

FORUM

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**A Return to Streaming?
Whose English?
A Defence of Comprehensive Education
A Post-16 Common Curriculum
Environmental Education**



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The next FORUM

The experience of the Scottish model for a primary school is revealed by **Aileen Fisher**. **Ian Campbell** considers an investigation of why some pupils become disaffected in some comprehensive schools. **Andrew Morris** writes about a local unified qualification system. **George MacBride** discusses the Howie Report in the Scottish context. **David Robertson** indicates some reforms necessary for socially wider participation in further and higher education. **Martin Rogers** reviews the opting-out scenario to date. **Don Vennell** investigates the effects of grant-maintained status on schools themselves; and in a case study of Milton Keynes, **David Crook** shows how the opting-out and the comprehensive versus selection debates can interact locally.

Summer of Discontent

The substance, if not the timing, of this Summer's outbreak of hostilities over the precise form (and, indeed, the desirability) of the National Curriculum testing arrangements could have been (and was) predicted five years ago when the Thatcher government first found itself having to implement the ill-conceived proposals in the so-called Education Reform Act. Indeed, the chief surprise is that it has taken so long for disenchantment and cynicism among teachers and parents to be translated into active protest and revolt.

In order to understand the current controversy over testing, we need to remember that most of those whose neo-liberal right-wing views inspired the market-driven philosophy of the 1987 Education Bill had no wish to see the introduction of a national curriculum and certainly not one embracing ten or more subjects. The Centre for Policy Studies and the Education Unit of the Institute of Economic Affairs believed that a school's individual curriculum should be one of its major selling-points with parents and *not* something to be determined by central government diktat. And the Prime Minister herself made it clear on a number of occasions that her chief concern was the teaching of the 6Rs: reading, writing, arithmetic, religious education and right and wrong; the 6Rs would constitute her *limited* compulsory core curriculum for both primary and secondary schools.

This marked hostility towards the very idea of a national curriculum among most of those who drafted the proposals for inclusion in the 1987 Education Bill helps to account for both the curriculum's hasty preparation and its simplistic framework. It also tells us much about the *centrality* of the testing debate. Realising that he lacked the support of the Prime Minister and her right-wing allies, Kenneth Baker decided to pre-empt further discussion on the curriculum issue by simply announcing his plans for a 'national core curriculum' on the London Weekend Television programme *Weekend World* (broadcast on 7 December 1986). Writing in *The Guardian* in November 1992, Baker revealed that he had not even taken the issue to his Cabinet colleagues, for he had not relished "holding a series of seminars for them on the differences between a curriculum and a syllabus, the purposes of testing and the teaching methods needed to deliver a curriculum in the schools" (*The Guardian*, 24 November 1992). With the right-wingers, including Mrs Thatcher herself, still refusing to be 'appeased', it was finally pointed out to them that, in one major respect, a national curriculum was *not necessarily* incompatible with free-market principles. It would, after all, act as *justification* for a massive programme of national testing at important stages in a child's school career, making teachers more accountable, and providing crucial evidence to parents of the desirability or otherwise of individual schools. Standardised tests would yield results that could be published in the form of simple league tables of schools, thereby *facilitating* the operation of a crude

market system. When one reads all the accounts of the chief players in the drama, it seems pretty clear that this was how the idea of a national curriculum was 'sold' to a number of sceptical but influential right-wingers in the Tory Party think-tanks; from the outset, the price of their support was the *precise nature* of the tests to be imposed on schools.

In the event, the Report of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT), published in December 1987, satisfied very few people. Its proposals were seen as an uneasy and ultimately unworkable compromise between two conflicting purposes of assessment: appearing to find a role for *professional* expertise and showing a concern for *formative* assessment; while, at the same time, giving politicians and civil servants the sort of information they needed for the purposes of accountability, control and the efficient running of a market system of schools. The Right dismissed the proposals as being far too costly and sophisticated; classroom teachers found them very difficult to implement with scant resources and in a limited time scale.

Significantly, the confusion over the objectives of testing has finally caused teachers to explode with rage. Since the start of the year, initial concern about the nature of the English and Technology tests for 14-year-olds has broadened into a decision by the three largest teaching unions to ballot their members on a boycott of all National Curriculum tests. And as I write, the teachers have just scored a second major victory, with Wandsworth Council being refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords against an earlier High Court judgment that the NASUWT boycott of tests constitutes a 'legitimate trade dispute'.

For legal reasons it was, of course, important that the NASUWT case should hinge on the question of workload. But this does not mean that teachers should now welcome the introduction of simple paper-and-pencil tests. The leadership of the NUT has always been at pains to argue that they are opposed *both* to Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) because they involve an 'excessive workload' *and* to paper-and-pencil tests because they are 'educationally unsound'. If testing is really designed to be *diagnostic*, then moderated assessment of individual children by their classroom teachers must be infinitely preferable to anything imposed by the Government.

It is now widely acknowledged that the Government's attitude towards testing has nothing to commend it from an *educational* point of view. In the words of the recent NATE statement attacking the revised English curriculum proposals (words which would seem to have a wider application):

The combination of a shallow and reductive curriculum with oversimplified testing will destroy the spirit of intellectual enquiry which underpins good teaching and effective learning.

A Return to Streaming?

Brian Simon

Co-Editor of *Forum* from 1958 until 1989 and author of over thirty books on education, Brian Simon has always been in the forefront of the twin campaigns to promote the movement towards comprehensive education at the secondary stage and establish the case against streaming in the primary school. In this article he examines recent government moves to denigrate the reforms that have widened horizons for primary-school pupils.

This is written for *Forum* readers and I beg their indulgence. *Forum* was established nearly 35 years ago. Robin Pedley, Jack Walton and I, who took the initiative, had two main objectives. First, to encourage the movement towards comprehensive secondary education then (in 1958) in its infancy; and second, but equally important, to encourage the movement towards the abolition of streaming in primary schools, then also in its infancy. In those days nearly all primary (or junior) schools large enough were streamed. The movement against was clustered in Leicester where we all lived and worked, but had just begun to spread further afield. In 1958 there were 86 so-called comprehensive schools in England and Wales. We wanted both these trends to become national movements. They did.

The Case Against Streaming

Why did we oppose primary school streaming so ardently? Because both its theory and its practice were, in our view, profoundly anti-educational. Its theory derived from the classic (Cyril Burtian) theories of intelligence testing. These stated that all children were genetically endowed with a given quantum of 'intelligence', that this was fixed, unchangeable (like the Rock of Gibraltar), and accurately measurable by a group intelligence test (as reliable, it was argued, as a thermometer). Its practice, derived from this theory, meant that at the age of 7 (or earlier, often at 5), children were allocated to A, B or C streams which were held to be 'homogeneous' and where they could be given an 'appropriate' education. Since transfer between streams was minimal, this early placement determined the child's entire future. Only those allocated to A streams had the faintest chance of passing the 11-plus and being allocated to places in a grammar school, then the sole route to opportunity.

With homogeneous classes teachers were expected, and indeed encouraged, to rely on whole-class teaching – the children in rows, the teacher at the blackboard. I well remember the class teaching of this type I observed when teaching in an 'all-age' (elementary) school (5-14) in the centre of Manchester in 1946-7. It was skilled. It was even humanistic. But it allowed not the faintest scope for individual initiative on the part of the pupils. The teacher was fully dominant, active; the children responsive, passive, sometimes answering in unison (as a whole class), sometimes as individuals to the questions (e.g. mental arithmetic) peppered round the class as out of the barrel of a machine gun. Ten years later, when we founded *Forum*, the same pedagogic techniques dominated though, from the infant schools, new approaches were now beginning to emerge.

The astonishing thing, looking back on all this, is that the battle against streaming (and it *was* a battle) was won

and, in the circumstances, with extraordinary rapidity. This was a product of the '60s and early '70s, and was closely tied up with the swing to comprehensive education which also got under way at that time, developing as a 'roller coaster', as Margaret Thatcher put it recently, in the early '70s. The actual *abolition* of the 11-plus, as school systems went comprehensive, removed the lynchpin of streaming. By the early '70s it was hardly possible to find a single streamed primary school in the country as a whole (not in England and Wales, nor in Scotland for that matter). Fifteen years earlier exactly the opposite conditions obtained. This, perhaps we can say, was *Forum's* 'great' period since we were then closely in touch with what proved to be a national movement of overwhelming significance. No wonder the Black Papers erupted precisely when they did (1969-70) in a premature attempt to halt the advance.

Ministers and the Tabloid Press

But now, in 1993, as is well known, Herculean efforts are being made to turn back the clock. This initiative is not coming from teachers, governors, parents, the hated 'educational theorists', or whatever. It is coming from the top – from Ministers, Secretaries of State, even (probably) from the Prime Minister himself who is reported (as I write) as having held a two-day seminar on education (and related matters). It expresses itself – and this is very much a 1990s phenomenon – in the tabloid press, alongside avid reporting of the misdemeanours of royalty and of (other) Ministers. The technique is that of the 'inspired' news item or even 'report' by an 'educational correspondent' who has apparently been tipped off by some highly placed 'source' and proposes to convey the truth to his or her gullible readers.

Here is the *Daily Mail* on 4 January this year, a fortnight before the release of the NCC and OFSTED reports on primary education:

Headline: "*Trendies*" Defeated

by Ray Massey, Education Correspondent

Below this is a positioned photo of John Patten, looking stern. This is titled: '*Patten: Resolute*'

Below the photo another headline in bold type:

'Minister Orders Schools to Bring in Streaming'

The story starts: "Traditional teaching in which pupils are streamed according to their ability is to make a come back in primary schools". And goes on: "Education Secretary, John Patten, is about to end three decades of 'progressive methods'. Advisers at standards watchdog OFSTED and the National Curriculum Council have told him that mixed ability teaching does not work". The article asserts: "Ministers want children to be grouped from their earliest years with others of roughly equal ability. They will insist that the most gifted receive sufficient stimulus".

On the same day (which indicates a clear campaign by someone in authority) the *Daily Express* ran a similar story under a banner headline:

*'Class Streaming to Put Bright
Five-year-olds on Fast Track'*

The story, by Gerald Greaves 'Education Correspondent' starts "Primary school children will be streamed according to their ability under new education reforms", going on, "A review of the country's 20,000 primary schools will aim to stamp out trendy approaches in coping with children's different skills".

These ideas, it is reported by both tabloids, are embodied in two reports due out later in January.

Both news items quote 'experts' and 'observers' (e.g. "one observer said yesterday") to enhance the impression of a top-level crackdown on the schools, to be powered by the two reports.

These assertions and asseverations about streaming were, by these two correspondents, beamed to millions. But in fact neither the NCC nor the OFSTED report, published a fortnight later (18 January) recommends streaming. The only mention either of streaming or of setting in the OFSTED report is the statement that, apart from the practice of ability grouping within a class, "there is little evidence of any widespread move towards other forms of ability grouping such as 'streaming' or 'setting'" (para. 44). The NCC report makes no mention of streaming whatever, but it does call for "the setting of pupils according to ability where this is practicable". The report, however, does not give one single reason nor any rationale to support the recommendation.

In spite of this, when the two reports were released to the press, apparently at a press conference in the embattled Sanctuary House, the message handed on (presumably by Ministers, for Patten was present) seems to have been quite specific. Here is David Kerr of the *Sun*: "Streaming is to be introduced into 22,000 primary schools to raise standards under a back-to-basics drive launched yesterday".

The intention is ascribed in the *Sun* to John Patten who "said the new moves were 'plain, old fashioned common sense'".

Now the *Daily Express* followed by saying that "the package, which allows for more pupils to be grouped by ability", is "a further nail in the coffin for Left-wing progressive education". This political shift or smear is adumbrated by Gerald Greaves who also warns us that "a Downing Street source" assured him that "John Major took education very seriously", adding that "He has been kept in close touch" (i.e. 'look out, Big Brother is watching you'). Both the *Sun* and *Today* ran bullying leaders attacking teachers ('Let's have more chalk and less talk', said the *Sun*).

So we get some idea as to how the news is made. There is actually no need for these stories, even when they cover official reports, to have any veracity whatever. What is important is the Ministerial message. 'Educational' correspondents (some) simply convey what they are told to say – that is their lapdog function for which they are paid. No wonder David Tytler resigned the job precisely as a protest against the manipulation of Ministerial press conferences.

Why is it all Happening?

So what lies behind all this? Somewhere there are powerful people who seem determined to get us all back into line. They seem to have a vision of the nation's four million primary school children all sitting in rows in streamed classes being bludgeoned from the blackboard by a new race of indoctrinated specialist teachers, all 'delivering' the National Curriculum through a ceaseless flow of speech and chalk. So everyone will learn, from their earliest days, to "know their place" in the words of a now notorious high official of the DES. "We have further to go in reforming primary schools", announced John Major, appropriately from the Carlton Club, early in February, "To sweep away the failed nostrums of the 1960s and 1970s". And we need "parallel reforms in teacher training", he went on, "to help good teachers do the job the country needs" (*Education*, 12 February 1993).

It seems that the old, and historically dominant, role of education as a means (now *the* means?) of exerting social change is once again to the fore – not so much, perhaps, to guard against any present threat to the existing social order as to shore up the situation for the foreseeable future. I believe that the determination to use education to preserve the status quo, in terms of social relations generally, to have been, historically, the main factor retarding the modernisation of education in this country and a main reason for Britain's relative backwardness in this field compared to every other advanced industrial country.

The intentions of those on high in relation to our primary schools cannot be allowed to be implemented. The country has already experienced a streamed system of primary education and rejected it. The rejection has been unanimous. In the late '50s and early '60s many research initiatives already highlighted the damage done by streaming. Most important, it was shown beyond doubt that the differences in achievement between streams were *exacerbated* as a direct result of the very process itself. This indicated that the original stream placement *determined* futures – indeed development as a whole.

This, basically, is an educational, not a political issue. The education of young children is about empowerment, about the enhancement of initiative, of self-confidence, of creativity, and of course about the structured development of abilities and skills across a wide range of human endeavour – of knowledge, science and culture. To find the most effective means of promoting these qualities in and outside schools is not only not easy; it is a highly skilled task which makes powerful demands on human ingenuity. That is the role of the teachers and of all directly concerned with primary education. The attempt of politicians at direct interference and indeed overall control for what are clearly directly political purposes cannot under any circumstances be permitted to succeed. That would be to render fruitless the massive humanist endeavour now embodied in our primary schools as well as effectively blighting the future for tens of thousands of our children.

The two Reports referred to in this article are:

- [1] NCC (National Curriculum Council) *The National Curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2*, dated 7th January 1993.
- [2] OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools: a follow-up report*, 1993.

God, the Enlightenment, Cultural Identities and St Philips Sixth Form College: defence of comprehensive education

Máirtín mac an Ghaill

Having taught sociology at St Philips Sixth Form College for six years, Máirtín mac an Ghaill is now a lecturer in curriculum studies in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham. In this article he describes the campaign being waged to prevent the College being changed back to the Catholic boys' grammar school that it was until 1976.

Introduction

At my Catholic boarding school one of our favourite pastimes was engaging in theological disputations. We enthusiastically debated such questions as: Whose side is God on in a war? My housemaster sagely explained that if it was a war between Catholics and Protestants – and we never heard about any other kinds of wars – then God being a Catholic would of course be on our side. We used to go off to bed secure in the knowledge that God had chosen *us*. To be honest, in retrospect, theologically speaking, as a pupil I was too easily satisfied. The more demanding question would have been: what if both sides are Catholic? These thoughts have returned to me with my involvement in a current campaign involving governors threatening to close a Catholic sixth form college.

The St Philips College Story

As the title of this article suggests, this is a complex narrative. It is a local story that has developed against the backdrop of a decade of the New Right educational project that has set out to destroy the post-war educational settlement. It contains high-profiled aspects of Tory rhetoric about increased governor control, parental empowerment, and local accountability. It also contains key elements of recent Tory moral panics about the 'folk devils' of comprehensive schooling, progressive pedagogy, anti-racism and sex education.

