

FORUM

for promoting 3–19 comprehensive education

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**Assessment Models
Curricula for Comprehensives
Northern Ireland
Early Childhood's Straitjacket**



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The *next* FORUM

The Autumn issue of *FORUM* will focus on the need to promote a clear case for the continuation of comprehensive education. **Clyde Chitty & Caroline Benn** describe the outcomes of their recent research for the book *Thirty Years On*, and **Bernard Clarke** draws on his experience as a headteacher and parent to affirm the principle of comprehensive education. **Jenny Thewlis** discusses how issues of disaffection and truancy at the secondary stage can be addressed positively, and **Ros Daniels** describes an approach to behaviour management and the development of self-esteem with children at Hare Street Infant School in Essex. **Lyndon Godsall** writes about the mentoring scheme in Birmingham primary schools for Afro-Caribbean boys, and **Stephen Ward** describes how partnerships in primary teacher education have been developed at Bath College of Higher Education. The issue will also include an article by **Roy Haywood** on the status of Advanced GNVQs at higher levels, and an extended review by **Clive Griggs** of *Thirty Years on*.

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Flawed Agendas

Education, along with the National Health Service and unemployment, is consistently given high priority in all opinion polls as we move further into the run-up to the General Election. Education is one of the key matters about which people are concerned because they are dissatisfied with what is happening. The public now realises that it was conned by the so-called reforms of 1988 and subsequent continued tampering, false promises and further legislation that has brought yet more instability. The original Tory agenda was flawed and so produced inherently contradictory results.

The flawed Tory agenda no longer has credibility. Parental choice has turned out to be schools' choice or covert selection. Local management of schools (LMS) has turned out to be delegation of managing inadequate budgets with cuts and redundancies. Local education services have turned into a competitive and hostile scramble between schools. Raising standards is imperilled by rising class size. Children are labelled by SAT Level as, equally misleadingly, they once were by IQ. Annually more are excluded from schooling.

A severely damaged, fragmented and demoralised education service is the result. Disparity between schools within it has increased and mirrors that between families as society becomes more polarised in an ungoverned market economy. Even schools that struggle successfully against the odds cannot climb far up the infamous league tables.

John Major's agenda is more flawed and dogma-driven than ever, seeking to revert to overt selection for 'a grammar school in every town', to invite all schools to adopt selective admissions policies and compel more to opt for grant maintained status. Selection and vouchers are the new Tory agenda. Vouchers for nursery places are first, but now Heseltine, Clarke and Portillo are pressing for post-16 vouchers. Selection and vouchers across public and private sectors epitomise education as a market.

Yet poll evidence indicates that this is not what the public wants. Significantly, analysis of two recent polls revealed strong opposition to selection and support for comprehensives among the generation of parents with school age children.

Labour's agenda still apparently aims to eliminate selection and to promote comprehensive education, but David Blunkett's sound bites on these issues are not backed by clarity on how they would be honoured in practice. They cannot be guaranteed by reliance on working out admissions policies by local agreement; on inviting parents to opt by ballot for community, aided or foundation status for their child's school; on schemes for cross representation of LEAs on all governing bodies and of parents on education committees. Proposals for reforming the iniquitous funding formula and for both specifying LEAs' functions and determining their funding will be crucial. As yet Labour's agenda lacks credibility.

Indeed it is seriously flawed by the inclusion of much from the flawed Tory agenda. Mantras for standards, choice and diversity are chanted without considering collective

and individual entitlement or contextual planning criteria. OFSTED is endorsed despite teachers' evident distrust. The response to the perceived problems of disruptive pupils, incompetent teachers and failing schools is broadly similar. Crucially, the National Curriculum's badly flawed assessment structure is not challenged any more than the content-centred curriculum which undermines active learning and alienates children as students. New Labour has to challenge New Right on fundamentals to develop a credible alternative agenda.

There are credible alternatives to the present essentially flawed agendas, some of which are explored in this *FORUM*. Myra Barrs exposes the flaws in current assessment schemes and explains a way forward that could enable teachers to promote more effective learning for all. Derek Gillard and John Butcher expose flaws in the present curriculum and argue for approaches that would serve all students' actual needs and interests in the middle and post-16 years respectively. Jane Collins shows how even today a comprehensive school can co-operate within a local system to serve the whole community in a context where much of the Tory agenda has failed to penetrate.

A system of comprehensive primary and secondary schools, without overt or covert selection, is the prerequisite for that effective education for all which an alternative government must be prepared to deliver. Such a system is the essential framework, a key means to a greater aim and vision. Appropriate curricula, assessment, examinations, qualifications, advisory and support systems, leadership, management, a safe and secure school environment are all further means to enable teachers to work effectively with and for all their students. Flawed means subvert the enterprise.

For the last eight years the New Right's agenda has sought to direct the education enterprise in accordance with an ideology veiled in populist mantras. Comprehensive education was the key target for destruction by various means, but has proved remarkably resilient and remains popular.

An alternative agenda is now required to redirect the education enterprise. It will have to tackle the damage, fragmentation and inappropriate mechanisms that are the heritage of eight years of ideological experiment. Some redirection of funding would follow logically, but significant additional funds will be essential for the task of reconstruction.

Tories divert inadequate funds from mainstream schooling to various ideological gimmicks. Liberal Democrats offer a panacea of a penny on income tax. Labour indicates priorities but refuses to commit new funds.

Any alternative agenda lacks credibility without explicit commitment to funding and a timescale.

NANETTE WHITBREAD

Tensions in Assessment

Myra Barrs

Previously a teacher and an LEA advisor for English, Myra Barrs is Director of the Centre for Language in Primary Education, London, which developed and published the Primary Language Record. Here she explains a better way of assessing for Key Stages 1 to 3.

A Single Value Measure

Sir Peter Medawar once pointed out that there was a long history, in many different fields, of trying to arrive at a 'single value measure' of a complex state. In demography, attempts had once actually been made to encapsulate in a single number a nation's reproductive potential and future population prospects. But these attempts had no useful outcome; predictions based on them proved completely inaccurate. In soil science, there had also been moves to 'epitomise in a single figure the behaviour of a soil'. This might seem a more manageable task, but Medawar explains that soil behaviour depends on many factors, such as particle size and shape, porosity, bacterial flora, hydrogen ion concentration, water content, and so on. In the end, attempts to arrive at a single value measure which would describe the full complexity of this behaviour had failed because: 'no single figure can embody in itself a constellation of values of all these variables in any single real instance.' In economics, the tendency to use the growth rate of GNP as a measure of national welfare is also of course, says Medawar 'totally inadmissible' (Medawar, 1977).

Medawar was using all these examples to underline the problems involved in attempting to sum up in one crude measure any complex human behaviour and, particularly, the folly of expecting that an attribute such as children's intellectual capacity could be represented by an IQ score. His argument is classic; at a time when children's achievement in mathematics or English is being summed up in the 'single value measure' of a SAT score, it is needed once again.

Purposes in Conflict

The recent analysis of 1995 SATs results has been an example of the kind of annual handwringing that we may expect to see now that national testing is back on track. Yet the numbers which are analysed so minutely, the statistics, the block graphs, and (eventually) the league tables, rest on shaky foundations, and these numbers, produced at so much expense of time, money, and spirit, are capable of many different interpretations. The essential point about the 11 year olds' results in mathematics and English, widely viewed as disappointing, was made by James Tooley in *The Times Educational Supplement* (1996). He pointed out that these results do not prove that children are falling behind, and cannot be used to demonstrate either the failure of Tory government or that of progressive primary teaching. 'All they show' he concludes 'is that the original National Curriculum Working Groups got it wrong when they guessed the levels of attainment for certain age groups'.

This difficulty of pitching the levels of attainment correctly was clearly signalled by Duncan Graham in his introduction to the original report of the mathematics

working group. ATGAT supplementary report also admitted at that time that the new system would not 'depend on empirical evidence of a particular linear or other pattern of learning for its initial construction, although the definition of the levels may need to be reviewed in individual cases in the light of information about the actual distribution of pupils' performance when the national curriculum and assessment system are in operation'. The syntax here is a reflection of their muddle.

The original subject working parties were presumably instructed to err on the side of optimism and overestimate rather than underestimate what might be expected of pupils in particular age groups, in specifying levels of attainment. By doing so, they would also be helping to set 'standards' higher, and encouraging higher expectations. But this was a dangerous line to take when no piloting of the levels was possible, and in such a high stakes assessment climate. It now appears that their original guesses about expected levels do need to be revised, at the end of both Key Stages 2 and 3. What a pity that in the interim a complete revision of the national curriculum has taken place which has left these levels (except for younger children) largely unchanged and has made further changes politically impossible.

This sequence of events illustrates the tensions inherent in the national assessment system and the purposes in conflict that it represents. On the one hand, the national curriculum levels are intended to be a means of measuring actual standards; a tool for nationwide monitoring. On the other hand, they have been used as a means of setting desired standards, a way of pulling the system up by its bootstraps. (Caroline Gipps & Gordon Stobart, 1993, see national curriculum assessment as an example of an American approach known as Measurement Driven Instruction, and point out that it combines high stakes with high standards in a way designed to exert 'the greatest impact on instruction'). These purposes, then, are in conflict and are producing a system in which many children are bound to underperform in relation to the targets set.

The New Level Descriptions

This year we enter a new phase of national curriculum assessment, following the Dearing revisions. A number of new problems have resulted from the revisions: problems always apparent in the abstract, but now becoming more urgent as we actually work with the revised system. Chief among these problems is the continuing existence of the ten-now-eight level scale, and the difficulty of linking level descriptions to this scale.

Dearing, we remember, considered and rejected the better option of end-of-key-stage scales. (It is interesting, though, to note that the 'fine grading' at level 2 which has been introduced in the reading and writing SATs means that, effectively, children *will* be assessed on a five-point scale

at the end of KS1). This option was rejected in favour of a single scale, partly in order to facilitate the tracking of 'progression' throughout the years from 5-14, and partly because of strong pressure for a system of measurement which would lend itself to 'value-added' calculations. For politicians and administrators, the idea of being able to measure the effectiveness of the system through following the progress of cohorts of children up the eight level scale was irresistible. However, the intrinsic problem of applying the same crude scale to children from six or seven up to age fourteen is the lack of any age-related dimension in the measure. This has become particularly problematic and noticeable now that the separate statements of attainment which marked each level have been replaced by level descriptions.

In theory, level descriptions ought to be an advance on the discrete sets of criteria that were the statements of attainment. They offer at least the possibility of using what Desmond Nuttall called "high level and integrating" criteria to inform assessment. The strong recommendation from SCAA that they should be used holistically – that teachers should look for the 'best fit' between children's performance and the level descriptions – suggests that they are meant to provide a holistic and recognisable account of what learning looks like at particular stages. But level descriptions, in order to be useful, must actually describe; they must provide pictures of learning at particular levels.

The new level descriptions do not provide recognisable pictures of learners, and – in English particularly – are noticeably thin and lacking in informative power at those levels which will have to be used to assess the learning of both high achieving seven year olds and low achieving fourteen year olds – levels 3 and 4. It is not surprising that it has been difficult to write descriptions that fit both of these groups equally well – their learning, in practice, is likely to look very different indeed.

Standards-referenced Assessment

This latest version of national curriculum assessment is a distorted version of a model of assessment which might, if it were properly carried through, provide the main audience for assessment – children's parents – with valuable information, inform teaching, and be an effective way of establishing common standards across the system. In essence, this model is the one described by D. Royce Sadler in his seminal paper 'Specifying and promulgating achievement standards' (1987). Sadler runs through a number of alternative models of assessment, and accurately analyses the major defect of criterion referenced assessment as it has been practised in the United States – its unsuitability in relation to "those subjects or parts of subjects where the quality of student work can best be assessed only by direct qualitative human judgement".

In this paper, Sadler gives the blueprint for a system which makes direct use of, and aims to develop, teachers' qualitative judgements. He suggests that in such a system there will need to be "explicit specification of standards so that acceptable degrees of comparability can be achieved" – schools do need to be able to refer to common understandings about achievement. He calls the system "standards-referenced assessment". Although it does involve some use of measurement, in it measurement "is not seen as an end in itself, but as ... a legitimate means to an end". Sadler maintains that, with adequate support,

teachers' qualitative judgements can be made dependable. His blueprint lays out the kinds of support that they need.

Sadler argues that all verbal descriptions of performance are always going to be imprecise or fuzzy, and therefore calls the standards that they set 'fuzzy standards'. Though verbal descriptions may contain some 'sharp' specifics (which generally relate to low level competences) they will also always include language which essentially depends on interpretation, and therefore on the experience of the assessor. ("In interpreting and using fuzzy standards, the overriding issue is whether assessors, taken collectively, know what was intended by the writers of the standards specifications"). But although these considerations seem to suggest that fuzzy standards are inferior to sharp ones, Sadler believes that sharp standards are not necessarily preferable at all, especially in the assessment of complex abilities. In assessing writing, for instance, sharp standards, assessed by objective tests with sharp cut-off points, are unlikely to be either valid or useful. Fuzzy verbal descriptions on the other hand "enable a competent assessor to make mental compensations and trade-offs" and to find "the class or grade description which *best fits* the object in question, in the knowledge that no description is likely to fit it perfectly".

In the course of the paper, Sadler suggests that a combination of verbal descriptions, numerical cut-offs, and exemplars is what is needed in order to specify standards effectively. Exemplars are a particularly key element in his model; they are the 'concrete referents' which are there to pin down the fuzzy standards of the verbal descriptions. Sadler suggests that exemplars should be accompanied by annotation, to draw attention to important features of performance at particular levels.

These three elements – verbal descriptions, numerical cut-offs, and exemplification – are now part of the new national curriculum assessment system, with its level descriptions, numerical scale, and the annotated 'exemplification of standards' documents that have been published to support teacher assessment. It is clear that Sadler's model, along with his emphasis on 'best fit' has strongly influenced the architects of the revisions to national assessment. But whereas Sadler's model was intended to provide an *alternative* to objective testing and a means of developing the 'professional qualitative judgements of teachers for making sound grading decisions', the new national curriculum has embedded these ideas in a system in which standardised tests and 'objective' measures are the final arbiters, and teacher assessment – though it continues – is still the poor relation in the system.

The Primary Language Record

There is considerable evidence from the experience that now exists of using the Primary Language Record to suggest that the combination of elements in Sadler's model is a powerful way of specifying standards and supporting teachers' assessment judgements. Assessments made on this basis have proved meaningful to both parents and teachers. The Primary Language Record contains two five-point reading scales which provide verbal descriptions of children's performance in reading at ages seven and eleven. Teachers draw on the information in their records in arriving at judgements on the scales. In a number of the contexts in which the PLR is now in use they can refer to exemplar records in order to define more precisely the meanings of the verbal descriptions in the scales.

But it seems likely that other elements will also be required in order to fully develop a trustworthy system of assessment based on teacher judgement. Group moderation, where teachers come together to compare their assessments in relation both to the verbal descriptions and to exemplars, is the missing piece in Sadler's model, and the extra element needed to create a truly responsible and accountable system of assessment. Teachers' attendance at moderation groups, we know from experience at many levels, has a major influence on their assessment practice and their teaching. This kind of moderation experience, rather than the narrow model of audit moderation now in operation nationally, is what is needed in order to provide quality assurance in assessment (cf Daugherty 1994).

League Tables

The kind of system that Royce Sadler advocates is clearly the way in which assessment should be developing today. Many complex abilities cannot be assessed satisfactorily through objective tests; their assessment will always require the exercise of human judgement. Nor can many of the wide range of competences that children are now expected to be able to master in, for instance, writing be assessed properly outside normal classroom contexts. The real instrument of assessment, in Peter Johnston's words, is the teacher. Any forward-looking system of assessment therefore needs above all to ensure that teachers' judgements are informed, trained, supported, and carefully moderated in relation to common standards. Where these circumstances apply, teachers' judgements can, as both Sadler and Harlen et al (1994) suggest, be made dependable.

But a model of the kind outlined by Sadler and discussed above would never stand up to the kind of heavy political pressure that has bedevilled the national curriculum assessment system. Sadler's model depends centrally on the exercise and development of teacher judgement. The present government has done all it can to undermine public confidence in teachers; politicians in charge of the education system have openly viewed professional educators as inhabiting an enemy camp. While this mindset persists, no progress can be made towards an assessment model based on teacher judgement.

Secondly, in the standards-referenced system described by Sadler, measurement is only one element in the process of establishing common standards of assessment; the aim of the system as a whole is to develop shared standards, not simply to produce numbers. But in the minds of administrators and politicians, measurement by numbers is the whole point of the national curriculum assessment system. From the outset all the political pressure has been to use those numbers to create league tables of schools and LEAs and that game has now begun.

