a range of measures Government could usefully take to secure a better operational framework, from universal provision of nursery education to maintenance grants at sixteen to allow real choice for continued education at school or college.

Most teachers and parents clearly support the aim of comprehensive primary and secondary education, but become disappointed and frustrated by shortages, dilapidated buildings and the many constraints that hinder progress and restrict children's educational opportunities. The extent of voluntary parental subsidising of schools is testimony to consumer support. It is not radical redirection with consequential instability and uncertainty that the system needs, but a period of stability and investment of the necessary resources to enable attention to be focussed on the real agenda of human problems, professional issues and coherent planning.

Forum will continue to facilitate debate, exchange of experience, dissemination of good practice, identification of new challenges. For this is how standards rise and can become more consistent across schools, especially when parents are brought more fully into the discussions and enabled to understand where their children feature. What is now needed is a renewal of commitment to making comprehensive education a success story.

This Bill must be exposed as a con-trick and relegated as a white elephant. It will be largely unworkable without co-operation on the ground. Governors may reject financial delegation on matters where they consider the school would benefit from continuing to share the locally planned allocation of resources. Opting for central maintenance with all the extra management burdens instead of remaining with the LEA may prove very unattractive. The tasks of the two statutory bodies in devising a national curriculum with attainment targets, tests and assessment procedures could prove unfeasible without their members prostituting their professional integrity. Legislation would produce uncertainty, but could prove as ineffective by 1990 as **Circular 10/70** in its intent.

Co-ordination of the resistance movement has already begun. In co-operation with a broad range of other organisations **Forum** is holding a day conference on March 19 as part of that process. (See page 55)

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Comprehensive schooling is better and fairer

Andrew McPherson and J Douglas Willms

This article was written as a reply to Anthony Heath's 'Class in the Classroom' in *New Society* (17.7.87). A full report of their research on the effects of comprehensive reorganisation in Scotland was published in *Sociology* in November 1987. Andrew McPherson is Director of the Centre for Educational Sociology at Edinburgh University and J Douglas Willms is currently there from the University of British Columbia.

Anthony Heath says that research has shown that comprehensive reorganisation, in common with other educational reforms this century, has made little impact on social-class inequalities in British education (*New Society* 17 July). He is not correct to say this about comprehensive reorganisation, nor to conclude that, in the face of this remarkable resilience of class inequalities, educational reforms seem powerless whether for good or ill.

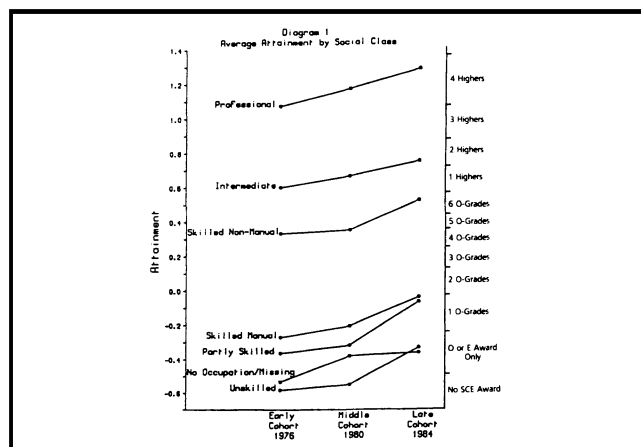
The view is widespread, of course, that comprehensive schools have failed to improve standards and to reduce social-class inequalities of attainment. Many people, though not Heath, think that they are doomed so to fail. In progressive educational thinking, and in some quarters on the left, this has led to renewed calls for the abolition of public examinations and for a humanist transformation of the secondary school curriculum. On the right, however, a similar pessimism about comprehensive schooling has contributed to the Government's provision for parental choice, to its proposals for the testing of pupils, and to its plan to give parents the right to withdraw a school from local authority control.

Scottish research confirms that social-class difficulties in attainment have been large and resilient. They remained roughly stable in Scotland for several decades after 1945, as they did in England. But the most recent Scottish study (McPherson and Willms 1987) has a different and more up-to-date story to tell about comprehensive schooling. Since the mid-1970s, the reorganisation that was initiated in 1965 has contributed to a rise in examination attainment and to a fall in the effect on attainment of social class. We call these two trends respective 'improvement' and 'equalisation'. One can infer from the Scottish evidence that there will have been similar, but weaker, trends in England and Wales.

First, the Scottish evidence. A 1983 study has already shown that social-class differences in attainment were higher in areas with selective schooling than in areas served solely by omnibus schools (ie, schools that were non-selective, but streamed). However, this finding came from a sample of pupils who left school in 1976, before the full effects of the post-1965 reorganisation could be expected to show. Also, many of the omnibus schools long pre-dated 1965. It was not until the mid-1970s that the majority of pupils could start their secondary schooling in a settled comprehensive system. What has happened since then? Could the more egalitarian tradition of the omnibus schools be realised in the traditionally selective areas? We can tell by

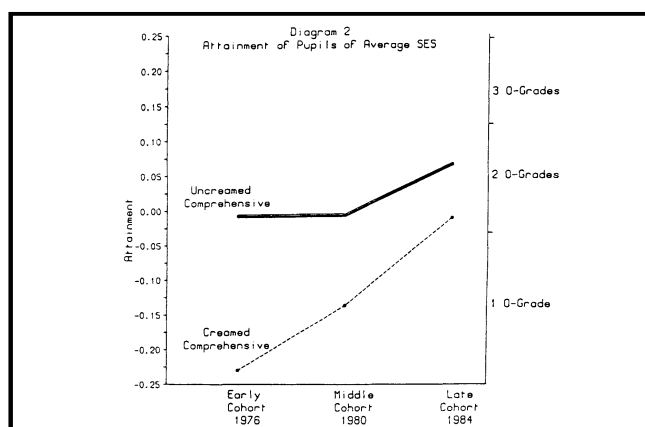
comparing the 'early' cohort of leavers in 1976, with a 'middle' cohort that left school in 1980, and a 'late' cohort that left school in 1984. All three cohorts are representative of the majority of Scottish schools, and the samples are large, totalling around 40,000 members in all.

Diagram 1 shows that the average SCE examination attainment of leavers in each of the Registrar General's social classes. We have scaled the attainment measure in order to make meaningful comparisons possible across the years, and we have set the national average of the middle cohort to zero. The diagram shows that average attainment increased across all social-class groups. Also, although there are still large social-class differences, attainment has been rising faster amongst the lower groups. For example, the gap between the intermediate and the skilled manual fell from .87 to .79 or by roughly half an O-grade award at A-C. (The SCE 0-grade is equivalent to the GCE 0-level). Overall, the gap between pupils from middle-class backgrounds (top three categories) and those from working-class backgrounds (bottom three categories) fell by a similar magnitude, from .94 to .87. Put another way, the gap between middle-class and working class pupils in the percentages getting at least one O-grade award fell by six points between the early and late cohorts, or by almost one percentage point per annum (not shown in diagram). An important point here is that equalisation was the result of a levelling-up in working class attainment, and not of a levelling down in middle-class attainment.



A private sector survived the reform in Scotland, and continued to 'cream' the state comprehensive schools, mainly in the four major cities. But selection at 12 years (the age of transfer) was eliminated in the public sector,

and this reduced the overall incidence of creaming. One effect of this can be seen in Diagram 2. This shows the attainment of a pseudo-pupil who had the nationally average socio-economic status (SES) for the middle cohort. Our SES measure takes account of father's occupation, mother's education, and number of siblings. Not surprisingly, the pupil of average SES performed around the national average in the uncreamed comprehensive sector. But the attainment of the same pseudo-pupil in the creamed sector rose by about one examination pass as the severity of creaming declined over the eight years.



We made similar, carefully controlled, comparisons between other types of schools that had varying histories of reorganisation. Other things being equal, the pupil of nationally average SES tended to attain higher

- in uncreamed schools
- the longer the school had been an all-through comprehensive
- in schools with 'favourable contexts', that is, with pupil intakes of higher SES or ability

Fuller details and other findings are in our 1987 article.

Why, then, do Heath's data tell a different story? In fact, in spite of his interpretation, it is not clear that they do. They show that both the 'working class' and the 'intermediate class' (Heath uses a different, 3-category, classification) have recently been catching the 'salariat' up in respect of the percentage of pupils obtaining at least one 0-level award. (The relatively small size of Heath's samples obliges him to treat some of these changes as sampling error.)

Also, timing is crucial here. Heath's latest time-point is for pupils born in 1960-65, who reached 16 years between 1976 and 1981. Any effects of reorganisation that started to show only after 1976 would be obscured in Heath's averaging for the years 1976-1981 (ie for pupils born 1960-65). But it was only after 1976 that the effects of reform in Scotland first became apparent. If we averaged our Scottish data across the years from 1976 onwards, as Heath has done with his data, we would underestimate the impact of the Scottish reform. If we stopped the story in the early 1980s, as Heath was obliged to do, we would also underestimate its impact. All in all, Heath's design would probably lead us to conclude that reorganisation in Scotland had left inequalities of attainment unchanged. But we would be wrong.

Reorganisation in England and Wales has not gone as

quickly or as far in Scotland. Overall, the system south of the Border has more selection and creaming, proportionately fewer 'all-through' comprehensives, and proportionately fewer communities that are served by wholly comprehensive systems. The net effects of reorganisation will therefore be weaker and later in England and Wales. As Heath says, the rhetoric of reform was bolder than the reality. But this does not mean that the potential for effective reform is any less than in Scotland. What it does mean is that a sensitive and timeous research design is required to evaluate the national significance of the widely varying circumstances of the schools and communities in England and Wales. Because there is no such study, there is little basis in research evidence for the widespread pessimism over the potential of comprehensive schooling outside Scotland.

It would be wrong to dismiss the Scottish experience as non-transferable. It is true that Scotland had more omnibus schools before 1965, and also true that the public provision of selective (grammar-school type) schooling was more generous in Scotland. But it was precisely this generosity that convinced professional educational opinion that Scotland did not need comprehensive reorganisation. Reorganisation was more decisive in Scotland mainly for political reasons. A higher proportion of the local authorities were Labour controlled, and were thus persuaded to implement central-government policy, even though most educational practitioners were sceptical or opposed. It is true, too, that the private sector is smaller in Scotland. But neither Glasgow nor Edinburgh need any lessons from England on how to organise private-sector schooling. In both these cities, class inequalities of attainment fall after 1976 (private and public schools combined), and attainment rose.

It would also be wrong to dismiss the size of the change in Scotland as trivial, even though it is small in relation to the class inequalities that remain. A political and historical perspective is essential here. The Scottish system of selective post-primary schooling that was finally ousted in the 1970s had been configured well before the First World War. It subsequently reinforced social-class differences in attainment by shaping expectations both in local communities, and in the national 'policy community' of administrators, school inspectors and leading teachers. The eight years that separate our early and late cohorts was but a brief period in which to unpick the legacy of decades.

How much further could equalisation go? Three illustrations are suggestive:

- In Fife's five largest towns 1976-80, equalisation was three times the national average, whilst attainment rose in four of the five.
- In Scotland's New Towns, the effect of social class on attainment was only two-thirds as large as the national average, but the level of attainment was at the national average.
- Scotland's Catholic schools serve a predominantly low SES population. Class inequalities were lower in Catholic schools, but the attainment of our nationally average pseudo-pupil was about two O-grade awards higher.

We conclude that comprehensive reorganisation has helped to make schooling better and fairer in the past

Records of Achievement and a National Curriculum

Mary James and Barry Stierer

Mary James is a Research Fellow in the School of Education at the Open University and Deputy Director of the Pilot Records of Achievement in Schools Evaluation (PRAISE), funded by the DES. Barry Stierer, a Research Associate at Bristol University School of Education, is a member of her team. Their article draws on the whole national evaluation team's experience.

In 1984 the Department of Education and Science published a Statement of Policy on records of achievement (DES, 1984). This indicated the government's intention to issue national guidelines by the end of the decade. It is envisaged that all pupils in secondary schools will eventually be involved in recording processes which are expected to fulfil the following purposes:

- to give recognition to the achievement of pupils
- to contribute to pupils' motivation and personal development
- to help schools to consider how well their curriculum, teaching and organisation enable children to develop the skills recorded
- to provide a summary document or record for every pupil.

Shortly after the publication of this policy statement, the government provided Education Support Grant funding for nine records of achievement pilot schemes, including three consortia: Dorset, Essex, ILEA, Lancashire, Suffolk, Wigan, the Oxford Certificate of Educational Achievement (Coventry, Leicestershire, Oxfordshire and Somerset), the East Midlands Records of Achievement Project (Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire), and the Welsh scheme (involving all eight LEAs in Wales). All schemes are funded for a period of three years, until March 1988, and report regularly to the Records of Achievement National Steering Committee (RANSC): a group of educationalists, industrialists, and others, who have the task of drawing up draft national guidelines for consideration by the Secretaries of State. The deliberations of RANSC are also informed by

reports from the national evaluation which runs concurrently with the pilot schemes in order to feed back information on progress and results.

The Pilot Records of Achievement in Schools Evaluation (PRAISE) is co-directed by Professor Desmond Nuttall and Dr Patricia Broadfoot and is based at both the Open University and Bristol University. The evaluation has three distinct strands: an analysis of reports from scheme directors and local evaluators; case studies of 22 schools and one tertiary college; and a study of LEA policy towards records of achievement. Interim reports on the first two of these strands were made public in the autumn of 1986 and in autumn 1987.

The focus and data sources for each of these strands differs. For instance, scheme reports are by their nature digests and interpretations of the available evidence. They are also shaped by a pro-forma of headings to which scheme directors have been asked by RANSC to respond. Similarly, local evaluation reports are interpretative accounts whose content varies according to the issues which local evaluators have chosen, or been requested by schemes, to focus upon. General principles, scheme-wide structures, resources, management, co-ordination and the general response of teachers and users feature prominently however. In contrast, the case studies of individual schools, which occupy much of the time of the three full-time researchers (ourselves and Sue McMeeking), focus principally on school and classroom issues and rely heavily on direct observation and conversations with pupils, teachers, and others 'in the field'. We do not make any greater claim for one kind of evidence over

Comprehensive schooling is better and fairer (*continued from page 40*) decade, and could do more in these directions. Current government policies, however, are likely to retard or reverse the recent equalising trend. Also, as Heath suggests, it is possible that equalisation at 16 years will be offset by countervailing trends in post-compulsory education. Indeed, there are some indications in our own data that this might be happening to a limited degree. However, even if the social-class attainment gap were widening after 16 years, this trend would not detract from the educational value of improvement and equalisation up to 16 years. Furthermore, the Scottish data support two stronger conclusions. The first is that equalisation of opportunity and attainment between the social classes is perfectly consistent with rising standards for all groups. The second is that social-class inequalities of educational attainment vary considerably across time

and community, and are open to change, 'whether for good or ill', through the political process of social democracy.

