FORUM

for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education

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Back to Basics
Teacher Education
GNVQ Debate
Special Educational Needs
Northern Ireland

TRIANGLE

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The *next* FORUM

Each of the three issues of **Volume 37** will contain a number of articles celebrating the 30th anniversary of the publication (in July 1965) of Circular 10/65, which marked the *official* start of comprehensive education reform in Britain. In the Spring issue, two headteachers, **Mike Evans** and **Linda Powell**, look at recent developments in the evolution of the comprehensive school. **David Tombs** writes about the new government proposals for RE; and **Clyde Chitty** follows up his recent article on sex education in schools with a detailed consideration of Circular 5/94. Among other articles, **Ian Stronach** writes about the growing wave of policy hysteria resulting from multiple innovations and changes; **Norman Lucas** looks at the challenges facing teacher education from a post-16 perspective; **Anne Buchan** discusses the controversy generated by Attainment Target (AT)1 of the Science National Curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4; and **Ian Grosvenor** reports on his recent research into the construction of racialised identities in schools.

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Editorial

There will be few who regret the eventual fall from grace of the former Secretary of State for Education, John Patten. The most amazing aspect of his tenure was that he managed to stay as long as he did. He will be remembered for his vanity, his arrogance and above all his inability to listen to the advice, wisdom and experience of others. His successor, Gillian Shepherd, at least looks as though she is listening and has lost no time in making contact with teacher unions and other groups who had either been ignored, derided or insulted by Patten.

A period of calm and stability is essential if schools are going to recover from the constant buffeting and turnabouts which have been a recurring feature of the recent educational reforms. So too is the need to re-establish strong relationships and support at all levels; a theme which is reflected in a number of articles in this issue.

Chris Tipple, the current President of the Society of Education Officers, exposes the intellectual aridity of the 'back to basics' philosophy. His comparisons with the nineteenth century world that Dickens portrayed in *Hard Times* make uncomfortable reading; particularly when we consider the statistics quoted which highlight the continuing inequality for the poor and the disadvantaged within our present social and educational system. The concept of education as a public service is, as Chris Tipple rightly says, the mark of a civilised society; a society which places value on the best possible education for all. The unprecedented attack by the Radical Right on different features of that service will mean that some schools will 'go to the wall'; whereas those who are deemed successful will be so because they have taken on the rhetoric of the market place and have accepted that competition is more important than co-operation.

The article compiled by Annabelle Dixon, charts how a group of teachers have developed their own learning and their knowledge about children's learning in a variety of ways. The learning of those involved cannot be separated from the contextual changes we have all experienced since the group first met in 1980. Their early work placed a strong emphasis on what individuals gained from the group; particularly the quality of listening, reflection, support and response. And, whilst these aspects are still important today, the significant difference now is that they have to struggle to retain a sense of professional worth and creativity in a political and educational climate which is hostile to notions of teacher autonomy and empowerment.

These concerns are echoed in the two articles on initial teacher education and training. Lyndon Godsall outlines current developments concerning the initial training of primary school teachers which are designed to produce competent technicians rather than reflective practitioners. Dave Hill's critique provides an analysis of the influence of the Radical Right on the de-professionalisation of the teaching force. Both Dave Hill and Richard Hatcher, in his response to the Labour Party Green Paper, argue strongly for a Radical Left alternative, an alternative which is not apparent in Labour's recently launched White Paper.

Bob Kerr's article on primary education in Northern Ireland exposes some of the myths surrounding the success of the education system within the Province. The points raised in his article, about the divisiveness of the selective system and the dangers of teaching to the test, take us back to the 1960s when *Forum* was at the forefront of moves to end selection at 11 in this country. Clyde Chitty's short article is important insofar as it reminds us that comprehensive schools continue to provide secondary education for the majority of young people in England, Wales and Scotland. It is also heartening to note the very strong response from secondary schools to the recent questionnaire designed to ascertain the current state of comprehensive schooling.

There is no doubt that education will continue to be a 'hot' issue for both the major political parties. And, whilst the debate concerning the implementation of the National Curriculum continues (despite all the attempts of Sir Ron Dearing to reassure teachers that it really was going to be more manageable), the focus for change is moving to post-16 education. Dan Taubman's article sets out the current debate on GNVQs and provides a clear analysis of their purpose and function. Whilst Labour's proposals for a General Certificate of Further Education go some way towards providing parity between professional and technical routes they do not bridge the divide between vocational and academic qualifications. As Richard Hatcher rightly points out, Labour's proposals contrast unfavourably with the National Commission for Education's proposals for an integrated system of vocational and academic modules leading to a unitary qualification.

There is a danger that the positive effects of the National Commission's Report will be side-lined by party political issues which are strong on rhetoric but which do not yet have the substance of a practical reality. Whilst not wishing to re-enter the Secret Garden that Jim Callaghan accused educationists of inhabiting in 1976, a period of reduced political interference would do wonders for the effectiveness of teachers; in terms of improving their teaching quality, morale and professional standing.

Let us hope that current moves towards the establishment of a General Teaching Council for England and Wales will gain momentum. Early signs would suggest that the new Secretary of State is prepared to consider such a step. The opportunity for teachers to have a clear professional voice is one which must be seized and built on. Only then will we be able to develop our worth and standing within and beyond the profession.

Back to Basics

Chris Tipple
Chris Tipple is the current President of the Society of Education Officers. He became Director of Education in Northumberland in 1984, following a distinguished career in educational administration in a number of LEAs, including the former West Riding and Leeds. This article is based upon his presidential address to the Society of Education Officers.

Now what I want is facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon facts, nothing else will ever be of service to them.

This is, of course, from *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens, and are the back to basic views of Mr Gradgrind, the retired hardware merchant and school proprietor. There is no doubt that Mr Gradgrind would have supported league tables and the public pillorying of failing schools. He would have avidly read his league tables and discounted anything that could not be quantified into a performance indicator. He would have approved mightily of age weighted pupil units. He lived in Coketown.

Fact fact fact everywhere in the material aspect of the town, fact fact fact everywhere in the immaterial. The McHoakumchild School was all fact and the school's design was all fact and the relations between master and man were all fact and everything was fact between the lying in hospital and the cemetery and what you couldn't state in figures or show to be purchasable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest was not and never would be, world without end amen.

'Back to basics' as articulated by the government, has a very Dickensian ring to it. Dickens even portrayed the product of such a back to basics mechanistic approach to education. Consider this description of Bradley Headstone, the school master in *Our Mutual Friend.*

He had acquired mechanically a great store of teachers' knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse so that it might always be ready to meet the demands of retail dealers, history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics and whatnot, all in their several places, this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care, whilst a habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait.

Doubtless Bradley Headstone was brought up on a diet of pencil and paper tests and a highly prescriptive curriculum which abandoned humanities and the arts to purely optional status at the later stages of his school career. Doubtless, too, he was brought up in a large class where the staffing policies had more regard for the cost of the teachers than the quality.

You may think I am stretching Dickensian comparisons too far but, in social terms, consider the fact that in 1855, when Dickens was at the height of his powers, 16% of children at a London Ragged School were beggars, while 22% had lost a father or both parents. In 1989 a Centre Point survey found 33% of their young clients were begging and 40% had been in care. Or consider the fact that in 1876 the workhouse diet of bread and gruel, meat and potatoes, would cost £5.46 per week per child at today's prices, which is 30% more than the estimated £4.15 which income support allows for a child's weekly food. In case you are wondering what an 1876 workhouse diet consisted of, it was 5oz of bread and $1^1/_2$ pints of gruel for breakfast, 4oz of bread and $1^1/_2$ pints of pea soup for lunch, or alternatively 12oz of suet pudding, or alternatively 5oz of meat and 8oz of potatoes. Supper consisted of more bread with a little cheese, or milk, or broth. Back to basics indeed.

Dickens, of course, lived in an age when there was no welfare state. Even at the end of his life one in three children did not even have the dubious benefit of a ragged school education. London alone contained 100,000 children who had no education at all. Private enterprise and competition which produced establishments like Dothebys Hall, was unfettered. Dickens was a firm champion of education, though a critic of most of the schools of his time. It is ignorance even more than 'want' which is the ghastly offspring that the Ghost of Christmas Present urges Scrooge to beware of. Towards the end of his life too, Dickens portrayed in *Our Mutual Friend* the society of the Veneerings and the Podsnaps. Speculation. Peculation. Overseas investments. Short term money markets. Brokering. Joint stock banking. Discount companies. Limited liability. Credit. A world in which human identity was seen in terms of monetary value. A world of barter and exchange. A world in which, to quote another famous Victorian, people knew the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Like us, Dickens lived in a society where shared values and visions were breaking down under the weight of new technologies and communications; a "go getter" world of atomised selfishness that seemed to scorn older celebrations of family, charity and community.

It would be wrong to press these comparisons too hard but as we move into a world where the gap between rich and poor is widening, where there is an erosion of the welfare state as we have known it, and where competition rather than collaboration drives policies even in an area of "common good" such as education, it is salutary to compare our world with the one that featured in the pages of Dickens through the middle of the nineteenth century.

What G. K. Chesterton wrote of Lord Macauley could equally well have been written of Dickens: "he typifies the two things that really make the Victorian Age itself, the cheapness and narrowness of its conscious formulae; the richness and humanity of its unconscious tradition".

Against that social and educational background I want to look at 'Back to Basics' in rather a different light. I

want to look at it in terms of education as a public service, in terms of current changes in curriculum and assessment and in terms of the inspection regime.

As we are being driven increasingly into the market place the concept of education as a public service has become far weaker and, in some places, seems almost to have disappeared. Yet it is, or should be, the mark of a civilised society that the best possible education is available to all its children. The market place cannot guarantee this. Whilst it is the sole objective of a public service to secure this the market is subject to other, sometimes conflicting, priorities as well. It seems to me that we now need to restate, very strongly, the concept of education as a public service. We also need to stand up very firmly for the existence of a local education authority. Writing recently in a letter to the magazine *Education* the Diocesan Director of Education for Sheffield suggested that we should abandon the title LEA and replace it with LES, Local Education Services. I think this would be a tragedy. Whatever its weaknesses the Education Committee are the only local legitimate expression of public will regarding the shape and nature of the Education Service. They are legitimated by the ballot box and their 'authority' comes from within and is not simply something imposed from central government. Certainly an education authority should be providing services which are responsive to the needs of its schools and its inhabitants, but it must do more than that.

The role of the local education authority in the market place must be kept in proportion. The authority has other very important jobs beyond buying and selling on the steps of the temple and a role which, if vacated, would create a very dangerous vacuum.

Secondly, what about back to basics in the curriculum? What this presumably means in government terms, in as far as this has been articulated, is a return to a limited number of fundamental subjects on which there will be greater concentration and a restriction to the more traditional methods of teaching them. The final Dearing report takes a step down the first of these paths by potentially squeezing out a number of subjects from the Post 14 curriculum, notably in the Arts and Humanities. It also pushes this way in its reference to the importance of vocational provision at a relatively early age. It is interesting that the industrial giants of the last decade or so, namely Germany and Japan, both defer specialisation to at least sixteen and, in the case of Japan eighteen. The report also slides in this direction when it suggests that a teacher's first call in respect of the time to be 'freed up' by the new arrangements, should be a reinforcement of 'the basics'.

The latest Dearing report does, however, present an opportunity to LEAs. Those curriculum statements which were produced a few years ago in response to the responsibilities of the LEA in relation to the curriculum embodied in the 1986 Education Act need to be dusted down and revised. With some measure of 'freedom' returned to schools, LEA guidance can and should again play an important part in shaping what happens and in supporting schools as they consider the new framework.

Perhaps the greatest 'back to basics' threat lies in the future proposed testing and assessment arrangements. In finally avoiding the Scylla of over sophistication the Dearing recommendations may well drive testing into the Charybdis of pencil and paper simplicities and teaching to the test. I would have wished that Dearing's history studies had led him to study former Prime Minister George Canning:

> *away with the cant of measures not men, the idle superstition that it is the harness and not the horses that draw the chariot along. If the comparison must be made, if the distinction must be taken, men are everything, measures comparatively nothing.*

As it is we still have teacher assessments second guessed by SATs and we still have the possible prospect of league tables at Key Stage 2. The best way to avoid this morass is to abandon SATs as nationally imposed standardised tests and simply use them as a bank of materials upon which teachers can draw in making their assessments, moderated as necessary. Redirecting the resources currently wasted on things like optical mark readers and all the other testing junk should ensure that such a system would be reasonably resourced and it would do wonders for the morale of teachers. Finally it would be seen that as in Japan, as in Germany, as in the Netherlands, as in France, as in almost any other country you care to name, the nation trusts its teachers.

Finally what about 'back to basics' in the context of inspection? There are signs of a crude back to basics philosophy beginning to appear in the inspection regime and this is a source of great concern.

As the volume of inspection increases and the framework for inspection is further refined there are signs that it is beginning to be formula driven. Bradley Headstone and Mr Gradgrind, not to mention Mr Squeers would all have been greatly in favour of formulae, They are, after all, the essence of 'fact' and they eliminate, largely, any scope for personal interpretation. We have formulae for LMS and formulae for SSA so I am certain that we will soon have formulae for inspection, and if a school does not fall into the template thus created a pretty dreadful public fate awaits it.

There are also some signs that inspection is being driven by another basic, namely money. Increasingly, retired inspectors looking for pin money are driving LEAs out of an artificial market which is weighted very strongly against them. This would not matter so much, because bulk inspection must be a mindnumbing process for local authority advisers and inspectors. But there is a danger that, without access to some inspection, they will lose credibility and their other activities will be severely curtailed because of loss of income.

Finally, the process of inspection is easily corrupted. After all it could be argued that the purpose of inspection in a market driven economy is to determine how responsive to markets schools actually are. They can also be used, all too easily, as punishments. Indeed the newly appointed Senior Chief Inspector who, he says, reacts well to threats, thinks that education should be subject to a bit more threat, according to a recent interview he gave to *The Independent*. In future inspections could, he suggests, be applied only to those schools not submitting information in order for the Government to compile league tables. This is totally to corrupt the process.

Of course good schools reflect those values which it is most difficult for formula driven inspection to evaluate. There is not much in the framework for inspection which acknowledges the value of collaboration and cooperation with other schools in the interests of the child. The impact of inspection over the next year or two is probably one of the most important things that LEAs and everyone else with an interest in a healthy education service should be monitoring. Dickens would have expected no less. Otherwise it will be 'back to basics' with a vengeance.

Longsearch: the development of a teacher group

Annabelle Dixon
Deputy Head of Holbrook JMI School, and a longstanding member of *Forum's* Editorial Board, Annabelle Dixon has compiled this article which recounts the experiences of a teacher group in Hertford who have met regularly since 1980.

Liz Thomson, an Editor of *Forum*, was a Teachers' Centre Leader in Hertfordshire in the early 1980s. In 1983 she wrote for *Forum* an article entitled 'Teachers as Learners'.[1] In her own words:

> *It concerned the work of a number of teacher groups who were developing and investigating their own practice in a variety of ways. More importantly it described situations where teachers were in control and responsible as 'active agents in the development of their own learning'. Situations which enabled those involved to become reflective practitioners through looking closely at the way children learn; through examining their own practice and developing hypotheses which emerged from their professional experience and judgement.*
>
> *One of the groups referred to in the 1983 article has continued to meet. At that time their focus was on looking at two kinds of learning: the learning of children and the learning of the teachers themselves. The investigations conducted by the group were written up and published in 1983 in a Longman/Schools Council publication called* What Learning Looks Like.[2] *The publication of the case studies provided external validation of the group's work; it also acted as a catalyst for a dialogue between the group and other teachers who were involved in action research across the country.*

The group had an unusual start in that it grew out of argument. A number of teachers were attending a course on the 'Match and Mismatch' [3] materials. The discussions arising from these sessions were more than just lively. Many present felt they were saying things about teaching and learning that they had never vocalised before. Their own experience was considered important by the other course participants and, in the way that the chemistry of these things sometimes works, those taking part were, or became, real listeners.

