

FORUM

for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education

Summer 1992

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This issue

Three Wise Men

Why assess?

Streaming revived?

Records of Achievement

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The next FORUM

It is hoped to include further articles on primary school teaching by Michael Armstrong, Mary Jane Drummond and Jenny Samways, following the so-called Alexander Report.

Gilroy Brown and Lyndon Godsall write about their campaign to turn an inner-city primary school in Birmingham into a genuine community school - and the implications for teaching and learning.

Derek Gillard looks at the implications of the current emphasis on a subject-based curriculum for curriculum developments in the middle school.

Ian Campbell responds to Clyde Chitty's recent article on Key Stage 4 by arguing for a different approach to the upper secondary curriculum.

David Tombs writes on bilingualism and religious education, and Geoffrey Walford on privatization.

A New Agenda?

The education service, along with the health service, was a key issue of concern throughout the recent election campaign. That these concerns did not determine the outcome on April 9 is no cause for assuming that parents and teachers ceased being profoundly dissatisfied with the detail and trend of the previous Thatcher/Major governments' education policies. There is no doubt that they want to see significant policy changes that will distinguish John Major's new government from its unpopular political inheritance.

An opportunity has been opened up, with the appointment of a new Secretary of State for Education, to break the Baker/Clarke mould of mindless ideology and arrogant contempt for the profession. It remains to be seen whether John Patten has the sense and sensibility to earn the confidence and respect of teachers and to tune in to parents' real concerns about their children's under-resourced education. As yet his credibility for the post rests on his having taught geography at Oxford University and that he sends his daughter to a state school.

The credibility of John Major's government as 'new' will depend on how far, in practice, he repudiates his predecessor's destructive policies which clearly threatened to lose him the election, in fact lost him forty-four seats including Michael Fallon's, and significantly reduced his party's majority to below a thousand in seventeen others. Central to the supposedly new image and John Major's vapidly on the theme of a classless society will be whether there is belated understanding that education is not a commodity and cannot be safely left to *laissez faire* market forces, but must be subject to state intervention and coherent local planning. This much was understood in Britain from the mid nineteenth century and is clearly recognised by all other industrial societies. It is a judgement crucial to both democracy and economic survival.

In her manic vendetta against LEAs, Thatcher turned the clock back by instigating opting-out, by contriving CTCs as a false solution to traditional English prejudice against technological education and by further undermining coherent local planning for school provision through the combined impact of open enrolment and a faulty financial basis for the LMS formula. The result is apparent in diversion of governors' and teachers' energies on fundraising and artificial competition among schools, in increasing disparities and in a growing mismatch between actual need and provision. John Patten, John Major and William Waldegrave (guardian of his patron's Charters) must recognise that all this amounts to erosion not extension of parental choice, a decrease not an increase in opportunity.

Forum calls on the new Secretary of State to confound DES mandarins' and media pundits' prophecies of massive opting out and a concomitant return to eleven-plus selection. He has the legal authority to close the floodgates or to allow a torrent to devastate the very foundations of our education

system. Has he the courage, sensibility and wisdom to break with the ultra Right's domination of Tory education policy?

The 1988 Act promised universal entitlement to 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum' from five to sixteen. That entitlement was eroded piecemeal in the secondary phase by the last Secretary of State. John Patten has a clear duty to review his legacy of secondary curriculum chaos and begin discussions with the teaching profession on how to resolve the longstanding problem of the proper basis and balance of commonness and student choice. This **Forum**, along with the previous and next numbers, contributes to this important on-going debate. It is a matter on which none of the political parties has developed coherent or sensible policy. Ironically, many comprehensive schools, responding to earlier criticism, were mapping out modular and other schemes that pointed a sane way forward just when Ken Baker intervened to cause uncertainty and disarray, which neither MacGregor nor Clarke did anything to dispel. John Patten would be wise to heed advice from professionals in comprehensive schools committed to enabling students to keep their options open, to avoiding premature type casting, to extending not restricting opportunity throughout secondary education.

Important issues on which policy change is urgent are explored in this **Forum**. On the assumption that the recently commissioned report on the primary curriculum will not be disregarded but taken to open up debate, Liz Thomson subjects it to close analysis and ends with a call to give primary teachers scope for vision in the context of their direct contact with how children actually learn. Two articles follow on the function and impact of assessment at the primary phase, an understanding of which is critical to policy on any requirement for SATs. Jack Demaine exposes the Right's attempt to resurrect Burt's discredited invention of innate IQ. Three articles focus on aspects of secondary education: two warn about the harm caused by stereotyping students' perceived capabilities and the third argues the value of integrated humanities for the 1990s. Two North American academics share their concerns with us in a manner that should discourage John Patten from emulating Ken Baker in seeking facile transatlantic solutions. We conclude with timely thoughts on the Maastricht fiasco's implications for education.

John Patten's stance on education will be a critical indication of John Major's new governments' claimed commitment to extending opportunity and choice. Longterm economic recovery depends on developing an education service that can nurture human potential from pre-school to higher education. The new Secretary of State has inherited a disintegrating system, a collection of contradictory gimmicks masquerading as policies, a demoralised teaching profession and a series of glib promises that presage disenchantment among parents. Will his tenure of office stand the test of appraisal better than his three predecessors'?

Where is the Guiding Star?

Liz Thomson

A member of **Forum's** Editorial Board, Liz Thomson has taught in primary and middle schools, worked at a Teachers' Centre and for two LEA advisory services and is now Deputy Principal at Bishop Grosseteste College.

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.

T.S. Eliot — **Journey of the Magi**

The recently published discussion paper on **Curriculum Organisation and Practice in Primary Education**¹ was written at the behest of the Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Clarke. He announced the enquiry on the 3 December 1991, and indicated that the report would be produced by the end of January 1992. The time of year and the choice of three men as writers, led to their being referred to as the 'Three Wise Men'. Whether or not they are wise is open to question; particularly when one of the three, Professor Robin Alexander, seems to have been anxious to disassociate himself with the way the report was presented².

Readers may recall that the text of the report was released by Kenneth Clarke to the press two weeks before its publication date of the 5 February. This meant that its intended audience (ie all those involved in primary education — teachers, trainers, governors and parents) did not have the opportunity to participate in the debate the report calls for, until after the topic had been fully exposed to media hype and distortion.

Now that the dust has settled, it is timely to look critically at the report; particularly in relation to what it sets out to achieve.

The writers were asked:

'to review available evidence about the delivery of education in primary schools' and 'to make recommendations about curriculum organisation, teaching methods and classroom practice appropriate for the successful delivery of the National Curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 2'.

Despite assurances that 'questions of how to teach are not for the Government to determine', the remit (and the response of the writers) leaves the reader in no doubt about the central issue of the report; namely, how should the National Curriculum be taught? We are left in no doubt that the *content* of the National Curriculum *will determine* how it is taught. The authors' main thesis is that the demands of the National Curriculum are such that it requires specialist approaches to teaching the nine foundation subjects and RE in primary schools.

It is worth pausing to consider the background to such a development. Since the publication of the HMI Primary Survey³ in 1978, there has been a continuing thrust to look at the role of specialists in primary education. It is interesting and informative to chart

some of the 'bench marks' in the move towards specialist teaching in primary schools since that time:

- 1978 — publication of the National Primary Survey
- 1984 — Senior Chief HMI, Eric Bolton addresses the National Association for Primary Education and talks about the need to consider specialist teaching for children of 9 years old and above.
- 1984 — Introduction of Educational Support Grants (ESG) to provide government support for training science and maths curriculum co-ordinators.
- 1987 — Establishment of specific national priorities for INSET through the Local Education Authorities Training Grants Scheme.
- 1989 — ESG to support the teaching of English
- 1989 — All LEAs embarked on prescribed modes of support for National Curriculum training. These occurred initially in the core subjects of science, maths and English and later in other foundation subjects.
- 1991 — All grant aid is linked in to national priorities through the Grants for Educational Support and Training (GEST).

It is important to note that the above developments were concerned with the subject as a discrete element of the curriculum, and did not address the need for whole curriculum planning and implementation.

The report raises questions about the kinds of expertise required to teach the National Curriculum. It asks:

'Can a generalist reasonably be expected to profess expertise across a curriculum of the scope and complexity of that now required by law at Key Stages 1 and 2?' (para.16)

This statement is critical to what the report is about; namely a curriculum which has, since the nineteenth century, been characterised by attention to the 'basics' of reading, writing and number, and the class teacher system.

There are references to the Hadow⁴ and Plowden⁵ Reports and their contribution to the rhetoric of 'progressive' education. However, the effects are described as, *'not so much radical transformation as mediocrity'* (para. 20).

The authors ask:

"why the teachers concerned have stopped thinking for themselves and have apparently become so amenable to indoctrination" (para 21).

All who have played a part in this — either as

administrators or deliverers of the primary education system — are exhorted to look at the part that we (and presumably they) might have played. There is a call for a new kind of debate about primary education distanced *‘from mindless iconoclasm as from mindless orthodoxy’*.

The report covers familiar territory in its analysis of standards of achievement in primary schools. You might say well it would wouldn't it, as the evidence base is not new. The areas of concern are taken from the Senior Chief HMI's Annual Report⁶ and the main sources of evidence are taken from HMI surveys and reports, APU surveys, two NFER reading surveys and the National Curriculum assessment data.

Despite their cautionary note on the interpretation of the National Curriculum assessment data, the authors fail to mention that when the programme for implementing the National Curriculum and the assessment arrangements was introduced in 1989, the first cohort to be assessed were to be treated as a 'dummy run'. Parents, teachers and the world at large were assured by the then Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, that the results would not be published during the first year of assessment. As we all know, this decision was rescinded by Kenneth Clarke, under the guise of accountability and openness. However for those concerned directly, the teachers and the children, it was a further betrayal of trust and confidence by their political masters.

The lengthiest section of the report focuses on the quality of teaching and learning in primary classrooms. Concerns are expressed about:

- models of teaching which are constructed solely from evidence about children's development;
 - collective planning for the implementation of all the National Curriculum subjects;
 - an over-concentration on the core subjects at Key Stage 2;
 - the 'undemanding' nature of most topic work in primary schools;
- They believe that —

“The time is now right to examine the appropriateness of existing models of curriculum organisation, teaching methodology and staff deployment in the light of the National Curriculum requirements.” (para 57)

The report defends vigorously the need to teach through subjects at the primary stage, which raises questions about the optimum size of schools. The requirement for 9 staff with relevant specialist expertise has particular implications for small schools. Although the solutions the report proposes of federation and combining schools with one headteacher and one governing body will not be popular with those small schools who have sought to achieve unique identity linked closely to their particular community.

Many of the issues raised in this section are elaborated in the rest of the report. The need to review the National Curriculum Orders as the implementation process unfolds is stressed and specific pointers to raise standards of teaching and learning are stated. There is also a section on strengthening curriculum expertise in primary schools, which is particularly significant in view of the earlier statement about the capability of

generalist teachers to teach the full range of the National Curriculum.

The final sections of the report consider the role of the headteacher in promoting effective curriculum leadership and the relationship between initial teacher training, induction and INSET. The headteacher's key responsibility is described as providing curriculum leadership and monitoring the quality of teaching in order to raise the standards of children's learning.

The authors call for a clearer articulation of the relationship between the respective roles of initial teacher training (ITT), induction and INSET. They believe that the priorities for ITT and induction must be concerned with students and young teachers acquiring and strengthening their subject expertise and receiving systematic training in a broad range of classroom organisational strategies and teaching techniques. They are critical of what they describe as a tendency for INSET to try to cover too much at any one time and advocate an in-depth approach which focuses on fewer priorities year by year. Alongside this they also believe that INSET provision should occur

“insufficient strength and quality to ensure that it has a decisive impact on the work of schools in the areas targeted.” (para 179)

The irony of the above statement is, as I have already stated, that the major priorities and funding for INSET have been set nationally since 1987. The question of where schools will get the strength and quality referred to becomes increasingly problematic as LEA infrastructures for support and development are cut-back and in some cases totally dismantled. The report talks about schools having access to a mixed economy of different forms of INSET, but does not take into account the time and organisational demands this will make on headteachers and co-ordinators in primary schools.

Perhaps the most notable omission from the report is any real discussion about the relationship between Key Stages 1 and 2. The requirements for early years are set aside and we are given the distinct impression that the advent of specialist approaches could well result in a two tier approach to primary education. The imperative style of the report contrasts with the plea for a new kind of debate and dialogue. Inevitably one is led to ask:

On whose terms will the debate be conducted?
and, Who frames the questions?

Where's the vision?

The time-scale for the production of the report (7 weeks) was such that it is hardly surprising it seems highly inconsistent and cobbled together in haste. However, the issues it provokes are serious; particularly at a time when government ministers display a cynical disregard for teachers' professionalism.

If we as a profession accept uncritically the statements about primary practice and the recommendations of the 'three wise men', we will lose what is best in primary education through our own sins of omission.

The best teachers are those who can be described as thinking, researching and innovative practitioners. Their professionalism is evident through the way they

Assessing Learning in the Early Years

Mary Jane Drummond

A tutor in Primary Education at the Cambridge Institute of Education and a member of **Forum's** Editorial Board, Mary Jane Drummond invites teachers of the under-fives to explore their own rationale for assessing young children's learning.