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another but the different perspectives provided by the three strands of the evaluation reveal some interesting differences and similarities.

In an article of this length it is not possible to do justice to the breadth of insight and experience deriving from pilot schemes. We have found, to our cost, that records of achievement initiatives have implications for nearly every aspect of life in schools including the content and organisation of the curriculum, teaching methods, assessment and reporting policies, in-service training and the organisational structures and management of schools. What follows therefore is not a summary of our findings to date, but merely an exploration of a few issues which have emerged from our data and which, in our view, require serious attention if records of achievement are to play a significant role in the educational future.

Some issues relating to proposals for a national curriculum

In July 1987 we drafted the second interim report of our evaluation. At the same time the Department of Education and Science published its Consultation Document on the national curriculum (DES, 1987). In the light of the latter, we reconsidered many of the issues which we had highlighted in the former. As a result we identified a number of areas where the relationship between records of achievement and the government's recent proposals for a national curriculum is problematic and will need to be clarified. These can be framed as a series of questions.

1. What role should records of achievement have in recording achievement on a national curriculum and what implications would this have for the development of records of achievement systems?

Paragraph 32 of the Consultation Document on the national curriculum confirmed that by 1990 national arrangements will be in place for the introduction of records of achievement for school leavers. Such records 'will have an important role in recording performance and profiling a pupil's achievements across and beyond the national curriculum'. The fact that the nature of such a role was left entirely unspecified can be interpreted as an indication that the Secretaries of State regard records of achievement as subsidiary to the main business of national curriculum planning and assessment, or that such a role was genuinely being offered for open debate. If the latter, then records of achievement schemes have a considerable opportunity to influence policy. But if the opportunity is missed then the whole records of achievement initiative risks becoming marginalised.

In the course of our work in schools, we have witnessed a growing recognition that records of achievement systems will need to adopt a whole curriculum approach if they are to have continued value. Thus the long-term objective of many systems is to record personal, subject-specific and cross-curricular experiences and achievement in as comprehensive a manner as possible. Few, if any, schools have yet attained this goal but this is largely attributable to the fact that development takes a great deal of time and has to proceed incrementally.

If continued progress is to be made towards this goal then it would seem important that the role of records of achievement in relation to the national curriculum

should be made very much more explicit. Indeed unless records of achievement become the principal vehicle for recording achievement 'across and beyond the national curriculum' it is difficult to envisage what role they could have in the future. They could be conceived purely as pupils' personal records but this would almost inevitably give them subordinate status to records of test performance, assessments on national attainment targets, and examination results. If, on the other hand, records of achievement become the umbrella for all recording in schools then there is a better chance that the process would be guided by a coherent set of educational principles like those which many records of achievement schemes are currently working towards.

Of course, by arguing for a central role for records of achievement in plans for a national curriculum, it nevertheless has to be acknowledged that there are numerous issues associated with the content, processes, products and management of records of achievements systems which remain to be resolved.¹

2. Should achievements in relation to a national curriculum be conceptualised principally in terms of subject-based attainment targets or should they be conceived more broadly, to include personal and cross-curricular achievements, as in records of achievement schemes?

In stating that records of achievement would have a role in recording performance 'across and beyond the national curriculum', the Consultation Document gave some tacit recognition to the broad definitions of experience and achievement with which records of achievement schemes operate. Furthermore, paragraph 68 articulated an expectation that 'programmes of work' will contribute to the development of pupils' personal qualities and problem-solving skills.

Although many problems remain, records of achievement schemes have invested a great deal in the development of systems for recording personal interests, qualities and competencies and cross-curricular achievements and skills, on the assumption that these are important dimensions of the education of children which deserve recognition and will be of interest to 'users'. If this assumption is correct then this experience should surely be taken into account in the debate on the national curriculum and the deliberations of subject working groups. If it is ignored it is possible that what is recorded will be limited to test scores and assessments on narrowly-conceived content-based attainment targets in core subjects.

3. Should 'programmes of study', developed to fulfil the requirements of a national curriculum, take due account of changes in the organisation of curriculum and teaching, e.g. towards modular approaches, which have been associated with the records of achievement initiative?

Although the national curriculum Consultation Document specified core and foundation 'subjects', it also referred to 'programmes of study' and stated that 'How teaching is organised and the teaching approaches used will ... be for schools to determine' (para.27). Although it is tempting to conclude that the Secretaries of State were thinking along the lines of a conventional subject organisation, the term 'course' is not used and it would not be reasonable to regard the debate about the organisation of curriculum and teaching as foreclosed.

In those records of achievement schemes which are developing a whole curriculum approach there is a distinct move towards encouraging curriculum organisation in terms of units of work, which may be subject-specific or integrated, but which are mostly designed around clear objectives. These objectives, which may be subject-specific, cross-curricular, or personal and social, or any combination of these elements, provide criteria for routine and regular assessment and recording of pupils' experiences and achievements. It is claimed that such an organisation facilitates diagnosis and target-setting — also important concepts associated with records of achievement. However, these latter processes can only be truly effective when subsequent units of work are tailored or chosen to meet the diagnosed needs of individuals or groups: in other words, when the curriculum is organised in terms of modules amenable to flexible use. This has implications for the structures of teaching and learning and, in particular, encourages developments towards individualised or small group teaching and independent or collaborative learning. As yet, the investigations of the PRAISE researchers in case study schools have revealed little that constitutes modularisation in any paradigm sense. This is not to say, of course, that it is not a goal worth pursuing. Indeed if we are to get the best out of our young people, as the government so much desires, there is a very strong argument that further ways should be sought to match curriculum and teaching to the particular needs of pupils. For all these reasons, those involved in planning in relation to a national curriculum, at whatever level, would do well to take into account the developments in curriculum organisation associated with records of achievements initiatives.

4. Is the principle underlying pupil self-accounting and teacher-pupil discussion in many records of achievement systems so important that these processes should be central to assessment procedures associated with a national curriculum?

For those developing records of achievement, one of the most disturbing aspects of the government's recent proposals must be the weight given to nationally prescribed tests and externally moderated assessments. The implication seems to be that unless assessments are made, or at least moderated, by people other than those in the schools they have no validity and/or credibility. Admittedly issues surrounding the validation of internally generated records and the accreditation of processes loom large in records of achievement pilot schemes. But there is no reason to think that the problems cannot be resolved with adequate time, resources and political will. Indeed, in other countries, such as West Germany, acceptable systems have been developed which have dispensed with the need for any external moderation.

Many records of achievement pilot schemes in this

country put emphasis on refining teacher assessments and give a lot of attention to possibilities for giving pupils a considerable measure of responsibility for assessment and recording processes. This arises from the belief that enhanced motivation will flow from an increased sense of participation in, and ownership of, the whole educational process, including assessment and recording. Certainly this underlies the attention given to the 'formative process', which many developers regard as the most important aspects of records of achievement.

These ideas were recognised in the 1984 Statement of Policy on records of achievement, which mentioned the possibility of pupil self-accounts and clearly acknowledged the importance of dialogue between teachers and pupils for the fulfilment of records of achievement purposes. It is extremely worrying therefore that the thinking of the Secretaries of State with respect to assessment of a national curriculum, at least as expressed in the Consultation Document, appears to be based on such a traditional view. No reference is made to the principles and processes which feature prominently in records of achievement schemes and which should have general import, if they have any at all. Indeed, there would be little point in continuing to promote the development of learner-centred records of achievement systems, which encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, if the major value is to be ascribed to assessment systems over which neither they nor the school has much, if any, control. The assumptions underlying the two approaches are diametrically opposed and one will almost inevitably nullify the other. Once more the relationship between the two developments requires careful scrutiny.

In early October 1987, when this article was written, the consultation period on the national curriculum had just ended and the parliamentary debate was about to begin. By the time the article is published the issues discussed above may have reached some resolution. Certainly, by Christmas, RANSC will have presented evidence to the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) established by the Secretary of State to advise on the introduction of the national curriculum. It will also have published its own interim report for consultation. Both lend weight to most of the points made in this article, but it remains to be seen whether TGAT will, for instance, recommend a stronger role for pupils.

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Note

1. These are itemised in our interim evaluation report, 1987. A limited number of copies is available on request from PRAISE.

The views expressed in this article are the author's and should not be taken to represent the considered judgement of PRAISE.

Forum Editorial Board's responses to the Consultation Papers on financial delegation, open admissions, grant-maintained schools and the National Curriculum were included in vol 30 no 1 and are available at 50p from the Business Manager, FORUM, 7 Bollington Road, Oadby, Leicester LE2 4ND.

The Board's responses on Charges for School Activities and Further Education Colleges are on pages 59-60 of this number. *Ed.*

GCSE Integrated Humanities — a response

David Scott

Continuing the discussion of GCSE, David Scott replies to Ross Phillips' article in our summer number's symposium (vol 29 no 3). He is Head of Humanities at an 11-16 Comprehensive High School in Luton.

Ross Phillips' Midland Examining Group 'Integrated Humanities' GCSE syllabus is not as progressive an enterprise as it would seem. The syllabus does attempt to stress process at the expense of product; but it takes on board — dare I say enthusiastically — much of the detritus of formal examinations. It adopts a skill-based format. It sets out grade criteria at seven levels for each assessment objective (something moreover which it didn't need to do — see the NEA and the Southern Board 'Integrated Humanities' GCSE syllabi). It makes no attempt to construct a view of Humanities knowledge; it merely talks about borrowing from other traditional subject disciplines (is this a definition of Humanities knowledge?). It relegates the assessment of content to a lesser position than the assessment of research skills, and yet this bland assumption ignores the epistemological problems inherent in it. Finally it accepts, perhaps unwittingly, a possession view of intelligence in that it comes to terms with the notion of differentiated ability.

The first point to be made is that any syllabus that sets out with the intention of reconstructing the process of children's learning cannot ignore knowledge. It can seek to redefine it though. The types of skills which the Midland GCSE Humanities Syllabus attempt to assess can be divided into two sorts. Firstly there are content skills; secondly there are methodological skills. The first type is to do with having knowledge; the second with acquiring it. The former is expressed as a skill, but we should be in little doubt that it approximates fairly closely to the type of assessment objective that GCE explicitly tested. To formally assess characteristics of human beings, we are forced to look at and observe, not those knowledge states expressed as assessment objectives, but the human performance which refers to them. In other words, when we come to assess skills associated with understanding and comprehension, what we are going to assess is a product. It doesn't matter whether the assessment is summative or formative. We still have to make assumptions about what lies behind a particular performance. To put it another way: structures of knowledge in a Brunerian sense can be expressed in all sorts of different ways. Therefore it is hard to know whether a person is operating through particular types of structure. If it is said that that this 'Integrated Humanities' GCSE syllabus doesn't concern itself with knowledge, content or the structures of knowledge, but simply with the having, being, acquiring states that are associated with knowledge, this doesn't materially alter matters. Understanding something is another way of saying 'having a structured view of life' or 'acquiring structure'. Therefore, having different levels of understanding —

and this, after all, is a well-advertised feature of GCSE (the Grade Criteria) — means in effect different types of structure being held: different models, different maps, different ways of seeing the world. Thus the new syllabi and the new examination still have to concern themselves with knowledge and the structures which underpin that knowledge.

The second point to be made is to do with the way this GCSE 'Integrated Humanities' syllabus, reluctantly or otherwise, adopts a behavioural objectives model of curriculum design. Ross Phillips points out some of the problems. Most of these are well known. The most important objections are to do with the way it describes knowledge and, in particular, Humanities knowledge. Lists of intended behaviours do not adequately represent the real structures of knowledge. Knowledge is always embedded within a context. Now this operates on a number of levels. The first type of de-contextualising that goes on within a behavioural objectives model is to do with the idea that a knowledge state, ie analysing, remembering, recalling etc can be evaluated, described or even assessed-in-terms-of-gradations-of-worth in isolation from the context which gives it meaning. It is a logical necessity of the curriculum model under discussion that criteria have to be worked out to fulfil its evaluative requirements — these criteria would enable us to recognize these knowledge states. The model also demands in its purest form that these knowledge states are free of content. Clearly we do talk about someone having a good memory, and we want to talk about people being good or bad at analysing. But to recognize such precise gradations of worth within the structures imposed on us by a behavioural objectives model means that we can only do so if these knowledge states are embedded within context or given meaning by being placed in a real life context. If, for instance, remembering could be described as free of content, then it is without meaning, and cannot be used as an objective. If it is said at this point that the behavioural objectives model does not demand this clear separation between content and knowledge states, there is still a tension between generality of objective and contextuality. General objectives, or 'aims' as they are sometimes called, cannot be assessed precisely enough. Contextualising objectives may ignore the important notion of transfer of learning. This does invariably mean that any formal assessment of pupil learning is only an approximation of what has happened.

The second way the behavioural objectives model decontextualises knowledge is in the sense that it treats the getting of knowledge in a transmission way. The problem is the tension between two ideas: knowledge as

something which is static, fixed, inflexible which the learner gradually acquires and knowledge which acts to facilitate re-creation within the human psyche. The problem is an epistemological one. The a priori structural principles, which underlie knowledge, are not a priori at all; but relative to the status and gifts of the learner. Jerome Bruner says in his much quoted remark, 'since the merit of a structure depends upon its power for simplifying information, for generating new propositions, and for increasing the manipulability of a body of knowledge, structure must always be related to the status and gifts of the learner. Viewed in this way, the optimal structure of a body of knowledge is not absolute but relative.' The logical conclusion from this is that each individual will come to know structure in a different way. And this poses immense problems for formulating criteria to assess the quality of learning, when what is being assessed is overt behaviour, which may or may not correspond to certain specific knowledge states.

The third sense in which the behavioural objectives model decontextualises knowledge is as follows: each item of the objectives bank is presumed to be a discrete entity which can then, for the sake of an examination, be picked out and graded. But such knowledge states as comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation cannot be separated off from each other. Synthesis involves analysis. Likewise to apply something without comprehending it would be nonsense. Now if this idea is correct, certain implications flow from it. Attempts at grading pupils' work in terms of these categories are bound therefore to be approximations to what is going on. Secondly, since it is difficult, if not impossible, to delineate the one from the other, expertise in one is likely to be construed as expertise in all such skills. Assessment, which relies on prespecified behavioural objectives in the form of discrete knowledge states, cannot avoid this problem.

