

# FORUM

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

Summer 1989

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**This issue**

**LMS**

**National Curriculum**

**Parent Governors**

**Under-fives**

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## The Next Forum

The theme of the next **Forum** is 'The Education Reform Act in the School Context'. Mary Jane Drummond and Derek Gillard look at the implications of the Act for the primary age range; and Caroline Gipps follows up her recent article on the TGAT Report with one on National Assessment and School Evaluation. Other articles look at the likely impact of the National Curriculum framework on the teaching of various subjects in the secondary curriculum; and Jean Jones of the Institute of Education leads a symposium on Health Education and PSE.

In addition, Caroline Benn will write on some of the unseen aspects of the privatization of education; and there will be a feature on the Government's new scheme for licenced teacher status.

# Baker's Dilemmas

Baker/Thatcher education policies are in disarray. At least two cornerstones of their reformed education edifice are proving insecure and threaten to destabilise its structure in the early stages of its reconstruction. Ideological conviction politics and the vendetta against Labour LEAs, which together inspired the design so hastily drawn up two years ago, are in conflict with economic and demographic imperatives and with their own rhetoric about raising educational standards in schools. Their scheme's populist underpinning may yet be found to contain a time bomb with a delayed fuse set by the clock of delegated budgets.

The National Curriculum is seriously at risk from the steadily growing shortage of teachers for key foundation subjects — a problem evident for many years and already restricting the curriculum on offer, but which is now highlighted by the requirement for schools to cover these subject areas. Opting out is misfiring on schools not intended as elite or political targets, thereby posing awkward dilemmas for the Secretary of State and frustrating his existing policy for financial savings through a rational reduction in the number of schools to match pupil numbers.

In February the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions, whose members Kenneth Baker appointed, warned: 'The supply, motivation and quality of teachers are likely to be a major determinant of the success or failure of the reform programme — including the National Curriculum'. They paid tribute to the 'notable degree of professional commitment' among teachers, found no evidence of any decline in the academic quality of new teachers, but again castigated the DES for its failure to produce up-to-date data on school staffing and repeated their concern about disguised specialist shortages whereby a quarter of all secondary teaching is by teachers unqualified in that specialism.

That Committee, HMI, the DES in its evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on the supply of teachers for the 1990s, the teachers' associations, the LEAs and other informed sources have identified mathematics, chemistry, physics, modern languages and technology — with computing, music and religious education added to some lists — as specialisms in which acute shortages are forecast to worsen to many thousands. At least half the National Curriculum, including two-thirds of the core, is thus threatened at the secondary stage; and primary schools are well known to lack teachers whose curriculum strengths originate in these areas. Yet, regardless of the National Curriculum as such, these are important features of any child's curriculum entitlement which government has a duty to deliver.

Moreover, HM Chief Inspector recently stated in his Annual Report that 'staffing numbers need to be commensurate with the demands of the national curriculum', including more in primary schools to permit at least 10% non-contact time. The teachers themselves believe this should be nearer 20%. As he said, without enough 'suitably qualified' teachers 'the rest falls.'

Opting-out policy is going awry — from this government's viewpoint. In a significant quarter of ballots so far held, parents have rejected taking the school out of the LEA. Ballots held, both those favouring and those rejecting opting-out, are evenly spread between Conservative and Labour LEA's. Eight schools now have approval to opt out, including two church schools. The predominant reason for holding a ballot has been to avoid closure within an LEA's plans to cope economically with falling rolls. Half the balloted schools have under 750 on roll — many well under. Thus the main threat is to the government's own policy, constantly pressed on LEAs, of rational planning in accordance with demographic and economic imperatives.

If he was to retain any credibility for responsible stewardship, Baker had to reject votes for the unviable and thereby lose credibility as parents' advocate. He has now done so. A school for over 1,000 with 236 pupils cannot opt out.

Intent on protecting Thatcher's flagship, he has announced a grant of £150,000 to the Grant Maintained Schools Trust for 1989/90 — on top of £23,000 last year — to subsidize opted-out schools above their DES grant. Here is reward and bribery for disruption of sane planning.

If Grant-Maintained Schools are funded at the same level as if they had stayed with the LEA, as the DES consultation paper indicated in March, their governors will face the same problems as those managing delegated budgets in LEAs, but with central government visibly responsible. If they are given more funds, as now seems his intent, then governors struggling with delegated budgets in the mainstream LEA sector must surely be up in arms at the injustice.

Local Management of Schools (LMS) with delegated budgets will make parent governors aware as never before of how underfunded schools are. This is already happening as LEAs consult with governors and explain the government's formula for delegating budgets which are plainly inadequate. The direct impact of rate capping becomes evident. There is potential here for a groundswell of protest if parents, teachers and governors combine in support of their schools' needs.

Scandalous amounts of money are being frittered away on promoting various aspects of the Education Reform Act's mischief. £6.2 million is allocated for three consortia to develop Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) — work which may not even be used — £40,000 a year for the salary of the chief executive of the City Technology College Trust, £173,000 to promoting Grant-Maintained Schools. Yet successive HMI reports on the effects of expenditure policies have shown a cumulative shortage of resourcing for basic tools of education and maintenance of school premises.

Parent governors together with teachers must bring the message to every home. The Secretary of State must be held accountable for the crisis in public education. His 'reforms' both show this up and aggravate it by irresponsible, costly, politically motivated adventurism.

# LMS: its impact on the headteacher's role

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## Keith Foreman

Keith Foreman is Principal of Burleigh Community College in Loughborough which is taking part in Leicestershire's LMS pilot scheme. He was previously Warden of Comberton Village College in Cambridgeshire and was involved in piloting that County's Local Financial Management Scheme. A member of the DES School Management Task Force, he writes here in his own capacity.

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Critics of Local Management of Schools (LMS) have seen it as a distraction from 'the central processes of education' — the teaching and learning of students in our schools. Heads have traditionally been regarded as leading professionals, the persons appointed, as a consequence of successful teaching experience, to manage groups of professional staff in the processes of pedagogy, the craft of teaching. Their job title 'head teacher' affirms the fact. How can they fulfill that role while, at the same time, attending to all the specific legal and financial management tasks which LMS demands? Fred Jarvis of the NUT put it succinctly when he said that heads, 'should be educational leaders not accountants struggling to balance the books'.<sup>1</sup> Are they, then, to become chief executives?

This article explores the changing role of the head as a consequence of the devolution to schools of major decision-making powers, and attempts to forecast, even somewhat speculatively, how the head's role as professional and pedagogic leader may be changed. The difficulty is that LMS cannot be considered as a separate issue because it is integral to other imposed changes in our educational system, including a national curriculum and testing at 7, 11 and 14; increased powers for governing bodies; open enrolment; and national conditions of service and systems of appraisal for teachers, all of which have implications for the role of the head.

Nevertheless, the hard focus of this paper will be on LMS in so far as it is possible and sensible to treat it discretely. It creates, after all, a radically new and challenging environment in which education is to be delivered.

A second difficulty is that pedagogy is not a word commonly used in this country. Curriculum we understand (even if we interpret it far too narrowly); pedagogy we cannot even pronounce with confidence! The professional duties of headteachers do not include the word. On the other hand they do include: deploying and managing all teaching and non-teaching staff; determining, organising and implementing an appropriate curriculum having regard to the needs, experiences, interests and aptitudes and stages of development of pupils and the resources available; keeping under review the work and organisation of the school; evaluating the standards of teaching and learning and ensuring proper standards of professional performance; supervising and taking part in appraisal.<sup>2</sup> Pedagogy, I interpret as the setting of learning objectives, the planning of learning experiences and the

assessment of students' achievement. My assumption is that, in the absence of a General Teaching Council which might have reached agreement on a national approach to pedagogy, teachers refine their knowledge of pedagogy by personal study and by observing and reflecting upon their experience of organising learning. Heads can assist in this process by creating the right environment for reflection and review, encouraging self-analysis, opening doors to constructive INSET, providing models of 'good practice' and constructing team teaching approaches. These after all, are the 'central processes of education' — and it is as well to remind ourselves of the legal context.

Perhaps it ought to be said at this point that in many larger schools these responsibilities are shared with other members of management teams. LMS extends such responsibilities, making team leadership even more important in the armoury of the practising head. In smaller schools, in contrast, many heads will spend a majority of their time teaching. For them LMS will have a different impact. Generalisation, as always, is fraught with risk.

## LMS: its key features

LMS requires each LEA in England and Wales (not in Scotland or the Isle of Man!) to produce a formula by which it allocates the bulk of its funds to schools; powers to determine how those funds are to be spent are to be delegated to the governing bodies of all secondary schools and all primary schools with over 200 pupils subject to any conditions imposed by the LEA under the scheme and approved by the Secretary of State. (Schools with under 200 pupils may be included at the LEA's discretion). Such schemes will, therefore, be unique to each LEA. They will involve far more than financial delegation. The powers of governors will extend to decision-making on most matters in schools, including, for instance, the determination of the numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff, their selection and dismissal and the established and publication of disciplinary and grievance procedures.

The basic aim of LMS, according to Circular 7/88, is *'to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools by making them more responsive to the needs and priorities of parents, employers, students and the local community'*.

Some critics have defined other, more political motivation. The underlying principle is that decisions are best taken by those who are closest to the users of



the education service, and that, surely, is to be applauded. The underlying assumption is that schools, in competition with one another, will become more responsive and alert to the demands of a changing world. That raises many questions about marketing schools, the danger that hard-nosed competition will harm valuable schemes of collaboration which have emerged in recent years. Some heads will want to go further and 'opt out'.

How will LFM affect the role of headteachers? In a word, dramatically. Governors will wish to delegate some of their powers and responsibilities and the pattern will vary, but they will rely to a large extent on the guidance of the head (who, incidentally, is more likely than ever before to be one of their members). The head, for instance, will need to ensure that a draft development plan is drawn up and strategic targets agreed with school staff and LEA officers/advisers/inspectors prior to presentation to governors. It will be the head's task to create a vision of where the school is going, and to recommend with wisdom where the priorities for resource-use lie.

### **Planning**

Because heads of schools had limited funds at their disposal prior to LMS — capitation allowances on a one year basis — strategic planning was rare. LEAs controlled staffing, the most expensive and valuable resource available. Few heads produced whole school development plans which had been agreed by governors, staff and clients of the school. They will now be essential.

Every section of the school will need to set out its aims and policies and its bids for the limited resources available. The head will need to lay down a clear and regular format for the presentation of such policy statements to governors, ensuring their inclusion in the planning cycle which must be based on the financial, not the academic year. In a technical sense, the head's capacity to plan, organise, coordinate and schedule will be extended. It will be demanding of time — especially in the learning phase of implementation and for those heads who do not easily adapt to these aspects of management. Some heads may need to develop skills associated with budget management-monitoring expenditure patterns, interpreting accounts, forecasting, project planning, for instance — but it would not be sensible for heads to become closely involved in technical aspects of accounting. Using the skills of teaching and non-teaching staff to the best advantage in these processes will, in many cases, be a key factor. Increasing the resource base, on the other hand, is an area that heads will not be able to ignore — which takes them into an area of some political sensitivity. Another skill to be learned? It will take them into an entrepreneurial role at which some will not be successful for reasons related to themselves or the social context of their schools.

### **Staffing: personnel management**

LMS demands a participative management style which will ensure the active collaboration of staff, both teaching and non-teaching, in planning and resource management. The head will need to find ways to build

teams and develop leaders by clear delegation of responsibility. Some heads may not have found this easy in the past. They will also need to harness the support of staff in meeting the challenges of change, building and maintaining morale, encouraging enterprise and creativity, often in the context of falling roles and diminishing resources.

Ensuring that the actual system of staff appraisal which operates in the school within the framework laid down by the LEA is acceptable to and supported by the teachers will be a major requirement. How, for instance, will classroom observation be designed? What measures will be used to determine the effectiveness of teaching? In a very direct sense heads will be accountable for the performance of the corporate body of staff, so their abilities to resolve conflict and negotiate compromise arrangements will be key skills. Heads collectively will also need to work closely with LEAs in ensuring that systems for the professional and management development of staff are established — for the most part they do not exist at the moment — and in schemes for monitoring and evaluating school performance (including the appraisal of headteachers themselves).

### **Curriculum & Pedagogy**

LMS seeks to ensure that students learn more effectively. The criteria for resource management must, therefore, be related to the needs of students in the context of the local community and within the national and LEA frameworks. Head will need to ensure that schools develop systems which allow these needs to be identified, guaranteeing that teachers have the opportunity to work with students in the determination of personal needs and ways of meeting them. Timetables will need to be reviewed, days and terms reshaped to incorporate a variety of learning situations. Clearly, too, the head will be constrained by the need to ensure the adoption of the national curriculum and attainment tests as they are implemented under the 1988 Act, but there will be many opportunities for curriculum initiative both within and beyond the National Curriculum which the wise head will seek to exploit: the shape of the core (translating the 10 discretely titled study areas so as to leave time for other things); cross curricular themes; the relationship of pastoral to academic structures (related also to teachers and their conditions of service); the management of records of achievement. Heads will also be able to influence pedagogy, especially if the emphasis is put on the needs of individual students: staff deployment, support structures, group composition, styles of learning which are active and participative, ensuring that teachers do not 'teach to the test' — a major problem not to be underestimated; methods to determine students' needs; systems for monitoring and evaluating the progress of learning; the provisions and allocation of scarce resources. LMS enhances, in my view, rather than diminishes the head's role in the management of learning.

### **The Community Role**

Heads will need to devote more attention to working

with and influencing non-professionals. Too much of their time in the past has been taken up with professional in-house debate and discussion with colleague heads, often concerned with the extraction of resources from hard pressed LEAs. They will need to spend more time influencing governors and beyond them, the wider community — employers, parents, students, pensioners, influential groups, opinion leaders, media reporters and photographers . . . They will need to sell their schools, to explain their values and resource needs, publishing successes, maintaining myths, acknowledging/rewarding those who have made contributions towards establishing and achieving the school's goals. It will no longer be possible in many cases to 'blame the LEA': the governors and the head will be directly accountable in both directions — upwards and downwards, if you like. Some heads will need to develop new skills: addressing strange and unfamiliar audiences, making presentations to the press and TV, writing reports for different lay audiences, ensuring that systematic, understandable and attractive forms of external communication are developed, playing a leading role in the life of the local community (and be seen to be doing so).

### Managing change

The most demanding role for future heads will relate to the process of managing change. The political climate encourages dissatisfaction with past and current performance; schools are to be subject to review and scrutiny and, above all, parental choice. Schools that 'fail' will find their share of resources diminishing rapidly under formulae, as potential students opt out. The budgetary implications could rapidly become very serious. The challenge for the head will be to ensure so far as it is humanly possible that his/her establishment copes with externally imposed multiple change (it would be foolish to assume another 44 years of peace as 1944 to 1988 may be portrayed). 'Professional overload' as the editor of the *TES* described it<sup>3</sup> may have to be redefined. The only solution will be to establish systems of school management, sufficiently adaptable and participative to cope. The model devised by Caldwell & Spinks<sup>4</sup> is a sensible starting point:

- needs identification
- goal setting
- establishing programmes to meet these needs
- allocation of resources
- implementation through teaching and learning with appropriate preparation and support
- monitoring and evaluation (based upon annual review of the development plan)

Can schools work like that? In broad sense the answer must be yes, though the style and approach will vary significantly from establishment to establishment (we all think that we work systematically, though most of us don't). In its worst form planning will stifle imagination and initiative; in its best, because it is 'whole school' and deals with a major slice of the resources available, it ought to be dynamic and enterprising.