Looking back over the turbulent events of the last five years in primary education, it is tempting to try and pinpoint a moment when we should have realised how serious a dispute was about to begin, and how dramatically our principled understanding of children's learning was to be challenged. For my money, that moment was January 1988, the date of the publication of the Task Group in Assessment and Testing (TGAT) Report. This report contained an infamous straight line graph, which purported to represent the progression of the pupil population along a pre-determined pathway from Level 1 to Level 6½. Fully formed seven year old children appeared from nowhere on the vertical axis of the graph, uncompromisingly positioned at Level 2, and eleven year olds, after four more years of schooling, were marked off at Level 4. This startling diagram, which completely ignores children under seven, should surely have served as an explicit warning to everyone in primary education, and especially to those working in the early years, of much of what was to come. Not quite everything, evidently, since even those of us most inclined to conspiracy theory could hardly have predicted the extraordinary critique of nursery education thrown into a debate on the Schools Bill in December last year, by two Tory MPs. Mr Alan Amos, MP for Wrexham, considers that nursery schools need to be inspected because 'there is too much emphasis on discovery methods'; the antidote for this is more teaching of the class as a whole. Mr David Evennett, MP for Erith and Crayford, is worried 'about the level of education these schools provide. They shouldn't just be about play' (reported in *TES* 13.12.91). Even the Red Queen, who could believe six impossible things before breakfast, might have choked on these pronouncements.

The TGAT report was the first of many documents to try to convince us that the process of assessment is

objective, accurate and mechanical. The word itself — 'assessment' — has now come to suggest checklists, precision, explicit criteria, incontrovertible facts and figures. The language that is used to describe the statutory process of assessment for six and seven year olds reinforces this interpretation, and the 1988 Act has established the concepts of targets, attainments and Levels 1-3 in the staffroom conversations of teachers in primary schools.

But in early years education, we have the immense advantage of working with children who are living, and learning, and playing (in defiance of Mr Evennett), beyond the reaches of the 1988 Act. For the first time in our professional lives we can see the non-statutory status of the youngest children in the school as a privilege, and not an insult. For the first time, early years educators can taste a sense of power and freedom denied to those locked into statutory assessment procedures. What remains to be seen is whether we will seize our advantage, whether we will make use of our power to assess young children's learning in ways of our own invention, in ways that match our philosophy, our aspirations, our educational vision. Will we be able to devise forms of assessment that will act both as a reproof and a shining light to teachers of older children?

The purposes of the statutory assessment procedures prescribed by the 1988 Act have been expressed in terms of raising standards and increasing accountability. Early years educators are free to define a wider range of purposes for the assessment of young children's learning, and, in so doing, to use the word 'assessment' in a different sense from the officers of SEAC or the NCC.

In the early years, when teachers work with young children, when we play and talk with them, when we watch them and everything they do, we are witnessing

reflect, articulate and question their practice. To do this, teachers need to have a vision of what they are aspiring to achieve. Without such vision and their own rationale, teachers will become little more than compliant technicians and operatives. There are few references to any kind of vision for primary education in the report, which in itself is an instrumental response to a prescribed agenda.

It would be unfair to criticize the three wise men too harshly, as they were asked to undertake a journey at 'just the worst time of year', and, unlike the Magi, they did not have a guiding star for illumination.

We must ensure that any debate on primary education is conducted within a professional framework

determined by those who are most directly concerned with the learning of children. Only then will the vision be restored and the pathway made clear.

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- 1 Robin Alexander, Jim Rose & Chris Woodhead — **Curriculum Organisation & Classroom Practice in Primary Schools** A discussion paper
- 2 Refers to an article in the **Independent on Sunday** 2/2/92
- 3 **Primary Education in England** A survey by HMI (HMSO 1978)
- 4 Board of Education **The Primary School** (HMSO 1931)
- 5 Central Advisory Council for Education **Children and their Primary Schools** (HMSO 1967)
- 6 **Education in England 1990-91** The Annual Report of HM Senior Chief Inspector of Schools (DES 1992)

a fascinating and inspiring process: we are seeing children learn. As we think about what we see, and try to understand it, we have embarked on the process that I would call assessment. I would choose to use this term to describe the ways in which, in everyday practice, teachers observe children's learning, strive to understand it, and then put their understanding to good use. This understanding has nothing to do with levels, or standards, or performance; it is an understanding with an evaluative purpose, and an enriching effect. Young children's awesome capacity for learning imposes a massive responsibility on the teachers whose task is to support and extend that learning. We cannot know if we are successful in this task, unless we carefully monitor the children's learning, recognising their achievements and their individuality, the differences between them. Then we can use these assessments to shape and enrich our curriculum, our interactions, our provision as a whole. We can use our understanding of individual's children's learning in the dynamic process of assessment advocated by Vygotsky, based on his perception of 'the proximal zone of development'. We can involve parents, the children's first educators, in this process, learning from them and with them how to evaluate and enrich the curriculum we offer.

None of this will be easy. Even the simple principle of partnership with parents, enshrined in the promising development of **Records of Achievement** in primary schools, may be under threat. The HMI report on primary education in France (DES 1991) reports that at the heart of the French assessment system is a **Dossier Scolaire** for each pupil, a detailed document which is absolutely confidential to the school and which parents are not allowed to see. Is this practice to be introduced into British primary schools? Time will tell, but meanwhile, early years educators will experience other forms of pressure, both from within the profession and from without. Teachers of young children are being bombarded with home-grown check-lists and schedules for so-called 'base-line assessment'; even the NCC is reported to be toying with the idea of a national format for recording children's learning as they enter statutory education. What these base-line schedules have in common is an overwhelming tendency to measure not what is of most value, but what is most easily measured. Items on these schedules typically include knowledge of the colour names, and the ability to count to ten; being able to name a rectangle is also, apparently, an important achievement for Britain's four year olds. Some schedules have a numerical bias; I have seen one on which a child's development is to be recorded on thirty three attributes, each with a numerical scale from 1-6. Attributes include imagination, enthusiasm, self-control and concentration. No verbal descriptions are given for any attribute, (though this may be a mercy for the attribute Toilet Training).

In resisting these pressures, early years educators will critically examine the real purposes of the inappropriate forms of assessment that are being offered them. This critical examination will be sympathetically encouraged by a new and fearless description of the best of early years practice in assessment. Gera Blenkin and Vic Kelly have just published **Assessment in Early Childhood Education**,

and their concluding chapter is full of fighting talk, showing clearly the failings of National Curriculum assessment. 'The purpose of developing a system of testing which emphasizes the — as yet undemonstrated — superior validity and reliability of standardized tests is not to enhance the quality of educational provision but to achieve ends of a political kind.' (p166). They are equally unsparing in their final denouncement: 'Even as a device for teacher or school appraisal and accountability, the system is crude, fundamentally inaccurate, unhelpful and unfair.' As Vic Kelly reminds us, in an earlier chapter, if assessment is to be the servant, not the master, of the curriculum, there is an inescapable conclusion to be drawn: 'not only should we plan our curriculum first and then devise forms of assessment to match it, but those forms of assessment must match it in every respect' (p20), including the fundamental way in which we conceive of a curriculum. And our conception of a quality curriculum for children under five is unlikely to consist of a core of Maths, English and Science, with attendant History, Geography, and the rest.

Devising forms of assessment that are appropriate for young children will require early years educators to think hard, searchingly and sensitively, about what we know about young children's learning. But we will also need to explore some taken-for-granted concepts and beliefs. Any form of assessment is based on an implicit value system, built up on a set of beliefs about children, about what kinds of beings they are, what kinds of ways they behave, and what kinds of feelings they have. A description of a normal child, or an ideal child, or a child-like child, (see Tobin 1989 for an electrifying account of this concept under debate), is not normally made explicit in the process of assessment. Nevertheless, as we set about observing, assessing and interacting with young children, we do have, deep in our mind's eye, some dearly held beliefs about what we are looking for. Should young children actively explore their environment, for example, running their own curriculum, or should they learn to respond to adult selection and direction? Should they use sharp knives, saws, secateurs? Should they dig up a dead rabbit? Play with bunsen burners? Dissect a dead gold fish? Or should we protect them from all possible harm or distress? Should they express their rage and their sorrow? Or should we help them to subdue and control their feelings? We cannot, I believe, establish effective assessment procedures in the early years until we have discussed and debated (and probably disagreed about) some fundamental questions about young children: what *do* we expect them to know, to understand, to explore, to do, to feel, to be?

Whatever the fruits of this debate, which we will enter with intensity and urgency fuelled by the utter disregard of young children revealed in the 'Alexander Report', some of its outcomes are easy to predict. Early years educators will resist all attempts to make us quantify the unquantifiable, or clap a number between 1 and 3 (or 1 and 6) onto children whose unique individuality we value. We will emerge from the debate able to articulate clearly and confidently the principles and purposes of our own practices in assessing children's learning. (Drummond and Rouse 1992).

Assessment and learning

Charles Desforges

Professor of primary education at the University of Exeter, Charles Desforges is currently researching childrens' learning and parental involvement in assessment. Here he exposes some false assumptions implicit in SATs and explores the impact of assessment on learning.

Some years ago I had the privilege of watching a creative writing lesson conducted by a teacher with a county-wide reputation for quality work. Her class of 7 year olds sat spellbound as she described to them the features of a model volcano on her desk. The model was two feet tall and of papier-maché on a wire frame. Its upper heights were stark black. Its lower regions, in contrast, were decorated with model bushes and trees, a few houses, some human and animal figures and a vehicle or two.

Having discussed these attributes of the model, the teacher pressed a small button hidden from the children. The button completed an electric circuit which released a piston inside the frame of the model. The piston in turn threw up a significant cloud of black ash. The children gasped and strained backwards. But their attention was riveted on the second emission from the volcano mouth. A thick, red and black jelly slowly overpoured the rim and oozed down the model hillside. It engulfed everything in its path. Trees, bushes, animals, humans and buildings were buried.

The children's jaws dropped. Their pupils dilated. There was a long silence. Suddenly the questions poured out. How did that happen? Were people killed? Can you run away? Why do they live there? Is there a volcano in our town? Speeches were made. 'I've seen one in a film'. 'There was an eruption on the television'. 'The sky goes black'. 'The washing gets dirty'. From the terrifying to the work-a-day, everyone had something to say.

The teacher let it happen. As the excitement subsided she reviewed the experience by echoing back the questions the class had asked. She then said to them, 'Right, Now I want you to write me something exciting. About living near a volcano. It can be in poetry. Or it can be in prose. It can be true or you can make something up. But it must be exciting'.

The children gathered themselves and went back to their desks. They were very quiet. They spent a lot of time collecting writing materials and sharpening pencils. They laboriously copied the data off the board. They were meticulous with their handwriting, taking great pains with letter formation. No one wrote very

much and no one wrote anything remotely exciting. Several started with, 'Once upon a time there was a volcano . . .' What had happened to convert such a manifestly exciting experience into a mundane and predictable performance?

What had happened was the teacher's assessment system. As the class gathered their wits the teacher patrolled the room commenting, 'That's very neat Alice.' 'Remember, Tom, Good up and down strokes'. 'Alan, that's not your best handwriting' — and so on. There was no further mention of exciting work — nor any strictures on boring work for that matter. The teacher's assessment system, manifest in this case by her praise for presentation, seemed to me to completely subvert her genuine intentions to stimulate exciting work. Her commitment to this intention could hardly be denied given the amount of preparation she had put into the opening section of the lesson. Assessment systems can radically distort learning provision. They frequently do.

The current obsession with assessment in the education system advances on rhetoric. Cliches have become self evident truths. 'Teachers cannot teach without assessment'. 'We have to be publicly accountable. Assessment is a means to this end'. 'Assessment will drive up standards'. The real truth is that the link between assessment and learning has yet to be empirically or even logically established. Another nasty truth is that assessment as publicly practised has a very bad track record in respect of its impact on learning. It has rarely done anything but harm.

Many others have already pointed out the banal and false assumptions regarding learning which are implicit in the public assessment systems to be enacted at the end of each key stage in the National Curriculum. There is the confident belief amongst the test designers that all important learning objectives can be specified and measured. There is the attendant belief that learning can be decomposed into discernible, hierarchical levels: do the easy things first and the hard things later: start with the basics. The beliefs slip easily from completely unstated assumptions to completely confident practice; from notional levels to a deadeningly real 'back to basics' curriculum.

Another pervasive and pernicious assumption is that learning can be meaningfully decontextualised for assessment (give them a page of 'proper' sums says the Secretary of State for Education) and hence, presumably, for learning.

We do not have to speculate on what the proposed approach to assessment might do (or to) school learning. We simply need to look over the horizon to the United States.

Ten years earlier than in Britain, dissatisfaction and pessimism set in with regard to economic prosperity.

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Unable to manufacture goods, political analysts manufactured scapegoats. Attention focussed on the quality of schooling. One of the main planks of policy intended to improve schooling was the institution of public accountability through the publication of test scores. Achievement tests had been common in the US schools. They had traditionally been used to group pupils, to plan teaching and to diagnose local difficulties. Under new Federal policy, annual tests are mandatory for each grade level, as is the publication of results in simple league tables inviting comparisons, state by state, district by district, school by school and even class by class. The system has been running long enough for the Americans to have learned some bitter lessons. I wonder whether this is an instance in which our policy makers are willing to learn from international comparisons.

What happens that we should be aware of? The first point to observe is that amongst the Americans press, public and, it should be said, professional teachers there is a comprehensive ignorance of test technology. Lacking any understanding of test construction or interpretation and in receipt of apparently simple figures, the test scores are taken to be the most important indeed the only significant index of teacher success. They are given predictably vigorous — some would say brutal — treatment by the Press. They are used to praise or pillory teachers, principals and teaching methods. They are used by estate agents to rate neighbourhoods. The scores have become very high stakes indeed. ‘Quite so’ it might be said, ‘That is the whole idea’. The question that seems to have been forgotten is, ‘how does it influence learning?’