The local issue revolves around the question of how young people of a religious background should be educated in a secular England of the 1990s? The answer is being fought out at a Catholic sixth form college, St Philips, in Birmingham. The response of the majority of the foundation governors (appointed by the Catholic priests, the Oratorians, who own the college land) is that it should return to an arena of religious separation and segregation. The staff's, students' and most of the parents' response is that the young people's education should be located within an interdenominational college committed to a multi-cultural/anti-racist perspective.

National and local press have recorded the development of this highly charged, bitter controversy: 'Catholics at war: future wisdom v. traditional values' (*Birmingham Post*); 'New uproar at row hit college' (*Evening Mail*); 'Catholics in turmoil over keeping faith with school'; and 'College split over breach of Catholic trust' (*The Guardian*). Much has happened in a matter of months: the resignation of the principal and the chair of governors, teacher governors leaving a meeting in tears, teachers threatened with suspension, students thrown out of public meetings and balloting of teachers and parents securing a vote of no confidence in the governors. In response, co-ordinated action

to maintain the status of the college has been organised by a 'Friends of St Philips' defence group, a student action group and teacher unions. Action has included mass leafleting, parents' meetings (over 500 attended one meeting demanding that the governors be sacked), demonstrations and petitions (over 1000 letters of protest to the local education authority).

So what is all the fuss about?

St Philips has 950 students, a third of whom are Catholic. The non-Catholics include other Christians, Jews, and large numbers of Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. The governors' claim that this decline in the proportion of Catholics means that they are unable to provide a religious education in keeping with their constitution. They have listed a number of options for St Philips, including closure, but they favour changing the College back to the Catholic boys' secondary school that it was until 1976.

The immediate response of one Asian student to the governors' threat of closure of St Philips was to refer to it as a form of 'ethnic cleansing'. A number of the students and parents, both black and white, share this view that the governors are acting in a racist way. The latter have responded that this is not the case. Their argument is that the religious ethos of the college must be specifically defined in terms of a culture of Catholicity. If two-thirds of the student body do not share that culture, then the College is no longer Catholic. The most recent threat against the staff involves governor inquiries into pastoral care and religious education. Some Catholic parents with young people at the College read this as a code to return the sex education programme to a more traditional doctrinal approach that they feel will have little meaning for the students.

Local councillors, MPs and community groups have been actively involved in the campaign. Their views were cogently expressed by the Labour MP, Clare Short, whose constituency includes St Philips: "This short-sighted decision to wreck a successful and happy college is a rejection of the multi-denominational nature of its student community. It is monstrous. No one but a small rump of governors wants these plans to go ahead and their attempts to push them through are deeply undemocratic. They are behaving like complete vandals. The destiny of this precious college is being decided by a small group of hatchet men" (*Birmingham Post*). This undemocratic response, threatening the jobs of 80 teachers, has been aided by the increased powers given to governors in the recent educational reforms. The dispute highlights fundamental contradictions in current schooling reform at the local level, concerning parental choice and

accountability. Ironically, these are the very issues that the New Right ideology has attempted to appropriate to its own élitist educational project.

Diverse Cultural Identities

The dispute is dividing the local Catholic community. Before the last election, Catholic bishops were prominent in condemning the moral poverty of central government's deregulation and restratification of state schooling. They were particularly critical of the financial differentiation to opt-out schools. The religious order that the foundation governors belong to distanced themselves from this stance. They run the first Catholic school to opt out in London. A local Birmingham consortium of 12 Catholic schools has published a letter arguing that the same 'market-place' logic of competitive individualism underpins the attempt to return the College to a Catholic boys' school. They point out the disastrous effects that this option will have on local schools, at a time when there is already ample provision for every Catholic child in the city and there are falling pupil rolls. A number of progressive Catholic theologians have developed this argument. Gerard Hughes, a Jesuit priest, has voiced his alarm at the proposed changes. He identifies such issues as advocacy of democracy, cancellation of third world debt, equality, human rights, women's rights, opposition to nuclear deterrence, war and the arms trade as some of the values in the common culture of the secular world. He accepts that "the common culture may not be very successful in realising these values, but they are commonly-held values which bind young people across cultures and religions". He adds that he believes these values are integral to Catholicism (*The Tablet*). Michael Walsh has spoken of the national repercussions of the action at St Philips. He examines how present education legislation has encouraged schools to focus exclusively on their own interests rather than on the needs of the community at large. A central issue that Walsh raises here is the question of religious and cultural identity (*The Tablet*).

Recently, similar questions have emerged at a number of English schools that have shifted from a majority white student population to that of a majority black student intake. The Honeyford affair publicly acted out the logic of the new racism, in which the emphasis moves away from racial superiority to the 'naturalness' of racial difference. Within this view, schools are portrayed as central preservers of fixed traditional British culture, into which the next generation must be inducted. Salman Rushdie has spoken of mass immigration as a major definer of the twentieth century. One consequence of this is the wide range of religious and cultural backgrounds of young people, particularly in inner-city schools. Earlier educational debates around multiculturalism—antiracism have not helped schools to think through sensitively how we might begin to address the complexity of cultural 'difference'. The crisis in Birmingham serves to illustrate the confusions and contradictions shared by policy makers, teachers, students and parents.

St Philips College: a model of comprehensive schooling?
Presently, Birmingham education authority, at the bottom

of 'the league table', is under attack from John Patten. Logically, it might be argued that this is not due to progressive pedagogy. Holding onto its grammar schools, the city has been unable to provide the necessary conditions in which a genuine comprehensive system might develop. As noted above, St Philip's was formerly a boys' grammar school. The foundation governors have much nostalgia for the selective system. This underpins their attempt to close what is nationally and locally recognised as one of the most successful (academically and pastorally) educational institutions in the region. Last year it was presented with a prestigious award for its curriculum development. It is particularly successful in providing a 'second chance' for white and black working-class young people, male and female, who have been failed in their secondary schooling. Equally important, the College is providing a safe space in which these young people have taken the opportunity to develop social practices that involve mutual respect and obligations. This has not been achieved without tensions and misunderstandings. Nevertheless, the students and teachers clearly show that there *is* such a thing as society and that cultural differences are not necessarily universal barriers to human development. So, how come the governors wish to close a flourishing college that has doubled its intake in three years? What appears to be the problem is that this is a success story for progressive education. The College is fully committed to comprehensive schooling and through educational vision, increased resources and hard work, it is providing 'really useful knowledge' that combines rigour and relevance, academic/vocational success and student collective empowerment.

The Enlightenment and what is to be done?

The Friends of St Philips defence group have brought together a wide range of support from many religious communities and secular groups. We are hoping that the local authority will take a more active role in attempting to resolve the dispute. It is not a case of interfering in a private domestic religious affair. The city has invested over a million pounds in the College. A solution favoured by teachers and students is to move to a different site, provided by the LEA.

Returning to the theological dimension, I am sure that God has been tuning into the post-modernist debate. It would be interesting to know what he thinks of the present disillusionment with the Enlightenment values of human solidarity and rational progression to a better world. Comprehensive schooling has been projected as a strategic site for attaining this goal. For me, St Philips may provide a social barometer to test out the thesis that moral and political emancipation is based on recognition of common human interests. Having theologically come of age, I would love to return to the question with my old housemaster: whose side is God on in this battle of religious and secular ideas? We need to know. And so do 80 staff, 950 students and many of their parents in Birmingham. Luckily (?) we have an educational secretary who believes in a Catholic God! Eventually he may be asked to intervene.

Whose English?

Ken Jones

Having taught English in London comprehensive schools from 1975 to 1990, Ken Jones is now a lecturer in the Department of English, Media and Drama at the Institute of Education, University of London. His recent works include *Right Turn* (1989) and *English and the National Curriculum: Cox's revolution?* (1992).

Debate on English in the National Curriculum is increasingly controversial. It is also, frequently, absurd. The chairman of SEAC's English Committee wants 14-year-olds to read extracts from *Rasselas*, and all 16-year-olds to read Francis Bacon.[1] The chairman of the NCC wants children to speak Standard English in the playground.[2] The Secretary of State for Education believes that there are local authority advisers who are opposed to teaching the alphabet.[3] When to this catalogue of eccentricity is added the bizarre mismanagement of the inaugural SATs for 14-year-olds in which secretive improvisation has replaced planning as a tool of educational policy – then it is tempting to suggest that the situation has finally escaped the bounds of logic, and that John Marenbon, David Pascall and even Mr John Patten himself are mere accidents of history, without lasting significance.

Tempting, but unwise. The government's programme for English has got a logic, and is guided by a sense of historic purpose. Both are expressed more or less coherently in the speeches of Conservative leaders, most notably of John Major himself. In February 1993, Mr Major spoke to the Carlton Club about 'Conservatism in the 1990s: our common purpose'. His themes were change, community and culture. Drawing to a considerable extent from David Willetts' book, *Modern Conservatism* [4], he tried to reconcile the permanent disruptiveness of free-market economic policy with the familiar Conservative emphasis on tradition and continuity. The more turbulent the period of economic and social change, Major suggested, the greater the need for cultural stability:

When people have to find strength and direction within themselves, we need more than ever that anchor of past experience and those institutions which give continuity to our national life. The monarchy. Parliament. Our churches and voluntary organisations.

There were those, however, who wished to haul up that anchor and 'sever our links with the past'. Such people disparage the 'glories of British history' and claim that "the works of Dickens and Trollope even poor old Winnie-the-Pooh are irrelevant to the modern child ... Others claim that the figurative tradition in art, and the lessons of classical architecture, have no relevance to the present day". Ideas like these, according to Major, have had a terrible effect: "The destruction they have wrought has been physical as well as emotional ... Our deepest values as a civilised nation are being threatened".

In this context, the apparent absurdities of curriculum and assessment policy begin to make a wider sense. At the same time, the weakness of that policy is revealed as just one aspect of the general improbability of the Conservative cultural project. For although insistent on the necessity of tradition to the maintenance of a stable national identity, that project is unable to connect its own reading of tradition

to the actual movement of social and cultural life in Britain over the last fifty years.[5] In fact, from 1975 onwards, Conservatism has taken the form of a war against the post-1944 'social settlement', against the programmes of Keynes and Beveridge on which it rested, and against the labour movement which did so much to bring it about. Far from coming to terms with this historically evolved social order, Conservatism under Major and Thatcher has aimed to replace it; far from respecting inherited customs and institutions developed in that period, it has undermined them. Rather than seeing what happened in the post-war years as an outcome of the most profound social conflicts of the first part of the century, it has viewed the period between 1944 and 1979 (especially its latter part) as an aberration, a departure from the 'normal' course of British history. Thus, when Conservatives speak of national 'tradition', it is in ways which must repress awareness of some of the most deep-rooted experiences of post-war life. The strain of that repression shows itself in the brittle and artificial character of those traditions that do get invoked: Bacon, *Rasselas*, Trollope, Winnie-the-Pooh.

How, in this light, might we understand the present controversies over English? As Brian Simon has shown, much of twentieth-century educational history can be written as an account of the conflict between an enduring élitist and restrictive system and the steady demand for the mass entry of non-élite groups onto the educational scene. The course of this conflict has often been viewed through the prism of the organisational changes to which it has led. But it is also worth noting some of the less tangible but no less central aspects of *cultural* change in the post-war period – the ways, for instance, in which schools came, unevenly, to register the presence of working-class children and to re-think curricula with some conception of their needs in mind. The relationship between the experiences of learners and the formal, organised knowledge of the school became an important issue in these years – nowhere more clearly than in English. The much stronger, *recognised* place of non-standard dialects in classrooms is part of this wider cultural shift.

So, too, is the way that narrow definitions of culture, tied to élite and Eurocentric traditions, have been challenged. There is a theoretical dimension to this challenge – a dimension expressed, for instance, in the work of Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton. There are also practical dimensions, in the explosion of non-print media and in the cultural activity of non-élite groups, including young people. English teachers have responded to these developments: through assisting in the development of media studies, through valuing students' own writing, through calling into question the received canon, through arriving at broader definitions of literacy. In doing so, they have not operated

on the mere fringes of history: on the contrary, they have been in touch with the central cultural developments of the postwar era.

It is against this double background – on the one hand an opening up of the school to wider cultural influences, on the other, a revivalist traditionalism – that we can best make sense of the unhappy progress of Conservative policy for the teaching and testing of English.

Its most recent phase began in July 1991, when John Major spoke to a meeting organised by the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS). For two years, ever since the publication of *English for Ages 5 to 16*, the CPS had been organising the discontent of the Right with the shape taken by the National Curriculum. Major's identification of 'insidious attacks' on the teaching of literature and history in schools [6] gave authoritative support to the Right's complaints. Soon afterwards, supporters of these views (Griffiths, Pascall, Marenbon, Marks, Turner and so on) were appointed to the NCC, SEAC and SEAC's subcommittees.

Since 1991, the work of SEAC and the NCC has been subject to tight political determination. The NCC's fairly rational agenda of reviewing the operation of the National Curriculum so as to make it simpler and more coherent [7] has been overtaken by the project of the CPS, so that rigour and simplicity are defined in right-wing terms. Media Studies, omitted from the draft revised curriculum for English, has been one of the casualties of this process. SEAC, meanwhile, has rejected the models of assessment originally developed for the National Curriculum and commissioned instead a set of summative, terminal exam papers.

Plans like these find their inspiration in the same cultural sources as Mr Major's speech. To read the anthology of literature on which 14-year-old students will be tested this year is to take a journey into the pastoral dream lands of a certain kind of English imagination, where winter is a 'red huntsman', where spring means 'golden daffodils', where steam trains hiss in Edwardian summer afternoons, and where autumn, of course, is close bosom friend of the maturing sun.[8]

To read what the revised (draft) National Curriculum has to say about the way that six- and seven-year-old children should use language is to enter a world whose cultural horizons have shrunk in the same dramatic way. Children's own dialects count for nothing. They are simply not mentioned as 'languages of learning'. Instead, all the emphasis is placed on 'standard English', which is described, in defiance of contemporary linguistic thinking, as alone possessing 'logical' syntax and 'correct' verb usage. Young children, whose own speech is not thought to contain such properties, "should be introduced to certain conventions of standard English" and will no doubt be tested on their use.[9]

Culturally, then, the new English promises to be thoroughly monological. A particular version of 'heritage' and 'excellence' takes absolute priority over the language and experience of pupils – and of teachers. Quite apart from the formal processes of selection which the SATs demand [10], a curriculum designed in this way contains its own implicit systems of inclusion and exclusion, based on pupils' familiarity with the dominant cultural forms, its own predictions of who will succeed and who will fail. These systems, deriving from a particular *model of culture*, will be strengthened by what the new English contains by way of a *model of learning*. The testing system, to which teaching

will tend to be geared, sets great value on the ability to formulate quick answers to the type of essay or comprehension question popular in 'O' level days. "Write a story called 'The Gift'", requests the KS3 draft test paper of 14-year-olds. They have one hour to do so. "This is a picture in words of the countryside in winter. Which details best give the reader this picture, and why?" demands a rather Gradgrindian question from the same KS3 booklet.[11] An approach like this allows no time for considered thinking, none for dialogue, none for redrafting. In other words, it does not establish a framework for evaluating the work of which pupils are capable when adequate conditions for their learning have been established. In the way that it sets aside everything that English teachers have learned from their experience of 'course work' at GCSE, it is just as much an irrational *attack* on well-grounded experience as the more general Conservative rejection of postwar history expressed by Mr Major.

Conservative activists, then, for all their talk of 'continuity', 'custom' and 'tradition', have failed to recognise these forces when they appear in any but the most conventional shape: 'tradition', to John Major, means Admiral Nelson or Winnie-the-Pooh. This is a misunderstanding whose political consequences are now becoming clear. The apparatus of Conservative education acts as if non-Conservative traditions do not exist, as if there are no deep, collective, motivating, oppositional commitments that it need worry about. Beliefs in multiculturalism, say, or child-centred education, or professional entitlement are thought to belong only to an insignificant few. It has accordingly behaved as if the school system is a *tabula rasa* on which its policies can easily be inscribed. It has paid no attention to the assembling of consensus, nor to the management of change. Programmes are devised by people without educational experience; consultation has been minimal; far-reaching policy has been pushed through without debate, even on SEAC itself.[12]

It is this novel approach to the making of policy which has provoked the first substantial challenge to the direction of government curriculum policy – the threatened boycott of KS3 testing in English, a boycott initiated by the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE), then supported by the NUT.[13] The immediate focus for this protest has been the incompetence of SEAC. This is an allegation for which there is a very good case, outlined by LATE last November:

It appears that the SATs will be very different from those piloted over the past three years and will not adequately cover the requirements of the National Curriculum programmes of study. The contract has been given to the English as a Foreign Language section of the Cambridge Exams Board which has little experience of assessing mainstream English. Teachers are being overwhelmed by rapid, contradictory changes ... We are now expected to prepare pupils for tests next June although we still do not now what the tests will be like.[14]

The speed with which English teachers have secured the support of heads, governors and parents for their campaign indicates widespread unhappiness over government curriculum policy. Their challenge threatens to spill over into other subjects and other stages.[15] Its current success will also be likely to encourage opposition to the revised English curriculum.