One other immediate role will be working with the

LEA in formula determination to ensure that it is as fair as possible for each school, and that provision for the transition period of adjustment is adequate. Heads will need to contribute (along with others) to the LEA's curriculum policy including the statement of the values it operates within and its financial and administrative policies. They will still need to formulate bids for capital allocation and receive advice and support on a whole set of complex issues — legal, financial, personnel, administrative. All of this will be in a climate of multiple change.

LMS imposes new demands on heads but, equally new opportunities in what is already a fascinating and complex role. Studies at home and abroad of pilot schemes have shown in general that heads welcome the flexibility and choice that LMS engenders; they recognise the benefits of a clear and consistent basis for budgets they will receive; they welcome the challenge to be more responsive so that students are attracted and retained. But LMS is not to be a pilot scheme: it will be more or less universal and it is coming quickly. Many heads will need to reassess their present positions — their priorities and use of time, their skills for coping with new demands, their need for training. In the initial phase many may lose their way if they forget that LMS aims to improve the learning opportunities for our students through improved teaching. The role of the head as professional and pedagogical leader in the context of LMS is promoted because the range of resources at his/her disposal is enhanced but local and national accountabilities are also extended. There is more, not less, exposure to criticism. The challenge to build effective schools is brought into the open (the market-place, if you like) and the need for training and LEA-managed systems for developing the skills of senior managers in school made more imperative.

It also raises difficult questions about the national accreditation and licensing of senior educational leaders, and ways of ensuring they have the essential expertise and competencies to manage effectively the nation's schools.<sup>5</sup>

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# Primary School Staff Relationships

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**Robin Yeomans**

Formerly a primary head and now a Senior Lecturer in Primary Education at Bedford College of Higher Education, Robin Yeomans was Research Fellow on the Primary School Staff Relationships Project. A book based on the project is to be published by Cassell this summer.

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In a recent edition of *Forum* (vol. 30 no. 3), Jennifer Nias (Director) discussed some of the findings of the Primary School Staff Relationships Project (PSSR). She analysed the concept of an organisational culture and in particular described the 'culture of collaboration', existing in three of the six project schools and developing in two others. As full-time PSSR Research Fellow I worked in four of those schools, so that I experienced at first hand both the processes by which a culture of collaboration began to develop and membership of a fully-fledged version of that culture. In this article I want to examine how a culture of collaboration seemed to be created and sustained. In particular I shall consider the nature of leadership within such a culture, how the schools responded to change, achieved continuity, and resolved any internal differences. Finally I want to suggest some possible implications of PSSR findings for teacher education.

Two general points need to be made about the ways that the culture of collaboration was created and sustained. First, all staff cultures are communicated through interaction between members. In turn interaction creates an environment that both reflects the culture and acts as an influence on its further development (particularly where new members are concerned). But the important distinguishing features of the culture of collaboration were that it was a deliberate creation, and was characterised by regular and frequent interaction between all members. Second, the influences which created the culture of collaboration were similar in kind but different in degree and implication from those which sustained it — so that actions which originally had leadership implications (because they helped create the culture by offering a new culturally appropriate behaviour) at other times sustained the culture when they became the typical membership behaviour which newcomers expected to adopt.

Since the creation of a culture of collaboration depended upon extensive staff interaction heads took positive steps to ensure this took place. They did so by creating frequent opportunities for interaction, at times and in places which were predictable, so that the whole staff was likely to gather. They further encouraged interaction by creating circumstances which made gathering together a pleasurable and rewarding experience, so that individuals sought out their colleagues. In particular heads in three schools ensured that staff rooms were inviting places to be in (eg by

ensuring communal coffee arrangements and comfortable physical conditions).

By their regular participation in staff social interaction, these heads were able to offer colleagues a culturally appropriate model of the values implicit in the culture of collaboration. Those values were expressed through the apparently trivial content of often fleeting day-to-day talk in staffrooms, and through other unplanned encounters on the 'critical pathways' of strategically-placed routes and spaces within the building. As one teacher said 'Chat is a high level activity' through which individual perspectives were revealed, and trust and openness encouraged, so that there emerged shared meanings which became reflected in a shared language, rich in inference.

Humour was extensively used to nurture the growth of the culture (eg as self-mockery which legitimised openness, as an encouragement to others to admit their failings, and as a way of bringing sensitive concerns into the open), and ultimately to reflect, celebrate and reinforce individuals' sense of membership of an exclusive and valued group (through 'in-jokes' which referred to shared understandings and past shared experiences). Heads also ensured that other occasions when the whole school was gathered reflected shared values. Assemblies were regularly used to express the values implicit in the culture in the presence of a child and adult audience.

Once a culture of collaboration was created, it was sustained by the behaviour of all its members, so that much depended on the personal qualities of individuals, both teachers and non-teachers alike. The heads appointed staff as much for their personal qualities as for their professional skills. They appointed staff who were acute observers, good listeners, sensitive to yet tolerant of colleagues, and who showed they could be considerate, caring and generous.

Once appointed, members were made to feel valued. They were encouraged to take initiatives and their contributions were then welcomed. Yet valuing of individuality was coupled with emphasis on the interdependence of the staff group, expressed and reinforced through special celebrations on occasions of group and individual significance (such as birthdays, farewells, term-end gatherings). There emerged a cycle of constant reinforcement in which membership of a rewarding social group which was also a professionally rewarding team reinforced commitment to the group and its culture.

Although the head's leadership was central to the development of a culture of collaboration, leadership

came from many sources and in many forms (though once that culture was established, mutual dependence and respect for individuals meant that heads regularly acted as members rather than leaders, sustaining the culture by their membership example). The head's leadership was characterised by a strong sense of mission. They considered it was their role to establish guiding beliefs, both educational, (concerned with the social and moral purposes) and managerial (concerned with how best to run the school in order to achieve those purposes). They had a deep sense of personal commitment as 'owners' of the school, so that they considered their major task was to establish a culture which was congruent with their personal beliefs. As culture founders, heads sought occasions when they could lead by example. They tended to take assemblies regularly, were seen as effective classroom practitioners, and through the everyday acts of praise, thanks and encouragement gave an active demonstration of their beliefs in action. Heads were adept at intelligence gathering through extensive communication networks within the school, made themselves approachable and available, and were always to be seen around the school wherever the staff were.

If the heads were the culture founders, the deputies were important as culture bearers. Heads relied on their deputies to express the values and beliefs of the culture in all their dealings, but particularly in informal settings, and to be active in monitoring and sustaining the culture. The deputies did so by ensuring there was effective communication between staff and by acting as a communication channel to the head, by always being available to listen to colleagues and support them whenever they could. They had an eye for detail which meant that they took responsibility for whatever no one else dealt with. Deputies were also curriculum leaders. Each deputy was in a close partnership with the head which was based on a shared understanding that the school 'belonged' to the head, that the deputy was loyal to the head, operated within parameters set by the head, and that support was reciprocal (though the partnership did not exclude other staff).

In each school there were also staff who acted as pastoral leaders, taking responsibility for the welfare of their colleagues, dispensing support, sympathy, cheerfulness and encouragement when they perceived the need. Personal qualities rather than allocated responsibility determined who gave this support. Though school secretaries were often an important source of pastoral support, they also made a major contribution to administrative leadership and were the hub of the communication network. Trusted by head and staff alike, they were willing to listen sympathetically, give advice when asked for it, and knew when to withhold or pass on information.

Curriculum co-ordinators benefited from heads' encouragement of individuality, and often led staff meetings. But their curriculum leadership was chiefly exercised in informal ways, at snatched moments in the staffroom and through informal chats in classrooms. Ambivalent about their authority, their leadership relied on the capacity of their ideas to influence colleagues.

So far I have described the positive steps taken by heads and other key staff to create and sustain the culture of collaboration. Considerable effort was also needed to prevent the erosion of the culture in the face of external pressures (from break-ins, awkward parents, changing LEA expectations), small but significant internal changes (such as industrial action, staff absences, visitors, tiredness at term end, and consequent changes in mood), and the major implications of changes in staff membership. Since the 'climate' of the school was dynamic rather than static, equilibrium could only be sustained by the constant vigilance of members. The departure of any member and their replacement by another was a threat to the culture of collaboration, since the newcomer had to be 'educated' into that culture's values, attitudes and beliefs. But changes of head were particularly traumatic for staff because they often meant the departure of one culture creator and the possibility of discontinuity in values, attitudes and beliefs. Though there were no changes of head during the project, there were residual effects from a recent change in one school, and in another, long-serving staff were still adjusting to the new values and beliefs of a head who had been in post for five years.

Because change was endemic, continuity was valued and emphasised through the telling of past 'sagas', and the importance given to ceremonies such as leave-taking. Rituals, especially assemblies, and other value-laden routines further sustained the continuity of the culture. Since staff's reaction to change was often an emotional one, such routines gave a sense of security.

One of the strengths of the culture of collaboration was that it enabled differences to be aired and resolved. The ways heads implemented policies influenced how differences were resolved. Though heads were prepared to use power to establish their values, the personal and professional example they set earned them an authority which allowed them to rely extensively on influence to gain support for their policies. They tended to request rather than demand, frame directions as questions, and use humour to signal deviations from policy and accepted behaviour. In short these heads tended to be skilled negotiators, conscious of the need to preserve staff self-esteem in return for commitment to the heads' policies. The culture of collaboration which they tried to develop gave their colleagues personal and professional satisfaction and made staff feel confident, successful and valued. Equally, participating in the culture satisfied the heads' own needs for praise, security and reassurance. Consequently it was in the interests of the staff as a whole to 'live' the values of the culture and so negotiate and compromise.

Heads' widespread use of influence meant that decisions were often made informally and that success depended on members' readiness to listen and respond constructively, which they did. In this climate, professional differences were normally settled by negotiation and compromise, whilst the openness of exchanges meant that when personal differences occasionally surfaced, they could be dealt with in an open and non-threatening way, made more acceptable where necessary by the use of humour.

# Where are we with Primary English?

**Henrietta Dombey**

Principal Lecturer in Primary Education at Brighton Polytechnic, Henrietta Dombey was 1987/88 Chair of the National Association for the Teaching of English. She taught in Inner London junior schools for eight years. Here she examines the national primary curriculum.

I spent this morning discussing **English for Ages 5 to 11** with the staff of a large and successful junior school. Lining the walls of the library where we sat, was a good stock of books, arranged to make access to information as easy as possible for inexperienced seven year olds as well as capable eleven year olds. As in many such junior school libraries, I noticed that the fiction section took up distinctly less room than the factual — about one sixth, I should think — and that there was no visibly obvious collection of poetry books. But books of different sorts written by children in the school were prominently displayed and the general impression was of eager and interested use.

Indeed the school has a well deserved reputation for its language work: its pupils emerge confident in the spoken and the written work, enjoying the books they read, able to interest and hold the reader with the stories they write and to explore situations in lively improvised drama. Yet this morning their teachers sat in nervous apprehension.

Like many primary teachers all over the country, they feared that most of this work was at risk. I don't think it is. Or rather, I don't think it need be if the staff can keep the courage of their convictions. In fact, even though it certainly won't usher in the golden age, I would suggest that for a school like this, English in the National Curriculum could provide a useful stimulus

to such lively and inventive teachers to develop their practice without sacrificing the principles on which it is based.

But this morning the teachers were anxious. Their anxiety prompted questions:

'How will we find the time to do all the assessment?'

'What should we do about talk?'

'Do we have to drop everything we're doing and start all over again from scratch?'

Together we tried to answer them. Of course until we see the assessment instruments, try them out and get used to them, none of us can claim to have the answer to their first question. However the second and third, it quickly became apparent, we could all answer and in ways that began to suggest interesting new developments.

I should note at this point that the necessary time lag between writing and publication means that I am referring only to the document published in November 1988. What is now (at the time of reading) on the statute book may vary significantly from the recommendations of the Cox Committee. (See Post-Script, *Ed.*)

Perhaps to a surprising degree, given the composition of the committee, these are based on good practice in real primary schools, and presented in such a way that they can and should be interpreted differently by every

The picture of primary schools which emerges from the project has implications for initial and in-service teacher education. Though small, these schools were complex and delicately-balanced organisations. Indeed, we considered the mobile an apt metaphor to describe the interdependence of the various elements from which a school was constructed. The metaphor highlights three key concerns — perception, wholeness, and equilibrium. Individual perceptions of the school depended on who you were and where within the school and its organisation. Since individual perspectives were inevitably partial, achieving a sense of the whole school depended on sharing and integrating perspectives, and making time to do so. Moreover, wholeness implies cohesion, which is not 'given', but had to be actively developed and sustained. Cohesion itself depended on achieving equilibrium in response to influences for change and continuity.

Achieving this complex balance is chiefly the responsibility of the head. Training for heads needs to identify their importance as cultural leaders and develop appropriate skills, particularly negotiation,

enquiry, self-scrutiny, and the perceptual skills for 'seeing' the school. But the importance of members' contribution to a school's culture suggests that to be effective staff members, teachers and students in training need to understand cultures, learn how to recognise the symbols through which cultures are manifested, and appreciate the cultural importance of 'ordinary' events. Training in inter-personal skills and sensitivity to group processes will enable them to play an active part in the development and maintenance of their own schools' cultures.

There have been few times when the external pressures for change have so threatened the equilibrium of individual schools. There has never been so great a need for colleagues to be mutually supportive and for the rhetoric of 'whole school' to match reality. Understanding the culture of collaboration may help primary schools see their way through difficult times.

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school. There are many perceptive and heart-warming statements such as:

'Teachers should recognise that reading is a complex but unitary process and not a set of discrete skills which can be taught separately, in turn and ultimately bolted together' (9.7)

Indeed the document is much better than many people feared. It sets literature at the heart of English teaching and of learning to read. It dignifies talk and listening by giving them one of the three profile components, all equally weighted. It recognises the contribution to be made by drama, media education and information technology in the teaching and learning of English. Unlike earlier documents on English it does more than pay lip service to the needs of bilingual children and the value of what they have to offer to their monolingual classmates. While properly recommending that all pupils should be helped towards a command of Standard English, it also shows a welcome respect for non-standard dialects and non-standard dialect users.

For schools such as this morning's, once the initial strangeness of centrally specified and legally binding Attainment Targets has worn off, the document is already prompting some constructive extension of current practice. But this is not happening everywhere. Schools where the teaching of reading is a matter of herding children through the reading scheme, from one numbered book to the next, relentlessly onward and upward, *should* now, in the spirit of the broad and well informed conception of reading that the document embodies, be considering what they might do to achieve such novel objectives as promoting enjoyment and developing the capacity to choose favourite texts. But are they?

Similarly those schools where writing is taught as if it were only a secretarial matter, *should* be starting to think about giving their pupils an experience of writing for a range of real purposes — lists to sort out their ideas on a given topic, notices that are genuinely informative, letters to real people, stories for each other and instructions that will have a practical part to play in the classroom. But is this happening?

There are indications that in many such schools defensive panic reactions are setting in. Headteachers, anxious to defend the security of a reading scheme, have seized on selected statements of the attainment taken out of context, such as 'show a developing sight vocabulary' (Reading 1 Level 1) and are using these as a justification of existing practice, or even of practice that has rightly been abandoned, as they triumphantly brandish the flash cards dug out from the back of the stock cupboard, having conveniently failed to take account of the surrounding statements about width and enjoyment of reading.

But there are some messages which are hard to distort in this way. Spelling and handwriting can yield only 30% of the marks for the profile component on writing. This in itself should cause some staffrooms to look more closely at the *content* of what their pupils write, and at the tasks they engage in. And the initial panic reactions of the defensive must inevitably be superseded, as LEA training programmes get under way and certainly when the informal assessment

instruments are introduced, by an approach that reflects more fully all the statements in the Attainment Targets. If children's capacity to revise and redraft their writing is to be assessed, then schools will have to recognise that this experience must be offered.