This then is one problem: that this Integrated Humanities scheme is formulated in terms of a highly dubious model of curriculum design. Other problems emerge. The much heralded stress on criterion-referencing is one. The MEG syllabus has taken to heart this idea without seeming to be aware of many of the difficulties. Criterion-referencing operates on the assumption that it is possible to test absolute levels of knowledge, skill, competence etc; and that with a simple criterion-referenced test like a driving test, criteria for passing are predetermined. In theory the whole entry may pass. The whole notion of criterion-referencing, though, gets more complicated when grades are introduced, because this brings in the idea of different levels of passing. Grade criteria therefore have to be formulated. In theory the full entry can achieve the highest grade; in practice for all sorts of reasons, they are not going to. If one assumes that there is, within any one year, people who are going to perform differently in any test or in any series of tests; then when these graded criteria — the levels at which they operate — are formulated, they are going to conform to imagined levels of ability in society. GCSE is therefore going to have many of the features of a norm-referenced examination; that is, it will operate in terms of prespecified categorizations of levels of achievement which correspond to an idea of how any cohort is likely

to perform. What is different is that the prespecified percentages for each grade are ruled out. The danger is that because the system of graded criteria for each domain is formulated in a hierarchical way, then grades will be awarded roughly in line with how they were under a norm-referenced system. In the National Criteria, the following point is made about coursework, 'Consequently the teacher is likely to be in the best position to judge the merits of his or her own candidates in relation to each other'. This would surely contradict the notion of criterion-referencing.

The second point I want to make is that discrimination is built into, and a necessary part of a norm-referenced test in that the purpose of such a test is to separate candidates from each other. Discriminating between candidates is not the purpose or intention of a criterion-referenced test. Indeed there is nothing illogical about all the candidates getting the top grade. This would presumably be why discrimination is stated as a separate principle from criterion-referencing. It must be seen, though, that the two ideas of criterion-referencing and discrimination are frequently in tension with each other.

Differentiation has to be distinguished from discrimination. Paragraph 16 of the General Criteria says, 'All examinations must be designed in such a way as to ensure proper consultation so that candidates across the ability range are given opportunities to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.' This is the idea of 'positive achievement' for all pupils. It clearly signals a move towards the individualisation of syllabi. It is clear also that this child-centred approach is in tension with other aspects of GCSE — the move towards greater centralisation of control of the curriculum, the desire to move over towards a system of grade criteria, the intention to grade in a formal way (that is to retain ideas such as comparability and reliability). An examination which sets out to compare student with student in terms of graded performances is going to be in contradiction to the idea of an examination being a positive expression of what a child knows. The hierarchical nature of graded criteria means that lower grades are inevitably less adequate versions of what is being achieved by those awarded higher grades. In the MEG 'Integrated Humanities' syllabus, the first assessment objective is, 'to understand and use appropriate concepts, terms and generalisations'. The lowest level of achievement requires the student to show a 'tentative understanding', and to be able to use 'simple concrete ideas'. The highest level of achievement requires the student to show 'a detailed and sophisticated understanding'. The point, I hope, is made. As Caroline Gipps remarked in a previous issue of FORUM, giving unqualified support to the GCSE examination is a mistake. Perhaps the idea of changing the curriculum, of establishing a new pedagogy for the Humanities by operating through a reformed examination system (Phillips, 1987) is merely a dream.

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Work-Based Learning and Assessment

Ron Needham

From experience as a Moderator and Senior Examiner for BTEC, Moderator for CPVE Alternative Route and Adviser for BTEC/CGLI Foundation Programmes, Ron Needham writes on the hazards of assessing work-based learning. He is a Senior Lecturer at Park Lane College, Leeds, and has contributed to *New Directions in the Education of Young Adults* to be published by Croom Helm in April.

The confusion which resulted from the proliferation of vocational qualifications led to a government sponsored review which reported in 1986 (The Review of Vocational Qualifications). Following the recommendations of the report the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was established on 1st October 1986, with the remit to rationalise the provision offered by the 300 or so awarding bodies. Very basically, the NCVQ will have the power to 'hallmark' qualifications which are submitted to it for approval, having ensured that they meet with pre-determined recommended criteria.

Amongst the criteria identified by NCVQ is that 'assessment should be based upon skills, knowledge, understanding and *ability in application*.' This latter element implies that assessment should be made of, and credit given to, what the candidate has learned at the work-place. The original RVQ report, in fact, indicated that the whole of the training and assessment for some awards could be (should be?) done at work. There is nothing fundamentally new in this — the overwhelming amount of training in the past has been 'on-the-job' through 'sitting with Nelly', apprenticeships, articles etc. What is worrying, in fact, is that it is precisely this form of training that was severely criticised in the past and blamed for many of the United Kingdom's economic ills. In many organisations, training beyond the learning of a narrow set of job skills has been virtually nil, leaving workers unable to cope with changes brought about by innovation or by changes in the pattern of consumer demand. It may be asked why, if work-based training has been so inadequate in the past, it is now being heralded as an innovation to be recommended (and perhaps enforced) in 'hallmarked' vocational qualifications?

What *is* new in the NCVQ criteria is the formalisation of the work-based training. Time-serving, as such will be insufficient in itself, and the indications are that the assessment and certification of competence in skills will be expected. Employers may be asked to assess and to certify that a worker has been trained and is competent in a range of job skills which have been previously identified as needed in the trade or profession. This may involve observing performance at work, or perhaps (as in the construction industry) testing at a validated test centre. It is argued that this will give currency recognition to the wealth of knowledge/skills learned at work, which could be used to progress to further education/training, whilst at the same time, the mobility of labour should be facilitated, there will be evidence to employers of the skills that a prospective employee could be bringing with him/her.

Government policy, as indicated by the recent antics of the MSC (eg in distributing YTS contracts), appears to be that any training initiatives will be 'employer-led'. Being realistic, however, many observers doubt whether employers will be capable of carrying out the training and assessment procedures needed without substantial help from the Further Education service. As mentioned above, the training record of UK firms is generally poor. RVQ itself recognised that only 40% of the UK workforce hold relevant qualifications, a considerably lower proportion than in other major industrial countries.¹ Often the first item of expenditure to be cut in a depression is training. Few firms have their own training departments, and since the demise of the Industrial Training Boards, large sections of industry have offered little in the way of formal training at all. Exceptions do, of course, exist,² but generally, YTS schemes where employers assume total responsibility for all aspects of training all too often offer badly structured programmes done on the cheap with poorly trained staff (despite the claims of the Accredited Training Centres, a three day course does not turn a check-out operator into a professional tutor). Anyone who doubts whether the moronic attitude to training in industry really does exist may do well to read Alan Middleton's comments in the TES.³

It is difficult to be any more enthusiastic about employer conducted assessment. Existing education/training schemes which require competence assessment at the work-place has revealed that there will be major problems.

Assessment of competence *by anyone* is fraught with difficulties. Competence is hard to define and is open to interpretation. What, for example, degree of infallibility is required before we accept that someone is really competent? Does the ability to type a letter with acceptable accuracy today mean that the operator concerned will be capable of doing so again tomorrow or next year? In all of the schemes utilising work-based assessment with which I am familiar (CGLI, RSA, Joint Board, CITB), not one has managed to define to what degree competence should be demonstrated before it is accredited.

Competence in single-step mechanical work-skills may be relatively easy to assess, but the assessment of competence to perform more complex skills, such as the ability to evaluate, to make decisions, to solve problems, is very difficult indeed. Difficulties also exist in assessing competence in tasks which will create difficulties in design work.

The assessment of competence *by employers* raises even more concern. The assessment of competence

requires particular skills and is time consuming. It should involve review/counselling/appraisal sessions ('profiling') in which assessor and assessed discuss attainment and how further progress is to be made. The evidence to date is that such skills and time are rarely available. On the CPVE Alternative Route (CPVE delivered through YTS), for example, work supervisors struggled to cope with assessment at the work place of the competence objectives in the Preparatory Modules. It was officially recognised that 'employers require assistance in developing assessment techniques and need encouragement to accept competence and to credit learning achieved'⁴ In fact, without the considerable assistance of the further education partners in the venture, assessment of on-job competence would in a number of cases have been a shambles.

Any form of testing and assessment raises issues of standards. In comparison with skill assessment, final examinations are relatively easy to moderate. Unlike traditional forms of assessment, the assessment of competence often leaves no solid proof of candidate performance which could be re-assessed by a moderator. Assessing the assessor and dealing with his/her errors of judgement is likely to be both difficult and expensive (the driving test, for example, probably the most widely known test of practical competence, relies upon a senior assessor sitting in on the test — yet how many candidates feel aggrieved at failure, and how many of us feel fortunate in passing?). Some work-based assessment schemes have made use of training diaries, but YTS experience shows that what is often being assessed is the trainee's ability to write about what he/she has done rather than how well he/she actually performs that task.

The issues involving standards are not helped by the doubts which exist over the professional credibility and ethics of work supervisors. Some YTS schemes have suffered in the past by the lack of professionalism on the part of the assessing supervisors, with competence assessment being regarded as of little importance compared with the 'real work' of production. In my role as CPVE moderator on the Alternative Route, and as YTS Coordinator in a college working with a large number of managing agents, I have too frequently come across cases where regular assessment has been neglected, and at times, where assessments have been fabricated. Given this, there is little wonder that some professional organisations are reluctant to consider acceptance of work-based assessment of competence even where this could be certified by brother professionals!

Some colleagues, especially those working in the Accredited Training Centres, and most MSC officers would accuse me of being unduly cynical in my prognosis for work-based assessment to be carried out by employers. Most, however, recognise that there will be need for considerable training of supervisors if they are to carry out this work. I am afraid that again I cannot be optimistic. The ATCs have been, so far, merely nibbling away at the edges. A commitment to training means the release of what are usually key staff in production terms, and the typical attitude to this is the statement all too frequently heard by those of us meeting employers involved in YTS: 'I'm in the business of production, not education.'

The foregoing critique of the ability of employers to meet the work-based learning and assessment requirements of the NCVO does not mean that the Further Education colleges are perfectly ready and able to be involved in this work. As outlined above, work-based learning and assessment is very heavy on tutor time. This will be needed for the staff to meet with employers to plan a coordinated programme. A period of placement may be needed for the tutor to gain first-hand experience of the employer's procedures. Meetings with supervisors will be needed on a regular basis, to discuss and review the progress of trainees. Tutors will be involved in assessment on a one-to-one basis, requiring a fundamental change in the way in which teaching time is calculated. As was noted with the CPVE Alternative Route, 'It will be necessary to re-define class contact time in colleges. This can no longer be solely in terms of 'formal class teaching'; instead such teaching may come to form a minor part of a lecturer's professional load. Work-based assessment techniques will require additional man/woman hours.'⁵ Given this, I find it more than a little disturbing that the LEA employers are, at the time of writing (October 1987) trying to re-write the FE conditions of service, extending formal class-contact to 26 hours.

It should also be remembered that the techniques used in work-based learning and assessment are not all that familiar to most college tutors. Many FE teachers are used to dealing with large numbers of students in very formal settings. A good teacher in such circumstances sees his/her role as a facilitator of learning, and manipulates resources available to ensure that students learn, but in the sense that it is not actually work, the setting is still essentially unreal and experiential learning depends upon fabricated exercises. Assessment, even where it is continuous, still relies heavily upon assignments which are 'tests' rather than learning *and* assessment exercises. Many staff still feel threatened and uncomfortable by less formal techniques. BTEC, for example, introduced the concept of work-related skills into many of its courses last year, asking centres to assess these and suggesting that a 'profile' should be used. Most centres have still not come to terms with this, many ignored it (hoping that it would go away?). Only a very few related it to performance at work and sought the help of students' employers/work-experience employers.

Work-based learning and assessment demand different skills (and sometimes attitudes) from teachers. There is a need for experience in using bi-lateral review and appraisal techniques to create awareness in the student of what he/she has actually learned at work, to develop a strategy for further learning, and to recognise and certify competence. A number of FE teachers have had experience of such techniques (CPVE, some RSA and CGLI courses). Unfortunately, these are concentrated at the 'lower' category of work (in terms of Burnham status), leaving a large proportion of colleagues unaware even that such developments are taking place.

If the further education service is to lead the way in the NCVO's crusade for competence assessment at the work-place, then clearly there is need for a raising of awareness and a change in attitudes of some staff, and a change in attitudes of Government and the LEA

Division by Rule?

Colin Everest

A Lecturer from further education, with fifteen years experience of working in industry, questions the rationale for distinguishing numeracy from mathematics education.

Numeracy courses and components are now a feature of nearly all curricular initiatives yet a great deal of confusion appears still to surround the whole question of numeracy. I believe that the word itself and the ideas and attitudes which are commonly hidden behind it do nothing to improve our understanding of the problems involved.

The lack of clear dividing lines between different ideas, and the failure to expose what lies beneath these have contributed to this confusion. The proliferation of 'theories' of, and 'approaches' to, education has also added to it. These 'theories' typically comprise setting up a dichotomy between, for example, 'convergent' and 'divergent' thought, 'rote' and 'schematic', or 'active' and 'passive' learning and then proceeding to say what conclusions about educational practice should be drawn from one or other of these positions. The problem with the 'dichotomies' thus produced is that what starts off as a, possibly useful, identification of two aspects of one process all too often ends up being presented as a choice between two incompatible extremes.

The lack of rigorous debate and the failure to build a 'science of education', a real pedagogy, has resulted in a state of confusion which appears to many people to be unavoidable. It is against this background that the growth of numeracy provision has taken place, and the ideas about numeracy and what it involves have evolved.

Definitions of numeracy usually centre on attempts to describe that knowledge of mathematics which forms a desirable minimum for all citizens. The problem here is not with the definitions themselves but with the interpretations which are given to them. What is described by such definitions is a subset of mathematics. Whatever emphasis is used in the selection of such a subset it cannot produce a separate subject.

The sleight of hand which tries to represent numeracy as something other than mathematics makes it easier to justify the fact that numeracy on CPVE, YTS and similar 'integrated' programmes is often the province of those with few or no qualifications in Mathematics. Lower achievers are the very people most in need of help from teachers with deep insights into the problems of mathematics and confidence in their own mathematical

ability.