In these growing controversies, issues of competence are, of course, importantly involved. But alongside them cluster wider concerns. In the process of opposing a government policy which is promoting a sort of monocultural divisiveness in classrooms, teachers have reached the point where wider issues are at stake than the smooth running of a system of testing. There is a growing awareness that Conservative education embodies ideas about history, about learning, about the nature of present-day Britain, and about its future which are warped by nostalgia and by the fear of democratic change. To an increasingly large number of people, modern Conservatism sounds less like the voice of 'tradition' than a doctrine based on historically irrational judgements and expectations. The more its leaders emphasise such themes, the more they are likely to call into existence a broad and articulate opposition.

Notes

- [1] An extract from *Rasselas* is included in the Key Stage 3 anthology (see note 8, below). John Marenbon's views on set texts were published in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 18 September 1992.
- [2] David Pascall, reported in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 18 September 1992.
- [3] John Patten, speech to the AGM of Abingdon and West Oxford Conservative Association 12/6/1992.
- [4] David Willetts (1991) *Modern Conservatism*. London: Penguin.
- [5] These points are expanded in the Hillcole Group pamphlet (1993) *Falling Apart: the coming crisis of Conservative education policy*. Tufnell Press.
- [6] John Major (1991) 'Education: all our futures', speech to the Centre for Policy Studies, 3 July.
- [7] National Curriculum Council (1991) *Corporate Plan 1992-95*.
- [8] Schools Examination and Assessment Council (1993) *Key Stage 3 English Anthology*. Poems by Osbert Sitwell, Wordsworth, Edward Thomas and Keats.
- [9] Revised Orders for English in the National Curriculum (unpublished draft, 1993). York: NCC.
- [10] The 'tiered' nature of the KS3 tests requires that pupils of differing abilities are entered for different tests.
- [11] SEAC (1993) *Key Stage 3 School Assessment Folder*. Sample Test Questions: English.
- [12] See the article by Peter Harding, member of the SEAC English Committee, in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 15 January 1993.
- [13] Initial concern about the nature of the English tests for 14-year-olds has broadened into a decision by the three largest teaching unions to ballot their members on a boycott of *all* National Curriculum tests.
- [14] LATE (1992) *Chaos in English Tests* (leaflet), October/November.
- [15] For indications of the development of campaigns against SATs in Mathematics, Science and Technology, see the *AntiSATs News*, published by London associations of the NUT, January 1993.

Quis Custodiet ipsos Custodes? Inspecting HMI

Janet Maw

Janet Maw is a senior lecturer in the Curriculum Studies Department at the Institute of Education, University of London. In this article she argues that it is important not to view past arrangements for schools inspection through rose-tinted spectacles.

The new arrangements for the inspection of schools in England and Wales, initiated by the Education (Schools) Act 1992, have not been received with much enthusiasm by the education profession in general or the teaching profession in particular. In so far as the measures exhibit the characteristics of what Rosenhead described as an "impoverished policy process" [1] in social policy in general since 1979 – ideologically driven, inadequately thought through, and with minimal consultation or research evidence – the suspicion is justified. The provisions for inspection at local level are seen as part of both a relentless attack on the powers of local government, carried to the point of vindictiveness, and the fetish for privatisation and the market place as the solution to all social and economic ills. At the centre, the replacement of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) has been

widely viewed as the destruction of an independent professional voice, seen as an important counterweight to ideology and assertion in the formulation of education policy, though as Stewart Sutherland (the newly appointed Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools) recently pointed out in a letter to *The Independent* (4 January 1993), the slimmed down HMI has been incorporated into 'Ofsted', not abolished. At the very least, however, the unfortunate acronym 'Ofsted' appears to imply that the inspection of schools is a relatively simple matter of applying technical and economic criteria similar to those relevant for assessing the water supply (Ofwat) and the telecommunication system (Oftel).

Nevertheless, whilst it is justifiable to view the future arrangements for schools' inspection with extreme caution, and important to subject them to evaluation and critique as they are implemented, it is also important not to view the

past arrangements through rose-tinted spectacles. Although the White Paper, *Choice and Diversity* [2], was both selective and unfair in some of its comments on the inspection services, it is the case that the Audit Commission 1989 report on LEA Inspectors and Advisers [3] did present a worrying picture of uneven provision, uncertainties of role, and variation in quality. Whilst this report provided no justification for abolishing the LEA services, and no evidence about the steps taken by LEAs to improve their provision in the three subsequent years has been presented or considered, nor any argument for the superiority of a privatised service (which was merely asserted), it did demonstrate the extent to which a more coherently structured, systematic, professionally trained and clearly accountable service was needed at the local level.

Aspects of HMI Practice

On the whole HMI has been curiously exempt from professional evaluation and critique. As a powerful élite body it has been able to resist research penetration and there is no instance of any independent, professional, published research and evaluation of its core activity of school inspection. There is no space here to examine in detail how HMI has been able to establish and sustain its élite position within the educational system over a long period of time without any of the obvious sources of power. This would require an analysis of the structural and political contexts within which they have worked, in particular the apparent depoliticisation of education for thirty years following the Second World War. However, it might have been expected that the increasingly overt politicisation of education since the mid-1970s, the publication of HMI national surveys since 1978, and the publication of their individual school reports since 1983 would have combined to create a widespread professional demand for much greater openness about the methods of observational data collection used by HMI, the means by which they are trained in them, how data are interpreted into judgements, the criteria which are applied, and how these are justified. On the whole this demand has been partial, occasional and muted.

There have, of course, been some criticisms of HMI work over the last decade. Occasionally a school has been moved to protest in print about the accuracy of an HMI school report, an HMI failure to set the record straight, or a failure to follow their own published procedures. The most serious of these was a complaint about both procedures and content of the Culloden primary school inspection of April 1991.[4] An article in *The Times Educational Supplement* (26 April 1991) accused HMI of being stampeded into the inspection by the tabloid press, unprofessional and unfair in its procedures, and vague and inconsistent in the content of the report. HMI, as usual, did not reply. On the whole, however, such rebuttals have been rare. Individual schools are not generally well placed to challenge HMI, and need to be particularly sure of their ground to do so. Such confidence is difficult to summon when procedures for the collection, interpretation and judgement of classroom data are not made explicit. In the mid-1980s there were mumblings of discontent from some LEAs over HMI reports on the educational effects of LEA expenditure cuts. Such reports, however, were likely to be well received by the teaching profession. Similarly, the reported antagonism of Mrs Thatcher and the attacks on HMI as just another self-interested, professional provide

group made by various right-wing 'think tanks' [5] would tend to increase the education profession's solidarity with HMI and to deflect more informed professional critique. Over the decade a number of careful analytic critiques of aspects of HMI practice has been published. These have examined, *inter alia*, HMI's psychologistic and individualistic model of teacher quality [6], their use of cross-cultural comparative data [7], problems in their reporting of the GCSE [8], and the implicit and atomistic nature of the criteria employed in their inspections.[9] Only the latter was directly concerned with the core activity of school inspection, all were necessarily based on HMI publications, rather than observation, interview or documentary evidence, and their impact was limited by their appearance in journals largely read by an academic audience. Thus, whilst HMI's role in curriculum policy and development has been heavily curtailed since 1988, its role in school inspection and evaluation has not, and it is this role which is embedded in the legislation of the Education (Schools) Act 1992. This is why it is important to question some aspects of previous HMI practice.

In addition to the fragmented, intermittent and muted nature of critique of HMI inspection practice we should recognise that HMI have become very skilled at self-presentation during the period of their increased exposure to professional and public scrutiny. For instance, in their publication *HMI: its work and publications* [10], the paragraph on the professional independence of HMI claims:

HMI use no blueprint, wave no magic wands. They offer the best professional judgments they can. They have no executive powers. They earn attention by what they are and what they do. Their effectiveness depends on relationships that have to be worked on. Perhaps the most significant characteristic of HM Inspectorate is its professional independence from central and local government and teachers and its obligation to report what is found without fear or favour.

This is a careful and skilful presentation, emphasising responsibility without power, obligation, impartiality and professionalism. It is a recent example of a long series of statements which present HMI as professional, disinterested, autonomous and objective, but which nevertheless stress the right of direct access to the Secretary of State for Education. The words 'without fear or favour' emphasise the *political* detachment of HMI and this is consistent with a long-standing view of themselves as wholly nonpolitical or apolitical. In one sense, of course, this is true; HMI have certainly not been party political, and have been largely nonpartisan, in that they present their own evidence and opinions and do not explicitly oppose or support those of others. Another strategy for avoiding political or partisan involvement is that they almost never reply directly to a criticism of themselves (though this creates other problems). In another sense the claim is naive. HMI are deeply involved in the business of educational evaluation, and this is always political in nature. They promote certain values, beliefs and practices and not others. Indeed, their claims to disseminate 'good practice' or to state that a certain percentage of lessons was 'satisfactory or better' mean that they claim to recognise both good and bad practice and to be able to state what these consist of. These are powerful and political claims. I want next to examine some issues in how these claims appear to be substantiated.

Reports on Individual Schools

HMI have been publishing reports on individual schools since 1983. On general reading, these reports are almost universally bland, giving no sense of the life of the school. It has been suggested that HMI "have responded to publication of their reports by writing increasingly in code" (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 1 December 1989), which implies that whilst they claim to publish "without fear or favour", they do write with extreme caution. Nevertheless, HMI school reports are highly judgemental, yet they contain neither explicit criteria on which the judgements are made, nor any statement of the evidence gathered or the methods by which it was collected. In the most recent statement on the work of HMI [11] it is claimed that:

Nor are Inspectors' observations and judgments of what is going on decided by predetermined criteria When HM Inspectors inspect they judge the education they see mainly in the light of the aims, objectives, resources, context and outcomes of the particular institution they are in.

These claims are, at best, worryingly naive, at worst misleading. There is plenty of testimony to the fact that Inspectors are generally sensitive and sympathetic to the contexts in which they are inspecting. Yet the notion that their judgements are made on other than general criteria (suitably qualified in relation to the context) is impossible to sustain. Indeed, if it were true it would totally negate the general judgements presented in their system-wide surveys, which would become mere aggregations of school and inspectorial preferences, unsupported by even the vaguest claims to validity and reliability.

In practice it has always been possible to arrive at the general criteria that HMI have used through an analysis of the reports themselves [12], and frequently they are those which HMI in their curriculum development role, have themselves advocated as central to curriculum planning, e.g. breadth, balance, relevance and differentiation which clearly raises questions about the relationship between advocacy and evaluation. In recent presentations of their work HMI are quite explicit about the general criteria they employ, and no school possessing such documents should now be in any doubt about what these are. The problem lies, not in the absence of explicit criteria, but in the relationship between evidence, criteria and judgement, i.e. what is to count as evidence to which a criterion will be applied to form a judgement? This is not generally discussed in HMI publications, but it is quite crucial for the schools. For example, three criteria of good practice frequently cited by HMI are that teachers use a variety of teaching methods, that tasks are matched to the abilities of pupils, and that their work equips them for jobs and future careers. Whilst all of these involve interpretation, the first is more unequivocally reliant on observation. The second involves considerable assessment of what the pupils' abilities actually are, and HMI have never clarified how they, who may see pupils for a single lesson only, are better able to assess the match or mismatch of tasks and abilities than the teachers who encounter these pupils week in and week out. The third involves consideration of whole sets of values and beliefs about the purposes of education and how these are best achieved, about which there is no consensus, and legitimate differences of perspective.

Before publication heads and governors are enabled to

correct 'any apparent factual errors', but a previous HMI pamphlet made it quite clear that "HMI's qualitative assessments are not open to negotiation at such a meeting". [13] Thus the Inspectorate's failure to discuss and clarify their assumed relationships between values and beliefs, criteria, observations and judgements means that they are not accountable for their judgements *towards those whom they judge*. This is both mis-educative and undemocratic.

HMI Surveys

Alongside the individual school reports, HMI have since 1978 published a number of substantial surveys of different stages of the school system, and related matters such as teacher education. They have also produced a much larger number of more limited reports on various aspects of education, the most widely known in recent years being the annual report of the Senior Chief Inspector of Schools. Both surveys and reports have drawn heavily on data from school inspections.

The early surveys, in particular, paid considerable attention to making explicit their methods of data collection and analysis. They included survey material and questionnaires together with discussion of statistical issues. In relation to observation methods they indicated the extent of observation, what was to be assessed and the criteria which would be used. The Primary School Survey of 1978 [14] and the Secondary School Survey of 1979 [15] included, in addition to information on what data were gathered, some discussion of how these were interpreted to form grading, or judgements. In other words, they paid some attention to the research criteria of validity and reliability, seen to be essential to the credibility of the surveys. They were valuable documents, influential in INSET and curriculum development. Later surveys have been less scrupulous in their attention to these matters. The 1988 update on Secondary Schools [16], for instance, reduced discussion of the complex issues of processing qualitative data to lists of numerical indices of the extent to which it was gathered.

Attention to issues of reliability and validity has been even more cavalier in the reports. Typical is the introduction to *Education in England 1990-91*, the most recent annual *Report of the Senior Chief Inspector of Schools* (published 1992):

1. During the academic year ending in July 1991 HMI in England inspected some 7,000 institutions; observed over 50,000 lessons; and issued 228 institutional reports, 79 reports on aspects of education and six publications on provision in other countries. This substantial programme of inspection underpins this report.

2. The percentage of work judged satisfactory or better within the main categories inspected was: primary education 70%; special education 66%; secondary education (11-16) 73%; secondary education (16-19) 82%; further education 90%; initial teacher education 85%; higher education 89%; education for adults 86%.

Here we are invited to give credibility to the judgements in paragraph 2 through the sheer weight of numbers provided in paragraph 1, and the spurious exactitude of the percentages set out. There is no information on how these judgements have been arrived at. Yet the problems of ensuring reliability across such a vast range of data are formidable. It would be less serious that these are ignored in the report itself if

we could check them in the various publications referred to, but we cannot, because they are not discussed there either.

It might be argued that issues of reliability and validity are of concern only to academics, and of marginal interest to the teaching profession. This would be a mistake. Teachers are aware and articulate about these issues in relation to the inspection of their own schools, though they are more likely to phrase them in terms of relevance, accuracy and fairness. Both developments in schools and participation in advanced courses have resulted in the profession becoming more knowledgeable about the methodology of evaluation, and about the political and ethical issues involved. Individual teachers and schools may seldom comment on HMI general reports, but they are well aware that these are frequently, indeed normally, used by the media to belabour the teaching profession. The recent heavily criticised HMI report on *GCSE Examinations, Quality and Standards* [17] was no different in its form of presentation than previous HMI reports. The difference was that instead of judging a large number of relatively powerless schools and teachers, it judged a small number of powerful examining groups, who were prepared to point out its inadequacies.

HMI might wish to argue that they cannot be held responsible for the uses to which their judgements are put, and that they frequently point out the pressures and difficulties under which teachers work and commend them for their achievements. The second point can be conceded, but the first is more controversial. In the first place unsubstantiated opinion and judgement more easily form a basis for political posturing than for informed discussion. Whilst to include a methodological discussion in all reports might make them unwieldy, HMI could well have published a much more substantial account of their methodology and training, and should have been willing to respond to particular issues of concern. Moreover, leaving aside methodological issues, for a newspaper to translate an HMI claim that one third of the lessons they observed involved poor teaching and that a third of all teachers were “not up to the job”, [18] or that 28% of lessons being poor or very poor meant that 28% of secondary schools were poor or very poor [19] is an irresponsible misuse of information, and there is no reason why HMI should not point this out. Similarly, they could also comment on the blatant selectivity of media reporting. For instance, the Senior Chief Inspector’s 1992 comment that 73% of lessons in maintained secondary schools were satisfactory or better, was used by a number of papers to emphasise that 27% were poor. The fact that 25% of lessons in private schools were also judged poor was little commented on and nor was any suggestion made that, given the minimal presence of disadvantaged pupils in private schools, the

overall performance of the maintained sector might be considered better.