Research shows that American teachers feel under enormous pressure to raise the test scores (Haladyna et al 1991; Smith 1991). So much so that significant numbers of them are willing to do anything to get the scores up. In consequence, US children are trained in test-taking skills. Teachers align the curriculum to that of the test. They practise on items similar to those in the tests. Some practise on the test as such. Many give hints to children under test conditions. Others make sure that low attainers are absent during test periods. These responses shade from the sensible to the downright unethical. Whatever the case they have nothing to do with promotion of quality learning.

The policy has been enormously successful in driving up test scores. So much so that all States can now report that their scores are higher than average. In contrast to this ‘Lake Wobegone effect’, surveys continue to reveal serious limitations in basic literacy, weaknesses in reasoning and problem solving and comprehensive ignorance of general knowledge. Saddest of all, low achieving children have become increasingly alienated from tests in particular and school in general (Paris et al 1991). The policy of public accountability through raw test score publication has done little for learning and least of all for those about whom there was most anxiety. We have all the props for this sad scenario here. Can it be avoided?

It seems to me that at least three courses of action are urgent and essential. First, the teaching profession must develop a code of ethics in regard to testing. This

would need to define what would count as proper preparation and identify improper preparation for tests. It should pay particular regard to the support warranted to those pupils who are, almost inevitably, going to be seen as failures year on year. The code would define the interpretive frameworks in which test scores should be considered and pay special attention to avoiding the denigration of whole neighbourhoods or catchment areas.

Second, it seems essential to challenge the whole basis on which SEAC and the DES are proceeding. Does their nonsense really drive up standards? Does the public understand, value, want, buy their scheme? Would SEAC survive a Treasury audit on a value for money basis on its own terms? I doubt it very much. It would be useful to turn that intuition into well conceived research projects questioning the effectiveness of SEAC.

The third course of action in opposition to the tide of assessment seems to me to be more fundamental. It entails challenging some taken for granted assumptions in both public discourse and professional practice in regard to assessment. There never was a golden age of classroom assessment. The scene described in my opening paragraphs is not untypical of primary classrooms. Here, assessment takes the form of praise for participation in working procedures in the classroom. Such assessment has done little — could do little — to promote quality learning experiences. The limitations of traditional assessment packages have long been recognised. But the burgeoning development of alternative forms of assessment (including for example, profiles, folios and ‘authentic’ activities) has in turn not paid sufficient attention to issues of validity. And the key question of validity seems to me to be ‘to what degree is this assessment procedure promoting quality learning?’

For those anxious about the effects of standardised assessment procedures, the results of which are floated as market indices, the attractions of alternative forms — including pupil self assessment — seem overwhelming. It would be a pity if these forms were attractive just because they were ‘alternative’. They must, in fact, be shown to be substantive. The only valid way to do that is to appraise their impact on learning by comparison with other forms of assessment *including the total absence of formal assessment*. It has become taken for granted that teachers cannot teach without assessment. This is not very important, true or not. The question is, what part does teacher assessment (as the term is commonly used) play in pupils’ learning. Strangely, this role has never been empirically established.

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The 'Burt Scandal' Resurrected

Jack Demaine

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Perhaps it should come as no surprise that psychometric testing, the notion of innate genetic endowment, and the spectre of Cyril Burt should once again stalk the pages of the educational press. Having served to legitimate a selective system of secondary schooling during the late 1940s and the 1950s, IQism might be called upon again during the 1990s to attempt to bring legitimacy to the new selective system which will be a consequence of the application of market forces to education (see Demaine 1989 and 1990). Indeed, during the run-up to the 1992 General Election, Mr Kenneth Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Science, expressed views on the advantages of 'streaming' in primary schools, and the return of Grammar schools to the secondary sector. No doubt there are those who would be happy to reach for IQ tests in order to differentiate between children and their supposedly different 'needs'.

A recent article by Clare Burstall titled, 'Arise again, Sir Cyril', was afforded front page coverage in the **Education Guardian** (9.7.91) and no doubt the views she expressed were given added status by the indication that she is a director of the National Foundation for Educational Research. Burstall is concerned to publicise attempts to clear Burt's name, in Fletcher's book **Science, Ideology and the Media: The Cyril Burt Scandal** (1991) and by Joynson in **The Burt Affair** (1989). Burstall is particularly concerned to challenge the idea that he cheated in his research. The implication is that if only his name could be cleared all would be well. This is wishful thinking, of course, because the real problems with psychometric testing lie at a much deeper level than with questions about Burt's methodology.

In the late 1940s when the local education authorities (LEAs) attempted to provide secondary education according to the 'age, aptitude, and ability' of pupils, as required by the 1944 Education Act, most adopted the proposals of the earlier Norwood Committee (1943), and intelligence testing became an official instrument of educational division at eleven for the vast majority of pupils. But by the end of the 1950s IQ tests had come under attack from educational reformers. IQ testing was seen as leading to social injustice and inequality of opportunity. Politicians and educationalists were concerned about the 'lack of fairness' and the 'class and cultural bias' of IQ testing. The 'environmentalist' argument was sufficient to win the day in the political climate of the 1960s.

Critics of IQ testing argue, persuasively, that it is meaningless to suggest that innate intellectual potential can be postulated as an entity outside of the biological, linguistic and cultural means through which it is

expressed. Those means are constructed in biological organisms (humans in the fundamental sense) which themselves appear in specific social relations. In fact, once human conception has taken place it makes no sense to attempt to consider genetic endowment apart from environmental or epigenetic expression. Genes are expressed in an environment which in turn affects their expression and creates a new environment within which further development takes place. Stress *in utero*, for example, can exert cataclysmic effects upon the expression of genes and thus alter developmental patterns of the phenotype.

In reality, of course, despite references to genes, genetics and genetic endowment, educational psychologists such as Burt and his followers, never concerned themselves with genes in the sense of the structure and evolution of DNA. Since Burt's day, research in genetics has displaced the notion of intelligence as 'innate potential' fixed in human individuals as part of their genetic endowment. The biological sciences have established that the human species share a largely common genetic structure. Human body cells contain forty-six chromosomes, or chains of genes; paired alleles one from each parent. Minute variation in genetic combination through sexual reproduction effects differences in individual phenotypes (apparent characteristics) but only part of the genotype is represented in the phenotype. Work by Cavalli-Sforza and Bodmer in their books, **The Genetics of Human Population** (1971) and **Genetics, Evolution, and Man** (1976), and an important paper published in 1975 in the journal **Science** by Feldman and Lewontin titled, 'The heritability hang-up', demonstrate the immense complexity of human genetic structure. These geneticists do not argue that specific genes 'control' intelligence and they have been highly critical of psychometrics. Few serious educationalists today make what is in fact speculative reference to relations between genes and 'intelligence'. Many would agree with geneticists Feldman and Lewontin when they argue that attempts to understand relations between phenotypes and genotypes is 'rather like trying to infer the structure of a clock by listening to it tick and watching the hands'.

Of course, genes may indeed be relevant to behaviour but in a way that has nothing to do with genetic determination. For example, genes affect skin pigmentation, which affects how others behave towards human individuals, which in turn has its effects. The examples of sex and length of hair as well as skin colour can be used to demonstrate that the relation between genotype and phenotype can be a *cultural* artefact.

America's multicultural panic

Alistair Bonnett

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A spectre is haunting American education. A 'new paradigm', *Time* magazine warned its readers last July, is preparing to overrun the nation's colleges — a paradigm which threatens to undermine the common cultural bond that holds America together. With halting unfamiliarity this malaise is given a name, the 'multicultural perspective'. *Time* provides a few examples: 'Instead of teaching that Columbus discovered the New World, multiculturalists stress that America was already inhabited'. Multiculturalists are also given to claim that 'the westward migration of white America was a violent process' and that the conventional 'retelling of such expansions downplays a loss of lives and native culture comparable to that of the Holocaust'.

Now apart from the implication that students are at present being taught that America was uninhabited when Columbus arrived or that the westward expansion of white America was an entirely peaceful event, these multiculturalist claims might not appear particularly shocking. However, over the past couple of years an increasingly influential group of conservative intellectuals have begun to open the nation's eyes to the reality of the matter. The most articulate exponent of this counter movement is Dinesh D'Souza, the Asian American founder of the far right student periodical *The Dartmouth Review*. On national television and a series of articles in *The Atlantic* and *Forbes*, D'Souza has repeatedly charged that multiculturalism is the subversive creation of irresponsible liberal academics and left wing agitators. In his recent book, *Illiberal Education*, D'Souza supports this assertion by recounting numerous incidences of the marginalization of Western culture on college campuses. He retells, for example, a widely publicized scandal at Stanford University involving the attempts by a group of students to pressurize the college authorities to reform the university's core curriculum. At one infamous demonstration in 1988 some of the protesters occupied the president of Stanford's office and set up a chant

that has been ringing in anti-multiculturalists ears ever since; 'Hey hey, ho ho, Western cultures got to go!'. Silly enough but hardly the worst thing ever shouted on a college campus. Yet, as D'Souza tells it, when Stanford eventually abolished its requirement that all undergraduates take a Western Culture course, they were caving in to the demonstrators' inane incantation. The old course was replaced with a broader, more culturally diverse lecture series called *Cultures, Ideas and Values*. 'In practice', D'Souza sarcastically observes, 'this meant that texts such as Plato's *Republic* and Machiavelli's *Prince* would have to make way for such works as *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, the political odyssey of a Guatemalan peasant woman'.

Similar subversions of the core curriculum are being reported from many of America's most prestigious colleges. At Harvard, *The Atlantic* reported in disgust, 'Western-civilization requirements have been loudly denounced' and the new curriculum is premised on the notion of 'content-free', non-Euro-centric knowledge. At the University of Texas, English Professor Barbara Harlowe, who has seen her department's courses become a source of national political acrimony, regretfully admits that multiculturalism is where 'the battle line . . . has been drawn'. From Harvard to Texas, from Yale to Princeton, a 'new sort of demagogic and fanatical fundamentalism' is on the loose explains John Taylor in *New York* magazine. The only thing that unites 'this peculiar intellectual cult', Taylor continues, is their insistence that 'Western values are the source of much of the world's evil'. Professor Arthur Schlesinger, the author of a dozen or so books on twentieth century American history, concurs. Within multiculturalism, he notes in a recent *Time* article, 'Europe — the unique source of the liberating ideas of democracy, civil liberties and human rights — is portrayed as the root of all evil, and non-European cultures, their own many crimes deleted, are presented as the means of redemption'.

With respect to education, it is clear that teacher expectations (of children's future educational achievement) are cultural artefacts which can themselves influence actual outcomes. The reintroduction of IQ tests could be harmful to the prospects of those children who, for whatever reason, do not do well on them. Cyril Burt and his ideas should not be resurrected. They should be left to rest in peace.

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Even schools are now being sucked into what Roger Kimball, author of **Tenured Radicals**, terms this 'swamp' which 'yawns before us'. One pro-multicultural state-sponsored report on the teaching of social studies in New York schools has come under particular media scrutiny. The 'Sobol report' recommends children be taught to respect different cultural identities and the 'interdependence' of the world's diverse peoples. It represents, comments **Time**, 'a radical departure' from the traditional view of education 'as a away of creating citizens out of a polyglot and diverse pool of young citizens-to-be'. **Time** translates itself: the report is a 'hatchet job on existing academic standards'.

British paradigms

All this will confuse British readers. Why are Americans getting so excited by a debate that has been rumbling on in this country for decades? And why is multiculturalism the focus? In Britain, after all, radical anti-racists used to dismissively describe multiculturalism as the three S's approach (Saris, Samosas and Steel bands). In other words, mere cultural tokenism. Indeed prominent anti-racists like Chris Mullard, one-time director of the Race Relations Policy Unit at the Institute of Education, described multiculturalism as a means of assimilating 'black groups, without disruption . . . an instrument of control and stability rather than one of change'. Unsurprisingly, it was the anti-racists who were the real butt of the tabloid campaign against the 'loony left'. Of course, multicultural innovations were also ridiculed but, in local government at least, they had the advantage of reasonably widespread cross-party support. At the chalk-face, moreover, multiculturalism had an image rather closer to 'sensible reform' than 'radical subversion'.

Could it just be that Britain is actually more tolerant of diversity than the nation so often regarded as a by-word for plurality? And did Britain actually arrive at multiculturalism before America? Sneakily pleasurable as these thoughts might be for British readers, they aren't reasonable conclusions. First of all, we need to recognize that in all the rumpus over the 'new paradigm', many Americans seem to have forgotten that multiculturalism has been part of their country's curricula for at least 30 years. The civil rights and ethnic revitalization movements of the 1960s stimulated the development of numerous ethnic and Black studies courses. By the 1970s multicultural ideas had become so widely accepted that in May 1977 America's major national teacher accreditation body, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, instructed its member institutions that 'provision should be made for multicultural education' in most areas of educational life. Areas included: 'courses, seminars, directed readings, laboratory and clinical experiences, practicum, and other types of field experiences'.

However, all this activity failed to shift the fundamental emphasis of American education away from its traditional aim of 'creating Americans' out of an 'unmanageably' disparate population. A precept that received its most influential articulation by the

American educationalist E P Cubberley back in 1909. Noting that immigrants 'tended to settle in groups or settlements, and to set up their manners, customs, and observances', Cubberley argued that the teacher's principal task 'is to break up these groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as part of the American race, and to implant in their children, as far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law, and order'. Looking between the lines of this statement tells us a great deal about why there exists such enormous resilience to multiculturalism in America. For at the root of Cubberley's remarks, and today's controversy, lies the same barely disguised fear of national disintegration. In the UK such fears have appeared far less integral to the multicultural debate. Multiculturalism has been about providing a more open, less one-sided, education service that goes some way to acknowledging the different cultural experiences and backgrounds of the 5% or so of the population that are Afro-British or British Asian. It has been, then, a limited recognition of the existence of ethnic heterogeneity that rarely threatens to raise unsettling questions about white identity or what being 'British' actually means. To the anti-multiculturalist in the USA, by contrast, opening the door on plurality is the equivalent of robbing the nation of its unifying myths and replacing them with a 'foreign' chaos. Multiculturalism is seen as an attack on the coherence, the very legitimacy of the category 'American'.