In this inhospitable climate, the model of teacher assessment now emerging from SCAA must, interestingly, be seen as a move in the right direction. It carries within it the seeds of a very different kind of approach to assessment from the high stakes one that we are currently living with.

Much more work would be needed on all its elements, from the inadequate level descriptions to the narrow view of moderation, in order to make this model really valid, but there are strong indications within it that SCAA has recognised the damage done by the crude criterion-referencing of the previous system, and is trying to promote a different approach. It will be interesting to see how far this approach can be developed at a time when not only the government but also every LEA in England and Wales is obsessed with league tables and statistics.

Wynne Harlen (1994) has pointed out that assessment can never be a hard science, it is never 'accurate' in the way that the word is used in the context of the measurement of the physical world.

Assessment in education is inherently inexact and it should be treated as such. We should not expect to be able to measure pupils' abilities with the same confidence as we can measure their heights.

Assessment, then, should properly be viewed as description rather than measurement; as Medawar suggested, the most important aspects of children's learning cannot be summed up in a number, or even a row of numbers.

One last word from Mystic Meg. The ten-now-eight level scale was always going to meet its Waterloo at the transition from the primary to the secondary phase. 1998 will be a particularly testing year for this assessment system. At that point many thousands of children who were assessed at levels 3, 4 or 5 at age 11 will be assessed again at the end of KS3 and will appear from the SATs results at that time either to have made no progress at all, or actually to have regressed since KS2. What will happen then?

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The Curriculum: a view from the middle

Derek Gillard

Derek Gillard was appointed Head Teacher at Marston Middle School, Oxford, in January 1989. He has written several times for *FORUM*, including two articles on coping with bullying in schools. He joined *FORUM*'s Editorial Board in 1995.

I began teaching in 1966, as the Plowden Report was being prepared for publication. I make no apology for my long-held view that Plowden contained much of value and that its underpinning philosophy of education – that it should be child-centred – remains a view of education to which I have been committed throughout my teaching career. It provided a number of other important messages – that children learn most effectively when they are guided to discover for themselves and that good primary practice should be extended upward into the secondary years – which I believe have also stood the test of time. At least, they would have if they had been allowed to do so.

My first headship was at Christ Church CE Middle School in Ealing – from 1995 to 1988 (i.e. the three years preceding the 1988 Education Act). There is no doubt in my mind that my most important function as a Head at that time was to lead the staff in developing the curriculum. Much of my time was taken up with this and I felt close to the actual learning process in the classrooms.

As I moved to my present post, the 1988 Act had just been passed. The seven years since then have seen dramatic changes in education which, I believe, have been traumatic for teachers and of questionable benefit for pupils. My job has changed out of all recognition. Of course I still believe that curriculum leadership remains my most important task; but I am now required to manage the school in ways which prevent me from having the benefit of regular 'hands-on' experience in the classroom, so I feel more detached from the learning process than I should like.

With the Dearing Review now in place we have been promised a period of stability. This has been, understandably, welcomed by teachers. It worries me, however, that this will mean several years of curriculum policy about which I have serious reservations.

My principle concerns may be expressed under four main headings: philosophy; models of curriculum and teaching and learning; assessment and league tables; and budget cuts.

Philosophy

I have already indicated that I support Plowden's commitment to child-centredness in education. I discussed this in my article 'Children's Needs and Interests and the National Curriculum' published in the Autumn 1995 issue of *FORUM*. I will not rehearse the arguments again here. Suffice it to say that I see little of this approach in the National Curriculum, nor in the pronouncements of government ministers and – more seriously – in the views of Ofsted's Chris Woodhouse.

Margaret Donaldson wrote in 1978: "There is pressure

now for change at the lower end of the system. And there is a real danger that this pressure might lead to change that would be gravely retrogressive" (Donaldson, 1978). If those words were true in 1978, how much truer they are today! Plowden's view was that good primary practice should be extended upward by raising the age of transfer to secondary education to twelve. The reverse has happened. Because the creators of the National Curriculum decided to make the break between Key Stages 2 and 3 at age eleven, many local authorities who had three-tier systems with middle schools for 8 to 12 year olds have now reverted to primary and secondary schools with the break at eleven. Middle schools like mine (with 9 to 13 year olds) straddle the divide between the two Key Stages. Some have seen this as a disadvantage and have argued for the abolition of such schools. However, I would argue that, if the assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 are valid (a debatable issue!), then 9-13 middle schools should be well-placed to use the results of these tests to inform planning for pupils at Key Stage 3. Again, some have argued that the situation creates problems of liaison for middle schools, sharing as they do the teaching at Key Stage 2 with first schools and at Key Stage 3 with upper schools. Personally, whilst I acknowledge the additional work this has created, I believe the higher levels of contact between staffs of schools in the three tiers has been beneficial for pupils.

Models of Curriculum and Teaching and Learning

Whatever happened to the process model of the curriculum? It seems to me we have a curriculum almost entirely based on content. Creative teachers are doing their best to use the framework as a vehicle for constructing appropriate schemes of work but the framework itself militates against this. Little wonder, then, that many have decided it is easier to cope with if kept in discrete subject areas.

At the primary level in particular, the subject-based, content-led nature of the curriculum makes allowing the pupils themselves to have an input difficult. The creators of the National Curriculum clearly forgot – or didn't believe – that "the child is a living thing, with thoughts and beliefs, hopes and choices, feelings and wishes; helping him with these must be what education is about, for there is nothing else to educate." (Pring, 1976)

Topic work, despite the occasional – reluctant – admission that it may have a place, is clearly frowned upon, as is that other *bête noir* of government and Ofsted, mixed-ability teaching. The paper 'Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools' by Robin Alexander, Jim Rose & Chris Woodhead (the so-called

'Three Wise Men Report') is a good example of the prevailing attitude. Despite the fact that this paper contains much that is good common sense, its thrust is undoubtedly to promote a return to streaming and setting on the one hand and to more specialist teaching on the other. There is little discussion of the appropriateness of these approaches, little acknowledgement of the vast amount of literature of the last thirty years which demonstrates a developing understanding of the way children learn. Indeed, the conclusions of each section of the paper appear to have been written first, with 'evidence' added as an afterthought to convince readers of the justification for the conclusions. Unfortunately, the evidence often does not support the conclusions.

There is already plenty of anecdotal evidence that the subject-based National Curriculum is causing disaffection, especially among less able pupils. Schools are reporting increasing levels of disruptive behaviour and the number of pupils being suspended is rising rapidly. Whilst I am sure it is true that there are other factors at work here – the disillusionment caused by unemployment, for example – I am convinced that a curriculum which regards subject content as all-important and pays little attention to the children themselves is a major part of the problem.

Another of my concerns is the emphasis now being placed on 'outcomes'. Again, the process doesn't seem to matter. This is particularly evident – and, in my view, harmful – in the latest SCAA document on early years education.

Assessment

We have a flawed curriculum and now we have flawed assessment procedures to compound the problem. Because all that matters in the curriculum is content, all that matters in assessing it is how much content pupils have absorbed. The Key Stage 2 Science test in the summer of 1995 was little more than a reading test. I marked our pupils' English tests. How can you set a story-writing exercise without allowing any marks for originality, imagination or creativity? SCAA can! SCAA should remember two things: that education is what is left when you've forgotten the content and that what is of value and what is measurable are usually at the opposite ends of a spectrum. There is the inevitable danger that teachers will look at the tests and decide that, if that's all children need to 'know', then that is all they will teach them. And finally, league tables merely compound the problem by using dubious statistics to set pupil against pupil and school against school.

Budget Cuts

In January 1993 my school had 360 pupils and 21 teachers, including the Head. Three years on, in January 1996, we have 430 pupils and 16 staff. That's seventy more pupils and five fewer teachers. We are no longer able to provide half-class group teaching in Design and Technology. We have lost our full-time Special Needs teacher and twenty per cent of our Learning Support hours. In the summer of 1995 we lost three young, able and enthusiastic teachers. At Christmas 1995 we lost our Deputy Head (to a Headship) and our Key Stage 2 Coordinator (to a Deputy Headship). While both these promotions reflect well on us as a school, they leave huge gaps in our staffing provision – especially as the posts of Deputy Head and Key Stage 2 Coordinator are not being filled, at least for the time being. These decisions have been made solely on grounds of economy.

The budget cuts in 1995 were devastating, leading to

low staff morale and preventing us from offering the sort of curriculum provision which we had spent several years developing. If there is any further cut in our budget in 1996 – and all the rumours I hear suggest that this will be the case – I simply don't know how we'll cope. The staffing level of schools like mine is being reduced to the extent where we simply won't be able to cover the National Curriculum.

Given all these problems, how should middle schools – and other teachers of middle-years pupils – be approaching the curriculum?

For me, education must be, first and foremost, child-centred. This means starting from where the child is, acknowledging the child's integrity and regarding his/her needs and interests as paramount. The philosophy of this government (if philosophy is a word which can be used to describe its rag-bag jumble of on-the-hoof decisions) seems to me to be based on the utilitarian view that the child is a unit to be prepared for a life of work, that the child has no individuality of his/her own. "They come to the teacher unformed, ignorant and distracted; their existence as citizens, and the rights and immunities which confer equality ... lie at the end of the educational process and not at the beginning" (Scruton, 1987). Compare this with Plowden's view that "A school ... is a community in which children learn to live first and foremost as children and not as future adults" (Plowden, 1967).

I am committed to the process model of the curriculum, though I acknowledge that content, aims and objectives have a place. How appalling it is now to hear from children that, whichever school they attend, they are all studying the Vikings or the Egyptians or the Tudors and Stuarts: whatever happened to the spontaneous, the unexpected, the creative? Education has become boringly predictable.

I want to allow, indeed encourage, the child to take a large measure of responsibility for his/her own learning. This means much less teacher direction (though, as Plowden pointed out, there must be advice and support from the teacher) and much more choice for pupils. I despair of education perceived as a series of teacher-prepared worksheets (usually photo-copied from textbooks) through which pupils must work as though they were filling in income-tax forms. This isn't education, it's time filling. Worse, it's time wasting. It is also de-skilling, since it prevents pupils from using their own initiative and a wide range of valuable skills.

I want to see guided discovery reinstated as the only ultimately valid way of learning: I want to see less of the teacher standing in front of the class lecturing (though there is a place for this occasionally). I want to enter a classroom and, after searching, find the teacher engaging with a small group or individual child.

I want to see far more resource-based learning, where pupils choose their areas of study and then have to find the information they need. It is in the finding, collation and use of information, and in sharing and discussing it with others, that much of the educational process lies.

I am not suggesting that subjects don't matter: we do our children no service at all if we don't teach them to read, write and add up. But, ultimately, this is not what education is about. They are a means to an end, not an end in themselves.

I want teachers to have control of the curriculum so that they can implement the above. I have no time for the concept of curriculum as being something imposed from outside.

"A curriculum consists of experiences developed from learners' needs and characteristics (as opposed to the needs of society), and a large measure of freedom for both teacher and learner is a necessary condition for education of this kind" (Skilbeck, quoted in Kelly, 1982). "The curriculum ... is internal and organic to the institution, not an extrinsic imposition" (Skilbeck, 1984).

I want no competition between pupils: I don't like house points, gold stars or merits and I certainly don't want to see pupils' progress compared with each other and – heaven forbid – displayed for all to see. If the work has integrity and validity and relevance, no external motivation should be necessary, though the appreciation and praise of teacher and peers is, of course, vital. I have no time for elitism: every member of the school has something to offer which should be valued by all. I don't like tests and I certainly don't want results published to anyone but the pupil him/herself and, where appropriate, to his/her parents or the school to which s/he is transferring. Assessment should be part of the dialogue between teacher and pupil as equal partners in the learning process. Education is much more than me telling you something and then testing you to see if you've remembered it: it's about learning and developing together. "A good school is a community of young and

old learning together" (Hadow, 1931). How much longer is it going to take us to learn this lesson?

We already have a National Curriculum which is distorting what education is about. With changes in teacher education, a whole generation of teachers is emerging from the colleges with no philosophical understanding of what it means to be educated. Does anyone read Dewey anymore?

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Alleviating Tension at 16-19

John Butcher

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There has been much discussion in recent years on the nature of the curriculum for the 16-19 age group. Given the inevitable rise up the political agenda of educational issues during the run-in to a General Election, it seems timely to highlight the key tensions implicit in a dual track academic-vocational divide, just in case any prospective Secretary of State is intent on a big idea for the curriculum of the future with which to woo those voting stakeholders. We have already had Sir Ron Dearing offering an interim report which, given its tentative suggestions, appeared constrained by the present government's insistence on the retention of the 'gold standard' of A-levels in their present form. If this view transpires, the post-16 curriculum seems likely to remain a prisoner of its past. We have also had articles (Richardson et al, 1993) which offered a far more radical set of solutions to the academic-vocational conundrum, yet such ideas are in danger of being peripheralised as institutions are sucked into the vortex of 'raw' league tables post-16. The key question must be: what should a comprehensive 16-19 curriculum of the future look like? And how should it link with a 14-16 curriculum? I intend, in the spirit of opening up debate, to explore four crucial issues: transparency, breadth; selection; and participation. In relation to each of these, I will comment on what the curriculum should *not* look like, and offer, with due humility, a contrasting vision on how it should impact on all students.

One answer might be provided by the transparency test. Few people could argue with the proposition that students reaching the end of their compulsory education need to make informed choices about how their interests, aspirations and skills can best be enhanced if they continue with their education. Unfortunately, what confronts them is a fragmented jungle of such Byzantine complexity that choosing an optimum pathway through the system can be at best inefficient and, at worst, fraught with difficulties that could impair a student's lifelong access to opportunity. A hierarchical system of separate academic and vocational routes, based on differing principles of curriculum, assessment, regulation and certification renders talk of 'equivalence' meaningless. The present system is a confused duality locked in an uneasy tension, with both academic and vocational proponents suspicious of the other. Routeways for students are not transparently clear. If there was clear credit transfer between the twin routes, and genuine parity of esteem, preserving the status quo and operating within the existing framework might be forgivable.

Regrettably, the flexibility necessary in such an incoherent and unintelligible framework is lacking. Students require disinterested advice on careers, progression and access, particularly where cross-sector partnerships are threatened by rampant market forces. Is this always available? Perhaps some of the darker recesses of the hidden curriculum could be illuminated if common learning,

support and recording processes were put in place for all students. Such inclusivity would demand an integrated, modular approach to the post-16 curriculum, which would depend for its responsiveness and transparency on signposted decision points and realistic advice on progression and credit accumulation.

A second answer depends on articulating the importance of retaining breadth over premature specialism. It does seem ironic that, in a period when both employers and higher education are agreeing on the skills, attitudes and knowledge they want 16-19 education to provide, the government, fearful of any dilution of benchmark specialist A-levels has retrenched from previous moves towards broadening the curriculum with AS levels or core skills. An abrupt shift to specialisation for all at 16 (whether A-level subjects or vocational as opposed to pre-vocational courses) is hard to justify when all students have experienced a 5-16 curriculum which stresses breadth and balance. National targets for Education and Training, such as “self-reliance, flexibility and breadth” are unlikely to be achieved by all students when key policy-makers are fearful of the distorting effect of core skills on A-levels and are insistent on external tests for GNVQ. This is a ludicrous impasse, since colleagues working with post-16 students value the contribution a broader range of skills can bring; witness the recent phenomenal interest in both Youth Awards and the Diploma of Achievement as ways of validating those skills missed by academic certification. But what if a ‘bolt-on’ addition merely confirms academically able students are successful in core skills as well?

The real problem lies in the inappropriateness of students having to choose between a set of subjects in an academic pathway, or a course in a vocational pathway, with virtually no intermediate entry points. As Finegold (1990) says “every student needs to balance theory and practice, not choose between them, [they should] balance academic and vocational study according to aptitude and interest [in a] common structure”. The unnecessary differentiation of forced choice restricts equality of opportunity.

And yet, research persistently suggests the country needs a flow of better qualified citizens. Any incentive to ‘stay-on’ after the compulsory school-leaving age is vital to achieve this, and for many students a year in which horizons can be broadened and life decisions made, is dependent upon the ability to keep options open. Any success at this time needs to be recorded, whether through a Record of Achievement, accreditation of prior learning or through Compact arrangements. At present, 18 months of A-level study can equate to nothing of value. This must cease. Some commentators have claimed (Jessop, 1993) that GNVQ need not hijack pre-vocationalism if a modular A-level is studied alongside GNVQ. However, few students appear to be experiencing such a mix, perhaps wary of the status that will be accorded it.

