FORUM

for promoting comprehensive education

TRIANGLE

Contents

Forty Years On

FORUM first appeared in the Autumn of 1958, so this year we celebrate a remarkable feat for an independent journal: 40 years of continuous publication. Our Autumn number, to be published in September, will be a special publication – looking back on some of the campaigns of the past 40 years, and forward to the issues we will be confronting in the years ahead.

The editors of the new journal back in 1958 were Robin Pedley and Brian Simon, both then teaching at the University of Leicester; and the Editorial for Volume 1, Number 1 argued that the birth of *FORUM* should be seen as "an expression of the educational ferment of the present time". This was, after all, the period when what C. P. Snow described (in his famous 1959 lecture on *The Two Cultures*) as "the rigid and crystallised pattern" of English education was beginning to break up under the weight of its own contradictions. It was becoming obvious to large numbers of parents and politicians that far too many children were being written off as 'failures' at the age of eleven at a time when new demands were being made on the education system as a result of technological change and economic advance.

The previous year (1957) had seen the launch of Stewart Mason's 'Leicestershire Experiment and Plan' by which a staged transition to comprehensive education would be made possible by the use of existing, though transformed, schools in a two-tier (11-14, 14-18) system. At the same time, a number of leading psychologists were beginning to distance themselves from the theories of innate intelligence propounded by Cyril Burt and others.

FORUM was founded to act as a focus for discussion of 'the new trends in education', and these were identified in that 1958 Editorial as: "the new types of school developing in different parts of the country; the steps taken by secondary modern schools to transcend their earlier limitations; re-appraisal of such features of internal school organisation as streaming; and new approaches to the content of education".

In succeeding years, *FORUM* campaigned vigorously for the modification of streaming in junior schools and for the transition to comprehensive schooling at the secondary stage. It stood for a genuine transformation of the whole system of schooling based on a belief in the educability of *all* children and in the futility of forcing them into outworn categories.

It seems to us that these principles are *still* relevant in the changed circumstances of the late 1990s. We have acquired new insight into how children learn; we have taken on board the more positive aspects of the move to vocationalise the upper-school curriculum; and post-16 provision has moved centre-stage as an area where reform and restructuring are still much-needed. But the *principles* remain the same.

FORUM has provided a platform for some of the leading thinkers and practitioners in all areas of schooling. We have never eschewed controversy and we have never imposed a narrow 'party line' on our contributors; we have been concerned to foster informed debate in all areas of our educational life.

At the same time, our guiding principles act as a sort of yardstick by which we can assess current developments and trends. We are able to analyse the potential benefits and obvious shortcomings of initiatives like the Literacy Hour and the Numeracy Hour and Education Action Zones by judging them against the background of an agreed set of commitments and beliefs. We would also claim that we have always championed 'high standards' in schools – term recently 'appropriated' by the Right and transformed into something essentially reductionist and de-humanising.

What we have with New Labour in power is not policy informed by *research*, but policy driven by *dogma*. So nothing much has changed. The new slimmed down primary-school curriculum, for example, in which the three 'core' subjects will be expanded at the cost of history, geography, art, music and much more besides, will simply serve to narrow teachers' and children's views of what it means to be 'educated' in a modern technological society. At the other end of the age range, the new regulations to permit the wider use of work-related learning at Key Stage Four will limit the horizons of many thousands of older pupils.

, With a government in power always looking for 'the quick fix' for all manner of human, social and economic problems, there is a continuing need to be critical and vigilant. That is a task *FORUM* will continue to perform in the decades ahead.

Clyde Chitty

A Totalitarian Approach to Literacy Education?

Henrietta Dombey
Professor Henrietta Dombey of the University of Brighton presents a lengthy critique of the Government's attempt to transform lifelong teaching in the United Kingdom.

As you read this, all over England, the National Literacy Strategy is being cascaded down through the ranks of advisory teachers, governors, head teachers, English co-ordinators and classroom teachers, with the aim of ensuring that all primary schools are ready to launch into a new concerted approach to literacy teaching at the start of the autumn term (Literacy and Numeracy National Project, 1997). Family Literacy projects are also getting ready for a new expansion. This August, despite the absence of any evidence of positive effect, Literacy Summer Schools will involve hugely increased numbers of under-performing 11-year-olds (Sainsbury et al, 1998). Meanwhile BT and other enterprises large and small are gearing up to urge everyone to take part in the Year of Reading. To complete the picture, teacher educators are busy overhauling their literacy courses to comply with the new and highly detailed directives from the Teacher Training Agency (CfEE, 1997). Are we on the right track?

There is a kind of desperation about this attempt to transform literacy teaching in England. Like their predecessors, our New Labour government sees low standards of literacy as a root cause of Britain's slide down the economic league tables, our high unemployment and our confused sense of national identity. The Conservatives tackled the problem with a national curriculum and an apparatus for policing it. But the English curriculum that Cox came up with seemed too much to the liking of teachers (DES, 1989). So, with the thinnest of excuses, they reconstructed it, steering it sharply away from helping children to shape and articulate their thoughts and feelings towards a utilitarian view of English in general and of literacy in particular (DfE, 1995). Literature, of course, is not excluded, but veneration of form is given precedence over consideration of meaning, and there is little place, if any, for developing the personal significance of a text for a young reader.

However, these upheavals do not seem to have delivered the literacy goods: literacy teaching is still held to be in a state of crisis. As is widely known in the profession, reading scores of seven- and eight-year-olds actually fell after the introduction of the National Curriculum (Brooks et al, 1997). What is less well known is that recent years have seen these scores climb back up again (ibid). Meanwhile, the scores of eleven-year-olds on the National Curriculum reading tests have increased markedly from the introduction of these tests in 1995 (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998). So do we have a crisis, and if we do, what is it about?

In a pattern which has persisted for most of this century, a substantial minority emerge from our primary schools with achievements in literacy well below the norm. This pattern, arguably related to inherent social and economic divisions, sets England apart from otherwise similar countries. In terms of literacy scores on measures of literal comprehension, international comparisons reveal the particular profile of England's literacy problem as 'the long tail of underachievement' (Brooks et al, 1996). And it was this that lengthened and grew fatter during the late eighties (when the number of children living in poverty increased dramatically) while scores of mid and high achievers held up.

We seldom hear this from OFSTED or our political masters, but the reading scores of most of our children compare favourably with those of our competitors. Our problem lies chiefly in the large numbers who lag behind their peers. The picture is borne out most recently by the 1997 SAT results for Key Stage 2, which show 20% achieving above Level 4, the target set for the notional mean, but also 25% achieving below this (DfEE figures).