They will certainly need help. Developments which have been initiated by enthusiastic and imaginative teachers responding to the needs, interests and capabilities they perceive in their pupils, which have taken years or even decades to become confident and accepted practice, cannot be instantly transferred to classrooms whose teachers have been content with more limited ways of working.

The whole business of drawing up the National Curriculum is based on the notion that while the content shall be centrally specified, choice of teaching methods will remain the prerogative of the individual schools and teachers concerned. But content and method are not so neatly separable. Certain kinds of content imply certain kinds of relationship between teacher and taught, while others necessitate very different relationships. Where children are marshalled through the reading scheme, it is quite clear who is in charge in the classroom. Where initiation into literacy is seen as identifying words in a written text, spelling and punctuating them correctly, putting them in the correct order, giving the correct answers to the 'comprehension' questions, and doing so at the teacher's command in a largely silent classroom (yes, it's still the case in more classrooms than one might suppose) the teacher is the giver of tasks and undisputed arbiter of right and wrong. But where there is choice of reading matter, where reading a narrative involves making a personal and coherent meaning, where writing is a matter of getting the words to say what *the writer* means, the teacher has to both share with her pupils the roles of instructor and judge, and also take on such new roles as listener, supporter, advisor, and above all provider of possibilities. You can't expect teachers to make such drastic changes by fiat from the DES or at a one day in-service session. It takes encouragement, support and time. And in some cases even these may not be enough.

And of course it also takes money in very substantial quantities, both to carry out the necessary in-service courses, engaging whole staffs in work focussed on the needs and strengths of their schools, and also to provide adequate book stocks. How many infant classrooms contain more 'real' books than the bedroom shelves of one child in a book-sharing home?

But even if we put aside the easily labelled but not easily dealt with 'Problems of implementation' other problems remain. How rich is the Cox diet? Does it meet all the needs of our primary children who will spend the greater part of their lives — working, playing and living — in the twenty-first century?

In its discursive chapters **English 5 to 11** gives an informed and imaginative account of best practice in the primary classroom. Of course it's not perfect: it's hard to think how a document produced in just four months could be anything other than imperfect. There are some significant omissions: parents are hardly mentioned and certainly not treated with the respect they deserve as partners in their children's education. The committee recognises the need for primary



teachers to be hospitable to the home languages of their bilingual pupils, but fails to see that this hospitality should continue after the children have acquired competence in English, and that there is a continuing place for dual language texts. The under-representation of black authors on the list of recommended literary texts is shameful, given the quality of the work for the children produced by, for example, Grace Nicholls, James Berry and Madhur Jaffrey, and the evident and stated need to give all children an experience of literature in English that is not limited to a white Anglo-Saxon perspective.

But in the main the principles laid down are sound, based on a thorough understanding of how children's language develops, of the central importance of using language with real people for real purposes, and the crucial role played by literature. Drama is recognised for its power in enabling children to use language otherwise inaccessible to them. And in a fitting salute to the twenty-first century, media education and the role of the computer in language development receive more than cursory treatment. Indeed to read the chapters surrounding those on the three profile components, is to develop a picture of primary English that is broadly conceived and forward thinking, and succeeds in reconciling the role of the primary school to enrich and enhance the present lives of its pupils with its responsibility to prepare them for the demands of the world that lies ahead.

However none of this has statutory force. If we look closely at the parts that rehearse what will, the Attainment Targets and accompanying Programmes of Study, the sections that foreshadow what is now written in the statute book, we find a rather more limited picture.

There are some passing mentions of drama in the programmes of study for speaking and listening, but media education and information technology have disappeared almost without trace. The opportunity to widen the conception of reading, for example, to include the reading of still and moving images has been missed — no trivial matter in a world in which the image plays an increasingly manipulatory part.

As to the statements on speaking and listening, these indicate a confusion in the committee about the patterns of development in the early school years. It is not until Level 4, for example, that the 'average' achiever is to be expected to 'make confident use of the telephone . . . speak freely and audibly to a class (or) . . . to adults encountered in school'. Not only is the Target seriously under-challenging, it is also fundamentally weakened by the fallacious underlying notion that with talk, development is principally a matter of increasing scale. As you progress up the primary school, your audience increases in size and height. Presumably by the end of the secondary school pupils should be capable of talking to massed audiences of giants.

Progress is, of course, much more complex. Many reception children are quite capable of talking confidently to the whole class, but find difficulty in talking to one other child, since here there is a need to establish a relationship and act reciprocally. Indeed the statements show no recognition of the essential reciprocity of talk and listening of their close inter-

weaving throughout our daily lives. 'Speaking and Listening', the title chosen for this Attainment Target reflects this omission.

When we turn to writing, qualities such as vigour, commitment, honesty and interest, applauded in the preceding rationale, have no place in the statements of attainment. The same is true of development in such features as match of style to subject and readership, independence from the teacher and ability to reflect on what has been written. Collaborative writing, a useful competence in its own right as well as the proven means for young writers to become more sharply aware of explicitness, coherence and the needs of the reader, receives no mention. Indeed the features listed in the statements of attainment could be accomplished by means of exercises alone, clearly not the message of the surrounding chapters.

Then there are the proposals of the Secretaries of State. While these are less at variance with the committee's recommendations than was the case for maths and science, there are some significant differences. Their preference for a lower weighting for oral language at 11, is regrettable, but to be expected from a government that sees schooling as principally concerned with the written word. Employers will not necessarily take the same view. The greater emphasis they would like to see placed on the sentence structures of written language could impede many children's development as writers, and make it likely that in many classes children will be writing to a syntactic recipe, rather than matching their sentence structure to the needs of their topic and readership.

The demand for greater specificity in the statements of attainment seems innocent enough, but in English, development is not so clearly linear and neatly definable as in some other curriculum areas. Where progress is a matter of continually refining competencies, rather than accumulating knowledge, skills or discrete understandings, close specification of levels of attainment carries with it an inevitable tendency towards atomisation and trivialisation of the competencies concerned. Clarity is best achieved through general statements accompanied by illustrative exemplars.

The Cox statements of attainment are an inadequate reflection of an interesting document. Rewritten with 'greater specificity' they will be thinner still. But I would still argue that much though the text book publishers might try to persuade them otherwise, the teachers I was with this morning will be able to help their pupils meet these demands through talk, reading and writing, engaged in with involvement, imagination and a considerable freedom of choice by individuals and groups, for purposes that are real and pressing in their own lives.

### Post-Script

The National Curriculum Council is clearly speaking with a more confident voice than it did for maths and science. In redrafting the Attainment Targets for English in the light of the Secretaries' of State's proposals, and comments received on the Cox recommendations, they have steered away from the former and towards the latter on a number of significant

# Buttering the Parsnips

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**Annabelle Dixon**

A member of **Forum** Editorial Board and an infant school teacher, Annabelle Dixon examines the Select Committee's recent Report, **Educational Provision for the Under Fives**, alongside the Childrens' Bill.

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So, now we can relax: the Select Committee has announced its approval of nursery schools and its apprehension about four year olds in mainstream schooling. It has recommended that more nursery school places should be provided and it has sound ideas about suitable educational provision for young children.

The relaxation allowed should have been less than ten days. The most significant event to happen in the week following the publication of the Select Committee's report, was probably the rather less publicized establishment of a committee chaired by Angela Rumbold to look into the content of pre-school education. This followed an announcement by the junior employment minister, Patrick Nicholls on January 19th that the government was 'not prepared to fund state nurseries' in response to the coming shortfall in the workforce and the probable appeal that will have to be made to mothers who are currently staying at home to look after their children.

One interpretation of these events could be that the government is simply not interested in the recruitment of mothers into employment. Following that, the provision of under school age child care for the purpose of freeing a significant percentage of the adult population into the work force would be considered irrelevant. That it might consider educational provision for young children of benefit in its own right does not

appear to surface as an important principle, except to the members of the select committee. A second, more likely interpretation is that the government is indeed interested in recruiting mothers back into the economy, but only if it can play the game by its own market place rules: ie there won't be any such thing as a free lunch.

Up to now, however, one could expect the lunch, paid for or not, to be a relatively 'healthy' one. That is, there have been mandatory regulations, in force since the Labour government introduced them in 1948, that ensured certain conditions have had to be met with regard to child minders, nurseries and playgroups; the qualifications of those who were undertaking such work were also subject to control as were the hours that were worked etc. Yet scarcely had the select committee submitted its report than it was realised that a back door measure was being introduced, which if passed by Parliament, would seriously hamper implementation of their recommendations. It would, nevertheless, mean a possible enlargement of the services that could be offered to under fives and their parents, though with a serious and increased loss in the standard of care. The mocking, familiar call of 'Never mind the quality, feel the width' now has an additionally sardonic ring, especially when one learns that these measures designed for deregulation have been introduced by obscuring them in the new theme in the new Childrens' Bill. Very few people were aware that the new

points. Baker has not had his way either over reducing the weighting given to spoken language at 11 or over the matter of close specification of sentence structure in the Attainment Target for writing.

The clear weight of the responses provides the justification for these acts of resistance. From my perspective as writer it remains to be seen whether these decisions will be reversed or modified in the construction of the Draft Orders. Those reading this will know and be able to imagine some of the intervening conversations in the offices of the DES.

Meanwhile there are many other ways in which the Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study have been changed to take account of comments such as those in the article above. Speaking and Listening has been substantially restructured to make it more challenging and to include group talk and the asking of questions. The two Attainment Targets for reading have been conflated into one, reflecting the view that to separate pleasure from the search for information is unproductive. But explicit statements on promoting enjoyment and developing the capacity to choose favourite texts have now both disappeared.

The visual media have crept into the Programmes of Study however, as has the use of word processors, even

for children in Key Stage 1. And there is a much firmer statement about the classroom conditions needed to promote writing at this age: a well-defined and well equipped writing area is strongly recommended. Yet one more strange innovation that large numbers of primary teachers will need support to introduce successfully.

The losses are puzzling but not crippling. The high ground has been held and indeed gains made. Perhaps English is profiting from other subjects having gone before. But significant uncertainties remain: none of us yet knows what the SATs will contain. I suspect they will be a selective, trivialising and life-removing reflection of the Attainment Targets we now have.

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(Henrietta Dombey wrote this article and postscript before Baker used his self-awarded autocratic power to tamper with the National Curriculum Council's insufficiently compliant advice. As **Forum** was not favoured by DES media release of his draft Orders, we did not know the exact nature of his idiosyncratic intervention before we went to press. *Ed.*)

Childrens' Bill was going to contain such proposals; it was thought of as a fairly standard simplification of the present legal complications surrounding the various responsibilities of parents and social workers and was initially introduced in the House of Lords, which is often the way for politically non-contentious bills of this nature. Fortunately the government's clumsy sleight of hand was detected for what it was and it can only be hoped that the proposals meet with serious opposition once the Bill meets the committee stage in the Commons.

Thus, one can make sense of the announcement by the civil service minister, Richard Luce, on February 19th: Government departments, already having dire recruitment problems, will now be allowed to subsidise child care and give mothers career breaks of up to five years, with one important proviso: this is, that no extra money is to be allowed for the initiative, the subsidy being met from 'running costs' where child care is considered to give 'good value for money'. Even so, such child care schemes will continue to be treated as a taxable benefit. In other words, the lunch still gets paid for by the parents.

There appears to be little or no mention of the quality of child care that is to be made available or how it is to be monitored, if at all. Its value to the children would appear to be entirely secondary. The taxing of such child care benefits can also lead to another disturbing feature. Where there are no state nursery schools more parents could be prompted into demanding that their local schools take under age children, with all the questionable benefits that the select committee itself pointed out and that concerned individuals and groups have been emphasising now for a number of years. As yet, having your four year old in nursery or primary school is not considered a taxable benefit and there are no fees to pay.

The conclusions and recommendations of the select committee's enquiry into provision for the under fives were admirable to many. It recognised that education at this stage could not only be beneficial to children in terms of its eventual benefits but could also be of value in its own right. It called for a steady expansion in nursery education until available to all three and four year old children whose parents desire it for them. It also emphasised that future expenditure White Papers should make specific higher provision for the under-fives. It had wise and discerning things to say about the quality and training of those concerned with the education of this age group and maintaining proper standards. One hopes that many of their recommendations will find their way into the eventual White Paper on the report, but the government initiatives mentioned above lead to considerable disquiet about the eventual outcome.

It would seem that three factors could well militate against the full implementation of the report. The first, the government's reluctance to fund state nursery education has already been touched upon. The second is the likely move towards even more centralised government control which will effectively mean those Labour controlled councils that are most committed to nursery education will be unable to pursue such policies, and the third is Mr Baker's open, even casual,

acknowledgement that the national curriculum will indeed affect the education of the under fives.

To look at the first factor in more detail, the combination of the theoretical and the pragmatic combine to explain the government's reluctance to provide the butter for the parsnips — the select committee having already provided the fine words. Research in the area of nursery education is notoriously difficult and to date there is no unequivocal evidence of its long term benefits, although there is much to suggest that such benefits exist. Given the government's predilection for an input/output model of financial investment, however and wherever inappropriately applied, it is hardly surprising that they would take advantage of the seeming uncertainty. This could explain their support for the pre-school play group movement. It is cheaper by far than any state nursery provision and currently only receives £4 million in various grants, parents having to raise some further £47 million for themselves, which is right, proper (and convenient) by present Tory thinking. This is in contrast to the expenditure figures of £495 million for 1988/89 which the government estimated was the amount spent on state nursery education, for which, unlike a pre-school play group, parents pay no fee. According to the most recent figures, 267,000 children between three and four years old are in nursery schools or nursery classes. Roughly the same number are already in schools but the play groups account for nearly three times as many children of the age group -600,000.

The Pre-school Playgroup Association however, was the only group to announce itself displeased with the select committee's report. While the report welcomed the playgroups' existence as part of the 'necessary diversity' in forms of provision for under fives, it added that steps could and should be taken by all relevant bodies to improve the educational content and quality of playgroups with the principal support for playgroups for older children being taken by the DES. Hardly surprising that the PPA were miffed but the recommendations followed extensive visits and enquiries. It also reflects the concerns of many involved with the education of the under fives who are already aware of the patchy and piecemeal service that with the best intentions, an organisation largely staffed by volunteers can, in all honesty, only hope to offer.

Nonetheless, the Government are listening very kindly to the PPA who maintain that increasing their grant would resolve many of their problems, particularly that of maintaining a proper quality of provision and extending their services to working parents. The wish expressed by Mrs Rumbold that the PPA would be able to 'assist' the work of the new committee mentioned above will no doubt be granted and it is to be noted that not only did Mr Baker have talks with the PPA shortly before announcing the new departmental enquiry, but that a paper was commissioned from the PPA by the chairman of the Ministerial Group on Women's Issues which was to be considered at their February meeting, a meeting specifically concerned with child care and under fives. Looking with increased benevolence upon the playgroup movement would suit the government's book very well; estimated expenditure on under fives'

education in 1989/90 is reckoned to be about £536 million. Allowing for the amount raised by fund raising, the playschools, who provide for nearly three times as many children, only had costs totalling £51 million. Politicians like sums like that — especially when they can add pious invocation to the involvement of, and control by, parents at the grass roots level.