Tinkering is not the answer. Breadth is part of a new learning demand, which requires the integration of cross-curricular skills with intellectual rigour in a common accreditation system. This will need elaborate reporting, and points to a unit-based curriculum (Burgess, 1993) similar to that presently operating at the BRIT School for Performing Arts in Croydon. If a zipper model (Y) (ibid) can be put in place allowing choice of pathways to be deferred until clear advice is offered at the end of Year 12, a unit-based unified curriculum will provide flexibility for students in a coherent structure. Participation will then increase.

A third answer values an accessible curriculum over a selective one. Conservative rhetoric of preserving A-level standards (little mention of vocational standards) has politicised the 16-19 curriculum. As a consequence, one of the greatest dangers to increased access to post-compulsory education could be in the encroachment of selective practices, limiting opportunity, under a euphemistic justification of ‘standards’. If forms of selection, or whatever phase is currently fashionable, are introduced into comprehensive schools pre-16 (and politicians of all parties seem to be falling over themselves to advocate just this) it is likely that far more rigid entry criteria onto post-16 courses will result. I see evidence of this already, with local comprehensives insisting on, for example, grade A or B at GCSE for entry on to A-level courses, having already selected students for tiered papers in GCSE which prevent many from having any access to a grade above C. Such early selection merely serves to confirm low expectations of students.

Publication of ‘raw’ league tables in the national and local press every year may tempt a number of institutions to inflate A-level points scores per student by instigating inflexible entry procedures as a barrier to potential grade D, E or N students. The prestige of an ‘academic’ sixth-form seems to offer far greater marketing opportunities than any investment in provision of vocational alternatives. However, such a process only de-selects the majority of students from access to the academic pathway, and subsequent opportunities in higher education or career advancement. Such students can expect to be offered a vocational route via GNVQ, but there are few opportunities for ‘connectiveness’, little encouragement for partnerships between institutions to offer a broad range of vocational courses at all levels, and limited recognition that students develop at different speeds. In a system dominated by A-levels, “credential inflation” (Spours, 1993) inevitably limits choice for a diverse two year cohort. Yet in the present, market-driven climate, A-level results for the selected top quarter of the year group will provide the most tempting output statistic for many schools. Whether they will be honest, or reflect a comprehensive egalitarianism, is doubtful. Such a failure of the system could be mitigated by the opportunity for a commonality of experience that a single integrated system would offer.

The dangers of selection are rendered even more pointed by the availability (following the Dearing Review) of GNVQ Foundation units or courses as options for Year 10 and 11 students. If comprehensives decided to offer all students a broad vocational experience to complement their academic studies, the possibilities for a radical rethink of a 14-19 curriculum open up. This could incorporate the Y model already referred to (Burgess, 1993) with the ‘zipper’ idea offering a range of entry points through modularity and ease of transfer. It could further encourage acceptance of the British Baccalaureate (Finegold et al, 1990). However, if, as local evidence suggests, the vocational track 14-16 is merely forced on academic failures, an invidious selection occurs far too early, and thus narrows opportunity.

My fourth answer is based upon a desire to increase participation qualitatively in order to avoid polarisation. If we are not careful, the result of increased selection will be an inefficient polarisation of students via a post-compulsory curriculum which offers more barriers than pathways. Evidence suggests (Raffe, 1995) that “participation in full-time education among 16-18 year olds has risen rapidly

in Britain since the late 1980s" but that the fastest rise in participation is amongst "less qualified 16-year-olds". This could be due to the decline in unskilled jobs, or the smaller cohort providing institutions with an impetus to put 'bums on seats'. The problem, as colleagues might recognise, is that completion, pass and progression rates have not risen as quickly. If, as Raffe argues "Provision ... needs to have more regard to their wider educational needs, to future educational progression, and to the skill needs of a much broader range of occupations", the quality and relevance of some course provision can be questioned.

The danger is that separate academic and vocational tracks will increase relative disadvantage between those increasing numbers who hope to graduate from an expanded higher education sector, and those unable to obtain an intermediate qualification who will be trapped in a cycle of casual employment or unemployment with low grade qualifications which possess little currency. As Raffe continues, "the most serious shortcoming of British Education (is) its failure to enable not just a minority, but a large majority of young people to obtain as much from their education as they are capable of achieving".

National Training targets are unlikely to be met simply by increasing the numbers continuing post-16, since significant drop out and wastage occurs at 17 (Dearing, 1995). OFSTED are intent on highlighting this phenomena, but their interpretation tends to be clumsy and simplistic. In my experience, much movement from Year 12 (and to a lesser extent Year 13) is driven by a financial imperative; students need to work part-time in order to support themselves, and some will perceive even temporary employment as being more beneficial than continuing on full-time courses possessing a doubtful value. It is even possible that such movement should be viewed positively, since a YT scheme which offers NVQ training may offer genuine opportunity for a student who, at 16, needed six months on a more general programme in school to unpick precisely what they want (or don't want) to do. There are obvious disadvantages to such a "sheep and goats" selection of jumping off points, but a more flexible, integrated curriculum would offer much safer internal transfer.

If progression, completion and participation are significant factors in the academic-vocational tension, it would seem that some form of quality control has been missing in the 'molecular accretion' (Spours, 1993) of changes in the post-compulsory curriculum in recent years. Local evidence would confirm that OFSTED is not looking effectively at 16+ education in schools, sidelining academic and vocational curricula to a few bland sentences in final reports. It would appear that the inspection process offers neither the time, nor the expertise to skilfully evaluate important post-16 activity in schools. The intense scrutiny given to the National Curriculum 5-16, and, to a lesser extent vocational development in FE, might confirm the 'Cinderella' view of a comprehensive 16-19 approach to education. Who is engaged in the strategic planning for this sector, when increasingly centralised control over the academic curriculum is counterbalanced by a reduced LEA role? Will TECs, the ones with the money, step in to integrate vocational imperatives with the academic superstructure?

Reactive policies will not significantly alter the

educational experience of comprehensive students 16+. The labour market has shown itself distrustful of vocational education if offered as a separate, but 'equal' track to the academic. This is unsurprising, given a recent finding in Milton Keynes that the most plentiful employment activities for young people occur in distribution, yet not one institution offers a GNVQ route into that vocational area. No, the way forward must lie in unified progression routes, which offer a pragmatic solution to low student retention rates.

In a 1990 pamphlet Sir Claus Moser pleaded for the 1990s to be "our decade for Education" recognising that the "truly central problems (were) the academic and training problems of the 16-19 year-old group". He predicted ladders of progression "would need a leap in quality and vision". His implied modernisation of the curriculum still requires a forward leap to relieve the tension between broad GCSE and specialised A-levels as well as the single subject separateness of A-level and vocational courses including Common Skills. Any modernisation needs to bridge the gap between the national curriculum 5-16 and those opportunities in HE and careers which require a range of independent and interdependent skills.

Of the four key issues explored, the first, transparency, can be achieved if pathways and transfer points are clearer 14-19. The second, breadth, is attainable if all students choose major and minor pathways through a mix of academic and vocational modules. The third requires all students to follow a complementary vocational option 14-16, and then if all pursue some form of academic option post-16 the inequities of selection can be reduced. Finally, participation, retention and completion routes need to be improved to avoid polarisation. A curriculum which offers a modular matrix of units, mixing the academic and the vocational, can attract students and allow them to progress through to careers or higher education. I look forward to teachers being empowered in this framework as tutor-counsellors on an Open University model, assisting students to map out their opportunities for progression.

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Core Skills at A-Level

Ian Duckett

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In this article I describe developments that have, I believe, been enhanced by the Training and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) in relation to two different kinds of 'core skills', that is those learning skills that are core to a student's whole learning programme and those study skills that are core, or central to a specific subject. The pilot scheme described below is intended to contribute to a more unified post 16 curriculum.

The Royal Society of Arts have published *14-19 Education and Training: implementing a unified system of learning*. In it Richard Pring and others state:

The system of education and training is in a state of transition. Not long ago schools and colleges divided young people into those who could succeed academically, progress to university, and those who were not successful academically, and therefore move into vocational training or straight into unskilled employment. Economically, that made sense because there were many jobs for the unskilled, and on-the-job training, together with an apprenticeship system, would provide the necessary craft and technician skills in a relatively stable economic world. Only a minority were thought to need the broader and more advanced education necessary for the professional, scientific, technological and executive expertise essential for the running of society and its industries.

All that is now changed. More people are in need of education and training on economic grounds. But the economic imperative has raised broader educational and social questions. It is not just vocational training that people should receive. They have a right to be educated more broadly. Once again that might be seen purely in economic terms. A fast changing society facing an unpredictable future requires what Sir Christopher Ball refers to as a 'learning society'. How else can society solve the problems which it is facing? How else can industry adapt to the increasingly competitive world market? How else can people experience fulfilment as human beings, when increased leisure opens up fresh opportunities?

Clearly Core Skills, be they generic Core Skills or the specific learning skills relating to a subject, have a major role to play, especially with less traditional students.

Core Learning Skills for A-Level English Literature

The core skills pilot grew out of work on assignment based learning at Barnet College that has helped to identify the core learning skills relating to A-level English Literature and relate them directly to the assessment objectives. The major influences have been work carried out through the AEB's London Six English Literature Consortium and TVE Extension (TVEE)-funded projects including Barnet TVEI's collaborative project.

The first step towards more flexible approaches to A-levels involves identifying key, or central study skills relating to a subject in this case, A-level English Literature, more specifically the A-level English Literature AEB 660 syllabus. Staff development and curriculum development are often about change. Recent syllabus re-writes and alterations to funding methodology have created (to borrow the insidious market parlance so prevalent in post-Thatcherite FE) a demand for flexible approaches to A-levels.

The identification of skills and attitudes at appropriate times is a pre-requisite. In this case: comprehension; evaluation; appreciation; exploration; understanding; reflection; sensitivity; interaction.

It is then necessary to relate these to the aims of the syllabus. These examples relate to the AEB's English Literature 660 Syllabus but the principles apply to any syllabus in any A-level subject and involve students in: appreciation of the wide variety of responses which literature evokes; exploration of texts in order to discover fresh insights; understanding of themselves and others; reflection on what has been read; an awareness of ambiguities and an expression of this awareness, where necessary; sensitivity to signs of mood and feeling; response in formats other than the traditional discursive or critical essay.

These changes need not (though it would be dangerous to think they never should) be viewed in entirely negative terms. I will outline the response by one subject team to management calls for a flexible curriculum and progressive trends relating to assignment based and student centred learning.

Assessment objectives need to be matched with both the appropriate skills, and attitudes and the syllabus aims and objectives which are: see meanings beneath the surface of a text; understand the nature and interplay of characters; show appreciation of an author's style; make a well-considered personal response to a text; show how texts excite emotions in readers or audiences; make interested and informed conjectures, when asked, about the intentions of a writer; explore works written for a different kind of society and in a different idiom from the candidate's own; write effectively, and appropriately, in response to texts studied.

Armed with the results of our 'Skill Audit' we were able to produce an introductory skills based module including an Identification of Skills and Attitudes, the Aims of Syllabus relating to Practical Criticism and Comprehension and the Assessment Objectives. It is worth, for the purposes of illustration, pursuing one example in more detail. Meeting assessment object 10 involved the following activities: "Write effectively, and appropriately, in response to texts studied". With this in mind students were asked to apply the following seventeen activities to

any text: empty mind of any preconceptions about writing; write down three things that the title suggests to you as an individual; agree on two or three best suggestions in your pair/group; now read the text – once to yourself – quickly!; one member of your pair/group reads the text; re-read the text individually twice; list, individually, all the things about the text that interest you for any reason. For example, usual words, words you like the sound of, repetition, patterns, contrasts, and anything else. The next stage is to agree a list of interesting features; taking a detailed look at the following aspects of the language: presence or absence of adverbs and adjectives, are verbs active or passive? tense; find groups of words that contain a similar theme. Not worrying about whether this makes any sense at this stage; discuss whether or not any pattern is emerging yet; reading the text again. Thinking about: does what you have said make sense? Answering the following structured questions: Who is speaking? The poet or someone else? Who? Who is it addressed to? A particular person? The writer him/herself? Everyone? What is the Writer's attitude to the reader? Angry? Joyful? Honest? Jokey? Teasing? Why is the text put down on paper the way it is? Describe how it is organised; what effect does it all have on you? Give another pair/group your text to read; talk them through it and answer any questions they might have; swap; choose either your text or the text you have just heard about and write about it, taking all the above into consideration and saying whether or not you like it and why.

Students were then asked to read a piece of criticism as a model and discuss the way it was constructed. The whole project has been popular with A-level students. A selection of comments from students involved in the activities described as part of the introductory module above reflect this:

It was an interesting way of introducing the subject of English Literature by giving passages from various texts.

It was very enjoyable to read. It's been a great and different experience studying this text. I've even showed it to a few of my friends and they say they liked it.

I liked the different extracts from the novels that were all combined together in this module. I thought that it was a very good idea because it highlighted all the different types of writings.

The staff development aspect has grown largely out of teachers working together on something that enhances the student learning experience, impacts on teaching and learning styles and develops the curriculum in its broadest sense.

Core Skills

The general core skills, those defined by the NCVQ, in Communication, Working with Others, Improving own Learning and Problem Solving, have been approached through a college TVEE-driven A-level Core Skills pilot

which consists of two stages, the first, involving a taster assignment has just been completed. It covered 256 students.

This taster, built around the Working with Others performance criteria, has led to a bigger project which is based on a community action assignment designed within the framework of ASDAN's FE Award Scheme.

TASTER ASSIGNMENT: working with others

Element 3.1: Work to given collective goals and contribute to the process of allocating individuals' responsibilities.

Performance Criteria:

1. The accuracy of own understanding of collective goals is confirmed with the person(s) setting them.
2. The accuracy of own understanding of responsibilities and working arrangements is confirmed with others.
3. Own activities are directed towards achieving collective goals and meeting own responsibilities.
4. Information relevant to allocating responsibilities is fed into discussions at appropriate points and provided on request.
5. Information provided is based on appropriate evidence.
6. Offers to undertake specific responsibilities are appropriate.

Activity:

1. In your groups identify a social or environmental problem you have noticed in the College.
2. In the half an hour or so allocated you should write a memo outlining a plan of action aimed at dealing with the problem you have identified.
3. Members of your group must perform the following roles: (a) Leader, (b) Scribe, (c) Researchers x 2.
4. At the end of the activity spend 5 minutes reflecting upon and identifying which of the performance criteria you have met.

Students who undertook the scheme have subsequently been enrolled in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) FE Award Scheme at Level 3 and have been working on a community based assignment and a project based around their work experience.

It is too early to report on the outcomes of part two of the Core Skills pilot, but I will tentatively assert that it has at the very least raised awareness among students, beyond the bland acceptance that study skills are a meaningless hoop to be jumped through in tutorial time and begin to demonstrate that an injection of core skills or central study skills can have some impact on a student's learning programme.



Campaigning for Comprehensive Education in Northern Ireland

Robert Crone

A practising teacher for twenty years, Dr Crone has been Vice-Principal of a secondary high school in Lisburn, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, for the past ten years. He is secretary of the Northern Ireland Association for Comprehensive Education, and here writes about the long campaign.

Despite the fact that the educational policy of the 1947 Education Act (Northern Ireland) was similar to the 1944 Butler Act in England, two very different systems of secondary education emerged within Great Britain and Northern Ireland during the second half of the 20th century.

Academic and Social Selection

The Northern Ireland Education Act of 1947 introduced a tripartite system of grammar, secondary (intermediate) and technical schools. A scholarship system was introduced to enable a greater number of abler pupils to attend grammar schools. However, as only nine of seventy-five recognised grammar schools were managed by local authorities the Act did not abolish fee-paying to these semi-independent schools. Instead the Act proposed that 80% of grammar school intake should comprise scholarship pupils who passed the 11+ or Qualifying Examination; 20% of grammar school intakes would be reserved for head teachers to select pupils at their discretion. The availability of fee-paying entry to grammar school blurred the stark consequences of a pass/fail 11+ examination and gave middle class parents an opportunity to use the selective system to their advantage by providing an alternative route to a grammar school place.

The retention of fee-paying entry to grammar school until 1987 represented a significant difference in the Northern Ireland legislation. In England under the Butler Act only those children who qualified could be admitted to grammar schools and fee-paying was confined to the expensive independent schools. Had the same rule applied in Northern Ireland the same middle-class forces, the parents whose children had not qualified, would have removed selection to secondary education as quickly as they did in England. In the event Northern Ireland ended up with a *hybrid system* which combined academic with social selection and all the conflict of interests that mixture entailed.