What we have is a long-term pattern of patchy practice, with too much tolerance of low achievement. There is certainly a pressing need to help less effective teachers of literacy develop their practice and for very many teachers to raise their expectations and improve methods of working with the lowest achievers. The problem, however, is not one of universal underachievement. Certainly in a society which is increasingly concerned with the construction, transmission and construing of information, literacy has an increased salience and so our expectations of all children should be raised. But this should not be taken to imply that the vast majority of literacy teaching has failed our children.

To a misrepresented problem, New Labour has brought no new insight. Like their predecessors, they have repudiated all socio-economic explanations for low achievement in literacy, preferring to point to the variation between schools serving similar populations, rather than to the much more substantial variation between the mean scores of schools serving populations of different socio-economic levels. And the aim is still to jack up achievement and give our children a unified cultural experience. What is new is the intensity of their determination to get the scores up, a political gamble on which New Labour has staked its reputation. This involves a novel approach to statistics – a determined opposition to the bell curve of normal distribution. Blunkett's desire for virtually all eleven-year-olds to achieve average or above average scores by 2007 is now the driving force.

So to the martial metaphors of their predecessors they have added an evangelical dimension, resulting in the Literacy Crusade. Banners waving and crucifixes held high,

the Murdoch press, supermarkets, BT, television companies are all being recruited to march alongside newly dragooned teachers in the holy battle against the infidel illiteracy.

The Crusade's strategy is, of course, also largely inherited. Its chief component is a huge expansion of the National Literacy Project, set up by Gillian Shephard to target 250 or so of the lowest achieving primary schools in a highly centralised initiative to raise their levels of achievement in literacy. Without waiting for the results of any evaluation study, the project is now being extended to *all* primary schools (with some watering down of the associated INSET) as a universal achievement-raiser. A less publicised but no less significant part of the strategy is also inherited: close control over the content of teacher education courses on literacy – both initial and in-service.

It is perhaps significant that, unlike the National Numeracy Task Force, the National Literacy Task Force, the overseeing body of the National Literacy Strategy, does not include anyone from a relevant subject association or with academic standing in literacy education.

The National Literacy Strategy rests on four central ideas:
● that socio-economic deprivation is *not* a significant cause of failure in literacy learning;
● that, given the right teaching, very nearly all children are capable of achieving at the level originally intended as the mean – the 'all can be average' hypothesis;
● that there is one best way to teach children to read and write and we now know what it is;
● that the literacy needed for the next century will be fundamentally no different from what was needed for the last.

I want now to examine each of these propositions in turn.

Socio-economic deprivation is not a significant cause of failure in literacy learning

We now know that children living in difficult socio-economic circumstances stand a smaller chance of learning to read and write effectively than those whose families are more fortunate. This has been shown in numerous contexts, but perhaps most graphically by two very different studies. The first is the analysis of twelve years of reading scores of Buckinghamshire's eight-year-olds, carried out by its Chief Educational Psychologist Mike Lake (Lake, 1991). This reveals no connection with the teaching method in use, but a clear link between incidence of low reading scores and the number of children receiving free school dinners.

The second is an analysis of the 1958 cohort of the National Child Development Study, carried out by John Bynner and Samantha Parsons for the Basic Skills Agency (Bynner & Parsons, 1998). This examines the current literacy levels of a sample of the several thousand subjects at the age of 37, and tracks back through the rich data of this vast longitudinal study, to find out what made a difference. Whereas cognitive tests at seven prove the strongest predictor, a clear correlation emerges between poor basic skills in adults and indices of childhood poverty, such as free school dinners.

The message from both studies is unequivocal: poverty is association with literacy problems. Those living at the margins of our society tend to have greater problems with literacy than those in well paid employment, and thus tend to be less able and perhaps less committed to helping their children develop their own command of literacy. Family

Literacy projects have broken into this cycle of underachievement, raising levels of literacy in both parents and their young children (Brooks, Gorman et al, 1996). But research into young children's capacity to recover from profound deprivation (Rutter, 1997) suggests that, in the long term, a wider approach that addresses family poverty, as well as parental and child competencies and interaction, has a greater chance of effectiveness.

Given the right teaching, very nearly all children are capable of achieving at the level intended as the mean

Perhaps, in part at least, because of the UK's enduring social divisions, the pattern of attainment in reading, as measured by a range of assessment procedures, has remained remarkably unchanged over this century, certainly over the last fifty years. Despite considerably greater attention to literacy teaching and learning in courses of teacher education, and significant changes in approach, the pattern endures: some children do very well indeed, most do reasonably well and a large minority trails behind. We certainly need to make a concerted effort to help the trailers close the gap. Reading Recovery shows that, with a huge investment of time and money, this can be done for a large proportion (Sylva & Hurry, 1995). But is it really conceivable that we can bring nearly *all* eleven-year-olds up to the level deemed realistic for the mean? As Lorraine Dawes has argued (Dawes, 1998), this is like stating than in ten years' time what is now the mean annual income will become the national minimum wage – an attractive but unrealistic prospect.

In Blunkett's original conception, the policy is, of course, inevitably self-defeating. However, much scores improve, unless everyone achieves exactly the same score, large numbers of children, schools and LEAs will always turn in below average test results. Even if 'over-achievers' failed to move ahead, the intended success with under-achievers would push up the mean score, triggering a process of expectation inflation.

On a saner statistical note, with 75% achieving Level 4 or above in reading in 1997 (63% for English as a whole), the 2002 target of 80% looks achievable. But a target of 95% for 2007 looks like a very tall order indeed, particularly in the absence of any parallel hope of eliminating poverty. However, our major concern should be for this last 20% or so since improved levels of literacy for this group will have a major effect on individuals' economic prospects. But, as Howard Glennister has argued, the connection between literacy and individual prosperity is much less clear for those not at the bottom (Glennister, 1998).

Meanwhile large numbers of our children seem to have slipped out of sight in the Literacy Strategy. There is no explicit mention of the problems encountered by children for whom English is an additional language, nor of their needs for specialist support. Treating everyone the same is presented as the way forward. But children who bring to their Reception classes very different experiences of literacy and English will, inevitably, differ markedly in what they make of what happens there. The irony is, that in the push to bring 80% up to Level 4, there is a very real danger that groups of the most vulnerable children may be left even further behind, as productive ways of working, with both bilingual children and slower learners, are marginalised in the rush into uniformity.