Conclusion

The failure of HMI to be involved in any discussion of their work means that, just as they have not been accountable to individual schools, they have not been accountable to the profession as a whole. They have been able to publish their judgements and walk away from the effects. This somewhat Olympian detachment is unacceptable in a situation where the schools themselves are increasingly held accountable for their performance. There is no space here to comment on indications for future practice, but I think it important that the necessary scrutiny of the privatised inspectorate should not draw attention from the need for a much more open and informed discussion of the practice of HMI in their new ‘Ofsted’ location.

Notes

- [1] J. Rosenhead (1992) Politics of the gut reaction, *The Guardian*, 5 May 1992.
- [2] DFE (1992) *Choice and Diversity: a new framework for schools*. Cm 2021. London: HMSO.
- [3] Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales (1989) *Assuring Quality in Education: the role of local education authority inspectors and advisers*. London: HMSO.
- [4] HMI (1991) *Culloden Primary School: a report by HMI*. 101/91/P.
- [5] e.g. Hillgate Group (1986) *Whose Schools? A Radical Manifesto*.
- [6] A. Hargreaves (1988) Teaching quality: a sociological analysis, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 20(3).
- [7] L. Chisholm (1987) Vorsprung ex machina? Aspects of curriculum and assessment in cultural comparison, *Journal of Educational Policy*, 2(2).
- [8] D. Scott (1989) HMI reporting of the GCSE, *Journal of Educational Policy*, 4(3).
- [9] J. Elliott & D. Ebbutt (1986) How do HMI judge educational quality?, *Curriculum*, 17(3).
- [10] HMI (1989) *HMI: its work and publications*. London: HMSO.
- [11] HMI (1990) *HMI in the 1990s: the work of HMI*. London: HMSO.
- [12] See Elliott & Ebbutt (note 9)
- [13] DES (1986) *Reporting Inspections: HMI methods and procedures*.
- [14] HMI (1978) *Primary Education in England*. London: HMSO.
- [15] HMI (1979) *Aspects of Secondary Education in England*. London: HMSO.
- [16] HMI (1988) *Secondary Schools: an appraisal by HMI*. London: HMSO.
- [17] HMI (1992) *GCSE Examinations, Quality and Standards*. London: HMSO.
- [18] *The Times*, 22 July 1987.
- [19] *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 February 1991.

A Post-16 Common Curriculum

Alan Payne

Alan Payne trained as a geography teacher and taught in comprehensive schools in the Midlands and South Wales before moving to his present post as a member of the senior management team of a comprehensive school in East Anglia. In this article he makes the case for a common curriculum at the post-16 stage.

Such is the momentum of change in education at the moment that comment on any recent development leaves you with the uneasy suspicion that it will be outdated on publication. However, for post-16 education it seems that with all the tinkering around the edges little has changed. Despite the increase in vocational courses and many arguments in favour of a thorough reassessment of the system, A-levels are still with us. What I would like to suggest in this article is that, while it is necessary to go back to basics, a return to the principles of comprehensive education and the establishment of a common curriculum are aspects of post-16 education that still need to be considered.

The basic difficulty is that institutions cannot ignore recent additions to the post-16 curriculum, however much they may find the underlying philosophy lacking in rigour. In a recent article in *Forum* (Vol. 34, No. 1) Andy Green lucidly outlines the deficiencies in the government's recent thinking on education and training. The suggestion is that this latest meddling with the post-16 curriculum simply delays the much needed fundamental review of qualifications and courses and at most provides a "marginally greater flexibility for transfer and combination within different areas". Whilst they may be sympathetic to this view, schools and colleges have little alternative but to absorb the new proposals and plan accordingly. Whatever their individual opinions, establishments cannot afford to resist recent recommendations about vocational qualifications at a competitive time when every post-16 student brings in extra cash.

Nevertheless, I think it is still incumbent upon the profession to redefine exactly what post-16 students ought to be doing. Green suggests that a comprehensive tertiary system may still emerge. Yet, for many of us, comprehensive education has always been associated with a common curriculum. Consequently, I would argue that while current government decisions continue to prolong the divisive of the post-16 phase, there is some worth in starting from the basic principles of a common entitlement as happens in the earlier years of secondary education and use these as the basis for post-16 curriculum development.

The notion of an 11-16 common curriculum has, of course, been a long-standing feature of secondary education. Debating what ought to be taught in secondary schools has involved many teachers and writers in countless hours of fruitful discussion. I say 'fruitful' because being able to be part of any decision of what is taught in schools is a vital way of retaining the professional support of teachers. It is not insignificant that this aspect of our professionalism has been eroded.

In the last two decades we have come a long way since the compulsory curriculum of John White (1973) or the common culture curriculum of Denis Lawton (1975). It is possible to track the thread of the debate from these authors through the publications of HMI to the National Curriculum. During this time, many more individuals have made an input into curriculum planning – parents, governors, educationalists, and government continue to express their opinions and so they should. More recently, the government has rather dominated the debate by introducing its own version of the common curriculum for 5- to 16-year-olds, and enshrining it in law. Unfortunately, dominated as it is by subjects, the National Curriculum lacks the strong philosophical basis that emanated from such works as those of Lawton and White or the series of HMI reports in the late '70s and early '80s. As Lawton has himself stated:

Nearly all the arguments in favour of a national curriculum have been associated with egalitarian campaigns for wider educational opportunities, or expressions of children's rights of access to worthwhile educational experiences. But now we are faced with arguments in favour of a national curriculum which have superficial similarities with those put forward earlier to support the principle of a common, or common culture, curriculum. (Lawton, 1988, p. 10)

Lawton goes on to argue that the National Curriculum is symptomatic of a minimalist approach. It supports a low-level basic National curriculum enforced by tests, and is characterised by segregation, accountability and value for money. With the suggestion that vocational courses may permeate down to 14-16, there is a chance that segregation may become even more entrenched and this is exactly what Lawton warned against. At post-16 the problem of segregation has been a permanent problem, although, to be fair, direct comparisons are difficult because of ability to leave school at 16. What I want to suggest, however, is that we return to the principles of the common curriculum but for post-16 education too. With A-levels firmly in place and education and training still separated it is much easier to maintain the existing structure and plan in a piecemeal fashion. This is a disservice not only to young people but also to our own professionalism. What I wish to foster here is the idea that there seems no logical reason why the common curriculum ought not to be applied to post-16 students as well.

Two personal examples serve to illustrate the point. As a teacher of sixth-formers for many years, I have been constantly reminded of the need for a more comprehensive response to their needs. One instance of this is the potential

difficulty of running tutorial programmes for two groups of students – those on the A-level trail and those on a one-year vocational course. Although at certain times of the year, one or other group may need particular attention, such as in applying for higher or further education, it is very easy to exacerbate the difference and lose sight of the fact that there may be common needs. Since students on a vocational course in my case form a minority, a loss of their self-esteem is a possible outcome.

A couple of years ago, I met a former A-level student who had just completed her first term in higher education. I had taught her geography and she remarked how useful she had found the course in understanding world issues and problems since going to college. Her opinion was unsolicited and I must admit to feeling a deep sense of satisfaction and pride. It served to remind me of the disadvantages that non-geographers possess in missing out on that essential spatial perspective and understanding. Before I eulogise too much and push for compulsory geography for all post-16 students, I have to seriously suggest that perhaps techniques of geographical enquiry are vital. Simultaneously, however, I can hear the historians, scientists, linguists and others putting forward similar proposals about other subjects and why not?

The two examples highlight different aspects of the same problem. At 16 students are given freedom of choice, in the context of plenty of advice and encouragement, to choose the next stage of their life and career. The emphasis is on divergence, however, and in schools and colleges this is emphasised by the increase in the types of courses as they wish to attract more students. Whilst institutions endeavour to promote AS levels and vocational or foundation courses and hope that the student numbers correspondingly increase, the common threads of post-16 education, maybe in the form of a common curriculum, are in danger of being lost.

I realise that for those who profess that post-16 education is about complete choice, a common curriculum is an irrelevance. Many young people have, of course, made the choice not to continue in any form of education at all. That should not be an argument, however, for maintaining that a common curriculum is not worth our consideration for those who choose to continue – hence my plug for geographical skills. In the same way that many comprehensive schools have settled on a common curriculum for 11-16 (with or without the National Curriculum), it seems totally logical to use the same principles of entitlement after 16, especially when the profession is being encouraged to boost post-16 numbers. The young person who comes into the sixth-form with just a few low-grade GCSEs requires just as much consideration as any other in terms of dignity and self-esteem. The fact that he or she is not taking A-levels does not make his or her needs any different.

It would be salutary if the common needs came first. What do we want all our post-16 students to achieve and to experience? As much as I would wish the common elements of the curriculum to come first in planning the timetable, I realise that the ‘gold standard’ of A-levels is still sufficiently at the forefront in many establishments that the common curriculum, if it exists at all, is the last priority. Since a school has to survive on its sixth-form numbers, who can blame it for playing the strongest card first?

For many years, of course, many schools have paid lip service to the common curriculum by way of a general studies

course which can even feature as an examination syllabus. Whilst there are signs that many institutions take the task seriously, lack of time and staff militates against a common curriculum. The divisiveness of post-16 education exacerbates this problem. As the number of students has grown so have the courses. Registration may be the only time some of the students meet together formally. Work experience, if it is only for vocational students, actually takes them out of school and emphasises that division. Establishments certainly recognise these differences but may find it hard to accommodate all that they would wish. Work experience for all may be impossible to timetable.

It does not help that the government has failed to start with a clean slate and plan anew. Instead A-levels remain the benchmark of excellence and everything else is tacked on around them. The White Papers published in May 1991 still accept the premise that two types of people exist, those with an academic bent and those with a vocational one. As Graham Phillips remarked in *The Times Educational Supplement* (10 May 1991), “there will continue to be a twintrack curriculum/examination framework led by A-levels, with NVQs as the alternative route”. It remains to be seen whether the Advanced Diploma to be made available in 1994 really brings greater coherence to 18 to 19 education training as the government hopes.

In the meantime what approach can be tackled? Rather than impose subjects, a post-16 curriculum can focus upon areas of experience, learning methods and modes of enquiry. A centrally imposed course that lacks qualifications is likely to find little favour among students. My own school, for example, is a member of a TVEI consortium which is tackling the whole business of post-16 core skills. Yet, whilst it is one thing to decide what these are, it is more difficult to put them into practice across all courses, not just A-level. It is even more unlikely that students can be persuaded that a certain combination of subjects or courses is advisable because the skills they offer are of paramount importance. Furthermore if, for example, the skills of a vocational course are deemed relevant to A-level, how often are the two considered together? It is more probable that lack of staffing and timetable stringencies prevent such a possibility and the compulsory period of tutorial work has to fulfil that task instead.

It may be that the tertiary college is more readily equipped to tackle the problem than are schools with sixth-forms and can offer a common entitlement more successfully, but with grant-maintained (GM) status it is unlikely that all sixth-forms will diminish. Quite the opposite in fact, since a GM school without a sixth form may decide to form one. If so, it is likely that the school faces the market with certificated courses first and relegates any thought of a common curriculum to a minor position.

What is needed is a total rethink of the post-16 system. This is crucial at a time when growing numbers are staying on and unemployment is high. Neither can the government in the case of training credits simply throw money at education in the hope that the present structure can adapt. While I would not wish the same unco-ordinated reappraisal of compulsory education to take place as happened with the National Curriculum, I would suggest that the notion of a post-16 common curriculum operating nationally is not out of the question.

To this end, schools and colleges cannot operate alone.

As part of the TVEI network, the local consortium of establishments in Huntingdon, where I work, has a regular forum to discuss post-16 education. Whilst the initiative itself concludes in 1994, the establishments have pledged to continue to work together discussing curriculum issues and build on existing networks. This is to happen despite the fact that some establishments are to become grant-maintained and that, in theory, each is in competition with the others. This is the environment conducive to progress, one in which schools and colleges share expertise and vision

and together create the space needed to maintain a tradition of curriculum development.

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The Implementation of the National Curriculum in History

University of Birmingham History Educators' Group [1]

Jim Campbell, writing in 1989, characterised the National Curriculum as "an experiment whose outcome is uncertain and whose hypotheses are to be put to the test in schools". It was, he argued "a set of hunches in search of evidence".[2] In the summer of 1992 we took a fairly lengthy questionnaire into ten primary and fifteen secondary schools in three Midlands LEAs. On a practical level as history teacher educators we wanted to know what problems and opportunities our students would face when going into schools. On a deeper level we wanted to find out how the teaching of history in schools was being affected by the statutory requirements. By gathering such information we felt we would be able to argue from knowledge rather than mere opinion about what is needed in the future. We include below a summary of our findings which we are aware are limited and quite localised, but nonetheless relevant. The information presented here pre-dates the National Curriculum Primary Review and may support or contradict NCC conclusions. It also has value as a 'snapshot', capturing the first stage of Campbell's 'experiment'. Finally, although as individuals we work within either the primary or the secondary sector we have included in our concluding remarks observations which relate to the teaching of history from 5 to 16 as the Order for history intends.

History in the Primary School

The majority of the history co-ordinators we approached felt that the place of history in the primary school had been strengthened with the introduction of the National Curriculum. They commented favourably on the

requirements to use source materials, to teach chronology and to include women's and non-European history as factors which had enhanced history's position in schools. There were dissenting voices among those surveyed: one teacher stated that teachers were now 'unsure' because before they had taught what they were 'confident about and interested in', and another simply stated that 'the Orders were an additional burden on a demoralised work force'. It is important to stress that such dissenting voices were in a minority.

Co-ordinators were then asked to identify specific changes that had occurred with regard to history's place in the primary curriculum. Two main areas of change were identified: the development of whole-school policy statements for history and a 'culture shift' in the way in which the teaching of history was organised. We did not ask for details of policy statements but it was clear from the replies that schools on the whole were recycling NCC statements without question or, worse, were confusing a policy statement with a curriculum plan and simply stating what would be taught and when. In Key Stage 1 history was taught through a cross-curricular approach in all but one of the schools, the exception being a school where history was allocated a separate half hour slot every week. In over half of the schools history was taught as a separate subject in Key Stage 2, with its time allocation varying between 1 and 2½ hours per week. The evidence would suggest that in the case of history, David Hart's call for the last two years of primary education to be based on subject teaching is already a reality.

Half of the schools reported that they were finding it difficult to teach all of the History Study Units (HSUs) in

the time available. When questioned further, teachers revealed that their concerns here related to the amount of specific subject knowledge they had to cover in each of the Units rather than the breadth of the history curriculum. Teachers also described difficulties they encountered in gaining access to documentary evidence, acquiring and storing artefacts and building up collections of relevant photographs. All of the schools had organised site visits but cost was a big problem for half of the schools. The use of computer-based materials was identified as being particularly problematic because of a combination of cost, the paucity of good packages and a lack of teacher expertise.

In the area of assessment teachers were divided over the value of the statements of attainment, with half of them stating that they were 'helpful' and 'a good guide to levels of progress' and the remainder variously describing the levels as 'irrelevant', 'misleading' and 'confusing'. Those teachers who expressed concern about the statements all agreed that the ordering of the levels did not reflect children's learning progress in reality. Teachers were also divided in their judgements about the range of attainments demonstrated by pupils, with two thirds of the schools reporting a wide range of pupil attainment at both age 7 and at age 11. All of the schools reported some difficulties in assessing children's learning in history. The most common difficulties recounted included: designing activities to realise the ATs; interpreting the evidence; and a lack of time. Teachers were then asked about the sharing of information about pupils and their achievement at point of transfer. No school reported the development of any formal system for sharing information; profiling a pupil's performance in history at either 7 or 11. Some schools did report some curriculum liaison across Key Stages.