The Transfer Market

Since 1947 selective transfer at eleven from primary to secondary school has been a feature of the Northern Ireland education system. The transfer market has been euphemistically *named* the 11+, the qualifying examination, the selection procedure, the transfer procedure, the revised selection procedure and physical capacity transfer. The *methods* deployed have been various too: written tests in English (two papers) and arithmetic; intelligence tests; standardised primary school record cards combined with

two verbal reasoning tests; internal assessment of suitability with grade(s) awarded by primary school principals; two formal verbal reasoning tests; external tests in English, Maths and Science based on the programmes of study of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

Even more various have been the *grades* used to label children: A Qualified, B Border-band qualified, C Border band not Qualified; D Unqualified; 1, 2, 3 (pupils graded in 3 subjects and hence labelled 111, 112, 113, 122, 123, 133, 222, 223, 233, 333); P, Q, R, S, with P* and Q* [P and Q starred used as subgrades]; P, P-, R, S; A, M, G; 1, 2, 3, 4; A, B, C, D, and A, B1, B2, C1, C2 and D. One might be forgiven for thinking one was referring to the distribution to secondary schools of eggs rather than individual human beings. In 1993-94 alone the transfer system cost £750,000 to operate.

The Numbers Game

In the first years of selection the purpose was clear: to select those pupils worthy of grammar school scholarships, usually about 22% of the age group, and the verdict was blunt. On the results of examinations in English and Arithmetic you either passed or failed. A pass gave entry to a grammar school, a fail meant transfer to an intermediate school except for those able to purchase a place in a grammar school. Suitability for academic education had a *cash exchange rate*. In the 1990s, as an outcome of the 1989 Education Reform Order (Northern Ireland), *open enrolment* is used to distribute pupils to grammar and secondary intermediate schools on the basis of *parental choice and the physical capacity of individual schools to accommodate pupils*.

Open enrolment is only the latest example of how selective transfer at eleven has been used to protect the institutional interests of the province's voluntary grammar schools, regardless of the adverse impact this manipulation has on other types of post-primary school. Over the years since 1947 different arrangements made for selective transfer have favoured voluntary grammar schools: pupils attending boarding departments were excluded from any considerations of aptitude or ability for grammar school places; the availability of fee-paying and second-chance 11+ review procedures for day pupils; elastic interpretation of fee-paying based on a percentage of *enrolment* figures which allowed individual grammar schools to admit up to 75% of their *intake* as fee-payers; a generous 27:73 quota figure for sharing out pupils between grammar and other

secondary schools, based on numbers *including fee-payers* already in the grammar school sector in 1976/77; payment of all public transport costs to schools of parents' choice more than three miles from their home address, costing a staggering £35 million in 1995; allocating a top grade to 25% of the *transfer group*, although only 70% of eleven year olds participate in selective transfer, means 37% of those pupils sitting the tests are given a top grade; physical capacity transfer which from 1990 abandoned completely the quota system for control of pupil numbers distributed between the grammar and secondary intermediate sectors.

In the 1990s around 35% of eleven year olds found places in grammar schools: in the first years of *open enrolment* pupil numbers admitted overall to grammar schools increased by 4,000 plus (10%) while numbers in the secondary intermediate school sector remained largely static. Similarly in the 1980s, when there was a serious decline in the overall numbers of pupils transferring from primary to secondary education, arrangements for selective transfer ensured voluntary grammar schools were protected from its effects as shown in the official statistics for the years 1984 to 1989:

- Enrolment in controlled secondary schools declined from 52,864 to 44,016 (16.7%)
- Enrolment in maintained secondary schools declined from 60,302 to 45,952 (23.8%)
- Enrolment in controlled grammar schools declined from 13,553 to 12,541 (7.5%)
- Enrolment in voluntary grammar schools declined from 41,072 to 40,490 (1.4%).

The financial advantages available to the grammar school sector are considerable at a time when schools are funded on the basis of pupil numbers with an *age weighted pupil unit* in favour of sixth form students in a province where grammar schools have 75% of sixth form work as well as the freedom to charge pupils substantial *annual capitation fees*.

A Comprehensive Campaign

The minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Northern Ireland Association for Comprehensive Schools held in the King George VI Youth Centre, Belfast, on 25 November 1969 provides an extensive list of Protestant and Catholic church leaders, trade unionists, business, commercial and professional representatives, university lecturers, head teachers, educational administrators and parents all expressing dissatisfaction with selection at eleven and a commitment to alternative forms of secondary school organisation. The minutes record:

The first priority is the abolition of selection. The forms of comprehensive education must take into consideration different local needs and interests. In Northern Ireland there are special circumstances, for example, 75% of grammar schools are semi-independent. No blueprint will be acceptable everywhere.

The setting up of a campaign organisation committed to the introduction of a non-selective system of secondary education reflected long-standing and widespread public concern about the social injustice and educational inequality resulting from selection at eleven. The Northern Ireland Association for Comprehensive Education has made a substantial contribution to professional discussion of and general public debate about the issues involved in reorganising secondary education in the province along non-selective principles and practice. Pamphlets were

produced highlighting the injustices of selection at eleven and the educational opportunities for all provided by a non-selective system of secondary schooling. A conference organised by the Association entitled 'The Primary School Curriculum Without the Eleven Plus' was attended by 250 primary school principals who overwhelmingly supported a call for the ending of selection at eleven. Public meetings were held at which distinguished speakers familiar with the comprehensive experience in the rest of the United Kingdom spoke including Robin Pedley, Maurice Holt, Michael Marland, Lord Edward Short, John Mann, Malcolm Skilbeck, Hugh Sockett, Bernard Barker, Margaret Maden and Tim Brighouse.

The Association published documents on a wide variety of educational issues relevant to non-selective reorganisation in the province and circulated them to Department of Education officials, political parties, church and religious leaders and to trade union representatives. Titles included *Comprehensive Challenge*, *Parental Choice*, *The Management of Contraction*, *Transfer Merry-go-Round*, *Education Reform In Northern Ireland*, *The Transfer Market* and *Framework For Development*.

The Association helped form a 'Parents For Comprehensive Education' movement in response to a powerful grammar school organisation, supported by both Protestant and Roman Catholic grammar schools calling itself the 'Parents' Union'. The Association regularly sent deputations to successive Ministers of State for Education in Northern Ireland as well as to their counterparts in the Shadow Cabinet of the Labour opposition. Public meetings were held in a variety of locations throughout the province making the case against selection at eleven years. Petitions were organised by Parents for Comprehensive Education seeking the abolition of the 11+ examination. Letters were written to local newspapers and every opportunity offered by television and radio taken to advance the case for the reorganisation of secondary schooling along non-selective lines.

The Power of Privilege

Yet today selective transfer to secondary education in Northern Ireland remains a fact of life for the majority of children, parents and teachers. Under the regulations of the Education Reform Order (NI) 1989, only grammar schools are permitted to use ability as a criterion for selecting pupils. In 1995-96 two exceptions were made to permit in the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) (DENI)'s rather dismissive term *non-grammar schools* to use pupil ability as a criteria for entry. One of the exceptions was an integrated school which had *grammar streams approved by the Department*. The DENI's circular 1995/22, *The Procedure for Transfer from Primary to Secondary Education: 1995/96* went on to state in bold type:

It is important to stress that these grades do not determine children as being suitable or unsuitable for any particular type of school and that none of these grades guarantees a pupil a grammar school place or a place at any particular school.

DENI's efforts to abandon *suitability* as a principle in selective transfer at eleven stands logic on its head, and is contradicted by the widely exercised freedom of grammar schools to select pupils on the basis of ability as measured by results achieved in the transfer procedure tests. Despite rhetoric about parental choice and open enrolment selection at eleven continues to divide children into those who *pass*

and *fail* the 11+. Moreover the stubborn relationship research continues to demonstrate between socio-economic background and educational attainment ensures that the divide between grammar and other secondary schools remains as much *social* as *academic*. In a society wracked by a generation of political terrorism against the state, the perceived *social exclusiveness* offered by a place in a grammar school remains the bedrock of support among sections of the middle classes for the selective system of secondary education in Northern Ireland.

The retention of selective transfer at eleven in Northern Ireland underlines to advocates of comprehensive education in the province the very limited impact empirical evidence, professional advice, intellectual argument and educational thought have on public policy. The reason for this state of affairs is not difficult to find. The introduction of a non-selective system of secondary education is perceived as a serious threat to the educational privileges and social exclusiveness selection at eleven continues to provide, largely at public expense, for those who currently benefit from what J.K. Galbraith has called "the culture of contentment".

Thus it matters little that a selection system based on a school's physical capacity and ostensible parental choice turns the traditional argument for grammar schools on its head, namely that the most able are best educated together away from their average and below average contemporaries. Nor does it matter in the days of a national curriculum that the idea of a grammar school education is redundant. At the heart of 1989 Education Reform [NI] Order lies a fundamental contradiction, namely that all secondary schools are required to deliver the same curriculum for all pupils, but some schools are permitted to exclude pupils for whom the curriculum is not suitable! It is a world whose logic is reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*: "When I use a word" Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less".

Selection by Another Name

England and Wales may have won the war against the 11+ but they must be vigilant if they are not to lose the peace of maintaining a non-selective system of secondary education.

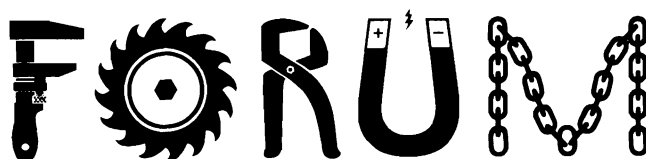
In the 1990s there seem to be moves being made to reintroduce a two tier system of secondary education, or grammar schools by another name. Let the experience, inequalities and injustices of Northern Ireland's *multi-tiered system* of secondary education be a warning to the rest of the United Kingdom! Since 1947 Northern Ireland grammar schools have retained their independence from the state sector. In the 1950s and 1960s considerable capital expenditure benefits resulted from the voluntary status of most grammar schools who had their requests for funding met centrally on an individual basis, while those schools

in the controlled and maintained sectors were considered in the light of the facilities and needs of other schools within a general area of the province. The 1989 Education Reform Order recognised that the voluntary grammar schools largely enjoyed the independence and autonomy of *grant maintained status*, and so confined this aspect of government policy to the *integrated schools movement*, thereby fragmenting further an already culturally divided and socially stratified school system.

Viewed from Northern Ireland what remains impressive about the *comprehensive experience* in the mainland of the United Kingdom, is the refusal of the vast majority of schools to opt out of a planned system of secondary education organised to safeguard the interests of all pupils, irrespective of background, ability or aptitude. It is testimony to the deep roots the non-selective principle has formed in many local communities and regions that comprehensive schools are regarded as a fair and decent way of organising secondary education as a public service rather than a private enterprise. It should be a matter of pride as well as renewed commitment that the general public's support for their local schools remains firm despite restrictions on public expenditure, continued hostility from sections of the press, the market-forces ideology of the government and the financial inducements offered to the strong or the powerful to opt out of the system. Inducements to the independent sector to *opt in* to the state system might well be compared to what happened in Northern Ireland in 1947 when the voluntary grammar schools joined the state system but have remained *semi-detached* ever since.

The peace is not yet secure. Northern Ireland's experience over half a century is that *selection*, and the educational privilege and social exclusiveness that are its *raison d'être*, comes in many modes and guises. It has been used to *qualify* fewer than one in four pupils, to justify the education of the academically most able apart from the rest, to ensure proper teaching, on the grounds of well motivated parents and parental choice, on the grounds of market forces and the need to rationalise the availability of school places, on the grounds of availability, suitability and eligibility, and to introduce a policy of open enrolment. In Northern Ireland our failure to end selection for the majority of parents and young people in the province has prevented us from nurturing and benefiting from the kind of knowledge and understanding of comprehensive schools which is so clearly demonstrated in the public at large's commitment to non-selective education in the rest of the United Kingdom. Yet advocates of comprehensive education should be mindful of H.A.L. Fisher's warning words in the preface to his 1936 edition of *History of Europe*:

Progress is not a law of nature. The ground gained by one generation may be lost by the next. The thought of men may flow into the channels which lead to disaster and barbarism.



Cri de Coeur

I took up a senior school leadership post in April 1979. In May 1979 a Conservative government was elected. I have spent 16 years in leadership with Conservative government, philosophy and legislation. I have not got much longer to go – I now qualify for free prescriptions!

After 35 years in secondary modern and comprehensive schools – in a mixed ability/equal opportunity philosophy since 1967; as the head of a Comprehensive school (in name and nature) in a relatively socio-economically deprived area of Durham; as the leader of a school which has resisted the worst excesses of the last 16 years and is very successful, measured by whatever performance indicators are chosen – increasingly I despair as to where I can find friends, support or comfort in the educo-political world of 1996.

I therefore applaud the two articles in *FORUM* Volume 37 No. 3 1995: 'The Need for Comprehensive Schools', by Tony Mooney, and 'Diversity and Excellence: a recipe for confusion', by Clyde Chitty. We need more realism like that. It is real hope – old and new realism!

I recall that Hugo Young's *Guardian* commentary on the 1995 Labour Party Conference was given the sub-editor's headline 'Some schools more equal than others' and began "God is plainly on the side of the Labour Party".

It begs the key question: who is on the side of those many, many students and teachers who are the back-bone and future hope of Britain?

In the school where I work we have survived without, *inter alia*, an appraisal scheme, directed time, SATS and the rest.

We have ignored the bureaucratic nightmare of National Curriculum assessment. We only jump through anyone else's hoops which are of benefit to our students and community. We expect and we organise so that all of our students are enabled to achieve. We don't stream or band: we set occasionally. We have an integrated/inclusive policy for SEN and disabled students. Our November 1994 OFSTED Report opened with "This school provides a caring and supportive environment where the worth of every student is valued".

Is it really too left-wing – or avant-garde or extremist or unrealistic – to hope for a political party, about to come to power, to have as a commitment: this government will provide a caring and supportive educational environment where the worth of every student is valued? And it will seek to provide the legislative structure which will enable that to happen?

David Blunkett argues that success not structure is the key issue. That is naive or something. The current overt structure of

different sorts of schools is divisive and elitist. Even when all schools are in a CTC/GM-free zone like County Durham there is a pernicious covert structure which is possibly even more divisive and elitist.

Outwith the heart-felt and morale-sapping experiences of the school where I work, elsewhere in Durham County there are two neighbouring schools which clearly illustrate the malaise. Consider these facts:

	School A	School B
11-16 Roll		
1989	992	693
1995	1112	641
5 + A-C		
1989	33.5	28.1
1995	47.1	47.4
Adm Limit	228	197
September		
1995 Intake	230	114

School B will suffer budget difficulties under LMS in the next years, will struggle to maintain curriculum, organisation and provision for all, and will certainly feel hard done to. What more should they do? When will they see some sort of recognition and justice?

Colleagues across the country will recognise and empathise with that scenario, and in County Durham the overt playing-field is level!

The school where I am privileged to work – serving the old pit villages and hamlets to the west of Durham City, with high unemployment, no industry, general despair and the usual quota of single-parent families, free meals at 25-30% and the rest – entered a greater proportion of the year group for 5 or more GCSEs and achieved a higher proportion of students graded in one subject than *any other* school in County Durham in 1995.

With 40% at 5+ A-C we were 15th from 43 Durham schools and within a whisker of being 10th. Our realistic target for 1966 is a top 10 position. Success *à la* David Blunkett? You must be joking!

Of the *only* four schools in county Durham above 50% at 5+ A-C *three* are within 3 miles of us in the Durham City area! We have had four good years: indeed we are over-subscribed in two years! But our September 1995 intake was 116 for a 158 AL. Nothing has changed except that we have improved, are improving and are perceived to be so doing. Our OFSTED report challenged us "to blossom". What has changed is that the public debate has deflected parents from us, many on appeal, contrary to the evidence, fact and perform-

ance indicators. Scuttlebutt, tittle-tattle, ersatz values rule OK!

Some schools are more equal than others.

It is soul-destroying enough now to see and feel the rejection and the drift, in a so-called level playing-field. What if we had CTC, GM, Foundation or whatever schools? Or even those that don't recognise Trade Unions?

I have lived and worked through tripartite, multi-lateral and the rest. In anyone's credo of diversity and excellence we have a recipe, not for confusion, but for disaster and division, for separation and selection, for futility and failure.

Last year I attended the *only* seminar, organised by the Labour Party, for party members working in schools which had achieved success against the odds. I was disappointed that it was a one-off. I was heartened that primary colleagues had a high focus. I was personally gutted that the only secondary spokespersons were from successful schools in uneven playing-field scenarios. I was comforted that I met so many other colleagues who felt and yearned like me!

There are two worlds, even in the structure of a totally comprehensive school environment. The foundation of those two worlds is enshrined in class, background, expectation, affluence perception. It will not go away! It will not be lessened or reduced by the crass proposals in *Diversity and Excellence*!