We now know the best way to teach children to read and write

We certainly know considerably more about how children learn to read and write than we did thirty years ago. The huge mass of research into literacy learning has greatly enriched our understanding of the complexity of what is involved. The different kinds of literacy practices engaged in by different communities (Heath, 1983), children's own ideas about the enterprise and its worth (Solsken, 1993), the importance of text (Meek, 1988), what children actually do as they read a text (Goodman, 1977), the pattern of children's approach to text (Bussis et al, 1985), the complex, multi-level nature of word recognition (Rumelhart, 1977), the role of phonological awareness and analogical reasoning in phonics learning (Goswami & Bryant, 1990), the successive phases of children's progress in word recognition and spelling (Frith, 1985), are only a few of the aspects of literacy learning we now know much more about.

However, the research on teaching literacy is much thinner. It is considerably more straightforward to look at what children do than to carry out the kind of research that can lead to unequivocal conclusions about the consequences of particular approaches to literacy teaching. The trade-off between reliability and validity is particularly difficult in this field. Where a complex phenomenon such as literacy is concerned, large scale studies, with their inevitably narrow range of variables under examination, tend to be superficial. Studies on a small scale can look at a rich range of variables, producing more complex pictures. But they cannot set out a clear pattern of cause and effect, so the general applicability of their findings is always in question. However, studies of both types can tell us something. The forthcoming NFER survey comparing the effectiveness of different approaches to helping slower readers will be informative. Unfortunately, we simply do not have the basis for a similar study of teaching approaches in mainstream classrooms. But Solity's recent work with children in 12 Reception classes in Essex (6 experimental and 6 control) indicates the superiority of three 10- to 15-minute periods of literacy instruction spread through the day (Solity et al, forthcoming). It may be that there are other factors at work here, pushing the children's score gains up to twice those of the control groups, but there is no such research to show the effectiveness of concentrated one hour sessions with primary children.

Meanwhile, in Australia, Cambourne's smaller and more detailed study compares classrooms where children are engaged in productive literacy learning with those where they are not (Cambourne, 1997). It finds that successful learning activities are linked explicitly to other parts of the teaching session, and to other teaching sessions. They also "coerce learners to draw on more than one sub-system of language": in the most effective activities on sub-system, e.g. phonics, predominates, but is supported by the others, e.g. syntax and semantics. Most importantly, successful learning activities are explicit, systematic, mindful and contextualised.

Of course the relationship between research and classroom practice is not straightforward. Teachers may resist challenges to their practice, and institutions of teacher education often fail to connect the evidence and ideas they deal in with the lived experience of participants' classrooms. But nonetheless, many of these research-based insights have had an important effect on literacy teaching in our primary schools. By and large this has been to widen and deepen the enterprise of literacy learning and teaching, and to give it a social dimension. This has involved the recognition both of the role of outside-school experiences and agencies, and of the inherently meaning-focused nature of literacy – that it should be engaged in for significant purposes ('mindfulness'), and, at its richest, involve the reading and writing of texts of complexity and subtlety, even where little children are concerned. Increasingly teachers are making practical use of Bryant and Goswami's work, promoting phonological awareness and the use of analogy within a clear framework. And literacy learning, long conceived of in this country as a matter of the individual child's lone endeavour, is now more often thought of as collaborative venture, in which children can learn in group situations, and from each other as well as from their teachers.

How does the National Literacy Strategy match up to this? The relationship claimed is straightforward: "The National Literacy Project has developed a detailed framework for teaching reading and writing based on the evidence of inspection and research" (Literacy Task Force, 1997, p. 17). Yet no precise references support this claim, either in this document or in the document setting out the framework for the Literacy Hour (Standards and Effectiveness Unit, 1998). But one can detect some influences.

Wider participation is clearly involved, with parents expected to engage in some 20 minutes of daily reading with each child, and ambitious public ventures planned for the future. In the classroom, the Literacy Framework has many positive features. There certainly seems to be a strong social dimension: indeed group and whole class work dominate in the Framework. For example shared reading and writing form the bulk of work at Key Stage One. This shift from one to one sessions to group instruction has been welcomed by most Key Stage One teachers, since it frees them of the nightmare of 'getting round the class by Friday'. Substantial texts of real merit are seen as central: much close textual work is involved, of a kind which clearly precludes the more facile reading scheme books. In highlighting work at the three levels of text, sentence and word the Framework provides a suitably varied and complementary range of focus. And at the word level, there are a number of references to onset and rime work, at least for Reception.

But curiously none of the relevant research to support these approaches is explicitly referred to. Nor is any research cited to support the Literacy Hour, either in its blocking of time, or in its pattern of activities. We are given three solid references to research on school improvement, but none for literacy teaching. Why?

I would suggest that there are two main reasons: the first is that many of the practices which relate to research findings, do so only superficially; the second is that other practices have no foundation in research at all.

The parental involvement required by the strategy seems to be a rather one way affair. The assumption seems to be that the only valid literacy learning that can go on in children's homes is learning that is closely controlled by the school. Yet the richest home-school partnerships seem much more collaborative than this. Work with CLPE's Primary Language Record (Barrs et al, 1988) has shown that parents can be invaluable informants about their children's various literacy activities out of school, and in so doing acquire a new respect and understanding of these (O'Sullivan, 1995).

The group work set out in the Framework is of a very special sort, where the teacher has decided in advance exactly what the focus of attention is to be with each activity. But research into group reading with older primary children suggests that the most fruitful sessions are those where there is real interaction, where, at least for part of the time, children initiate exchanges and determine the focus of attention, and where they are encouraged to do so and to respond to each other (King & Robinson, 1995). Research I am currently engaged in with teachers making successful use of whole class approaches to Big Book reading in Key Stage 1 shows a very similar pattern (Dombey, forthcoming). The children call out their observations, about the spelling of a particular word, the morality of the characters' actions or their own related experiences. Of course the teacher has her pedagogical intentions, but this teaching is truly interactive: a negotiation between teacher and children about what the text has to offer and the process of reading it.

Similarly, the work with 'rich and varied' texts set out in the Framework offers children little opportunity to experience these in any very rich or varied sense. Texts are to be treated as geological sites from which words and phrases must be quarried in a laborious process. The emphasis is all on drawing children's conscious attention to the devices by which the writers achieve their effects, rather than ensuring that those effects are achieved, much less on taking any account of reader response theory by recognising the unique nature of each reader's response to a text. The teaching of writing presented is the counterpart to this, a matter of equipping children with a set of techniques and rules for choosing when and how to apply them. Yet why do we read and write? In addition to more mundane purposes, we read to enlarge our understanding of the world and our place in it, to explore other lives, to take pleasure in the virtual reality which we conspire with the author to create, and the language which gives it life. We write to shape our thoughts, to put them in a form which makes them communicable to others, to put our mark on the world. Such conceptions do not inform the Literacy Framework: formalism rules.