To some like myself, this was a particular characteristic of the group of teachers attending this course and it was one that we all came to value, so much so that we decided to continue meeting as a discussion group.

Being the early 1980s it wasn't too difficult to elicit a measure of local authority support for the formation of a discussion group that wasn't tied to a particular course or agenda, although it was evident that it would naturally concern itself with matters that were relevant to education.

Liz Thomson was able to offer assistance on several levels. The practical one, in her role of Teachers' Centre Leader, of being able to organise the typing, distribution of minutes etc., and also that of being able to offer expertise on the formation of such a group.

As a discussion group we don't consider ourselves unique although our longevity is perhaps unusual. However, a description of the group's evolution might serve, in a small-scale way, to illuminate how the tensions and pressures of the last ten years, have affected us and how belonging to a group in this way can act as a very real support. Hopefully it might serve to encourage others to form or maintain their own similar support group.

In the early 1980s, the agenda for our weekly meetings centred round the points raised by Wynne Harlen on the development of children's scientific thinking. In compiling this article and looking back at the 'Match and Mismatch' material, I realised that the development of the group was analogous to the manner in which Wynne Harlen described certain influences as acting upon and indeed are necessary to, mental development. She describes these influences as being **growth**, **experience**, **active response** and **social interaction**. Is it being over fanciful to see just these same influences acting upon a group of adults who had and have both a corporate existence as a discussion group and who have developed as individuals within their own professional and personal lives?

At a recent meeting, the discussion group decided to consider their evolution in the terms described by Wynne Harlen. It was felt the time had come to take a retrospective look at the development and achievements after thirteen years before considering the way into the future. Each member took on the writing up of one of the aspects and much of the following contains quotations from their reflections.

In relation to the factor of intellectual **growth**, Wynne Harlen wrote that, "what we do know is that growth and maturity, which depend largely on the passage of time, are important factors". Growth over time, both personal and the less personal over thirteen years, have undoubtedly influenced us and a perusal of our minutes has been very enlightening in this respect.

Some minutes relate to issues which are probably common to many groups such as recruitment, communication, size and purpose etc., all of which re-surface from time to time. These minutes were taken, as was the position of the chairperson, on a democratic basis, with each group member taking a turn. The move towards group leadership was and is important although producing its own problems in terms of direction and efficiency. It was a point of growth though and this aspect of leadership is felt particularly important by one participant who writes about

> *... the value of belonging to and coping with a group which is in essence non-hierarchical. This allows for the experience of equality and ownership which is often*

in marked contrast to the working-group situations in which we find ourselves.

Membership has been fluid over the years with some long-standing participants and a core of about twelve members; although nearly forty people have been involved over the time. Their interests and expertise have all helped to develop each other's thinking, a point which is returned to later. The movement is explained mostly by promotion to posts elsewhere and, as might be expected over the years, those who initially met mostly as classroom practitioners are now training college deputy principals, advisers, moderators, consultants, head and deputy headteachers etc. Some have remained as long-distance members, others have retired or lost touch. The range of their experience has been interesting, ranging from art, maths, domestic and computer science, media studies, traveller education and psychology. A common factor was that all brought with them a real curiosity about learning which seemed to be the reason why they were drawn to belong to the group in the first instance. The changes of membership have had an effect on the perspective of long-standing members, as one of them reflects:

Those of us in the group at present have been a part of it for several years and have seen the ebb and flow as temporary (and often younger) members have come and gone – due to career moves more often than not. As a result we have both collective and personal long-term views of the development of the group over the years and what it has meant to us.

The degree to which funding was available in the early years makes nostalgic reading nowadays. Hertfordshire LEA took an active interest in the group and supported us financially by funding external consultants and residential meetings, all of which helped the group in its growth and development. We were able to meet in a local Teachers' Centre free of charge and minutes were typed and distributed without a fee. As present day minutes show, such support is now minimal and occasional. Local Teachers' Centres are no more and it seems we shall shortly have to meet in each others' houses, and we can no longer rely on our minutes being typed and distributed as a matter of course. LEA officers have maintained their interest and personal support but the financial circumstances of today have had their effect and bitten deep into the way in which the group might have developed.

Taking minutes, having a chairperson, an agenda and giving ourselves a name were all significant steps in growth and maintained a certain structure, evolving as the needs were perceived. As informal groups tend to, the organisation veered from the faintly shambolic to being rather over-organised.

One whole session was spent thinking of an appropriate name and 'Longsearch' was one that was eventually agreed upon. It seemed to exemplify the purpose of the group and acted as a useful shorthand for its existence. As the passage of time takes its toll, so the present practice seems to be one of less frequent and less well attended local meetings but better attended residential regional meetings.

What of personal growth within the group though? A long-standing member writes of her own experience in this respect: "I found that I was encouraged to observe and listen to children when they were learning. This experience helped me review my understanding and expectation of children and through this my teaching practice. It was very exciting to be in control of my own professional development". She continues that in general terms

The Longsearch group offered and offers the individual member a safe place to discuss professional and personal issues. A place where others would listen, support and constructively challenge. It has given its members opportunities to develop a personal philosophy of education which underpins practice and helps them to remain strong in the face of constant educational change. For example, I have sometimes found myself having to encourage my staff to teach and assess in ways with which I did not philosophically agree but the group listened and helped my respond positively to external pressures. It has also helped its members to have the confidence to value the things that each of us believes in and does well".

Another member writes:

What has become clear as we consider how the group evolved is the importance of its original brief or purpose – not, we think, the particular subject area (in this case practical science) but the quality of study and questioning that arose from it. This led to high expectations of participation and honest sharing, including the ability to admit to problems and failures".

'Experience' is another of Wynne Harlen's necessary factors for mental development in children, and, continuing the analogy, what could be said to be and have been, the experiences of this particular teacher group in this respect?

It seems to fall into three categories, the first being the influence of personal and professional life experiences on individual members. These have ranged from the sombre to the unsettling to the pleasingly joyful and, as the trust between members grew, so mutual support became an important and unexpected benefit to the group. For some it became an asset as their careers changed direction. As one teacher writes:

Longsearch has been a central inspiration and support to me over the years, particularly when reflecting on day-to-day classroom experiences. However the group background in Action Research was especially valuable when I was researching for an advanced diploma at the Cambridge Institute. This involved working with a nursery class and also with small groups of juniors doing practical maths and science. It enabled me to get support to set up the situations I required, to obtain and use the hardware for recording (video and audio), and to benefit from the observations of the group over a period of time.

The second aspect has been those professional experiences that have been dictated by the times we have lived through. None of us started the decade ever suspecting the degree or kind of change that was shortly to be inflicted upon education. A glance through the minutes reveals how seriously these changes were taken and the importance of mutual support once more.

The third aspect has been more particular to 'Longsearch' in that it has included those experiences that, in the main, we actively sought out and goes hand in hand with our **'active response'** as Wynne Harlen has it. For instance we decided at different times in the 1980s to attend two conferences on different aspects of action research, one at the University of London Institute of Education and the other at Cambridge Institute of Education. We also, as Liz Thomson mentioned at the beginning, took it upon ourselves to become personally involved in action research and in

due course published, under the auspices of the Schools Council, a description of our efforts called 'What Learning Looks Like'. This entailed a considerable amount of extra work and we decided upon a residential weekend in which to write up the various accounts. Because of the resulting benefits of such a weekend, in terms of group collaboration and discussion, a weekend at Bishop Grosseteste College was organised in 1985 which was concerned with furthering our own practical learning experiences. This looking at learning at our own adult level was very valuable and acted as a catalyst to our future development.

A later writing venture is described by Liz Thomson below:

> *The group's latest publication* Harvesting the Nettle – learning to live with the National Curriculum [4] *charts the experiences of different group members in their search to accommodate the demands of the National Curriculum. The introduction refers to the ways in which group members have done this: both through taking advantage of unexpected opportunities and through what can only be described as damage limitation exercises. Above all the booklet celebrates the achievements of dedicated teachers who reflect on their practice and whose primary belief is, as one group member recently described it, that 'children's learning is at the still eye of the storm'. As the storm continues to rage that phrase should serve to anchor us to the essential priority.*

On the more mundane level of the weekly/fortnightly meetings, the experiences have often been that of sharing some example or problem of children's learning and then the level of discussion has become anything but mundane. Other things are also discussed as another member describes: " We exchange news of courses attended, articles and books that have been read and personal and current issues". This particular member also welcomes the opportunity to experience ways of looking at hitherto unfamiliar areas of education, for example, "A particular case was that of traveller children; because of the involvement of certain members in this field the whole group developed considerably more understanding of the rewards and problems of teaching traveller children".

The final factor, that of **social interaction** almost speaks for itself but like many groups, whether composed of teachers or not, it's the engine that drives the whole dynamic. Because groups such as 'Longsearch' have interests and beliefs that are generally held in common and indeed provide the foundation for their continued existence, there is an understandable feeling of unity. To one member this feeling is akin to that of belonging to a family. "An everyday family might discuss issues such as local politics, match of the day, the news or even what the neighbours are doing. In our – family the issues are the concerns of education". Despite ups and downs, comings and goings, the support as in a good family, is always to be relied on. It's a safe house in which concern that might be difficult to discuss in the workplace can be openly shared. As the member continues: "Friendship and trust have also allowed a real freedom to question each other as well without anyone feeling threatened and has always meant relying on others' good intentions".

Another aspect of this social interaction has been that, to continue the writer's metaphor, "Family ties are such that although so many have sought new horizons, they still feel themselves to be members, even when separated by time or distance". One group member even received our minutes in Pakistan and considers herself a participant even though she is presently working in Jordan! Another, retired member, sees her role as acting as the group's 'grandmother' and always attends the residential workshops.

The **social interaction** aspect has not, as perhaps might be expected, confined itself to a rather enclosed and simply self supporting way, turning inwards to the group itself, but has extended outwards. This 'network' of former members, shared acquaintances and friends extends further than might be thought. It has provided extra support, a wider audience and, for one member at least, "It opened up the connections and networks to pursue further academic learning".

The future of the group is something, as the minutes show, that has taxed us from the beginning. It still does and hopefully will go on doing so. We swing from having very definite aims to being rather less than consequential; but at base we know there are clear and unambiguous values about learning that we want to pursue and protect.

Looked at one way the publications and the level of discussions all bear evidence to 'mental development' which has been influenced by our growth, experience, shared responses and social interaction. And it is probably true to say that, as a group member records, "There is no doubt that for most of us, the group has been a crucial and influential force in our professional lives".

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[1] Liz Thomson (1983) Teachers as learners, *Forum,* 25(3).
[2] Liz & Alan Thomson (1984) *What Learning Looks Like.* London: Longman/Schools Council.
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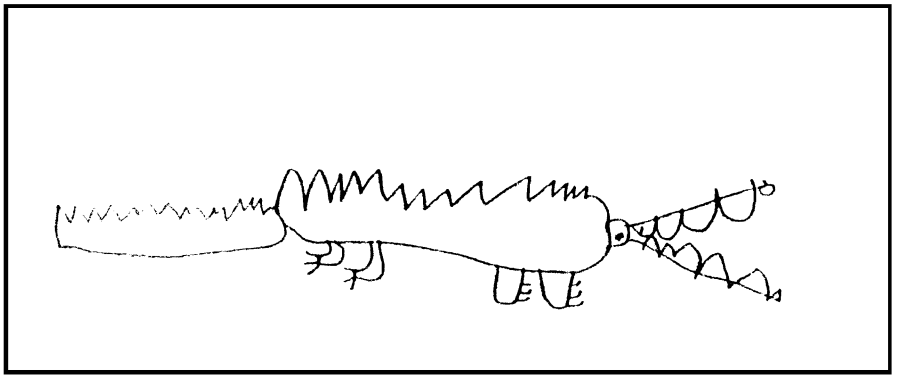
[4] *Harvesting the Nettle.* Longsearch Group, c/o Annabelle Dixon, *Forum.*



Counting the Cost: the future of the initial training of primary school teachers

Lyndon Godsall
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Circular number 14/93 from the Department for Education (DFE) sets out new criteria for all courses of initial training for primary teachers. The document makes reference to the reforms that have had a dramatic impact on primary education. Central to the reforms is the effect the National Curriculum has had on primary education, particularly the primary class teacher.

Since the implementation of the National Curriculum, there have been numerous attacks on the quality and competence of primary teachers. Alexander, Rose and Woodhead criticised much of the existing practice in their report for the DFE 'Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools'. Reports from OFSTED and the National Curriculum Council, have stated the need for primary teachers, to be confident in subject knowledge, to be able to choose a range of teaching methods, and to demonstrate competence in testing and assessing pupil's progress.

The proposals place a greater emphasis on the teacher possessing subject knowledge than on having a clear understanding of the pedagogical issues vital to the learning processes. Three year, six subject BEds are suggested, to prepare teachers for work across the primary curriculum, as well as an emphasis on subject specialism at Key Stage 2. Furthermore, it is suggested that schools should play a much larger and more influential role in course design and delivery, in partnership with higher education institutions.

There are many issues at stake with the new proposals. For many years institutions of higher education together with schools have been partners providing initial training for teachers. The training has been practical, intellectually demanding and has had the breadth to support teachers' continuing professional development. HMIs have also recognised the quality of the provision and the conflict resulting from the nature of the new proposals. This quality is now threatened by unnecessary damaging changes.

Most of the proposals are widely regarded by schools, colleges and universities as unnecessary, expensive, divisive and dismissive to the collaborative progress of the past thirty years of teacher education. There is a danger of dividing the disciplines that contribute to the education of teachers. This separation of all the other areas of academic study at higher education level will continue to be administrated by the HEFCE and will threaten the higher education status of teacher education. Since the development of the BEd degree in the late 1960s, many have fought a hard battle to ensure that the course had parity with all other Honours degree courses.

In an article in *The Times Educational Supplement* (May 6, 1994, p. 3), by Nicholas Pyke, former Education Secretary John Patten promised to overturn the crucial compromise clause on teacher training in the new Education Bill. Mr Patten told his fellow ministers that schools running their own teacher training schemes should be able to decide themselves whether they want to work with universities or not.

The House of Lords angered the Government by insisting that higher education must still be involved in the early stages of school-based training schemes. Schools taking on initial teacher training need support from higher education to ease them into the role. There have also been concerns from higher education bodies such as 'The Council of Church and Associated Colleges', who are responsible for 28% of the nation's teacher education. They say that the Bill will help drive out teacher training from higher education. Mr Patten accused opponents of supporting 'vested interests'.

Much to the Government's dismay, two notable voices of dissent from the Conservative benches have been warning that school-based schemes are totally inadequate. Alan Howarth, former higher education minister, warned that school-based training would not prepare teachers in the area of special educational needs. "It really should remain a requirement that training in special educational needs should be carried out in conjunction with institutions of higher education".

Another critic has been Richard Tracey, MP for Surbiton, he claimed that school based training could damage the quality of teaching. He said, "Parents may be alarmed at too many student teachers being brought into schools and children being subjected to much teaching of teachers". It seems ironical that Nicolas Bomford, headmaster of Harrow, in an article in *The Times Educational Supplement* (11 February 1994, p. 3), voiced his concerns about school-based teacher training. "We have not really got the means of coping", he said. For two years the school has taken students from London University's Institute of Education. From September this arrangement will end, because, the school says, its senior staff cannot afford to spend time supervising five trainees.

What chance is there for an inner-city primary school, with all its demands, to train teachers to the high specifications laid out in the circular? If a high profile, well-resourced school such as Harrow gives out warning

signals, something must be wrong. The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) has indicated that the Government should brace itself for further withdrawals from school-based teacher training.