I have lived and worked through the most exciting and developmental period of our education structure. I have been truly privileged to be allowed to carry out the high ideals of the various progressive Acts of the education revolution. I have been personally pleased to have had the power and the clout to be able to resist the worst excesses of the last 16 years.

When will it end? When will we begin to legislate and co-operate for a truly successful and excellent service?

We are *all* under-achieving. We are still wasting the talents of our young generations. Some/many of us aren't being helped to overcome our disbelief and lack of faith by the various inappropriate legislature nuances.

Will this oratory fall on fallow, fertile, or stoney ground?

DAVID ARMSTRONG

For the last 16 years, David Armstrong has been teaching as Deputy Head and then Headteacher of Deerness Valley Comprehensive School, a small 11-16 Comprehensive School in the City of Durham area.

Community Comprehensive

Jane Collins

Jane Collins has been Principal of Welland Park Community College in Leicestershire since 1989. The college provides comprehensive 11-15 schooling and one of the county's largest youthwork and continuing education programmes.

The comprehensive community school has never been better placed to achieve its mission: the quality of education in schools is now widely recognised as critical to the future national interest. This is not just an argument about the need for economic competitiveness or social cohesion, it is about the pace of technological advance, the explosion of information and knowledge and the desirability of creating a learning society for the millennium. Yet the values, practice and language of comprehensive education have increasingly been called into question. Long standing critics of comprehensive schools have found friends in a new convergence within the political domain, centred on concepts of diversity and choice. It is clear that education policy will be given a high priority by both major parties as the general election approaches. While there appears to be a consensus regarding the need to raise standards, there is much less clarity regarding the means to these ends. In particular, there is a difference of perspective between those with a lay involvement in education and those with professional experience. Teachers generally have felt under close scrutiny, and often under fire, within this debate. A particular feature of these recent discussions has been the extent to which the public focus has gone beyond school organisation and moved on to look closely at what goes on within schools. Many aspects of comprehensive schools have been singled out for criticism, including curriculum design, ability grouping and teaching methods. This article sets out to argue, with the example of one school as a case study, that it is timely to reassess and reassert the values of comprehensive community education, as part of a constructive, practical and forward looking process.

Any proposals for the future should reflect an awareness of the opportunities which exist within the changing context in which we work. Some of these positive elements include the delegation of decision making to school level, a common entitlement curriculum, school involvement in the training of teachers and the publication of school information for parents. The task is to identify the complete set of conditions within which the greatest number of people, particularly young people, will be able to realise their educational potential. In our context, replicated many times throughout the shire counties outside the major urban centres, the catch phrases of selection, competition, league tables and open enrolment are less likely to drive school improvement. Instead the more relevant values are those of community, local accountability, responsibility, participation and equality of opportunity. Initiatives such as the Schools Curriculum Award, recently revived, have recognised large numbers of primary and secondary schools nationally working from this inspiration. In these schools comprehensive community values have been translated into roots of action for school development. The examples which

follow describe the practice in one school, but are representative of many others.

Aspirations

Firstly, the comprehensive community school is nothing if it is not aspirational. Within the College we draw attention to individual excellence and collective achievement through regular newsletters to parents, use of local media and presentation in school assemblies. We have been successful in creating a 'can do' culture which rewards effort through an effective system of rewards, both public and private. On entry to the College we encourage parents and students to take a positive view of the opportunities available to them. We actively encourage our students to develop their skills and talents, and have an exceptional number involved in school music and sport. Student targets form part of the annual report cycle, which provides information to parents under the headings achievement, attitude and advice. We have given each student the opportunity for one-to-one discussion of their targets with their tutor and our initial experience suggests that students value these opportunities highly. We ask students to attend consultation evenings with their parents: we continue to be impressed by the participation rate and the tangible motivation which these meetings produce. While we are extremely cautious about the reliability and form of National Curriculum assessment,

We expect our own results to improve year on year. We are determined to give the greatest priority to curriculum continuity between primary and secondary phases, particularly in the core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science. Teachers, headteachers and governors of the nine schools which provide education for young people from age 5-19 in the town, meet regularly and have recently agreed to distribute information to parents which describes the ways schools work closely together. We have a policy for all schools regarding the transfer of information and special needs screening which will contribute to our shared capability to set challenging benchmarks for our students.

We provide our school age students with visible evidence of the business of lifelong learning, with under-5's provision and adult classes side by side along classroom corridors. Adult students including groups who are recovering from mental illness and others with physical disabilities study during the daytime and during the evening make use of all available space. While the broad emphasis of our adult programme is leisure and recreation based, we have an ambitious and expanding programme of award bearing courses funded by the FEFC. The College is also in the early stages of establishing a partnership with the local upper school and a nearby College of Further Education to provide better routes of progression, advice and guidance for adult students.

Inclusive

Secondly, a comprehensive community school is inclusive. We recognise that all students are capable of making a contribution and every member of the College should receive credit for their efforts. We seek to create a community within the school where those with ability and talent are rewarded and challenged and those with difficulties are supported. The context for this is an organisational framework which emphasises all-ability teaching groups and integration of students with special needs through classroom support.

Within the curriculum, we start with the principle of entitlement: all students have access to a common experience. We are increasingly aware, however, of the practical means which are needed to guarantee this. We have had early success in writing individual education plans for students who are listed on our register of special needs. We are developing policy for more able students and we are expecting all staff to participate in a 'challenge initiative' designed to extend the ways in which we provide curriculum extension activities. All staff attend regular Access to the Curriculum/Teaching and Learning meetings which discuss the needs of individual named students or whole teaching groups. The homework room has become a popular lunchtime base. It provides in-school support including help for those who may not receive it at home and provides a reminder to those who may be 'bored' that learning can be an enjoyable voluntary activity!

Local Accountability

Thirdly, a comprehensive community school succeeds through a highly developed framework of local accountability and local relationships. While the governing body has a central role in determining long term direction and matters of policy, the day-to-day relationship with parents is critical. We have a year long programme of induction for new parents which begins with Open Day in the autumn and continues through to the Summer Term day visit of our new Year 6 and their parents. A home-school agreement is explained and circulated to parents, setting out what the school will do and how parents can help. For many parents there are striking differences between their own experiences of school, sometimes negative, and those of their child. Many parents comment positively about the increased openness, relevance and opportunities available to their children.

For many years we have annually sought parent views through a questionnaire, regarding all major elements of school policy. We have made changes each year in areas which this exercise has highlighted, including school dress, educational visits, school reports, homework and curriculum structure. This year we have asked parents to involve themselves further in raising awareness about the importance of homework. We have been impressed with the level of

their response. We have monitored our homework policy carefully and actively sought out those few parents who have adopted anything less than fully positive support – we expect more.

Humane

Fourthly, a comprehensive community school is a humane school which aims to provide explicitly for the personal, social and moral development of its students as well as for their intellectual and academic growth. We aim to give our students a sense of self-worth and self-esteem, a sense of responsibility for themselves as well as social responsibility. These aims continue to be central to our purposes. The Dearing 'settlement' has given us the opportunity to look again at areas of the curriculum beyond the National Curriculum. We would want our tutorial programme to continue to be at the centre, rather than at the margins of our teaching.

We present a Record of Achievement to Year 9 students which includes a personal statement written by the student and a curriculum statement written by teaching staff, containing advice for future improvement. Each statement is produced on word processor. The quality of the final document communicates the high status which we have given to Records of Achievement as a teacher led and student led initiative, before the Department of Employment stamped its ownership on the process.

If the principles of comprehensive community schooling remain relevant, however, the context has changed. While many of the changes of the past decade have been 'anti-educational' others have the potential to provide powerful tools for school development. Last June the College was inspected by OFSTED. It has been widely suggested that the OFSTED model of school inspection has many failings and there is little evidence to support it continuing in its present form. As school inspection evolves, it will hopefully place increasing emphasis on school self-evaluation and continuous development. However, the OFSTED framework has generated extensive debate both within and between schools about teaching and learning, and this must be welcomed. In our own case, we were delighted to receive in our inspection report commendation for the quality of student learning, something which we have explicitly aimed to develop over several years. The report also strongly endorsed our management of change through the School Development Plan. The promise for schools in the future must come from harnessing the potential available within the school, in the student body and their parents, in the teachers and in the governors. It is these constituents who must impose their collective will on those at a distance who would design and impose an educational blueprint for the nation.



Rachel, age 5

Teachers' Professional Development

Annabelle Dixon

Annabelle Dixon is a class teacher and deputy head who has taught for over thirty years in a variety of infant and primary schools both abroad and in England. Also a psychologist, she is currently assisting the BBC in the making of a series of teacher training programmes on child development.

We take the phrase 'professional development' as having a more or less unanimously agreed meaning, so that it rarely gives us pause for thought; I would like to suggest that we do pause for thought and observe the ways in which the word 'professional' has gradually been losing its ownership to those other than teachers over the last seven or eight years. The evidence is revealed through the kinds of training courses offered to teachers as part of their 'professional development' gives insight into the subtle changes which indicate the way in which younger teachers in particular will be encouraged to view their 'professionalism'. A view that will offer few, if any, alternatives.

The differing ways in which teachers think of professionalism nowadays can be illustrated by the following two recent anecdotes from the classroom. Each teacher saw the situation as challenging their interpretation of themselves as a 'professional'. They do not describe major events but demonstrate two dilemmas that might and do face the ordinary class teacher today.[1] Their resolution offers significant insight into the way in which teachers' self image of themselves as a 'professional' can have a powerful effect in decision making.

In the first story an infant teacher, who is overseeing the SATs maths paper for her class, is explaining to a moderator why she is not comforting a little boy visibly distressed by what he is being asked to do. She says she is upset but despite his tears, he has not yet reached the point of being unable to do the work. The moderator says she feels that it is becoming a very stressful experience for the child and recommends that he stops working. The teacher is genuinely shocked and is most reluctant to take her advice, citing the instructions for the test that state that children *should* continue until they fail.

In the second story which occurs just a few years later, a class teacher is also administering the KS1 maths SATs; her children have worked hard but she knows that though confident, they are not high flyers, i.e. they are 'Level 2' = average; but some of the children, rather to her surprise, are able to do the test well enough to 'pass' at Level 3. Examination of the test items reveals a very uneven spread in terms of understanding and experience required and that, by answering certain questions correctly, children may well achieve an unrealistic level. This appears to be what has happened; the children concerned have not, and could not have, especially in two years of KS1, covered anything like the whole curriculum that would be suggested by their test marks. Should she give them the marks she feels really reflect their ability and understanding though, or should she give them the higher mark that they have undeniably

achieved in their test? There is considerable pressure to do the latter – parents and governors would be pleased for instance, and it could be seen as reflecting well on her teaching. But what of their teachers in the following years? It could be that, misled by their test marks these children are set work that is really too hard for them. Depending on the ever changing tests, it could well be that they only achieve a level 4 or even 3 again when they take their next set of SATs at 10 or 11. What can teachers say then in trying to explain to their parents that these children have only 'gone up' a single level, or worse, stayed at the same one, after four years' work? Having administered every SAT test for KS1 that ever there was, the teacher knows there is very little comparability between the yearly tests and their reliability and validity are nothing like established: she decides to give the children the lower mark.

Which teacher was being more 'professional'? Why did they seem to take different attitudes? Can the word be said to have a meaning over and above the shifting changes and demands of teaching over the years? Teachers haven't got the equivalent of the Hippocratic oath. Nowadays young teachers are not universally introduced to the ethical demands of teaching except in a piecemeal and unplanned manner.

Having said that, we probably wouldn't find it difficult to accept certain behaviour as defining a professional framework; for example, not abusing our position of authority in any way that would cause harm to those in our care. Nowadays we accept as a matter of course that this includes physical as well as sexual harm; but it is worth recalling that hitting children was perfectly acceptable amongst a great many teachers until fairly recently and was even legally acceptable. Swearing in front of children is probably considered unprofessional, but only a certain kind of swearing. Many teachers would escape condemnation or even comment nowadays when calling down the Deity to witness some wondrous piece of idiocy, but less than a hundred years ago such blasphemy might well have cost them their posts.

So does 'professional' in the sense of being a professional teacher, mean undertaking certain special obligations instead? Are they written, i.e. contractual, unwritten, or a combination of both? There are certain obligations that are common to the world of work which include teachers but do not necessarily define their particular professionalism; for example the requirement to turn up on time to work each day none the worse for wear probably being among them. There are also common expectations of honesty and truthfulness besides those of punctuality and attendance.

Specifically, the unwritten code extends to things like not discussing other people's children in front of other parents but that could be said to be similar to a doctor's professional etiquette. Contractually, there are now a great many more legal obligations but it is open to debate as to whether these could be termed 'professional'. Is the sense of the word changing and if so, what or who is influencing this change and why? I would like to suggest that chance is only playing a minor role.

In the late 1960s and 1970s it began to be possible to detect a new sense, a new understanding of professionalism amongst teachers and one that was particular to them alone and unrelated to contractual duties. Released from having to prove themselves *vis-à-vis* the eleven plus, primary teachers in particular began to take stock of their educational obligations and started to turn their attention to the needs of those they were serving. The notion of the whole child and the ways in which various teaching methods might be effective in furthering the progress of children in all areas of their development began to take a hold. In wanting to make education less of the blunt instrument it had been in the past, teachers actively sought out courses and training that made schools not only more attractive to children but by deepening their understanding of the learning processes also made teaching more effective.

Initially it wasn't uncommon for teachers to pay for such courses themselves and they nearly all took place after school hours. It was considered a 'professional' thing to do so. Gradually pressure from the teaching unions and goodwill from LEAs meant that this didn't remain the case but there was no doubting the fact that teachers were beginning to see themselves differently. The mandatory 3-year training from 1960 onwards meant that teachers had the advantage of increased study and reflection. Hardly surprising though, with all the changes, that some of the pedagogy was translated rather sloppily when it came to practice. Later, some came to confuse the two. Even so the establishment of teachers' centres and new advisory services, coupled with the establishment of the Schools Council, meant that while extending their understanding and expertise, teachers deepened the sense of their own professionalism and, dangerously, as it turned out, their sense of intellectual independence. To quote Professor Bridge of the University of East Anglia in a recent lecture: "The teacher education community in 1971 was anxious about a wide range of new intellectual currents, open to radical ideas and quite unselfconscious and uninhibited in their pursuit. It also saw engagement with these ideas as an essential foundation for participation in teacher education." [2]

This being so, it was assumed, when I started teaching in those times of many moons ago, that as a trained professional, I would do the job to the best of my ability and see to it that the children learned what I considered, on the basis of my training, they needed to in the way of skills and understanding. One wrote individual notes on the children and an outline plan for the term and year and occasionally the children had a Maths and English test which were used for diagnostic, rather than streaming purposes. That apart, there was little interference. Indeed, when I started teaching an old hand told me there was only one obligation that I absolutely had to undertake as a teacher and that was marking the register. Even so, he added, there was progress, it didn't have to be marked in the traditional blue and red pen. Come the 1990s and what is the picture?

Not only have compulsory red and blue marks on each and every register returned but additional letters have somehow to be squeezed into the 2mm oval that denotes an absence, e.g. 'T' for Treatment, 'S' for Sickness, 'X' for Exceptional Circumstances, 'H' for Holiday, 'V' for Visit, 'L' for Late, 'U' for Unexplained etc. There was even a rumour that one should put 'GF' for Granny's Funeral ...

A small-scale change perhaps but immensely telling in its message and implications.

The recent history of education in England is only too familiar to most teachers, but it is usually seen in terms of increasing centralised control as in the instance above rather than a specific effect on the notion of 'professionalism'. However I think it is changing and it is possible to detect three strands that have influenced the changing meaning of the word. The first two strands have their place in history, both involving strongly held ideas about society and the place of the individual within society. To recap what is familiar to many, education for the masses (as seen in the nineteenth century), actually called 'The Lower Orders' in official documents, was a strictly utilitarian idea; the country needed a better informed and skilled workforce. Meeting this demand was given to teachers to carry out. They 'delivered' education. The mechanisms for controlling quality output were (a) strict guidelines on content, and (b) testable outcomes. Payment by result seemed a particularly brilliant idea to motivate the workforce but, to the mystification of government, (a mystification which lasted to this day), it didn't seem to have a universal appeal and by 1888 it was recommended that it should cease.

'Professionalism' for teachers meant adhering strictly to the multiplicity of instructions with which they were laden. Nonetheless, in the current situation which exists in primary schools whereby a certain number of hours have to be dedicated to each subject per week, it is interesting to note that such detailed and specific prescription of set hours was actually renounced by Parliament way back in 1907.