There is a tendency to interpret the requirements of numeracy programmes in a minimal way — as narrowly defined functional numeracy. Again the use of the word 'numeracy', by its suggestion that it represents some new subject, encourages this idea. I have witnessed serious discussions about numeracy syllabuses which have concentrated exclusively on such topics as change giving and reading clocks and timetables. Such activities have their place, but to establish such a low expectation of the generally achievable standard is to invite disaster.

In the strictly functional terms which are employed by many of those currently concerned with numeracy programmes it could be argued that mathematical demands on the citizen have been declining rather than increasing. The narrow utilitarian approach to the relationship between mathematics and the rest of our culture, which leads to this conclusion, is unsatisfactory. Mathematics has a number of interfaces with our daily lives which amount to more than basic arithmetic and the relationship between the two is an extremely complex and subtle one.

I believe that it is the wider view of context and relevance which should be understood when the Cockcroft report urges the importance of context and relevance. We should be aiming to produce a population with sufficient understanding of, and interest in, mathematics to be able to master fundamental aspects of the major economic, political, scientific and technological issues which are a prominent feature of modern life. This is not to suggest that every school-leaver should be able to master the intricacies of such matters as price elasticity, population growth or electrical engineering, but that they should have an appropriate level of understanding of the underlying principles of proportionality, series, percentages and algebra to allow them to deal intelligently with such matters in the way society requires of a non-specialist. Those who may be tempted to reject this idea as over-ambitious should consider whether a modern open democracy can really operate if its citizens are not equipped in this way to make informed judgements.

It is often suggested that there are people who take no

Work-Based Learning and Assessment (continued from page 47)

employers towards allocation of teaching resources, as well as a major staff-development programme. The latter is now open to even more doubt, in the auction-like atmosphere which will follow the implementation of GRIST.

If work-based learning and assessment are to be successfully implemented in NCVQ qualifications, then it is important that further education is adequately prepared both in spirit and in skill. If we fail to meet the challenge, then what started as a serious attempt to bring vocational education and training into the 1990s will

flounder as someone else (i.e. employers and cheap-skate training organisations) will fill the gap — with disastrous results for our clients.

Notes:

1. NCVQ, its Purpose and Aims
2. HMI Report on training at Sainsburys
3. Alan Middleton, 'What Industry Wants', *TES*, 9 October 1987.
4. Interim Report by Joint Board/MSC Alternative Route Project Team, October 1986.
5. Ditto.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own, and should not be taken to represent those of the award bodies for which he moderates.

delight in the wonders of mathematics and whose interests lie elsewhere. Should we not, it is argued, provide such people with a functional understanding of mathematics as a tool and leave it at that? But the idea of using a tool without some feel for its mode of operation is not tenable. That one can switch on a television, for example, without understanding the electronic principles of its construction is not in dispute, but the issue of using a tool such as television properly goes far beyond simple knob twiddling 'skills'. It involves, as a minimum, selection of appropriate programmes, attention to the output and interpretation of the information transmitted. So it is with the even more complicated tool of 'mathematics'.

Mathematics is not reducible to a set of rules worthy of memorisation without some attempt to grasp what they do and how they do it. The difficulties that students experience arise from their unfamiliarity with the language and ideas of mathematics rather than their inability to perform operations. Similarly the problems young (and some not so young) people have with television do not centre on manipulating the controls, but rather on knowing when and why they should be operated.

There may be different views regarding the appropriate degree of mathematical understanding required of the ordinary citizen; but that some degree of understanding is necessary should not be in dispute. If a line is to be drawn at some arbitrarily chosen level of understanding and labelled 'below this point is numeracy, above it is mathematics', then it should be possible to explain why this is desirable. Some of those who propose numeracy programmes for, by and large, working class students might be embarrassed by their attempts to make such an explanation.

The best that can be said about this idea is that it provides a means of delineating the mathematical education desirable for the specialist and that for the non-specialist. But the problem is more complex than is implied by such an argument. Society doesn't require only 'mathematicians' and 'non-mathematicians' but people of many shades of mathematical ability. The ability to distinguish precisely between different programmes would be a small gain compared with the possible divisive effect of such an arbitrary distinction.

The word 'numeracy', perhaps because of its linguistic derivation, encourages a simplified view of the mathematical requirements of ordinary people confined only to matters involving number. The term may be used to justify the avoidance of difficult, time consuming and therefore expensive aspects of mathematical teaching

and learning. It does not, however, offer a solution to the real problem.

Faced with a population whose mathematical performance is judged inadequate, it is all too easy to say 'they don't need much anyway' and go on to dismiss the value of much of the traditional curriculum. Restricting one's view to the purely numerical makes this even easier. This is not to argue that the traditional curriculum does not need examination, but that such a facile view of utility is not the basis on which such an examination might be made.

There are a number of non-numerical ways in which the daily lives of ordinary people interface with mathematics and through which the quality of their lives could be improved by a deeper understanding of what is involved. To be able to distinguish 'if' from 'if and only if', to know that $A=B$ and $B=C$ means that $A=C$, to know that all multiplication does not commute, to be able to imagine 3D objects from plans, to be aware of spatial relationships and directions or to have a feel for the value of rigour; all are facilities to which mathematical education can contribute: none should be the sole preserve of the professional mathematician. There is more than an element of arrogance involved in the view that such abilities are proper for teachers, managers and the like but need not concern ordinary people.

In summary: the word numeracy appears to add nothing to our understanding of the peculiar problems which have attended mathematics education almost since its inception. The concept of numeracy appears to be based on a number of false dichotomies, such as relevance vs. abstraction, utility vs. academicism, functional vs. cognitive and, furthermore, on a conflation and confusion of the former categories in each example. Rather than bringing enlightenment, its use has served to obscure some of the fundamental issues surrounding the whole question of the mathematical education of the average citizen. Issues such as the basis on which the curriculum should be chosen, and what qualifications are required of teachers, may be more easily sidestepped if there are both numeracy and mathematics programmes. The use of the term opens up potential for trivialisation of the programmes offered to the non-specialist student. Taken in conjunction, these considerations seem to me to build a strong case for abandoning the use of the term 'numeracy' and attempting to reconstruct a mathematics curriculum which aims to synthesise the utilitarian and intellectual aspects which mathematics itself marries so well.

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‘Taboo’ issues in rural schools

Steve Brigley, Peter Coates and Homer Noble

Steve Brigley has taught history and general studies in secondary schools in the West Midlands and is now a research assistant at Exeter University School of Education, Peter Coates is Head of Humanities at Colfox School in Bridport, and Homer Noble is Head of English at a High School in Nova Scotia. They met while doing part-time doctoral research in curriculum studies.

There can be no indoctrination without censorship. The treatment of controversial issues receives notorious and disquieting publicity in the national media and political fora. These controversies have been centred in large metropolitan areas like Bradford, Brent, Haringey and the ILEA. Little notice has been taken of the fact that similar problems with controversial and ‘taboo’ issues may occur as frequently in rural areas; in fact many schools cope with such issues as part of their daily routine. One of the major concerns of this paper is the myth that challenges to the curriculum content and practice of schools only occur in larger centres. This myth allows problems to be ignored or quietly disposed of in ways which maintain the impression that some felicitous consensus about values and beliefs exists in rural areas. In reality, the battle for control over the curriculum so prominent in urban boroughs rages as vigorously among the various social and political factions in smaller communities across the country. Less attention accrues to these rural debates in the national media and this helps to perpetuate the appearance of local peace and unanimity. Typical of this facile relegation of local controversy to the status of a mere ‘storm in a tea cup’ is the row over the alleged harmful effects of teaching about the occult in an Okehampton school in Devon. Here a local councillor, reacting to a parental concern, insisted that a disciplinary hearing be conducted against a teacher whose lessons in fact were part of an approved school syllabus.¹

This paper seeks to show that people in rural areas are quite aware of issues and are often able to manipulate the myths of what the consensus consists of to their advantage; they argue that curriculum innovations or discussion of controversial issues violates established community norms and custom or traditional perceptions of what education ought to be. When a conflict arises between the educational institution and parents who, for whatever reason, challenge the curriculum, teachers and administrators may find that their hands are tied in their efforts to promote reasonable and relevant additions to the syllabus which parents or members of the public find objectionable. The controversy which has resulted from the present government’s policy of empowering parents as governors over schools has brought the problems of populist techniques of control and influence in schools to a sharp focus.

Parents and other parties who object strenuously to what goes on in classrooms have shown that they have full command of the political strategies of influence and pressure. These strategies are used to perpetuate or develop the sorts of educational programmes they see as appropriate or worthwhile. Although in rural areas there exists no rationally or democratically agreed consensus as to what values and beliefs should be taught, references to this consensus most often support

conservative values. In Devon, objections by senior local politicians led to a proposed effort to prevent teachers from using lapel badges and car stickers to promote any cause which might be construed as political.² This rather bald display of putative political clout failed, but not without having caused real concern. In most situations, however, the modes of influence on school practice in controversial areas are much more imperceptible and, as a consequence, far more powerful. Such subtly undermining techniques deflect the impact of valid educational content or methodology by making it appear trivial, impractical or irrelevant. In this sort of challenge, the sincerely innovative and caring teacher may not be taken seriously or, worse still, be treated as a joke. The after-effect of such challenges to the curriculum is almost inevitably a narrowing of scope in courses and/or teacher and administrator decisions about content which amounts to self-censorship.

The discussion of homosexuality in classrooms serves as an interesting example of an issue which in rural areas might be treated in this quiet self-policing way rather than in the full glare of public political debate. In certain urban authorities, such as Haringey, the issue of homosexuality and the need for classroom discussion to promote more positive views of this life-style is advocated by forceful spokespersons within local authorities. This provides a support system and defense strategy for teachers who undertake such lessons, because the teachers have a constituency to whom they can appeal strong enough to withstand intervention from the highest levels of national government.³

In rural areas few such mechanisms of support exist for such teachers either in the public arena or in local government or educational policy statements. This can lead to very serious professional and ethical dilemmas for teachers and administrators who live and work in rural communities.

The avoidance of controversial issues as a result of successful external challenges to classroom lessons amounts to negative censorship. Indoctrination through paternalistic omission can sometimes have vicious and lasting repercussions within the school. Such controversies when they do become public can undo patient and genuine efforts to establish a school-community climate of trust in which proper and planned examination of controversial, even ‘taboo’, issues may take place. Just how delicate an operation this is and how easily solid and painstaking progress can be threatened is illustrated by the following case report.

In a rural school teachers and administrators have been in the process of creating a school-wide policy concerning which topics would be dealt with under the auspices of a new personal, social, moral, and religious programme. Although considerable ground-work has been undertaken, the school has yet to present the

completed syllabus and policy to the governors for negotiation and ratification. Much care and attention has been given to the political pitfalls and contingencies involved in promoting this curriculum innovation and development in order that they can fulfil perceived needs of students and yet comply with LEA guidelines. The particular concern of the Head and teachers has been that the process of implementing change in the school can be done with the full cognisance and support of parents, governors, and community groups.

As a part of developing trial materials and approaches, a teacher planned a series of lessons dealing with the themes of friendship and cooperation. The lessons were diligently prepared with a wide range of examples and situations which enabled the pupils to engage the particular question of prejudice as it relates to these themes. The students concerned were twelve to thirteen year olds. In role-play exercises designed to help the students to understand how conflicts and prejudices arises between people, one illustrative stereotype, used among several examples, was a homosexual. The lesson's premises and methodology have been widely recommended as effective in enabling pupils to come to grips with these issues in non-threatening ways.

One parent expressed grave disquiet about the homosexual element in the lesson to the Head. The parent pointed out that parents were unaware that this issue was being dealt with by the school with young children. If it was, then parents had the right to be informed so that they could withdraw their children from the lessons if they so wished. Furthermore, the parent questioned the necessity of using a homosexual stereotype with children of this age when other examples were available which could serve equally well to demonstrate the point of the lesson. While disclaiming any personal objections to homosexuality being addressed in the school, this parent skilfully marshalled arguments which suggested that even if the lesson content had been considered necessary and useful, it had not elicited an appropriate response from the pupils. Implicit in the parent's objections was the point that the lesson was needlessly controversial and at variance with the local community consensus on what was appropriate subject material. The result of this one parent's intervention was that the teacher was advised by the Head to withdraw the offending element from the role-play lesson.

The Head found himself placed in a complex and uncomfortable position. While perfectly in sympathy with the intent, content and methodology of the lesson and genuinely supportive of the teacher's efforts, he could see that vocal and articulate parental criticism could seriously endanger the progress being made towards a whole-school policy. The Head's action was motivated by his perception that at this point the school was especially vulnerable to such external pressure because the school policy was not in place but rather in planning stages. The school curriculum was challenged, the teacher's professional judgement was questioned, and self-censorship was exercised by the school. Experience suggests that this case is neither untypical nor extra-ordinary. If the right of schools to evolve curriculum structures is to be protected from overbearing pressures, then the bulwark of an unequivocal

policy statement which addresses controversial issues is vital. Even though they may be contentious, anti-racist, anti-sexist statements of policy do exist and may prove useful as models for schools in the rural setting.

The usefulness of a negotiated and established statement of school policy about the teaching of controversial issues stems from several considerations. First, only when the process of informing and negotiating involves parents, governors, and community interests, will it reflect an explicit and agreed commitment that such studies should take place and thus legitimate the fact that they do take place. Second, after the general policy has been in practice, the gradual evolution of examples of cases establishes precedents and custom as justification for future practice. Third, careful documentation of any dispute about school practice will serve to consolidate and further develop the policy. Fourth, if teachers in rural areas knew that they had the protection of firm policy statements and backing from the community, such as exist in the larger urban centres, many would feel more comfortable about approaching controversial issues like homosexuality with their classes.