Alongside this must be noted the rapid expansion of private nursery education, an estimated 12.7% between 1987 and 1994 (DES figures) and likely to be larger as more and more realise the potential for establishing work-place nurseries in the time of the forthcoming labour crisis. An interesting example of such private nursery provision was described in the *TES* of January 13th and could well serve as a model for their future. Run as a business, along somewhat American lines, it represents quality care — at a cost. In the future one could foresee that such costs might be shared between employer and employee, but as mentioned above, there are no tax concessions yet for women who use such work-place nurseries. This could be an inhibiting factor in the growth of the private sector and for the present Mrs Thatcher is in no mood to change the situation as she considers that allowing tax concessions would attract the most 'terrible abuses' although she is vague about the precise nature these 'terrible abuses' would take. Happily it seems that the tax concessions allowed for company cars on the other hand, are above and beyond such moral tinkering.

The second factor, the reduction in the real power of County Councils and the large Metropolitan boroughs, is already on the horizon but the full effect of the consequences can only be guessed at. Even so, only the most blinkered optimist would think that it would automatically lead to increased spending on state nursery schools whatever the parental demand. One of the disturbing features that could emerge might well be the non-implemenation of the sensible recommendations of the select committee for increased and long overdue liaison between various local and central authorities, eg social services, DES and Health departments that are all involved in providing care for this age. The select committee's report may have met with widespread approval amongst those concerned and working with the under fives but they must represent one of the least powerful lobbies of the age. Only until there is proper recognition in terms of ministerial responsibility and possibly a co-ordinating minister for this age group, will there be power enough to enforce the recommendations on the range and

quality of provision and the essential training of staff and monitoring of standards.

Finally, it could hardly escape notice that the select committee were disturbed by the poor quality provision and inappropriate education that they saw four year olds being subjected to in many mainstream primary schools. No-one has yet come up with any kind of argument that is even half convincing for the admission of four year olds into primary schools; and it should be noted that while the situation is far from cheerful it is nonetheless wonderfully cheap; the reason for this continuing state of affairs being essentially one of expediency. The committee recognized that not nearly enough money was being spent on adequate provision, welfare assistance and proper training of the teachers and made very specific recommendations for an improvement in these areas.

Many LEAs have already taken, or have been told to take action, on the situation in their areas and their efforts have been commendable. Only time will tell however, whether there will be the necessary long term commitment or if one will see yet another convulsive one-off re-training exercise when a future report early in the next century reveals an equally lamentable state of affairs. For the moment the nature of the task is illustrated by the real example of convincing some teachers of young infants that projects on tropical rain forests (with an in-depth look at Brazil) is not the most appropriate choice of educational subject for this age group.

Once again a report by HMI on good practice in early years education is promised and its publication will be welcomed by those who were disappointed by the curious non-arrival of the previous report on this subject. It should also be noted by the vigilant that the 'small committee of experts' chaired by Mrs Rumbold, which has already been referred to above, has as its brief the examination of the content of pre-school education and in particular its 'quality, continuity and progression'. One wonders at such an apparent duplication of effort and can only have pious hopes that identical conclusions are reached by both committee and Inspectorate. Anxiety that they might not is heightened by the bland assertion from the Secretary of State on January 18th that the national curriculum will introduce factors which those providing education for pre-school children will need to take into account.

Many teachers of young children, frequently because they have arrived at teaching this age group through various routes, quite often through training for secondary age children, are unaware of the enormous debt that is owed to the original pioneers of education for young children. Foremost among these was Margaret McMillan whose biographer, Elizabeth Bradburn, recently concluded a study of her life with words that have a prophetic ring: 'The classroom of today is not the classroom of yesterday. It is full of new light — and new shadows.'

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# The Norse Code: comparative issues

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**Roy Haywood**

Currently a Senior Lecturer at the School of Education of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, after teaching for twelve years in secondary schools, Roy Haywood recently researched 16-19 education and training in Norway for a PhD.

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Now that in this country curriculum developers have at last started to talk to assessment specialists (*pax* ex-Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations; ex-SCDC and ex-SEC; and incipient NCC and SEAC), it could be postulated that the government's proposals on the national curriculum, and the system for holding the teachers to account for its delivery, are no more limiting than present arrangements. Indeed, the government's proposals may hold out more possibilities for the players not to keep scoring through their own goals and to start scoring winning goals.

For a government so devoted to comparing our children's standards of performance with children in other leading European countries, there is very little notice taken of other countries' experience over the introduction of a legislated national curriculum and national assessment system. Why is it always the case, to misquote the BBC motto, that though nations may speak education to nations not many people seem to listen — or to listen very selectively for the tunes they like?

Norway has turned what was potentially a 'straitjacket' into a 'framework' for developing and sustaining a truly national curriculum — but at the same time a national curriculum with a system of assessment that is not just national but also professional. The lessons the Norwegians have learned echo Thomas à Kempis, namely that whilst it is governments that propose, it is teachers that dispose.

In 1969 the Norwegian parliament (*storting*) passed an act to establish the 9-year comprehensive school (*grunnskole*) for all pupils aged 7 — 16. The act required the Ministry of Church and Education to devise a Model Plan (*Monsterplan*) for teaching and assessing all subjects at all levels. The Ministry, before it produced a provisional plan in 1971, consulted its statutory advisory councils and also took into consideration the 360 written submissions that it received from interested individuals and institutions. Thus, from the beginning, the Norwegians adopted a practice quite unlike this country where, according to Julian Haviland<sup>1</sup>, Whitehall has largely ignored the 20,000 responses from the informed citizenry to its booklet, *The National Curriculum*, 5-16. Some three years of experimental work followed in Norway and in 1974 the official plan (M74) appeared. Recently this plan in turn has been revised and replaced by a new plan (M87). Throughout the twenty years of development the aims have remained the same. The main priority stressed was that it was the duty of the state to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, to

which all pupils were entitled. The key features were to ensure progress and continuity. It was the responsibility of the Model Plan to lay down the main guidelines for teachers to assess standards and pupils' progress because, as in England and Wales, it was considered important that 'assessment policy should follow from decisions about the curriculum'<sup>2</sup> and not the other way round.

At least twice each year Norwegian parents are informed of their children's progress at meetings with the teachers or by written reports. Over the years there has been a trend towards reducing the importance and use of marks in comprehensive schools. At the junior stage (years 1-6) no marks are given. At the youth stage (years 7-9) marks are given for the compulsory common subjects; and parents can opt for their children to be graded for optional subjects and courses, and for conduct.

Marks are awarded by the teachers on a five point scale. After public debate and widespread pressure it was decided that in the core subjects of Norwegian, mathematics and English the marks awarded should be norm-referenced to the Gauss curve of normal distribution. In the other compulsory subjects, in practice, the teachers use a three point scale to reward positively pupils' achievements (50% of the pupils are given the top grade and only 5% are given the lowest grade).

At the very end of their last year of compulsory schooling, the 9th year, the pupils sit a final external examination. This can be a written and/or oral examination for one or more of the three core subjects only. Which pupils sit which subjects is determined centrally. The pupils are informed who has been selected for what type of examination in which subjects just two days before they are due to take the examination.

This form of national examination that uses a representative national sample for the external assessments of the pupils work, combined with the teachers' continuous assessments locally moderated, provides the state with all it deems it needs to know about maintaining and improving standards in schools.

When the pupils leave the basic school at 16 they are awarded a national certificate. On it is recorded the pupil's final marks. These include those given by the teachers' continuous assessments and those given for external examinations. The certificate also records the optional subjects taken over the last two years, with teachers' marks where appropriate.

The majority of pupils continue their education in the upper secondary schools (nearly 90% of each year group). Entry to the course that pupils freely choose is, however, regulated by the number of places available in each local county. The allocation of pupils for certain courses which are currently over-subscribed takes into account the marks obtained in the basic school.

To us in England and Wales, conditioned as we are to the importance attached to school assessments, tests and examinations, the Norwegian assessment system looks remarkably teacher dominated because the system is based upon trusting the professional judgements and competence of the teacher. Obviously, the Norwegians consider their system sufficiently valid and reliable to continue to use it. What is more they think that it is both effective and efficient. They argue that it has the merits of being easy to operate; quick to do; and, consequently, it is much cheaper than making every pupil take more and more formal external examinations for everything done at school.

To the Norwegians our system already looks remarkably bureaucratic and externally dominated. They regard us as having the most centrally controlled system for overtesting and overexamining individual pupils in the world. The new proposals will only reinforce this view. Perhaps we in our educational fortress should now at least consider how our European neighbours operate their national systems for curriculum and assessment before we go any further.

This does not, of course mean that we should go in for wholesale transplant surgery of another country's system. But there are a number of important points to make if a comparative analysis is to be made.

First, the Norwegians, rather like many other European countries, do not merely have similar concerns about education and schooling. They have the same concerns. Just like us they have attempted to raise standards by providing a national curriculum which consists of the same three features:

- a basic core and foundation subjects, together with a small optional element,
- attainment targets, specified in a three year framework,
- national arrangements to assess what pupils have mastered and learned,

including nationally prescribed and independently moderated tests. However, the Norwegians have proceeded very differently to us over the means of solving rather than just resolving common concerns.

Secondly, in the same way as standards are always related to particular contexts, so too are curriculum and assessment systems. These change over time and place. Particular contexts directly influence both the processes (what is taught and how it is taught and learned) and the products (what is assessed and how it is assessed). It is clear from the Norwegian experience that the

government has conceded that once a broad consensus has been reached over the processes for improving standards, the successful achievement of the product lies in the hands of educational professionals. Society's desired ends, legally defined by democratically elected representatives, only become legitimated by the teachers interpreting these within the context of diverse values as well as the constraints of structural arrangements. As Professor Peters<sup>3</sup> cogently argued thirty years ago, most disputes about aims of education are disputes about principles or procedure. If both the government and the teachers recognise this there is the chance that a lot of the rhetoric might be reconciled with the reality. Only then will the tight grip of the centre become a loose handshake when it reaches the classroom.

Thirdly, assessment, in both England and Wales and Norway, is not a bolt-on after thought. It acts as a necessary condition for the integration of both curriculum development and teacher development, rather along the lines advocated by the late Lawrence Stenhouse<sup>4</sup>. The system of teachers' continuous assessment of their pupils, in both countries, is continuously developing. Teachers in both countries have built upon good practice. As teachers have sought to relate pupils' achievement to aptitude they have developed a growing awareness of the importance of listening to pupils. Evidence from the recent GCSE results<sup>5</sup> clearly shows that as teachers are beginning to teach less (less instruction and training) the pupils are learning more (being initiated and inducted to knowledge).

Fourthly, the Norwegian system of moderation of teachers' assessments by fellow teachers is paramount in accrediting teachers' professional judgements. It underpins and validates the formative processes and summative products of real teaching/learning relationships. It would be great shame if, as Professor Harvey Goldstein<sup>6</sup> has pointed out, we were to introduce in England and Wales a system in which bureaucratic moderation to national norms over-rode classroom teachers' careful and considered judgements. What better way could be devised for rendering them, and the teachers redundant!

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Saturday 11 November 1989 — Forum Conference

## OWNING THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

details in the September Forum — note the date now

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# Parent Governors as Representatives

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**Steve Brigley and Mike Golby**

This is a further report from the Exeter Society for Curriculum Studies research project on parent governors in Devon's secondary schools, whose interim findings were discussed by the same authors in **Forum** vol 30 no 3. Steve Brigley is now a lecturer in Education at Bristol Polytechnic and Mike Golby a Senior Lecturer at the School of Education of Exeter University. They have published **Parents as School Governors**.

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We found evidence in 1988 of a variety of educational values among parent governors in Devon (see **Forum**, Summer 1988). We called these the grammar-school, service, and egalitarian perspectives. We proceeded to consider through case study what opportunities there are for parents to assert their educational values in governorship, and whom they think they represent. An examination of the way parent governors operate in the representative role reveals some of the deepest ambiguities and uncertainties about the concept of school governorship. We have found that, in the absence of a purely theoretical or given solution, parents have to evolve their own practices as representatives if they are to create a clear role. The following three examples show how diverse such practice is, and some of the reasons why.

## **Grass Roots Governors**

At Hopton Community College, parent governors work creatively to achieve contacts with wider constituencies. Geoff Glover and Alison Davies benefit from an open-door policy at school, a liberally-minded group of governors and their own rootedness in church and community activities. They are very much local people, both of them having been brought up and educated in or near Hopton, Geoff at a private school and Alison at a high school. Geoff works as a self-employed accountant in the centre of Hopton. Alison is based at home, and helps out with the family farming business.

The Governors identify strongly with the pupils and the teaching staff at the college, as well as with the parents. Geoff Glover describes his general role as champion of the underdog. He gladly advocates the case of any parents, teachers of pupils whom he sees in a weak position in relation to school, local authority, or the governors. The energy with which both parents discuss issues with the relevant parties and dig out information is crucial to the effectiveness of their representative activity.

The governors devote as much as ten hours a week to governors' business, much of which involves contacts with constituents. Three times a year the parent governors give a light-hearted, yet informative report-back at PTA meetings. The school also has an established liaison mechanism with the PTA through its Year Group Committee structure. On each committee discussions are held between the Year Group Head, a

governor and a parent representative. Parents on Year Group Committees give a formal report back to the full PTA gathering. The parent governors have no fixed role in this system, but can get involved as and when it seems expedient. The liaison system is quite dormant for the most part, although on one occasion it provided Geoff Glover with an early warning of parental worries about in-school reorganisation.

Miscellaneous attempts at improving dialogue between parents, governors and school have been reported. One was a joint PTA-governors curriculum review week, including a Saturday conference. Another was a school uniform survey in which a questionnaire was issued to parents, pupils, and teachers and considered by the governors before taking their decision.

The parent governors make it a priority to attend the Annual Parents' Meetings and to help to improve them. Attendance has not been high on these occasions, but parent participation at question time is forthcoming and makes for interesting discussions of some important issues.

Contacts with individual parents are encouraged through special surgeries offered twice a year by the parent governors. Here parents can discuss problems confidentially. These surgeries have only been utilised by a small number of parents, but are viewed as an important safety-valve.

The Hopton pair energetically cultivate informal links with parents, school and community. The governors are regular supporters of the annual round of school events, such as prize givings, house sports day, a pupils' dinner, and the school drama production. Their own community activities inevitably increase social contacts with school pupils and their parents. Both governors make routine visits to the school and its staff room. Such activities give them ample opportunities to meet parents, teachers and pupils and develop a grasp of a wide range of views.

The parents have discovered in their different ways that it is often more efficacious to exert influence through informal rather than formal channels — thus stepping 'outside the brief the (LEA) want to keep us to', according to Geoff Glover. He is a zealous canvasser of wider opinion, and seems to approach teachers as a matter of course when important issues arise. Both parent governors sense that the consequent force of their comments on the curriculum may occasionally be seen as intrusive by the head. It could

also be argued that this broad conception of their constituency carries the danger of collusion with professional interests.

However, while the management of the school remains keen to foster their semi-professional approach, the Hopton parent governors are very willing participants in such occasions as consultation evenings and induction meetings with parents of the new intake at eleven plus. This encourages their proactive style of representation and the communication of local knowledge which is evidently useful to the school. In one instance, they provided advance information on special needs cases among the new pupil intake. Such background makes them able and informed advocates in governors' discussions. Because the governors fundamentally display humanistic concern for the pupils and seek out creative partnerships, they are not disliked for their approach and make natural allies of the teaching profession and more active governor colleagues.

### **A surface governor**

In contrast with the previous pair, Mrs Hill seems isolated among governor colleagues and remote from potential constituencies. A former teacher, she helps to govern an urban, voluntary-aided comprehensive school at which she is the sole elected parent representative.

Mrs Hill's own definition of her role indicates something of her remoteness from her constituency:

'... trying to represent what the parents feel about the school, which is extremely difficult; to be open to what parents feel and don't feel; simply to be a responsible governor using the experience I have as a parent and teacher.'