All of the teachers consulted had received some local authority training in the implementation of National Curriculum history. The quality of this training varied with teachers in one LEA generally agreeing that it had been 'useful' and had succeeded in 'raising awareness', while in the other, it was variously described as 'patchy', 'inadequate', 'of little use' and 'rushed'. None of the schools in either LEA had used the NCC history Inset materials and, indeed, only two history co-ordinators had actually seen the materials.

Finally, the history co-ordinators were asked to review their own role in the implementation of the statutory Orders and to identify their continuing professional development needs. This review produced a detailed profile too detailed to include here of the skills that had been demanded of them during the academic year. The range of these demands can be deduced from the five training needs most commonly identified: assessment; updating subject content knowledge; teaching strategies for meeting individual pupil needs; developing a whole-school history policy; and skills associated with the successful delivery of INSET.

History in the Secondary School

Every department we approached now teaches history separately, two-thirds of them beginning with mixed ability classes. Few history departments appear to have special provision for children with different special needs, one-fifth of them having lost previous support to other subjects. The amount of time allocated to history varies considerably, ranging between 60 and 105 minutes a week. Every school wants more time but most do not expect to get it.

The syllabus has proved to be an area of major change despite the fact that two of the most commonly chosen study units for year seven have been the Roman Empire and Medieval Realms, both taught in some measure somewhere in KS3 in former days. All the schools but one have already had to revise their syllabus for year seven. Three-fifths of the schools found that the requirement to teach history from a variety of perspectives was making them introduce aspects of history previously ignored or little touched. It seemed also that the National Curriculum was stimulating a slight increase in studies of women's history, European history and even local history but the overriding impression given was that much of this was not being particularly stressed. Three heads of department believed that the Supplementary Study Unit (SSU), a study unit involving non-European study, would enable them to teach more multicultural history, but an equal number deplored having to reduce their teaching on this because of the new requirements.

When asked about different historical sources the departments appeared to have few difficulties except in the case of music. Three-fifths already went on site visits but all stressed problems of organisation and time. Greater intrinsic opposition was shown against the use of computer based materials where four-fifths of the departments had considerable difficulties of access, organisation and time: some certainly not seeing the need for history to soak up time on an activity already taught elsewhere and by experts.

Only one third of those questioned felt that they had had to adapt their teaching methods to teach AT1 and AT3 but half thought this on AT2. The introduction of the statements of attainment (SoA) and assessing pupils upon them, however, has obviously signalled a huge change and not one welcomed by the majority of these teachers. For most the SoA were 'confusing' and half said that they were 'misleading'. Only a minority found them 'helpful' or 'a good guide to levels of progress or ability'. The problems of framing the right questions and tasks, gaining sufficient time to gauge pupils' levels correctly and assessing meaningfully were matched by lack of faith in the SoA as a means to accurate assessment anyway.

All but one of the schools assessed pupils' progress through tasks set for this purpose but arising out of ordinary class work, but two-fifths of the schools set special tests at the end of the study unit as well and one set only these. It was obvious that most teachers were wary, even bewildered as to how to explain the system to the children and even more so to parents.

Planning appears to have become more precise with just over half the departments having a detailed scheme for their National Curriculum work and the others a loose one. Just under half of the departments have links with other subjects and two thirds believe that they have taught to cross-curricular themes in year seven but it would seem that as yet such teaching is included if it is already part of the course rather than as a focal point.

One link which does appear to have been strengthened because of the National Curriculum is that with feeder schools. Nearly half the departments have begun to co-operate with these and another quarter intend to do so in future.

Broadly speaking, apart from the obvious concentrated effort which had to be made in planning for the National Curriculum, more problems appeared to be raised than opportunities by it. One of the most pressing problems is

that of time with every department acutely worried about how they could cover the content let alone meet the other statutory requirements of the Order. Again and again teachers pleaded for the prescribed content to be reduced. Even though they might like the framework they wanted greater flexibility given to teachers within it, yet lack of time means that some departments are already cutting the time given to the supplementary study units – a golden area for flexibility, active learning and attention to such important issues as equal opportunities. One department, for example, had covered castles and cathedrals in five weeks.

Similarly, worry over the lack of appropriate resources for the new syllabus was widespread. The use of former materials was often not possible. A lot of hope was invested in books specifically written for National Curriculum history but some of these were found to be less helpful than anticipated or too wordy and complicated for slower pupils for whom there is little available. Furthermore, the difficulty of obtaining sufficient, or any, new books for years eight and nine was stated by many. The problem also of limited accessibility to some resources such as videos and especially computers is obviously a serious hindrance to fulfilling the requirements of the National Curriculum as are the problems over site visits.

A quarter of the respondents brought up the unsolicited response that there was a danger that teachers were now teaching to the statutory requirements rather than responding to pupils' needs, but there was no general disagreement with the overall attainment targets. It was the actual addressing of the statements of attainment which emerged as one of the biggest problems facing history teachers, a widespread dislike of such a focus on attainment being matched by a sense of confusion about the whole process.

Faced with these many problems, many felt that there was a further lack of proper in-service training for the National Curriculum. Over half the departments complained that they had had only a little of this and were not over-complimentary about that although, of course, all the training took place under the stress of speed and constant change. For future needs time was consistently demanded and much more training on assessment and recording.

It was not that teachers saw no opportunities in the new regulations but more that some of the problems made it very difficult to realise these. Overall the impression gained was that many heads of department were satisfied that they had been developing worthwhile, interesting and enjoyable courses before the National Curriculum and that the advent of the latter had added little of worth beyond a useful framework, a concentration of minds and a focussing of effort valuable though these were. Those interviewed stressed the relentless pressure they had been under to meet the requirements and feared that the principal victims of this would be the pupils whose interest and success in the subject would be lost.

History 5–16

It cannot be doubted that teachers are working determinedly to ensure success for the new curriculum and that the place of history in schools has been strengthened. Teachers in both the primary and secondary sectors expressed concerns over 'content overload'. The NCC's curriculum review may resolve some of the difficulties encountered in the primary sector but there is a real risk, to borrow Jim Sweetman's

phrase, "of losing the growing curriculum baby along with the bathwater".[3] Primary teachers expressed concerns about the depth of content knowledge required by the existing Order, not the breadth. Secondary teachers worried about too many SUs but there is a worry that if one were cut it might be one of the valuable SSUs. The danger is that with the continued ascendancy of the right-wing educational lobby the very areas singled out by teachers – the use of evidence, women's and non-European history – may be lost and replaced by manageable national history topics and an associated digest of facts which can be easily tested.

Primary schools are having to implement the Orders without having time to debate the purpose of school history and as a result the scaffolding for supporting effective history teaching is not in place. Successful primary history teaching, as the DES stated in 1989 [4], is dependent upon schools having clear aims about the knowledge, skills and attitudes to impart and a consistent approach to planning and assessment. Schools are developing time management strategies in order to manage change but the situation is exacerbated by the sheer volume of reports and circulars landing on school doorsteps which results in useful supporting documents not reaching those individuals who could make best use of them.

Time also is at the heart of the problems faced by secondary teachers. Familiarity with both the Order and with the resources available and the publication of better resources will all obviously ease some of the initial problems of implementing National Curriculum history. Greater financial help should be forthcoming from the government if it wants its own legislation to work. There is an immediate and continuing need for more in-service training which must be impressed upon headteachers and governors allocating their budgets. Such training would do well to facilitate that sharing of experience amongst teachers which all those in the survey praised and to consider the planning of whole study units so that all the programme of study requirements are met, the assessment of different levels of attainment and planning across key stages.

Whatever change may take place the problems of time, planning, assessment, progression and continuity across the key stages are generic and will remain. Teachers need to be equipped with the intellectual ability and flexibility to meet these demands. Equally they need to have time to reflect on their new learning and experience and thus be able to form a wider and deeper view of the teaching of history. As SEAC says, "There must be recognition that effective practice in assessment, recording and reporting takes time to develop: everything cannot be done at once".[5]

Notes

- [1] This article has been written by two history teacher educators both based at the University of Birmingham: Ian Grosvenor at Newman College and Ruth Watts at the School of Education. Together with Paul Bracey, who is researching separately on history and the humanities, we have been investigating how the National Curriculum in history has been implemented in both primary and secondary schools, what effects this has had and what are the implications of these for both initial teacher and in-service training.
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Environmental Education – where now?

John Howson

Before becoming Senior Education Officer for Friends of the Earth, John Howson taught Rural and Environmental Science for nine years and was head of department at Prince Henry's High School in Evesham.

Environmental concern among young people is live and kicking. Every week over 800 children and young people write for information on environmental issues to Friends of the Earth alone.

Environmental education is a cross-curricular theme in the National Curriculum, and environmental issues are covered in geography and science. Yet environmental education in our schools has a long way to go in becoming established. This is particularly true because young people will increasingly need knowledge of the environment in a world of growing environmental crisis. Their need is greater than current resources can supply in all but a few schools.

A recent survey by the RSPB found that only 2 out of 10 Secondary schools in Wales has a written policy for environmental education (*Environmental Education in Wales*, 1991). The situation in the rest of the UK is much the same. Few schools have appointed cross-curricular co-ordinators for environmental education, even fewer have made concerted efforts to run a green establishment. However, it would be wrong to believe that this lack of coverage is due to a lack of concern among teachers or any absence of desire to teach the issues. There are many factors contributing to this situation but there are two that are worth highlighting. Firstly, many of the teachers are not trained to teach about environmental issues; secondly, many teachers simply do not have time in a busy curriculum to fit in environmental education.

To add to these problems, those few advisory posts that do exist within local authorities for environmental education specialists are under threat. This is due to recent legislation and the squeeze on local authorities.

So where does environmental education go from here?

One of the first points to make is a historical one. Environmental education as it is currently represents a marriage of various areas of study: Environmental Science, Rural Studies, and Urban Studies to name a few. To some extent these diverse roots have led to a fragmented community of practitioners; there are several different national organisations, for instance, representing these different traditions.

This diverse base is both a boon and an impediment to the further progress of environmental education. A boon because the different traditions have helped to ease the transition for environmental education from a subject area to being cross-curricular. An impediment because there is still much innate conservatism within parts of the education establishment that labels 'environment' within the traditional bounds that tended to be set by these traditions.

Those in environmental education, and in the environmental movement, have long got past the stage of

seeing environmental education as consisting of such tasks as school gardening, building a nature garden or sorting out the school's litter problem (if indeed they ever saw it that way).

However, that is exactly how many members of the general public still see environmental education.

To pursue the example of the nature garden it is obvious that creating a nature garden at school and coming to grips with some of the planet's urgent environmental problems requires a different set of skills. That is not to say that the nature garden does not have a value; it clearly does both for developing practical skills and discovering the local environment. However, having taken part in developing one is not a necessary condition of becoming environmentally aware.

Indeed, it could be argued that building a nature garden could be counterproductive because the whole school's grounds should be seen as an environmental resource, not just part of them. To promote environmental understanding we need to get beyond confining the natural world to controllable chunks of our world. What is necessary is to establish a link between all of our actions and what takes place in the wider world. Within this context running the school grounds in an environmentally responsible way, which may include establishing wild areas, can be seen as one positive step in the right direction. However, it is not the first and not the only one. If all a school does is to build a nature garden, if it does not evaluate its energy use and recycling policy, then it could simply be reinforcing popular prejudice.

Our view of environmental education needs to be both positive and proactive. The school's own behaviour toward the environment should be recognised as just as important a part of the curriculum as what is taught in the classroom. Environmental education should start with the needs of young people. Educators need to go beyond simply saying that young people need to be informed to saying that young people have a right to be well educated environmentally. Indeed they have a right to know what they can do *now* to protect the environment. It is something that they can legitimately insist on, since clearly decisions taken on these issues will affect their futures.

At its best environmental education should be seen as positive and indeed celebratory of life. It should underpin the use of human technical and scientific ingenuity to solve ecological problems and therefore benefit both human beings and the natural world (such as, for example, encouraging the development of renewable energy such as wind and wave power).

It should reinforce the use of language through literature

and poetry to depict the world in which we live. Environmental education should be as exciting as it is positive so that young people are not left feeling gloomy and helpless. It should be as empowering as it is fascinating, feeding on the natural curiosity of children to explore their surroundings.

Introducing concepts of the environment can indeed heighten the appeal that a subject has for young people, as many teachers report. Rather than appearing boringly establishment or irrelevant to the life young people lead, good environmental education relates directly to young people's experience. This is why in part many young people respond so well to learning about the environment.

Indeed there are lots of instances of children leading a school down the road to becoming more environmentally aware. Coleraine Girls' School in Northern Ireland is an example of such a school. The school won Friends of the Earth's 'Going Green' competition to find a greener school. In the case of Coleraine a group of young people led by one enthusiastic teacher set out to inspire a whole school and beyond to the wider community. Through a series of environmental projects the school involved an increasing number of young people. Projects developed by the group showed not only a heightened environmental awareness but also an increasing level of political awareness.

The teaching of environmental issues should not just highlight the ecological problems that exist in the world today. It should give young people a cognitive model which can be used to help solve future problems and to provide a basis for change. True, questioning our environmental imperatives puts some previous philosophy in doubt (such as the idea that an economy can grow unendingly) but this

A Whole School Approach

In my view making such links is the first step to running a greener curriculum. However, simply emphasising the importance of the environment is not enough. Unless the emphasis of the curriculum is underpinned by what actually goes on in the school in terms of running the establishment, what is taught is of less value. As the National Curriculum Council document *Curriculum Guidance 7* says (p. 13):

The spirit and ethos of the school contribute significantly towards the development of caring attitudes towards the environment. Pupils cannot be expected to value what is clearly not valued by the schools. The way a school building and grounds are managed, displays in the school and links with the community all tell their own story.

If one is to give the environment a priority it is necessary to go one stage further and say that the running of the school establishment is of equal importance to what goes on in the curriculum. If our institutions care about the environment in the way they are organised then this caring is more likely to become innate in those who attend them. There is no part of human activity that does not impact in some way on the environment (good as well as bad), therefore there should be no aspect of our activity which we do not consider in relation to the wider world.

In order for environmental education to really become established in schools, it is going to be necessary for the teacher to relate the environment to her or his subject area. In order for this to happen greater resources will need to be put into training teachers both at initial stage and through INSET. Ultimately, since schools decide their own budgets, the decision whether or not to give the environment a priority

The National Curriculum and the Environment

<i>Cross-curricular themes</i>	<i>Subjects within current National Curriculum, containing environmental elements</i>	<i>Subjects which readily lend themselves to the inclusion of environmental elements within current curricular limitations</i>
Health Studies		
Economic Awareness	Science	English, Mathematics
Education for Citizenship	Geography	History, Modern Languages
Environmental Education	Technology	Movement and Dance

questioning is necessary and valid, if we are ever going to develop a sustainable society.

The process of linking action with awareness should happen at every level within the curriculum. Traditional educational philosophy has tended to see all subject areas as being made up of discrete areas of knowledge, each characterised by its own type of thought. This approach puts the emphasis on the differences between subjects rather than the similarities and overlaps.

Too often specialisation has meant that the implications of a set of actions in the environment were not taken account of. However, through such work as that carried out at the Global Education Centre in York a different perspective has begun to emerge. Their concept of Global Studies puts the emphasis on the links between subjects rather than the differences. This means that areas of study such as environmental understanding become central to a subject rather than peripheral.

will increasingly be left up to the schools. But since budgets are incredibly tight, cross-curricular themes are likely to get a low priority.

Ultimately, environmental educationists must look to central government, who have said that they are committed to environmental education both in the environment White Paper *This Common Inheritance* and in *Agenda 21* (which arose out of the UNCED conference on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro). There are various ways in which central government could encourage environmental education. It could be a compulsory part of the curriculum rather than optional; for instance, money could be given to schools through such mechanisms as the GEST programme (formerly education support grant). Further encouragement could be given to schools by including environmental issues within revised National Curriculum Documents. Whether any of these measures actually happen depends in part on political priorities; but if we miss the opportunity to develop

and channel children's environmental concern not only will the environment suffer, but our children too will have been sold short.