The difficulties in negotiating agreement about curriculum policy statements of this sort in rural areas must not be under-estimated. Although many differences exist between the rural and urban schools, it should not be presupposed that rural schools cannot benefit from the experience and practices of schools in the larger centres. Because the problems in rural schools are far less overt, this does not mean they do not exist and are not of acute importance. Attempts to create awareness and concern about controversial issues, let alone establish policies for dealing with them, often encounter the stubborn resistance of people who deny the existence of the problem and any need for a clear policy statement. A common argument raised against such statements is that good teachers naturally know what is best and can be trusted not to exceed accepted conventions of what education is about. In this view, the traditional role and practice of teachers offers sufficient protection against abuses and nothing else needs to be institutionalised to guarantee it. In this way the status quo is maintained in a flexible manner of quietly dealing with each case as it arises with 'wise and paternalistic' practice. This concept in fact depends for its success on teacher self-censorship and the careful avoidance of any potentially controversial or 'taboo' issue. Unfortunately, teachers err on the side of caution, a process which can be professionally dubious given the needs of their students. This paper has argued that policy statements concerning controversial issues can help to pre-empt negative censorship and routine indoctrination into social, moral, political and sexual mores in rural schools.

References:

1. J. Powell, 'Row Over School 'Occult' Lessons', *Western Morning News*, 23 September 1986.
2. Though widely reported in April 1985, this ban was never enforced, being overtaken by events in the form of local government elections.
3. See, for example, 'Move to ban book on gays', *Times Educational Supplement*, 19 September 1986, p.3.

Sheffield's School Focused Secondment Programmes: an LEA Initiative

Kath Aspinwall and George Hill

The Evaluator of Sheffield's School Focused Secondment Programme (SFS) and a secondary teacher seconded to it describe and discuss this unique initiative by an LEA. An ex-primary teacher, she has run conversion courses for Sheffield.

'The main purpose of SFS is to examine practice within our schools and identify areas in which we can make changes so that children end up having a better experience of school'.

'The size of SFS should mean that nothing is untouched and that no school is untouched. It will have a radical effect'.

'SFS is to change schools and make it better for pupils, but we should never forget that it's incredible what it does for teachers'.

'I know that change is going to come, and I want to be there in it, as part of it'.

'I want to be able to look back when I retire and say, "I was there"'.

The 'SFS' these five teachers are talking about is the School Focused Secondment Programme which has been running in Sheffield since September 1986. The teachers are five of the two hundred teachers who were seconded full-time to the project in the first year. In this article we will attempt to describe the SFS initiative and then to identify the particular aspects of the programme that contributed to the sense of excitement and purpose in the secondees that is indicated above.

Sheffield's School Focused Secondment Programme is a city-wide curriculum development initiative, designed to revitalise the curriculum and enhance the experience of pupils. The programme was initiated by the LEA and, though there is a primary component, the main focus so far has been the secondary (11 to 16) curriculum. Schools were first informed of the LEA's proposals in a letter circulated to secondary schools by the CEO in December 1985, recognising that Sheffield's comprehensives 'will bear comparison with any in the country', as is confirmed in the HMI report on Sheffield's educational provision published in 1987. The CEO stated that this was not enough. The letter referred to aspects of the secondary curriculum and school organisation that must be developed if pupils are to receive an education that is 'interesting, significant' and 'will meet the needs of a young adult in the late 20th century'. The suggestions in the letter were not unfamiliar, for example:- more active and experiential learning; new areas such as information technology, economic awareness and personal and social education to be fully integrated into the curriculum, not merely added on; increased modularisation and cross-curricular approaches; a comprehensive record of achievement for each pupil. However there were more unusual elements.

Firstly, the letter committed the Authority to a process of change:-

'Traditionally schools have (implicitly) been staffed and resourced on the assumption of "no change" ... This Authority is committed to a new relationship with schools, and to major cooperative initiatives that will enable schools and teachers to make the radical changes necessary'.

As part of the 'new relationship' the Authority proposed to second up to five teachers from each secondary school, to work on 'commissions' which were negotiated between the school and the LEA and documented in some detail to ensure a focus on school-based priorities within the broad LEA framework. To provide the support, information and challenge that would enable secondees to carry out their commissions the Authority was to work in a 'structured partnership' with Sheffield University and Polytechnic, as 'the issues that must be faced by the teachers are daunting both in their size and their complexity. Their resolution is dependent on an unparalleled degree of openness between the schools and the Authority and the local institutions of higher education'.

The programme was designed to be a rolling one with further secondments to follow in future years. Within the programme there are two sub-groups: three schools are involved in a TVEI initiative, and seven others, four core and three associate, as part of the LAPP programme, in Sheffield called the Curriculum Development Initiative (CDI).

The general response to the letter was positive, although there were some problems. For example, the teachers' action made it difficult for schools to engage in the kind of consultation and debate that had been hoped for. In practice, many decisions were made by Heads and senior management with consequent worries about how best to ensure the commitment of the staff to these decisions. In recognition of the equal importance of the study of primary schooling an additional number of teachers was seconded as individuals from thirty two primary schools. This group found it was harder to develop as clear a corporate vision of the central issues that need attention in primary education. However, despite such factors, the two hundred secondees were soon enthusiastically engaged in exploring and carrying out their commissions. (See Rosie Grant's article in this number.)

The secondees' programme required them to spend

two days a week in their schools, one day with the LEA Advisory team, and two days in either the Polytechnic or the University, although there was a considerable degree of discretion and flexibility. All secondees were taking a diploma at the higher education institutions, a requirement of the year's funding arrangements, which ensured 75% of the programme's finance. There was no central package of materials, teacher-proof or otherwise. The programme was developed around the nature of the school commissions, and the secondees played a crucial role in defining what was needed. The courses at the two institutions ran independently of each other, but were intended to support the secondees in the carrying out of their commissions, by providing input, helping secondees to examine their tasks systematically and critically, and setting the concerns of their individual schools into the wider context.

'I began to feel frustrated at having to consider abstract notions whose relevance escaped me, rather than being allowed to get on with work for my school. I felt as though the University was actually preventing me from making real progress'.

'The fact that our week was pretty well filled with seminars, task groups, theme groups, tutor time etc, was another source of frustration; they wanted us to read and think, but took away our time for doing it.'

'However, this state of mind soon altered. I did not take long to realise that the ideas I was being nudged into accepting were very relevant and, what is more, interesting, that I was beginning to enjoy the discussions and arguments, and that the people who had discouraged me from beginning my commission were right. There was more to it than I had thought.' (George)

The Advisory team had the difficult task of running a series of subject and theme days concurrently with the two HE courses. The diversity, flexibility and sheer size of the programme caused some organisational problems, particularly at the beginning of the year, but it was necessary to respond to different needs and requirements. The secondees varied in age from 24 to 57, and in status from deputy head to scale one. Some already had further degrees or diplomas. The schools had different starting points and priorities, and commissions developed in different directions. The programme had to be flexible and responsive to be effective.

A straightforward description does not convey what it was about being involved in SFS that caused the secondees to feel so excited and committed to the work for the year. At a time of general disillusionment among teachers the secondees' morale was high. At moments it was possible to feel that one was among a group of 'born again' teachers. Moreover, although it was difficult for teachers still in the classroom to sustain the same enthusiasm, there was considerable support for what was happening in schools. For example, in one secondary school all staff except four were involved in some way with activities generated by the secondees, such as developing new integrated courses for lower school pupils for September 1987. This enthusiasm and commitment is equally evident in the 72 teachers who have been seconded for 1987-88 to continue the process of curriculum and staff development.

The willingness to consider change appears to result from widespread agreement, particularly among secondary teachers, that change is necessary in schools. This can verge on uncritical acceptance at times. There is general agreement with the priorities set by the LEA which is taking a close interest in what is happening in the schools. It would be difficult for any less than enthusiastic senior management to marginalise what is happening.

A crucial factor for last year's secondees was the creation of school teams and other interest groups working closely together.

'One of the strongest impressions of life on SFS is of being a member of a team, or of several teams. Our own school team consists of five people of whom only two would claim to have been friends before this year. But we have become quite a closely knit group, with increasing tolerance of, and respect for, each others' strengths and specialities, worries and difficulties. There has been a genuine effort to keep one another informed of ideas, and a surprising (especially on my part) willingness to listen to the others. For example, when one member of our team was faced with persuading the school staff to accept the idea of an integrated first year curriculum, the whole team helped her to do it. There are frequent examples of in-team, and inter-team consciousness: team jokes, team greetings, team mints, team solidarity.'

'Further to this, membership of a team has given a strength which an individual does not have, manifested in, for example, an insistence on sticking to previously established arrangements, despite a Head's pressure to change them, a feeling that we are operating from a position of strength, and, because we are sure of the support of at least four other people, a sense of independence.'

'The fact that we are working as a team has given us more courage to criticize the diet we are offered, where we have felt it necessary, which we probably would not have done as individuals on an ordinary course.' (George)

Of course this powerful team solidarity could exclude other teachers, and had to be handled carefully. It could also feel threatening to heads and senior management for whom it could represent an alternative power base within the school. It could be very uncomfortable for the Advisory service or the staff of the HE institutions whose offerings were sometimes criticized. But for the secondees it was undeniably a source of strength and support. The value placed on being a supportive team also led to a general acceptance that, whatever their status within the school, the secondees must work as equals during the year. This ethos was often talked about, and it is interesting to see how this is maintained now the teachers have returned to school.

All the first and second year secondees see the SFS programme as very different from 'ordinary' secondment. This is because they welcome the fact that their work has a direct relevance for their schools. However, the difference is worth exploring further. The juxtaposition of time in school and time out seems to result in creative tensions. Every week the secondees move between theory and practice, action and reflection, reality and the ideal, personal change and organisational change, school/classroom and Polytechnic/University, authority direction and school

focus, process and product. To use Schon's analogy, they spend half their time in the helicopter and the other half back in the swamp. (Schon 1983). These tensions can be stressful but they also seem to be very productive. There is of course a problem in that the secondees are asked to bring other staff along with them. They are not seconded to produce packages of materials to hand back to other staff. Their time out of school, and the intensity of their activities and discourses during this time inevitably mean that they can find themselves moving further or faster than other staff can accept. The secondees are learning to develop skills in the process of working with adults, with colleagues who are also willing to criticize.

It can be suggested that teachers have a natural predilection for idealism and missionary zeal, qualities which have undoubtedly been tapped by SFS. (See Grace 1978, Nias 1981, Watson 1961.) At a time of general scapegoating of teachers and consequent low morale, for a teaching force to be told by its LEA, in effect, 'we are giving you the time and the trust to work on what is possible in schools', is having considerable effect. It is not perhaps surprising that secondees use words like 'empowered', 'revitalised' to describe their new situation.

It is too early to know what long-term effects the SFS initiative will have on the system, but a group of teachers is feeling pretty good.

'Much learning has taken place, and thinking and planning. The air is full of strange noises, and one of them is the sound of long-disused brain cells having a new lease of life. For that, and for the self-esteem we have gained, as well as for whatever effect we may have in our schools in the future, let us be truly thankful.' (George)

The resistance of the education system to change is well documented. The process in which SFS secondees are involved is leading them to raise questions which can render accepted practice problematic. These questions may be rejected. Last year's two hundred teachers were a powerful force when together, but are only a small part of the whole system. The centrally imposed curriculum casts a shadow, as do the present government's plans to limit severely the power of local authorities. An LEA with only administrative responsibilities may find it difficult or impossible to develop such creative initiatives in the future. Already changes in the funding of INSET have drastically reduced the money available for the initiative this year, with the result that both the secondary, and the already small primary programmes, are smaller than originally intended. However, the secondees are determined to hold on to their aspirations. The situation is worth watching.

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SFS Primary

Rosie Grant

Rosie Grant is a primary tutor on Sheffield's School Focused Secondment Programme (SFS), having previously taught for many years in primary schools and been an evaluator of primary curriculum development projects in Sheffield.

In September 1986, I joined the School Focused Secondment (SFS) programme as tutor with responsibility for the coordination of the primary programme within the overall structure of SFS. The decision to include a small group of primary teachers within the initiative came as a surprise to some observers. Certainly, there was no mention of the primary phase in the CEO's letter to schools in December, 1985. In general SFS was portrayed as a radical new form of inservice designed to promote change in secondary schools. With support from the LEA's advisory teams and tutors from the Higher Education institutions, teachers were to be commissioned to explore ways of moving children's learning away from the formal tradition of 'chalk-and-talk' into more relevant modes which demanded much more active involvement. The reconstructed curriculum would be based on an imaginative programme of integrated studies in the first two years and a modularised course thereafter. Within these broad guidelines, schools were to set their own immediate priorities and ways of working.

SFS is still most frequently referred to within the context of secondary curriculum reform. Currently it forms one branch of Sheffield's Curriculum Initiatives, running alongside the other secondary orientated projects of TVEI and CDI (Sheffield's version of the Low Attaining Pupils' Project). In reality, however, one in six of the seconded teachers is from a primary school. In respect of primary SFS, I would argue that two separate issues have emerged from our experiences. First, given that the SFS programme was planned around teams of teachers working to effect change in secondary schools, does it also provide an effective model for curriculum review and development in primary schools where it has been facilitated by single individuals? And, secondly, what are the consequences of the minority status of the primary group? Does this provide a climate in which primary teachers can develop personally and professionally as well as having an impact on the working practices of their schools? Can they transcend the barrier of being the 'invisible' section of the SFS programme?

I would argue that primary SFS is sufficiently like its secondary counterpart to make distinctions largely inappropriate. It shares common aims and purposes, and the direction of change has been the same. Integration, collaborative group work, and negotiated

(Issues touched on in this article are explored in greater depth in *Curriculum Change: the Sheffield Experience* (1986) Ed. by Jon Nixon, obtainable from Publication Sales, Division of Education, University of Sheffield, Arts Tower, Floor 9, S10 2TN, price £3.50.)

learning, for example, have been issues of concern to many of the secondees. In addition, all secondees have been orchestrating similar processes of curriculum review and development, regardless of the precise nature of their commissions or the age of the children involved. The development strategies for implementing school-based INSET, for instance, has become part of the repertoire of most course members. At first, it seemed that the decision to second a team of teachers from each secondary school as against single individuals from the primaries might be a limiting factor in the effectiveness of the initiatives. The secondary secondees had immediate recourse to interested and supportive colleagues with whom they could discuss issues and decide upon courses of action. In contrast, the primary teachers had to create their own reference groups amongst colleagues on the course or back in school. It may be, though, that this imperative has ultimately worked to their advantage. Primary teachers have had no option but to negotiate with — and work alongside — their colleagues in school. The 'ownership' of the commission could not remain their 'property'; it had to be shared. Additionally, many useful links have been made between primary schools interested in exploring similar curricular issues. Other inschool factors may have favoured the likely 'success' of the primary initiatives. I have no reason to believe that there will be significant differences. My hunch is that other factors, such as the support of the head and the energy and commitment of the secondee, will be much more influential than the school sector. I believe that in spite of the teething troubles associated with any new project, SFS has worked extraordinarily well in many of the primary schools involved. I have been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and hard work displayed by the majority of the secondees, and know that in some schools a process of consultation, followed by the implementation of planned and evaluated change has been established which will continue to be of benefit long after the life of the original commission.