But surely in its references to onset and rime the phonics work reflects important research findings? Unfortunately this is not the case. Despite more extended reference to onset and rime in the latest version of the Framework, full use is not made of this powerful route into understanding of English spelling patterns. The phonics and spelling elements in the Framework, from Reception to the end of Year 6, are based on a synthetic, bottom-up, where the chief focus of attention is the spelling of individual phonemes and the chief means of instruction is the setting out of explicit rules and facts for children to learn. In Reception children are to identify and write "initial and final phonemes in consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words". In Term 2 of Year 2, they are to "discriminate, spell and read the common spelling patterns for the vowel phonemics (sic) 'air', 'or', and 'er'". (The problems posed by accents in which the 'or' in 'sport', the 'oor' in 'floor', the 'aw' in 'claw' and the 'au' in 'caught' are not equivalent are not considered.) Learning is presented as a matter of accreting items of information, rather than developing successive theories about how systems work. A couple of references to onset and rime and analogy are to substitute for a coherent, dynamic approach. Nor does Frith fare any better: there is no recognition that children in different phases of learning

to read go about the business of identifying words in fundamentally different ways.

What we have is not a pedagogy informed by research, but a pedagogy driven by dogma. It is based on convictions about what constitutes effective literacy teaching, of the sort that inform the much criticised OFSTED report *The Teaching of Reading in 45 Inner London Primary Schools* (OFSTED, 1996). Mortimore and Goldstein's closely argued analysis of this document demonstrates that these convictions do not derive from the data, but are imported (Mortimore & Goldstein, 1996). Some have the allure of common sense: the idea of setting up routines with which children become familiar is attractive. There is certainly a case for an increased focus on whole class and group activities. And many teachers welcome a clear framework of activities and expectations. But what about the rigidity of the prescribed timing, content and transactions? And what is the justification for separating literacy into three levels, word, sentence and text, with unconnected activities laid down for each? There seems no research at all to justify this tight sort of programme.

And tight it certainly is. In its three strands, with up to twenty-seven detailed items in each, the Framework specifies term by term what is to be learned. This is the sort of tight prescription which runs completely counter to Cambourne's findings referred to above. When the Cox curriculum was published, countless teachers were relieved to find something very different. But if the dark hints of the Chief HMI's Annual OFSTED lecture have substantial significance, the National Literacy Framework may yet work its way on to the statute book as the official curriculum for English. "The litmus test for me on this one will be how closely the new Orders for English and Mathematics conform to the curricular emphasis and pedagogy of the literacy and numeracy strategies" (Woodhead, 1998, p. 6).

The new National Curriculum for Teacher Training underpins the classroom approaches of the Framework (DfEE, 1997). Under penalty of loss of permitted student numbers (and hence loss of income and lectures' posts) institutions of higher education have no choice but to teach a Primary English curriculum which foregrounds detailed syntactic knowledge and specifies exactly how and in what order children shall be taught about sound/symbol relations, leaving little or no space for consideration of relevant research evidence, more reflective approaches to texts or an exploration of the social dimension of literacy learning.

As to the research evidence to justify this, in parallel with drawing up this curriculum, the TTA itself commissioned an investigation into the knowledge underpinning the effective teaching of literacy in primary schools (Poulson et al, 1997). The investigation showed effective teachers to have a shaky grasp of syntactic categories and structures, while their ability to segment words into their syllabic, morphemic and phonemic elements was no better than that of the comparison group. 'Situated knowledge' developed in the classroom and in in-service courses, focusing on processes of literacy teaching and learning, appeared to make a stronger contribution to their effectiveness than explicit linguistic knowledge. Disappointment with the findings seems to have delayed publication by the TTA.

It is clear that both OFSTED and the TTA are undeterred by the absence of research findings to legitimise this new orthodoxy. Certainty is the keyword – a certainty which seems to leave no room for changes which might result

from research findings in the future. We have to hope that those who are so sure that they have all the answers are not given control over research into this area.

But teachers in this country have a strong tradition of collaborative professionalism. Where literacy is concerned, this is based on a rich view of what it is to be literate, increased interest in the findings of others' research and close observation of what their own children actually do as they engage with texts. So imposing an orthodoxy was never going to be easy. No doubt in the months and years to come we will hear that many schools are not implementing the strategy as they should. Already interesting variations are creeping into the process of dissemination. Those in the second tier of the cascade process have prepared written materials to introduce teachers to the Framework which show other influences in operation. Instead of making separate provision for work at word, sentence and text level, these materials integrate all three into the Big Book sessions. They also make explicit mention of Marie Clay's work, and reference to the promotion of autonomy and problem-solving through literacy learning - a far cry from the more arid didactic approach of the Framework itself. It is to be hoped that the process of implementation will increasingly draw in such well-founded ideas, particularly if schools begin their involvement by examining their current practice, highlighting features they see to be positive and productive, and ensuring a place for these in the new order.

In this way some of the worst excesses of the National Literacy may be mitigated. But in its structure, content and pedagogy the Framework does not provide us with a sound way forward. It raises grave concerns about children's experience of sustained writing, about the danger that highly literate children in Key Stage 2 might be held back, and about all the other aspects of English teaching which do not fit into the orderly little workbox which it provides. We know far more about literacy teaching than we did, and what we know neither points incontrovertibly towards one monolithic approach, nor significantly informs the Literacy Strategy in overall design, or in detail. And there is certainly much more to learn. This cannot be the answer.

The literacy need for the twenty-first century will be fundamentally no different from what was needed for the last

We come, finally, to the future. None of the documentation of the Literacy Strategy appears to recognise that we are living in a period of intense change in the way in which we communicate with one another, and extent our knowledge and understanding of the world. The exponential development of information technology has profound implications for our conception of what it is to be literate, and of what, consequently, we should be teaching our children. Texts are changing in a number of ways. Printed texts are becoming more visual, and less linear. Increasingly, computer texts are moving towards multimedia presentation and hypermedia organisation. The accessibility and power of DTP software are giving visual aspects heightened significance, so introducing elements of design to writing. Many texts now allow the reader to extend or transform them, blurring the distinction between reading and writing.

Children whose home experiences of literacy include some or all of these elements are likely to find the single-mindedness of the Literacy Hour something of an irrelevance.

So what does this all add up to?