Friends of the Earth's Education Programme

Friends of the Earth have tried to develop resources around our philosophy of linking environmental awareness with action. Our pack *Green Your School* looks at the school itself from an environmental point of view. In all our materials we try to facilitate the development of environmental understanding. This understanding aims to go beyond awareness to what is needed to bring about change including personal action and an understanding of the political and governmental options concerning the environment.

In 1991 Friends of the Earth launched a programme for schools under the flagship of 'School Friends', our teachers and schools subscription scheme. Through 'School Friends' teachers can receive our resources without any charge above the £25 annual subscription. Friends of the Earth also have

a youth section called 'Earth Action', which targets resources at young people wishing to take part in environmental campaigning. Through the programmes of organisations such as Friends of the Earth, young people can become active in environmental issues and be better informed.

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[For further information on 'School Friends' or Friends of the Earth publications contact Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ.]

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Helping 'Adam' to Achieve his GASP Level 1 Certificate

Brenda Hanson

Brenda Hanson is a science teacher and is in charge of Health Education at Crofton School in South-East London. This is a revised version of an assignment written for the University of Greenwich.

Starting from the viewpoint that teachers who undertake action research attempt in a variety of ways to move their teaching forward, by subjecting themselves and their practice to critical scrutiny, I decided to investigate why Adam in my tutor group 7HN, had not, thus far, satisfied the criteria needed to be awarded his level 1 Statement of Achievement from GASP.

The Graded Assessments in Science Project (GASP) is the science assessment scheme used by Crofton School at Key Stage 3. It has 15 levels of achievement and most pupils are expected to attain at least two levels per year. Pupils are therefore working towards realistic goals which are attainable within a relatively short space of time; this has proved to be a great motivator.

All pupils know what they have to achieve to obtain a particular level so they know *exactly* what is expected of them, what they have achieved and what they must aim for next. Another aspect of GASP is that it assesses pupils when they are ready – the assessments are not age-related. Having successfully completed a level of achievement, each pupil receives a very impressive certificate from the London East Anglian Group (LEAG) which shows quite clearly to whom the certificate is awarded, their date of birth and the level achieved. It also shows the various skills which had to be demonstrated by the pupil to reach that particular level.

As a further acknowledgement of each pupil's achievement, the certificates are presented at full school assemblies. To be awarded a certificate of achievement at level 1, pupils are assessed in two aspects of scientific activity:

1. *Content*: Pupils follow a 6 week unit of work and are then tested on their knowledge and understanding of scientific content. This is in the form of a test paper containing multiple choice questions, boxed word questions and a few recall questions. The presentation and language used consist of short, straightforward sentences; there is a minimum use of scientific and technical vocabulary. The pass mark for each test is 75%. Two tests must be passed for level 1.

2. *Explorations*: These are devised to introduce pupils to scientific investigations. They are expected to plan and carry out their own investigations and to use skills such as prediction, observation and evaluation. Two explorations must be passed for level 1, in addition to the two content tests.

7HN is a mixed ability class of 11-12 year olds. There are thirty pupils altogether, six girls and twenty-four boys. According to their reading performance grouping from primary school, four are band 1, seventeen are band 2 and nine are band 3. Adam is band 3.

So, according to crude statistics, 7HN is weighted more towards the 'lower ability' range. And yet, by the beginning

of the Spring term of their first year at Crofton, twenty-seven pupils have GASP level 1 and of those, twenty also have level 2.

Of the three members of the class who do not have level 1, two started late. Adam is the only original member of the class who has not achieved level 1. As stated, Adam is band 3, but eight of the nine band 3 members of the class have GASP level 1 and two of them also have level 2.

Why is Adam underachieving?

Looked at superficially, the fact that he lives with a single parent father who is illiterate, could be a major contributory factor to his low achievement. However, there is another boy of similar background in the class who has been able to achieve level 2.

As a teacher, I am unable to control factors outside the classroom which may inhibit learning, but I feel strongly that the deficit theory must not be used to condone the failure of many teaching approaches in raising the achievement of disadvantaged children. It was on that basis that I approached this action research with a sense that through a reflection of my teaching methods, and a consequent improvement in my teaching strategies, I might be able to raise Adam's level of achievement in his science lessons.

The Research

To help me make a start in identifying how I could change my teaching in order to enable Adam to secure GASP level 1, I decided to video 7HN during one of their science lessons.

I took the lesson as usual, but asked a colleague to operate the video camera for me. I felt that using a video camera would be more reliable than asking my colleague to simply observe the lesson. I knew exactly what I wanted to focus on and I would later be able to analyse the video myself, both at leisure and in detail. I would be able to make good use of the playback facility to carefully make a note of all the relevant occurrences. Also, without the video I would not have been able to observe Adam in a 'normal' science lesson with myself as the classroom teacher.

I was very pleased with the results of this method of enquiry because it was very revealing. Once the children had got over the initial excitement of being filmed, they were not inhibited and worked as normal so it was very illuminating for me to analyse my classroom practice.

From the video observation, I was able to see that Adam's underachievement was not because of disruptive behaviour in lessons. He was well behaved for most of the lesson with only one lapse (a game of 'thumb war'), and he engaged in only one conversation that was not about the work in hand. Nor did other pupils distract him from the given tasks.

Rather, Adam's main problem was that he spent a large

part of the lesson daydreaming or playing with his pen, pencil or pencil case. This was done at times when it was very important for him to be listening to the teacher. As a result, he missed most, if not all of the instructions given to the class and had to rely on his best friend to show him or tell him what to do.

Another observation I made from the video is how easy it is for a teacher not to notice Adam's behaviour during the lesson. He is not disruptive and is very quiet, and while 7HN are a very well behaved and well motivated class, there are one or two pupils who tend to sit and talk too much, and it was to them that I gave most of my attention.

Although I was able to videotape only one of my lessons due to the limitations of time and the availability of the equipment, I was able to observe Adam closely for four other science lessons which were taken by a student teacher during her two week initiation period. Even though I was not the classroom teacher and so the lessons were not 'normal' in that sense, Adam's behaviour during the lessons confirmed what I had already observed and concluded from the video of my own lesson.

As the second part of my research, I gave the whole class a questionnaire. The aim was to ascertain their feelings about their science lessons. I wanted to find out their attitudes towards their sense of achievement in science; and to make an analysis of the factors which influenced their positive or negative responses to the subject of science.

As their science teacher, I was very interested in how each child completed the questionnaire; however, my main purpose was to analyse Adam's responses.

I decided to use a questionnaire because it would be easy to administer and could be completed reasonably quickly by the whole class. Interviewing each child personally would have taken much longer. I also felt that I would get a more honest response from a questionnaire which the pupils were told would be confidential (they were told not to put their names on the forms), than from face-to-face interviews. I did not want the class to feel intimidated by my asking them questions about my own subject and being made to feel that they had to give me the 'right' answer.

Realising that I would have to be able to recognise Adam's paper, I decided to give his questionnaire an identifying number.

I was very pleased with the response of the class to the questionnaire. 92 per cent said they had enjoyed filling it in and asked if they could do others. Most of them felt valued and important because I was interested in their views. They also felt pleased to have been able to help me with my college research.

The most difficult aspect of doing the questionnaire was analysing the results. This was much more time consuming than I had thought it would be.

From the questionnaires, I was pleased to find that 64% of the class, including Adam, were very happy to be at Crofton School and that for 52% of them, science was their favourite lesson.

From Adam's questionnaire, I found out that he felt science lessons were 'okay' and that he couldn't think of a boring science lesson because "all science lessons were good". So clearly, Adam's failure was not because he perceived them as boring. He, in fact, found his science lessons to be better than he had thought they would be.

Most importantly, I found out that while he really enjoyed

being engaged in practical work, he particularly disliked doing written work. Also, he felt that he had made a lot of progress in science; that the big words you have to learn do make science difficult; and that he found it difficult to read both the questionnaire and his GASP test paper.

Intrigued by Adam's feeling that he had made a lot of progress in science, I decided to use a third method of enquiry – an interview.

Interviewing Adam informally proved very enjoyable because he is a very entertaining character and I was pleased to be able to hear his tone of voice and see his facial expressions while we discussed his science lessons.

The first thing Adam told me was that he did not "really understand science a lot". Having by now observed Adam closely in one of my science lessons, this did not surprise me at all. I was reminded of an excerpt from John Holt's *How Children Fail*: "he does not listen when you are explaining, and then says, 'I'm all mixed up'."

In spite of this, Adam felt that he had made a lot of progress in science because he now knew "what a test tube is and what a Bunsen burner is." He also knew how to tell if a substance had dissolved or not. He told me that if a substance was soluble it "disappeared".

During the interview Adam confirmed what he had written on his questionnaire, i.e. science had "lots of big words" and he found it difficult to read his GASP test paper.

When I asked him to read a worksheet for me, I found that he read better than I had expected but that he needed to spell some of the 'longer' words out loud (words such as: thinking, feeling, about). Having done that, he got most of them right.

Adam told me that he disliked written work because he found writing with a pen difficult. He was used to using a pencil in his primary school, and felt that using a pen slowed him down and stopped him finishing his work. He expressed particular concern about the amount of writing that had to be done before and after an exploration to get the required pass mark. This went towards explaining why he had yet to successfully complete his first exploration.

I then asked Adam what his father would say if he were to get a GASP certificate. Adam told me that his father "would say 'good boy' and would probably give me some money ... or give me some money to go to McDonalds".

Analysis of My Research

Having collated the information that I gathered from my three methods of enquiry, I believe that Adam uses avoidance techniques, such as rummaging through his pencil case for long periods of time, to avoid the experience of failure.

Although Adam has at least twenty pieces of equipment in his pencil case, he still finds it very difficult to locate a pen that works or even one single pencil.

He does not enjoy written work and I believe that his past experiences have left him deeply discouraged and with no faith in his ability. He no longer feels that he can achieve success or recognition for his written work but rather than cease to make any effort at all, he instead seeks to hide behind various excuses. Then, he can comfort himself with the belief that, "the reason I haven't succeeded is because I couldn't find a pen or pencil that worked".

And yet, Adam felt that he had "made a lot of progress in science". Why? I believe that this notion comes because we have a need to achieve because we don't like thinking

badly of ourselves. Therefore, his actually finding the required writing implement, albeit halfway through the lesson, has led to Adam creating the self-delusion that he has actually achieved something in the lesson. Or perhaps, his notion of success is created because of the success of his avoidance technique, i.e. he has achieved what he set out to do which was to do as little written work as possible.

From these observations, I have come to the conclusion that Adam's main reason for underachievement is low self esteem. This low self-esteem is further exacerbated by his poor reading and writing skills.

I believe that Adam's low self-esteem is as a direct result of his past experience of failure. Perhaps he has often been told that he is 'hopeless' and that his work is 'messy' and therefore he has come to believe it. As teachers we are sadly not always aware of the effect our comments have on the children we teach. Often we scold, criticise and humiliate children and this can serve only to heighten a child's negative evaluation of himself.

Adam's 'bizarre' behaviour in lessons has developed as a means of avoiding further hurt and humiliation and has led to his teachers having very low expectations of him.

Implementation

Having analysed my research, I decided to implement the following changes:

1. To move Adam to a seat nearer to my bench. In doing this, I will be able to support his concentration through eye contact and the direction of my 'teacher talk' to him. I will then be able to see any signals he might give if he is confused by my instructions and as a result, I will be able to adjust my language appropriately so that it becomes more accessible to him.

2. To monitor Adam more frequently and to ask him to respond to questions more often than at present. This is to make sure he is attentive but will also give me the opportunity to praise him publicly for correct answers. Evidence suggests that teachers often praise 'lows' less frequently than 'highs' for success and call on 'lows' less often to respond to questions.

In the past when I have asked a 'low achiever' a question and they have had difficulty in responding, I have tended to wait less time for their answer or I have called on someone else to answer the question instead. I believed this was a good thing to do because it saved the child embarrassment. But I now realise that this behaviour has probably added to the child's notion of their 'stupidity' and that instead, I should try to improve their responses by giving clues or repeating or rephrasing the question.

3. To allow Adam to use a pencil instead of a pen for his written work. Adam was used to using a pencil at his primary school and felt that using a pen slowed him down and prevented him finishing his work.

4. To help Adam locate a pen, pencil, ruler and rubber from his pencil case before the lesson starts. Having done this, I will ensure that his pencil case is then put safely away in his bag.

5. To prepare a large 'merit card' especially for Adam. This I will keep stuck to my bench where he can easily see it. I feel this will be necessary initially because Adam has a habit of losing things as part of his avoidance technique. This will continue until he develops the self-esteem needed so that he no longer has to use the strategy of losing things.

The idea will be to award Adam a merit for each piece of work successfully completed in science. I have decided on this action because small immediate rewards tend to be more effective than large delayed ones.

6. To work closely in the planning of lessons with the Special Needs department. This will ensure that well thought out strategies to support Adam's reading and understanding of teacher language can be implemented.

7. To see if team teaching can be occasionally carried out with members of the Special Needs department and if Adam can be given extra support when taking his GASP tests.

8. To ask the Special Needs department to test if he has a specific reading problem, such as dyslexia.

9. To ask the school nurse to check his eyes and ears.

The Results of My Implementation

When I first told Adam that he would get a merit for each piece of work successfully finished in science lessons, he smiled and yelled, "yes!". Later, having been given his first merit for a very pleasing piece of work, he asked, "Did you say that I can get a merit for every lesson?"

During that first lesson, I provided Adam with his pencil and ruler, and allowed him to do all his written work in pencil. This did make a big difference. Adam sat at the front bench and managed to keep up with the rest of the class starting his practical work with everyone else. I found it quite amusing when Adam was asked by Tommy, "Are we supposed to draw that?", and Adam quite confidently told him, "Yes!". It was probably the first time that Adam had *provided* guidance instead of being guided.

Since that first lesson, Adam has made slow but steady progress. He has managed to complete four pieces of work and has been very proud of them and his resulting merit marks. I have decided that when he gets his fifth merit mark, I will give him a large certificate to take home.

Recently when I asked Adam and several other children to rewrite their best piece of work so that I could display them on the wall in the classroom, he felt very proud to think of a piece of his work on the wall for others to see.

Adam has also managed to pass his first GASP test since I started my programme to tackle his underachievement.

Generally, Adam is much more attentive in lessons and responds well to any questions asked of him. He is less reliant on his best friend and is keen to do well. He responded very well when I gave him the responsibility of carrying around the day sheet for a week. Even though he forgot to collect it at the end of several lessons and had to be reminded by other members of the class, I believe it made him feel a more valued member of the class.

The main drawback to Adam's progress is still his dislike of written work. He now no longer spends time looking in his pencil case but instead will spend a long time drawing and then refining his diagrams. My awareness of this change in his strategies to avoid failure, has emerged because of my greater monitoring of his classroom behaviour; I have had to constantly encourage him to move on to the written work that has to be done, by praising his diagrams as finished products.

His most successful lessons have been the ones with the minimum amount of written work. This is the reason why several pieces of work including one exploration, have not been completed. I would like to be able to sit with Adam

and take him through each section of an exploration, because he still lacks the confidence to attempt these. But, this is very difficult to do with twenty-nine other children in the class, and sadly, the Special Needs department were unable to offer support during science lessons.

Although they were unable to do this, they did provide extra support for me in the preparation of lesson materials. I am now much more aware of the language I use when preparing worksheets and I have also tried to give more visual support to the language I use by the employment of overhead transparencies and also by demonstrating more practicals to the class before they then go on to do the practical themselves.

Conclusion

Since doing this action research, I have come to believe that teachers can successfully work on the self-esteem of a child. By focussing their approval and affection on a child, teachers can help that child to value themselves and increase their sense of worth.

Although Adam still finds it difficult to do all the written work required of him and even though he knows that he still has a long way to go to get his GASP level 1 certificate, I believe that the repercussions of my action research have helped to promote his feeling of success. He has experienced the positive effects of having his work praised, being given several merit marks, and of passing his first GASP test.

I have tried to encourage Adam with reassuring words and a smile for every successful task he has done, pointing out to him the progress he has made regardless of where he stands in relation to the others in the class, and I feel that a lot of the progress that he has made is as a result of his feeling that someone actually cares about him, is taking a special interest in him, and actually values his academic performances.