I see the minority status of the primary group as a much more problematical issue. Last year, it is likely that the management of the programme exacerbated the situation. The primary teachers perceived themselves as being last minute placements brought in to round up the numbers (200 teachers were seconded overall) and the tutor team may have been too anxious to offer separate provision as a form of remediation. This year we have set off on a different footing. Most provision is across the sectors, with separate tutorial support for the primary group. It remains to be seen, however, whether this will alter the interaction patterns that we observed within some mixed groups last year. There was a tendency for the primary teachers to form the silent majority and when they did contribute their issues were not always taken up and developed by other group members. The nursery teacher offering a different perspective might be politely listened to, but will her secondary colleagues really hear what she has to say? And if they don't, what chance is there of real change occurring in the secondary schools?

SFS represents an LEA commitment to the improvement of children's learning experiences in schools. Through it, I think they also need to display a commitment to a concept of education which spans the

whole of a child's formal education. I think that the inclusion of primary teachers in future years in more equal numbers is an important marker of that commitment. Only then can a truly balanced programme which is informed and strengthened by the differing perspectives of its membership be provided. Primary teachers need to feel valued members of the educational community. Secondary teachers need recourse to the experiences and expertise of their primary colleagues. The educational system needs unifying if concepts such as continuity and progression are ever to be more than buzz words dreamed up by some educational advertiser who is more intent upon images than implementation.

Unite for Education

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PROGRAMME

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Session 2 **Curriculum and Testing:**

11.15 am infant, junior, secondary implications for children, teachers, parents.

Session 3 **The Fight-back:**

2.15 pm opposing the Bill now and longer term strategies to protect educational values.

SPEAKERS include:

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Collaborative Enquiry in Staffrooms and Seminars

Colin Biott

Principal Lecturer in Educational Development and Enquiry at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic and previously Director of In-Service Education at Sunderland Polytechnic, Colin Biott has taught in primary and comprehensive schools and spent two years as a Regional Information Officer for the Schools Council.

At this time of increased interest in collective, school-based INSET, and especially in view of its promotion through GRIST, it seems appropriate to emphasise that co-ordinators of collaborative enquiry in schools will need continual support. In this article I outline briefly what can be gained, but signal caution to those who assume that it will be straightforward. To achieve collegiality at the same time as thorough analysis and challenging debate is far from easy. The claim being made here is that those who are trying to bring about collective learning in their staffrooms should, themselves, be willing to learn about that task with a group of fellow co-ordinators.

Like many other tutors in teacher education, I have been involved for some time in supporting teacher enquiry which is collaborative, interactive, contextualised and aimed at the promotion of change. The enquiry groups I have worked with in LEA workshops, in curriculum projects and in award-bearing courses have encouraged members to initiate and co-ordinate parallel collaborative enquiries with colleagues in their own schools. Impatience with those who have joined such groups to get 'off-the peg' solutions, materials or new ideas for the minimum of personal investment, has been matched by admiration for those who have made full use of the opportunity to enhance the work of their schools. This has been done through persuading colleagues to join in co-operative enquiries, and by extending and modifying the investigations to address issues of specific relevance to the schools, thus using external support but maintaining the independence and autonomy of the staff.

In 1982/3 with the help of a Schools Council grant, three seminars were arranged to bring together such teachers so that they might share their reflections about the nature of their co-ordinating role. A collection of eight case studies, four from primary and four from secondary schools, describes their individual experiences of linking their membership of a Schools Council project with general school improvement. The following 'pay offs' are claimed. It...

- improved the learning experience of the pupils,
- generated more energy, commitment and self esteem,
- increased the sharing of ideas and problems,
- enhanced internal communication,
- led to the development of new skills in individuals and in the group,
- identified a school's own INSET needs,

- changed expectations,
- speeded up the process of team building,
- helped to make new contacts outside of the school,
- brought recognition and further motivation,
- provided opportunities to influence LEA policy,
- led to the development of new materials and teaching approaches.

(Biott & Storey 1984 p7)

It would, of course, be misleading to imply that their successes were instant, consistent and enduring. The teachers making those claims had shown considerable resilience to overcome the inertia, suspicion, mistrust, indifference and resistance that astute staffroom observers would anticipate. They all felt that they could not have achieved what they did without having first gained confidence and skills in a regional group which also continued to offer them the support they needed to persevere.

At this time of change in the funding and management of INSET many more people are talking about school-based approaches as though they will be straightforward and unproblematic. In the undue haste to spend money it is implied that school-based INSET will yield instant corporate change. Some schools with no previous experience of collegial, enquiry-based development may be looking in vain for quick results. Holly (1986), in his review of the literature, and Foster and Troyna (1987) have emphasised how the collegial approach to school improvement is riddled with dilemmas and contradictions.

The work of Nias (1987) has shown how collegiality is difficult to achieve. She has noted how teachers rarely engage in genuine exchange of views on educational issues, especially in their own schools. This she attributes partly to the traditions which have underpinned their training; the naturalism and pragmatism of Froebel and Dewey rather than the dialecticism of Hegel and Marx. Further, she suggests that there are some features of teachers' occupational lives which impede the growth of the kind of collegiality needed for collaborative enquiry. In their day-to-day professional lives teachers are short of time, they belong to reference groups which protect them from challenge and tend to focus their encounters on the trivial. Their classroom role encourages them to talk but there has been little encouragement to develop the habits of listening.

Further to these observations about initial training and the nature of the occupation it is apparent that much

of the management training offered to senior staff has been based on a 'human relations' rather than 'political model' (see Baldrige 1972). This means that the main task has been seen as the elimination of conflict through skilled work with groups. The political model, on the other hand sees conflict as endemic rather than pathological. Easen (1985) has drawn attention to the difference between constructive and destructive conflict in staffrooms. The avoidance of constructive conflict means, he suggests, that 'instead of looking hard at any inadequacies in our ways of making sense of the world, we become ever more defensive of them.' (p 18) The emphasis on the social well-being of the staff and the individual's concern for maintaining the self-image are powerful forces against penetrating enquiry which might reach the fundamental issues which staffroom talk never fathoms. As one headteacher remarked to me 'You feel reluctant to rock the boat'.

Pollard (1985) observed that the themes most commonly raised in the primary staffroom were related to the maintenance of the self image; enjoyment, workload, health and stress and autonomy. It is likely, then that many of the school-based enquiry groups to be established will reinforce and confirm what is already taken for granted. Those groups will use what Braut (1984) calls the language of 'talk about teaching' or 'the rhetoric of justification', which has been carefully developed to preserve teachers' autonomy and justify their habitual actions.

The attainment of harmony can become an end in itself. In such circumstances, those who are frustrated by the quality of the enquiry and debate may withdraw or make a plea to be told what to do by a strong leader rather than waste more time. In a recent study of cooperative group work in classrooms (Biott 1987) teachers tended to expect that popular and compliant children would be good in groups. Some were subsequently surprised by evidence which showed how some children raised the quality of the processes of group learning by sustaining challenges, urging reflection when urgency was generally favoured, and by being stubborn in the face of group drift towards 'making do'. The critical point here is how 'responsible membership' and 'collaboration' are being conceptualised by teachers in the classroom and in the staffroom.

Active co-ordinators of school-based enquiry tend to value the support of the group away from their own workplace. There is frequent mention of how the talk in their staffrooms rarely matches the open discourse of the seminar room. There is little value in 'library-knowledge' about collaborative enquiry. In any case what has been written is unlikely to interest those who have not tried to do it. In my view, genuine learning about collaborative enquiry is essentially experiential and interactive. Secondly, and because of the experiential and interactive nature of the learning, it cannot be accomplished quickly. The commitments and expectations of participants need to be set relatively high even if the result is that the casual or reluctant attender drops out.

Thirdly, the teachers' sense of motivation and satisfaction needs to derive from an interest in the processes if an enquiry, rather than a claim to superior knowledge about its content. For this reason, the

emphasis should be on the conceptualisation of the processes of building collective meanings which are grounded in specific school contexts.

Fourthly, because of the contextual nature of school enquiries, no person in the group can have prior knowledge of what will or should work. The enquiry is a genuine quest for shared understanding which derives from participation of all members. There are no known procedures or series of generalised steps which will eliminate the need to learn through exploring and checking hunches in specific school settings. New insights are rarely gained in an orderly or predictable way.

Taken together these propositions lead to the suggestion that the external, supporting INSET activity should itself be a collaborative enquiry about collaborative enquiry; it should mirror what is being attempted in the staffroom. Holly (1987) has argued convincingly that it also mirrors the changing pedagogy of the classrooms. Its data and evidence will be of members' work in their own schools. Its processes will need to be kept under continuous, critical reflection to avoid the fixing of orthodox procedures. However, the following criteria may form part of an agenda for a review of progress by both school-based and external group co-ordinators.

Criteria for Reviewing Progress

1. Has the group begun to share a language which is encouraging, supportive and analytical?

I have found from experience that many teachers have a tendency to savage the practice on, say, an anonymous video of a lesson offered for discussion. I have also witnessed how blandly the same group might analyse the work of someone present. Drummond (1986) has discussed this issue and argued convincingly that the lack of language which is both encouraging and analytical is a barrier to the building of collective professional knowledge.

2. Is the group engaged in the interpretation of actual evidence which is equally available to all participants?

A great deal of time can be wasted in talking about education in familiar groups when most of the members could have written the script in advance. Many staff meetings turn out like that. The concentration on the analysis of some specific evidence reduces the likelihood of a series of rehearsed remarks. As Day (1981) and Braut (1984) have argued such an activity can reveal hidden value conflicts.

If unresolved differences in values or preferences remain 'hidden under the carpet', curriculum policies are unlikely to be implemented with any degree of consistency, even though people might speak as though they are.

3. Is involvement voluntary and not stratified according to organisational hierarchies, and are all viewpoints in the evidence, including students' or children's comments, treated equally?

Ground rules should discourage people from prefacing comments with statements such as 'if you were a head of a department, like me, you would know that ...'. or 'I've lived in this area all my life and I know that...'. Constructions of that type discourage and limit

others' participation regardless of the quality of the ideas. It is also educative for students to be brought into enquiries, especially when they are asked to make meaning of their own learning experience and to understand what the teachers are trying to do.

4. *Are the enquiries empowering for participants?*

Have the teachers begun to have more individual control of their own professional work and has the staff gained the collective confidence to ask itself harder questions? These questions might, for example, be focussed on the way that habitual and customary practices are embedded in the socio-political and historical aspects of schooling.

5. *Have the enquiries led to people wanting to do things as a result?*

The concept of 'catalytic validity' (Lather 1986) is useful. It replaces the idea of 'research-neutrality' and detachment, with the notion of people being excited about what they are finding to the point of taking action as a result. It emphasises self-determination through participation in enquiry: of knowing what we want to be better at and of having the will to try.

6. *Does the school-based enquiry group welcome the participation of outsiders in its work and do members seek opportunities for learning experiences in other settings?*

This is desirable on at least two counts. Firstly, that it signals an absence of defensiveness and a degree of assurance that the group is ready to accept a possible increase in uncertainty. Secondly, it suggests that the enquiry is beginning to make participants feel the need to be more informed.

7. *Does the group wish to present its work to other audiences?*

This was referred to by those who attended the Schools Council seminar mentioned earlier. They felt that their own enquiry groups had reached significant stages when individuals overcame their modesty within the group and when the group wished to present ideas and talk about the work to people outside of the school; both to professional audiences and to parents. The advantages claimed were that ideas were organised and refined through presentation and subsequent discussion, and that the ensuing recognition was motivating.

None of the above can be achieved mechanistically from an instruction manual. Those who have tried to sustain group learning will be aware of the 'fits and starts', the false leads, the troughs and the sideways drift. Some problems are anticipated at the outset, but most emerge later. Our future stock of knowledge of what collaborative enquiry means will depend on those with practical experience of it. Those LEAs sponsoring school-based INSET will probably find that the establishment of support groups for its co-ordinators will be money well spent. It will help to shape the future work in the schools and in the LEA. It will also help to build the kind of knowledge the profession urgently needs.

Roy Waters retires

Roy Waters joined the Editorial Board of **Forum** in January 1968 when he was Head of William Penn School in London. He had previously worked under Raymond King, the original Chairperson of **Forum**, at Wandsworth School, one of the very first comprehensives. He joined the ILEA Inspectorate in 1969 and has been invaluable in keeping the Board informed about developments in the schools of the metropolis.

Roy has entertained as well as informed the Board. His serious commitment to comprehensive education and the humanitarian approach that **Forum**, stands for has been tempered by his humour and wit which have enlivened discussion. Shrewd yet humane, he is a realist with vision. The Board has now reluctantly accepted his resignation on his retirement, and here records its thanks to him for 20 years of voluntary labour. He will be missed for his wisdom and friendship. He leaves with our best wishes for a long and happy retirement. *Ed.*

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BOOK NOTICE

The Great Schooling Scandal by Brian Simon, explaining the dangers posed by Kenneth Baker's Education Bill. To be published by Lawrence & Wishart on 12 March, pbk £4.95.

The Education Bill

FORUM Editorial Board's response to the Consultation Papers, Part 2

The Editorial Board has already responded to the four main Consultation Papers related to the school sector in connection with the proposed Education Bill, and now comments on that concerned with post-school further education and on that about school charges.

Maintained Further Education Financing, Governance and Law

FORUM's thirty year commitment to the goal of equalising and extending opportunity for all children to benefit from the best possible provision of comprehensive primary and secondary education has always encompassed a vision of continued opportunity beyond the statutory age for school attendance. Hence the journal has taken an interest in the various schemes for post-16 tertiary organization and community education that local authorities have devised as well as in the more recent series of government initiatives related to the 16-19 age group. The Editorial Board has therefore decided to consider certain aspects of the Government's proposals for reforming this sector.

1. We note that 'the Government recognises the importance of proper planning and co-ordination of further education provision both between colleges and in relation to neighbouring schools.' We are also aware that there has been increased collaboration between secondary schools and colleges of further education in the provision of courses that extend educational opportunities, often facilitating otherwise unavailable combinations of traditionally academic and technical studies. While the initiative for such developments has variously come from the school, the college or the LEA, their realization has required resource planning by the latter.