The Education Bill has had a rocky ride since it was first published in November where it provoked outrage from all political sides. Amongst the proposals was the creation of yet another quango, the Teacher Training Agency. This move is to promote school-based schemes, where control rests with the Secretary of State for Education. Critics said that John Patten was grabbing a dangerous number of additional powers. This view was reinforced in a damaging report from the cross party House of Lords Committee set up to scrutinise new legislation.

The implications of the Bill are numerous and very damaging to the prospects of quality educational provision. The future role of the teacher is now seen not as a reflective professional practitioner, but as a competent technician. Also the calibre of the student will be determined by the quality of the course they are about to receive. If students have a choice of studying at a university or college, together with other students, are they going to choose to spend their time being billeted at a school for the next three years? Further implications may mean that students can only train in their own towns and cities, thus limiting their experiences. Could this be another financial incentive to the Government to go ahead with the proposals?

For higher education institutions, the idea of 'Teacher Education' becoming ring fenced and separated from higher education is not a good prospect. Also trying to retain an Honours status course in three years against the present course will cause many problems. There is also the notion of 'quality control', where one third of the school based element of the course will not be the within the remit of an institution's responsibility for validating a quality course. The Secretary of State will also provide financial disincentives to institutions wishing to continue with a 4 year route.

Concerns from schools, unions and associations, regarding the excessive workloads of classroom teachers have not aided the Bill. Parents have also voiced concerns about the possibility of their children spending a significant proportion of time under the guidance of 'apprentices'.

It is very sad to read on the front page of *The Times Educational Supplement*, in an article by Clare Dean (29 April 1994), that Primary school head teachers throughout England and Wales are warning youngsters off a career in teaching. A national survey of almost 1000 head teachers pointed out that their profession was constantly criticised, debased and undermined by the Government and the media. They said that they could think of no positive events that have taken place since 1991.

The survey indicated that nearly half the respondents would not encourage a young person to take up a career in teaching. The authors of the survey, Bruce Carrington and Peter Tymms from the School of Education at Newcastle University, warned that the mismatch between Government edict and research evidence is often so stark as to mean that any real engagement is unlikely to be productive.

Another survey was carried out by the Standing Conference of Principles of higher education colleges (SCOP) which represents many teacher training institutions. This survey found that 1500 primary heads did not want their schools to take part in the Government's flagship teacher training scheme. It showed that heads were unwilling to shoulder the responsibility of becoming a training school, controlling budgets, course design and student admissions. Many of the heads were against taking charge of student welfare, or the intellectual development of trainees and 80% of those surveyed thought that the process of selecting students should be the job of higher education institutions.

One worrying concern raised by heads was the credibility of a new school-awarded qualification. Many thought that it could attract an inferior calibre of student which reinforces the idea that practice is all that is needed and that academic rigour and a theoretical base are not important.

Ray Mann, an officer for SCOP said "I do not believe that parents, teachers or governors will accept the levels of disruption that this will entail. We believe the existing balance between higher education and schools is meeting the Government's objectives."

As the work of teachers becomes more and more complex, can the Government really believe that school-based teacher training will improve the quality of the learning process in the classroom. What will be the cost in the end?

Teacher Education and Training: a Left Critique

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'Reforms', Rationale and Tactics

Teacher Education and the Radical Right

Conservative Government policy towards the training and education of teachers has become increasingly influenced by radical right-wing ideologues, think-tanks, publicists and their newsprint media allies. Radical Right wing publications [1] have echoed and given ideas and shape to Conservative policy and Ministerial pronouncements on

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) since the mid-1980s, building on and developing Conservative horror at, and critique of, egalitarianism and of 'permissive progressivism' expressed in, and since, the Black Papers of 1969 and 1975.

For the Radical Right, teacher education colleges and University Departments of Education and their staff are 'unreliable' or 'dangerous'. Some lecturers are socialist, many (probably most) are centrist/social democratic/liberal democratic or one-nation liberal Conservatives. Few lecturers voted Conservative in the 1992 General Election, let alone support the gung-ho tactics of the current Conservative regime.

The Radical Right, and Government Ministers loathe what they describe as the permissive society, 'trendy teachers', 'the Blue Peter Primary Curriculum', 'loony left' staffrooms, 'the false cult of egalitarianism', 'anti-racism', mixed ability teaching, collaborative learning, democratic classrooms and democratic management of schools. So serving teachers have to be whipped into line by the National Curriculum and compulsory recording and assessing, by schools and teachers competing against each other, and by the prospect of payment by results.

In the training and education of new teachers, student teachers too, are being controlled and 'moulded' ideologically.

Five Conservative Tactics in the Re-forming of ITE

Five tactics in Government Policy since 1984, (markedly since 1989) have been to:

(i) prescribe the content of BEd and PGCE courses. BEd and PGCE courses themselves are now more rigidly circumscribed than at any time. The major effect of this specific circumscription is to de-theorise, de-critique and de-intellectualise ITE courses and new teachers.
(ii) take those students out of colleges and place them for far longer periods in schools, and for shorter periods in lecture theatres and seminar discussion/ evaluation rooms. Hence the major increase in school-based training since 1989.
(iii) take some ITE out of College/ Universities altogether (or virtually altogether), and set up a market in teacher training/ education, a variety of totally or overwhelmingly school-based schemes – the Licensed Teacher Scheme, the Articled Teacher Scheme, the Secondary and Primary totally school based schemes, the Open University Scheme.
(iv) divert funding for ITE away from higher education institutions towards schools, via a Teacher Training Agency. A move which will substantially reduce the human, equipment, and research base of ITE higher education institutions. Not least will be the likely considerable reduction in college lecturers in the ITE sector. Not only are such oppositional 'intellectuals', 'professionals' to be circumscribed. Many will be redeployed or become redundant.
(v) attract into teaching two new types of teacher, in an attempt to re-stock the teaching force with new teachers who have, in ideological terms, developed and been constituted differently to those whose initial professional and education socialisation and identity was mediated through BEd and PGCE college-based courses.

Recomposing the Teaching Force

The first 'new' targeted group was/is ex-businessmen (sic) and ex-Armed Forces Personnel, that is, mature men and women who are accustomed to commercial and competitive-exploitative human relationships and/or to disciplinary authoritarian relationships. Their view of education (for example school content, pedagogy and management) might be assumed to be instrumental, managerial, technical, vocational. However, my own limited experience of leading, (and interviewing applicants for) a four year BEd Primary route for 130 Mature and Non-standard Entry students, is that many former commercial and Armed Services workers wishing to embark on a four year BEd degree frequently claim to wish to do so precisely to escape such competitive–exploitative and/or disciplinary–authoritarian relationships and work climates. This particular population group is opting for a four year undergraduate degree and not a one year school-based scheme. But there may well be many who want to learn (and to qualify) quickly, on the job, without concerning themselves with theory, critical thinking and examining alternatives.

The second major group targeted by this Government recruitment tactic, was 'Mums'. For example the June 1993 proposal by the then Secretary of State for Education, John Patten, to recruit mothers (who, generally, left school at 18) with 'A' level qualifications, and thence to crash-course train them in one year. This course would have been in stark contrast to the currently required three or four year undergraduate BEd courses for such recruits. Such 'Mums Army' courses would have been of the same duration as the (academically) lower level one year Nursery Nurse courses.

Although the 'Mums Army' scheme was dropped after near-unanimous opposition, it clearly illustrates the government's desire to employ, as teachers, people who have not been through the Higher Education degree process.

'New Style Training' in Schools

What both of these targeted groups would have in common is that:

(i) they would be trained, not educated;
(ii) this would occur on-the-job in school;
(iii) they would learn through an apprenticeship system, 'learning at Nellie's or Nigel's Knee';
(iv) they would not experience a variety of school ethoses and styles;
(v) they would have minimal opportunity for collaborative evaluation and criticism;
(vi) they would be largely denied theoretical and analytical perspectives, other than those of themselves and their mentor teacher/ mistress/master Nellie or Nigel;
(vii) most crushingly of all – in terms of the status of the teaching profession, and their own probable future status and pay within a staffroom – they would be non-graduate.

In brief, these new types of recruits to the teaching profession would be trained but not educated. Trained to deliver but not educated to systematically question and evaluate. Compared to teachers undergoing a four year BEd or a BA/BSc plus the one year PGCE, these recruits, desired by a Conservative government to fill up staffrooms and classrooms, would be denied the opportunity to encounter non-Conservative views and philosophies of schooling and education other than through their own life experiences.

What is Now Out of BEd and PGCE Courses and What is In

Out go many education issues such as 'race', gender, social

class factors in schooling and policy response strategies to address these issues. Out goes any ideological and political analysis of micro-policies (in the classroom and school) and macro-policy (in legislation such as the Education Reform Act, Opting Out, the National Curriculum, Assessment, Special Needs). Out goes the framing and evaluation of alternative educational ideologies, and of micro and macro-policies. Even more important, all BEd and PGCE courses lose the space and the opportunity to evaluate the study of teaching, learning and education critically.

Under the new 1992 Secondary and 1993 Primary ITE regulations, out goes anything other than an extremely minimal treatment of such issues as bullying, styles of classroom management, child abuse, the legislative framework of schooling, and the study of cross-curricular issues – other than induction into capitalism, i.e. 'Education for Economic Awareness' which is relatively well-funded.

Critical issues are being replaced by detheorised, 'how to', practical courses. The Conservative intention is to restrict ITE courses to a non-critical instruction and training in how to 'deliver', uncritically, the Conservative National Curriculum and Assessment for schools. This vision of schooling includes the following features: a single subject version of knowledge; a conservative selection of knowledge based on an elitist view of culture; authoritarian transmissive teaching methods; individualistic, competitive, relationships between children; competition between schools resulting in a social class based hierarchy of types of school. This vision can be summed up as a Conservative education to fit children and worker/ citizens unthreateningly into capitalist economy, ideology, and policy.

In order to attain this vision the Government intends that new teachers should have little opportunity to engage seriously with 'oppositional ideologies'. The 'reforms' in ITE constitute an attempt to marginalise, to 'hide' the two major oppositional ideologies- socialism/ Marxism on the one hand and liberal/ progressivism on the other. They are part of an overall Radical Right Conservative ideological strategy, an attempt to deride and delegitimate socialism/ Marxism and liberal progressivism in education and in society. So in schools, and in ITE, the following are marginalised: classroom and educational practices which are based on (and indeed help to perpetuate) radical Socialist principles in education such as egalitarianism, comprehensivism, positive discrimination, collaborative non-competitive work, community-centredness, collectivism, democratic control.

Derided too are liberal progressive principles such as individualistic child-centredness, discovery methods, and interdisciplinary topic based organisation of the curriculum. The 'Plowden Report', the bible and motor of such liberal-progressive Primary Schooling, is vilified by the Radical Right as sentimental, dangerous, treacherous rubbish .

Socialists try to apply socialist principles when deciding how to organise pupils/ students within the classroom and within the school; what knowledge (and whose knowledge) to select for inclusion in the curriculum; what attitudes to encourage towards that curriculum; what methods of teaching and of learning and what pedagogical relationships between teachers and pupils/ students there should be; what type of school management structure there should be; what should be the aims and priorities of local education authority and national state policy.[2]

With spaces for social justice being narrowed down in college-based parts of ITE, schools now have a greater responsibility – and a greater opportunity – to develop socially and educationally aware, impassioned, egalitarian teachers.

Notes

[1] Key publications include; Hillgate Group (1989) *Learning to Teach.* London: Claridge Press; Anthony O'Hear (1988) *Who Teaches the Teachers?* London: Social Affairs Unit; Stuart Sexton (1987) Our Schools: a radical policy. London: Institute for Economic Affairs; Sheila Lawlor (1990) *Teachers Mistaught: training in theories or education in subjects.* London: Centre for Policy Studies; Dennis O'Keefe (1990) *The Wayward Elite.* London: Adam Smith Institute.

[2] An attempt is made to apply such principles to Initial Teacher Education in Dave Hill (1991) *What's Left in Teacher Education : teacher education, the Radical Left and policy proposals.* London: Tufnell Press; in Hillcole Group/ Clyde Chitty (Ed.) (1991) *Changing the Future: redprint for education.* London: Tufnell Press; and in Dave Hill (1994) Initial teacher education and ethnic diversity, in G. Verma & P. Pumphrey (Eds) *Cultural Diversity and the Curriculum. Vol. 4: Cross Curricular Contexts, Themes and Dimensions in Primary Schools.* London: Falmer Press.

The GNVQ Debate

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Assistant Secretary (Further Education) at NATFHE, Dan Taubman writes here on the current debate surrounding the introduction and development of NVQs and GNVQs. He has previously worked in adult and community education and immediately before moving to NATFHE worked at Middlesex University.

In early January 1994 I took up post as Assistant Secretary (Further Education) with NATFHE, the University and College Lecturers Union. My start there was a few weeks after the broadcast of the famous, or infamous, *Dispatches* programme on Channel 4 television.[1] In this programme and the accompanying pamphlet Professor Alan Smithers of the University of Manchester made a series of withering critiques of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and the new General Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). Since then the educational press have it seems weekly carried items for and against both sets of qualifications, particularly GNVQs. The conference circuit in the first half of 1994 seemed to be an unending series of heavy weight bouts between Smithers and either Gilbert Jessup or John Hillier from the National Council of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). What does it all signify? Is it all self-publicity and hot air or is there cause for genuine concern and a genuine debate? This article attempts to set out the background for what is a fundamental and long standing debate about the status and position of vocational education and training in Britain; to summarise the rival positions and finally to lay out a middle ground which is both critical yet hopefully constructive.

Background

For the first industrialised country Britain has an appalling record in terms of vocational education and training. This can be traced back at least a hundred if not a hundred and fifty years, if not to almost the beginning of industrial revolution then certainly to the period when Britain's industrial supremacy was challenged by Germany and the USA. Regularly over the last century there have been Reports and Commissions bemoaning the state of British vocational education and training both in the schools system and in the workplace.

Alongside other symptoms of the British disease of short-termism, this lack of a coherent vocational education and training system has been cited as the cause of the decline of the British economy. The figures tell the same tale now. In 1989 less than 33% of the UK labour force had vocational qualifications compared to a figure of around 65% in Germany and 40% in France. Even in 1986 only 15% of French school leavers left full-time education without completing a vocational course and more than 70% of the 16 to 18 years cohort stayed on in full time education compared with a figure of just over 30% in Britain. Figures in the 1990s show an increase in the numbers staying on in education after 16 but this can at least in part be attributed to the recession and cuts in benefits for this age group.

Part of the reason for Britain's lamentable record has been the reluctance of Governments to intervene on the training scene in a consistent and coherent manner and to employers' failure to invest in education and training. But the problem also stems from the class nature of British education and the manner that 'trade' and vocational education has always been seen as inferior. Perhaps this was a legacy of empire. Whatever the reason class division has always been built into the education system. It was at the heart of the 1994 Education Act which, whilst establishing a national system of secondary education, did so with the three tracks of grammar, technical and secondary moderns schools. The academic track has always been the most highly valued and success in school has been equated with successful exam results and entry to higher education for a small élite. One of the main props to this educational apartheid has been the exam system with at the top A-levels.

The 1970s saw the stark reality of weak British economic performance, the collapse of the traditional form of vocational education and training – apprenticeships, and the rise of youth unemployment and social unrest. It was becoming apparent to all that Britain could no longer afford a ramshackle educational and training system that was failing to provide young people and the country with the skills base needed for a modern global economy.

The 'Great Debate' on education that Callaghan as Prime Minster started at Ruskin in 1976 grew apace in the 1980s. That decade saw the rise and fall of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) which seemed to be having a greater and greater influence; not only over training but also education. It was in the heart of the MSC where the first stirrings of a new paradigm of education and training had its origins. This paradigm looked to concepts of competence, standards and defining learning programmes in terms of the outcomes for the learner.