Thus what British educationalists may regard as the perplexingly intemperate attacks now being made on multiculturalism in the United States need to be set in the context of the enormous fragility of the Anglo-American self-image. Conversely, it is more likely to have been a general complacency over the unassailability, the eternalness of white British (or English, Scottish or Welsh) identity, rather than some innate national tolerance, that made the debate in the UK so comparatively unemotional.

Anti-racism driven underground

That there are very real limits to that tradition of tolerance was made abundantly clear by the extraordinarily vindictive campaign the British popular press waged on anti-racist education. A campaign that was, moreover, largely successful. Anti-racism is now practically an underground activity in British schools. Indeed in its last days, even its old supporters turned on their creation. Before it was abolished, the ILEA under Neil Fletcher, was busy stamping out the last vestiges of this political liability in the capital's schools. It was too late for the ILEA of course. The aura of radical excess that had been largely fabricated around it (and the GLC) by sections of the media turned the irresponsible destruction of an elected body into a kind of mercy killing.

The anti-multicultural lobby in the USA has yet to achieve such spectacular successes. But it is early days. D'Souza in **Forbes** magazine has called upon its readers to financially pull the plugs on institutions that indulge in multiculturalism. 'Resistance on campus', he proposes 'needs outside reinforcements'. Before the cavalry arrive, however, other forms of opposition are

GNVQ threat to GCSE

Terry Hyland

A lecturer in the department of continuing education at the University of Warwick for the past year, Dr Terry Hyland has taught in schools, further and higher education including teacher education. Updating his warning in **Forum** vol 33 no 1 he shows how vocationalisation and competence-based assessment threaten to undermine comprehensive education.

If we were to try to characterise the chief influences on education over the last decade or so, two key factors would be the centralisation of control over the system and the vocationalisation of the school curriculum. Both these trends were extended and reinforced by the DES White Paper **Education and Training for the 21st Century** which became the Further and Higher Education Bill and was enacted in March.

The 1988 Education Reform Act moved control of the education system from the local authority periphery to the DES centre, and the proposal that, from April 1993, further education and sixth form colleges will be 'funded directly by the Government through new Councils appointed by and responsible to the Secretary of State' (DES 1991) extends and consolidates this centralisation of power. Although the official aim of this policy is to respond to the demand from students and employers for high quality further education, no amount of rhetoric can disguise the fact that the allocation of funds and responsibility for strategic planning is to be transferred from LEAs to the Further Education Funding Councils controlled by the DES. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has described this as a policy of allowing LEAs to wither on the vine, and even the Conservative-controlled Association of County Councils has declared that the 'government proposals for a new educational quango will create a centralised bureaucracy with no local democratic element' (Hackett).

The other major thrust of recent policy, the vocationalising of the curriculum through school-based work experience schemes, enterprise projects, youth training and National Vocational Qualifications, was also given a boost by the overt instrumentalist and utilitarian tone of the DES proposals. Under the slogan of 'parity of esteem for vocational and academic qualifications' the White Paper proposes a whole host of measures designed to extend and reinforce the vocational emphasis of the 14-19 curriculum without unduly interfering with the academic A level 'gold standard' route.

The main vehicle for vocational reform will be the framework of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) which will now, as it has always threatened to, be allowed to introduce the competence-based assessment model into schools. The introduction of NVQs is to be speeded up and, more significantly, the Secretary of State will use reserve powers under the Reform Act as a means of 'requiring colleges and schools to offer only NVQs to students pursuing vocational courses' (DES 1991). A number of writers have pointed to the weaknesses and serious shortcomings of NVQs and Ashworth and Saxton have gone so far as to warn careful educators to keep away from such competence-based strategies. As damaging as all this could be for the good practice already established by a number of pre-vocational schemes (Triggs), an even greater danger might lie in the other chief provision concerning the establishment of general

being developed. The Madison Centre for Educational Affairs, which financially supports many of the country's conservative student publications (and which, in turn, is 'heavily bankrolled', according to a report in the American newsweekly **The Guardian**, by Mobil and other major corporations) is emerging as a major player in the anti-multicultural counter-attack. Thus, for example, the Madison Centre recently established the Student Forum as a channel for anti-multicultural black and Latino students. The coordinator of the new group, David Bernstein, suggests that most minority groups want nothing more than to be treated as 'Americans'. 'A lot of people', he suggests, 'are fed up with the whole race issue garbage'. Despite Bernstein's enthusiasm, however, so far the Student Forum has only attracted around 70 members. Still Bernstein need not be unduly worried. For the anti-multiculturalists' most valuable political weapon is already firmly in place. I am referring to their success in establishing the terms on which the multicultural debate is being fought. For almost everywhere the

controversy is represented as one between multiculturalism vs American education; 'politically correct' radicals vs non-extremists; people who like to chant 'Western culture's got to go' in public places vs people who don't. It's a contest in which the dice have been loaded from the start.

However, perhaps the strangest thing about the American multicultural panic is that, in the midst of all the controversy, so may Americans have lost sight of the fact that multiculturalism, far from being a revolutionary project, emphasizes traditional 'apolitical' values of cultural celebration and social harmony. It remains true, of course, that multiculturalism challenges the notion that the West is the fount of all worldly wisdom. And, perhaps, for some it has all gone too far too fast. But, there again, if the American way of life is threatened by the nation's colleges putting **I, Rogoberta Menchu**, 'the political odyssey of a Guatemalan peasant woman' on the curriculum, a shock to the system is surely long overdue.

NVQs (GNVQs) designed to 'cover broad occupational areas'. GNVQs are meant to provide alternatives to existing courses in schools and, unless the vocationalising pressures are resisted, they might easily result in, not just the end of general vocational education as opposed to occupationally-specific training, but also cause a further erosion of the ideals of comprehensive schooling.

General NVQs

In response to the DES proposals the NCVQ produced a consultative document on GNVQs in October 1991. The remit of the document was said to be based on a 'request from Ministers to draft the criteria for the new qualifications and co-ordinate the development of the first general National Vocational Qualifications for introduction into schools and colleges in September 1992' (NCVQ 1991). City and Guilds, which took over CVPE and Foundation programmes for 14-19 year olds in 1990, plans to launch a Diploma in Vocational Education in September 1992 in order to forge 'links with GNVQs' (CGLI 1991) and BTEC has plans for a similar qualification.

Some of these developments include elements which could be given a conditional welcome by secondary school teachers, particularly those with experience of good practice on CPVE and related schemes. In addition, the general foundation of 'core skills' deserves some place in vocational schemes and is, in fact, in accordance with recommendations being made by a diverse range of agencies such as HMI, BTEC and the National Curriculum Council as a means of upgrading vocational education and training. The overt link, through GNVQs, with competence-based assessment, however, is bound to be a cause of concern for all teachers committed to building on the gains made in secondary schools over recent years.

Like most of the NCVQ literature, the document on GNVQs is rather vague and, in parts, systematically ambiguous. GNVQs are intended to be both 'clearly related to the occupationally specific NVQs' yet 'sufficiently distinct from occupationally specific NVQs to ensure that there is no confusion between the two'. Confusion is, however, compounded by the references to grading which, unaccountably for a document ostensibly concerned with proposing *alternatives* to the standard academic route, is designed in such a way as to make 'the coverage of a general NVQ equivalent to two A levels'.

Although the outrageously ambitious nature of this project has to be admired, its fundamental flaws and radical inconsistencies need to be pointed out. How can an assessment system which tries to imitate A levels — and thus has to pay lip service to 'written tests' in order to 'achieve credible parity in relation to A and AS levels' — still maintain a commitment to the 'primary characteristics of NVQs' which 'should be specified in the form of outcomes to be achieved'? Are we to believe that the standard written A level exams are in some sense measuring outcomes in the way that NVQs are? The suggestion is preposterous and, indeed, is contradicted by the evidence that any success that CPVE and TVEI schemes managed to achieve was due in large part to a flexibility in modes of assessment

which allowed for alternatives to the traditional academic routes.

GNVQs, GCSE and the National Curriculum

Little mention is made in the NCVQ document of the glaring mismatch between the GNVQ model and the bulk of GCSE work in schools. The incompatibility of GCSE and A level methodology has already become painfully evident to teachers, and the introduction of GNVQs into schools will add yet another layer of confusion. The recognition given by GCSE schemes to differences in learning styles, to the importance of motivating pupils through project work, and to the general desirability of having a wide range of assessment modes is all at odds with the basic principles of competence-based assessment which underpin both general and specific NVQs.

Certainly, NVQs may be said to be criterion-referenced but, unlike GCSE standards, these are *performance* criteria established by Lead Bodies representing the interests of leading employers in their respective occupational fields. The assessment of competence is founded on 'functionalist and behavioural' principles which result in a model which is 'one-dimensional and prescriptive' (Marshall 1991). GCSE, on the other hand, makes use of a variety of measures which, though ultimately related to grade criteria, neither prejudice the appropriateness of particular methods for pupils nor attempt to foreclose the learning options of individuals. Moreover, recent research by Smithers and Robinson indicates that GCSE results are the key determinants of 16 year olds' next destination and, by implication, their life chances. It is, therefore, monstrous to expect students to transfer from GCSE work to a competence-based system or, even more sinister, to introduce covertly an occupationally-oriented vocational route for those 14-19 year olds not considered able to follow a mainstream GCSE route.

The gains of GCSE have now been confirmed by the research evidence which indicates that, not only have more students gained pass grades, but that coursework-based courses have maintained high standards (Pyke). All this has, of course, been ignored in the current DES scramble to put the clock back by limiting course-work to around 20% of the total marks. This most recent attack on GCSE can be seen as the logical culmination of a process which started soon after the introduction of the exam (Scott), and represents a rearguard action by supporters of a selective system and the elitism of the A level so called 'gold standard'.

The desperate problems of integrating Key stage 4 with GCSE and, at earlier stages, of implementing SATs has resulted in a wholesale retreat from the National Curriculum promise of a 'balanced and broadly based curriculum' for all pupils. As always the pupils most likely to suffer from this regressive curtailing of options are those who do not fit easily into the standard academic mould. In my view, it is these pupils for whom GNVQs and similar vocational routes are really designed, and this can only mean a return to and reinforcement of the old academic/vocational divisions and differential status for selected areas of the 14-19 curriculum.

The DES proposals ensure that the introduction of new vocational qualifications in schools and colleges for post-16 students will not interfere with traditional sixth form A level studies. With the independence of sixth form and FE colleges in the planned post-1993 competitive scenario, there will be a squalid scramble to retain as many students as possible after school leaving age. If these efforts were driven by genuine educational motives they would, of course, be entirely admirable and fully in line with comprehensive ideals. The real motives, however, are fuelled by the same vague and misguided notions about the need to improve vocational training to increase industrial effectiveness and national competitiveness that guided the tragically inept youth training schemes of the 1980s. In the event the new divisions likely to be created post-16 might easily be allowed to subvert the general aims and purposes of schooling.

GNVQs and Comprehensive Schooling

During the last decade there has been a series of attacks on the foundations of comprehensive schooling through the establishment of CTCs and blatant incentives for schools to opt out of the state system, through the erosion of local democratic control of education, and through the vocationalisation of general education and the introduction of an assessment system designed to increase competition and encourage a return to streaming. The only faint glimmers of hope in this picture of gloom have been the changes in secondary curricula and exams brought about by GCSE and the possibility that the Reform Act might provide a form of entitlement to equality of opportunity and access to a broad range of curriculum options. GNVQs might threaten even these few examples of positive development.

There is every sign that, as the National Curriculum subject areas and accompanying SATs are slimmed down, the provision of work-related vocational studies for those pupils falling outside of the academic A level streams is likely to be increased. The warnings that the competence-based instrumentalism of NVQs would eventually filter down from the post-compulsory to the school sector (Hyland 1991) have proved to be tragically correct. The blueprint for further streaming and a more rigid academic/vocational divide is being established for the 14-19 curriculum through the plans to introduce new vocational studies in September 1992.

The NCVQ document makes overt connections between GNVQ level 2 and attainments in the National Curriculum and declares that 'it is anticipated that level 2 will be broadly equivalent to National Curriculum level 7 or slightly above' (NCVQ). It seems that a number of schools are already planning to develop this 'GCSE equivalence' by following a 'third route' halfway between the academic system and traditional vocational education (Jackson).

The implications of all this for comprehensive schooling are profound and serious. Combined with the destructive forces outlined earlier, the proposed changes could herald a return to the pre-1960s divisions. Indeed, the old tripartite system established under the 1944 Act is actually being recommended by educationalists such as Halsey and Prais as the latest

panacea for all our current educational ills! (Tomlinson).

Supporters of comprehensive schooling need to answer all these attacks on the system and to resist vigorously any further marginalisation of general education through the vocationalisation of the curriculum. Vocational education naturally has a legitimate place in a comprehensive system, but this must be for *all* pupils and should not interfere with a broadly-based general education. This broad general education is not only what most employers actually require but also a necessary foundation for later vocational studies. This foundation is currently weak and will obviously not be strengthened by further erosion resulting from the introduction of GNVQs or other similar vocational courses.