I also regret that many of Adam's teachers have accepted that 'he has no idea', as I have heard said of him, and therefore have only negative expectations of him. It would be interesting to do a case study on Adam to find out if he uses the same avoidance techniques in other lessons.

Recently Adam came to me and told me that he did not understand another of his subjects. From his wistful tone, I felt that he wished a strategy similar to the one adopted in his science lessons could also be adopted in that other lesson. As a result, I have discussed with my Head of Year the need for a meeting with all of Adam's teachers to discuss his progress and how we can encourage him more in future.

My results show that Adam can learn well and that with positive reassurance from his teachers of his worth and ability, will begin to make progress. A recognition of his efforts and the acknowledgement of his achievements instead of constant reminders of his general inadequacy would definitely help him to make much better progress. However, the limitations of being a classroom teacher with the need to

respond to a mixed ability class of abilities ranging from the very able to the poor reader, once again became very apparent to me.

It is accepted that all teachers have to be teachers of reading and this action research highlighted that principle for me.

My strategy of concentrating on the building up of Adam's sense of self-worth by making him value his contributions to lessons, did have a positive impact on his reading skills and on his written responses. However, without specialist support, I was not really able to move Adam on as an able and confident reader. Since Adam's reading skills are closely linked to his self-value, this action research has made me much more conscious of my own need to develop a deeper understanding of the processes which lead to children developing their literacy skills.

A further outcome of this action research has followed the interest shown in it by my colleagues in the science department. When my Head of Department saw my questionnaire, he asked for 150 copies to be reproduced so that all other Year 7 pupils could complete one. This move is a new departure for the department. We have often talked about the need to involve pupils more when reflecting on our teaching practice in order to raise levels of achievement, but these discussions had not resulted in any real concrete moves forward. My questionnaire and the interest shown in my video transcript, will, I hope, be an important way forward for us as a department.

Another area in which my questionnaire has proved useful, is in that of Equal Opportunities. We are very concerned about the gender imbalance at Crofton School, and the response of the girls to the question which asks if they are glad they came to the school, will be collated and used in the future planning of how best to deal with the imbalance.

I feel that this action research should not end here. Reviewing my strategies, it is clear that I have looked at Adam in isolation from his peers in terms of developing teaching methods to enhance his performances in science. I see a need to develop this action research in setting up activities which promote collaborative learning. It would be valuable to see how Adam responds to a variety of learning tasks in a supportive group structure that requires all the members of the group to make an equal contribution.

Collaborative learning emphasises the three aspects of learning; listening, empathising and talking, and focussing research on the interactions of the group would help me to establish how that structure could enhance Adam's learning.

With collaborative learning, those members of the group who have listened actively, facilitated and spoken their share receive positive reinforcement from their peers which leads to a build-up of their self-esteem. It would be interesting to see if this would help Adam to make further progress by making him feel that others value his contributions.

Responses

In the last issue of *Forum* we asked teachers striving to adhere to progressive principles and resist reactionary pressures to write and tell us about their work and its progress. We are very pleased to publish below some of the responses that we have received, and we very much hope this 'Responses' section will become a permanent feature of the journal as we step up our campaign to prevent the advances of the last thirty years being totally undermined.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN MATHEMATICS

You asked people to write and tell you if they are trying to maintain an equal opportunity approach to education in the face of the pressures around not to do so.

I am particularly interested in hearing of any other schools in which mathematics is taught in balanced groups throughout the secondary years and in which teachers do not resort to published individualised schemes in order to cope with differences. We have used pastoral groupings for nearly seven years. We teach whole tutor groups because the close relationship between students which develops through other subjects and tutorial work often adds something extra to whole-class work and group work. In addition students who know each other well are more supportive of each other.

All but the first of our GCSE cohorts were taught in such groups. During this time our results have improved every year, and far more students are now choosing mathematics as a subject for further study. Students feel limited neither by self-imposed ceilings nor, we hope, by our expectations of them. We do not feel limited by our expectations of them.

As their teacher my job is a challenge to find access for them to the widest possible range of mathematics. The level on which topics appear on the National Curriculum is of low priority for me; what is far more important is *the development of mathematical thinking*. I like to foster this in the context of any mathematical topic.

An example of the approach might be to consider trigonometry. This is on a relatively high level (whatever that means) of the National Curriculum and has even been considered to be something of a hurdle over which potential high grade GCSE students need to jump. But I do not consider it part of my job to decide who should or should not be given the opportunity to work with it first, last or not at all. I recognise that there are some students who might not be able to grasp it under my teaching, but I do not decide in advance who they are.

Instead I try to find an approach to the topic which offers many pieces of a jigsaw of ideas which may lead to the concept and an opportunity to play around and see how they fit together. This could be done with a friend or perhaps with someone else in the classroom with whom they do not normally work. This makes lesson planning something of a lottery because after the initial setting up of the situation I cannot force understanding on people. I am aware that some of the starters I and others in the department have developed seem to offer very quick routes to understanding, whereas others offer a long slog full of doubt, error, assumption, retracing the steps of an argument, looking for a new point of view, questioning, being stuck, becoming unstuck and many other delights. Both types have value.

I think this is what learning mathematics, or anything,

is about and I simply cannot understand how the endless pages of a book can do this in the way a human being can. Nor can I understand why so many schools think it can be done only in sets. Take an old-fashioned bit of geometry, for instance the conditions for two triangles to be congruent. I know that anyone can discover these for themselves by playing a game with each other in which only three pieces of information can be given and the recipient's job is to make as many triangles as possible using only those three pieces. If only one can be made they may have found a condition for congruence or they may have missed a possible way of putting them together. A very fruitful discussion can follow about completeness, sureness and truth.

In the right circumstances and with the right encouragement, anyone can think about these issues. The confidence students gain by having someone ask for their opinions and listen to their arguments is, to my mind, much more valuable in terms of the development of learning than to insist on a particular outcome for a particular group or limit access to content to those who match the teacher's idea of 'able'.

I have to acknowledge that my notion of 'able', and we all have one, is biased towards those who can reason, explore and create rather than those who will only reproduce received algorithms. I am also aware that received algorithms have their place, particularly in mathematics. In fact my own notion of mathematical thinking may itself be an algorithm, a method, a particular collection of processes, which I wish to see others adopt and reward when I see. But at least if I teach pastoral groups the risk of limiting students by my own notions of 'able' is reduced with the wider variety of styles of learning which is always facing me in the classroom. I cannot avoid taking individuals into account. I have to constantly reassess my view of mathematics, my view of learning and my view of them.

We are fortunate in having a National Curriculum which is just a list of the content which goes to make up our subject. We are also fortunate in our Attainment Target 1 which encourages us to be aware of the processes of mathematics. As a department we enjoy the challenge of putting these together but as a *framework*, not a *straitjacket*. We do not feel that the craft of teaching has been taken away from us, nor that we have had styles dictated to us. Maybe we are missing something, maybe there is some clause somewhere which says run for cover, buy the textbooks, set the students and transmit knowledge to them. If there is, will someone please tell me?

Anne Watson, Peers Upper School, Oxford

ADHERING TO PROGRESSIVE PRINCIPLES!

Err, um, well yes I suppose so if you put it like that! In our (mathematics) department we believe that mixed ability is a natural and effective way of organising learning. Terms such as 'progressive' or 'basics' can have the effect of polarising people. This in turn determines our likely responses to situations before we have given ourselves an opportunity to find out what anyone means by them and what anyone has to offer. Such words take on meaning only when we are better informed about how the words are interpreted and contextualised. I don't feel that our department is particularly progressive, although I recognise that we are different to the vast majority of mathematics departments who teach in setted groups. We put energy into curriculum development and spend little time making narrow assessments through the medium of testing. We might be different to many other departments in the way we organise teaching and learning, but I feel perfectly comfortable in saying to the parents of the students we teach that we go 'back to basics'. What I mean by this is we offer ideas to students with intentions to help them construct basic understandings in order to develop their thinking to work on ever more complex ideas. The basic approach is of a problem-solving nature and figuring high on our list of priorities is to encourage our students to engage with mathematics and at the same time become aware of their own responsibilities to achieve independence and autonomy. All fine words and ideals, yet tomorrow we will still have some students in our mathematics classes who may not want to play this game!

In response to the challenge/request in the previous issue of *Forum* I would like to share with readers how the teaching and learning of mathematics is organised at Orleton Park School in Telford.

We teach in mixed ability groups from Y7 to Y11, almost entirely without text books and where worksheets are becoming a thing of the past. Neanderthal! We certainly feel to be part of the process of evolution. Since 1986 we have made small moves towards mixed ability teaching. From the outset the head teacher insisted that the decision to move to mixed ability groups had to be for the educational benefit of all the children in the school and not to fulfil any political ideology that might exist. This proved to be a most important touchstone and the move to mixed ability into Y11 was a slow process that was not completed until 1990/91. This evolution was framed within three important axioms:

- developing children's mathematical understanding
- putting into practice an equal opportunity policy of access and entitlement of children to mathematical learning, and thirdly
- encouraging professional development of us as mathematics teachers

We are now in our third cohort of entirely mixed ability groupings. For the past two years we have had GCSE results which far exceeded anything that we previously achieved in the three years of GCSE when we worked with setted groups. We are currently striving to keep up the 'standards' that we have set ourselves for the 1993 GCSE examination.

Developing Children's Mathematical Understanding

The methodology is based upon principles stated in Cockcroft and HMI *Mathematics 5-16* :

(451) ... that development should be from the bottom upwards' by considering the range of work which is appropriate for lower-attaining pupils and extending this range as the level of attainment of pupils increases

(452) ... it should be a fundamental principle that no topic should be included unless it can be developed sufficiently for it to be applied in ways which the pupils can understand. Mathematical content needs to be differentiated to match the abilities of the pupils ... this is achieved at each stage through extensions rather than deletions. This is a positive approach to a differentiated curriculum based more upon what pupils can do than on what they cannot do; more on pupils' successes than on their failures ... Differentiation of content, if well planned, facilitates progression for all pupils. (HMI, 5-16, para. 3.3)

Pupils are encouraged to behave as mathematicians, working on problems which offer them opportunities to explore and research ideas that help them understand and work with traditional mathematical concepts. Because a high expectation is placed upon the pupils, then their responses to the ideas that they work on is of a high standard.

There are important skills of working systematically, checking results, comparing results, working in small groups or individually, coding results and of course pupils can be strongly encouraged to share their work with someone at home, and in so doing help to put the Parents' Charter into practice. In order to try to inform our parents of the way we work, we organise "Mathematics for Parents" evenings where we provide them with typical starter lessons and problems to work on so that they can begin to understand the ways in which we work with their children. Progressive? Not really, it just seems like a basically reasonable idea.

From the students' point of view I want to feel that they are being encouraged to rise to the challenge whatever their ability, so that the focus is on the problem rather than the stigma of the set that they happen to be in.

Putting into Practice an Equal Opportunity Policy of Access and Entitlement of Children to Mathematical Learning

I believe that to provide equal access to mathematical learning and to enable each person to achieve their potential, independent of race, gender, cultural background and ability, equal opportunity policies must be implicit within the structure and the organisation of an institution. To avoid the danger of tokenism and condescension, approaches to equal opportunities must be implicit in grouping structure and methodology. For all students to be encouraged to engage with learning I believe it is of central importance that everyone is able to make a start on a particular problem. There should then be opportunities for teachers to help students develop a task to the best of their abilities and at a variety of different paces. Whereupon the multitude of interactions that teachers have with students should attempt to be a celebration of individual students' contributions. Equal opportunities must be much more than a policy document; it must involve our being aware of our own behaviour and questioning our actions and motivations. This is characterised by a preparedness to acknowledge our own shortcomings and to seek actively to change ways of working that have led to inequality in the past in order to achieve greater equality in the future.

Encouraging Professional Development of us as Mathematics Teachers

In any class we teach, be it mixed ability, setted or banded, there is always a wide range of ability, and a wide ranging set of potential responses to different aspects of the curriculum. I don't think it matters how wide this spread of ability is in a class; what is important is that teachers are constantly seeking ways of drawing out the best from all of their students, whatever their ability, without having to place them in a phony, unnatural situation. There are important issues here about nurturing students' personal responsibilities for their learning. I worry that the reason for teaching setted groups is more for the convenience of the teacher than for the good of the students. I am also concerned about the nature of the criteria that are used for putting pupils into a particular set, such as test scores or behaviour.

I want to continue to pursue the ideal of mixed ability without reverting to an individualised work card or a tightly prescribed text book scheme. The teacher's ability to find the good stimuli and resources, when and when not to intervene, when to encourage discussion or group or individual work to take place are all central to well organised mixed ability teaching.

Present government policies entrenched in testing, fragmentation, labelling and competition will, I believe, prove to be an irritating hiccup in the natural evolution of basic progress for teachers of mathematics.

Mike Ollerton, Orleton Park School, Telford

I THINK IN PICTURES

Whilst driving along the motorway I was struck (metaphorically) by the similarity between a motorway and a mixed ability system. Clearly all the drivers are moving along the same route and have different ability and experience. Some are aiming for the same destination. The time of arrival is important to each person but who arrives first or last is immaterial. Each driver will make decisions about when and in which lane to drive. Some may stop at a service station for a break or to refuel. They will eventually arrive at their destination. Some may turn off and take a detour. Their experience may well be enriched by taking a different route. What is essential in a mixed ability system is from a particular starting point each student, working in conjunction with the teacher, is in control of the speed and of the route. Problems occur on the motorway when drivers try to compete, such as 'overtaking' on the inside lane or are not considerate of others, such as sticking to the middle lane. The very nature of streaming generates situations of students being competitive and trying to keep up with their peers and frequently failing to do so. By being constantly measured against each other students are unable to recognise their own responsibility so they drop out or fail to get to any destination of value. Learning support is the equivalent of the AA, RAC, etc. but it doesn't seem to work that way. After all whatever the ability of the driver anyone may still require a breakdown service at some time.

I believe that we all learn by being challenged and the

most important challenge is to push one's own frontier of understanding forward. My experience is such that learning is best achieved in a mixed ability system. After all life is like that, isn't it?

Dave Ridgway, Orleton Park School, Telford

A VIEWPOINT FROM A TEACHER OF MLD STATEMENTED STUDENTS

The multifaceted aspects of being in a mixed ability group need to be viewed from the pupils' standpoint. Do they feel overawed? Do they feel intimidated? Or does the fact that they feel part of a normal, regular class help them achieve standards far in excess of what is expected? I see the latter having very many more far reaching, positive effects that may not at first be recognised.

I see that there are definite academic gains. As well, there are social benefits for all students. The challenges of working with more able students benefits and extends my teaching skills. By working with mixed ability groups the reality is that I do not see myself as exclusively a special needs teacher or as someone who is particularly skilled at working with 'bottom' set students.

I see the two-way help that students of widely differing abilities are able to offer each other as being an unqualified plus. However in setted groups such peer help between so-called more able and less able students cannot be found. Confidence is a key issue and I realise how far back the boundaries have been pushed when I see a statemented special needs student explaining an idea to someone who in other subject areas is in the 'top' set. Another aspect that I often observe besides the standard of work produced is the changes in behaviour patterns. The same students become involved in far worse learning environments as a consequence of poor behaviour; in fact compared to how they behave in mixed ability groups I believe that they go through a complete metamorphosis. As I work in a school where I support the same special needs students who are in mixed ability groups for some subjects but are setted for others, I am able to witness such events.

In an ideal or even slightly better world of education we would have the resources to provide sufficient support to teach all pupils in mixed ability groups. Such support could be utilised during examinations when, sadly, the benefits gained through a mixed ability system are undermined because of the withdrawal of support that certain students experience.

I believe that pressure needs to be put on the so-called hierarchy to confront them with the realities of what life is like in schools. They need to be made aware of the series of decisions that have to be taken when schools are faced with cuts in funding and the consequences of larger classes and less attention for individuals.

Perhaps we are educating from the wrong end of the system!

Livia Turner, Orleton Park School, Telford

Reviews

Empathy and Ethnocentrism Dealing with Difference: handling ethnocentrism in history classrooms. A Handbook from Practice

HEATHER FRY, JANET MAW &
HELEN SIMONS, 1991

Curriculum Studies Department, Institute
of Education, University of London. £5.00,
136 pp.