It is the weakness of her links with parents that leads her to give this more general, 'responsible' emphasis in her role-description. In fact, Mrs Hill attends PTA meetings regularly to acquire and disseminate information which is relevant to parents. She also makes it known that she will raise matters with the head and governors on behalf of parents, but has been contacted very infrequently, and then mostly on her annual bugbear, admissions to the school. She believes genuine representation of parents' views is a practical impossibility.

Essentially, therefore, at governors' meetings Mrs Hill represents viewpoints which are of personal interest to her, while keeping an eye to what parents might want. Thus she raises such matters as admissions policies, the needs of the able pupil, combined science, and staff allowances.

Her personal qualities of independence, articulacy and intelligence help to sharpen her profile as a governor, and her teaching background lends an added authority to her contribution in the eyes of the head and governor colleagues. She is consulted — often, she believes, as a parent and a mother — at governors' meetings, but also makes positive interjections of her own.

Mrs Hill's interventions at meetings are replete with points of information, principle and rational consistency. She shows an academic's acumen for vagueness or weakness of information which needs probing, but her concerns do not grow out of

constituency contact. Indeed, in her account of her work Mrs Hill exhibits a marked opposition to the consumer-orientated accountability adopted in parts of the USA. Her individual style and general antipathy towards overbearing external influence on schools suggest that she has a patrician's rather than a populist's view of her representative role. Thus, her most productive relationship is with the head, with whom she speaks freely and on equal terms outside of governors' meetings. But on formal governor occasions she feels largely overshadowed by the dominant faction of foundation representatives.

### **A Businessman Governor**

Nigel Alston is a highly organised and efficient businessman who is the managing director of a company, a Rotarian, and a member of the Council of the Chamber of Commerce of the city in which he lives and works. He is a parent governor of an urban grammar school with long traditions, which is widely regarded as being at the top of the pecking order of local schools.

The impetus underlying Nigel Alston's representative role can be located in the marrying of his own business outlook with the current climate of educational change. He represents not so much a constituency as an efficiency ethos which has been gaining increasing currency in education. He clearly sees his role in a positive light but only as a consequence of taking a purely functional view of governorship. His unproblematic approach is partly the product of the top-level business world in which he operates. In a task-achievement culture dominated by speed, competition and efficiency, and dependant upon direct and observable performance, the creation of a positive and uncomplicated role for himself comes perhaps more easily.

This parent governor believes firmly that his position is both important and special, and that his unequivocal task is to establish parents' views and attitudes. On the question of what he is setting out to achieve as parent governor, his stance rests on an equally firm conviction. He is to make clear to the head and staff 'an understanding of the expectations of parents (and) to review the action on the head's part to review the same.'

For Nigel Alston schools exist as institutions to provide a service as well as a product, in exactly the same way as commercial and industrial businesses. Thus, the values of a business culture are imported unproblematically into the educational world.

'The parents are the consumers ... I suppose I'm being influenced by the fact that I'm a businessman and I live by the creed that any organisation is only useful insofar as it meets the needs of its customers, and clearly parents are the consumers of the product produced by schools.'

Now it may be that education has neglected to explore certain 'customer and consumer' concepts and relations, but this approach is blind to the value of educational processes in schools (which some parents may be interested in). Furthermore, education may be said to have other aims of a more critical kind which cannot admit the simple adoption of a commercial-business model of schooling. Nevertheless, the clarity

# The Search for a Model

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**Andrew Fletcher**

Andrew Fletcher took time out from secondary teaching to research into teacher appraisal. Here he presents a critique of Robert Key's Conservative Political Centre booklet, **Reforming our Schools**.

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'We need a new model', suggests Robert Key in the opening remarks of his Conservative Political Centre booklet entitled **Reforming our Schools** (1988). However, it seems that his real purpose is to discuss some of Kenneth Baker's philosophy behind the Education Reform Act of the same year rather than to pursue actively any cogent model. A good 'model' will contain an integral momentum of its own reflecting a balance of power between its component parts, so that it will not require regular re-launching. Mr Key's section under the title 'A new strategy for education' (p 16) does not provide such a model, though he does refer to the crucial roles of headteachers and the teaching profession and the need for a Staff College for headteacher training and for a Professional Teachers' Council. Though Mr Key concludes this section with an argument for strengthening the role of HMI, he makes no attempt to provide the sort of model which could be said to show the 'momentum' of the Education Reform Act. The purpose of this brief analysis will be to look at some of the issues presented by Mr Key and to suggest that there are some flaws in his arguments for the reforms so far, and that further supportive action may be needed if goals are to be achieved. The convincing model has still to be found.

Schools take many years to develop their full momentum, whether private or maintained. They do not share the same features as the typical industrial 'input-output' model because they have a wider range of 'consumption' purposes for both individuals and society. If they are to develop their own traditions and social cohesion, they need to have some stability. The social bonding which will encourage pupils, parents, and teachers all to have a sense of commitment to an institution does not happen overnight. Although the future succession of a school can never be assured, people need to be convinced that any changes do have a satisfactory rationale. A major plank of Kenneth Baker's reforms is to achieve a major shift in the balance of power in the running of schools, so that parents will have a major policy-making influence in a school (Key, p 12). The effect of this aspect of the Reform Act has been to demote the role of both teachers and local authorities. While it has been the activity of only a minority of local councillors which has led to this general demotion for all, the proposal is that the focus of power should now move to the governing bodies of individual schools, many with devolved financial management and other powers. However, no doubt some of the self-same councillors

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and force of Nigel Alston's articulation of his representative role reminds us that a new attitude towards education is abroad. In the words of like-minded parent interviewee, parents' views must be accommodated because 'parents' rights have been eroded to a very large extent by schools.'

These are examples of governors from different backgrounds, who interpret the role of parent governor in contrasting ways. The Hopton pair are well rooted in a particular section of the local community. They see themselves as active intermediaries between the local network and the school. Mrs Hill, by contrast, finds it hard to establish similar pathways. She relates instead mainly to the headteacher rather than a constituency. Nigel Alston appears to be monitoring schooling within an accountability framework, with education as a service industry.

It is difficult to locate in such cases any secure ground upon which the idea of parent governors as representatives can be established. They reinforce our wider findings among parent respondents that some think and act as mandated or delegated office-holders, others as representatives of a constituency. Many show confusion in their understanding of whom they represent: is it the parents, the school, the teachers, the community, or the pupils? Or a combination of these?

Our research tends to encourage the conclusion that governorship is what you make it, or what you are

allowed to make of it. Confusions about role-definition and aims in relation to effectiveness lead some parents to resort to metaphor in describing their work. They compare the parent governor with a shop-steward, Ombudsman, middleman, or watchdog in an attempt to make sense of the representative role.

We see no signs of a radical new order of governorship in the wake of current changes. However, there is rising evidence among some governors of a clear sense of purpose based on a community or business perspective which is not the slave of, and may be at variance with, the views of professionals. Our evidence suggests that, while there are important exceptions, most Devon parents hold on to traditional educational values, which not all teachers will share.

Ambiguity about the role of parent governor smothers the potential of some to participate, but may be exploited by those who are more articulate and assured. In general, middle-class governors are better able to penetrate the web of educational decision-taking and make a distinctive contribution. But they can only do so when supported in such ways as the Hopton pair are in their school. Whether such contributions become more commonplace in the coming years will depend very much on whether the new regulations in practice cloud or clarify the uncertainties and ambiguities we detected in 1987/8.

from the local authorities will now secure election to school governing bodies as parent-governors, and there seems every possibility of further central-local polarity. Indeed there appear to be some strange contradictions in the processes which have been involved so far. In order to achieve more decentralisation there has in fact been a considerable increase in central powers. Secondly, the planning role of local authorities has been deliberately made more difficult with a resulting fragmentation of their responsibilities through the opportunities for grant-maintained schools and City Technical Colleges. Local authority democracy seems to be the loser.

A suggested benefit of the Act will be that local authorities 'will face competition in the provision of free education' (Key, p 12) for the first time in 80 years through the greater choice provided by the Act's 'opting-out' procedures, and that standards in all schools will rise 'as the competitive spirit is introduced into the provision of education' (p 12). The idea that competition inevitably feeds and improves any situation is not proven; indeed co-operation between many schools has historically solved many problems of curriculum provision at the sixth form level, for example. The private sector in education does not thrive on competition alone; many of the schools belong to mutual support groups or foundations (such as the GPDST and the Woodard Corporation). The right-wing Hillgate Group state:

'we accept that education cannot be treated as a market, and that "consumer sovereignty" does not necessarily guarantee that values will be preserved.' (1986. *Whose Schools?* p.8)

These examples of the distortion of key-words have been cited to illustrate that there is an excessive and alarming degree of uncertainty in the Education Reform Act, which is not resolved by Mr Key, between its provisions and its intended results. The second half of this paper now looks at the implication of the reforms for parents and pupils, and finally for teachers.

No one can dispute that parents should be involved in the running of schools as much as possible and that 'a new partnership of trust' should be built up 'between parents and their teachers' (Key, p 7). What one can question is the extent to which it can realistically happen, given the existing pressures on the time of parents and families. There can be no real confidence that the elected parent-governors, however responsible, are actually to be representatives of the whole parent body. They will be delegates and will probably have relatively short-term views of the school's needs and future development. Apart from an annual general meeting no mechanism is envisaged in the Act which will enable all parents to be democratically involved in the running of the school. In practice it is difficult to see how 'parents will be able to shape the ethos and direction of schools themselves' (Key, p 13). Mr Key also argues that the increased choice of schools for parents will be a powerful influence and that 'standards will rise in all schools as a competitive spirit is introduced into the provision of education' (Key, p 12). However, standards clearly will not rise in schools which are starved of pupils, and local authorities will have to pick up the pieces. Parents are

unlikely to consider moving their children from school to school, fearing the disruption. Hence, the choice of first school will be critical and the new powers of parental choice will merely put pressure on schools to spend scarce resources in publicity efforts to project an image which may not be supported by the reality. Increased powers of choice for parents may not be the panacea for all parents which Mr Key claims.

Little is said about the individual needs and rights of children in Mr Key's booklet. As the National Curriculum becomes a reality, pupils' exercise of choice in their studies will be much reduced and this may have an effect on their motivation particularly in times of enhanced maturity. Schooling in the maintained sector provides the one experience of belonging to the nation which a child today receives, and this should have a long-term significance for the adult life of the citizen as well as for the peaceful cohesion of society. Public education should be seen as public investment in future citizenry. If attendance in full-time education to 16 is to remain compulsory, then it is surely reasonable to argue that the state should be involved in ensuring a semblance of equity in its provision. Alternatively, children should be given some choice as to whether they wish to participate. The National Curriculum will provide a framework but it will not provide any assurances of equity. If the commitment of the pupil is to be retained to the age of 16, then there might be an argument for the final years being of a more contractual nature between the pupil and the school.

It has been suggested so far that more regard should be paid to the situation of parents and pupils, and similar arguments may be made with reference to teachers. The majority of teachers in the maintained sector have a strong sense of commitment to public service. They themselves enjoy no real choice of their pupils and it is part of their public service commitment that they accept children of all abilities as their responsibility. The changes which are intended under the Education Reform Act have very much been imposed on teachers, and their entitlement to consultation and part-ownership of the system as professionals has been much eroded. It follows that to retain teacher commitment more yet needs to be done. Teaching environments compare very unfavourably with those in most tertiary service employment. A policy should be developed that every teacher is entitled to his/her own place of work in a school, a classroom which he/she can call their own. Some assurances of regular in-service training should be contractually available, as recommended by the James Report in 1972.

Kenneth Baker is quoted by Robert Key as identifying some key-words underlying the broad purposes of his reforms; these are 'choice, freedom, standards and quality control' (p 16). It has been the purpose of this short paper to argue that these words have been used in too bland a fashion, and that they are unlikely to become levers in his reforms as their meanings have been distorted. It has been suggested that more still needs to be done to achieve a fruitful relationship between parents, pupils and teachers, if indeed a 'new model' is to be established for our schools.

# Teacher Shortage and the PGCE

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**Keith Swanwick**

In this article the Professor of Music Education at the University of London Institute of Education makes use of early responses to a large scale survey of PGCE student attitudes currently being undertaken there by Clyde Chitty.

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It seems odd that certain philosophers and sociologists have decided to assault PGCE courses. Perhaps it is because they have both become endangered species in the academic world and feel a need to attack courses which have an element of professional usefulness. Or maybe they are simply in the grip of some ideological fixation. I do not wish to speculate further on this but want to dispel some of the hot air presently blowing around the critical issues of training and teacher shortages.

Apart from workforce shortfall, several kinds of argument are put forward for not educating teachers beyond a certain level of subject competence. One of these consists of drawing comparisons between state and private schools; the latter, it is claimed being staffed by untrained teachers but producing better results. Both of these assumptions are very dubious. Private schools employ a growing proportion of trained staff and there is no evidence at all to support the idea that the untrained are the essential workforce. As to better results, it would be instructive to compare GCSE successes between similar state and independent schools, say day schools in middle class areas, where pupil intake and home environment may approximate fairly closely to one another. I know of no research to suggest that on these terms teachers in private schools are more effective, whether trained or not.

Another argument advanced by, for instance, Baroness Cox (TES, 6/1/89), is that HMI reports on teacher ineffectiveness are evidence of poor initial training. But apart from the latest report on the new teacher in schools, concern is also frequently expressed about the quality of work of some teachers after many years of classroom experience (for instance the primary and secondary Surveys). What are we to make of this? Classroom experience by itself is obviously no guarantee of effective professional practice and yet is recommended as the only useful element of training, the rest being seen as so much 'theory' with a bias towards certain sociological fads.

This is the other main line of attack — asserting the inappropriateness of PGCE courses. But though it may be fine for Caroline Cox to express doubts about her own former teaching of the sociology of education, she ought not to generalise from this limited experience to all current PGCE courses. If analysis of classroom materials, the practice and discussion of teaching techniques, the sharing of professional perspectives, the study of the social, psychological and administrative context of education is theoretical; then departments of education are certainly guilty of this charge. Similarly, if we mean by theory the critical examination of assumptions, the principled sifting of evidence, the

scrutiny of operational models and other discourse about professional practice; then we are also guilty.

It is interesting that a philosopher, such as Professor O'Hear, accepts the desirability of the serious study of education and the right of any teacher to undertake this (**Who Teaches The Teachers?**) but still wants to remove the automatic requirement of training. Baroness Cox would simply abolish training altogether; for her, it seems almost as though thinking itself is subversive and impedes practice, having no place in the teaching profession. And so she reiterates the myth that all students find of any value in a PGCE course is teaching practice and recommends copying a mentor as the way into the profession.

Where then is the evidence? Some of it is to be found among those most directly concerned — the clients, students in training. If we listen to them, it would appear that the in-college part of PGCE can have great value and is professionally important. PGCE students at the Institute of Education, London University were asked in mid-course to list any professional help that would have been missing if their training had consisted entirely of experience in their teaching practice schools, in other words, as 'apprentices'. A preliminary analysis of responses indicates a number of recurring views across several subjects and the primary/secondary divide.

Students felt that experience only in a single school would be restrictive in terms of educational perspective, organisational framework, range of materials, ideas and teaching would be 'haphazard', 'limited', 'unbalanced' and 'biased'. Because of this they appreciated professional contacts with teachers in various schools, and work with their tutors on the regular school-based days and in the university sessions.

They also thought it important to have access to the expertise of university staff, to the library and other resources, to recent research findings and to have *systematic* help with teaching skills, classroom control and materials; as opposed to what was often seen to be 'off the cuff pedagogy' or 'tips for teachers' in pressurised school contexts. The interaction with their students and discussion of 'important issues like race, sex, class and special needs' (sorry about this Professor O'Hear) were also valued. So was work on the National Curriculum, on the GCSE, on child development.