The low skills-low quality equilibrium which, as Finegold and Soskice argued, is characteristic of education and training in Britain was caused, not by schooling practices, but by misguided policy and a lack of investment, and it is high time that educators exploded the myth that declining economic performance is caused solely by ill-equipped school leavers and instead addressed the structural problems and weaknesses of the system. One of our chief problems in comparison with other European countries is the failure to provide a 'good general education covering both technical subjects and the humanities' (ibid). The remedy, therefore, is not more of the failed vocationalism and narrow skills training of the 1970s and 1980s, but the re-assertion of the importance of a general liberal education for all pupils.

This conception of education, recommended by thinkers as far apart as Plato and Dewey, consists in that general development of knowledge and understanding which, as Bailey points out, derives its worthwhileness, universal power and general utility from the fact that it allows us to think and act 'beyond the present and the particular'. Such a liberating concept is the only one ethically justifiable in a compulsory education system and is close to the heart of the comprehensive ideal. Any further vocationalising of the curriculum which threatens this ideal needs to be resisted by all supporters of comprehensive schooling.

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(continued).

A Loss to Comprehensive Education

Don Stansbury

As a teacher Don Stansbury was responsible for developing the Record of Personal Achievement adopted by schools in about thirty LEAs in the 1970s and the Record of Personal Experience used in 82 secondary schools by 1984. He is now secretary of the Springline Trust, an educational charity to further the idea of personally compiled records, based at Mansion, Fore Street, Totnes.

An idea of considerable importance to comprehensive education has been lost. It is the idea of personally compiled records which began as a response to the Newsom Report in 1963. It provided a new way of motivating and qualifying the less academic and a new way of bridging the gap between school and employment. Some people believe that the National Record of Achievement is the inheritor of that idea. That is a measure of how completely the idea has been lost. It has been so completely lost that people cannot now recognise that the NRA is its opposite.

An aim was to move the development of personal qualities closer to the centre of the school's concern and to provide a system of documentation to support this. It was intended that the development of personal qualities would be documented by personal recording. It was recognised that personal qualities could not and should not be assessed but they could be revealed through a personally compiled record of experience. Recording documents learning through experience as assessment documents learning through instruction. This produced a workable system which would give to less academic students objectives which would relate to the world and would be relevant to them and would enable them to document their successes in and out of school. Academic failure would not mean failure in their lives.

The aim of recording was to enable pupils who were failing in school to succeed in their lives. This idea was important to the success of comprehensive education. As long as success in school is defined as getting high grades in school subjects, school will be good for some and the ones it will be good for will be the most academic. Those who cannot get high grades will be depressed and will feel rejected. Any useful capacities or qualities they may have will be buried beneath this central failure in school. The more that employment is

made to depend on academic qualifications the more complete will be their exclusion from work. That is not good for the economy or for society because people who are not successful in school subjects can still contribute to the economy and to society. There are many necessary qualities and capabilities which are not required in the study of school subjects but which do need to be developed in the young and which need to be documented so that they can be taken into account when young people are seeking employment. Recording does that. It makes secondary education comprehensive because it allows schools to value all kinds of people and to prepare people for all kinds of employment.

Of course this is anathema to those who want education to be selective with academic success at the top, academic mediocrity in the middle and academic failure at the bottom, and who want academic failure to be punished with failure in life. The economy may suffer, two and a half million people may be unemployed, society may be divided and threatened by an increasingly dangerous, alienated underclass but the selective system will be in place even if comprehensive is still the name on the gate. There are policies here which no one can state. No one can say they want unemployment, they want society to be divided, they want young people on the scrapheap with no hope of employment. Yet these are the objectives that have destroyed recording.

National Record of Achievement

The disappearance of the idea of recording is clearly shown by the arrival of the National Record of Achievement. It is designed to make the most successful more successful. It defines success in terms of school subjects. It has a standard format in order that comparisons can be more efficiently made between the successes and the failures as they come out of school. The record cannot be shaped by the individual to show his or her strengths. It is limited to four sides of A4 on the grounds that if it is too long no one will read it, which is rather like saying that if the telephone directory is too long no one will read it. A record is a collection of items. Each one is free standing. Each one gives self contained information.

At the beginning of the holidays we made our hay. We cut 30 acres. Then after it was baled, I picked up several fields of bales on my own.

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This is an item from an actual record of personal experience. It is fully informative as it stands. It would be useful to an employer at an interview, it is useful educationally because experience of all kinds is a part of education and it is useful to the individual because it helps self esteem — a sense of personal worth based on genuine capabilities. A record of personal experience may contain many items or may contain only a few. Some records are long. Some are short. Some reveal many interests and activities. Some reveal consuming specialisms. All records are different because people are different. That is the point of recording.

Malevolent format

The NRA has a different point and purpose. It is designed to make assessment easier and has decided in advance the grounds on which comparisons will be made and, of course, the most important ground for making comparisons has to be success in school subjects. The first page is for achievements in the school curriculum. 'In due course' this will be the national curriculum and 'national curriculum statutory assessments will need to be entered here'. This page is designed to make very clear who has done well in school subjects and who has not. In addition attendance must be entered as a percentage so that will put a searchlight on the malingers — those whining schoolboys who have crept like snails unwillingly to school. They will be shown up. And they will have a comment on whether their absences were justified or not.

On the second of their four pages they will put down nothing but their results in public examinations. The record must not be too long, but page one can be about achievement in the school curriculum as revealed by tests and page two can be about achievement in the school curriculum as revealed by examinations. One page is then allowed for other achievements and experiences which is supposed to be completed after discussion with teachers and must show 'achievement in the core skills', for example, numeracy and modern language competence. One page is then left for a personal statement. This has to contain 'your own assessment of your progress to date': so even here in this last little hiding place for something personal it must be school and it must be assessment. There is no way the less able, the less academic can use this structure to communicate their strengths, that bit of a capacity they may have to do something useful that could make them employable. The purpose of the national record is to destroy failures. It is a result of applying ideas of industrial production to education. Standards are kept up in a factory by destroying whatever is below the required standard. It is an absurdly inappropriate idea to apply to schools because failures when they have been destroyed have to be paid for through unemployment benefit and they steal or riot and cause endless problems. Education has to be for everyone and for all kinds of futures. It is absurd to match everyone against a template.

People need to know that there is an alternative. It is possible to value all kinds of people and all kinds of

talents. The idea of a single standard against which all people have to be measured is absurd. People are valuable and useful because they are different. Each individual is a unique resource for society and for the economy because each individual is a unique mix of talents, of experience and of insights.

It was not an accident that recording developed in Swindon in the sixties. The new industries in Swindon were showing what the future held for employment and the schools responded. Any piece of information that can be stored in the head of a child can now be stored in a data system. Any simple skill that can be taught to a child can now be taught to a robot. That does not mean that people are redundant. People are needed because they are not data storage systems and they are not robots all programmed to do the same things in the same way. People are useful and valuable because they are different, because they have human capabilities. They are flexible, they plan, they see connections, they have ideas, they invent. There is no end to the human capacity. What education has to do is to release those capacities by enabling people to discover and to develop their strengths and to document their strengths so that they can be known about and be useful.

Value individual experience

In a society with advanced technology everyone is a specialist. People are not employed to do the things that they are bad at. It does not matter how many things people are bad at as long as they do not do them. It only matters that they know what they are good at and can prove it. Personal recording achieves both purposes. Young people discover and document their strengths through personal recording. It has to be personal and it has to be a record of experience. It has been very well known since 1970 that personal recording is 'of experience'. It is not 'of achievement'. Those who insisted that it should be national rather than personal and of achievement rather than of experience knew perfectly well what they were doing. In times of rapid change people panic. They introduce a national curriculum which makes everyone learn the same things and develop the same skills. That way lies unemployment, economic decline and social disorder. Personal recording was and is a response to the changed world in which we have to live and to make our livings. It is a very simple way of enabling young people to think about their best abilities and to prepare to give their best abilities to the world. Whatever the future holds, that is what they will need to do and schools ought to be helping them to do it.

Schools can do something about this. Even in these dreadfully difficult times teachers can hold on to ideas that can make things better. The idea of personal recording need not be lost. It may not be possible to use personal recording with pupils in current circumstances; but the more teachers who know about it, who know that it has worked in hundreds of schools since 1970 and who know that it is not the National Record of Achievement and nothing like it, the more certain it will be that eventually it will return.

Integrated Humanities and the National curriculum

David Sands

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The meaning of the term 'Humanities' has always caused problems. Traditionally it meant the teaching of Latin and Greek, but from about 1967 the term began to take on a new meaning, though what that meaning is eludes clear definition. A starting point is to accept that Humanities includes elements of History, Geography, Classical Studies, Environmental Studies and so on; but this does not get us very far. Historically 'Humanities' became established as a curriculum term — and as an educational idea — through the work of the School's Council. Its earliest mention was in 1967 in Working Paper No 11: **Society and the Young School Leaver**: A Humanities programme in preparation for the raising of the school leaving age. This paper, together with the development projects stemming from it, established 'Humanities' as a curriculum area in its own right.

The main argument in favour of Humanities is that subject divisions are artificial. This becomes increasingly obvious if the curriculum becomes involved with real problems. For example, for students to study Pollution or Conservation a host of subjects need to be drawn upon. As Anthony Adams¹ has put it: 'The traditional secondary school timetable has tended, by its compartmentalising of knowledge, to lay undue stress upon the differences between subjects, rather than concentrate upon the elements they have in common to enable us to learn, to make sense of the world in which we live'.

Along with others,² Adams also believes that there needs to be a realignment of knowledge and thinking and not just a yoking together of separate subjects in the vague and fond hope that they will inform one another. He does, however, have a rather cynical, though no doubt realistic, view that the key motivator for these curricular developments was the raising of the school leaving age.

Given that the School's Council was largely responsible for the creation and dissemination of the curricular term 'Humanities', what was their view of its role? The School's Council view changed very little during the life of the organisation, although there was methodological development. Through Humanities, controversial issues would be explored by means of class discussion. Teachers would not promote their own views but act as a 'neutral chair'. Discussion would be the mode of teaching and would allow for divergence of view.

Finally, the teacher would have the responsibility for the quality and standards of learning in discussion. Through following this programme students would

develop 'an understanding of social situations and human actions and of the value issues which they raise'³. Humanities, by fulfilling such a role, would contribute to the solution of more general educational problems, particularly those involving poor student motivation.

When assessing the role of Humanities within the curriculum the selection of content is clearly a contentious issue. Indeed the issue of content has in recent years become even more controversial, as a result of National Curriculum legislation. Both sets of orders for History and Geography prescribe content, with political interference becoming almost a norm. Although the level of detail regarding prescribed content has progressively diminished, there has been virtually no debate as to what the content is actually for. Content is seen in Historical or Geographical terms only. There has been no attempt to widen the debate or even to co-ordinate the schemes of the two working groups. The two documents seem mutually exclusive, flying in the face of decades of Humanities curriculum development.

In trying to assess the role of content it is perhaps a good idea to think first about the students and the purpose of education. If education exists so that students will become thinking, sensitive, active, critical and positive young citizens then the content of the Humanities curriculum must contribute to this. The main emphasis will certainly fall on important human issues of widespread and enduring significance.

Of course, the problem with important human issues is that they are controversial: that is, they cannot be decided upon simply by reference to evidence or experiment — a value judgement is necessary. So if content is to fulfil its role within the Humanities curriculum it has to be about issues on which people are divided and on which opinions will differ. The content is there not to dictate opinions but to inform them.

The role of Humanities within the school curriculum, as envisaged by the HCP, caught many people's imagination and much curriculum development in the 1980s reflected the HCP philosophy. Certain changes in emphasis can be delineated however. While the HCP advocated Humanities almost as a current affairs or human affairs course for the lower ability school leaver, leaving academic subjects for the more able relatively untouched, the severe economic depression of the early 1980s, together with falling rolls, forced many schools to take on an integrated approach as a pragmatic response. The chief proponents of the integrated model

have made a virtue out of necessity and indeed argue that to integrate Humanities is to ensure that its constituent subjects remain available to all students as an essential part of an integral area of experience. The single subjects are seen as vital. To quote Professor Douglas Holly; 'Integrated Humanities without an historical dimension is quite simply not integrated Humanities. Nor as a matter of fact, can integrated Humanities be imagined without a knowledge of geographical inter-relatedness, a spiritual/moral dimension, an economic awareness, an experience of politics, a sense of the individual in society, a feeling for other people in other places, a development of language an enjoyment of reading, watching, listening, writing, drawing, acting . . .'⁴

There have also been changes in methodology. The argument here is that Humanities requires a method of learning which is involving. Indeed Jerome Bruner and others have argued that personal development is a defining characteristic of all true learning. Moreover, the ambition is to produce an active comprehension within the student and this requires that 'the springs of human feeling be tapped'. Together with an understanding that we are all responsible for what happens in the world there needs to be 'a moral feeling about that responsibility'.⁴ As teachers developed confidence, the reliance on HCP discussion lessened and a more enriched methodology — and indeed educational philosophy — emerged.

However, such ambitious developments had a tough time in the early 1980s since the bleak economic climate and the tone of the Government tended to produce a sort of social psychopathology — a reduction in moral feeling and sense of social responsibility. Paradoxically, this climate produced a movement advocating the development of empathy within students. This skill was essential it was argued, 'for without it no amount of information will be of avail; if the learners simply 'switch off' when the topic is too demanding on their emotions they will never learn in a humanistic way, never comprehend.'⁵

An environmental focus

Despite the advent of the National Curriculum, with its framework of individual subjects, integration remains a progressive assertive philosophy which clearly outlines the role of Humanities within the school curriculum. The central focus for Humanities in the 1990s will undoubtedly be environmental. With the earth's eco-systems showing increasing signs of strain environmental awareness, for all its smugness and shallowness in some quarters, continues to gather momentum. Moreover, the current emergency has forced a rethinking of how we view reality. Fragmentationalist thinking, originating in the West but now encircling the world as a result of the West's power and influence, is seen by a growing number of contemporary thinkers as a fundamental cause of many of our current ecological and social crises:

'The dominant world view — materialist, rationalist, utilitarian and reductionist has held sway for two or three centuries', writes Dorothy Walter Schwarz. 'It has given many of us wealth and freedom but the dramatic cost is evident in the irreversible damage wreaked by "development" on our planet'.