The wider world outside school for which we are (ostensibly at least) preparing our children, operates increasingly through symbolic transactions, rather than substantive physical acts: the location, interpretation, production and communication of information increasingly dominate our working and domestic lives. In this information-driven world, proficiency in literacy practices has a growing, perhaps even a threatening, salience. Those who can't play the complex literacy games demanded – by income-tax forms, delivery dockets, cheap ticket offers, benefit regulations – are at the mercy of those who can. But it seems that the very children most in danger of social marginalisation are likely to be neglected by the Literacy Crusade, which is to save the souls of the 95%, but has no targets for the rest.

And there are other costs. A constant focus on getting the numbers up will reduce literacy teaching to the measurable: children's commitment to reading and writing, their enjoyment of these and the development of personal tastes and strengths are likely to fade into the background. And focusing on literacy could be self-defeating: the 'even slimmer' curriculum in which the three core subjects expand at the cost of history, geography, art, music and much more, will narrow children's views of what it is to be educated, and of what literacy is about. Young children have a particular need of art forms through which they can construct powerful meanings. Experience of music has much to contribute to learning to read. Experience of drawing enriches and informs children's early writing in complex ways. For older children, the study of history and geography show the power of the written word to deliver complex understandings about our own and other times and places. When we marginalise these experiences in the primary curriculum we impoverish literacy.

So why are we being force-marched along this route?

Our New Labour Government needs a quick fix for economic problems, and can tolerate neither the number of children who fail to learn to read and write effectively at primary school, nor the political consequences of recognising the part played by social deprivation in this state of affairs. So a (fairly) generously funded national campaign to get teachers to pull their socks up and pull together has to provide the answer, fortified by explicit directives to teacher education institutions to ensure that initial and in-service courses train teachers to sing the same tune. Political imperatives demand that the campaign must be seen to have made a difference by the end of this parliament, and a substantial difference by the end of the next, so speed and a tight ship are essential.

But as Peter Robinson shows conclusively, in a meticulous analysis of international league tables of economic and literacy scores, "There is no way of demonstrating a link between levels of attainment in literacy and relative economic performance" (Robinson, 1998, p. 9). So is this campaign all a huge mistake? Certainly we should be aiming for a higher, richer and more inclusive literacy for our children, but not in order to boost our economic growth. We all need a modicum of literacy to keep us from economic marginalisation. But beyond that, literacy should be valued for increasing our ability to understand and control the physical and social worlds we move in, and our internal psychological worlds. Through literacy we can extend and

deepen our experience, not just through encountering texts that tell of other times, places and people, but through our use of a medium that encourages constant reflection and re-evaluation.

These are the reasons why literacy should be at the heart of the curriculum. But unless that curriculum is built on a recognition of the deeper role of literacy in our lives, the way in which technology is changing its nature, and the findings of research about literacy learning and teaching and unless it also encompasses more than a passing acquaintance with art, music and the humanities, what our children will receive will be thin and insubstantial.

We have not yet teached the point of a total police state: despite dark mutterings from the Chief HMI, there is still room to interpret and use the Literacy Framework in more informed ways than those laid down. And in principle, there is as yet, no legal obligation on schools to adopt it, provided they can show that other approaches yield equally effective results. This is our room for manoeuvre.

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Lethal Discourses: National Curriculum or curriculum nationalism?

Chris Searle
This article has been edited from an address given by Chris Searle of Goldsmiths College to the National Conference of the Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network, Manchester University, June 1997.

A few weeks ago one of the great teachers of the world died. I am talking of the literacy educator, Paulo Freire of Brasil and Paulo Freire of the world. And in seeking to deal with the subject of 'exclusion in the Curriculum', I want to begin by invoking his words and his insights.

In a most meaningful play upon words, Freire declared that "reading the world always precedes reading the word and reading the word implies continually reading the world" – an insight expressed with supreme balance. He wrote in his work *Literacy: reading the word and the world* [1] of the need for all learning to start from the 'word universe' of the student and the people and communities of the student. He wrote of: "the word universe of the people who are learning expressing their actual language, their anxieties, fears demands and dreams. Words should be laden with the meaning of the people's existential experience and not of the teacher's experience." He emphasised the need for the teacher to chart and understand that universe: "Surveying the word universe thus gives us the people's words, pregnant with the world, words from the people's reading of the world."

Freire's conception is both brilliant and basic: as wide as the world and yet as focused as the neighbourhood. He was using the word world in two fundamental ways.

Firstly, he was a profound internationalist so the world to him meant its entirety from his own Brasil and its rural and slum areas, to literacy processes in the rest of Latin America like the Nicaragua Crusade and those in the English-speaking Caribbean, where his pedagogy was critically adopted in popular adult literacy processes such as the JAMAL programme in Jamaica or the CPE(Centre for Popular Education) in revolutionary Grenada. Many progressive teachers have also employed and adapted his insights in their teaching in European and North American urban areas. So his view of the world was as wide and huge as the world itself and the multifarious words of **all** its people.

Secondly and apparently contradictorily, but with an obvious logic, Freire was a committed localist while being a profound internationalist. There was no contradiction for him here. The world he invokes through the 'word' is also an immediate, local, world of the doorstep – the 'word universe' he speaks of is of the community, its schools and its real, dynamic words and languages. The 'cultural' and 'word' universe includes the smallest of places as well as the hugest. And these small community venues all over our cities, are, in Freire's words 'cultural universes' that

are "points of departure, enabling students to recognise themselves as possessing a specific and important cultural identity."

'Bulldog' Curriculum

Thus, direct from Freire to the issue of curriculum exclusion in our schools, colleges and universities here, in the inner cities of Britain which are so massive in their internationalism and so filled with cheek-by-jowl cultural universes, neighbouring worlds of words and cultures – little universities as well as universes in the scope and power of their learning and teaching potential for all who live and work there. But it is a huge step backwards from the open, boundless learning world of Paulo Freire – in Brasil, Guinea, Grenada or Nicaragua to the prescribed, narrow, tramlined state-licensed and nation-dominated view of education enacted and institutionalised by the Conservative Government through its National Curriculum and zealously upheld by their New Labour successors. When Tony Blair, wrote for *The Sun* newspaper [2], proclaiming the 'Bulldog breed' and promising, if elected to "rouse the bulldog to its former glory" – as well as sanctifying St George's Day – a day revered by all British fascists, ultra-nationalists and those still infected by imperial aggression and nostalgia, when he wrote for this most mystifying and backward newspaper, he was betraying the mantra he had chanted so religiously through his election campaign – that his passion was "education, education, education". Reviving all the thinly subconscious memories of Empire, domination, racism and colonial violence, he was reflecting the impact of the new nationalism that has structured and infected our school curriculum and caused millions of our young people – working class, black, bilingual and enormously talented with untold levels of brainpower – to feel even more excluded, rejected, jettisoned and irrelevant to the mainstream of British schooling and education.