The first sign of these concepts of standards of competence was buried in the MSC's New Training Initiative (NTI) published in 1981.[2] The NTI stated that if the UK was to meet the requirements of a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive economic environment it needed a more highly skilled, trained and flexible workforce. Employees would need to train and retrain throughout their working lives to keep pace with ever changing work requirements and occupational structures. The NTI attempted to set out an alternative approach to education and training. Deep in the Report was the sentence:

> *... at the heart of this initiative lie standards of a new kind.*

It was these new standards that were to form the core of the system of education and training which developed in the 1980s.

One of the major developments from the NTI was a move to make explicit the outcomes sought from education and training programmes. This was in sharp contrast to previous practices which defined education and training in terms of the learning inputs required. These inputs were usually in the form of syllabuses, courses and training

specifications. This shift from an input-led model to an outcome-led system had fundamental implications for education and training and for opening up delivery of programmes to a far more varied set of learning and assessment modes. Learning objectives in the new system are specified in the form of the necessary standards of outcomes. These are independent of any course, programme or particular learning mode and thus it becomes possible to create a framework of standards which can be adapted by any course or programme. The new model was particularly appropriate for vocational education and training, and it is this model which underpins both NVQs and GNVQs.

So started the process of introducing a whole new series of vocational qualifications based on employer-led occupational standards of competence derived from functional analysis of jobs and their related activities and skills.

In 1986 the Government decided to tackle the problem of the proliferation of vocational qualifications and awarding bodies. Following the MSC's *Review of Vocational Qualifications* in 1986, the National Council of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was established to harmonise the emerging new system of vocational qualifications and clarify the relationship between the qualifications. The plan was (and is) to create a national framework within which all the vocational qualifications can relate, thus ensuring a uniform system in which the transfer of nationally recognised credits and qualifications is possible. What was being created was, however, a vocational training not an educational qualification. It was to be obtained in the workplace. Colleges could and did run a range of NVQs but they were difficult for schools to deliver, even if this had been thought appropriate.

At the same time as the Government was introducing reforms to the training system, it also began to tackle the other side of the vocational education equation – education itself. It began a long series of reforms that were to completely to transform the English and Welsh education systems. The Education Reform Act 1988 brought in the local management of schools and the National Curriculum. The late 1980s had seen a series of reports from both Government agencies and academics, ministerial statements and initiatives that pointed out the narrowness of the post-16 curriculum and A-levels, its failure to create a viable and acceptable vocational track. A major debate ensued. There was considerable and widespread agreement on policy goals – greater participation of 16-19 year olds, intervention to ensure training in employment for the same age cohort, greater use of credit transfer between courses, increased access to higher education, establishing parity of esteem between vocational and academic tracks. Actual proposals were always far more controversial. The main stumbling block has perhaps always been the Government's reluctance to abandon the 'gold standard' of A-levels.

The main thrust of the Government's eventual policies was in the White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* and the subsequent Further and Higher Education Act 1992. This not only created a whole new structural and funding framework for a new incorporated further education sector but also confirmed the retention of A-levels and announced the speedy development of General Vocational Education Qualifications (GNVQ).

> *Many young people want to keep their options open. They want to study for vocational qualifications which prepare them for a range of related opportunities but do not limit their choices too early. Some want to keep open the possibility of moving on to higher education. Employers too want to have the opportunity of developing their young recruits' general skills, as well as their specific working skills. A range of general qualifications is needed within the NVQ framework to meet these needs.[3]*

The requirements of GNVQs were also laid out in the White Paper

> *GNVQs should cover broad occupational areas, and offer opportunities to develop the relevant knowledge and understanding, and to gain an appreciation of how to apply them at work. GNVQs should also:*
>
> *– offer a broad preparation for employment as well as an accepted route to higher level qualifications, including higher education;*
> *– require a demonstration of a range of skills and the appreciation of knowledge and understanding relevant to the related qualifications;*
> *– be of equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level;*
> *– be clearly related to the occupationally specific NVQs so that young people can progress quickly and effectively from one to another;*
> *– be sufficiently distinctive from occupationally specific NVQs to ensure that there is no confusion between the two;*
> *– be suitable for use by full-time students in colleges, and if appropriate in schools who have limited opportunities to demonstrate competence in the workplace.*

GNVQs had a lot to do! Their development was entrusted to the NCVQ who proceeded apace. By 1992 first phase of GNVQs had been developed and introduced for five areas. 1993 saw another three and 1994 will see more. GNVQs come in three levels – Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced. They are based on nationally agreed standards of achievement. They are located within the NCVQ framework and are designed to have some equivalence with other qualifications: an Advanced level GNVQ is said to be worth 2 A-levels, an Intermediate GNVQ the equivalent of 4 GCSEs. GNVQs combine vocational skills, knowledge and understanding with core skills in numeracy, communication and information technology. GNVQs are made up of units of equal size; an Advanced GNVQ has 12 vocational units and 3 core units and an Intermediate GNVQ 6 vocational and the three core skills units. GNVQs like NVQs do not have tight syllabuses to follow. The heart of GNVQs are the statements of achievement and their demonstrable achievement of these by the learner. Although the main vehicle for assessing the learner's achievements are portfolios of work and evidence, there are external tests.

The initial success of GNVQs has been in some respects remarkable. By the autumn of 1993 over 80,000 students, 1 in 7 of all 16-year-olds were registered on GNVQs. There were 1,423 GNVQ Centres involving some 820 schools and 510 colleges. The latest move, following the Dearing Report's call for more vocational work in schools, will be the possibility of introducing Part 1 GNVQs into the space made available by slimming down the curriculum at Key Stage 4.

This then was the situation on which the Channel 4

television programme based on Smithers's work burst late in 1993. Many were unhappy about GNVQs, not least because of the haste with which they had been developed, piloted and introduced.

The Critique against GNVQs

An OFSTED Report [4] praised much in the pilots but was concerned at the variable standards at Intermediate level. The Report identified such shortcomings as: the use of too much technical language; imprecise and difficult to interpret assessment and grading criteria; the late arrival of information on course requirements and changes in arrangements, thus making course planning and organisation difficult. The Report also stated that the late availability of tests from the awarding bodies caused problems and that the tests varied too much in style and level of difficulty. There were concerns that some of the verifiers had been verifying procedures and standards of work in areas where they had no specific expertise. The Inspectors complained of insufficient guidance to schools and too little opportunity for collaboration over issues such as the role of core skills and assessment, areas where the Report said teachers had insufficient understanding. Core skills delivery needed better integration.

It was the Smithers Report [5] and programme however that garnered all the publicity. Smithers calls the introduction of GNVQs "a disaster of epic proportions" and claims that the responses to both the programme and the Report has shown that there were many organisations and institutions across the country harbouring doubts about how useful relevant, rigorous and cost-effective, the new qualifications were.

The core of Smithers's critique of GNVQs and NVQs is that they are:

Schematic framework derived from behavioural psychology ruthlessly applied;
Unfamiliar jargon not readily understood by students, teachers or employers;
No syllabus;
No specified course or time limit;
Student-centred learning;
No compulsory written exams for NVQs;
Underpinning knowledge and theory not separately tested but inferred;
One-to-one continuous assessment when candidate deemed ready;
Bureaucratic procedures;
All existing vocational qualifications to be replaced.

He believes that GNVQs are based on broad fuzzy statements that lack precision or prioritisation; that their assessment is fragmented with no overall assessment and he dislikes the possibility of only limited grading. He concludes in a sensational manner:

Few are aware of the new revolution transforming education for the majority in Britain or the unconventional approach now being adopted. Even fewer are aware that many involved in this revolution, often by circumstance rather than desire are expressing reservations. They fear the new system, far from raising the profile and establishing the credibility of vocationally-based education may discredit it further.

My contention is that the Smithers' position is essentially reactionary; that he seeks to defend the status quo and the academic track including A-levels. The main criticisms he makes of the new qualifications are that they are designed to recognise what people can do rather than stretch them. NVQs in which candidates have simply to 'do it once' for competence to be demonstrated are compared unfavourably with former courses such as City and Guilds where there were exams to test understanding of underpinning knowledge. Smithers constantly and deliberately mixes NVQs with GNVQs. They are different . One is a training qualification, the other an educational qualification. With NVQs Smithers contends that there are no guidelines for teachers about what to teach - students are required to 'discover', to find out knowledge for themselves.

What seems to be missing is an understanding that NVQs are occupational standards, that is they are criteria by which to judge performance in the work place not knowledge in the classroom. NVQs need not be the maximum but the base line from which to develop programmes. It is true that standards for underpinning knowledge have been inadequately specified in the NVQ format but there is sufficient indication of what underpinning knowledge is required to devise appropriate schemes of study. What is missing in the system at present are the resources both in terms of time and money to allow the providers to engage in curriculum and materials development to deliver quality programmes leading to NVQs and GNVQs. These new qualifications need to be examined for their potential not just the actuality. Potentially knowledge is defined within the G/NVQ framework. It underpins and should transcend the particular context within which achievement is demonstrated and should result in more creative and flexible thinking than perhaps resulted from the 'old style' courses. All are agreed that creativity and flexibility are essential requirements for the future workforce.

The Case for GNVQs

Many have been moved to rebut the Smithers' argument. Two of the most cogent critiques have been in *Education* magazine by Kershaw & Gadd [6] and Thorne & Cashdan [7]. Kershaw & Gadd begin by saying:

Smithers and Co's view of the failings of GNVQ would be laughable if it weren't so important a subject. Not only is GNVQ beginning to prove an invaluable pathway for the progression of increasing number of students, it is also developing into the necessary central element which will enable us to make sense of the whole 16-19 curriculum.

They tackle head-on Smithers' arguments regarding GNVQs' lack of syllabuses, unfamiliar jargon, no specified courses, student-centred learning and a lack of testing of underpinning knowledge and theory.

Kershaw & Gadd maintain there is a clear, logical relationship between the terms used by GNVQ that is not often found in GCSE and A-levels. They go on to say that there are no specified courses in A-levels otherwise it would not be possible to study for them in a variety of modes and over differing lengths of time. They praise GNVQs norms as allowing students to learn at different speeds and making allowance for this. Kershaw & Gadd rightly make no apologies for the student-centred approach that focuses on student needs; after all the other approach of A-levels fails the majority of the population.

They assert that GNVQs do have syllabuses, albeit with language and layout that is unconventional. They believe that taken together the various parts of GNVQs – the units, elements, indicators and test specifications do constitute a

syllabus that has more detail and is clearer than most A-levels. If the core skills elements are taken into account then GNVQs do have breadth. Finally Kershaw and Gadd disprove the myth of the lack of formal testing. They quote how eight mandatory advanced science units must be passed through 7 hours of externally set and marked tests which count towards the final qualification: thus knowledge and theory are tested separately. This is backed by tests and assignments assessed by the student's teacher that provides supporting evidence of the student's understanding of the theory and knowledge. Grading themes are used and Smithers' assertion that they are based on core skills rather than the technical expertise is shown to be erroneous.

Thorne & Cashdan cover much of the same ground as Kershaw & Gadd. They maintain that GNVQs may be a better preparation for higher education than existing A-levels.

> *There is no doubt about the positive aspects of GNVQs. They lay stress on skills, building on the 'know, understand and can do' of the national curriculum and focus on the development of the independent learner. Both of these should be excellent preparation for HE, particularly as it is currently developing, and should provide a basis for an integrated and positive approach to 16 to 18 education.*

Like Kershaw & Gadd, Thorne & Cashdan believe that the information given by GNVQs in terms of range statements and performance criteria are explicit . They take the battle on assessment to the heart of A-levels by raising serious questions about their assessment. 'What does a D or E graded A-level mean?' they ask after teachers have sampled the A-level syllabus, students have sampled what they are taught and examiners again sample the syllabus, what price then coverage? Given the heavy norm referencing of A-level a D or E grade may well mean the student has failed half of what they have attempted.

Thorne & Cashdan see assessment as the critical issue because of the multiple and often conflicting purposes to which it is put; critical because it is assessment that really defines the syllabus for most learners. If it is central then GNVQs are radically difficult to A-levels but may be better. The summative assessment suits the administrative purpose of sorting out successful candidates for HE. Thorne and Cashdan conclude that the very problems of GNVQ assessment are its strengths.

> *Judgements are less easy to summarise because they depend on the demonstration of competence in a range of situations on more than one occasion, involving detailed specification and multiple assessments ... Examining the actual learning experience they represent, we might conclude that for many bright 16-year-olds GNVQ would be a better option. They would certainly have a more interesting and involving set of experience. most significantly, for a 16-year old who is unsure of whether HE is what s/he wants, GNVQ leaves the options open.*

A Way Forward

Where does all this debate leave the bemused educational world? GNVQs certainly have their faults. As the OFSTED Report shows their introduction and delivery have been flawed It is becoming clear that for further study in some subjects such engineering, they fail to provide the underpinning knowledge and skills in mathematics.[16] They do, however represent a new approach to learning and particularly the possibilities of a new and integrated post-16 qualification. They could be the corner stone of what most believe to be the necessary next step towards real parity of esteem between the vocational and academic tracks – that is a new unified post-16 unitised qualification supported by a credit accumulation framework which enables students to specialise in one track or mix and match between tracks.

Many of the flaws of GNVQs can be remedied through review and through an increase in resources especially for staff development to assist those delivering GNVQs in meeting the challenges that their introduction presents.

A checklist of reforms might look thus:

- forms and documentation to substantially reduced;
- a better balance developed between learning and assessment;
- an adequate system of moderation to be developed and properly resourced;
- a review to be undertaken of the role of performance criteria and their wording to be tightened;
- exemplar material be provided to assist teacher assessment;
- the grading system to be reformed and the need for external tests considered. If they continue they must be set by staff with the proper expertise and be adequately pre-tested;
- the beneficial role of the core skills be given greater weight by NCVQ;
- all optional and additional units to be available at the beginning of the programme;
- the role of the external verifier to be reviewed;
- substantial extra resources to be provided by the DFE;
- adequate class contact time given to deliver the programme, including time for individual tutoring and counselling, for course team contact, planning and review;
- adequate support staff to assist the organisation and administration of the programmes;
- extra funds to cover the additional assessment requirements; and
- a proper staff development programme co-ordinated by the DFE and the awarding bodies be developed.

Given the Government's ideological commitment to the gold standard of A-levels, GNVQs remain the best hope of obtaining real parity of esteem between the post-16 tracks. The baby should not be thrown out with the bath water of flawed introduction and delivery and gross under-resourcing.

[The views expressed are those of the author and do not represent those of NATFHE]

Notes

[1] *Dispatches*, shown on Channel 4, December 16, 1993.
[2] MSC (1981) *A New Training Initiative: agenda for action*, London: HMSO.
[3] DES (1991) *Education and Training for the 21st Century*. London: HMSO.
[4] OFSTED (1993) *GNVQs in Schools*. London: HMSO.
[5] Alan Smithers (1993) *All Our Futures*, p. 9. Channel 4.
[6] Noel Kershaw & Ken Gadd (1994) Sunlit path, *Education*, 25 February.
[7] Pauline Thorne & Asher Cashdan (1994) Off the gold standard, *Education*, 10 June.

The Cost of Good Practice

Suzanne Taylor
Suzanne Taylor has been Learning Support Coordinator at Frank F. Harrison Community School since 1991. Prior to this, she worked in comprehensive schools in the West Midlands where she acquired extensive experience of developing strategies to support pupils with learning difficulties.