Students were conscious of 'the help, advice and support of people, who, although not currently school teachers, have a grasp of the subject matter and teaching issues in one's particular field', support, say other students, which 'teachers in schools do not have time' to give. This help is seen to run to the detailed planning of lessons, an activity which may seem to be

# Brian Simon and FORUM: an acknowledgement

With the present number, Brian Simon relinquishes the editorship of **Forum**. The occasion is not really valedictory. Brian remains a member of the Editorial Board and we are in no doubt that his presence will continue to guide the thought of this journal in the years ahead. Still, we cannot, despite Brian's wishes, allow the moment to pass without an acknowledgement of the journal's extraordinary debt to its founder.

Brian Simon is the outstanding educational thinker of his day. He is a brilliant historian whose studies in the History of Education are indispensable to an understanding of our present educational circumstances. His contributions to educational argument and research have been distinguished both by their power and by their range, from the devastating critique of intelligence testing published as long ago as 1953 to the elaborate accounts of learning in primary school classrooms contained in the reports of the ORACLE Project in the 1980s. He is a wonderful teacher, as all of us who have experienced his gentle wisdom and his eagerness to converse can testify. Above all, to the readers of **Forum**, he has been the presiding genius — he will hate the term but no other seems as apt — of the Comprehensive Movement from its infancy in the middle and late 1950s to the present day.

Brian Simon founded **Forum**, with Robin Pedley and Jack Walton, in 1958. For more than 30 years the journal has offered teachers committed to the Comprehensive Movement the opportunity to advance their understanding of the principles and practice of comprehensive education through critical argument, the exchange of ideas, the description of new methods, syllabuses, and forms of classroom organisation, and the development of new approaches to knowledge and learning. Brian has presided over this passionate enterprise with a unique combination of modesty and authority. He understood from the beginning the profound implications of comprehensive education for

all schools, primary as well as secondary. He realised that the comprehensive principle made nonsense of streaming no less than of selection. He foresaw that the attempt to realise the goal of a common education for all children would call into question not just the organisation of schools and classrooms but the method and content of the curriculum. Year after year he has kept these insights in the forefront of the discussion that has taken place in the pages of this journal and he has compelled us all, readers and writers, to address them.

The Comprehensive Movement faces a critical future. Its commitment to an education system which recognises the excellence that is common to all contradicts the prevailing political temper. Brian Simon's insistence on rigour in argument and adventurousness in thought and action has never been needed more. He will certainly continue to remind us of our obligations and of the high purpose of our enterprise. Meanwhile we honour, with gratitude and affection, our founding editor's achievement.

*Michael Armstrong*

**Roger Seckington**, chairperson of the Editorial Board, writes:

All Editorial Board members echo Michael Armstrong's eloquent tribute to Brian Simon. It is good that Brian will continue on the Board for the comprehensive movement has never been so under threat and it needs people of his understanding and articulation to continue the campaign. The Board is also fortunate that Nanette Whitbread, joint editor of **Forum** for over two decades continues her work and outstanding contribution. Clyde Chitty, a long standing member of the Editorial Board and for several years Reviews Editor, joins Nanette as co-editor of **Forum**. We are fortunate indeed to have such a strong, dedicated and experienced editorial team and can look to the future with confidence.

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more appropriate in consultation with school staff but which is fairly rare. If the balance of training is to be yet further school-based, a great deal will have to be done to ensure that *all* students get at least this degree of practical help, including raising the staffing levels of schools substantially and preparing teachers properly for professional partnership in teacher-educator.

These responses — part of a research project — indicate that structured observation and planning, lively and critical discussion of important educational issues, appraisal of available materials, access to more than one school, expert support and familiarity with a wide range of practical ideas and materials are among the special and valued functions of departments of education; promoting a sense of objectivity towards a complex and demanding task. Teaching is not a mindless activity.

The acute problem of teacher shortages will not be met by taking in the untrained. Some will just be poor teachers finding an easy way to get into the profession without careful scrutiny, while others will default without the mediation and support of education departments. In the 1960s it was found that untrained graduates were more likely to fail probation, take time off and leave teaching (Mildred Collins, Leicester University). As one of our PGCE students puts it (in spite of a successful practice in a very supportive school) 'it would have been a disaster if I had done my training only in school — I don't think I would have lasted'.

The way to increase the numbers of *good* teachers lies through the operation of market forces: salaries must rise quickly and sharply.



# Preparing to leave school in the 1990s

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## **Brian Smith**

Formerly a science teacher, Brian Smith is head of John Bunyan Upper School in Bedford. For the first six months of last year he was seconded as a Schoolteacher Fellow at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

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From January to July 1988 I was a Schoolteacher Fellow at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, seconded from my post as Headteacher at John Bunyan Upper School, Bedford. Because I normally worked in an area of comparatively low unemployment, I wanted to see how the vast changes that had occurred in employment in the last ten years or so were affecting young people who were trapped into these changes. I also wanted to try to relate Secondary School experience more directly to this changed world.

The size of the change in employment rapidly became clear, showing starkly in the figures for sixteen year olds in 1974 to 1984. In 1974, 61% of sixteen year olds were in employment, whereas in 1984 this figure had dropped to 18%. Although the situation for this age group has altered slightly since 1984 no plethora of schemes or massaging of figures can remove the enormity of these figures. Bearing in mind that young people always figure disproportionately in unemployment figures, it is not surprising to learn that in 1987 nearly 1.2 million under twenty five were unemployed, and that of those, 331,000 had been out of work for more than a year, and 350,000 on the dole had never had a job. (Lewis and Lunn 1987).

Again, even in the areas where unemployment is comparatively low, it is a very different world from that of ten to fifteen years ago, as the figures for Bedford show. Moreover, the prospects for all young people who are leaving full-time education are totally different now. For the majority the nature of the jobs/scheme available is all too often low grade and unsatisfying. The level of wages/grant is similarly humiliatingly low. One type of employment for life in which one progresses to more senior positions is unlikely. Far more probable is the scenario of a whole succession of jobs, quite likely part-time, interspersed with spells of unemployment and returning, followed by early retirement.

At least, that will be for the lucky ones. A sizeable number will go for two years in YTS, to a six month enforced period of unemployment, to membership of an Adult Training Programme, and then unemployment.

Much has been written concerning the effect of unemployment on young people (eg Roberts 1984), but it is not just the direct impact of not having a job that is at stake, awful though that is. There is also the danger of alienation of young people in general, who will see themselves as an underclass at the margins of 'real' society. The nature of the employment that is available for young people in the more favoured areas, such as

Bedford, coupled with the problem of homelessness only intensify this implication. These are desperate times in which to leave school, with so many messages that imply inadequacy, even unworthiness, on the part of young people.

The task of Secondary Schools set in the above context is to determine how they can best help young people to prepare for this harsher world, so that they are able to make the best of the situation into which they are thrust. That will involve a very close look at the quality of young people's experience of life at school. When that is done, it quickly becomes apparent that there is an urgent need for reappraisal of secondary philosophy and practice, so that quite simply the needs of the students are at the centre of the school's aims. The consequence of that desire will be a conscious drive to give all students a greater dignity, a better regard for themselves, so that they have the confidence and poise to face whatever the current situation is when they finish compulsory schooling. At present it is still true that in the majority of secondary schools success is experienced by the minority, and for the others it is largely a matter of 'not being very good at', a diet of repeated failure. (Hargreaves 1982).

Clearly that change in emphasis is very far reaching but fortunately there is already considerable movement in secondary education which is highly significant in this regard. Nothing is more striking than the changing relationship between teacher and student, and this could be said to be at the very heart of the matter. At its worst the relationship at secondary level is one of domination, in which the teacher is the imparter of knowledge and the student is the sponge-like recipient. Clearly that must change to one in which the students are actively involved, with the teacher becoming a resource and catalyst. Put in another way, the teacher becomes a consultant who assesses the student's current situation in terms of understanding, knowledge and skill, and then works with them to see the way forward. Not only does that have the most marked advantages in motivation for the students, but it also puts them in a much more appropriate situation for when they leave school.

Such approaches need changed courses and CPVE, TVEI, GCSE and the B/TEC 14-16 approach, have been vehicles for much movement towards a new relationship. Ironically, such approaches have been common for many years in areas considered to be of low rating in the traditional academic curriculum. Work in practical subjects, expressive arts, physical education and special educational needs are good examples. The

ability to converse with adults, to voice their views and argue their case, to plan together and relate to those round them at work, or with society in general, can only be of the utmost significance for the growth of confidence and self respect in young people. Closely allied with this change is the significance of work undertaken by students with adults other than teachers. Work experience of shadowing is probably the best known example of this, but its usefulness has too often been seen as helping young people in choosing a job, more especially the 'non academic'. In many areas that is now irrelevant, apart from the useful idea of YTS 'Taster Days' to enable choice of a YTS course that is good for them, but the significance is at any rate greater. Work experience affords young people the chance to become acquainted with the parameters of adult working life and to begin to see themselves accepted into that status. For maximum effect such experience needs every possible involvement of the student in preparation before and reflection afterwards. Given that, the results can be astonishing, especially with those who may not have seen themselves as successes at school. As an extension of this, a permanent link between a school and a local business not only provides some of the vital placements, but can also produce involvement of students from all parts of the school in seeing how the 'real' world functions. The penetration of that experience into all parts of the curriculum clearly acts as a weld between school and life after school, another way of helping students in their preparation for making the transfer with confidence.

Community involvement by the school is another way of working with adults, and the results are often again very impressive for the students, as well as socially worthwhile. They are also enlightening for those who might otherwise rely on the generalisation of the media for their feelings and attitudes towards people they do not know in society. The particular situation of the school and attitude of the Local Authority will determine in part the activities undertaken. However, community service can take a wide variety of forms including visiting the elderly, supporting young families, working in local primary or special schools and work in the local environment. In the other direction, as it were, adults can come into school to join or form classes, to help with teaching, to join clubs or to use facilities such as a library, cafeteria or sports hall. All of those situations can again relate students to the wider world outside school, linking the two together, and emphasising the importance of relationships that are honest, accepting and positive. Almost incidentally they draw the students into seeing themselves accepted as adults, rather than children, and thus increasing their confidence to cope with adult life in all its uncertainties.

The stress on adult relationships means that a system of assessing and recording progress that is centred on the student is vital. Profiling and records of achievement seek to involve students in drawing a fuller picture of themselves, a picture from which they can learn confidence and assurance. How different that is to reporting, that, with every good intention, seems so often to be more like evidence of failure, even a putting down process. A principle outcome of profiling is that

understandable targets will be set, for reasonable periods, so that students can see where they are going and thus feel part of it. Profiling therefore involves negotiation and reflection, and draws staff and student together in shared aims and understanding. At the same time it supports curricula becoming modular in their construction so that there shall be maximum motivation for students.

Profiling that is well done will be the ideal basis for the compilation of student records of achievement. Much pilot work is currently being undertaken towards the implementation of a national scheme, and despite inevitable teething problems concerning interpretation and acceptance, it is obvious that such a record for each student should be of real value. That will be particularly so if the certification is earned in a variety of ways, not just as a result of written work. The dominance of writing and reading as means to obtaining good assessment in the secondary curriculum has been a major deflating block to achievement for a very large section of the student population, and indeed a block to simple enjoyment. In case anyone wonders whether the author has no concern that school leavers can read, write or add up, may I emphasise that I take it as automatically accepted that for schools not to ensure that their students leave equipped with the basic skills to cope with everyday life, would be a betrayal of those young people. If we are to do our young people justice we must move away from assessment which, whilst being easy to administer, is so limiting in what it tells of the whole person. Profiling and certificates of achievement offer the way for cooperative recording that arises from active partnership between student and teacher. Young people will be stronger to face the plethora of challenges that will come their way when they leave school if they have first faced up to their progress and abilities with those they know, in a situation and background in which they are secure.

If all that has been said about cooperative learning, working with adults other than teachers and new ways of recording progress and achievement, is to be successful, it must be set in a student's continuous experience that is positive and affirming. That implies a common curriculum within the school and therefore that working in mixed ability groups is not an option, but a vital demonstration of commonality. Such a situation means a great deal of work for teachers in finding methods and approaches that stimulate and satisfy all students. In at least the last two years of compulsory education that will surely mean modular approaches to enhance flexibility but, as has already been stated, that is desirable for other reasons.

A vital part of students' experience which enables them to reflect and build, will come through tutoring and a properly planned programme of personal and social education. The search for oneself is not something that schools can abrogate to themselves with respect to their students, since young people are only with them for a fraction of their growing time. However, adolescence is a time of particular awareness and for some, even a time of struggle: no school that aims to meet its students' needs can avoid recognition of that fact, nor dodge involvement with their questioning and searching.

Perhaps ideally the whole of this area of work should be woven into the common curriculum, rather than appearing as a separate programme. For most schools, however, this will be a counsel of perfection, and whichever way it is tackled it will be necessary to continually revise and update content and approaches. The latter are crucially important. Adherence to didactic methods will quickly ensure disappointment, disillusionment and even despair! Some schools have committed themselves heavily to residential experience as a part of personal and social education, and it is certainly a stimulating environment for growth in these areas. It is also significant that residential experience is now extensively used in many types of training outside schools. If it is possible to offer this type of experience to all students, it will undoubtedly repay the considerable expenditure of money and organisational time.

What has always been regarded as an important part of a personal and social education programme has been so called 'careers' education. At one time the careers teacher was simply seen as a job finder, but for some years now more imaginative work in careers education has been prominent in many schools. In them the time has been used to look deeper into factors that will heavily influence those leaving schools. Included in such a programme should be areas such as employability skills, adaptability awareness, survival skills (including the blunt facing of the current facts about benefits, and a sharpening of the ability to frame questions and assert rights), contextual awareness concerning unemployment, skills (including courses available, local voluntary work), and alternatively opportunity awareness. (Watts 1978, 1983 & 1987).

Seen in that light careers education is clearly a valuable part of deepening students' understanding of life after school. It would be helpful too if some imaginative look into the future of work could be undertaken as well (Handy 1984 and Watts 1988). If that was possible it would be more likely that our people were prepared for the yet more rapid and far reaching changes which have been forecast for the not too distant future. Perhaps we might even be able, along with Charles Handy, to see these changes as opportunities to be grasped rather than fears from which to hide.

There is no room in an article of this length to do more than touch on the issues I have raised, nor to look at the shape and contents of a total school curriculum. However, I am sure that what I have described can incorporate the evolving national curriculum, including the constraints of national testing, and that indeed the content of the curriculum is of no more importance than the methods by which learning takes place. Since first knowing that I was to be at Newcastle the situation concerning unemployment has changed considerably and there is no doubt that it will change again in the future. The responsibility for making sure that young people are ready for whatever is to come in a rapidly fluctuating world sits firmly upon those who work in schools. Heaven forbid that those young people are no better prepared than those caught up in the malevolent whirlpool of the last fifteen years.

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## RAYMOND WILLIAMS MEMORIAL FUND

*I've often defined my own social purpose as the creation of an educated and participating democracy. The workers' Educational Association taught me much, in defining these terms. It has always stood for the principle that ordinary people should be highly educated, as an end justifying itself, and not simply as a means to power. It does not see the good things in society as benefits to be handed down by an elite, or as bargaining counters to win favours of an electorate. In the end, it has insisted, they will only be good things if people have made them for themselves.*

Raymond Williams, **An Open Letter to WEA Tutors**, 1961.