1.1. We fear that such collaborative initiatives would be jeopardised by the new proposals to delegate college budgets to the governing body whose focus of interest must necessarily be that of the college alone. Moreover, taken with the proposals for financial delegation of school budgets, the co-ordinating role of the LEA would be severely weakened and its ability to deploy resources restricted.

2. FORUM is not committed to any specific form of tertiary co-ordination, consortia or college but considers that such arrangements are best determined in the context of particular local circumstances: our criteria is whether they extend opportunity for all without selective barriers to access. We find it remarkable that this new Consultative Paper makes no mention of any such forms of tertiary organization, and provides no clues on how they might be accommodated.

2.1. The overlap in the work of secondary schools and further education in relation to the 16-19 age group, and the blurring of demarcation lines which comprehensive education has brought about, means that tertiary planning must be undertaken across the sectors. The proposals apparently require LEAs to accept this responsibility without the power to deliver. Once schools and colleges

become semi-autonomous in their separate sectors through financial delegation, the scope for future tertiary schemes will be effectively precluded.

2.2. We conclude that the proposals would be detrimental to tertiary planning.

3. Adult and community education is currently provided in a variety of settings such as schools, community colleges, colleges of further education and their outposts or annexes as well as in separate centres, normally within the Further Education service. Varied premises and centres are necessary to enhance availability and coherent planning required to meet local community needs. The service has suffered fragmentation through dependence on a range of ad hoc, short term, specific grant funding from several sources over recent years while real availability has been restricted by fee levels through pressures for self-financing: there is evident need for reform.

3.1. The proposals not only fail either to recognise the circumstances or to confront the problems, but militate against coherent approaches. Financial delegation to institutions whose prime function is provision of another kind of education is liable to marginalise adult and community education as the perspective of an individual institution is inevitably narrower than that of an LEA accountable to the whole community. Yet the latter's power to plan across institutions and sectors is intended to be diminished.

3.2. We conclude that the proposals for financial delegation would be detrimental to continuing adult and community education as a community-wide service.

4. Colleges of further education collectively, and most individually, offer a wide range of courses, many of which cannot be firmly categorised as exclusively work-related vocational or recreational personal interest: that distinction often depends on the perception and motivation of the student. FORUM believes that it should be the function of further education to offer open access to continuing educational opportunities for all both to equip themselves for work and to pursue their own personal development throughout life.

4.1. We regard the proposals on the composition of Governing Bodies as inappropriate to this function in that they distort the balance in favour of employment interest and disregard wider community interests while also restricting input from the LEA with its strategic planning responsibility for the service as a whole.

5. The proposals for financial delegation and on the composition of Governing Bodies are clearly intended to interact so as to steer further education in a utilitarian direction quite unacceptable to FORUM.

6. In our view, this Consultative Paper

exposes considerable misunderstanding by Government of the complexity, flexibility and sensitivity of further education as it has evolved and is consequently misconceived, mischievous and threadbare. Taken along with the four Consultation Papers about the school sector it clearly demonstrates that the Government's proposals are driven by ideological conviction politics and not by concern for education for people in a democratic society.

Charges for School Activities

1. While welcoming the Government's affirmation of commitment to the principle of free primary and secondary education as established by the 1944 Education Act, FORUM believes it is now necessary to ensure the principle applies universally without discrimination in respect of school location or access to any area of the school curriculum. We regard this guarantee as an essential prerequisite for basic equality of opportunity for all children to benefit from a balanced education.

2. We are concerned at the increasing erosion of that principle, especially over recent years, and the growing disparity in its application which has resulted in educational disadvantage for children attending certain schools — often those in economically and socially disadvantaged catchment areas — where the provision of books and other essential learning materials are so inadequate that there is now reliance on parental contribution or individual purchase as well as shared use by pupils. We have noted that HMI have expressed similar concern in their annual reports on the effects of LEA expenditure policies and identified the inadequacies as a significant factor accounting for poor work and inhibiting independent work.

2.1. We contend that the financial circumstances of parents or guardians must not be allowed to debar children from participation in mainstream educational activities available to their peers: to do so is further to disadvantage precisely those most likely to be already experiencing disadvantage through straitened home circumstances and restricted educative experiences outside school.

2.1.1. The particular location of the school means that certain facilities essential for children's physical development, health and a properly balanced curriculum may be available on the premises or within cost-free walking distance or require transport. Free access to such facilities must fall within the principled guarantee of Section 61 and must therefore apply to such curricular activities as games and swimming, regardless of the location of playing fields and swimming pools. Indeed, whether or not a child learns to swim may be a life or death matter.

2.1.2. Assumptions about the essential content and scope and certain objectives of some school subjects have changed within the past forty years, reflecting developments in the subject discipline as practiced by professionals in the specialism itself, and hence have come to be reflected in compulsory sections or questions within

external examinations. Examples include map reading and fieldwork in geographical and environmental studies, practical work and experiment by pupils in the sciences. Such work is therefore now planned as *integral* to school syllabuses and teachers' schemes of work. Some such work necessitates greater use of consumable materials and some necessitates learning experiences which have to take place outside the classroom and off the school premises.

2.1.3. Educational activities planned as an *integral* part of a scheme of work designed for a class must therefore be accessible to all those children, whether or not a particular activity occurs on or off the school premises, when these are organised wholly or largely during the normal school day. These activities must therefore be non chargeable. To guarantee this would not preclude charging for those more extended, additional activities of this kind which are supplementary to the common course and hence optional.

2.1.4. That some areas of the school curriculum involve greater use of consumable materials than others must not differentially determine access to such studies and associated educational activities by requiring payment either in kind or in cash. This principle has been accepted in respect of science, art and some crafts; but practice has become varied in respect of some crafts or design media and home economics. We would prefer the principle to apply throughout the curriculum, but we recognise that this could severely restrict the range of activities that would be provided in these areas of the curriculum. We suggest that a logical criterion for identifying consumable materials for which parents might be charged, or which they might be required to provide in kind, would relate to whether an artefact or product to be taken home is the intended result. This would define the exception under 9.d. and protect against charging for materials consumed in respect of science and as practice materials consumed in the process of learning skills in crafts of any kind.

2.1.5. We believe that it is important to encourage those extensions of curricular opportunity that can be made available through linked courses between schools or between schools and colleges of further education or local 'cluster' arrangements and that participation must not be inhibited for individuals by transport costs. We therefore support 9.h. and suggest the inclusion of a reference to cover these arrangements.

2.1.6. Individual children must not be deterred from serving or representing their school as members of a team or orchestra etc. at events organised by the school or LEA at a location which involves transport costs. In supporting 9.h. we therefore suggest it cover such arrangements.

2.1.7. Ideally, study of both rural and urban environments should be deemed necessary for a balanced education, yet one or the other may require day or residential visits depending on the location of the school. A child's opportunity to benefit should not be prevented by the financial circumstances of parent or guardian compounded by the location of the school. LEAs should be allowed to develop their own policies here.

3. FORUM believes it is necessary to establish unequivocally that equal access to a balanced curriculum, unrestricted by charges, is a legal right. We therefore support the

principle in 7.i. of listing in primary legislation those categories of expenditure in respect of which *no* charge could be made.

3.1. We consider that the list of categories would need to cover not only those included in 9.a)-i) in the Consultation Document, but also those that we have indicated in 2.1.1.-2.1.6. above.

4. FORUM believes that LEAs should continue to be able to develop their own curricular policies, encourage innovation and seek to match the needs and aspirations of their local communities in respect of educational provision. We therefore consider that each LEA should be permitted to extend the no charge principle, either generally or in cases of hardship, beyond the items protected by primary legislation.

4.1. We consider that each LEA should be required to determine and publicise its policies in respect of charging for other activities; and that these policies should not discriminate between schools providing for the same age phase, although there might be legitimate differences for primary and secondary phases, special schools or outside statutory education.

4.2. Moreover, we do not consider that the Governing Bodies of individual schools should be permitted to divert from the LEA policy by charging for any activity or facility that the LEA had decided to make available free. To do so would encourage some schools to become socially exclusive or introduce effective social discrimination within them.

4.3. However, we consider that schools should be permitted to subsidise other activities or provide facilities from additional resources raised or arranged by their own initiatives for the benefit of pupils attending that school.

4.4. We have argued in our earlier response to the relevant Consultation Paper that we are opposed to the proposal for some schools to opt for Grant Maintained status under central instead of local government. However, if such a new category of school were to come about, we consider that these schools should also be covered by the primary legislation referred to above in paragraphs 3 and 3.1.

5. FORUM is strongly opposed to the suggestion (7.ii) of giving the Secretary of State 'a new power to make Regulations listing those items for which charges might be passed on to parents.' We consider that such a new power would be dangerously open-ended and could be used in the future seriously to undermine the principle enshrined in the 1944 Education Act. We also reject the suggestion in para 11 for 'Regulations allowing Governors ... to pass on charges for items specified in those Regulations.'

6. FORUM recognises and welcomes the many initiatives now taken by teachers, schools and LEAs to offer a great variety of opportunities for children to participate in a wide range of activities never envisaged at the time of the 1944 Education Act. We would wish to encourage such developments. We would also hope that the community, industry, voluntary organisations, Parent-teacher Associations, etc. will support them financially so as to widen access for children who cannot participate for financial reasons in the rich array of extra-curricular 'extras' offered by many schools and for which charges have regrettably to be made.

6.1. We reiterate our concern, however, at

the increased reliance on parental contributions for *essentials* as a consequence of cumulative under-funding. Government must recognise that the cost of many educational essentials, such as textbooks and many consumable materials, has risen at a rate considerably in excess of general inflation. Funding must reflect this to protect the quality of the service in the provision of essentials.

6.2. While welcoming the assurances concerning the status of voluntary contributions from parents in para 6, we deplore the practice whereby some schools *require* such payments. We consider that such practices should be made illegal, lest they become a mechanism for negatively influencing parental choice and thereby for socio-economic exclusivity.

7. FORUM considers that LEAs should be required to publicise their remission arrangements for hardship cases; and that while ensuring that families in receipt of income support or family credit pay no charges, schemes should be flexible enough to cover others identified by the school as needing such help.

8. FORUM is concerned that charging for any school-based activity within the normal school day can lead some children to absent themselves, with or without their parents' knowledge, and then to associate with delinquent truants. We urge the Government to heed this warning when formulating its policies on charging for school activities.

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Discussion

Gender Preference and Subject Status at O Level

It is well known that different O Level subjects attract different numbers of boys and girls: for example, 60% more girls than boys pass Art, and two and a half times as many boys as girls pass Physics.

The aim of the survey reported here was to ascertain what headteachers thought were the main reasons for the discrepancy and examine some implications of it. The heads of eleven secondary schools in one division in Humberside were interviewed.

The heads agreed in identifying similar kinds of pressures on children - the differences between individuals were a matter of degree not of substance. For example, most heads agreed that there were parental and peer group pressures but their extent varied from school to school and from family to family. Naturally the students' own preferences affect their decisions when choices are being made as do the students' perceptions of their own abilities - some students are unrealistically negative about their ability in subjects which require precise reasoning one head suggested. Another personal factor involved in the choice of subjects is the individual's relationship with particular subject teachers, and the teacher's attitudes and methods. Since it is easy for children to make ill-informed decisions in the third year all schools have a system of counselling and pupils have to choose subjects within certain constraints to ensure a reasonably balanced curriculum.

The heads unanimously, and in most cases rather strongly, felt that there should not be different influences affecting boys and girls but they acknowledged that in practice there were. School counselling systems attempt to minimise gender differences but the traditional attitudes of parents and peers and the unspoken gender models provided by staff perpetuate the status quo. 'Hidden messages' from schools are provided by science departments almost entirely staffed by men or modern language departments with more female staff. Local employment prospects also are relevant. A reduction in the number of traditional outlets for boys, notably in fishing, has made catering and leisure more attractive outlets which in turn is perhaps moderating boys' resistance to cookery. There seemed to be a sharp difference between schools in middle class and working class areas and between middle and working class children in a school. Traditional gender preferences were much stronger in working class areas while middle class schools appeared much less bound by tradition. One school has as many girls as boys passing O level maths. Sadly, mixed education has had a retrogressive effect on gender differences. In the first years after comprehensive reorganisation there were substantial numbers of female students on post-O level mathematics and science courses at one of the schools but these diminished as the influence of the previous girls' grammar school diminished.

'A career is not as important for girls as it is for boys' said one head - an observation about his catchment area rather than a personal value judgement. However, our survey may suggest a broader truth in this: as one of my students pointed out, we interviewed eleven headmasters but not one headmistress.

The heads were asked to grade the major O level subjects according to their perception of public attitudes. Although they co-operated a number expressed their reservations about doing so - insisting that educationally they thought it inappropriate to distinguish between the subjects.

Nevertheless, a combined ranking was obtained by averaging the ranks of the individual heads. There was near unanimity about the high status of (1) Mathematics and (2) English Language. A group of eight subjects followed: (3) Physics, (4) Chemistry, and (5) French were clearly spaced; but (6) Biology, (7) Geography, and (8) English Literature, and (9) History were closely grouped. The final two subjects were (10) Economics and (11) Art.

This list can be compared with the rankings of the same subjects according to the ratio of boys to girls obtaining O level grades A to C, which is: (1) Physics, (2) Mathematics, (3) Chemistry, (4) Geography, (5) Economics, (6) History, (7) English Language, (8) Biology, (9) French, (10) English Literature, (11) Art.

The status rankings are based on very limited data so it would be unwise to read too much into them but it may be of interest that the rank correlation coefficient is 0.55, suggesting that boys tend to take higher status subjects. (The rank correlation coefficient is a significant positive value at the 5% level although the product-moment correlation coefficient is slightly lower, 4.6, and not significant.)

Girls have obtained more O level passes in every year since 1972 (except 1977 when the numbers were just about equal). Yet any suggestion that girls out-perform boys in this examination has to be tempered by an appreciation of the standing of the subjects passed. While girls' quantitative achievement is greater, boys' results may be perceived by the public as qualitatively better. Continued counselling, especially of girls from working class homes, and their parents, is essential.

ALAN MARRIOTT
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Reviews

Science for Girls? ed. Alison Kelly, OUP (1987) pp.138 £6.95

The whole subject of girls and their success in science, at the secondary school level, has attracted a wide range of writers. Too often the work of these people has reiterated previous ideas and findings, or hidden its message beneath an inaccessible text. This makes **Science for Girls?**, edited by Alison Kelly, all the more satisfying. Within its four sections the theoretical, historical and social aspects of science education, which have made it inaccessible to half the school population, are allied to possible responses. Presenting the information in this way should assist the authors in getting their message across to the widest possible audience.