As a practising support teacher of some fifteen years experience, I have fought long and hard for recognition of the skills and expertise shown by teachers in the field of Learning Support and Special Educational Needs. There is much evidence of good practice shown by those teachers who choose to enter this field. I consider that it is inappropriate for newly qualified teachers to enter this area as the experience gathered through teaching classes in the mainstream, whatever type that may be, is vital to provide the background knowledge, philosophy and strategies necessary to become a good practitioner.

Good practice to me is meeting the needs of the individual within the context of the comprehensive school and its community. It is the basic right of the individual to have their educational needs met within the context of their neighbourhood and community. The issue of labelling and its attached stigma has long been contentious. This has been the case due to segregation being operated within the educational experiences of so many current teachers. The majority of children, in my experience, do not 'label' other children until labels are used by adults around them. Indeed, on being confronted by deaf and hearing impaired children in a previous teaching post the only stigma that arose in my presence was from me and my inability to cope with those who were outside my own experience in education. Those students and their teachers taught me a great deal about my own propensity to label. Also, when introducing a reading scheme that required extraction of students from lessons, the only example of labelling came from one child who thought they *might* be teased, but ended up as the object of envy for the extra time and attention given and resulted in a waiting list being drawn up for the honour of extra lessons.

In-class support has been, and in some schools still is, a contentious issue. For some staff it still constitutes a threat to have another adult in their domain (the classroom). Those staff who have managed to take the seemingly giant leap and accept the presence of a support teacher / classroom assistant / ancillary / Adult-other-than-Teacher (AoT), frequently become the most fervent converts. Although it maybe that the support teacher is in the classroom to meet the specific needs of the individual, in the case of a statemented student, or group of students, there is a beneficial spin off to all students within the group. This is because they will receive a greater proportion of a teachers time when and if they need it as well as experiencing the whole range of a full community. This affords *all* students a greater chance of reaching their full potential and supports furtherance of the comprehensive principle.

Support systems must also provide the opportunity to use flexible learning strategies. Many students are very aware of their own shortcomings and will make positive moves in a non-threatening environment to address their needs. The provision of a resource base, staffed and available at breaks and lunch-times and accessible to those who can be 're-encouraged' to use it, has proved to be vital to the delivery of support that frequently is not possible or appropriate in the classroom or within the span of lesson time. This, of course, has staffing implications which must be addressed either by alternative personnel or flexibility of staffing arrangements .

Learning support provision, by its very nature, in best practice is supplementary to the timetable, and is organised after the compilation of it. This is a dangerous situation as it means that Learning Support is then the easiest area of provision to cut. The supposition that this has little or no consequences within a school is a fallacy. A cut in learning support has a direct effect upon:

- the potential reached by individual students;
- the potential reached by the supported group;
- stress upon staff;
- achievement of the school;
- exam success at the end of compulsory schooling;

and in our current climate also:

- truancy figures; and
- exam league tables.

This list is *not* exhaustive.

At all times, even without the rigours of the impending Code of Practice, Governors need to be fully aware of the entire scope of SEN and LS operations within the school. In times of cuts the Governors are a very important group to lobby and also I have found them a great source of support. But this can only be the case if they are very familiar with the work that teachers in SEN provision give and facilitate. It is only when they are fully informed that the Governors can correctly make decisions regarding the seemingly easy and painless option of cutting Learning Support staffing and provision to balance the budget.

To look at the needs and rights of the individual in education is to examine carefully the problems and deficiencies of the establishment and the education system. This, of course frequently when reduced to its basic level, becomes a funding and resource issue. No matter how hard we try, the 'blood out of a stone' impossibility always arises. However there are many strategies and stages to embrace before the 'stone' becomes the only choice. Flexibility of approach and initiative are essential.

A recent experience of being forced, through LEA funding for statement provision, to use a classroom assistant proved to be a very salutary one for me. Having fought long and hard throughout my career against the dilution of professionalism in the classroom it has been illuminating to see the true worth of an AoT to those students who need almost constant attention for reading and/or amanuensis in

order to access mainstream lessons. There is, from the employment of AoTs, the issue of training for the proper use and development of these assistants and also a need to constantly remind other teachers that AoTs cannot take charge of a class alone. Whilst the use of AoTs has been prevalent in special schools, it is a new experience for many teachers in mainstream education. The issue of the cost of AoTs is an advantage in a situation of scarcity of resources and can in no way replace a teacher, but is rather a complementary aspect to the flexibility of SEN provision. Perhaps it is time that every individual child had a written statement of their needs. In many cases such a 'statement' would be the formalising of that educational experience already available and taken up by them and not a new provision, but it would acknowledge the attainments and aspirations of that individual and build on the Record of Achievement

The Code of Practice can be viewed as an attempt to specify needs, introduce a staged approach and direct resources. If this were purely the case then I believe it would have been welcomed more; for much within it has been what those dealing with special needs have asked for years. Fear, at the moment, lies in the probability that assignment to levels could mean labelling, alongside the scarcity of resources and further reduction in these to increase 'efficiency'. The frequency of reviews stipulated in the draft Code of Practice defies printable comment in its implications, and in schools with only the SEN co-ordinator and no learning support teachers, is an impossibility to deliver alongside classroom involvement. The implications for all staff, especially in relation to individual education plans (IEPs) and their construction, delivery and review for those students identified at level 1, are immense both in terms of training and experience. Another question to be faced is that of just how many schools already operate IEPs? How many staff know how to construct them? To what degree of detail should they go?

Even more basic to the operation of the Code is how many schools actually have SEN Coordinators in place. The rush to appoint or assign responsibility to a person within the school to oversee implementation of the Code of Practice highlights the need, yet again, for specialist experience and in-service training. If, as is frequently suggested by the powerful voices fronting the current round of conferences, the Code of Practice in its final form is to encourage the adoption of current 'good practice', why does it not carry with it the wherewithal for full resource provision? It does clarify responsibilities, it does encourage systematic thinking, it does encourage partnership with parents and all agencies, but it expects it all within the scenario of much depleted SEN departments and single person departments.

With increased resourcing, and plenty of training for all staff, SEN and LS teachers could enhance the effect of the Code in the promotion of the SEN debate. Furtherance of this debate would mean development of a useful and usable tool to enhance all students' education. It could serve to ensure that good SEN practice is available to *all,* i.e. setting clear, attainable short term objectives; sharing with the student the delineation of the objectives; early explanation of the process; regular positive reviewing of progress; celebration of success; and long term goals agreed with inbuilt flexibility.

And You Have to Dissect Frogs!

Jenny Griffiths & Lesley Jones
Jenny Griffiths has taught in schools and worked in theatre in education. She joined Goldsmiths' College in 1975 and has specialised in drama and classroom management. Lesley Jones taught in primary and secondary schools in Birmingham between 1968 and 1985. Since then she has worked at Goldsmiths' College, mainly in the area of mathematics education. This article describes their recent research into children's perceptions of primary and secondary school science.

As part of a research project on primary / secondary liaison we recently interviewed a number of Y6 children about the work they had done this year and their expectations of the work they would encounter in secondary school. The project concerns itself with Design and Technology, Mathematics and Science. The children talked about their experience in Y6 and the things they had learnt which were new to them. Their experience was mixed, varying from class to class and between the four schools involved. Some clearly had more practical experience, whereas for others their science experience is based largely on a series of TV programmes. For most of them science is a very positive experience and one which came high on the list of the 'best' thing they had done so far this year. One group had learnt about electricity and were able to give a very clear account of the way in which a switch works. The pupils who had learnt about magnetism were able to describe what happened between two like poles, though they were not able to proffer any explanation about why it happened.

The groups were asked to say what they thought would be different about the work when they went to secondary school. Most of them were feeling very positive about their transfer, "Can't wait to get there". The differences they perceived related to social and academic changes:

You come out later (referring to the timing of the school day)
You are the smallest in the school
I'll have to walk to school
The lessons are harder
We won't know the teachers
You have to dissect frogs
... and bulls eyes
You get homework
You do drama
There's more computers

The reference to dissecting 'frogs' took us by surprise. We were fairly confident that this was not the case, but checked it out at the next opportunity. Definitely not for the last eight years and probably not for many years prior to that. Sheep's eyes, but definitely no frogs. Where do these myths come from? The girl who claimed to know about it, described the operation in graphic detail, with a mixture of fascination and horror.

In describing the work they had done throughout the year we found that many of the children focussed on the concrete 'content' of the lesson and were not immediately aware of the underlying concepts. This is, perhaps, not surprising, but may contribute to the view of primary science as less 'real' than secondary school science. Unless abstract ideas are plainly highlighted, learners often do not make connections between what they actually do and the concepts that underlie it. This was clearly demonstrated in the response given by a group of eight children we interviewed for the project. Drawn from three classes in the same school, the children had followed similar courses. When asked what new things they had learnt over the past year two children volunteered 'wind resistance'. When the rest of the group were asked if they had also learnt about this they were quite sure they hadn't. However, when the first children began to describe what they had done there was a chorus of recognition from the rest of the group, "Oh yes we did that." When asked what they thought these activities had been about they all replied that they were "paper" experiments.

How important is this lack of recognition of underlying concepts? If we are considering the issue of curriculum continuity across the primary/ secondary divide it could play a significant role. As Jarman (1993) notes 13% of children responding to a study (exploring their perceptions of the similarities and differences between their primary science and secondary science experience) perceived secondary science as 'real' and, by implication, primary science as 'not real'. One criterion which the children appeared to be using to substantiate this perception was the use of 'real scientists' words' in secondary science (e.g. wind resistance experiments v. paper experiments). Jarman contends that a "very important dimension" in curriculum continuity 'has to do with children seeing similarities between their previous and present experiences within an area of study' and as one means of achieving this she stresses the "importance of interpreting ... experiences in terms of the dimensions of science learning – science concepts, science processes and science procedures." The ability to put the 'scientific' name to an experiment or activity can thus become crucial in ones ability to make links with current and previous science experiences.

This also has implications for the status of primary science. If children are interpreting their primary science experiences as 'not real' they are less likely to value them or offer them, on reaching secondary school, as instances of science they have already experienced. This, in turn, will tend to perpetuate the idea, both in the children's and teachers' minds, that pupils are really just starting science when they begin their secondary education. Knowing that

one has investigated wind resistance is very different from knowing that one has done some paper experiments.

Another element which may be at work in producing the division perceived by many children between 'not real' primary and 'real' secondary science is one of 'theatricality.' The secondary school laboratory provides a 'theatre' where the scientific drama can unfold and the children's responses demonstrate their recognition of the 'drama of real science'.

You have a special location, the lab – *we've been there!*
You have a special teacher – with costume (white coat)
You have dramatic effects – *you may be exploding things – there's static electricity from machines and your hair stands on end – some girls' hair stands right out*
You have an element of danger, fire – *you'll be using Bunsen burners;* chemicals – *you'll use chemistry sets*
You have catharsis – *you have to dissect frogs*
You could be cutting up live worms

This view of science as a 'dramatic' activity and the children's evident excitement about secondary science adds weight to the argument made by Williams & Howley (1989) that there is a case to be made for some discontinuity in aspects of the curriculum. Tickle (1984) discusses the idea of planned and unplanned discontinuity and argues that only unplanned discontinuity is to be avoided. The move between primary and secondary school has, for some children, an element of a 'rite of passage'. It heralds a change of gear and a change of status. Teachers may refer to this change, "You are not in the juniors now, we expect you to ..." Williams & Howley argue that for some children it is a positive advantage to have discontinuity because they thrive on a total change of pattern. They claim that planned discontinuity is a deliberate change in practice with the intention of stimulating children's growth and development. Evidence from the NFER (Lee et al, 1994) suggests that pupils at transfer age welcome changes in the curriculum and the way in which teaching is organised.

Science seems to be a key area in primary secondary transfer and this is reflected in the literature about transfer, much of which is found in science education journals. Science is also a relatively new area to be developed in primary schools. Curriculum projects have aimed to increase the profile of science in primary schools since the early sixties, but they have had comparatively little impact and it is only really since the introduction of the National Curriculum that substantial changes have taken place. The evidence from our small scale study would seem to suggest that children's experience of primary science varies greatly from class to class and school to school. The situation is very different from that of mathematics where a considerable amount of time in year 6 is dedicated to consolidating the children's understanding of the four rules of number. Curriculum continuity encompasses more than just the curriculum content. At the primary/secondary interface children experience a change in location, the introduction of different apparatus and a change of teacher style. They may move from an integrated curriculum to more subject specialisation. However, the National Curriculum does not seem to have led to a more uniform curriculum content experience for the children. From the limited evidence of this research we formed the impression that primary teachers are selecting areas of science from the National Curriculum, but with considerable autonomy about the areas covered. Secondary schools receiving children from a number of feeder schools cannot reliably expect any specific content area to have been covered.

As the National Curriculum becomes more familiar to Key Stage 2 teachers they will be in a position to pass on detailed information about individual children and their attainment. If secondary school colleagues are to be able to build on this information and to use it effectively in their curriculum planning the curriculum content needs to be more uniform for the children moving across the primary/secondary interface. In mathematics there is a generally accepted view of the 'basics' and primary teachers seem to spend a considerable amount of time 'polishing' these skills in year 6. Perhaps it would be helpful to define some 'basics' in science, so that we could ensure that all the children transferring between schools have had the opportunity to build firm foundations prior to transfer.

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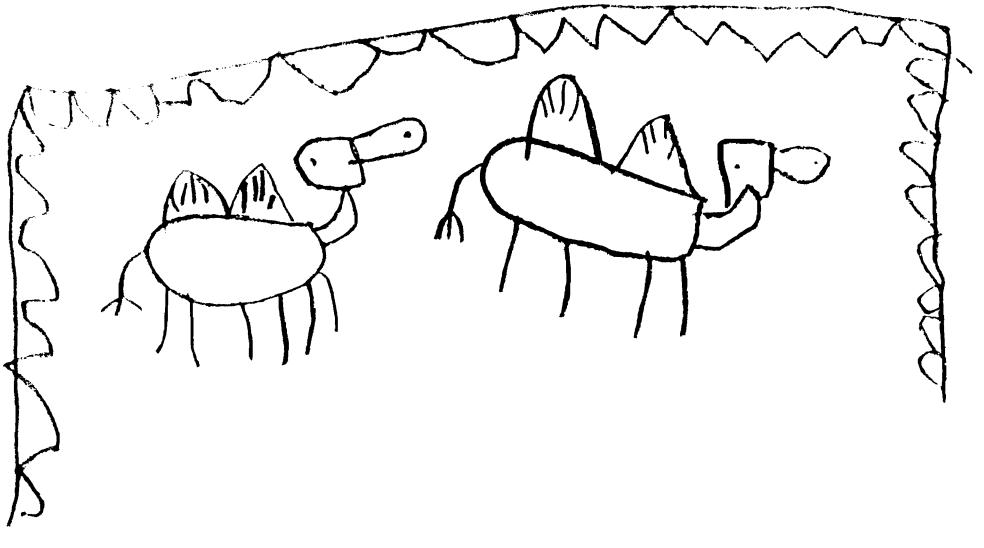
CICLE (Continuity in Curriculum Learning Experiences) is a research group based at Goldsmiths College, funded by the University of London Central Research Fund.



The New Right and RE

David Tombs
David Tombs is a member of *Forum*'s Editorial Board and lectures in Theology and Religious Studies at Roehampton Institute. Previously he taught Religious Education at Lampton Comprehensive, Hounslow. Here he sets out the background and influence of the Radical Right on current developments in RE. In the next issue of *Forum* he will focus more closely on government plans and proposals.

New Right social interests continue to underpin the government's attempts to influence and control religious education. Two concerns may be identified in the development of government attitudes to religious education. First, pressure for religious education to be predominantly Christian; second, emphasis on moral instruction in Christian values. These developments can only be fully understood when the New Right ideological agenda behind them is recognised.

Back to Basics?