If you think I am arguing an extreme case, consider the document *English in the National Curriculum* [3], a description from the Department of Education and Employment (DfEE), of 'Programmes of Study' and 'Attainment Targets'. Then turn to page 20 which gives the reading list for students studying at Key Stages 3 and 4. Among the sixty or so novelists, poets and dramatists listed there is not a single black writer. Can you believe it? The exclusion in entirety of black writers in English, let alone those in translation – and in a decade that has seen the Nobel Prize for literature awarded to black writers

in English of enormous power and achievement – Derek Walcott of St Lucia, Wole Soyinka of Nigeria and Toni Morrison of the USA. The whole of black literature excluded – what are teachers and their students to make of this in our inner city schools where often eighty, ninety or 100% of classes are composed of young people whose family origins suffered directly and probably resisted directly the deeply- damaging effects of cultural and linguistic colonialism? Paulo Freire again reminds us, from his letters to Guinea-Bissau – words as relevant to our own inner city young people and their teachers as they were to an emergent African nation breaking free from the cultural bonds of Portuguese colonialism:

In truth, the process of liberation of a people does not take place in profound and authentic terms unless this people reconquers its own Word, the right to speak it, to pronounce' it, and to name the word: to speak the word as a means of liberating their own language through that act from the supremacy of the dominant language of the colonizer.

The imposition of the language of the colonizer on the colonized is a fundamental condition of colonial domination which also is extended to neocolonial domination. It is not by chance that the colonizers speak of their own language as 'language' and the language of the colonized as 'dialect'; the superiority and richness of the former is placed over and against the poverty and inferiority of the latter.

Only the colonizers 'have a history', since the history of the colonized is presumed to have begun with the civilizing presence of the colonizers. Only the colonizers 'have' culture, art and language and are civilized national citizens of the world which 'saves' others. The colonized lacked a history before the 'blessed' efforts of the colonizers. The colonized are uncultured and 'barbarian natives.'

Without the right of self-definition, they are given a profile by the colonizers. They cannot, for this reason, 'name themselves' nor 'name' the world of which they have been robbed.[4]

This 'robbery' still continues across Britain under the respectable guise of the National Curriculum. And not only in the sense of the international world of which all our children are a part in the multiracial cosmos of our inner cities. Also in that very local world around the school, that world in a community of which Freire wrote in *Reading the Word and the World.* In that list of literature we have a stone-cold and often, to our students, a stone-dead canon. These are great works of literature, that undoubtedly, should be the property of all, but it is literature which is not of the people who are corralled to read it. Good teachers can make it speak of their world, but it has not emerged from their streets, their voices, their anxieties, their struggles. It is being **imposed** upon them. It is a curriculum based upon a 'word universe' which is not theirs and from which they have been excluded.

When I see a British inner city class of 14-year-olds, most of whom come from Pakistani, Somali, Yemeni, Caribbean families, confronted with a text from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – trying to grapple with a language they have but half-learned, a faraway narrative of aristocratic shenanigans in a land of fairies and the author's ridicule being launched against a group of plebeian would-be actors, despite the efforts of good teaching to make it all make sense and beauty – I find myself recoiling in anger at the violence of the cultural imposition and the huge and disrespectful damage done to both the teenage readers and the great dramatist himself, whose own words are not yet ready to engage the children of our inner-cities. Neither writers nor readers are ready for each other – neither text nor its interpreters are prepared for the encounter. The world of the reader, the school student and their families and communities is where we should be creating and enjoining our text – in the word universe which makes meaning of the process of living, learning and wordmaking. As Freire reminds us again, that is the world where words have real meanings, where experience is included and nourished. not excluded and famished. For teachers, he writes, need "to take the neighbourhood or the street as our own concern, trying to see them and to hear what the people are saying ... then we become militants in search of the reality of the area with the people who live there".

'That Voice'

For millions of inner city young people the prescribed voice of the National Curriculum and its narrow view of language, history and experience is what excludes them, causes tedium, boredom and disinterest in school, provides the motivation for wide-scale truancy, self-exclusion and under-achievement as well as the disaffection and rebellion which can lead to disruption and sanctions such as permanent exclusion from their schools. **That voice** in the words of Kipling – remember:

*So 'eres to you Fuzzy-Wuzzy at your 'ome in the Soudan.
You're a poor benighted 'eathen but a first class fighting man.*

That voice which has come down from Empire and domination, and is brilliantly characterised in Jamal Mahjoub's novel of the British Empire's war against the Sudanese people, *In the Hour of Signs.[5]* The imperial icon of General Gordon's words of martyrdom on the steps of the palace of Khartoum is reversed as the Sudanese rebels hear **that voice** exhorting them to forget their insurgency:

It is a voice they know. It comes from beyond the walls constructed to keep them out, beyond the gardens and the guards. It comes from within and is the same voice which gave them every stillborn child, every sickly goat, every drop of fever, every stony year, every lost son or brother fallen in battle, every league walked, this is the voice that defines and confines them.

Yet in my experience, the same young people, hearing a voice and reading the words which affirm, include and excite them, will have a completely different attitude to language and literature. Seeing, for example the enthusiastic response of a class of predominantly Pakistani and Yemeni young people responding to a poem either in their own language by the Urdu writer Faiz or the Arabic poet of Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish, is to see an end to the bemusement and uninvolvement across the same faces when grappling with *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* This poem for example, by Faiz;

*Speak
Speak – your lips are free.
Speak – your tongue is still yours.
This magnificent body
Is still yours
Speak – your life is still yours.*

Look inside the smithy -
Leaping flames, red-hot iron.
Padlocks open wide
Their jaws.
Chains disintegrate.
Speak – there is little time
But little though it is
It is enough.
Time enough
Before the body perishes -
Before the tongue atrophies.
Speak – truth still lives.
Say what you have
To say [6]

The poem caused an explosion of poetry about language itself from a class of 14-year-olds. Poems of pride in their own voice. their own and their parents' languages – be they, in this case, Punjabi, Urdu, Somali and Arabic. A Syrian girl wrote about her Arabic:

My Arabic Language

Words of my language are expressive and dear to me.
That's how I feel about my language.

No matter how far I go
No matter where I am
I'll still think of my precious language.

Some people think that a language
is something that is just spoken.
It is in a way
But there is more to it.

It's something
that is very precious,
It's something
that a person is born with
It's something that I would never swap,
It's something that can't be destroyed
That is all yours and the people around you.
My language
My heart is throbbing
My heart starts to beat more
When my language is mentioned.
I think of me
and what I am going to do.
My language might give me work?
A home?
A good education?