'Inner fragmentation' writes Fritjof Capra, 'mirrors our view of the world "outside" which is seen as a multitude of separate objects and events. The natural environment is treated as if it consisted of separate parts to be exploited by different interest groups . . .

The new movement in the West stresses the need to view the world in a holistic way. The concept of holism has been fed by developments in sub-atomic physics, ecological and feminist thinking, and mounting interest in Eastern religions and philosophies. The holistic approach to education, I believe, constitutes the intellectual springboard by which the curriculum will remain educative in the 1990s and beyond. Humanities, with its concern for the whole environment needs to be in the vanguard of this movement.

One of the key elements of this holistic approach to education is the emphasis given to the connectedness of things. The mass of information in the modern world encourages specialisation — with a corresponding inability to relate the particular to the whole. An holistic education replaces the notion of collecting, storing, exploiting and imparting stocks of isolated facts with the idea of 'examining the flow of interconnected phenomena'.⁵ Proponents of the holistic approach to education argue that the fragmentationalist curriculum obstructs, while the holistic curriculum enhances, comprehension (literally 'the ability to hold it all together').⁵ An integrated approach would clearly facilitate effective holistic education through fostering an attitude of mind, on the part of the teacher and student alike, which searches out relatedness to the whole.

The holistic curriculum would allow students to develop 'biocentric wisdom'⁶, an understanding that we are part of, not above, nature; that we have a duty to live within the planet's means. The interdependence of world society and the fact that primary global issues are interconnected would be stressed, giving the curriculum global perspective. Such a curriculum would involve a refocussing of many of the most important developments in Humanities over the last thirty years, for example Development Studies, World Studies, environmental education and political awareness — particularly human rights education.

Finally, it would be strongly orientated towards the future and would recognise that 'acting morally is acting in a way that future generations would ask us to act if they were here to ask.'⁷ Such a role represents the future of Humanities within an educative school curriculum, whilst the National Curriculum, on any reasonable timescale, must represent an aberration.

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Using Truancy Rates as Pls

Keith Morrison

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The proposal in the **Parents' Charter** (DES 1991) that schools should publish their truancy rates makes massive assumptions about the practicability, usefulness or desirability of such an exercise. Problems abound in using truancy rates as indicators of school effectiveness.

A definitional problem exists, for the term 'rate' has several meanings. In one sense it is 'a stated numerical proportion between two sets of things' (Allen, 1990), implying that a *proportion* can be determined. However it is unclear what are the 'two sets of things' which will determine that proportion. For example, it may be simply an aggregation of a whole school population's attendance or absence over one school year, or it may be an individual child's attendance or absence over a whole school year, or it may be a year group's attendance over a year, or it may be an 'actual' attendance divided by a 'possible' attendance over a year — for the whole school population, or identified groups of children, or for individual children. Different 'sets of things' yield different results. In another sense the term 'rate' can mean 'rapidity of movement or change' (Allen); in this case the published attendance rate will have to chart *movements* or *changes* in attendance over time. This, too, is problematic as it is unclear whether, in order to capture such fluctuations accurately, the data would have to be gathered each week, or month, or school year; yet without such detail the data would be meaningless if this interpretation of 'rate' was required. Here also the question has to be asked whether this would be an aggregated school or class score, or an individualised score for each pupil.

The notion of a truancy rate is imprecise: for example, is it a measure of the numbers of truants or the number of absences? Is a school whose 200 days' truancy figure derives from only 8 children absenting themselves for 25 days each better or worse than a school where the same 200 days' truancy figure derives from 100 children absenting themselves for 2 days each? A few truants might exert a disproportionate effect on a school's truancy figure (Morrison 1992). Despite this potential definitional complexity it will hardly become as surprising if a crudely aggregated yearly figure is required as this will conform to the crude model of accountability which is politically attractive to the present government and which is evidenced in the proposed publication of league tables of pupils' assessment scores.

It would be more meaningful if truancy rates were presented with reference to the numbers of children who were truanting, weighted according to the frequency of truancy by individuals or groups of children. For example, a 'banding' system could be

adopted where definitions of each 'band' were determined by a combination of the mean attendance and standard deviation (SD) of distribution of scores. The mean attendance of the school, year or class and SD of the scores could be calculated¹. Children in the third SD above the mean (or higher) would be classed as 'very good attenders'; those in the second SD above the mean would be classed as 'good attenders'; those in the first SD above and below the mean would be classed as 'average attenders'; those in the second SD below the mean would be classed as 'poor attenders'; those in the second SD below the mean (and lower) would be classed as 'very poor attenders'. Attendance or truancy rates for each 'band' could be published. A simple t-test would indicate the statistical significance of fluctuating means² (either globally or by band). These, combined with a statement of the stability of membership of children in the different 'bands', would provide useful and sensitive data. In this way parents would be able to identify both the numbers of truants and where changes in attendance were occurring over time; it would overcome the problem of a few children skewing a school's overall attendance profile.

Just as the notion of 'rate' is imprecise so there is a problem of defining 'truancy': at what point does a truant become entitled to the badge of 'truancy' — after an absence of one hour, or a day, or a week? Or is there to be an element of 'regularity' required, so that one only becomes a truant after more than one absence (in which case a single absence will not be recorded as truancy)? How does one allow for complicity by parents who write to schools indicating that their son or daughter was absent for a 'good' reason? Problems are compounded when trying to understand what the data really means. Of what is truancy an indicator — a good school, a bad school, a good home background, a bad home background, a good child, a bad child, a good curriculum, a bad curriculum, a good teacher, a bad teacher and so on? Exactly what can be inferred from the data? There is a *major* problem of validity here, for the suggestion that a truancy rate could ever be an indicator of *school* effectiveness — either on its own or in conjunction with league tables of pupils' assessment results — belies the complexity of that which it attempts to measure. A school is effective through the interplay of complex variables — eg teaching and learning styles, curriculum content and organization, interpersonal relations, management and administration, not simply by keeping its pupils in the building.

A truancy rate is no more and no less than an indicator of truancy alone, and to impute any other meaning to it is to make inferences hugely beyond those

which the data are capable of sustaining. The data bears no explanatory potential of its own at all, indeed the most fundamental principle of social science is that one should not make inferences beyond the scope of the data; a truancy rate might be a total irrelevance in judging school effectiveness. The silence on this in the **Parent's Charter** is deafening; but then, silence disables criticism — it is difficult to take issue with something that is unsaid.

A truancy rate is guilty of being a simple indicator of something complex, measuring symptoms not causes. We see in it the same mentality as operates in increased pupil assessment. There is an assumption that the more you assess children the greater will be their achievement; the more you assess attendance the greater it will become. Such a notion diverts attention from the fact that resources need to be made available to improve then one has to understand *why* children truant — or indeed attend. One should be seeking to understand causes not symptoms. Of course this is a much more complex matter than the short-termism and simple remedies to problems sought by those politicians whose lack of subtlety in educational policy decision making is matched by their need for politically expedient, quick-fix solutions to complex problems. Reality is complex, and to gloss over this is disingenuous. It is as much an intellectual insult to parents as it is an ideological, hegemonic process wherein informed challenges to 'government-speak' are simply ignored.

We see here applied to attendance rates the same norm-referencing which underpins the publication of aggregated and unadjusted raw scores of pupils' achievements in formal assessments. How much more useful it would be to look at *individual children's* improvements over time. The message from everyday knowledge and from published research is clear: some schools and pupils start the attendance race with far more problems or advantages than others. Let us take the example of a school in a multiply deprived area. A truant in that school may have, say, 45% attendance over a year. The school might invest a vast amount of time and care in that child and the next year that child's attendance might be 90% — a 100% improvement. A school in a more privileged area might have a child attending for 60% of the year. That school invests time and care in the child and the next year that child's attendance rises to a similar 90%, indicating only a 50% improvement. Which school or child is better? How do we allow for the 'value added' components of home and extra-school factors when assessing truancy rates and the steps that schools take to reduce truancy? How demoralizing and demeaning it is be for those teachers and schools who invest time in reducing truancy only to find that their efforts are sacrificed to a crude comparative and competitive league table whose results are then used against them. Such publication commits a fundamental moral error in holding teachers and schools accountable for that over which they exercise only limited control; it is akin to holding a doctor totally responsible for the life or death of a patient. Maybe the publication of truancy rates should be replaced with the publication of action taken by a school to improve

attendance. At the heart of publication of league tables of attendance is a fundamental distrust of teachers' efforts or abilities to take action to improve attendance. Such publication espouses the politics of attack on teachers and dog-eat-dog competition between schools rather than a politics of support for the daily initiatives which schools take to reduce truancy. Given this it is scarcely surprising that teachers will be reluctant to engage in an exercise that undermines their own professionalism.

Let us take a final example. For some children their 60% attendance should be applauded as a real achievement in the face of lack of parental support or sociocultural factors which diminish the perceived relevance of school, whilst for other children the same 60% attendance might more justifiably be condemned as laziness or lack of application. A crude statistic of attendance makes no allowance for this crucial feature; it tells us nothing about motivation, effort or difficulty in attendance — those very factors which those seeking to improve attendance will need to know.

Figures alone are unhelpful in deciding what action schools can take or whether a school is to be judged effective; they need to be contextualized and referenced to individuals or groups of children, preferably over time. Surely it is not beyond the wit of ministers to use formulae which would allow for differential 'value added' starting points? Of course this renders the problem more complex and hence politically less palatable than the simple solutions to school effectiveness sought by government ministers.

If school attendance is to be improved then it must be recognised that this will necessitate the funding not only of research projects within schools to identify causes of poor attendance, but, of equal importance, of substantial support for teachers actually working to improve attendance. This could be done if the money spent on the perhaps wilful deception of parents for political ends were diverted into the much more worthy, if long term, enterprise of supporting schools' real efforts to reduce truancy. The questions of resourcing, pupil-teacher ratios and pastoral systems within school must feature highly here. One hears echoes of a previous century where it was said that if education were to be efficient it would not be cheap, and if it were cheap it would not be efficient. The message is not new; unfortunately whenever teachers repeat the message they are cast as Jeremiahs whose voices should be ignored rather than listened to for their professional wisdom.

Notes

1. DES (1989) reports a mean attendance of 91.9% for primary schools in 1988 and 89.5% for secondary schools in 1989.
2. DES (1989) reports a slight downward trend (3.1%) in the decade 1977 — 1987.

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Classroom as Info-Mart

Dennis Slattery

Dennis Slattery is Associate Professor of Literature and Writing at Incarnate Word College in Texas. This is a shortened version of his contribution to the debate on teaching and learning.

What I detect in much of the learning in today's schools is a kind of learning that is held at arm's length by students, with dropping out as the extreme form of such distancing of self from knowing, and scan-tron tests the most sanctioned form of such hideous learning.

What is involved in distant learning, wherein there is no real commitment to the what or how of coming to know, is its other impulse, instant learning. It is learning which takes place outside of a context; it is somehow less than a human activity and more akin to a technical exercise, a human form of data-processing wherein there is no human participation.

Perhaps even more serious is that in distant learning there is a kind of disembodiment that attends such a pretence to knowing. In **Technology as Symptom and Dream**, the psychologist Robert Romanyshyn has written about the technical functions replacing what were once very human activities. One of his favourite metaphors is that of the corpse which, in a technical world, replaces the dead body; the corpse is both a physical condition as well as a psychological disposition; for the corpse is a-historical, has no context, no future, no rituals attending its burial and has no significance beyond its curiosity as a specimen. The corpse is more akin to an event than to human experience. The corpse is a fact rather than a significance: it does not touch us as a person we once knew.

The image of the corpse has much to do with distant and even instant learning. It is a metaphor for the matter and the attitude towards it that many students (and I can't exclude all teachers) feel towards what they learn. The corpse, translated into learning, becomes information. Facts are corpses for they relate to nothing beyond themselves *if* they are given no context. Students who pile up at the back of a classroom resemble members of a wake, there to gaze without feeling at the corpse-fact laid out in front of them for review. The review is without feeling, is distant and never 'touches' those in attendance. No wonder so much of what is paraded out in education has no sense, for the senses are never engaged in the act of learning. Jacques Maritain has written that learning needs to be visceral; one needs to feel what one learns in a bodily way if any sense of a 'habitus' or habit of mind, a way of seeing and dealing with facticity in learning is going to have any lasting impact.

If the body is divorced from learning, education becomes 'heady' as Romanyshyn defines it; education becomes non-sense, for only the mind is engaged in the

process, not the flesh. Students have learned to look just for the facts; don't beat around the bush. Their language reflects too often the lexicon of literalism in learning wherein there is no play of the imagination, no playfulness, and certainly no joy in learning.

What grows from such an antiseptic view of knowing is the ferocious impulse of explanation. Learning is anatomical, information is cadaverous. When information is explained it goes little further than being a commodity and learning no more than consumption. Students become corpse-like in the face of such a stance towards knowing; there is no 'connectedness', no analogy with the individual's own life and history. Explanation is driven by 'mastery' of information; it is distant, organised, institutional and in the process levelled. Its by-product is the scan-tron exam, the 'achievement' test, the true/false marking easily absorbed by machine evaluation. The result is an assessment-measurement attitude so that diagnosis and skills-acquisition become the mainstays and the true gauges of education.