By early 1994 the 'Back to Basics' crusade on personal morality launched at the 1993 Conservative Party conference had collapsed in a series of disasters. In the wake of serious embarrassments amongst Conservative politicians it was apparent that 'Back to Basics' was a policy that the Tories expected to impose on society's disadvantaged rather than to apply to themselves. Reacting to the adverse publicity created by this hypocrisy John Major switched directions. He claimed that 'Back to Basics' was not about personal morality but a common-sense approach to services like education.[1]

Regrettably this new direction for 'Back to Basics' has received far less media interest and critical scrutiny. However, it should not be left unchallenged. To claim that 'Back to Basics' is about education and not personal morality is deeply misleading. Recent Conservative policies on education, and especially religious education, reveal a growing emphasis on Christian values and a 'Back to Basics' drive on personal morality.

The New Right and Christian Values

One of the features that unites Neo-Conservative and Neo-Liberal wings of the New Right is their shared concern for 'traditional Christian values'. The New Right sees them as part of the national heritage and an important way to promote individual conformity at a time of economic restructuring and potential social unrest.

In this task the government might have expected support from the Churches. After all, the historical link between the Conservative Party and Anglicanism goes back to the founding of the party. However, far from finding the Churches willing partners in this work, the government faced resistance and criticism. During the 1980s relations between the government and the Church of England were particularly turbulent. Advocates of New Right philosophy frequently found themselves in confrontation with the Church of England's Board of Social Responsibility and certain prominent Bishops.

At times the government was forced onto the defensive and it responded by trying to damage the Churches' credibility and dismiss their views as naive and misguided. Critics of the Churches were quick to argue that instead of offering social comments the Churches should restrict themselves to spiritual matters and the limited concerns of personal morality. In conjunction with this attempt to restrict the Churches' social voice there was a concerted attempt by New Right thinkers to seize the initiative and articulate their agenda in Christian terms.[2]

Mrs Thatcher took the lead in this mission. In her highly publicised address to the Assembly of the Church of Scotland (21 May 1988) Mrs Thatcher provided perhaps the clearest statement of her thinking on these matters.[3] Her concern for an individualist Christian ethic and its relationship with free enterprise runs throughout the speech. For example, when she referred to her favourite hymn 'I Vow to Thee My Country' she offered an interpretation that juxtaposed strongly nationalist undertones with an insistence that Christianity is an individual matter that proceeds 'soul by soul and silently'. Henry Clark succinctly summarises her viewpoint when he says:

> *her understanding of Christianity is that of a highly individualistic evangelical Methodism in which the sum and substance of religion is seen as personal salvation and energetic self-discipline leading to self-reliance and, ideally, to self-sufficiency.[4]*

The 1988 Education Act and its Aftermath

In view of the above it is not surprising that Conservative efforts to use religious education to support their social agenda have grown steadily since the mid-1980s. Two main thrusts in the government's attitude are identifiable. First, there has been increasing pressure for religious education to be predominantly Christian. Second, there has been growing emphasis on moral instruction in Christian values.

In her address to the Church of Scotland Mrs Thatcher drew attention to the place of Christianity in schools:

> *I believe strongly that politicians must see that religious education has a proper place in the school curriculum.... the Christian religion, which of course symbolises many of the great spiritual and moral truths of Judaism – is a fundamental part of our national heritage.*

This was particularly important, she said, because it offered a much needed moral code:

> *The truths of the Judaeo-Christian tradition are infinitely precious, not only, as I believe because they are true, but also because they provide the moral impulse which alone can lead to peace, in the true meaning of the word, for which we all long.*

The same year saw the publication of the pamphlet *The Crisis in Religious Education*. The authors, John Burn and Colin Hart, made a scathing attack on multi-faith religious education and demanded a return to Christian teaching. In the Foreword Baroness Caroline Cox linked this to a concern

with moral values: "Our leaders are rightly concerned for a return to firm personal values".

These demands affected provision in the 1988 Education Act for both collective worship and classroom religious education. The 1988 Act introduced new regulations on collective worship specifying that it should be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" (Section 7.1). Classroom religious education was also affected although the government stopped short of making it subject to national determination. Instead it had special status as part of the 'basic curriculum'. The Agreed Syllabus was left to local discretion but all Syllabuses adopted after 29 September 1988 would have to: "reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian" (Section 8.3).

Although the spirit which inspired the law was regressive the letter of the law was considerably more liberal. A reactionary social policy was indeed the intention behind the Act but the legal wording of the Act itself allows for much more progressive interpretations. This proved consistent with subsequent guidance from the DES that provided clarification on the Act's provisions.[5] However, the New Right had successfully created a climate of Christian triumphalism that progressive religious educators would find hard to resist in the aftermath of the Act.

Not surprisingly, within a short time complaints were being made under the new law. Various new Agreed Syllabuses were accused of having an inadequate Christian content. In March 1991 a DES letter circulated to all Chief Education Officers set out the government's views and legal advice. The main point in the letter was that a syllabus should be sufficiently detailed to give adequate guidance on what should be taught. In offering this advice the letter went on to add:

> *The fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian would in most cases be properly reflected by devoting most attention to Christian traditions... [6]*

Although this is non-statutory and only an interpretation of the Act it has been extremely influential in focusing concern on the Christian content of Agreed Syllabuses. Later in 1991 an NCC publication, *Religious Education: a local curriculum framework,* offered suggestions on how the locally Agreed Syllabus might offer adequate guidance by adopting a similar framework to National Curriculum subjects. However, the next significant development was the July 1992 White Paper *Choice and Diversity* which prepared the way for the 1993 Education Act.

Choice and Diversity?

A whole chapter in *Choice and Diversity* was devoted to 'Spiritual and Moral Development'.[7] Education Secretary John Patten explained a few months later in an article he wrote for *The Tablet* that he had "chanced his arm" in this way because he believed that "schools must not be value-free zones".[8] In the article he argued that moral education should have a place in both the formal curriculum and the informal ethos of the school. Although he paid lip service to a diversity of values his own position is indicated by his comments on the importance of religious faith for moral development.

> *Those with a secure foundation in faith have had guides from whom to learn, and clear signposts directing them.*

It should not be forgotten that in an interview with *The Spectator* when he was appointed to Education, he suggested that good behaviour was linked to Christian beliefs in heaven and hell.

This new thrust on moral issues was developed in an NCC discussion paper on moral and spiritual development that was issued in April 1993. It required schools to teach 'moral absolutes' but gave no explanation as to how they were justified as 'absolutes' or how they had been chosen. The examples used were oversimplistic but very revealing. They included "telling the truth; keeping promises; respecting the rights and property of others ...".[9] Presumably these aspects of a personal code are chosen as moral absolutes ahead of social concerns for justice and equality because they fit the New Right social vision. Despite the White Paper's title as *Choice and Diversity* the clear impression is that in government eyes moral education was to be concerned with authority and conformity far more than personal choice and cultural diversity.

In this climate it was not surprising that Baroness Cox attempted to introduce amendments to the 1993 Education Bill at the committee stage of the House of Lords. She expressed anxieties about multi-faith and thematic religious education and argued for greater concentration on the moral and spiritual values of Christianity "as the main historical heritage of this land...."

Although Baroness Blatch resisted these amendments to the Bill she promised the publication of new guidance that would bring their spirit forward without requiring further legislation. The new requirements on religious education in the 1993 Act were therefore largely limited to ensuring that any Agreed Syllabus adopted before 1988 would be reviewed to ensure compatibility with the 1988 Act.

The government's reluctance to introduce yet more regressive legislation is a relief but of course the provisions of the Act itself are not the only issue. Once again, the New Right has succeeded in creating the right climate to take further its crusade on Christian values.

Conclusion

Between 1988 and the Education Act of 1993 government attitudes to religious education showed a consistent pattern of development along two lines: a focus on Christianity and an emphasis on personal morality. Developments after the 1993 Act should be understood as further stages in this process. They are not determined by educational principles but the New Right concern for a national Christian heritage and a conformist moral code.

References

[1] See, for example, *The Times,* 14 February 1994.

[2] See for example the essays collected in Michael Alison & David Edwards (Eds) (1990) *Christianity and Conservatism.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

[3] Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 23 May 1988 reprinted in Alison & Edwards, op. cit., pp. 333-338.

[4] Henry Clark (1993) *The Church Under Thatcher*, p. 10. London: SPCK.

[5] *The Education Reform Act 1988: religious education and collective worship.* Circular No. 3/89. London: DES.

[6] DES Letter, 18 March 1991, signed by A.E.D. Chamier to all Chief Education Officers in England.

[7] *Choice and Diversity: a new framework for schools.* Command Paper 2021, July 1992. London: HMSO.

[8] John Patten (1992) Don't sell pupils short, *The Tablet,* 10 October, p. 1256.

[9] National Curriculum Council (1993) *Spiritual and Moral Development: a discussion paper*, p. 4.

Primary Education in Northern Ireland

Bob Kerr
Bob Kerr is Principal of Dungannon Controlled Primary School in Northern Ireland. A former President of the Ulster Teachers' Union and Secretary of the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council, 1982-90, he writes here about the effects of the selective system on primary education in Northern Ireland today.

There are some who say that we in Northern Ireland have the best education system in the United Kingdom, and we are sometimes cited as being the envy of many other regions throughout the home countries, especially when judged and compared on results at 'A' level.

There are, on the other hand, many who point to the fact that Northern Ireland has the highest percentage of young people leaving our school system with no qualifications at all to show for their twelve years of compulsory education.

Neither of these views is surprising, nor are they contradictory of each other, when account is taken of the fact that Northern Ireland still retains a system which selects children for different types of secondary schooling on the basis of their perceived academic ability at the age of eleven years.

Those children labelled at this age as suitable for an academic-type education – in theory somewhere in the region of 35 per cent – proceed to the Province's Grammar Schools, while the remainder are catered for in what used to be known as Secondary Intermediate Schools – now nearly all renamed as High Schools.

Irrespective of name, the outcome is similar throughout practically all of the Province. Approximately one third of the eleven-year old population sets out along an academic route, while the other two thirds follow a mixture of courses which have been created for their wide variety and range of abilities – some of which will have academic tendencies, but most of which will not.

Thus, the academically selected pursue their specialist paths towards GCSE and 'A' levels. Among the remainder will be those who can also attain reasonable academic levels, but this sector will also include those who will be unable to achieve any sort of academic-type success, and some who will have great difficulty in coping with the school system at all.

So it is, therefore, not surprising that those who are selected for grammar school on the basis of inherent ability, and who go on to make the most of that ability, should emerge with high grade GCSE and 'A' level results. It is equally unremarkable that many of those deemed unsuitable at eleven will be become more disenchanted with a system which places such a high premium on academic prowess, to the extent that they almost opt out of that system altogether.

It is my firm belief that the separation at 11 years which in the public eye, if not the educational one, categorises youngsters as passes and failures, exacerbates the problem of low achievers in schools. Not only does it deflate the confidence of those deemed academically unacceptable, but it also reinforces in them a sense of rejection which stems from the whole process associated with this arbitrary division at a very questionably early age.

The fact that this hurdle exists at all at eleven determines what happens for years beforehand in the primary school.

Parents and public have the perception of success in schools as being measured by examination passes and grades. Therefore at 11 the 'success' rate in the transfer procedure is the bench mark by which schools are judged, and in turn this becomes a factor – indeed an overriding factor in determining which Primary School parents will choose for their children to attend.

A further consequence then of all this is that schools, anxious about reputation and enrolment, devote disproportionate energy and resources to the purpose of achieving high grades/pass rates in this selection procedure. Frequently this means streaming on the basis of ability from an early age in the Primary School, and the less-academic child is therefore at risk of multiple rejection and of increasing disillusionment with school in general.

By the time such a youngster has reached year 12 he or she may well have become a real problem in school, and as often as not, a problem in society outside of school as well. One thing for certain is that confidence and motivation will have taken severe knocks, recovery from which is a long and slow process.

Some schools, perhaps understandably, given the system with which they are saddled – but in my view misguidedly from an educational viewpoint make matters worse by their attitudes and practices in trying to gear pupils towards so-called success in the transfer tests.

For example a group of around fifteen Primary Principals in one area of the province have each recently constructed practice tests for their Primary 7 pupils in preparation for the official tests which are set and marked by the Northern Ireland Department of Education.

These fifteen Heads then swopped the tests around all their schools, so that the pupils underwent extensive rehearsals in English, Mathematics and Science in order to maximise their performance. One wonders how there was sufficient teaching time left in what is an already overloaded and overcrowded curriculum.

But all this continues to be imposed on the Primary School population because of Government's persistent refusal to move from the current divisive system, despite repeated advice and calls to the contrary from many quarters.

The Government defence of this no-change policy is based on the excuse that there is no apparent groundswell of opinion in the Province for a move away from selection

at eleven. Yet two of the three main teaching unions – The Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the Ulster Teachers' Union – have for decades strenuously opposed the system, and called for the introduction of non-selective transfer from the Primary to Secondary stages. In recent years the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers has made the same call; several educational administrators share the same view; sections of the press have regularly voiced it, and no less an authority than the present Senior Chief Inspector of Schools in Northern Ireland's Department of Education is on record as being less than impressed with the present operation. Ten years ago, when addressing a major conference on the future of education in Northern Ireland he said:

> *I am not persuaded that, were we to move for sound educational reasons to a non-selective system, we would lose anything of real worth.*
>
> *I am convinced that the existence of such a system would help to create bridges to an understanding of one another, and could create a climate in which the total values of society could be stimulated, tested and improved.*

Let it be noted that this comment comes from someone who has a complete overview of the whole school system in the Province and who has no political or ideological axe to grind – simply an overriding desire to encourage what is best educationally for all our young people.

The Northern Ireland Association for Comprehensive Education – a grouping which embraces the major teacher unions, parents and other enlightened educationists – has been in the forefront of a succession of well-documented and well argued submissions on the drawbacks of selection for years, but its well-reasoned presentations are conveniently ignored and unanswered.

It is interesting to note in this respect that Government did not seem to require widespread consensus for any of its other initiatives or changes, most notably the recent Northern Ireland Curriculum and its attendant assessment procedures.

The unreliable and unsatisfactory nature of selection has been mirrored in the variety of methods used to implement it over the years. First there were English and Arithmetic papers plus two 'intelligence tests', then intelligence (verbal reasoning/VR) tests on their own, then teacher marked English and Mathematics and then back to VR tests again.

Now the discredited VR tests have been abandoned and the new instrument of differentiation is the child's performance in externally set and marked tests in Science, English and Mathematics, based on the work laid down in these subjects in the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

The gross distortion of the Primary Curriculum because of the verbal reasoning tests method will thus be lessened, but there are signs already of the pressures and temptations in Primary Schools to coach and stream, and to concentrate unduly on the elements prescribed for the selection process.

This may be a poor reflection on the professionalism and educational integrity of schools and Head teachers, but the overall context in which schools are forced to work must be borne in mind when passing judgement.

The latest twist to this whole sorry affair has come with the advent of open enrolment, end of Key Stage assessment, and the eventual publication of league tables for comparison of school against school – all following on the back of the so-called educational reforms.

Now, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, crude assessments and comparisons will be made here, irrespective of the difficulties or disadvantages with which the children and schools have to cope in the first place.

This will be bad enough at the Primary stage where it will undoubtedly lead to more pressure and coaching to ensure high 'performance' at the assessment stage, but it will be manifestly more unjust at the Secondary level where schools which have their enrolments decided on purely academic criteria to begin with are then to be compared as if they could somehow have similar levels of performance when their pupils reach 14 and 16 years of age.

Cumbersome assessment and unnecessary league tables have no value in any school system, but to impose these on the secondary sector here is utter nonsense.