That's what I will always hope for and dream of.
I hope it will come true one day.
                                      Khadeegha Alzouebi [7]

And a Pakistani boy expressed his own selfhood and that of his community in his poem of Punjabi:

Language

Speak the language you were born with,
Show your feelings to the people around you.
Show the people you are proud of your language.
Language is a great thing.
With language you can make friends.
People will know you as long as you live.

Language can help you to understand things around you,
Language can make you proud and happy.
Language will lead you to happiness.
Don't let anyone make fun of your language,
Shout your language out to the people around you!
Let them know that you love your language
And you will speak your language as long as you live.
So shout your language out!

                                              Izat Khan [7]

Of course, it should go without saying that these young people, and hundreds of thousands of others of the so-called 'linguistically impoverished', have developed an extraordinary sophisticated learning achievement with regard to the languages that they speak. Bilingual, sometimes speaking three or more languages by the time of their teens, they have come to grips with language learning in ways most white suburban children – or their teachers themselves – cannot fathom. They engage in highly complex interactions, translating or interpreting for their parents or grandparents in doctors' surgeries, local council or DSS offices, often dealing with very complicated bureaucratic procedures or medical transactions. Yet their brilliance in living within two languages and cultures, their internationalism and the learning experience of sojourns in the lands of their origins are frequently viewed as a disadvantages and in entirely deficit terms. It is all discarded as a criterion for formal school success and achievement. This is the measure of their exclusion from the mainstream of the British educational process. It creates what Toni Morisson in her 1993 Nobel Prize Address called *"tongue suicide"*. "Children" in her country, she said, "have bitten their tongues off and used bullets instead to iterate the void of speechlessness, of disabled and disabling language that adults have abandoned altogether as a device for grappling with meaning providing guidance or expressing love". Instead of excluding their languages we should be welcoming them, recognising their immense achievement of teenage bilingualism as the equivalent of an 'A' level for university entry, and incorporating them into our schools as languages of equal value with English and richly motivating word universes.

National Curriculum or Curriculum Nationalism?

I wrote of Tony Blair's 'Bulldog' opportunism earlier. I want to return to its context, for its invocation signals a post-imperial era where it seems it is respectable in the highest political echelons to praise and wax positive and lyrical about the inordinate crime of Empire. Blair's restoration of the imperial and racist 'Bulldog' image reflects the white masculinism of the old music hall jingoistic song, *Sons of the Sea*, written in the year of Victoria's jubilee in 1897, when Britain was seized by a wholesale imperial frenzy:

Sons of the Sea, all British born
Sailing every ocean, laughing foes to scorn,
They may build their ships, my lads,
And think we know the game.
But they can't build boys of the bulldog breed
Who made old England's name.

Are they really the watchwords we want at the beginning of the 21st century for our young people? For National Curriculum is fast becoming curriculum nationalism. The nationalist ethos, institutionalised by the cultural tramlines

of the National Curriculum continually comes to us explicitly and obnoxiously through the words of Dr Nick Tate, head of the government's curriculum quango, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. A great critic of what he calls "misapplied cultural egalitarianism" which "wants to give equal attention to everything," is Dr Tate, giving out his prescriptions and advocating a strong sense of what he calls "majority culture that is sure of itself" [8] – in fact the mainstream white, not-to-be-challenged establishment culture which has hegemony within the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum itself becomes an expression of this position imposed upon every school in the land. In this context how vital and imperative becomes the rebelliousness of progressive and combative teachers and their students.

Certainly such curriculum nationalism both feeds and accommodates a newly confident and celebratory nostalgia for Empire, which is gaining favour in the public consciousness and being pushed by both the respectable and non-respectable Right. Witness *The Daily Telegraph*'s new commemoration of "500 years that shaped the world" – the five centuries since 1497 John Cabot sailed from Bristol to North America on his first 'Voyage of Discovery' to plant the King's Standard on the shores of Newfoundland. The foreword to this finely produced book, by one John Keegan proclaims:

> *Should the British be proud of the Empire they left behind? Of course they should. Should they be proud of their history as an imperial people? Of course they should. There is a sort of love for the old British Empire that remains warm among most of those who belonged to it and that is its greatest monument.[9]*

He's talking about us, a post-imperial people, and all the ultra-contented subjects from Nkrumah to Paul Bogle, from Shaka and Cetewayo and Ghandhi to George Washington, Dom Mintoff, to the Mau Mau, Cheddi Jagan and Julius Nyerere and all the millions who struggled alongside them to free themselves of this huge and demeaning imperial burden.

And while imperial nostalgia is bolstered on one side, comfort is given by the National Curriculum to its companion, national xenophobia, on the other. See what they are doing to Wordsworth for example, a dion of the canon of English literature, in *The Vanguard,* the journal of the ultra-nationalist National Democrats. Wordsworth, it is well-understood in his youth was a poet of deep revolutionary conception, identifying strongly with the French Revolution, the anti-slavery movement and other emancipating causes. *The Vanguard* however, understands the ethos **nowtimes** of conservative cultural restoration and nationalism and makes him an anti-European Xenophobe, putting his anti-tyrannical and anti-Napoleonic *Sonnet to the Men of Kent*, in the context of a climate of nationalist racism provoked and encouraged by the respectable mainstream figures such as Dr Tate or the now prime ministerial Tony Blair. In an article on Wordsworth's 'patriotism', contributor Andrew Webster writes:

> *Britain's national revival (something he confidently recognises) will be built on spiritual forces: quiet pride in our unique racial and cultural identity: and love and respect both for our ancestral heritage and for our descendents.[10]*

Ours! He write as 'one of us'. The rest are excluded, they have no part of 'us'.

That is the basis of the curriculum exclusion that threatens

to disenfranchise so many of our young people. Of course. it would be a terrible injustice to Wordsworth to leave him with such warped interpretations. So let us invoke his most powerful and memorable sonnet – the 1803 tribute to Toussaint L'Ouverture, the liberator of Haiti who was betrayed by the same Bonaparte, and imprisoned until his death in a French jail. Wordsworth recognised and saluted his enormous courage and intellectual genius – his 'unconquerable mind'.