In order to commemorate the life and work of Raymond Williams a group of his students, colleagues and friends, after consultation with his family, have launched an appeal. This met with a very generous response in its first weeks, such that two aims can be met. First, the presentation of a bench and tree to Wedgwood Memorial College at Barlaston, an adult residential centre founded by the Workers' Educational Association in 1945: Raymond Williams worked in the WEA as a full-time tutor from 1946 to 1961. And second, the provision of bursaries at the College for first-time, unwaged, or educationally disadvantaged adult students who may be living in situations of urban deprivation or rural isolation, or who wish to work in political/cultural areas of research associated with Raymond Williams. Funding for such work is often difficult to obtain and the bursaries would provide much needed opportunities.

Raymond Williams' contribution to the adult education movement in Britain was that of a radical and authoritative teacher. Through his writings he continues to influence academic work in diverse areas of research, and in many different countries. The organisers of the Fund hope that general readers, students, and academics who admire his work will join us in establishing this memorial to an outstanding educator and socialist intellectual.

(Please make cheques or international money orders out to the Raymond Williams Memorial Fund and send them to Dr Morag Shiach, 11 Hobart Road, Cambridge, CB1 3PU, England, enclosing SAE if you require a receipt.)

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# The Relationship Model of Learning

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**Mervyn Benford**

This piece was originally written for the newly qualified teachers with whom Mervyn Benford now works as General Advisory Headteacher (Primary) in Oxfordshire. Until recently he was the Secretary of the National Association for Primary Education.

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A new research project has revealed dramatic improvements in reading when parents are involved. In the process Keith Topping's programme reduced traditional performance gaps between boys and girls, working and middle classes, Asians and whites. Furthermore he found that attainments improved similarly where abler pupils worked with the less mature. These are significant findings for someone who has long argued that learning is first and foremost a social process. They reflect the impact of relationships. The barriers being undone are social.

For too long a pre-eminant focus in education has been subject-matter. More recently priority has brought process and method into the reckoning. The National Curriculum can provide a framework for both content and method to flourish, a framework building on earlier prescriptions which also referred to the way schools, classrooms and teachers were organised. Contact with a variety of adults, in personality, style and background, has been identified as an important element in effective learning. Such a virtue employs a social potency to enrich the pedagogy.

The Topping work follows upon the path-finding Haringey Project, one of whose most startling findings was that children reading at home to adults not conversant with English, and thus impotent in a tutorial sense, made the same dramatic progress. This especially elevated the social factor as a learning agency, confirming my gut feeling that pedagogy, whilst highly relevant, was incidental to social force. The most patent expression of this hits most families with remarks like, 'I hate history. Old Bloggs is awful!' The alternative positive correlations within pupil perceptions merely emphasise the social character of what is at work.

In the fascinating ITV study of a group of children from different backgrounds followed through to adulthood, one of the most successful and secure in adult life was the lad from a tiny Yorkshire village school, thereby allegedly short on peer group contact and curriculum cover, who spoke warmly of the learning he gathered from other adults in his community.

Parents are the first educators and, for better or worse, deeply effective. The child comes to school already imprinted with a pattern which, even in the best-run reception classes, may but poorly match what is suddenly imposed at 4+. The lack of match has been identified in studies like those of Nicholson, and Eysenck, as a factor in educational performance. The closer the match the more the scope for improvement

through working partnership is reduced, and this is what Topping also revealed, thus confirming the significance of class factors. But the closer the match the more is children's performance maximised, and any step towards parents — Topping cites home visiting — can prove beneficial in all social classes.

My conversion to home visiting arose in Sir Alec Clegg's West Riding when he encouraged a headteacher to send her deputy on such a mission to some newly-arrived, re-located mining families who had just not settled in and kept themselves apart. The result was a rapid turnabout in attitude and positive integration within the school community, and so the neighbourhood. At Lewknor, part of our Schools Council Community Link Project was general home visiting. This drew much interest and support from all sections of the community but we also touched a richer vein in our relationships with the parents, not least those who 'never come' to parent-teacher events.

This programme paved the way for a 25% take-up (quite high allowing for numbers of parents at work) when we offered parents time at home with their children during school hours to pursue study agreed between pupil, parent and teacher. Almost all detected high commitment to learning on the part of the children and valued the chance to be involved, often for the first time with just one child in otherwise larger families. Contrary to predictions the take-up cut evenly across the social spectrum, and the next step was to offer the opportunity in out-of-school hours, less ideal maybe, but likely to be as worthwhile.

The Topping peer-pupil finding is greatly significant. The primary profession has too long played with the notion of mixed age and ability working, with little conviction based on insight. In my 1980/81 Rowntree research into rural school problems and prospects I met this defence from a US Senator of the 'one-room school': 'It's preview and review. When you're young you see what's coming long before you get there, and when you're older you look back on what you learned through more experienced eyes.'

It is an affirmation of the master-apprentice model of learning, the 'do-it-like-this' method of masters great and small throughout history, producing the highest possible general standards without inhibiting the emergence of new individual genius. As a young teacher I shared a professional dislike of pupils who but copied others' work and ideas. Yet that was a mode of discovery as useful as those I espoused as a member of the Nuffield Junior Science Project, whose open, child-centred teaching I have never disowned.



Topping's 'masters' simply 'told' their apprentices the words they did not know. The hallmark of successful teaching is to know when to use the formal or the informal, the traditional or the avant-gard, intervention or detached oversight, planned or spontaneous, open or closed learning, individual or collaborative tasks, individual or collective teaching . . . and to be able to use them all. This is a partnership argument, a relationship between teacher and taught that encompasses both home and school. The essential versatility and flexibility of the teacher is the best guarantor of match between pupil and task within an overall framework of broad and balanced provision in which the recognition of individual difference is central to assessment and evaluation. Strong social overtones colour such teaching and we should all be socially informed.

Wholesale re-organisation is not the price of providing practice seen as virtuous. It is not beyond the wit of caring staffs moderately to re-shape the children's daily or weekly experience. The flexible deployment of staff expertise, in schools and within clusters, broadens the horizons for all concerned. When children of more and less mature attainments work together there is benefit for both in the developing sensitivity to the needs and circumstances of others. Where prospectuses pay lip service to personal and social development collaboration learning delivers not just the proven dynamics of group efficiency but the qualities of tolerance, co-operation and leadership that begin the development of tomorrow's executive generation. As with partnership between home and school, changes of this order can be small-scale, may even dove-tail or telescope together and will certainly inform approaches to a national curriculum whose targets and profile components overlap naturally and argue for integrated teaching. It is the but modest degree of shift within organisational emphasis that

lends such change a seemingly radical character. But presently-perceived 'best practice' already includes many of the elements cited above and the national curriculum opens that door further. Through such elements a 700-pupil primary school I visited in Sydney offered parents, children and teachers a range of working situations on the basis of annually-negotiated choices. With that ultimate and highly social flux it would be a foolish person, politician or not, who tried to tamper.

The essential character of strategies like vertical grouping, team-teaching, peer-pupil working, parent-child partnership and of much we advance in the name of effective achievement is social, replicating very closely the child's first experiences within the relationships of family life. The more we institutionalise learning and divorce it from home experience, the more limiting and harmful it can be, and it is interesting to note research in reading that suggests able children succeed despite school teaching while the divorced and alien character of the school model simply acts as a barrier to the less able who linger in their immaturity. This will be as true of pre-school years. One wonders if the Topping results exposed differences within families where one or both parents worked.

Systems tend to ignore people, and therefore social processes. When the latter are articulated scientifically and academically it can even offend the systems. But we must return learning to the dynamic of human interaction and human scale. The significance far transcends the impact on reading development. The relationship model of learning will underpin the good society because it recognises that society exists as more than a collection of individuals. To subordinate self in the cause of others is the cement of that moral fabric the Government is so concerned for, the awesome, ultimate fallacy for an ideology in which the pursuit of self is so prized.

*Mervyn Benford with Jeremy*



*Photographs by Philip Sayer*

# Reviews

## A consensus of opprobrium

**The National Curriculum** edited by Denis Lawton and Clyde Chitty, Bedford Way Papers/33, Institute of Education, University of London (1988) pp 122, £4.95.

The National Curriculum, established by the 1988 Education Act, did not have the assent of the people. It certainly does not receive much assent from the nine authors of this collection of essays on its origins, ideologies, policy implications and likely outcome.

The subject-dominated origins of the National Curriculum are well described by Richard Aldrich, who shows the similarity between what is proposed in 1988 and the 1904 Regulations. He demonstrates how the grammar school curriculum, formulated at the beginning of the century by Morant and Headlam and experienced by Kenneth Baker in his own schooling, has been translated into the 1988 Act.

Denis Lawton gives a crystal-clear account of the various ideologies and argues that the National Curriculum represents a victory for the minimalists. They see the state providing a cheap and basic education which the better off will simply buy themselves out of, a stance strongly criticised by Tawney in the early 1920s.

One striking feature of the consultative paper put out in July 1987 prior to the Bill being debated was the marginalising of the HMI perspective. During the preceding years HMI had produced a string of documents about the curriculum as a whole for 5 to 16 year olds as well as about the major subjects. This thinking, as well as the many written responses to the HMI discussion series, could have been available to the government, had it genuinely wished to consult. Clyde Chitty highlights the difference between the professional view of the curriculum propounded by HMI, which sees children as individuals and the curriculum itself as a network of subjects, themes and areas of experience and knowledge, and the bureaucratic view which emphasises the measurement of 'efficiency' by regular testing. There are no prizes for deducing which model sank and which triumphed.

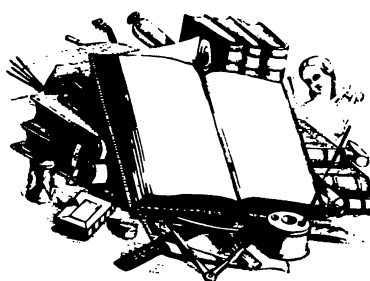
There were numerous omissions in the 1987 consultative document, including any proper understanding of such cross-curricular themes as health education, which was seen as a minor subset of biology and dismissed in a line. Even TVEI only received a couple of mentions. The most spectacular omission of all, however, was what seemed to be a complete unawareness of children with special educational needs. Klaus Wedell points out that the 1981 Education Act committed the government to educating such children as effectively as possible, yet the 1988 Act, in his view, has done nothing to confirm this commitment.

Numerous other themes are tackled in this interesting set of essays. Janet Maw traces the evolution of Conservative party thinking over a decade and shows how, at the very last stage before the Bill was put forward, some of the earlier thinking was jettisoned. She describes the tension within the Right of the party and between it and other sectors of the decision making process. Caroline Gipps considers the effects of the Act on primary schools, especially where the testing programme is concerned, and Helen Simons and Janet Harland address the issues of teacher professionalism and crisis management respectively.

When I saw that the last chapter had been written by John White I half expected that, as a supporter of the notion of a National Curriculum, he might be the one author to enthuse. The opening sentence of his first paragraph soon disabused me, for it reads, 'It's amazing how wrong one can be.' John White imagined that the construction of a national curriculum would be a pretty complex task requiring the collaboration of professionals, civil servants, politicians and others. His second paragraph begins 'I now feel a complete idiot,' and he goes on to explain how, when invited along to advise on what he calls 'this shoddy document', he pleaded that he had to take his daughter's weasel to be splayed. Sensible chap.

My only suggestion about this excellent set of essays is that it might have contained at least one piece that was rabidly enthusiastic about what was being proposed. Perhaps such authors are just too thin on the ground.

E C WRAGG  
Exeter University



## Let's care

**Peace** by Chris Sewell, Spokesman Books, (1988), £2.50

Amanda picked this wonderful book off my desk and took it into the quiet corner. Just before playtime, she returned having written down a peaceful memory in response to the book which had so absorbed her:

'It was a summer's day and we were swimming in our pools. My little four-year-old brother was in the little pool. I got out of my big pool and picked up my brother, put him in a fluffy towel and gave him to our mum. We played in the sunshine all day.'

Amanda's writing takes us into the heart of Chris Sewell's book where she could read about St Francis, Mother Theresa, the Greenham Common Women, Martin Luther King, and could see and hear their shouts, their celebrations and their struggles for peace in the face of devastating cynicism and atrocities. Soon the book was encouraging Amanda to move from her personal memory to the wider world. She and her friends produced a moving set of No-War posters.

The author describes how the impetus for the book actually came from three youngsters struggling in a Special Reading Class:

'We're not doing Special Reading today. Sir. We're doing about nuclear war.' This conviction informs the whole book. It's accessible, touching and challenging and begs to be used to initiate projects at both primary and secondary level. Lines and scenes from the key peace songs and poems, and from the devastation of war, are beautifully illustrated, and children are able to interpret these songs and poems themselves with the help of the liberating medium of illustration.

In the section on war against Japan, lines by Mitsuyoshi are quoted:

How could I forget  
that flash of light!  
In a moment thirty  
thousand people  
ceased to be.

Neil was especially moved by these words and by the incredibly simple but disturbing drawing of a desperate child at Hiroshima. He too wrote a poem about the great peace teachers and campaigners. Above all, Neil wrote, they keep on teaching how:

to be kind to others  
And to find the  
Love in us.

Peace education in schools is one way to help us all find that compassion deep within 'Us' — before we destroy ourselves.

Chris Sewell's booklet is an important, highly usable contribution to the cause of compassionate education. It is available from 264, Staines Road, Twickenham, TW2 5AR.

JULIAN HYDE  
(Third-Year BED Primary Student)  
West Sussex Institute of Higher Education



# Inspirations from the shires

**Stewart Mason — The Art of Education** by Donald Jones, Lawrence Wishart (1988) ISBN 0 85315 6999 pp 203, £9.95.

Given the weight of often rather turgid material pouring across the desk it was a pleasure to turn to a book about an innovative educationalist, individualistic administrator, highly intelligent and influential man — all of which Stewart Mason certainly was. Donald Jones has done a splendid service in trying to encapsulate something of the life and work of this remarkable man.

Andrew Fairbairn, who was Stewart Mason's deputy and then successor as Director of Education in Leicestershire, and Brian Simon in their Foreword and Introduction (and Donald Jones himself) are at pains to point out that his considerable achievements were made at a time of post-war expansion and optimistic consensus. That is not to diminish the scale of his success for he was a pioneer and able in an extraordinary way to turn his ideas into practice. It is a matter of pure speculation as to how he would have coped with the present harsher climate but it is less likely that we shall see such powerful individualism so much in control ever again. Stewart Mason was very much a man of his time who had 'the good fortune to retire before these changes took place.'

His achievements are well-known and rehearsed. Leicestershire was the first major authority to establish a countrywide network of comprehensive schools. Despite claim as to the origin of the two-tier idea, for undoubtedly Robin Pedley was writing about it at the time, it was Stewart Mason who translated it into a highly acclaimed scheme. By the 60s, a huge interest was being taken in Leicestershire comprehensive schools as worthwhile, creative and stimulating places. Some parents were moving house to be in a comprehensive catchment area and many teachers were eager to come and work in the authority. With an acknowledged debt to Henry Morris, Stewart Mason established community colleges. His successor Andrew Fairbairn was able to develop and expand both community education provision and the concept of lifelong education. It is to both that some credit must go for so embedding and integrating the concept into a general educational provision that it has largely survived the battering of recent years.

'His greatest achievement in a sphere outside education must surely have been the establishment of the Institute of Contemporary Prints at the Tate Gallery'. Mason's work with art and music was substantial including the establishment of a quality county art collection and a renowned School of Music. 'For a quarter of a century he ruled over a cultural barony of his own making affecting for the good the lives of innumerable young people'.