What makes the retention of our present organisation of education in general even more incomprehensible is the existence of pockets of non-selective transfer from Primary to Secondary which have been established for over 30 years, and which work extremely well for the benefit of all pupils involved. These are an 11-14 years and 14-18 years two-tier system in an urban area, and 11-18 years provision in two rural areas. All were the result of suitable circumstances in the regions concerned, helped by the support of far seeing local authority administrators, and they are shining examples of what could be achieved on a province-wide basis.

But perhaps before leaving this brief view of educational provision in Northern Ireland I could offer one other thought. I often feel that we concentrate too much on children's academic ability, and this is valued almost to the total exclusion of the wide variety of other talents which children exhibit, and the educative process therefore revolves around this all-consuming requirement.

Basic skills of numeracy and literacy are certainly important, and form the cornerstone of future progress, but to determine a child as successful or not on purely academic yardsticks seems to me to be a very narrow view to take, and one which is detrimental to many pupils.

Children's abilities abound in a multitude of directions, as is continually evidenced when they grow into adulthood. It is surely time that our school system, whatever form it may take, began to recognise that fact, began to adapt accordingly, and genuinely to value all the talents of our young people equally.

Is your school striving to adhere to its progressive principles and resist reactionary pressures so that all children may expect an equal entitlement to as good an education as possible?

Please write to *Forum* (see inside front cover for address)

Thirty Years On

Clyde Chitty

In this short article Clyde Chitty, an Editor of *Forum* and Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham, describes the background to the research he and Caroline Benn are conducting into 30 years (and more) of comprehensive schooling in Britain.

It has become fashionable among commentators on both the Radical Right and the Postmodernist Left to dismiss the comprehensive school as an institution of the past – part of the social democratic agenda of the Sixties and therefore of no relevance to the world of the Nineties.

For Professor Roger Scruton, one of the leading members of the Neo-Conservative wing of the Radical Right, the comprehensive 'experiment' is clearly part of the 'absurd attempt' to provide equality of opportunity which "unless it is to involve massive compulsory surgery of an unthinkable kind, is simply a confused stumble in the dark". For Professor Scruton, it is not possible to provide universal education. Nor, indeed, is it desirable: "for the appetite for learning points people only in a certain direction; it siphons them away from those places where they might have been contented".[1]

The White Paper *Choice and Diversity*, published in July 1992, vilifies the comprehensive system for presupposing that "children are all basically the same and that local communities have essentially the same educational needs".[2]

On the Postmodernist Left, James Donald argues that social democratic approaches to education which continue to favour the concept of the all-ability comprehensive school are now faced with the need to take account of increasing specialisation and diversity within contemporary society. This apparently calls for approaches which are based on "participation and distributive justice rather than simple egalitarianism and on cultural heterogeneity rather than a shared humanity" – a post-modernist project which, according to Donald, puts a question mark against the whole idea of comprehensive schooling.[3]

Yet despite all the criticisms and misrepresentations, various forms of comprehensive school continue to provide the secondary education of the vast majority of young people in England, Wales and Scotland. It is difficult to be dogmatic about the statistics, but if we concentrate on pupils of secondary-school age educated within the state system, it seems likely that 90 per cent of them are attending comprehensive schools in England; even more in Wales; and virtually 100 per cent in Scotland.

The Major Government, like the Thatcher administrations which preceded it, would dearly love to be able to re-introduce straightforward selection at eleven-plus, but it is scared of provoking a head-on collision with the comprehensive principle. It has therefore resorted to the more sophisticated strategy of promoting parental choice, diversity of provision and subject specialisation. (Indeed 'selection by 'specialisation' was the theme of an article that the then Education Secretary John Patten wrote for *New Statesman and Society* in July 1992).[4]

Our present Prime Minister seizes every opportunity to attack the comprehensive reform, notably in his long running and revealing correspondence with Fred Jarvis, former General Secretary of the NUT (reviewed in the last number of *Forum*), where he argues that the current problem of low standards "stems in large part from the nature of the comprehensive system which the Labour Party ushered in in the 1960s and from the intellectual climate underpinning it that has tended to stress equality of outcome at the expense of equality of opportunity."[5]

This ridiculous statement conveniently ignores the fact that the drive to reorganise secondary schools along comprehensive lines was a grass-roots movement long before it became national policy with the publication of the Wilson Government's Circular 10/65 on 12 July 1965. In the 1950s and early 1960s a number of local education authorities showed themselves eager to make major changes in their selection procedures, and the breakthrough came in 1963 when important authorities in the Midlands and North decided to abolish the hated eleven-plus and introduce comprehensive schools. First Manchester, then Liverpool drew up plans to ensure an effective transition within two or three years. And they were followed by Sheffield, Bradford, the West Riding and many other authorities.

Nevertheless the appearance of Circular 10/65 was an important event, signifying official recognition of the strength of the comprehensive movement throughout the country. And during the period of the 1964-70 Labour Government, the rate of progress was quite remarkable. Between 1965 and 1970, the percentage of maintained-sector pupils attending comprehensive schools in England and Wales almost quadrupled: from 8.5 per cent to 31 per cent. Over the same period, the number of such schools increased from 262 to 1145.

It was three years after the Circular's publication that Caroline Benn and Brian Simon embarked upon the first independent national survey of comprehensive education in Britain, with Guy Neave and myself acting as research assistants on the project. A fairly short questionnaire was sent to 958 schools, and the overall response rate was an astonishing 81 per cent. The results of the survey were published in 1970 and updated in 1972 in *Half Way There: report on the British comprehensive school reform.*

With next year (1995) marking the 30th anniversary of the official start of the comprehensive reform, Caroline Benn and I decided (with Brian Simon's full support and encouragement) that this would be the ideal time to undertake a new independent enquiry into comprehensive schooling in this country. And in March 1994 we sent out a new questionnaire to all comprehensive schools and open-access colleges in England, Wales and Scotland (over 4,000 establishments in total).

It was a matter of some concern to us that this new questionnaire was extremely long (20 pages and 148 questions), but we felt we had to be able to write about all

aspects of the life and work of the modern comprehensive school. Subjects such as today's complex admissions arrangements, recent devolvement of management tasks, the far-reaching curriculum and assessment changes, and new factors such as the creation of equal opportunities policies – all had to be covered. We also found that we had a large number of questions relating to the post-14 age range, whereas the 1968 questionnaire highlighted developments in the eleven-plus years to age thirteen.

We have been delighted with the response to our enquiry, with over 2,000 completed questionnaires having been received at the time of writing.

We intend to follow up the questionnaire by visiting a number of comprehensives and seeking permission to identify those schools where exciting developments are being pioneered.

David Fulton Publishers will be publishing the hardback version of our survey in July 1995.

As I contemplate the task ahead of us, some lines from Edwin Muir's poem *The Combat* keep coming into my mind:

... One would have said beyond a doubt
That was the very end of the bout,
But that the creature would not die.

Notes

[1] Roger Scruton (1980) *The Meaning of Conservatism*, p. 157. London: Macmillan.

[2] Department for Education (1992) *Choice and Diversity: a new framework for schools*, p. 3. London: HMSO.

[3] James Donald (1990) Interesting times, *Critical Social Policy*, 9(3), pp. 39-55.

[4] John Patten (1992) Who's afraid of the 'S' word?, *New Statesman and Society*, 17 July, pp. 20- 21.

[5] Fred Jarvis (1993) *Education and Mr Major: correspondence between the Prime Minister and Fred Jarvis*, pp. 25-26. London: Tufnell Press.

Margaret Miles: an appreciation

I once told Margaret Miles of my own (shameful) initiation into the art of public protest. I was ten years old in 1955 when the headteacher of the private primary school I attended in Manfred Road, Putney, took all her small charges on to the streets of south-west London to demonstrate against the reorganisation of Putney County Secondary School, a three-form entry girls' grammar school, into the new Mayfield Comprehensive. If I remember rightly, I carried a little placard which read 'Down With Comprehensive Schools'. Margaret said she wouldn't hold it against me! She was in any case only too well aware of the misinformed anti-comprehensive propaganda that had bedevilled the creation of the new school.

Margaret Miles had been appointed to the headship of Putney County Secondary School in 1952, having spent a successful six years as headmistress of Pate's Grammar School in Cheltenham. Although she had not been told of the London County Council's decision to create Mayfield as one of the five designated comprehensive schools, she embarked on the task of reorganisation with determination and vigour.

In her 1968 book *Comprehensive Schooling: problems and perspectives*, Margaret wrote of the difficulties involved in changing from a grammar school to a comprehensive school:

> *In the summer of 1955 the usual hundred or so girls left, but in the autumn of 1955, they were replaced, not by a similar number of girls all of whom had been selected for a grammar-school education, but by four times as many, only a quarter of whom had been selected for a grammar school education.*

The whole process was made more difficult by "the general attitude of gloom and doom" which so many people – among them parents, staff, former pupils and neighbouring heads – adopted towards the new school:

> *There was an extraordinary lack of imagination ... which assumed that girls who had not been accepted by the grammar school were somehow* different kinds of people *from those who had, and would not be able to adapt to any of the demands normally made on those who attended grammar schools. It was assumed, too, that the 'others' would drag down the standards of the 'grammar' girls.*

Refusing to allow anything to throw her off course, Margaret was a great headteacher and a great campaigner for comprehensive education. She was also marvellous company on all those occasions we travelled home together from meetings of RICE (Right to Comprehensive Education). She was still RICE President at the time of her death and continued to support and encourage our work even when ill-health meant she could no longer travel from Wales to attend meetings.

One of the last pieces she ever wrote was an article for the hundredth number of *Forum* in 1991. She described the excitement of working for the opening of Mayfield in 1955 but ended on a sad note: pointing out that, "horror of horrors", a City Technology College was being planned on the site of her beloved school.

London was indeed fortunate to have the services of a number of outstanding headteachers in the pioneering days of the comprehensive school: Margaret at Mayfield, Mary Green at Kidbrooke, Raymond King at Wandsworth, Eugene McCarthy at Malory – to name but a few. Their energy, vision and commitment were indispensable to the generation that inaugurated the comprehensive reform. What they all shared Margaret had in abundance: a profound belief in human educability and a determination that everyone should have an equal chance to learn.

Clyde Chitty

Labour's Green Paper: the limits of consensus

Richard Hatcher
Richard Hatcher teaches in the Faculty of Education at the University of Central England in Birmingham. Here he responds to Liz Thomson's review of the Labour party's Green Paper in *Forum*, Volume 36, Number 1, 1994.

Liz Thomson, in her review of Labour's Green Paper *Opening Doors to a Learning Society* in *Forum*, Volume 36, Number 3, 1994, was right to welcome its positive features: the emphasis on pre-school education and childcare; a national framework for the curriculum based on entitlements to areas of experience; an end to the SATs; the proposals to meet children's special educational needs; and measures to overcome the vocational/academic divide. The Green Paper, together with the National Commission on Education report *Learning to Succeed*, and the Institute for Public Policy Research pamphlet *Education: a different version* (all published towards the end of 1993), represent the emergence of a process of reconstructing an agenda of the centre in educational politics.

Liz Thomson is also right to welcome the Green Paper's preference for consultation rather than policy-making by diktat. It recognises that there are many issues, such as the curriculum and assessment, where we know what we are against but need time to debate what we want to put in its place.

However, if the Green Paper is an improvement on Conservative education policy, it also has its own limitations and omissions. These are the ten most striking.

Pre-School Provision
The Green Paper stresses the educational importance of nursery education and the need for full-time education and care to be available for working parents. However, its proposal is not for free nursery education and day-care provision for all parents who want it, but the much more limited target of full-time education and day-care provision for 70% of three to four year olds, provided through an integrated system of state and private provision. Even this would require a considerable increase in spending, but the Green Paper is silent on the funding implications of these proposals.

Class Size
The Green Paper makes no commitments on class size. Its silence on this key demand contrasts with the proposal of the NCE Report for no primary classes over 30 within five years, with a maximum of 20 in classes in the first two years of primary school in deprived urban areas or with a high proportion of children with ESL needs, and 10% non-contact time for primary teachers.

Equality
The Green Paper is extremely weak on the issue of tackling inequalities of gender, 'race' and class. It makes the obligatory references to the need for equality of opportunity, but it assimilates the crucial issue of social class inequalities into the general rubric of 'raising standards'. It reduces the gender debate to the issue of single-sex versus mixed provision, and the question of 'race' to differences in achievement and parental influence, while saying nothing specific on either. The important work that has taken place on these issues in the last twenty years goes unrecognised.

Post-16 Provision
The present system of post-16 provision is characterised by early selection into a high quality but narrow academic stream for the few and a fragmented system of low-level vocational education and training for the majority. The Green Paper's solution is a new unified qualification, the General Certificate of Further Education, which would replace both A-Levels and existing comparable vocational qualifications. It would have 'professional' and 'technical' routes, with parity of esteem, and would be institution- or workplace-based.

While obviously a step forward, this solution would still tend to maintain the academic/vocational divide, in which the institution-based academic route will have higher status. It contrasts unfavourably with the NCE Report's proposal for a genuinely integrated system in which students can choose a mix of 'vocational' and 'academic' modules leading to a single qualification, the General Education Diploma at Advanced level. (The IPPR makes a similar proposal).

Funding Post-16 Students
As for the funding of students, while the NCE calls for discretionary awards to be made statutory for those in full-time education, the extension of support to those on part-time and non-degree courses, and the removal of barriers such as the '21 hours' rule, the Green Paper makes no such commitments.

Local Management of Schools
The Green Paper rejects the market as a governing principle, but is unclear about its alternative. The linchpin of the education market is per capita funding coupled to parental choice, freed from LEA interference. The Green Paper says that Labour wants to retain LMS and restore local education authorities, but it doesn't address the crucial questions of what powers should legitimately be exercised at school and LEA levels, particularly in respect of admissions, budget control and the employment of teachers, and how the market dynamic can be suppressed.

Grant-Maintained Schools
There are three particularly striking and symptomatic omissions in the Green Paper. The first is its failure to give an explicit undertaking to reintegrate the opted-out schools – and the CTCs – let alone state a timetable, even though this is ostensibly the policy of the Labour leadership.

Selective Schools
The second omission is any commitment to end the existing selective state schools and create a fully comprehensive system – surely an elementary demand to make of any Labour government.

Private Schools
And the third silence concerns the private schools. The Labour Party's traditional policy remains to seek their abolition. There is an important tactical debate to be had here about how to proceed, but the Green Paper ignores the issue of private schools entirely.

Teachers' Pay and Conditions
Finally, the success of any alternative education agenda is dependent on the teachers, whose pay and conditions have been under relentless attack for the last ten years. Again, the Green Paper is silent.

'National Consensus' and Popular Interests

These symptomatic silences in the Green Paper (which place it on a number ofissues to the right of the NCE Report) do not arise simply from the desire not to foreclose the debate. Nor are they solely the product of Labour's strategy for winning the next election unencumbered by policy commitments. They are inherent in the strategic orientation of Labour's project, which is to modernise education so it can contribute to the modernising of the British economy. That can provide the basis for, in John Smith's words in his introduction to the Green Paper, 'a national consensus on our approach to education which can underpin a consistent commitment to both quality and equity'. In this view there is no conflict between the personal, social and economic functions of education, nor between popular interests and those of capital.

This is not a new theme for Labour. On the contrary, the Green Paper picks up the threads of continuity with Labour's educational reform programme of the 1960s and 1970s. The critique levelled then at Labour's dual educational repertoire of egalitarian and economic aims is equally applicable today: 'Labour's repertoire has been formed in the relation between popular interests and 'capitalist schooling'. Labour, especially Labour in power, has always served two masters in this way, usually by insisting on the identity of their interests. It has constructed working-class interests as national interests, very largely as the interests of capital.[1]

The onset of the long recession and rising social unrest in the 1970s broke apart the claimed consensus of the 1960s. Callaghan's speech at Ruskin in 1976 was a turning-point. It marked the acceptance by the Labour leadership, forced to choose between dominant and popular class interests in education, of the employers' definition of what was wrong with British education, and opened the door to the Conservative counter-reformation.