Others, in the nineteenth century and before, were taking a longer term view of education and questioned whether the inculcation of skills and rote learning should represent all that was meant by the word. Pioneers such as Froebel, Herbart, Rosmini, and later, Margaret McMillan and others less heralded but equally determined, offered a view and practice of education that altered the role of the teacher. 'Professionalism' in this case meant caring and providing for the wider needs of the developing individual child within the group. [4] The needs of the larger society were not ignored, indeed often formed the basis for such new developments but the vision was less mundane, less tied to the emerging needs of new industries. Teachers in such schools and under such influences saw themselves as responsible to the furtherance and sustainment of a more enlightened and just society which enhanced their sense of 'professionalism' This was also supported by the new science of psychology which deepened their knowledge of how children actually learned.

Little wonder that mutual bafflement, even distrust, was evident between teachers when these more liberal influences started to enter the state schools from the late 1930s onwards. Each considered the other's views on 'professionalism': askance. Briefly summed up, there were those who saw their responsibilities as 'enablers', others as 'controllers'. For a while the 'enablers' were able to persuade more reflective educators to share their wider views on education

and thus on society but a government that is determined on central control doesn't take kindly to such notions, especially one that has adopted an essentially pragmatic business/industrial model for all its endeavours.

This then is the third influence: the turning of teachers into (business) 'managers'. Not far from the 'controllers' and therefore having an equal appeal (for when honesty has its back to the wall, can anyone deny that one of the appeals of teaching is being able to control *something* in whatever guise?) Education is now, once again, a commodity to be 'managed' and there is 'quality control' of its 'products'. It is so close to the nineteenth century ideals that those enlightened MPs like Sir James Bryce (the Bryce Report, 1895) who were dubious about its aims at the time spoke of "...Education being destroyed by uniformity ... it (would not) be desirable to throw the whole of it under government control".

It has had effects both negative and beneficial; amongst the latter has been the fact that teachers have had to cooperate and talk together about things like joint policies, plans and the provision for children with special educational needs. In other words become more 'professional' in terms of seeing their school as taking part in a joint venture with themselves and each other as partners in it. On the other hand, as schools are now supposed to be in competition with each other, this side to professionalism should only extend to one's own institution. The factory model is persuasive though. Teachers today talk unselfconsciously about being 'middle management'; their ambition is to become part of a 'senior management-team'; they are responsible to a 'line manager' etc. While appearing to give them high professional status though, is it subtly taking it away? Who are they managing for? Seldom is it breathed 'the children'.

A glance, a snapshot overview, of some of today's professional training courses for teachers in terms of management is very instructive: teachers can learn not only to manage and organise their classrooms, they can also learn to manage time, stress, change and communication. (The very titles of which courses should give pause for thought.) Those higher up the ladder can learn how to manage school effectiveness, staff development and how to manage

and develop their 'positive influence styles' and there are even courses not just on *quality* management but *total* quality management. The really ambitious ones can even take a NVQ in Management. One course that held out promise of deeper thought and reflection was 'Creative thinking for primary school managers'; the small print though revealed it to be concerned with problem solving and decision making, i.e. the only too familiar duo 'crisis management and damage limitation'.

Except for some valiant one-off lectures and short courses offered by a few resolute institutions on the philosophy and psychology of learning, most other courses for teachers concern themselves with ways in which the twin- and short-term demands of inspection and the national curriculum can be met. If the needs of children are also met, it is not mentioned. Thus we arrive at what 'professional' is coming to mean in the context of today; not encouraged to increase or widen their knowledge or understanding by reading, teachers are kept too pre-occupied by the business and practice of daily management and teaching to ask long term and essential questions about education and children's learning.

How is the scene going to develop? Such courses as described above seem to represent the beginning of a new kind of on-the-job training, still seriously hankered after by a number in government. Will this engender some kind of pseudo-professionalism? To quote: "It isn't at all necessary to have so much formal training. They [the teachers] should mainly learn and raise their standards in practice". Chris Woodhead? No – Mao Tse-Tung at the start of the Cultural Revolution.

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Peddling Feel-good Fictions

David Hamilton

David Hamilton, Professor of Education at the University of Liverpool, reflects on P. Sammons, J. Hillman & P. Mortimore (1995) *Key Characteristics of Effective Schools: a review of school effectiveness research*, London: OFSTED. He first wrote for *FORUM* in 1968.

Effective schooling has become an international industry. Its activities embrace four processes: research, development, marketing and sales. Research entails the construction of new prototypes; development entails the commodification of these prototypes; marketing entails the promotion of these commodities; and sales entails the effort to ensure that market returns exceed financial investment. The school effectiveness industry, therefore, stands at the intersection of educational research and a much broader political agenda – social engineering.

There is another perspective on school effectiveness research. Its efforts cloak school practices in a progressive, social-Darwinist, eugenic rationale. It is progressive because it seeks more efficient and effective ways of steering social progress. It is social-Darwinist because it accepts survival of the fittest. And it is eugenic because it endorses the desirable and, consequently, depreciates the exceptional.

But something else lurks beneath this liberal veneer. School effectiveness research underwrites, I suggest, a pathological view of public education in the late twentieth

century. There is, it appears, a plague on all our schools. Teachers have been infected; school organisation has been contaminated; and classroom practices have become degenerative and dysfunctional.

In short, schools have become sick institutions. They are a threat to the health of the economic order. Their decline must be countered with potent remedies. Emergency and invasive treatment are called for. Schools need shock therapy administered by outside agencies. Terminal cases merit organ transplants (viz. new heads or governing bodies). And, above all, every school requires targeted INSET therapy. Senior management teams deserve booster steroids to strengthen their macho leadership, while their rank and file colleagues should receive regular appraisal-administered HRT (human resource technology) to attenuate their classroom excesses.

From this last perspective, then, school effectiveness research hankers for prototypes, in the form of magic bullets or smart missiles, that are the high-tech analogues of the lobotomies and hysterectomies of the nineteenth century. It is no accident that Professor David Reynolds (Newcastle upon Tyne), who co-authored a 'mission statement' on school effectiveness and school improvement in 1990, was moved five years later to caution against quackery: "we need to avoid peddling simplistic school effectiveness snake oil as a cure-all" (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 16 June 1995).

For these reasons, school effectiveness research is technically and morally problematic. Its research findings and associated prescriptions cannot be taken on trust. They are no more than sets of assumptions, claims and propositions. They are arguments to be scrutinised, not prescriptions to be swallowed.

Key Characteristics of Effective Schools illustrates these problems. It is a "review of school effectiveness research", commissioned in 1994 by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). The reviewers, based at the International School Effectiveness and Improvement Centre of the University of London Institute of Education, saw their task as two-fold. First, to summarise "current knowledge" about school effectiveness; and secondly, to respond to OFSTED's request for "an analysis of the key determinants of school effectiveness".

This task redefinition is noteworthy. The extension of OFSTED's remit – the attention to "current knowledge" as well as "key determinants" – suggests that the reviewers were reluctant to focus unilaterally on causality. There was, they imply, a "need for caution" in interpreting "findings concerning key determinants".

The redefinition also suggests that the sponsors and researchers did not share the same view of causality. OFSTED appears to espouse a straightforward, linear model of causality. In linear systems, a straightforward cause leads to a straightforward effect. In non-linear systems the outcome is so sensitive to initial conditions that a minuscule change in the situation at the beginning of the process results in a large difference at the end.

OFSTED assumes that, in cases of straightforward causality, outcomes can be linked directly to inputs. OFSTED believes, in effect, that it is possible to predict the final resting place of a clutch of billiard balls on the basis of the prior cue stroke.

The reviewers, however, shared a more elaborate view of causality. They recognise that schooling cannot be reduced to the dynamics of the billiard table. If several

balls are simultaneously impelled by separate cues, the play remains straightforward; but it is much more difficult to distinguish the key determinants. Yet, if it is assumed that schools and classrooms are complex, non-linear, adaptive systems, their behaviour ceases even to be statistically straightforward.

The reviewers carefully acknowledge such problems of prediction. Yet, having voiced a series of caveats, they proceed to dilute or disregard them. The notion of key determinants is abandoned, to be immediately replaced by "key factors".

Semantic sleight of hand continues. The key factors are packaged in an "accessible [i.e. tabular] format". The preamble to this table denotes them as "correlates of effectiveness" whereas the table itself is headed "eleven factors *for* effective schools" (emphasis added). Social engineering assumptions are smuggled back into the analysis. The factors, that is, provide a better understanding of possible "mechanisms" of effectiveness.

Once the factors have been identified, however, their aggregation presents further problems. The tacit OFSTED assumption seems to be that causal factors are independent, universal and additive. The OFSTED reviewers, in return, fully acknowledge that these conditions rarely apply in the multivariate world of education. Yet, as before, they appear disinclined to confront OFSTED's innocent assumptions. First, they aggregate results from different studies conducted at different times in different countries. And secondly, they aggregate factors into a summary table. The aspiration to simplify, in the interests of communication (or packaging and marketing), becomes self-defeating.

The reviewers run into difficulties because they conflate clarification (achieving "better understanding") with simplification (the extraction of "key determinants"). They are careful to identify recurrent problems in school effectiveness research. They report, for instance, that previous reviews had commented that "there is no consensus yet on just what constitutes an effective school". And they quote another author to the effect that "defining the effectiveness of a particular school always requires choice among competing values" and that "criteria of effectiveness will be the subject of political debate". Overall, the reviewers seem to accept that current school effectiveness debates are as liable to disagreement as any other area of human endeavour. But they make no effort to insert this caveat into their analysis. Clarification is about the honouring of complexity, not its obfuscation.

The conflation of simplification and clarification is also evident elsewhere in the reviewers' arguments. Effective schools, they suggest, are characterised by "shared vision and goals" (Key Factor Two) which, in turn, are contingent upon notions of "a sense of ownership", "strong input from staff", and "reciprocal relationships of support and respect" among pupils and staff.

Elsewhere, however, the review projects a different model of collegiality. Key Factor One is "professional leadership", a characteristic that, among other things, should "usually" be "firm and purposeful". Under this last criterion as a sub-heading, the reviewers go on to quote a US study which suggested that, "in the early years of ... an improvement drive", effectiveness is also enhanced by "vigorous selection and replacement of teachers". Thus, it seems, school effectiveness depends on two kinds of reciprocity: "strong" input *from* staff, and "purposeful" output *of* staff. Such reciprocity is clearly asymmetrical.

Its elaboration and retention serves a rhetorical purpose in the OFSTED review – as a feel-good fiction.

To conclude: *Key Characteristics of Effective Schools* relates to an ill-defined policy field where, the authors admit, reviews outnumber empirical studies. The search for better understanding, it seems, is repeatedly swamped by the desire for policy prescriptions. Such imbalance arises because, as the reviewers also acknowledge, school effectiveness research suffers from a “weak theoretical base”. The associated demands of social engineering and human resource management outstrip the capacity of the research community to deliver the necessary technical wisdom.

In these circumstances, research is pulled by the market place rather than steered by axioms and principles. It becomes product-oriented. It is expected to supply prototypes configured, in this case, as a package of “key characteristics”. Sponsored by powerful quasi-governmental agencies, this package is placed – and generously hyped – on the global cash-and-carry market for educational products. Bundled with a franchising deal and/or a

complementary package of technical support, it is then disseminated around the world (e.g., east of Berlin, south of Rome and north of Euston).

I reject both the suppositions and conclusions of such research. I regard it as an ethnocentric pseudo-science that serves merely to mystify anxious administrators and marginalise classroom practitioners. Its UK manifestations are shaped not so much by inclusive educational values that link democracy, sustainable growth, equal opportunities and social justice but, rather, by a divisive political discipline redolent of performance-based league tables and performance-related funding.

The enduring lessons of the school effectiveness literature are to be found in its caveats, not its cure-alls. The OFSTED review should have given greater attention to the value suppositions as well as to the empirical outcomes of such research; to its diversities as well as its central tendencies; and to its exceptions as well as to its “common features”. By such means, the more enduring aspiration of the reviewers – a “better understanding” of schooling – might result.

An Undesirable Document

Mary Jane Drummond

Linked to the Government’s detailed proposals for the voucher scheme for nursery education for four year olds, *Nursery Education Scheme: The Next Steps*, is a document which sets out the ‘desirable outcomes’ of pre-school education. Mary Jane Drummond, tutor at the University of Cambridge Institute of Education, and member of the Advisory Group of the Early Childhood Unit at the National Children’s Bureau, discusses the inadequacies of this approach to an early years curriculum.

It had to happen: as soon as the Task Group on Assessment and Testing proposed a straight-line model of learning, with ten distinct levels up which normal pupils would steadily progress (DES, 1988) early years educators knew that there was worse to come. As we all remember, lorry-loads of National Curriculum documents followed the TGAT Report, spelling out, in interminable detail, the statutory requirements of levels 1-10; still the early years community watched and waited, apprehension growing. And now it has happened. Before level 1, before working towards level 1, come *Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning*, set out in black and white and turquoise in the latest glossy pamphlet from SCAA and the DfEE. This publication marks a turning point for early years education. The precious territory of children’s lives and learning before compulsory school age has been invaded; the people who gave us the National Curriculum are staking out their claims on new ground, where their writ has never run before.

But this territory is already inhabited by a sizeable and serious community who are willing, ready and able to contest the claims of the outsiders. The publication of *Desirable Outcomes* in February of 1996 followed the customary ‘consultation’ period. In spite of the extremely tight deadline for responses to a draft version, all over the country early years teachers, headteachers, advisers, inspectors, lecturers and HMI grabbed their pens and filled in the response forms. Their opinions were strongly expressed and unequivocal. For example, the response from the Early Childhood Unit at the National Children’s Bureau, the leading agency in

early years educational research and development, included the following items:

The desirable outcomes are sufficiently clear to enable the setting up of appropriate educational activities.

1. Strongly agree ☐
2. Agree ☐
3. Not sure ☐
4. Disagree ☐
5. Strongly disagree ☒

The desirable outcomes *as a whole* represent a sufficiently broad educational experience.

1. Strongly agree ☐
2. Agree ☐
3. Not sure ☐
4. Disagree ☐
5. Strongly disagree ☒

The type of guidance included in this consultation pack is helpful or unhelpful.

1. Very helpful ☐
2. Helpful ☐
3. Not sure ☐
4. Unhelpful ☐
5. Not at all helpful ☒

Other responses I have seen from early years inspectors, advisers and headteachers were equally uncompromising. Since none of us have much faith left in the so-called consultation process, none of us were very surprised when the final version appeared with only a few minor amendments, additions and omissions. The next task then, for early years professionals, is a more important one: to

make our case in a more public setting, showing that we are clear and unshakeable in our conviction that the *Desirable Outcomes* are irredeemably undesirable.

The title is a clever one, I must admit. The authors must have realised they would never get away with 'Level O descriptions' or 'End of Key Stage Zero', and 'desirable' is a masterly alternative, disarming and wrong-footing the critic at a stroke. By grabbing such an appetising and seductive word for the title, the authors must have hoped to forestall dissent and denial. Who could afford to be seen advocating anything else *but* 'desirable outcomes'? Surely, says the reasonable voice of SCAA, we all want the very best for young children; and here, almost by definition, it is. And indeed, many of the outcomes are desirable, eminently and self-evidently so. However, they are also, as I will show, paltry, unrealistic, unprincipled, culturally biased and dangerously limiting.

The document has been prepared "for people who work with children of pre-compulsory school age across the full range of provision in the private, voluntary and maintained sectors", so that they can provide a curriculum which enables children to make maximum progress towards the outcomes. Now everyone in early years education knows, and regrets, that there are unacceptable variations in quality across the range of provision; but I cannot accept that anywhere in the land is there an early years provider so inadequate to the task that she or he needs to be told that it is a 'desirable outcome' for young children to "talk about where they live, their environment, their families, and past and present events in their own lives". (What else *would* they talk about? one wonders.) Furthermore, even if there were people who needed telling, people who not only seriously believed that young children should keep silent, but also managed to enforce their belief, it is a foregone conclusion that reading this document, of itself, would do nothing to set them straight.

The key to quality in early years provision is sustained, rigorous and disciplined training in early years practices and principles. A 13-page glossy pamphlet is no substitute for such training.

Not all the 'desirable outcomes' are as pathetically banal as the one quoted above (though there are other examples). Some are questionable on a different count, especially those grouped together under the heading 'Personal and Social Development':

Children are sensitive to the needs and feelings of others and show respect for people of other cultures and beliefs. They take turns and share fairly. They express their feelings and behave in appropriate ways, developing an understanding of what is right, what is wrong and why. They treat living things, property and their environment with care and concern.