Refreshing is the honesty of much of the comment. Mason was a commanding figure. Always stimulating and interesting, he could also be authoritarian and distant. Personal

anecdotes help to identify the regard in which he was held, but he could be daunting. I remember my first famous annual heads' conferences in one of the newer universities. In one two-hour session the agenda was entirely hijacked in dealing with a fairly mild complaint from a then long serving head questioning the length of journey and cost involved in assembling the group. Determined we should see these places Mason ruthlessly debated the issue until all 'agreed' and had accepted a rather bizarre arrangement for travel costs. His interviewing techniques were also legendary with much warning given to interviewees of the likelihood of being asked 'When did you last cry?' or 'What do you think of when you see a field of daffodils?'. He was interested in a complete picture. Having made an appointment he left people as free as possible to do their work.

In the 60s Leicestershire primary schools were famous, attracting many visitors. He recognised that some of the changes were cosmetic but saw the successful schools as 'cells of innovation which others could develop'.

On school buildings Mason had a clear view about making them interesting, pleasant to work in and less institutional. Working as I do in one of the colleges built in his period it is again refreshing to note the candour with which it is recognised 'the original plan was jeopardised and had to be changed with results which were to say the least, unfortunate'. Elsewhere the vision about buildings as learning environments was very successful.

Donald Jones has in his interesting and useful book given us an insight into the work and life of this truly remarkable Director of Education. At the end we are reminded again of just how much the educational world has changed. His successors no longer enjoy the freedom he had but there is no doubting his high calibre and massive personal contribution while in office.

ROGER SECKINGTON  
The Bosworth College, Leics.

**The School Book, life at a comprehensive school**, Peers School Books, (1988.) pp. 184, paperback, £5.95.

This is an astonishing book, and one that certainly deserves widespread circularisation, especially among supporters of comprehensive secondary education — now definitely under attack. It is the best kind of answer to the continuous denigration of comprehensive schools, as indulged in ad lib by Conservative politicians and (some) industrialists. The reason is that this book maintains throughout an outstanding level of production, both in form (which is superb), and content.

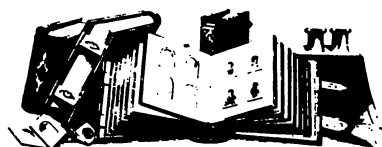
The Peers school, as many will know, is an Oxfordshire comprehensive, maintained by the local authority (and certainly not thinking of opting out!). The book has been produced by the school — that is, by an ad hoc group of staff, students, parents and governors. Some of these clearly had access to the most modern types of reprographics, with the result that the cover (very striking), print and general layout, enlivened with photographs, line drawings, collage, and every variety of type, is absolutely first-class, and would be the envy of any reputable publisher. The quality of the paper is also good, while the general plan of the book itself effectively covers every aspect of the manifold activities of the school and its students, so giving an outstandingly clear picture of what a modern, well-organised comprehensive school is really like. It should be compulsory reading for all government members and their officials.

The head of peers until recently was Bob Moon, a contributor to **FORUM**, and now a Professor of Education at the Open University. The present head is Bernard Clarke. The materials in the book refer mainly to the year from September 1987. So these are up-to-date in their relevance. The book is, of course, designed for Peers School — its parents, students, teachers and others; but sets out to provide a picture of a comprehensive school that will be of interest to all concerned with this development. 'The School Book describes a particular school' the authors write, 'but has been written to tell readers about any comprehensive school'. 'It is an anthology of first-hand accounts, interviews, minutes of meetings, photos, letters, articles, memos, press cuttings, internal staff reports and handbooks, profiles, drawings, timetable, numerical and financial information . . . and so on'. Desktop publishing methods have been used. 'Our aim', they say, 'has been to make the book informative, stimulating and entertaining'.

There is no doubt whatsoever that they have succeeded in their aims. This book, which sells cheaply in terms of its character and content, would brighten up the staffroom of any comprehensive school. It might well promote some emulation, and that would be all to the good.

This is not a review, in the normal sense. It is an attempt to communicate something of my enthusiasm at receiving and reading this book, in the hope that others may feel impelled to obtain it and pass it around. Send a cheque for £5.95 (post free in UK), payable to 'Peers School Books' at Peers School, Littlemore, Oxford, OX4 5JY.

BRIAN SIMON



# Reviews

## From a working class childhood

**A Local Habitation** (Life and Times, Vol. I 1918-40) Richard Hoggart, Chatto and Windus (1988), pp 223, £13.95.

I last saw the author of this autobiographical enquiry just before his seventieth birthday, toward the close of 1988, standing on a platform — very straight, if shortish — as recipient of an honorary degree; in recognition of the founder of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham, as assistant director of UNESCO, warden of Goldsmith's college, writer of the *The Uses of Literacy*. This book outlines an earlier phase, the road travelled by Bert Hoggart from the Hunslet district of Leeds, habitation of workers in heavy industry in the 1930s, to the local university. Towards the close Professor Hoggart, who has commented throughout, affirms a present belief that most people never outgrow the pattern or model formed in their heads from an early age; that a predominantly socially given sense — of time, of space, of perspective — can persist virtually untouched, so strong is the 'cohesive power of the lived-into and day-by-day'. Numerous though the television series may be, seeking to convey alternative interpretations of the world, nothing of the kind may penetrate. This characterisation stems from a personal experience of being eased out of a day-by-day parking lot, to join an auxiliary traffic lane passing through district grammar school to graduation and academic status. Once this direction has been taken, the mover is never again 'wholly at ease' in a former dwelling place, let alone 'an integral part of it', though he may respect and make peace with its culture. It is from the resulant 'outsider' angle that this story of a local habitation is presented.

The book cannot have been easy to write, for one who provides evidence of a thin skin but still probes beneath the surface of his story. Autobiographical reminiscence and commentary combined touch on many aspects of educational experience, approach, outcome, yesterday and to-day. Most insistent is the emphasis on an 'overwhelming immobility' or lack of expectancy, a 'damp putting up with things' and getting by, as a leading 'working class' characteristic, not merely in the Hunslet of the 1930s but at large to-day.

Sometimes, perhaps, there is insufficient appreciation of alterations. There is only a passing reference to comprehensive schooling as desirable, given a call to acknowledge the care grammar schools accorded to first-time entrants from working class homes. On another page, however, first generation teachers, epitomising the product of such schools, are depicted as only too content to have arrived at this point, exhibiting a life-style 'effectively coralled', a flaccid acceptance of 'the over-arching rightness of the system as a whole'. Likewise the teaching they handed on, however devoted and good in parts, consolidated negative working class characteristics at a new level rather than providing any

counteraction. The stuff simply came on a plate, in rations for acceptance, devoid of seasoning to stimulate. In the circumstances regret for likely loss of the 'academic idea' in all but the best comprehensive schools, in terms of 'a climate in which clever and bookish children' thrive, seems somewhat particularist and dated in 1988.

Turn back to the underlying story of Bert Hoggart and it appears that it was less the grammar school than auxiliary aids which saw him on his way. Contending at elementary school with the bullying accorded to incomers — orphaned at eight, he had been taken by his paternal grandmother in Hunslet — the boy cultivated an admired gift of the gab, notwithstanding a speech impediment, which made for acceptance of later 'brightness'. Failing the 11+ nonetheless, since the required maths was not taught at Jack Lane, he secured a place, the first for the school, because the head betook himself to the City Education Office to demand it. Adjusting to the new institution, a distant and public one of seemingly vast proportions where Bert ceded place to Richard, produced a 'nervous breakdown', after which a new public library offered a refuge — and shelves of poetry, discovered for himself. Reaching sixteen Richard was able to stay in school because the kindly and competent Miss Hubb of the Board of Guardians, who had regularly ensured the weekly allowance of 6d was well spent by his grandmother, explained to her the issues and got the allowance doubled to compensate for loss of earnings.

In the sixth it was possible to let go on paper, in essays which could ease a teacher from his carapace to introduce the idea that one may think for oneself. But it required a change of institution to acquire the kind of culture shocks — from a professor of English, Bonamy Dobree, as unusual as his name — which effectively extended 'the education of Richard Hoggart.'

JOAN SIMON



# Practical advice

**Improving Secondary Transfer** The Final Report of the Secondary Transfer Project ILEA: Research and Statistics Branch (1988), 55 pp, £6.00

This is the final report of a series of 17 bulletins produced during a four year longitudinal study into pupil transition between schools in Inner London. Approximately 1,600 pupils have been extensively questioned about their attitudes, attainments behaviour, and attendance both before and after transfer. The various practices of junior and secondary schools were examined and the opinions of parents and teachers sought about the transfer process. This report is the final summary and set of recommendations; more detailed findings and suggestions may be found within each individual bulletin.

There are some sixty recommendations made in the report, clearly laid out in sections such as 'Increasing teacher-contact', 'First day at school' and so on. As the report says 'It should be stressed that the recommendations and suggestions put forward in this bulletin are in no way prescriptive. Each school's situation is different, and no single formula will be appropriate for all.' While this is clearly correct, the report provides a very detailed checklist which any school concerned with the efficacy of its own induction process would do well to utilise.

The report makes no bones about the fact that good transfer processes should involve many people: teachers, pupils, parents, external agencies and, most importantly, the pupils themselves. This will, inevitably, be expensive in terms of time and of money. The final result may be seen to be worth it and the links aimed at helping transfer should continue after the move so that monitoring of actual progress against predicted can take place.

Equally strongly advocated is the way staff in both levels of school should aim to gain a better understanding of each others' problems and strengths, utilising the latter to help overcome the former. At a time when we are all under external pressure more understanding of mutual problems can only be an advantage.

I would recommend this book and its predecessor bulletins to any person involved with helping pupils transfer between schools; the more teachers that read it the sooner many of the problems that face pupils will be overcome. I am reminded of the comments made by Galton and Willcox in an earlier work on the same subject when they commented that it is often teachers' attitudes that need changing as a first stage in improving the move between schools; this is clearly so but this report offers a great deal of practical advice based firmly on solid research.

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# Democracy and Education

**Education in Search of a Future**, edited by Hugh Lauder and Phillip Brown, The Falmer Press (1988) 246 pp., hb: £19.95, pb: £9.95.

A seminar on democracy and education held at the time of the last election could not but agree on the need to develop credible alternative policies for schools. Faced with the complete turn-around by the Tories, who had suddenly abandoned a decade of vocational 'relevance' for the traditional 'standards' of the past, the assembled lecturers in education and sociology (plus one deputy head) shared their editors' commitment to developing a popular and democratic politics of Education.

Phil Brown argues that what distinguishes such policies from the populist, market freedoms proposed by the Conservatives, is their commitment to empowering the working class. This is practically possible through schooling if theory admits that education matters to working people. On the basis of his research in Swansea, Brown states most school students share an instrumental commitment to getting on through education, either by 'swotting' for non-manual careers of 'conforming' in the hope of skilled manual/office work. Only a majority reject school in a self-destructive apprenticeship to intermittent unskilled jobs. These mainly white 'lads' have been romanticised by educational sociology since Willis' celebration of them as representing authentic working-class resistance to the bourgeois state system. Instead, Brown suggests that the contradictory accommodation with the system made by 'ordinary kids' should be taken as the basis upon which to develop a critical mass consciousness. This implies defending the gains of the past but in the context of 'an "action theory" which avoids both immaculate theoretical conception on the one hand, and token administrative "practical" changes on the other.'

Hugh Lauder's contribution to this theory focuses on realistic policies to democratize education. Like Brown, he aims to avoid 'a visionless realism' by espousing 'reforms which would be necessary in any socialist transformation of society, rather than reforms designed to co-opt those exploited by capitalism'. He sees Sweden and France (presumably during Mitterand's first hundred days) as models for social wage policies which decommodify wage labour by redistributing wealth through universal welfare entitlements. Despite following Gramsci and Bourdieu to emphasize the relative autonomy of educational institutions — as opposed to old-style Marxist insistence upon their direct correspondence with the economy — Lauder is unprepared for the Tories' reversion to type with a traditional academicism totally unrelated to any supposed 'needs' of the economy. Nevertheless, his insistence upon participatory democracy in school organisation and solidarity in cooperatively learning a negotiated curriculum indicate the defences that can be made against the

competitive individualism and arbitrary academicism promoted by the Education Reform Act.

Michael Fielding proposes democracy coupled with solidarity as the new paradigm for comprehensive schools, while Stephen Ball sees Swedish schooling as quite consistent with socialist aspirations. Colin Lacey's idea of socialist education swimming in a sea of capitalism posits the socialist educator as an inspirational teacher amidst the radicalisation of youth occurring in reaction to the destruction of the global environment. Rob Moore returns to the theorisation of education in relation to production to propose 'the reformist objectives which have traditionally been pursued through educational reform acting directly upon demand-side institutions', for example contract compliance. A socialist education for girls, argues Anne Marie Wolpe, would 'address the relationship between the education system and structure of the family'. She suggests an agenda of really useful knowledge to challenge the ideology of familism 'in which gender formations in the division of labour are expressed and carried out within the privacy of the home' because equal pay for equal work and adequate training for women is 'only half the battle'.

Science as useful knowledge rather than pure science — a collection of supposedly neutral 'facts', discovered not constructed, is advocated by Alison Kelly. She sees the stipulation of 20% science (12% for some) in the 'national' curriculum as a universal entitlement, which needs to be supplemented by consideration of science's social and technical consequences. While John Evans questions the usefulness of individual programmes of health related fitness for understanding how sport lays down 'the rules of belonging to our gender and class fraction', Patricia White relates how an inner-city primary school playground became the focus for a democratic learning experience, incidentally reducing the dominance of boys' football over other playtime activities.

Martin Lawn sees Quality Control Circles in industry as providing a model for schools and Shane Blackman examines the possibilities and limitations of the Youth Training Scheme to suggest the MSC could democratize training. These two contributions show most clearly the limitations of the new realism permeating the collection as a whole. Lawn turns to QCs as a way of holding onto the vocationalism the government has now abandoned and using it as a dentured shield against the educational reforms; while the MSC, which was so closely identified with that vocational phase, has now been abolished and training returned to employers.

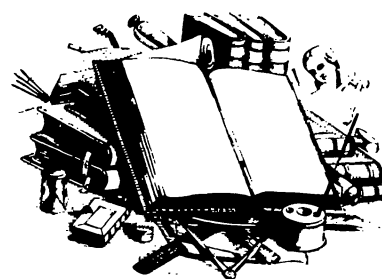
However this collection's search for an alternative future for education has already uncovered a wealth of suggestions, practical as well as theoretical. Its starting-point is that, as Rob Moore writes, 'the broad social-democratic reformist consensus has

collapsed', so it is no good pretending all our problems would be solved by a return with more resources to the comprehensive status quo (which was not very comprehensive anyway). The crisis in education is symptomatic of a crisis in society. Unlike the ideologues of the new right, socialist educators can no longer pretend to possess the unique solution to that crisis. Rather than elaborating alternative programmes, we need to grasp the fundamental principles of cooperation against competition, of participatory democracy over squabbles for allocating limited resources, an understanding of the necessities of real freedom as opposed to consumerist illusions of free choice. These principles can be realised in the defensive actions of teachers and parents against the insane competition the government seeks to foster amongst schools and between individuals. They can be developed in protecting public services against privatisation and with a determination by various communities of their real needs and demands for education.

Above all, we must develop a new conception of the really useful knowledge which will be necessary for society's survival in the next century. With the reconstitution of traditional labour by the latest applications of new technology, this claim to collective empowerment must transcend the social division that the government's latest reforms aim to preserve and widen. It must seek to preserve schools and colleges as places where new ideas can be generated to comprehend and manage a rapidly changing reality.

This collection of thought-provoking essays is evidence that the search for such a future for education has at last begun.

PAT AINLEY



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