I have no panacea for change save one. I propose that we begin to study, in the spirit of poets like William Blake and Gaston Bachelard, the imaginative life of the spirit and imagination as alternative ways of teaching and knowing. What is the interior life of a student who assumes that much of learning has really no affect on him or her? How can we promote the imaginative life so that what Wendell Berry has called 'affectionate learning' becomes part of students' experiences?

In affectionate learning something is added to the process that engages material *and* the person in a relationship; ideas are understood to be not corpses but living things, in need of questioning and even de-information, to be acted upon and to act on those engaged in learning. I don't know how in any formulaic way, but try in an experiential one to present ideas in such a way that students take in information in openness and friendship so that one befriends what one learns to allow for a new substance, not just what one has been given. The mind and the heart are implicated in affectionate knowing so that what one studies continues to have heart. Mary Richards writes in **Centering** that knowledge 'must be transformed within one; it must turn into life on some level'. I believe this is our task as teachers: to help students along with this process of transformation so that they become life-long learners.

Maastricht and Education

Paul Bennett

As Assistant Secretary for Policy and Research at the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, Paul Bennett has attended many international conferences of teachers, including the European Trade Union Committee for Education.

One of the successes of the Maastricht European Summit was to give approval to a much wider remit for the EC institutions in respect of education, training and research. The original Treaty of Rome's Article 128 had been regarded by many over the years as a shaky foundation for the range of European initiatives which have been introduced — although a series of 'creative' decisions by the European Court legitimised them. Now Article 128 has been expanded into a substantial Chapter, which should give a new impetus to the educational work of the European Community, albeit within the limits of subsidiarity and the competence and integrity of individual states which the Summit took great pains to emphasise. This emphasis on the devolution of responsibility to individual states and protection of national diversity gives the lie to the British Government's negative, xenophobic posturing at the Summit.

Now the dust has settled following Maastricht, it is clear that Mr Major's short-term political 'triumph', trumpeted so loudly by the British media, is nearer to a continuing economic and social tragedy for the British people. The rejection of the Social Chapter by Britain and the chapter's removal from the final Maastricht deal will simply mean that the other 11 countries of the Community will move steadily forward, developing their workers' employment rights, and the social base of the Community. Already it has been indicated that British ministers will be distinctly unwelcome at EC discussions on the Social Chapter issues. Mr Major has ensured that we will have no voice — we will have to accept what the '11' will have agreed as a *fait accompli* when we seek 're-entry', to participate fully in the social and employment provisions of the EC, as we surely will. Our absence from the negotiating table could mean that we have no influence on a wide range of issues affecting education — for example equal opportunities provisions, child care, the regulation of children's working hours or work experience as students and young people.

If countries as politically and economically diverse as Germany and Greece, Denmark and Portugal can agree to the social provisions proposed at Maastricht, how can Mr Major argue that they are against our interests — and how *dare* the British Government unhitch our country from this process? Mr Major's narrow, short-term vision will look like a monstrous betrayal when the new Europe has been built with Britain a grudging, second-class, semi-detached partner. Having lost out in the 1950s by refusing to participate in the foundation of the EEC, Britain's new isolation is condemning us to be a two-time loser.

And for what? Mr Major's vision is limited to Britain's role as an assembly plant for Japanese goods,

and a Trojan Horse, just within the EC's walls, for Toyota and Sony — a role which will endear us to our European partners. Since Maastricht, even this limited vision is revealed as fatally flawed: the Treasury admits it was over-optimistic in predicting economic recovery, key economic indicators are stubbornly refusing to show significant improvement, and just before Christmas a panic-stricken Government ordered the building societies to devise crash measures to avert the housing re-possession crisis attributable to its own policies.

The draft education provisions agreed at Maastricht (and, as I write, still being tidied up for the definitive text of the union treaty) are broad in their scope. The new Articles start:

'The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity . . .'

and:-

'The Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the member states for the content and organisation of vocational training . . .'

The EC institutions now have the power to influence education policy at all levels albeit through cooperation and promotion, rather than direction. It seems certain that a higher proportion of the EC's budget will in future go to educational policies and programmes. But the British government's negativism towards Europe is paralleled by the crassness of its educational policies. Measures tantamount to the privatisation of education, including opted-out schools and City Technology Colleges, the philistinism behind the effective destruction of HM Inspectorate, and the lack of strategic vision either for the schools or for post-school education, all horrify our European partners.

Against this background a German academic recently said to me, very politely, 'why don't the British just opt-out of the EC?' Certainly if the future lies between our Government's blinkered views and the grim economic reality for Britain, both our ability to benefit from EC membership and our partners' patience with us, seem likely to be severely limited. The NUT, NASUWT, AMMA, NATFHE and the AUT have all sought, through the European Trade Union Committee for Education, to make a British contribution to the European debate on post-school education, but the odds are increasingly stacked against us by our own Government. The General Assembly of the European Trade Union Committee for Education in Luxembourg in December received detailed reports

Reviews

Advances and Setbacks

Education and the Social Order 1940-1990, by Brian Simon, Lawrence and Wishart (1991) pp. 646, £39.95. ISBN 085315 734 0.

In his introduction to the final volume of history of education in England and Wales, Brian Simon takes up a comment that books on education, however worthy, are often dull. In no sense can this be a charge levelled at works written by him, and this study, describing and analysing the last fifty years, is no exception. He has again been able, in his commanding and scholarly way, to convey arguments, passions, hopes and disappointments that have continued to mark this period and have certainly not lessened in this last decade. Indeed, as readers of *Forum* will know, he has been actively engaged in many of the debates which he describes. One of the strengths of this book has been the ability to make extensive use of a range of material and resources which he and his wife, another distinguished educational historian, have collected in their lifelong campaign for educational advance. This has enabled him to supplement the official record which is lacking for much of the period which he covers.

Two decades, the 1940s and the 1960s, are marked out for special attention in the book because they signified a dramatic surge of educational activity. In both constraints which had previously held back greater access to all forms of education were forcefully challenged from below. He argues that in the early 1940s, in the course of an increasingly long and widespread war, many sections of the population, including teachers, trade unionists, parents and professional groups, were drawn into campaigns to open up the hitherto restricted and stagnant pre-war educational system. The result, in Brian Simon's own description was a 'conservative revolution'. 'Revolutionary', for instance, because free secondary education together with a single

code for all secondary schools opened the way for far-reaching changes. On the other hand it was 'conservative', because much of the older hierarchical structure remained intact including the public schools and rigidly separated and differing types of secondary education. One of his greatest sources of disappointment was the way in which the post-war Labour Government, in implementing the Butler Act, accepted almost without question the continuation of a graded system of education.

In seeking later to explain the 'educational explosion' of the 1960s Brian Simon has detailed thoroughly the pressures that were leading to a transformation of the system. A surge in numbers in the schools, greater expectations among wider sections of the population, changes in the occupational structure demanding new skills made many responsive educationalists, teachers and local administrators, recruited to put in practice the post-war settlement, highly critical of the restraints imposed by the Conservative Governments in the 1950s. Much of the educational underpinning which had supported the concept of the limited pool of talent was steadily stripped away by educational sociologists and psychologists. Demands for changes in one part of the system, such as the broadening of opportunities in higher education, forced changes elsewhere. Again, however, the 1960s, too, for all their excitement and turmoil ultimately represented only a half-finished revolution. He details the delays and hesitations in capitalizing on the momentum which was building up in the whole decade for comprehensive education. As a result, in too many of the reorganized schools, curriculum, pedagogy, and indeed streaming remained untouched. No attempt was made to deal with the hierarchical structure of external examinations or the continuing presence of public schools. By the end of the decade the forces that had always challenged wider access in education, began to re-group and fight back.

From the 1970s the reaction against the changes of the previous decade set in. New institutions of the 1960s from comprehensive

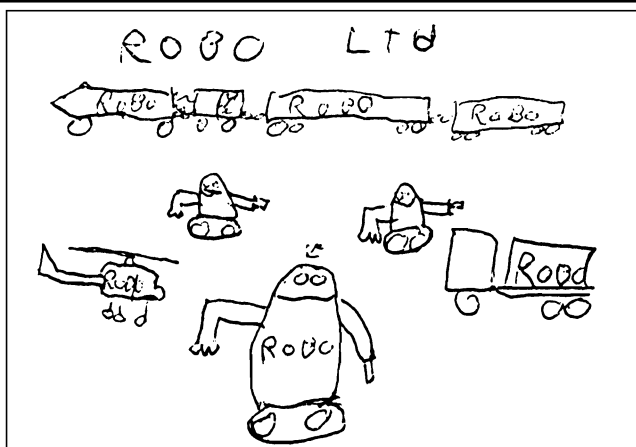
schools to polytechnics came under attack in a sustained media assault for their alleged shortcomings. Brian Simon is highly critical of the 1974-79 Labour Government that did much to weaken, but little to defend, what had been achieved. The ineffectiveness of the Wilson-Callaghan Government, and, in particular, Callaghan's attempt to use the critical press campaign to publicize uneasiness about what was happening in the educational world, have been factors, in his view, in making the task easier for the Thatcher Governments in the 1980s to seek to remould education in a more hierarchical structure with different provisions for different sections of the population.

As in so many of his earlier works, Brian Simon has set an agenda which others working in this period of history will have always to take seriously into account. There will be those who will challenge his interpretations. As a figure who has always accepted the cut and thrust of intellectual argument, he would not have it otherwise. New considerations, particularly with the release of official records for the 1960s, might well cast new light on the changes in that decade. Feminist historians, though noting that he does address some of the concerns raised in their writings, would no doubt have wished to see more on gender issues throughout the book. Some elements on the Left will claim that he has been over-optimistic in his assessment of the achievements of the 1960s. I anticipate that Brian Simon, such a lively and well-informed scholar, whose work has enabled the study of history of education to be taken seriously in the historical and educational world, will enjoy taking part in the debates that his final volume in the now completed *Studies in the History of Education* are certain to stimulate. I hope that the publishers provide a paperback version of this volume as soon as possible to ensure that it is read by the widest possible public.

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of the outcomes of Maastricht and passed a motion (put by the NASUWT) condemning the British Government for its negative attitude. Maastricht has raised the profile of education in the EC, but Britain's odd-one-out position, combined with Mr Major's vision of Britain as a low skill, low wage economy, puts a serious question mark over Britain's capacity to benefit from the EC in education, as well as in the areas of employment protection so firmly rejected by John Major at Maastricht.

Ironically, in July 1992, Britain takes over the Presidency of the European Council of Ministers. It is difficult to see how the European Community can be credibly led from the sidelines.



Reviews

Post-16 Jungle

Post-16 Education: Studies in Access and Achievement ed Clyde Chitty, Kogan Page (1991), pp 244, £25.00; ISBN: 07494 0097 8

The post-16 Education sector is a difficult one about which to generalize. It includes a range of providers, stakeholders and participants that do not appear in the Primary and Secondary sectors. The diversity of provision in terms of content and depth, styles of delivery and the different approaches to access, assessment and accreditation often undermine the most perceptive analysis and conclusion.

This book is divided into two parts. The first offers us general perspectives on post-16 provision, in particular on the education and training normally referred to as vocational or job-related. There are some helpful perspectives, summaries and definitions here. In particular, the chapters by Clyde Chitty and William Reid represent a clear chronological survey of Vocational Education and Training (VET) development, revealing not only the major turning-points since 1945 but also offering the reader opportunities to challenge the rhetoric of key players. Both authors offer us an insight into policy-making and log key players and issues to be explored later. The dominant themes of this first section concern: the segmentation and complexity of the post-16 VET sector; the artificiality of the break at 16; and the relatively poor retention rates achieved by the British system. Most of the authors also clearly identify the limited number of key players in the sector and the dominance of initiatives such as YTS and TVEI. The importance of the MSC and the NCVQ is emphasized, and the all-too-obvious, but often unmade, point that both quangos are unanswerable to the same Department is clearly highlighted. As Janet Harland reminds us, there may be different 'kings in the jungle' but power in the system remains concentrated. This particular theme of dominant key players is referred to by most of the authors.

The segmentation and complexity of the sector are also referred to by most authors. Little optimism is drawn from the NCVQ's brief to produce a relevant comprehensible VET system. Several authors clearly identify the 'jungle' of post-16 provision and highlight the difficulties of mapping a route through post-16 qualifications. The conclusions seems to be that confusion remains and segmentation has increased. The authors attempt to review the divided structure and contradictory initiatives in VET but Reid's conclusion that 'segmentation has run riot' is difficult to contradict.

There may be more on offer from more providers but the authors do not seem convinced that access has genuinely been improved. There is evidence that what is actually on offer is more of the same to more of the same types of student. The artificiality

of the division at 16 is identified and Reid's chapter on ideology goes some way to explaining the apparently generalizable truths that UK participation rates are lower than they should be and that despite the rhetoric of meritocracy and responsiveness to economic pressures, the nature of the education system remains inherently political. This system is often moulded more by tradition, ideology and social conventions than by what is going on in the economy. In reality, adjustments to the curriculum have been limited. Access to high-status curriculum is still restricted; the top down, producer-led response still deliberately and inadvertently restricts access. The new 'kings in the jungle' still look more like producers than consumers.

The second part contains a collection of issues and case studies illustrating some of the main themes in post-16 VET. These themes reflect those identified in the first section and although each issue is treated separately and chapters stand unrelated, together they offer useful insights into this complex and segmented sector. Provision is reviewed in terms of providers: Further Education (FE) Colleges; Tertiary Colleges and Sixth Forms. Curriculum initiatives are revealed through studies of the Education Reform Act, NCVQ and pre-vocational education in the form of CPVE. Access is discussed in terms of Class, Gender and Race.