This is wishful thinking, of course, not a serious attempt to map out an appropriate curriculum for children under five. The fine words of this paragraph constitute, I accept, an aspiration worth aspiring to, but creating a learning environment that is fit for young children is one thing, and fantasising about a new breed of impeccable, saintly under-fives who will inhabit it is quite another.

The 1989 Children Act made history in early years care and education by requiring providers to positively support each child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background; this element of good practice is emphasised throughout the guidance (Volume 2) issued with the Act. But, as many respondents pointed out the first draft of *Desirable Outcomes* made no reference at all

to equal opportunities issues, nor to the many bilingual children living and learning in Britain today. The revised version makes a token gesture in this direction ("Children must be helped to acquire competence in English as soon as possible, making use, where appropriate, of their developing understanding and skills in other languages.") but does not go far enough in emphasising the distinctive contribution that bilingual children can make to monolingual learners. Equal opportunities issues still do not appear. Nor is there any reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in the UK in 1991, a document which many early years educators have found both supportive and challenging in establishing the principles on which their provision is based (Newell, 1991). But then, the SCAA document is almost entirely free from principles of any kind. The detailed prescriptions of what children should know and do ("write their names with appropriate use of upper and lower case letters") are not rooted in any consideration of *why* they should do these things, or how 'appropriate' behaviour (another desirable outcome) is to be debated or defined. The justification for this particular programme of study is simply not given.

Maybe this absence is one of the only things that can be welcomed in the document: at least there is no attempt made, at the level of principle, to do educators' thinking for them. There is still plenty of room for educators to ask each other, and the communities in which they work, questions of value and principle, 'why?' questions that reach to the heart of the matter, the essential purposes of educating the youngest children in our society. Only at the level of detail has the SCAA document got there before us, busily setting down its vacuous prescriptions. "Children explore sound and colour, texture, shape, form and space in two and three dimensions". And then? What else is there left to do?

The answer is progression, of course. The last six pages of the document are laid out to show "Key features of progression from the end of pre-compulsory education to the end of Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum". I have been having difficulty with the concept of progression for some time, worrying not about the word itself but about how it might get translated into classroom life (how does a child 'progress' from painting a bowl of anemones, for example?) Here, all my nagging anxieties are confirmed. Take three examples:

A: Pupils begin to show some confidence in talking and listening, particularly where the topics interest them.

B: Pupils talk about matters of immediate interest. They listen to others and usually respond appropriately.

C: In small and large groups, children listen attentively and talk about their experiences. They use a growing vocabulary with increasing fluency.

Can you see the progression in these empty descriptions? Can you tell which is level 2? level 1? or a desirable outcome?[1] Do you care very much? Or, look at it another way. Observing in a nursery class during the conker season, I heard James, aged 4 years 5 months' explaining the rules of the game to his attentive teacher. "And," he concluded, "the one that doesn't break is the winner, and the one that does is not." There's glory for you, in terms of the power of this child to communicate, vividly and effectively, his pressing concerns. But what level is it? And what will James progress to?

The concept of progression, as exemplified here, can

do little for attentive and respectful educators, who prefer, by listening and observing, to try and get close to children's thinking, children's growing understanding. Educators who listen carefully will be able to follow what Annabelle Dixon so forcibly calls "the grain of children's thinking". They will then be well placed for the practice of what Bruner, following Vygotsky, has called "scaffolding", where the educator supports a child's learning in the "zone of proximal development". As children, master-builders, construct their learning, the teachers are there to support and sustain, admiring the new constructions as they take shape in their individual uniqueness.

For teachers like these there is no need to search for signs of progression along a predetermined route; indeed, the grain of children's thinking may lie another way. A nursery teacher asked one of her four year olds to sort out a family of bears and their belongings who had "got muddled up". The child obligingly dressed the bears in their respective outfits (obedience is a highly desirable outcome in many early years classrooms) and placed them in a row: Mother Bear, Father Bear and Baby Bear wedged tightly in between them. The teacher was disappointed. She was teaching ordering from left to right, and so that was what she wanted the child to learn. She enquired, gently "Why have you put the baby bear in the middle?" The girl replied: "Because he's the littlest". Who knows more about size and sequence, in terms that matter? And what can the concept of 'progression' add to such an observation?

The *Desirable Outcomes* document is, for the time being, the most recent, though certainly not the last, in a long line of attempts to get a curriculum down on paper, as one strategy in the never-ending pursuit of high quality in early years education. But it is an attempt that is deeply flawed, however honourable its intentions may have been. The central flaw, running like a geological fault-line across a continent, is a confusion between means and ends, between process and product, between the destination and the journey. The issue is not whether society as we know it will stand or fall by the number of five year olds who can "recognise the letters of the alphabet by shape and sound". The issue is, what will educators do to and for three and four year olds in order to achieve this aim, behavioural objective, goal or desirable outcome? (The terms change, the argument stays the same). It is only too easy to imagine

a range of different approaches, some of which will be enriching, educative, respectful of children's powers, and some of which will be eminently undesirable in themselves, never mind the outcomes.

Shortly before his death, Lawrence Stenhouse gave a public lecture in Sheffield. As he presented an abbreviated version of his celebrated critique of the objectives model (Stenhouse, 1975), it was clear that not all his audience was following him. The moment he stopped speaking, an angry voice from the floor began to remonstrate with him. Foaming with indignation, the heckler delivered his parting shot, "How can you get anywhere, if you don't know where you're going?" Stenhouse wearily rose to his feet and began once more to elaborate on his position. The enterprise of education, as he saw it, was a journey, but of a particular kind. It was not a motorway marathon, in which pupils and teachers travelled at high speeds between predetermined points. It was more a matter of exploration, enquiry and discovery. In a memorable metaphor, Stenhouse tried to give his opponent an insight into this possibility: "With a good tourist map, you can go all over Norfolk".

I was reminded of this moving occasion more than once as I read and re-read *Desirable Outcomes*: the wrong map, for a pointless journey. Educators who trust to this map will lose some children and be abandoned by others. They may survive the inspection programme and be validated for the receipt of vouchers, but at a terrible cost to children's learning. There's a lot to see and do in Norfolk (don't miss the seals at Blakeney Point), but there is even more to see, to do and to learn in an early years curriculum that is worthy of young children. We need the best maps we can find – and this one won't do.

Note

[1] Statement A is level 2, statement B is level 1 and statement C is a desirable outcome.

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In Defence of Drama

Jan Bridger

Jan Bridger, Head of Expressive Arts at Penair School in Truro, defends Drama within the curriculum and in particular considers how it can help to raise self-esteem and motivation for difficult students.

It is my firm belief that the Arts, all the Arts, have an inestimable role to play as an important part of the curriculum and not as appendages to a regressive curriculum. In order to meet the increasing perplexities and demands of life, during, after and beyond school, young people need a broad and balanced general education. If we do not give credence to the Arts we will not only face an ever increasing unemployment situation, but we will also face a loss of our cultural heritage from society as a whole.

The success of a subject area within a school can be measured against a variety of criteria: a clear curriculum development plan; a well motivated and highly qualified staff; a well defined policy document; a syllabus which reflects the requirements at national, school and pupils' level. I could continue, but would add at this point that it seems one vital success indicator throughout the history of education is related to results at public examination level. Government legislation, in 1991, requiring the compulsory

publication of public examination league tables, provides recent evidence.

The Tearaways

Recently, I embarked upon a study exploring the subject of Drama within the curriculum at secondary school level. The study considered the work of Drama as a tool to help raise self-esteem and promote motivation and good behaviour in a group of pupils with behavioural difficulties.

School drama has been the salvation of many a would-be tearaway. Now its future is threatened. (Sweetman, 1993)

My research followed some of those 'would-be tearaways', my intentions being to rationalise the work and therefore justify the teaching of Drama within the curriculum.

My investigations were prompted by the omission of Drama from the list of prescribed core and foundation subjects when the National Curriculum Consultation Document was published in 1987. As the Educational Reform Bill made its way through Parliament it became apparent that while Arts and Music retained subject status, Drama was merely included in the remit of the English working group.

Status

I am fortunate at my secondary school in that I have fairly well equipped facilities, a small team of like minded colleagues and a supportive headteacher. Drama enjoys a fairly high status within the curriculum at my school. Status is important because it affects resources and the atmosphere in which work is done. It is also important because it reflects public values and priorities. It may be expedient in the short term to demonstrate the relevance of the Arts, and in particular Drama and Theatre Arts, to existing priorities. In the long term the strategy must provide for changing what these priorities are.

Indicators of status for any curricular areas are (i) the time allocated to it and when and (ii) whether and for how long it is compulsory or optional and for whom. My reasons for regarding the status of Drama at my school as fairly high are that all pupils receive one fifty minute lesson of Drama each week at KS3 (equal to the allocation for Art, Music and RE and one half the allocation for Languages, Humanities, Design Technology and Physical Education). Drama stands as a discrete subject at KS4 within the 'options' or 'curriculum choices' and, as a GCSE subject, receives equal time allocation to other optional GCSE subjects; three fifty minute sessions per week.

Whilst, at the moment, it seems secure, I do not suggest that this seemingly high status for Drama is a permanent feature on the curriculum at my school. The status has been built and held by a dedicated staff supported by a sympathetic Headteacher and Governing body. A high reputation with excellent examination results at GCSE and a high profile through an extensive extra-curricular programme to include school plays, public performances and extra classes and clubs has been maintained and this justifies its place on the curriculum. But the time bomb could explode and no teacher of Drama can ever feel complacent in today's educational climate.

The status of Drama, as of other curricular work, is always related to prevailing educational priorities. The 1960s were boom years for Drama in schools. Training courses expanded and specialist departments began to open in the re-organised Comprehensive Schools. This expansion of Drama was not an isolated phenomenon but took place

within general innovation when 'progressive' and 'liberal' education became increasingly popular.

Drama teachers adopted popular 1960s principles that school should provide a broad-based general education that was not narrowed by pre-occupation with the perceived needs of the labour market beyond the school. However, the educational climate changed in the late 1960s and continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when political emphasis was on cutting the cost of education and on accountability. Drama suffered in this new climate, just as it had prospered in the previous climate. Finally Drama was excluded from the list of prescribed core and foundation subjects in the National Curriculum and then reduced to a single paragraph in the 1993 revised National Curriculum for English document.

Drama teachers have fought for independence for many years. In the late 1980s many secondary headteachers hurried into reorganising their curriculum structures to bring the Arts subjects together into some form of 'Art Cluster'. My school joined this structural reorganisation and eventually created one 'Expressive Arts Faculty', encompassing Art, Music, Drama and Dance. This gave the Arts a louder and stronger voice within the curriculum and gave Drama a potentially safer position.

Influential practitioners, such as Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote promoted the use of Drama as a method of exploring issues across the curriculum. Practitioners throughout the country continue to use this valuable method of teaching. However, critics, such as David Hornbrook argue that this emphasis has distracted from the importance of Drama as an Arts discipline in its own right. My view is that Bolton and Heathcote in the late 1970s and early 1980s did much to promote the value of Drama as a teaching method but in doing so made it so cross-curricular as to lose its discrete identity. The subject encompasses two areas, 'Drama' and 'Theatre Arts', both important and together a valuable subject within the curriculum.

There is no doubt that the status of Drama has suffered since the 1960s and whilst I agree with David Hornbrook that practitioners may well have lost the discrete identity of the subject, I believe that the political and economic factors mentioned here are the cause of its ultimate loss of status and that educational accountability is not exclusively an educational issue but is economic and political.

Light at the End of the Tunnel?

All Drama teachers sighed with relief when the threat of losing Drama from our curriculum was lessened slightly with the publication of the Dearing Report in January 1994. In the key points section came the revelation:

For 14-16 year olds, flexibility within the curriculum to be increased to allow schools to offer a wider range of academic and vocational options. (Dearing, 1994)

At my school this report came just in time to save another cohort of pupils from the restrictions of previous Government legislation at KS4. The number of pupils opting to take Drama at GCSE level doubled as the choices opened up for them. The picture was very much the same in the other three secondary school included in my study.

'Image' and Pupils

The study of Theatre as part of our cultural heritage and the multi-purpose methodology in the teaching of Drama are equally important and, I believe, vital in a broad and balanced curriculum. Excellent GCSE results are not a

certainty and therefore not a secure base upon which to build an argument for the inclusion of a subject within a curriculum. In today's climate a school needs to look 'healthy' in the annually published League Tables and to have a high profile through regular 'shop windows' of its excellence (school plays, art exhibitions and concerts are all very good vehicles for this). Whilst at my school all the Arts add considerably to the very good overall image of the school, I believe that the value of Drama needs to be measured by its special part played in relation to pupils with behavioural problems, pupils who are often disadvantaged by the core curriculum. Where the subject of Drama is handled sensitively it is not only an excellent learning method but also a vehicle for raising status and self-esteem and therefore benefiting pupils with behaviour problems.

My study (qualitative research employing the methodology of case study to include observation, interviewing and the collection of recorded information) involved eleven pupils, eight of whom were identified as the 'tearaway' types; others were included to establish some sort of control within the study; all were aged 14. A questionnaire was used to gather information from a further 106 pupils in local secondary schools.

Enjoyment in Learning

One obvious finding was that all pupils actually enjoyed their Drama lessons. There were no behavioural problems and all pupils were successful at the subject. All pupils were confident when interviewed and seven of the pupils expressed a general loathing of school, or even hatred of it, with the exception of the Drama lessons.

Questionnaires and interviews revealed common views of Drama lessons by the pupils; 'group work', 'relaxed atmosphere', 'trust', 'freedom', 'teamwork', 'don't have to sit at a desk', 'a good laugh', 'loads of different stuff', 'teacher understands us', 'no-one is put down'. One girl, with a particular anti-establishment attitude within the school, commented, "I can't say I know a lot about Drama but I know a lot more about me, and that's important".

I was left with the question of what was it that caused this improved behaviour in these 'tearaways' during their Drama lessons? The evidence from my study revealed that those pupils generally regarded as 'trouble' and of apparent low self-esteem were confident and felt successful in their Drama lessons. It did not, however, show this raised self-esteem gleaned from the Drama to be a transferable skill because patterns of bad behaviour were still displayed throughout the school. I suggest that it might well be down to the perhaps unique teaching techniques which help to develop personal skills and to explore social encounters. By examining human interactions within the subject of Drama pupils are helped to face emotional and social changes. My findings also suggest that this uniqueness of the teaching and learning techniques employed in Drama is also valued by the pupils.

Motivation

My investigations indicate that lack of motivation in learners is a central problem in schools today and that many pupils have little commitment to their own learning. Perhaps this arises because schools tend to establish and maintain dependent relationships where pupils perceive schooling

as something that happens to them, rather than as a process which they are engaged in creating. Government makes decisions about what is to be taught and then teachers implement these decisions, often refraining from communicating their intentions to pupils and attempt to engage pupils in activities which are designed to lead through to learning. The only way the pupils can become involved with the teacher's agenda is, if by accident, the teacher's intentions match the pupil's interest. An unlikely occurrence and therefore it is no surprise that pupils fail to be motivated.

I feel that learners learn best when they have learning goals which they own as significant for them. I am very aware of breaking down the traditional dependency relationship within my Drama courses, which has, I feel, been a significant feature in the motivation of pupils, especially those with behaviour difficulties. Clearly, learners still depend on their teacher for help in the learning process; but the nature of the dependence changes from that of passive dependence, where the teacher is seen to be *in* authority, to that of active dynamic dependence, where the teacher is seen to be *an* authority.

I return to the ideological educational debate regarding the obsession with standards for passing academic examinations and for selection: standards for what? My opinion is that we should be fighting for an improvement in the lives we lead and that Drama, as with all the Arts, has a good deal to offer here. But in a climate where academic achievement is increasingly emphasised and where there is a return to conventional forms of education, exponents of Drama in education cannot be complacent.

Space to Succeed

I remain convinced that in this age of rapidly changing school curriculum Drama is an indispensable subject area, which has much to offer all pupils including the disaffected. It is of paramount importance that there is an area within the curriculum where children can succeed. Perhaps secondary schools need to look closely at the organisation of options.

Drama occupies a tenuous place in the British education system and I suggest that the time has come for Drama to reclaim its rightful place as part of the National Curriculum and to enter unequivocally into the generic community of the Arts. The distinctive subject of Drama should be offered in any curriculum claiming balance and coherence.

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worse, to a genuinely 'chaotic' situation on the ground. What could be the outcome?

In the hope that readers will feel impelled to buy this book I now deliberately withhold the author's conclusion, set out in Part III. Reviewers of cliff-hangers should not reveal the denouement. Perhaps I have said enough to indicate that this book is a good read (to use a popular term, however ungrammatical). On the way through entertainment is provided, for instance, by a series of almost unbelievably stunning quotations – Baker on the DES as a left-wing consortium or conspiracy, Thatcher's educational views, Nigel Lawson on Cabinet procedure, Thatcher again on the original TGAT report, and yet again telling us 'What History is'. There is also an ingenious content analysis of Baker's literary effusions listing his 'Likes and Dislikes'.