Dealing with Difference: handling ethnocentrism in history classrooms provides an interesting insight into how history teachers deal with 'difference' in the classroom. Written for and partly by teachers, this project emanated from the Institute of Education, University of London. Sixteen volunteer teachers, working in state schools within a 45 mile radius of London and using five different modern history syllabuses, took part. They participated by allowing the project team to observe them teaching and to interview them. Nearly two-thirds of them also attended sessions at the Institute to learn self-monitoring techniques.

The focus of the project was on the handling of ethnocentrism in the teaching of the history of the USSR at GCSE, but since this encompasses coping with evidence and empathy it is of use to all history teachers. This is particularly so as the debates on National Curriculum history and on the nature of history and of values in the classroom, continue. The methodology is based on observing and disseminating classroom practice, the many extracts from the transcripts giving a fascinating glimpse into what actually goes on in the classroom. The whole project, indeed, is a useful exemplar of such research.

The authors' definition of ethnocentrism is of beliefs, attitudes and practices which derive from membership of a cultural group and which colour how that group or society will view or act towards other groups. Essentially it is the acquired cultural attitudes of one group towards other groups, valuing positively its own group's achievements and characteristics whilst valuing other groups only from its own point of view. The project was designed to examine how teachers deal with ethnocentrism when teaching the history of a country which is very different in structure, ideology and culture from Britain and about which pupils know little directly. Many of the teachers found it difficult initially to define ethnocentrism, although the majority assumed it was negative and akin to racism. Some valued its positive attributes, however, and even

more thought it inevitable to some extent. What became clear, whilst teaching children who themselves have different backgrounds or ethnic origins, was the complexity of ethnocentrism. For example the 'backwardness' of Russian agriculture in the early twentieth century is viewed rather differently by those of ethnic origin other than western European.

In the same way as participation in the project highlighted for those involved in it the dangers of stereotyping and implying value judgements when teaching, so this book does for its readers. This arises partly from the implicit upholding of democracy and freedom on the part of both teachers and students coupled with the difficulties of having both to simplify complex ideas such as communism and Marxism and to overcome pupils' general suspicion of other cultural groups. In addition, however, serious shortcomings in the syllabuses are recognised in that their exclusion of certain parts of Russian history, such as eastward expansion and artistic culture, lead to a more negative image than is necessary. Such factors are reiterated in many of the standard textbooks used by the teachers and the examination of the contents and language of these and the values and attitudes implied should engender some self-reflection amongst their writers. The fact that most of the sources available on Russian history are western, that the textbooks rarely put the development of Russia in a European framework, that the use of sources is no guarantee of a less biased approach, raises important issues.

Most of the teachers involved hope to challenge ethnocentrism in their pupils or at least raise awareness of it, chiefly because they see it as bad history. Their perception that history is about having as open a mind as possible and trying to understand people in the context of their time and place means they see the issue of empathy as very close to the issues of raising awareness of ethnocentrism. It emerges clearly from the project that teachers have continuing difficulties over developing empathetic understanding in pupils and, especially, in assessing it. An example of this can be seen in an added chapter examining the value of visits to Russia by pupils. It becomes clear that although old assumptions might be displaced and new sympathies awoken, equally such visits can actually narrow the mind and reinforce ethnocentric views. Nevertheless, project teachers overwhelmingly supported a concentration on empathy and evidence as a valid route into ethnocentrism.

The lengthy extracts from the lessons observed should prove very interesting for any teacher wanting to see how other teachers try to develop their pupils' understanding of how to use, examine and question evidence. (The project added the use of evidence as a basis for empathetic

work to the National Criteria guidelines.) Taking part in the project and exploring their own practice and values certainly seems to have proved rewarding for the participants as the project team had hoped from the start. The project was informed by an awareness of the centrality of teachers both in successful curriculum change and in participatory research. (Would that the government thought the same!) Hearing the transcripts of their lessons was obviously a fairly terrifying experience for the teachers but the ensuing self-reflection and monitoring and the sharing of experience and analysis in the workshops made it more than worthwhile although even the keenest doubted whether pressure of work would allow them to do further research into their own teaching. The project team was aware of difficulties: shortage of time, for example, meant that the project team had to control the process yet their emphasis on participatory research and the value of self-evaluation meant that they would not give the direct feedback that some teachers clearly expected. 'Interdependent', in fact, is a better descriptor of the research than 'participatory' as the team realised.

Another limitation, again recognised by the project team, was that the research concerned teachers more than pupils. Perceptions of the pupils' angle were gleaned from observation and teacher comment, not from the pupils themselves. Very little direct expression of ethnocentrism was observed from the pupils although teachers were sure that their pupils were very ethnocentric and pro-British. Generalised jingoism was noted but not specifically anti-Russian or anti-USSR feelings. The project raises the question whether, if the teachers' perceptions are correct, pupils are learning how to produce what is expected of them in class, without internalising more open attitudes.

The great value of this research lies in the evidence it gives as to how ethnocentrism is handled in the history classroom, the issues that are raised in connection with this, the illustration of the value of teacher self-evaluation and reflection, the highlighting of the need for further questioning and research and, last but not least, the example of what valuable research can be done with teachers themselves playing a central role.

[Copies of this document are available from the Secretary, Curriculum Studies Department, Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL. Price £5.00, inclusive of postage and packing. Cheques only, payable to the Institute of Education.]

RUTH WATTS
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Rethinking Brian Simon? Rethinking Radical Education: essays in honour of Brian Simon

A. RATTANSI & D. REEDER (Eds), 1992
Lawrence & Wishart
320 pp., ISBN 0-885315-717-0

There is an ambivalence in the title of this book which echoes uneasily throughout its pages. These are *Essays in Honour of Brian Simon* but they are also about *Rethinking Radical Education*.

For many, Brian Simon has been, and remains, the most lucid and persuasive exponent of a radical, socialist vision of education in the post-war era. Author or editor of 31 books, including the superb four-volume history of English education; co-founder and, for many years, joint editor of this journal; leading campaigner on IQ testing, streaming and comprehensive education, Brian Simon has been a towering force in shaping educational historiography and history and his impact continues to be profound. Published just months after the 'Gerbill' was released, his *Bending the Rules* was the first book to expose the free-market follies of the 1988 Education Act; his latest two volumes with Clyde Chitty, *Education Answers Back* and *Save Our Schools*, lay bare the results of these policies, confirming many of his earlier predictions. This tribute to his work is thus long overdue; however, it is also somewhat ambiguous: *Rethinking Radical Education* is, in a sense, rethinking Brian Simon.

In some ways, the essays in this volume are a fitting selection. They are all politically engaged; they champion the rights of those traditionally marginalised within the British education system; and they balance analysis of long-term historical trends with critical contemporary policy analysis. Ian Davey writes well and clearly and his analysis of the origins of mass schooling contains an important argument about the crisis in patriarchal relations in the early industrial period; Richard Johnson provides a typically perceptive and sensitive reading of the multifaceted nineteenth-century 'radical' tradition, demonstrating how it may be appropriated in traditions of both Left and Right; and the inclusion of historical pieces on 'progressive' and adult education, by Kevin Brehony and Sallie Westwood, ensures that these areas of particular importance in Brian Simon's work are duly represented, even if their perspectives differ from his. Amongst the contemporary pieces two clearly inhabit the same political space as does Brian Simon: Clyde Chitty ruthlessly dissects the contradictions of the New Right; whilst Caroline Benn argues powerfully for the continuing importance of a common education.

The main problem with the book lies in the ambivalent relationship between the political and theoretical perspectives of

many of the authors and those of the subject of the tribute. The editors see Brian Simon's work as sitting "squarely within the tradition of enlightenment rationalism", whereas they, and a number of their contributors, are clearly sympathetic to the 'post-modern' perspective which is suspicious of rationalism and notions of historical progress and adamantly opposed to what it calls the tyranny of grand narratives theories which seek to find meaning in the larger patterns and trends in social relations and historical development. Post-modernists stress the relativity of knowledge and the irreducible nature of the local and particular, celebrating difference rather than seeking the traditional unities of socialist discourse.

Whether post-modernism has much to offer the cause of educational advance is not for this review to debate. However, what is certain is that this volume does not begin to answer the question. Whilst a number of articles raise important points about the politics of cultural difference in relation to education, they give little indication of where this leaves the socialist project of a common education. Several authors attempt to deconstruct the traditional 'unities' of the radical tradition in education but none, except Richard Johnson, engages directly with the historical specificity of Brian Simon's arguments. This is a pity, not only because the encounter could have been fruitful, but also because it only adds weight to the view that post-modernism is hopelessly ahistorical. Almost all the characteristics attributed to the 'postmodern condition' – the relativity of knowledge, the instability of the subject, the fragmentary nature of experience, the heterogeneity of cultures and values – have already been associated with modernity by writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Where does this 'rethinking of radical education' leave us? The editors see the book as engaging in a "probing, reflective, open-ended exercise" more relevant to our 'transitional' and uncertain times than the construction of concrete agendas for reform. The probing and reflection is clearly important but I am less sure about concrete agendas being less relevant today. At a time when the Conservative Party has recently won four elections with 'conviction politics' and highly interventionist reform programmes, not least in education, there has never been a greater need for direction and clarity of purpose on the Left. Perhaps we should not be too quick to jettison all the 'old certainties' of the tradition honoured in this volume.

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The Case for Local Democratic Control The Role of Local Government in Education: assuring quality and accountability

STEWART RANSON, 1992
Longman in association with the Local
Government Management Board
paperback, £14.95, pp. 188.
ISBN: 0-582-09244-2

This book deserves a warm welcome and a wide readership, especially among all those concerned with schools and education generally. The author is a member of the Centre for Education Management and Policy Studies at the University of Birmingham and an expert on local government. In a well-researched study, Ranson uses his skills and special knowledge to good effect. At the start he sets out in almost frightening detail the nature of the Conservative government's harsh and apparently relentless assault on local government and its role in education. But he does much more than this. The book contains careful case studies of four local authorities detailing the complex and sophisticated manner in which these have responded to increasingly powerful blows at their traditional role and even viability. The authorities chosen, Enfield, Kent, Manchester and Warwickshire, vary considerably in the way they have reacted to current pressures and criticisms, but all have clearly devoted enormous thought and energy to evaluating and implementing a positive role in spite of all the difficulties. In many ways it is a heroic story.

But events are moving with extreme rapidity, and sadly the destructive implications of this do not appear to be fully recognised within education or more generally. The ongoing and even relentless character of the attack on local government is evident in the book's very title. Since it was written, the supposed 'quality assurance' role of local education authorities has been to all intents and purposes summarily removed with the establishment of OFSTED and the related (financially forced) decimation of local inspectorial and advisory teams. In the meantime the tightening financial pressures due to opting out and even harsher EMS formulae, not to speak of recent overall cuts in grants are leaving authorities with very little space for manoeuvre. As Ranson sees it, the outlook is bleak.

Nevertheless the case studies the author presents are, in many senses, a series of success stories. Local education authorities have restructured themselves and, in particular, made themselves a great deal more user-friendly. They still have an important role to play since the system has not yet been destroyed. The fact that this is widely appreciated is testified to by the

slow progress of opting out, in spite of the obscene financial advantages the government still offers (but for how long?).

Ranson's final chapter, 'The LEA of the Future' leaves the reader in no doubt that a healthy, functioning system of education must allow for local involvement, control and accountability.

The government's 'vision' whereby everything is run directly from Whitehall (often through quangos) is neither acceptable nor is it likely to be cost-effective. The four authorities studied "exemplify the tradition of creative innovation in the reform of local education", concludes the author. Each LEA has "brought a distinctive perspective to the management of change that derives from ... local needs and demands". A strong case is made for the continuation and indeed strengthening of local democratic control.

This crucial battle is not yet lost. The more people who read this book, the more effectively it will be fought.

BRIAN SIMON

Racism, Education and the State

The Apostles of Purity: black immigration and education policy in post-war Britain

BOB CARTER & IAN GROSVENOR, 1992
Birmingham: AFFOR
£1.50, pp. 38 ISBN 0 907127 13 4

This excellent and thought-provoking pamphlet takes its title from a statement made by Salman Rushdie in 1990:

Throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings. Like many millions of people, I am a bastard child of history.

Rushdie goes on to argue that, to be successful anywhere in the world, antiracist politics should insist on celebrating:

...f hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes from new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs.

Such sentiments would, of course, deeply offend all those in this country who played a part in drafting the 1987 Education 'Reform' Bill and subsequent legislation, for theirs is a philosophy firmly based on a racist and ultimately unworkable

conception of the 'nation' as politically and culturally indivisible. For the Right, education policy must be viewed as a central force in the generation and reproduction of a discourse which links race, colour and culture in such a way as to fix a national identity where to be *British* is to be *white*.

What Bob Carter & Ian Grosvenor seek to demonstrate in this pamphlet is that there is a clear and discernible relationship between government policy towards black immigration and government policy towards education. In constructing the notion of black people as a 'problem', as 'unwanted outsiders', postwar immigration policies have served to 'legitimate' educational strategies, which have then treated black pupils as an 'alien' and 'problem' element in 'our' schools. The twin answers to all 'our' difficulties have been, *firstly*, to place strict curbs on the number of black people allowed into the country (to prevent Britain being "swamped by people with a different culture", in Mrs Thatcher's emotive phrase) and then, *secondly*, to seek to *absorb* those actually allowed to stay here.

Since at least the passing of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, the commitment of successive governments to assimilation as a clear policy goal has been buttressed by a draconian system of discriminatory immigration controls.

At various points in the last thirty years, there have been welcome signs, usually at local authority level, of an education policy towards the needs of black people and of other ethnic minorities which has moved *beyond* the assimilationist orthodoxy; but such initiatives have never been allowed to flourish and multiply.

The 1977 DES Green Paper *Education in Schools: a consultative document* was one of the first official documents to recognise that education had to adapt to sweeping social changes:

Britain has ceased to be the centre of an Empire, and has become instead a medium-sized European power, albeit one with wide international connections and responsibilities. The education appropriate to our Imperial past cannot meet the requirements of modern Britain. (pp. 3 & 4)

The Paper went on to argue that the school curriculum had to reflect the needs of this new Britain.

Our society is a multicultural, multiracial one; and the curriculum should reflect a sympathetic understanding of the different cultures and races that now make up our society. (p. 41)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many schools, and particularly those in inner-city areas, sought to celebrate cultural difference and ethnic diversity. And some LEAs went *beyond* cultural pluralism and the promotion of multiculturalism by seeking to introduce Equal Opportunities policies and to develop strategies designed to combat racism in local services.

Carter & Grosvenor point out that Conservative ministers were dismayed, or indeed outraged, by any attempt at the school or local level to 'undermine' the fundamental values of 'mainstream' society. Speaking in 1986, Education Secretary Keith Joseph made his own position quite clear:

Multicultural education is a dangerous term. Teachers should teach children to respect each other's culture, but children of ethnic background should be taught the British way of life.

And Norman Tebbit, while Conservative Party Chairperson, attacked the Equal Opportunities policy of the ILEA with his usual disregard for the facts, relating the level of pupil truancy in London to the promotion of "anti-sexist, antiracist, gay, lesbian and CND rubbish".

The passing of the 1988 Education 'Reform' Act marked a very real setback for the cause of multicultural/antiracist initiatives in education. On the one hand, its market-driven philosophy was clearly designed to penalise those who were already downtrodden and disadvantaged. At the same time, the National Curriculum was so constructed as to leave very little room for the promotion of multi-ethnic and pluralistic values.

All this is superbly documented by the authors of this pamphlet and makes for pretty dismal reading. What might have been useful (and indeed uplifting) would have been a *longer* concluding section, tracing a possible way forward for antiracist politics. After all, there are signs of a growing public disenchantment with the sterile orthodoxies of the 1980s; and teachers can no longer afford to operate in splendid isolation from broad or political and social movements. In alliance with others, teachers have a leading role to play in the movement to outlaw inequality and discrimination *both* in education *and* in society at large.

The Apostle of Purity is available from All Faiths For One Race, 27 Weston Road, Handsworth, Birmingham B19 1EH

CLYDE CHITTY
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