The 1993 Green Paper postulates a new harmony of class interests in education, whose premise is a vision of the future needs of the economy. The Wilsonian rhetoric of the 'white-hot heat of the technological revolution' is recycled in post-Fordist terms. In the 'modern Britain', the Green Paper claims, "The 'operative class' will need the same knowledge and skills as the managerial and professional classes. So will those currently being prepared for a marginal place in our society" (p. 11). In other words, we are entering a new phase of capitalism in which the existing division of labour, along class, gender and racial lines, will be largely overcome. According to this new correspondence principle, the problems of British education arise not from its capitalist character but from the opposite: its lack of conformity with the progressive requirements of a modernised capitalist economy.

This is a fantasy. Of course, there are anachronistic features of British education, many of them cultivated by the Tory right. But the significant changes which are taking place in the work process are creating not a reduction in social inequalities but a further polarisation of the workforce towards a high-skilled sector at one extreme, and a sector of low-skilled low-paid often temporary jobs at the other, accompanied by permanent high unemployment.[2] Gender and racial inequalities are reinforced. An education dictated by these characteristics of the economy would inevitably be out of key with any egalitarian, let alone socialist, conception.

In a recent article on 'Poverty and Education', Bob Connell reminds us that "Disadvantage is always produced through mechanisms that also produce advantage ... No one should imagine that educational change in the interests of the poor can be conflict-free".[3] The Green Paper's attempt to reconcile these conflicting interests through a discourse of consensus and partnership is secured at the expense of the subordination of popular interests whenever they infringe upon dominant interests. That is why there are no commitments which entail increased expenditure. It is why there are no radical policy commitments to democratise education and tackle inequality. We need to identify which specific policies within Labour's 'modernising' programme we can support. But we also need to warn of the tensions and contradictions within the modernising programme and the limits that 'consensus' sets to it. On financial grounds, Labour's education reforms risk being starved at birth as a result of the economic situation a Labour government would inherit and the weakness of its plans to deal with it. In terms of the content of education, the failure to adopt policies which would represent a radical change in the educational experiences of the majority of children and young people, and in particular the poor, will leave Labour vulnerable to a backlash from the right, as it did in the last period of Labour's educational reforms.

Notes

[1] CCCS (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) (1981) *Unpopular Education*, p. 97. London: Hutchinson.

[2] See K. Jones & R. Hatcher (1994) Educational progress and economic change: notes on some recent proposals, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42, pp. 245-260, for a more detailed critique.

[3] Connell, R. W. (1994) Poverty and education, *Harvard Educational Review*, 64, pp. 125-149.

Book Reviews

Grant-maintained Schools: education in the market place

JOHN FITZ, DAVID HALPIN & SALLY POWER, 1993
London: Kogan Page.
ISBN O 7494 1067 1, paperback

This three-year study financed by the Economic and Social Research Council examines the origins and development of grant maintained schools (GMS). In particular the evidence gained is used to examine the short, medium and long term effects of the policy of schools being encouraged to opt out of local authority control.

The investigations are concerned with five areas. How the GMS policy was constructed, legislated for and subsequently implemented. The typology of schools seeking and achieving GMS status. How far claims and predictions of supporters and critics concerning the introduction of market forces into schooling have been found to be true. The perception of headteachers of the opting out process and their experience of GMS and finally, the degree of parental and pupil support for opting out, including their perception of its claim to enhance choice in schooling.

Legislation for the policy was set out in the 1988 Education Act which contained provision for the setting up of GMS to be funded directly by central government grant. However the origins of the scheme can be traced back much further to the ideas of the numerous Radical Right education pressure groups who were constantly critical of education throughout the 1970s and claimed that the application of market forces would lead to improvements in standards in schools and colleges. Fitz et al provide a concise overview of the policies which arose in response to these small unrepresentative but powerful Radical Right forces in the form of the Assisted Places Scheme(1979), the City Technology Colleges (1986) and the most recent GMS. All these schemes were forced through against widespread opposition from most sectors within education and all political parties with the exception of the Conservative Party. One common characteristic with all of these moves has been for the Government to claim these schemes would increase open competition and then proceed to give preferential funding to the APS, CTCs and GMS to ensure that they were given an advantage over LEA schools.

The Grant Maintained Trust was established under the direction of Steve Norris, Tory MP, to provide 'information' about the 'benefits' of opting out. The Trust (now Centre) "receives funds from the government to support its activities. Its initial grant of £25,000 in 1989-90 was expanded in 1991-92 to £600,000. Small wonder that it is seen as no more than a 'Tory front'.

The preferential treatment of GMS became clear in January 1990 when funding for capital projects became known. "Twenty-nine GM schools were allocated £6.3 million compared with £410 million made available for similar purposes to the country's 24,000 other schools. This trend has continued up to the present day. Indeed the Chancellor's November 1992 Autumn Financial Statement indicates roughly one-third of the £1.8 billion the government expects to devote to school capital expenditure in the next three years will be directed to schools within the GM sector". So much for claims by Kenneth Baker in 1988 that the "'effect of opting out should be broadly neutral for both school and LEA ". John Major was forced to concede to the NUT in 1991 "that GM schools had received preferential treatment".

As with so much of recent government education policy based upon the political theories of Radical Right groups constant adjustments have to be made in the face of reality. One early suggestion by Government was that schools in Labour controlled areas would seek to remove themselves from local authority control in order to 'go it alone' with a larger budget. Many of these schools realised that in effect this also meant placing themselves directly under central government control. In fact the schools most enthusiastic for GMS status were to be found in Tory Kent and Lincoln, two authorities well known for their low spending on education.

As the research of Fitz and his colleagues shows the two major reasons for schools opting out were the threat to their survival through local reorganisation of schools in response to falling rolls and the promise of preferential financial treatment. Local authorities soon learned that the moment the plans they had been encouraged to make by government to reduce expenditure by closing schools surplus to requirement in their area became known the schools under threat applied to the Education Minister to opt out. Local authorities found it impossible to cope with this contradictory education policy of the Government and the Audit Commission in 1988 warned that the outcome would be "'extremely expensive"'. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Society of Education Officers also expressed concern at the irrationality of the policy. Most authorities were forced to stop reorganisation plans. The claim that GMS would lead to greater independence was of little consequence once most schools were involved with local financial management (LFM).

In seeking to analyse types of school which opted out Fitz et al did find some common factors. "Of the first wave of GM schools operating in September 1989, nearly one half (47 per cent) had selective admissions policies. While the rate of grammar schools opting out has remained fairly consistent that of comprehensives has increased.... it is noteworthy that many (we estimate approximately 46 per cent) of the comprehensive schools which have opted out are ex-grammar schools".

The suggestion that dissatisfied parents would lead moves to opt out has not been born out by this research. "The opting out process is often initiated by headteachers anxious about the long-term security of their institutions, rather than by groups of parents or governors ... As a result the GM schools policy in practice is sometimes more of a headteachers', than a parents' or governors', charter. Certainly, there are few signs that it increases either groups' democratic control of schools. Indeed, once parents have taken part in the ballot, and approval for GM status is forthcoming, their involvement in their children's schools frequently exhibits no remarkable difference of emphasis from what they were used to previously".

Mrs Thatcher's claim that soon most schools would opt out has been wrong. Each time the scheme has faltered the rules have been changed. Hence the 300 pupil limit has been removed, the second ballot abolished and there have been recent reports that John Patten wishes to scrap ballots and force all schools to opt out after the next General Election (TES 28.1.1994) Whatever the declared intentions might have been GMS status has been largely decided in schools on pragmatic grounds, namely preferential funding. This is interesting in that on the one hand "government wishes to deny any such link between increased school expenditure and educational benefit" yet in practice continues to pump extra funds into the GMS to ensure they do well. As the authors point out "The benefits brought to individual schools have been at the cost of the majority of pupils in LEA schools". To put it another way the children of parents who do not favour opting out will be punished by receiving less funding in the schools they attend. So much for government claims to encourage 'parental choice' and 'the classless society'.

This very readable analysis of the development of GMS contains essential information for all those who wish to understand the growing centralisation and politicisation of schooling. The GMS scheme continues to develop daily, the

packing of the New Funding Agency for Schools with those who are active Tory Party members, contributors to the Party's funds, members of Radical Right Groups and advocates of GMS being just one of many recent moves to ensure that no critical voice is heard concerning GMS policy.

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The National Curriculum: is it working?

CLYDE CHITTY (Ed.), 1993
Harlow: Longman
171pp., paperback, £16.95
ISBN: 0-582-21591-9

I welcome this book: there is something thought-provoking or informative in each of the papers, all of which are written by members of the School of Education of the University of Birmingham.

That said, there are also problems in producing a book of this nature, which is essentially a snapshot of a moving target! Clearly the speed with which the writers are attempting to respond to events means that they are forced to focus their data gathering on what is manageable. There is a heavy reliance on interviews with heads and senior school staff, nothing from pupils, and nothing from observation of classroom processes or outcomes. And of course, in spite of this, events have moved on – I write on the day we expect the results of the Dearing 'slimming down' exercise! Additionally, if the title of a book consists of this particular question, we not only expect some answers, but also some initial clarification of who is to judge, and by what criteria. Chitty's introduction, contextualising the Education Reform Act 1988 is a model of clarity and economy whilst avoiding over-simplification. In particular he outlines the confusions and tensions within the Conservative Party and the New Right, prior to 1988, and points out that Kenneth Baker did not present his curriculum proposals for Cabinet discussion – a surprise to me! No wonder there were inconsistencies in the Act. Nevertheless, I would have welcomed some discussion of criteria in the section on 'The Scope of the Book'. Are we to take the Government's own stated concerns (whether from the 1987 discussion document or the 1992 White Paper) those of HMI, headteachers – or commentators? In the event, all of these come into play at different times, but the reader has to be vigilant.

After the introduction the book consists of three short chapters, a dialogue about Key Stage 4, and a substantial paper (about one third of the book) by Peter Ribbins. The latter is not centrally concerned with the key question set by the book, but is a thoughtful and very well-informed reflection on the changing nature of headship and leadership in secondary schools in the very different conditions post ERA, which as he says '... are likely to call for a style of effective headteacher very different from that practised by the thoroughly one-dimensional creatures that stalk through the present-day leadership literature within school effectiveness'. Ribbins uses a substantial number of interviews with secondary heads as the main data to examine the dimensions of headship, who controls the curriculum, relations with governors etc. Only in the latter part of the chapter does he look at head's perspectives on whether the National Curriculum is 'working', using a number of criticisms by John White and Philip O'Hear as his criteria. What he reveals is a great complexity of perceptions, which defy any attempt to 'read off' either perspectives or outcomes from any uni-dimensional analysis. Overall, however, the paper is optimistic in that it does not support the view that the National Curriculum leaves the head or school without a role in curriculum construction and development.

That conclusion appears to be supported by most of the authors represented here. Chitty, looking at the question of managing a coherent curriculum, is less sanguine, but even he reports no uniformity of view from his small number of schools. Butterfield, examining issues of assessment and progression, is perhaps the least hopeful about the ability of schools to set their own agendas. Mac an Ghaill's concern is the impact of the National Curriculum on equal opportunities. He inevitably found the polarised views that:

(a) the National Curriculum provides a quality, relevant common curriculum; and

(b) the National Curriculum is designed in a 'socio-cultural vacuum' which ignores class, race and gender.

But he also found a considerable complexity of views and a perception that the schools have some flexibility and autonomy of response. As he points out, those living post-1944 probably experienced much more confusion and compromise that we see looking back. He also notes some teachers' views that opting-out, LMS and league tables might be much more damaging to equal opportunities than the National Curriculum. This is a topic that cries out for research data that goes beyond teacher perceptions and self-report.

Overall, then, this book can be seen as a staging-post. It provokes thought and stimulates further questions. What we all need now is the breathing space to examine these questions in greater depth, and work through the implications of the evidence we gather. The questions posed here will not go away.

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Supporting Schools against Bullying: the second SCRE anti-bullying pack

Edinburgh: Scottish Council for Research in Education, 1994
£10.00. ISBN 0947833-781

This is the second anti-bullying pack from SCRE. The first, *Action Against Bullying*, was published in 1992 and was distributed to all schools in the United Kingdom. It concentrated on raising awareness among teaching staff and developing a school policy. It is still available at £6.00

This new pack, *Supporting Schools Against Bullying*, is about involving everyone in anti-bullying action with a special focus on families, parents' groups and non-teaching staff. The pack contains two booklets and photocopiable materials.

The larger booklet, *School Action Against Bullying: involving parents and non-teaching staff* provides guidance for head teachers on involving the whole-school community in the school's antibullying policy. It has been written by Pamela Munn, who has led a number of studies on aspects of school management and discipline related problems. She is Deputy Director at SCRE.

The smaller booklet, *Bullying and How to Fight It: a guide for families*, is by Andrew Mellor. He is a teacher experienced in the problems of bullying and is currently Anti-Bullying Development Officer (Scotland). This booklet is available separately at £3.25 (discounts are available on bulk orders).

The three sets of photocopiable materials are: 'Scenario' (discussion starters for training sessions); Information on publications and useful organisations; and ways of finding out about bullying in your school.

Pamela Munn's booklet is commendably concise. It contains an invaluable distillation of current knowledge on the problem of bullying and offers a wide range of practical actions which schools can take.

She urges schools not to think in stereotypes – it is too easy to label children and their parents. She underlines the importance of encouraging victims and witnesses to speak up: secrecy and silence nurture bullying and all incidents should be taken seriously. She points out that the single most effective thing a school can do is to have an active policy which makes it clear that bullying will not be tolerated. Head Teachers are seen as key

figures whose active support and leadership is essential if bullying is to be tackled effectively.

It is possible to map potential bullying trouble spots – this helps to avoid incidents. There are various way of doing this, ways which include asking parents, pupils and non-teaching staff to participate in collecting information – but also letting them know about how the information they supply is being used.

Teachers are reminded that they are taken as role models for behaviour by pupils and also by non-teacher adults in schools. This is an extremely important point, as teachers can sometimes inadvertently legitimate bullying by their own attitudes.

Andrew Mellor's booklet for families is intended to be used as part of collective school action but also provides excellent information and advice for those who may have difficulties in persuading the school to take their concern seriously. (Such schools he describes, rather aptly, as 'ostrich schools' and quotes an assistant head teacher as saying "I do not think bullying is a big problem in this school. I do not think we need to do more work on it.") He urges anyone who is worried that someone is being bullied to get in touch with the school and – if necessary – to be persistent.

He emphasises that talking is the only way to stop bullying so that everyone understands how others feel and he suggests that honesty, openness and involvement are three key factors in improving schools.

Anyone can become the victim of bullying – bullies try to justify what they do by saying the victim is different but people have a right to be different and if a real difference does not exist the bully will usually invent one.

Children often feel that it must be their own fault if they are bullied and find it hard to tell their parents – therefore families need to trust their instincts and talk and listen to their children.

The photocopiable materials are of good quality. Some would be useful for staff and governor training, others would form a valuable resource for a programme of work in Personal and Social Education.

Like many others, my own school has done a lot of work on bullying (I have written about it in previous issues of Forum) but there is always more to be done and I believe that schools will find this pack an invaluable tool in the ongoing task of combating the scourge of bullying. I can imagine that parents' associations might well want to buy a set of copies of the families booklet. I warmly commend it to all schools and hope that it may be possible for it to be distributed free in the same way as the first pack was.

Supporting Schools Against Bullying: the second SACRE Anti-Bullying Pack (which includes the family booklet *Bullying and How to Fight It: a guide for families*) is available from SCRE Booksales, 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR (Telephone 031-557 2944).

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