More seriously Lawton does identify the leading characteristics of the contemporary Tory Mind in education, defining a set of six key words which encapsulate the central features of Conservative thinking. What has most struck Lawton's own mind on dissecting the Tory one is the "almost paranoid belief in conspiracies among the 'educational establishment'" which appears time and again in speeches and autobiographies. This, he believes, has distorted the Tory perception of education in such a way as to have serious consequences for the future.

This is an important contribution to analysis of our current discontents. It deserves a wide readership and will surely help to increase awareness of the need for a radical change in the educational leadership in Britain.

BRIAN SIMON

**Exciting Optimism
Towards the Learning Society**
STEWART RANSOM, 1994
London: Cassell. £12.99
paperback, 146 pp.,
ISBN 0 304 32769 7

There are not many books on education that could be said to have major significance for the future of society: this is one of the few. It combines careful analysis of the present system with a vision of a realistic set of alternatives. I hope it is brought to the attention of those in a position to make important decisions about education in the next few years – we cannot afford to wait long.

But what is meant by 'the Learning Society'? Ransom provides us with a definition in his preface:

In periods of social transition, education becomes central to our future well-being. Only if learning is placed at the

centre of our experience can individuals continue to develop their capacities, institutions be enabled to respond openly and imaginatively to periods of change, and the difference between communities become a source of reflective understanding. The challenge for policy-makers is to promote the conditions for such a 'learning society': this should enable parents to become as committed to their own continuing development as they are to that of their children; men and women should be able to assert their right to learn as well as to support the family; learning cooperatives should be formed at work and in community centres; and preoccupation with the issues of purpose and organisation should then result in extensive public dialogue about reform.

The rest of the book is concerned with detail – of analysis and prescription for reform. Lest anyone thinks they are in for a utopian recipe, Ransom assures us that his work has been most influenced by practitioners in some of the most disadvantaged areas. Their practical experience has stimulated "a revised vision of comprehensive education, of equality of opportunity..." The author modestly claims only that this book is the first part of a theorising project. It takes us a long way in the direction of a better future.

The first chapter, 'Understanding the Crisis in Education', critically examines recent changes in the system. 'Reforms' which were claimed as means of improving standards and giving parents greater choice have contained so much confusion and contradiction that the result is crisis. In the course of his description of the crisis, Ransom examines the word 'education' and the variety of purposes that have been attached to it. He sees the purpose of education as complex and 'multi-layered': each layer should be seen as complementing the others, not in opposition to them. Four purposes are briefly but sensitively examined: meeting the needs of individuals; the transmission of knowledge, culture and morality; investment in human capital and vocational preparation; education for the polity. Although the purposes or functions of education should be complementary, they may not always sit easily together, and at different times one function may be emphasised at the expense of others. This principle is illustrated by dividing the history of education since World War II into three periods which serve as the titles of Chapters 2, 3 and 4: the age of professionalism 1945-75, corporatism 1970-81, and consumerism since 1979.

Chapter 2, 'The Age of Professionalism', is not an exercise in nostalgia. It begins with the 1944 Education Act, the post-war settlement, the radical swing in public opinion, weakening the hold of class and seeking a fairer, more open society. There was an all-party, consensus

approach to the settlement. But this Welfare State was incomplete – and reversible. The implementation of the 1944 Act was a splendid step forward, but it was by no means unflawed: it survived the 1960s, but during the 1970s it was increasingly clear that something else was needed.

The next chapter includes a perceptive discussion of some of the social and economic changes influencing education, before we move on, in Chapter 4, to 'The Period of Corporatism' (1970-81) when the British state moved from supporting to directing economy and society. Production and efficiency became the new keywords (more important than equality and social justice). In education the economic purpose is emphasised, and vocationalism begins to emerge as a serious alternative to academic education, with an integrated code rather than the traditional collection code. The Department of Education and Science was confused and lacked real policies, but they nevertheless tried to exert more central control: accountability and rationalisation became the order of the day.

Chapter 5 analyses the third period: 'Education in the Market Place' which has been increasingly dominant since 1979 (we all know what happened then!). A Tory vision of consumerism replaced the egalitarian social engineering of comprehensive schools. 'There is no such thing as society' was the individualist slogan: self-interest was legitimised. Ransom then embarks upon a detailed critique of the market as an alternative to educational planning. It is, in my view, the most devastating demolition of the neo-liberal position on education yet written. I will not try to summarise the argument here: it needs to be savoured in full, paragraph by paragraph.

Ransom also points out that an important result of Tory policies has been "marginalising the LEA" and the chaos of privatised school inspections. He points out how far we have moved from the 1988 Act to 1993 (the 'choice and diversity Act'). Ransom aptly blames "an atrophied psychology of possessive individualism" a degraded and distorted view of human nature – for this commodification of education.

So, what are we offered as an alternative? Chapter 6 sets out a programme for 'Towards Education for Democracy: The Learning Society'. For many this will be the most important part of the book. A return to the pre-1979 system would be neither feasible nor desirable. A New Order will not be easy to achieve, but Ransom is more optimistic than, for example, Alistair MacIntyre whose analysis he refers to. Ransom suggests that the challenge for the time is 'to create a new moral and political order' which has the capacity to enable an educated public to participate actively as citizens. Agreeing with Nagel,

Throughout the book principles of geography as a discipline, of education itself, and of social and environmental themes in education are illustrated. The successful synthesis of all three of these is felt to be vital for effective geography education in the future.

Marsden places great store on an appreciation of the 'heritage' of geography education, echoing Rawling in his desire to get back to a time of greater curriculum thinking, rather than continuing with our over reliance on politically driven changes. With this in mind one of the stated aims of the book is to 'investigate whether there is a current resource of fundamental thinking in geography and education that we can make use of in a revitalised critique' (p. viii) – Marsden succeeds in indicating some avenues to follow in the pursuit of such a critique.

Geography 11-16 is divided into four sections which broadly consider educational aims and practice (with later reference to changes in the discipline of geography); geography and education; geography and social education; and the effects of the National Curriculum on geography education. Although the introductory section is, for me, not entirely successful, the overall style of writing throughout the book is effective. The reader is given the benefit of Marsden's wealth of knowledge and understanding on a variety of themes, compact and helpful accounts of previous developments, illustrative examples, and a series of well-thought through 'bullet points' for convenient reference. The writing is unashamedly of a left-of-centre and liberal-humanist standpoint, however this never imposes itself and the author always supports his arguments. The result is a lucid, concise and readable text that teachers should find enlightening and useful.

One important message that permeates the book is a belief that the work of geography educationalists and academic geographers should draw closer together in future. The writings of the latter in the late 1980s and early 1990s have so far had little impact on the world of geography education – certainly not in the way that the revolutionary ideas of the 1960s did – leaving a variety of new methodologies and approaches largely undiscussed and untried in schools. Notably Marsden sees one of the reasons for this as the time consuming effect of the National Curriculum on teacher's work in schools.

At times the ordering and sequencing of material within chapters appears somewhat quirky (in Chapter 6, for example, the section on 'language' has become separated from that on 'questioning skills' which might have made a logical connection), although in general the cross referencing between chapters is successful. Additionally it would seem more logi-

cal for the chapter on National Curriculum Geography and its cross curricular context' (Chapter 10) to follow, rather than precede, that on 'Geography in the National Curriculum' (Chapter 11), although this may be merely a personal preference.

Some unfamiliar areas of content are included – Marsden makes a plea for 'ageism' as well as 'sexism' and 'racism' to be explored in geography education (although interestingly he does not consider issues of class) in his section on stereotyping, whilst at the end of Chapter 8 he provides an interesting case study of stereotypes of Spain from the perspectives of four different paradigms in geography. Within the chapter there is also a thought provoking argument about cartoons providing a new source of stereotypes in geography education. However, some important contemporary areas of geography and education are not fully explored in the book – the debate on vocational education, GNVQs and geography perhaps warrants rather more coverage than a mere half page.

The final sections of the book deal most directly with the National Curriculum. Here Marsden states that "It will be clear from the many statements of Secretaries of State for education, other ministers, and in the right-wing press, that there is either a very hazy concept of the distinction between education and instruction, or, alternatively, a clear belief that the latter is preferable" (p. 155). His coverage of the development of the National Curriculum, its influence on geography education, and of the Dearing review, is both fair and critical, although some sections are perhaps overlong and will date quite quickly. He concludes that following Dearing any lasting limitations in the National Curriculum "should not obscure the positive point that almost all the moves are in the right direction, and that there is sufficient flexibility and freeing up of the arrangements in the new Statutory Orders to allow the rekindling of good practice in geography, pedagogy and social education".

The concluding section, 'Approaching the Millenium', is short (pp. 206-215) but impressive. Here Marsden writes freely and directly, clarifying his own liberal-humanist position and giving more vent to his views. It is significant that the reflective introduction to this final section is titled 'Decades of Disillusion' and there is a warning that "In the approach to the millenium, educational progress will undoubtedly be checked, not least by a flight of teachers from the profession, if we do not return to some stability (psychological as well as curricular), common-sense judgements, and decent human relationships".

The present dangers that face teacher training, the reductionism of geography curricula, and potential constraints on the

quality of geography education are all commented upon, whilst the challenges provided by IT, and the emerging frontiers of research in geography and education, are noted. Interestingly one conclusion is that the contribution of geography educators to curriculum thought, research and publication in the 1980s has been marked by "deintellectualisation and diminution" as their "publications have largely become edited compilations of articles, rather than coherent and substantial methodological monographs".

Overall the book provides a stimulating, comprehensive, thought provoking read and a welcome addition to the literature on geography and education.

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Active History in Key Stages 3 and 4

ALAN FARMER &
PETER KNIGHT, 1995

London: David Fulton. 152 pp.,
£13.99, ISBN 1 85346 305 1

Managing the Learning of History

RICHARD BROWN, 1995

London: David Fulton. 168 pp.,
£13.99, ISBN: 1 85346 3450

It is perhaps a relief after many years of debating the pros and cons of the various versions of the national curriculum in history, to concentrate on how best to educate pupils and students within a given context. Both the books reviewed here focus on how to enable the highest quality of learning and understanding in history at the secondary level. Both do, in fact, give clear and informative analyses of the development of the history curriculum in schools in the twentieth century. Farmer & Knight, referring to the repetitive debate over the nature and purposes of school history and the relative importance of content and skills nail their colours to the 'content mast'. Their immediate explanation, however, that *content* needs understanding of *concepts*, *procedures* (skills) and *purposes*, reveals the impossibility of divorcing these in historical learning of any worth.

To Farmer & Knight effective learning is always active learning. By this they do not mean jumping around the classroom but 'anything that encourages learners to take a *mentally* active stance to the history material that they encounter'. They stress that learners need to make sense of new knowledge, think and work on problematic aspects and know what they are about whilst the teacher, the most important resource in the classroom, must

promote appropriate work. Their comments on how the teacher can do this are welcome. Pupils do need intelligent engagement and challenge in their work, variety, increasingly demanding activities, opportunity for differentiated responses and interesting, stimulating tasks. They should have their investigative and communication skills developed. They can gain their information from books or the teacher but the importance for their learning and understanding does lie in the active use they make of that knowledge.

Farmer & Knight also argue that history can and should become active (and relevant) through engaging in controversial issues and using skills which are 'actively valued' in the employment market such as being able to handle evidence, deal with awkward material and understand other points of view. They give sensible advice on the vital matter of engaging the pupils' interest, even daring to consider the evidence which shows children actually like: 'blood and guts' history; dramatic detail; storytelling; case studies of individuals, events and places; and, perhaps surprisingly to some, the excitement of the remote past and knowing content well enough to be able to make value judgements upon it. They stress that an investigative approach to most topics tends to motivate pupils and is the essence of historical procedure (and the very opposite of narrow questions on highly-selective, very short extracts from sources!).

There are many excellent suggestions for learning activities in this clear, readable book and a welcome range and variety of stimulating tasks. The advice given is very practical throughout, recognising common realities of the classroom and of the difficulties of time and management factors and some national requirements. The authors point out that although the grand aim in KS3 and 4 might be to develop sophisticated historical understanding, a 'more modest goal' would be simply be 'to foster awareness of the past' – a broad general grasp of key concepts and procedures with some information. Active history, they argue, is hard in that it forces learners to think 'which can be uncomfortable' but if it thus makes clear that historical content, concepts and ways of working are useful and permeate learning, the relevance and need for history will be realised.

Brown shares many of Farmer & Knight's viewpoints, not least that the effective learning of history *must* have a combination of active learning and qualitative instruction. He has some pertinent comments on gender, multicultural and language issues in learning but it is his stress on teaching and learning as managerial experiences which is particularly interesting. To improve quality in the leaning of history, it is vital, he argues,

to establish collaborative interaction with students and a continuous process of creative construction of the student learning experience by a department which also works collaboratively. He urges departments to set 'outrageous' or 'Hoshin' goals which challenge teachers and students to go beyond what they currently think they can achieve and to succeed through a high quality, shared process.

Although Brown's emphasis on teams of teachers experimenting, planning and evaluating collaboratively may seem risible to the many heads of minute departments, his argument on how change can be negotiated in history teaching and learning, should be pertinent to all. So should his stress on heads of department as 'facilitative and developmental rather than instructional or controlling' team leaders. His aim is *Total Quality Management* (TQM) which 'presupposes that quality is the outcome of all the activities that take place within an organisation'.

Much interesting advice on how to achieve TQM follows, including how to deal with resistance to it. It must be said that this reviewer could be included in those who feel distaste at the use of the language and model of the market – the concept of a 'client' for example, is very different from that of a 'student'. Nevertheless, history teachers have to be realistic as all the authors reviewed here cogently state. Furthermore, Brown constantly reiterates that managing history in schools has to be 'about empowering people whether they are teachers or students' and all his arguments are to this end. He rightly sees evaluation of both students and teachers as part of TQM and, most importantly, as part of the learning process itself. Indeed, he depicts history departments as learning organisations in which, through proper management and planning, a 'learning culture' is stimulated for students and teachers alike.

On such issues Brown, and Farmer & Knight, are all agreed. A judicious reading of their books might well help teachers to develop the active, interested and independent learners the authors desire.

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Language Education in the National Curriculum

CHRISTOPHER BRUMFIT, 1995
Oxford: Basil Blackwell. £35.00
hardback; £11.99 paperback

Aimed at teachers and educational policy-makers, these twelve essays from Southampton University's Centre for Language in Education attempt to make educational sense of the disparate language-related elements of the National

Curriculum, drawing particularly on the English and the Modern Foreign Language Orders. Specialist practitioners will find many of the debates familiar; the particular value of this book is in opening the issues up within a framework of language development in which everyone concerned with language in education has a stake.

Unifying themes are provided by the assumptions that language development is "part of a single process of learning and maturation" and that personal development is important in all aspects of language learning, and by Brumfit's 'Language Charter', which stresses the value of dialect or home language plus Standard English *plus* another language.

Virginia Kelly, in 'Reading to Learn', argues for guided reflection in enabling learners to advance from techniques to independent strategies within a whole-school approach to reading; a useful synthesis of research and practical application which is never quite matched in other chapters.

Michael Benton's combative 'Literature Teaching and the National Curriculum' considers the importance of active reader response to literature in relation to personal growth, cultural heritage and cultural analysis models of English teaching. Kate Armes and Andrew Hart defend Drama and Media Education respectively against the possibility of relegation to 'tool and service' status.

The cumulative effects of a range of measures on the social identity and educational opportunities of speakers in multilingual communities are outlined in Christopher Brumfit and Rosamond Mitchell's *Bilingual Learners: Community Languages and English*. Michael Grenfell in *The First Foreign Language* traces developments leading to the current emphasis on communicative approaches to MFL teaching, while Melanie Smith argues for greater diversification in the MFL curriculum on economic, educational and socio-cultural grounds.

Janet Hooper considers the suggestion that language awareness may offer some common ground between English and MFL, but concludes that since reflection on language in MFL classrooms concentrates on grammar while English focuses on texts and genres, this link remains tenuous and unproductive.

George Blue's account of Language after Sixteen gives an informative survey of provision for language study and language development at A level, in GNVQ and other vocational courses and in Higher Education. The book also contains a useful annotated list of recent government reports bearing on language topics.

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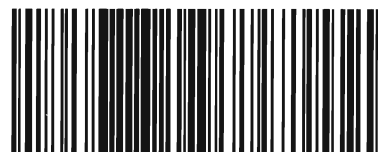
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