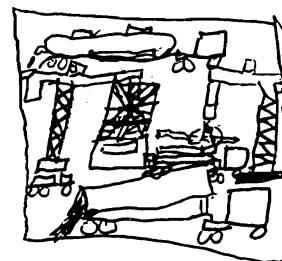
Jack Mansell in his chapter on the role of FE in the post-16 sector confirms previous observations about complexity and segmentation. Those who are not familiar with FE will probably be surprised by the number of students involved and by the range and depth of courses available. They may be less surprised by Mansell's observations that the participation rate for 16-19 year olds remains one of the lowest in Europe and that FE provision for this group remains as 'crisis led' as it was a century ago. Paul Barrow identifies the opportunities lost in Tertiary provision. He describes the Tertiary development as potentially one of the most significant of recent years, but is forced to conclude that the chance of offering a clear unfragmented provision in the post-16 sector is being undermined by the changing priorities of the key players. The forces of instrumentalism; the increasingly competitive nature of post-16 provision and the rise of vocationalism are all acting against rationalization. The chapters on access offer glimpses of what is going on. Peter Mangan's review of the development of Access courses offers the background to the piecemeal development of improved access to Higher Education; other studies refer to access and participation more generally. These chapters on Gender, Ethnicity and Class reveal the substantial inhibition, real and perceived barriers and inequalities that continue to restrict access to post-16 education for the groups already under-represented. Sorrel Pindar's case-study of Tower Hamlets offers

sound explanations as to why leavers and stayers make their decisions at 16 and there is much to be learned by interviewers and advisers of this particular client group whether they be under-represented or not.

In a period in which everyone seems to have something to say about VET, this book offers more than most. There are invaluable insights into the complexities, contradictions and confusions of the post-16 sector and some solid useable reviews of what is going on. The attempts to present overviews and draw together themes and practices are useful, even if the nature of the sector undermines most attempts at generalization. What is on offer here reflects much of what is going on in the sector. For the student and the practitioner, it provides an unusual combination of authoritative summaries, definitions and useful case-studies to which to relate experience. For the key players there are evaluations of their success and healthy challenges to the rhetoric in a period in which most seem to have accepted the efficacy of an increasingly work-related curriculum, yet few offer any reasoned rationale for their conviction.

There is a temptation in reviewing such a compilation to search for what is *not* there and given the nature of this dynamic, diverse and segmented sector, it is all too easy to find an aspect that is unexplained or under-represented. I certainly felt that there was much more to be explored and discussed within the theme of the academic and vocational divide, and there is only a limited coverage of the changing role and influence of Vocational Examination boards such as BTEC, CGLI etc; in particular their rapidly changing attitude to assessment and accreditation. It is also interesting to speculate about what this particular body of authors would have thought of the most recent rhetoric from key players, whether from the DE or the DES or the new TECs. Whether they would have been any more convinced by the apparently new found, 'born again' language of improved access, entitlement, standards and choice offered in the recent White Paper, (Education and Training for the 21st Century), than by their experiences of previous VET initiatives, remains in question.

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Unresolved debate

History in the National Curriculum, ed. by Richard Aldrich, Kogan Page (1991), pp. 116, pb: £9.95. ISBN: 07494 00943.

It is difficult to bring out a book on the National Curriculum which is not almost immediately dated. Nevertheless, writing in the summer of 1990, Richard Aldrich and his colleagues have produced a book likely to remain relevant to all those who care deeply about the fate of history within the National Curriculum. The contributors have aimed both to supply a detailed analysis of the Final Report of the History Working Group for England and to give a fundamental professional analysis of historical knowledge, assessment and the historical perspective of history in the school curriculum. They hope thereby, to clarify the confused and politicized debate on history in schools and to keep going a necessary review of the history curriculum, in itself an historical product. In these aims they have achieved a large measure of success.

John Slater's critique of the Final Report remains very pertinent, despite the latter's subsequent metamorphoses ending in the Final Orders of March 1991. A number of Slater's criticisms have been satisfied — not least the far greater freedom, in KS3 at least, given to teachers to devise their own supplementary study units within a national framework and the disappearance of essential and exemplary information. Others, however, still need addressing: there is still too much content to cover and the question of how the necessary resources, including time, are going to be supplied remains the worry of teachers and advisors rather than that of the Government.

Overloading the curriculum and over-prescribing what is in it concern Slater and his fellow contributor, Peter Lee, because these lead to neglect both of the vital resource of the pupil's own enthusiasms, interests and experience of life and the expertise of the teachers to build upon them. This could *prevent* the development of real understanding in history. Peter Lee argues further that history is not a practical subject. It is one which changes people not societies but can do this only if it offers a rational past, that is one which 'incorporates public criteria and operates through open procedures'. If this is done and anything beyond mere annals of the past is offered, then the teacher must be given professional licence to teach free of heavily prescribed material, albeit in an open, thematic framework. Lee rightly stresses that no truly democratic government can specify which account of the past children should learn; besides which, prescribing just *one* account conflicts with the very nature of the discipline. Thus children should learn what happened and why and how historical accounts are fashioned. Without the latter standing, they have no way of differentiating history from myths or legends.

Lee reminds us that further research is needed on how children learn history, a costly exercise for which society (government?) might not be prepared to pay. Alaric Dickinson powerfully argues for clear, fair and reliable *assessment procedures* and techniques which measure what is important in terms of pupils' learning in history, which

'reflect not constrain good teaching and learning', which are an integral part of the educational process and which use teachers' expertise, but not too much of their time. Such arguments are very much to the point as we are still awaiting the substance of assessment in history and will be so doing for some time after the teaching of National Curriculum history has begun. Sensitive assessment arrangements are, indeed, vital to a National Curriculum if it is to improve standards of teaching and learning.

Dickinson welcomes clear attainment targets — surprisingly none of the writers comments that the attainment targets as written in the Final Report might not be clear — and can see no alternative to the TGAT model at present. Like Slater, however, he believes that the opportunity was there in history to have fewer levels than ten. His praise of coursework and his caveats about mass over-testing, time-consuming exercises and misleading reports are, unhappily, all too needed at this time, since the Conservative Government took its own decisions on these matters, ignoring the advice of professional educators.

History in a democracy is constructed by the interactive process of different groups as Richard Aldrich and Dennis Dean demonstrate. The latter also argues that to destroy that process would do more than damage the quality of history; it would harm democracy itself. Although history teachers can thank past governments for keeping history in the curriculum at all, government prescription of the syllabus is a new affair. Since this book was written, pupils have also lost their promised entitlement of history from five to sixteen on which National Curriculum history was premised. (They have also lost any coherent twentieth century history under Kenneth Clarke's peculiar dating system). 'History in schools', says Peter Lee, 'is too important to be left to the politicians.' The problems of history in the National Curriculum elicited this professional response. It is worth reading for its thoughtful contributions in a still unresolved debate.

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Contributions to the Education Debate

IPPR Education and Training Papers Nos 1-6, IPPR 30/32 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7RA.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) was established in 1988 by leading figures in the academic, business and trade union community to provide an alternative to the various think-tanks on the Far Right which have exerted such a powerful influence on policy-making within the Conservative Party over the past decade. It has published Reports of a consistently high quality on education and training, industrial policy and a wide range of social and environmental issues. Each has been notable for bringing together a *wealth* of statistical evidence and policy analysis to underpin the radical solutions on offer.

Education and Training Paper No 1 which

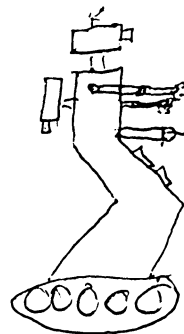
appeared in July 1990 was called **A British Baccalaureat** with the sub-title 'Ending the Division Between Education and Training' — a succinct definition of the Paper's distinctive approach. The IPPR's solution to the problems posed by Britain's *early selection* — *low participation* system was to integrate academic and vocational provision within a unitary, education-led post-sixteen system: creating, in effect, a *late selection* — *high participation* education system appropriate for the needs of the 21st century. The Paper was reviewed in **Forum** Vol 33 No 2 (1991) by Andy Green who argued that its radical proposals represented the best model so far produced for transforming our post-sixteen system of education and training.

The second Paper, on a related theme, was called **Learning by Right: an Entitlement to Paid Education and Training**, and argued for the spread of education and training throughout the workforce. Written by David Miliband, its basic starting-point was that *laissez faire* 'voluntarism' was a bankrupt strategy. As a small step on the road towards more far-reaching goals, it recommended a national target of *five days'* education and training per adult per year.

Paper No 3 **Markets, Politics and Education: Beyond the Education Reform Act**, published in May 1991 and also written by David Miliband, investigated the rationale and consequences of market-based decision-making. It reached *three* basic conclusions: firstly, that the ERA's educational market would provide for *selection by schools* and not *choice for parents*; secondly, that selection by schools must inevitably result in the hierarchical division of schools and school populations; and thirdly, that the starting-point for all educational reform must be excellence in provision. This latter point has been taken up by Tim Brighouse and John Tomlinson — in Paper No 4 **Successful Schools**, which argues that *all* pupils have the right to attend a 'successful' school, and that it is quite ludicrous to imagine that market pressures will 'transform' a poor school into a successful one.

Harvey Goldstein's Paper **Assessment in Schools: An Alternative Framework** argues for the use of assessment to promote individual learning. Paper No 6 by Philip O'Hear and John White, **A National Curriculum for All: Laying the Foundations for Success**, outlines a new national curriculum to prepare students for living a worthwhile and socially responsible life in a liberal democratic society.

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Reviews

Transforming Schools

Innovation and Change: Developing Involvement and Understanding, by Jean Ruddock, Open University Press (1991), pp. 156, pb: £10.99; hb: £32.50; ISBN 0-335-09581-X

All concerned with the curriculum reform movement over the last twenty or more years will know of the work of the extraordinarily talented group who formed the original staff of the Centre for Applied Research (CARE) at the University of East Anglia. Lawrence Stenhouse, Jean Ruddock, Barry Macdonald and John Elliott were the original team who carried through the Humanities Curriculum Project (HCP) which aimed to transform received pedagogical procedures through enhancing dialogue as the means of rational self-development. By an imaginative coup, possible in the early 70s, this team (all from outside the university world) was given a permanent base at UEA. Though they had then to raise their own research money to gain their bread (or some of it), their record of sustained innovative research and enquiry has, since then, been remarkable (though Lawrence Stenhouse sadly died in 1982, still fully engaged in new projects).

In this short and very readable book, Jean Ruddock has distilled the essence of her own researches and enquiries over the last few years; while including, as the first term, a fascinating 'Auto-biographical Note' — 'Getting Hooked on Change' — which delightfully records her recruitment by the Schools Council (as a young teacher), her first meeting with Lawrence, and her appointment to HCP. Much of her work since then, she claims, arose from this

project; in particular, that relating to the right, of teachers and students, as partners in the daily enactments of the classroom, 'to understand what they are doing and why they are doing it, to recognise the areas where they can, together, influence and improve the experience of learning and teaching, and to appreciate, each in their own way, that the goal is to extend the possibility of control over one's own working environment and life changes through deeper professional and personal understanding' (p. 21).

It is impossible to summarise this book, which is rich in perceptions about learning and teaching, always based on actual research or enquiry material derived from the classroom, school, or in-service conferences and sessions — often set up with dramatic originality. Jean Ruddock is concerned with change, with finding the means of empowering both teachers and students; fundamentally with *transforming* schools so that they become centres of enquiry, of dialogue — places where the qualities of a true citizenship may be developed (although she does not use these terms). This was also Lawrence Stenhouse's objective (as I understand it). This stance has defined implications. When this book was completed (she writes), 'teacher research was being hailed by some writers ... as the major oppositional and emancipatory force in the face of increasing centralised control'.

Now based at Sheffield University, the author ranges over research undertaken there over the last seven years. The headings of the different Parts set the tone: 'Challenging Traditional Values and Assumptions'; 'Pupils Involvement and Understanding'; 'Teacher Involvement and Understanding'. In each Part, specific research studies are drawn on. The whole

amounts to a sustained and highly intelligent (but available) discussion about the crucial problems and difficulties involved in promoting change, and how these may be faced. A key to understanding Jean Ruddock's outlook is her conception of change as much more than a simply pedagogical issue — as centrally a cultural problem.

The final chapter confronts the situation following ERA. The scope for creative teacher action is being reduced. 'Teachers are increasingly denied space in which to engage on focussed critical questioning'. But, as Stenhouse warned, 'Improving education is not just about improving teaching as a delivery system'. In spite of all the difficulties, the need remains to 'develop self-critical communities within which teachers can treat educational policies practices and institutions as problematic'. Those working in universities can and must contribute to this end, even if university staff, are now subject (as teachers are) 'to new systems of surveillance and control'. The threat of cut-backs makes universities vulnerable to market forces (as schools are too), 'and the danger is that this vulnerability make make us cautious where earlier we would have been more courageously defiant'. Criticising government policy has been a traditional and important responsibility of the university. 'It seems to me' concludes Jean Ruddock, 'that we must keep our courage and sustain our commitment to the rigorous analysis of educational policy' (p. 140).

Amen to that. One wishes that there were more like her.

BRIAN SIMON

Sam Fisher

Sam Fisher, who died in March, had been closely associated with the start of **Forum** 34 years ago and served on the Editorial Board for the journal's first nine years. He remained a staunch friend and supporter to the end of his life, only last autumn joining past and present members of the Board to celebrate publication of the hundredth **Forum**.

His commitment to comprehensive education derived from reason and his experience as a teacher in one of London's early comprehensive schools. Many teachers were inspired by his lucid exposures of IQ testing, 11-plus selection and streaming to make comprehensive education a reality.

The courage, determination, optimism and humour that characterised his life and teaching career were again evident as he fought cancer. All who knew him will wish to join us in extending sympathy to his wife, June. (Ed.)

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