Part one of the book offers four approaches to the reasons for girls not obtaining the most from the science education offered. The overall message of these four chapters can be summarised by the words of Alison Kelly: 'it is necessary to change science'. This attitude pervades much of the book and distinguishes it from many earlier texts where only the 'image' of science was seen as detrimental to the progress of girls.

The second part of the book looks at what actually happens in the classroom and presents some evidence, from Margaret Spear and Margaret Crossman, that teachers of either sex are liable to show bias in the way they mark, the way they present their subject and even the way in which they allocate their attention and time. Although some of these ideas have been proposed before, the presentation of data to support the conclusion does enable supposition to become factual. This is important if action is to be taken to initiate solutions to the basic problems. Unless those who wish to make science more accessible to girls have evidence that the present system fails in this respect, then progress will be slow.

Another essential, for an effective policy, is presented in part three of the book: curriculum analysis. Barbara Smail presents the techniques she has applied to develop materials which are more 'girl friendly'. This is followed by a more discursive chapter, by Di Bentley and Mike Watts, which proposes a need for 'feminist' rather than 'girl friendly' science curricula. This latter differentiation is seen as a logical reflection of the previously outlined need to change science, not just its image.

The last section of the book looks at intervention programmes used by this country and in the USA. The evidence offered by the work of these programmes is not made very clear but it does seem that the failings of the present system to make itself accessible to girls acts to perpetuate its own failings.

In summary, I found this a most thought-provoking book, and one which I would readily recommend to others concerned about the weaknesses of science education. My only qualm concerns the time that it will take for mounting evidence to be used to develop an effective response so that all pupils have equality of opportunity in science.

DAVID MOUNTNEY
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Reviews

Whither Comprehensives?

The Comprehensive Experiment: A comparison of the selective and non-selective system of school organisation, David Reynolds and Michael Sullivan with Stephen Murgatroyd. The Falmer Press, Education Policy Perspectives Series (1987) pp155. hb:£14.95; pb:£7.95.

Researchers use quantitative methods in the hope of creating a scientific foundation for their speculations. A few tables of statistics can convert opinion into fact and argument into evidence. Unfortunately every experiment has a designer with the same flawed, selective vision as the rest of us. Why, for example, were identical twins so important for Sir Cyril Burt? Why is the National Council for Educational Standards interested in grammar-school results?

The Comprehensive Experiment describes and explains data created by its authors in a fictionalised Welsh school district, Trelw. By happy chance, half the area went comprehensive in 1973, and half did not, facilitating a comparison of the 'two systems'. 328 pupils in all, 42 of them in a grammar school, were given the Edinburgh Reading Test and two American attitude tests. Results were compared with scores recorded earlier (at primary school) for extraversion, neuroticism, reading, maths and verbal reasoning. According to Reynolds and Sullivan: 'the selective system slightly outperformed the comprehensive system on academic output, and considerably outperformed the system on one of the attitudes to school scales.'

These surprising 'product moment correlations between intake and outcome variable' are explained by ordinary observation. In one of the schools 'there is no formal pastoral care system ... senior staff activity is at a low level and their expressions of concern for the pastoral care of pupils are generally conspicuous by absence.' Primitive management systems (described as 'bureaucratic') include the headteacher 'handing out stationery and textbooks to heads of subject departments'. Meanwhile, in the other comprehensive, 'sixteen heads of department gave on average over twenty lessons a week to the sixth form.' Between them the two fledgling comprehensives developed only three mode III CSE examinations.

The 'non-selective system' of the sub-title in fact refers to two traumatized, split-site, social priority area schools fourteen years ago. The authors comment that 'our research atypicality must be admitted openly' but inevitably feel that their work has 'implications' for all schools. A final chapter, 'Towards Policies for Effective Comprehensive Schooling', argues persuasively that if you aren't nice to people they can be horrid back, especially when young.

Reynolds and Sullivan are disturbed by the

'failure of the schools to develop good relationships with their pupils' and call for a 'far more participatory style of management'. A comprehensive must be 'universalistic ... and selectivistic' to achieve 'the academic and social development of all its pupils.' These familiar, generalised recommendations arise from the researchers' impressions of the sample schools in action, not from causal connections implicit in the data. No attempt is made to prove that these two sad cases are typical of the system, in 1974 or 1987. The authors demand, nevertheless, 'almost a cultural revolution in the teaching profession's behaviour, expectations and attitudes.'

This apocalyptic talk of revolution is dangerous because it disguises the limitations of research into 'school effectiveness'. Innumerable factors influence development; and 'input/output analysis' is unlikely to disentangle the contributions of teachers, parents and the pupils themselves. Complexities of mind and culture mock the assessment techniques designed to trap them.

Reynolds and Sullivan, like other school improvers, judge the system by its failure to discover an elusive formula for permanent educational advance. Such utopian aspirations, often shared by politicians and the public, have led to a harsh verdict on reality, damaging morale and confidence in the schools. Teachers, accustomed to working with ordinary, unsuccessful children, despair of achieving unattainable goals. **The Comprehensive Experiment** contributes to a climate of discontent with schools and teachers in which progress is less likely than before.

BERNARD BARKER
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Redefining the Comprehensive Experience ed C Chitty. Bedford Way Papers 32 (1987) pp128, £5.00.

This symposium is most opportune. Clyde Chitty has brought together five people committed to comprehensive education to examine some of the problems which the movement faces and to suggest ways forward.

As editor, he sets the recent historical context from the 1960s and, in his concluding chapter, relates the debate to the wholesale attack represented by the Education Bill in 'its repudiation of the post-war social democratic consensus'. In his perspective there is continuity from Callaghan's Ruskin Speech in 1976 to this latest threat, and the main subservice theme the pressures for differentiation.

One of these subversive pressures is elaborated by Michael Young's analysis of moves to 'vocalize' education. He suggests that the accompanying rhetoric about breaking down barriers to access can point the way forward to a 'new vision of

education' liberated from the sterile dichotomy of academic versus vocational and practical. Margaret Maden exemplifies how this can begin to happen in a comprehensive Centre for 16-19 year old students who increasingly negotiate their curriculum and find a 'commonality of concerns' which shapes the institution. Her plea is for a tertiary system incorporating a variety of models.

In a refreshing exposé of inherent contradictions in the sloganised demands for greater vocationalism, instrumentalism, specified objectives and so on in the production model of schooling, Bernard Barker unwraps progressive education from those accrued distortions that gave it a lack of direction and made it vulnerable to attack and take-over. This enables him to argue for traditional academic disciplines presented through the pedagogy of progressive education to recreate humanism for today.

Carol Adams argues for the comprehensive movement's traditional concern with social class to be redefined to include race and gender and interaction between these three bases of unequal treatment. She then suggests a range of strategies to achieve the necessary changes.

Consonant with this widening of the concerns for comprehensive schools' attention is Michael Fielding's search for a new — although he terms it 'alternative' — paradigm for comprehensive education. His is the most theoretical contribution in which he stakes a claim for the third quality of the revolutionary trilogy to be the new underpinning. Libertarian and egalitarian responses can be mutually exclusive in practice without the principle of fraternity to provide 'the interpersonal grounding' and sense of community so lacking in today's individualistic society.

Running through these essays is the message that, to regain the initiative, the protagonists of comprehensive education must set their own agenda in today's context. To do so requires a fresh analysis of that context as well as of the current trends foisted upon the educational scene over the two decades. This collection begins that process at a politically crucial moment and should encourage others to pursue it further.

NANETTE WHITBREAD
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Comprehensive Schools: Past, Present and Future (1986) by Alan Weeks; Methuen, London; pp 228; £15.00 hb; £6.95 pb.

The first third of Alan Weeks's book is a detailed gallop through the 'why' of comprehensive re-organisation and the vagaries of that re-organisation since the early 60s. For the student of the last two decades or so of the comprehensive movement, this is a usefully concise summary. Touching lightly on a considerable number of issues, the

political ebb and flow and the influence of pressure groups are well rehearsed. 'Expedience rather than ideology' is the theme — comprehensive schools as a substitute to increasing grammar-school places; the middle school movement of the late 60s and the current interest in separate post-16 institutions at a time of falling rolls.

This is a description section, and where opinions are shared, there is little that will upset those who worked through those years. A small point perhaps, but I do wonder whether the delay in raising the school leaving age from 1970 to 1972 can simply be covered by 'thus comprehensives, struggling to become established, were denied for two years the 20,000 or so extra teachers this measure would have provided'. It seems to me that this illustrates one of the problems of touching too lightly on many issues. In this case it could be argued that the two extra years of preparation were not always well used and that, when additional resources finally arrived they, too, were not always effectively deployed. Certainly the young school leavers' courses, often in separate blocks, were not part of a genuine comprehensive development. It was the spur to a more detailed examination of post-14 comprehensive education; a continuing but still incomplete process today.

In a longer mid-section, Denis Marsden's 'Which comprehensive principle?' from *Comprehensive Education* (1969) is used for a more expansive examination of the 'meritocratic' and 'egalitarian' principles or profiles. In essence, the 'meritocratic' schools by their infrastructure, particularly setting or streaming, continued the grammar-school tradition attempting to 'equalise education opportunity by maximising a pupil's academic attainment'. Reasons for meritocratic success or failure are explored in a reasonably balanced way. For me the author's view comes through by reading *between* the lines. He charitably considers the task to be huge and complex. On considering the fewer egalitarian schools he clearly warms sympathetically to the subject. These schools, some of them household words, do more clearly represent genuine comprehensive principles. Adding in the community dimension, Alan Weeks considers issues of mixed-ability teaching, democratic models of government, issues surrounding a common curriculum and multi-ethnic programmes. Perhaps I am revealing my own personal perceptions but I feel his message is that the task is huge and complex but the egalitarian direction is still the right one.

Finally: a shorter section on the future starting with the rather grim picture reflected by cuts, falling rolls and alienation, but ending on the more optimistic opportunities ahead. A difficult task at the best of times. Priorities are identified and, very properly, the end is a focus on the pupil/student and what it all means to them. From my parochial context I feel at ease with this but would have liked some more help with the 'how'.

Amongst the material I particularly like: — the promotion of 14-19 concern over the possibility of 11-16 becoming the fastest expanding type of school. 'This is the only sector of the comprehensive system without a mature ideology, but this does not usually hamper developments in secondary reorganisation'.

— statements like 'Youth unemployment must constitute one of the worst prospects for comprehensive schools, even worse than financial stringency,' and

— the concern for more opportunities for women.

With these and other key issues raised, a more campaigning stance is certainly going to be necessary in the coming months and years.

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The Elite Corps

HMI by Denis Lawton and Peter Gordon.
Routledge and Kegan Paul (1987) pp180. hb: £14.95

Just as the eye is the only exposed part of the brain, so the Inspectorate is the only exposed part of the DES. With a Freedom of Information Act it might be a very different story, but as it is, the lost legion of bureaucrats remains cosily concealed in Schools Branch 2 or Teachers Branch 1 while your neighbourhood HMI is the word made flesh.

But whose word? A personal HMI word, or that of the Inspectorate as a corporate entity? Does HMI allegiance lie with the Permanent Under Secretary, or with the Minister? These questions are increasingly important as the politicians annex more and more educational territory, laying waste so much of value as they go on their philistine way. This is therefore a timely book, and even in some respects overdue. Given the extent of educational publishing, it is surprising that HMI have had to wait so long for their meed of attention. Perhaps it is a further vindication of the Andy Warhol principle, for they are by nature a discreet, penumbrous collection of suits and skirts, yet at last they have the chance to be famous for five minutes.

They regard themselves, it appears, as 'an elite corps' (p147), and did not relish the 1968 Select Committee's suggestion that they should regularly change places with LEA advisers. But there are ways of dealing with every suggestion, and their collaboration with LEAs in producing the 'red book' series of reports in the early 80s was commended by the 1983 Rayner Report. There are scarcely 500 of them, and there were fears that their privileged status might take a tumble as they rode into the Rayner valley of death. But the corps has emerged stronger than ever, successfully resisting the axes of audit and the muskets of the managerialists. They emerge

squeaky clean, too, from the Lawton-Gordon scrutiny. Can any English institution really be that virtuous? How is it possible to stay the teachers' friend on the one hand, and the servant of the DES on the other?

The answer is threefold. First, they enjoy historical privileges which give every Senior Chief Inspector a few aces to play; second, they have been generally well led, keeping deftly clear of potential pratfalls (managing to look the other way, for instance, during the William Tyndale affair of 1973-5); and perhaps most important, they are demonstrably sound at doing their job. Size may come into it, too: if they were any bigger, some of the grapeshot would be bound to hit them.

Do they, then, possess a corporate identity? It is difficult to believe it, from this account. They are initiated, upon joining, into the customs of the clan during a year's probation, but thereafter the endless round of inspections and reports must leave little time for image-building. And this, in any event, would look too political, even too bureaucratic. Their voice is their professionalism, and it is a shield as well, protecting both HMI and those whom the Inspectorate inspects.

Yet HMI is not a merely reactive body. The publication of *Curriculum 11-16* in 1977 was a pre-emptive strike (even if very reminiscent of the Scottish Munn Report of that year), as was *A View of the Curriculum* in 1980. But what makes the story of the Inspectorate so riveting is their involvement in almost every significant educational development. The book is particularly strong on this historical aspect, and to read the narrative of this century's changes from the HMI perspective is to gain a fresh insight into these events. Like most good stories, it leaves one thirsting for more. We await a more ethnographic, insider's account of how HMI discuss and form policy, how they judge issues and actions, how they respond to the pressure of political events. Step forward Peter Wright, HMI.

In the meantime, we must content ourselves with continuing to note those significant educational developments which HMI do *not* get too involved with. The APU is a good example, and so is teacher appraisal. After all, who in the land can possibly know more about teacher appraisal than HMI? But all we hear is a deafening silence. And now we learn that responsibility for checking up on the performance of schools, under Mr Baker's national curriculum and its benchmarks, will become the responsibility not of HMI but of LEA advisers and inspectors. How very interesting, in the Chinese sense (as Sheila Browne SCI once remarked to a Parliamentary Committee). Can it be that HMI have doubts about this very wonderful new scheme? Surely not!

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