To Toussaint L'Ouverture
Toussaint, the most unhappy man of men!
Whether the whistling Rustic tend his plough
Within thy hearing, or thy head be now
Pillowed in some deep dungeon's earless den; -
Oh miserable Chieftain! where and when
Wilt thou find patience! Yet die not; do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:
Though fallen thyself never to rise again,
Live and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

So what is the effect in schools of all this? There is convincing research that shows how the tedium of such curriculum content causes school student disaffection and boredom -leading to disruption, self-exclusion and exclusion used as a sanction. In other words, that curriculum exclusion in school can lead directly to physical exclusion from school. A recent National Foundation for Educational Research project found the curriculum to be a major source of disaffection and student turn-off in British schools [11], and even research done for the former School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (Dr Tate's former quango), concluded that the rigid, canonical and culturally narrow English curriculum in our schools was having that specific effect – and that the SCAA were cold-shouldering the findings and ignoring their own research conclusions.

Teenagers are being turned off Shakespeare because they have to sit an exam on his work at 14 and that encourages boring teaching and parrot fashion learning according to a recent report.

The Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) commissioned the Report. But when the SCAA summed up the Report's findings, in a circular to schools, it failed to mention the serious criticism of Shakespeare tests.

Teachers suspect that the SCAA sat on the argument, because the Conservative Government had made a virtue of its commitment to classic books and traditional examinations.

The teachers are hoping the debate about the curriculum will re-open under Labour, although Education Secretary David Blunkett is unlikely to make any early changes. [12]

This, from the *Yorkshire Post*, not known for its liberal or progressive views: There is also the recent nonsense research which argues that children learn better when they are insulated from their own community and cultures, coming from the London University Institute of Education, which concludes that "schools need to adopt techniques which insulate the school and its pupils from the community".[13] Exclusion by research, and bogus

academicism which excludes the very community that the school serves, the very word universe of the student.

False Standards

The rhetoric of 'standards, standards and standards' – the real and false mantra of Major, Blair and Blunkett is in fact an authoritarian movement to yoke inner city school students to a curriculum which does not speak their voices and renders them virtually invisible in history and culture. It seeks to ignore and undo the vibrant internationalism of British inner city schools, and to implant a false and narrow curriculum nationalism in the name of 'standards'. It failed to work in the USA and it will fail in the United Kingdom because young people and their bravest teachers will not accept it. They will wilfully exclude themselves from such a curriculum rather than be excluded by it, and the waste and oftimes perversion of brilliant young urban minds will continue. As a report on the US 'Standards Rush' by the Poverty and Race Research Action Council concluded

> The standards movement further reneges on its promise when states translate standards into curriculum frameworks that reinforce the status quo, elevate certain knowledge to a level of official approval and render poor, African American and Latino students invisible in the curriculum. English Language Acts standards that call for more reading of 'better' books create an aura of rigour but if the frameworks fail to address the need for multicultural content, many students will remain on the periphery, perceiving school as another world, another culture.[14]

It is a significant phrase this report uses: 'on the periphery,' – an echo of the so-called 'peripheral' nations from which the family origins of many of these inner city students (and in England too) spring. Yet they are the new glory of our cities, their vibrant contribution is transforming much of British urban life, and if encouraged and fostered within a liberatory framework of education – away from the prescriptive and narrow deformity that exists now, it could transform our schools too. Instead, as Alice Walker writes in her *Anything We Love Can be Saved*, huge numbers of young people – in the USA and in the United Kingdom, walk excluded along the margins of state education:

> Instead, like plants whose roots are sunk in poisonous soil we find ourselves producing generation after generation of blighted fruit. And why is this? It is because the dominant culture, whose values are designed to encourage the full development of the white and the male only – and not even of the disadvantaged of those categories, leaves the rest of us unsupported, except in ways that are frequently injurious to us. It is also because many of us have forgotten or can no longer recognise our own culture at its healthiest. We no longer know that it is the soil we need in order to survive, in order to thrive.[15]

But Walker's sense of optimism emerges too from this analysis – that it is in the culture of the constituent communities that makes up her multiracial America and our multiracial Britain that her hope lies, and we need to struggle for a culture that includes all, manifests all and shows a cooperative future to all – not in the narrow, rhetorical New Labour sense of things merely 'national'. Not by bulldogs, shaming, curfews and 'standards' without cultural inclusion – but in the voices and words of all our people in the inner cities. As Alice Walker declares "They show us the way home, which is the whole earth".

The whole earth – as exemplified by, for example, the series of reading books for classrooms in Mozambique, one of the poorest countries on Earth. In 1977 these readers told of that 'whole earth' civilization. Authors from Mozambique, of course, but texts from all over Africa and the world – from the USA to Chile, from Angola to Vietnam, from France and Portugal to Germany, South Africa, Cuba and China. The world eclipsed the nation, the included invited the excluded in with them, into their struggling nation for a daily cultural rendezvous in all their classrooms.

And 'home' too is the whole local world of our students beginning from their own word universes, their communities and the way in which our schools can include them, reflect them, affirm and value them, give them confidence and prepare them for the rest of their lives – not cast them aside with the cultures of exclusion and arrogance, offering what Toni Morisson in her Nobel Prize Address called the "lethal discourses of exclusion, blocking access to cognition".

We have the world in developmental process in every one of our schools, classrooms and inner city communities and that should be reflected too in our universities. We need to learn from these worlds and their discourses to transform the whole of our country. They are our living texts to change its exclusivity and cognitive xenophobia into a new word universe for all our children. That was Paulo Freire's objective of a learning inclusion for all: it could be ours too.

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Teachers' Thinking on Mixed Ability Grouping in Six Secondary Schools

Kanae Nishioka
This article is based on a chapter of a PhD dissertation recently completed by Kanae Nishioka at the University of Birmingham.

Introduction

It was a common misconception in the 1970s and 1980s that all comprehensive schools favoured mixed ability teaching. In 1996, Benn & Chitty reported that only 3.1% of comprehensive schools had mixed ability grouping for all subjects in Years 10 and 11, although 50% of them had mixed ability grouping for all subjects in Year 7.[1] How do teachers understand the relationship between pupil grouping and the promotion of equality?

Between 1995 and 1997, I conducted a comparative study of six secondary (11-18) schools with different types of catchment area in Central England. I spent at least one week in each school, interviewing six to nine teachers in each school and observing school life. The data in this article came mainly from the interviews [2] with the key interviewees (i.e. the deputy head for pastoral care in Banyan Tree School [3], and the headteachers in the other five schools) and those with a number of subject teachers (an English teacher, a maths teacher and a science teacher in each school). The research as a whole concerned the schools' overall curriculum policies at Key Stages 3 and 4, but this article will focus on grouping policies and the teachers' thinking about mixed ability grouping.

Profiles of the Schools

The characteristics of the intake of each school were as follows:

● *Green Field School*: a non-selective school in a rural area. It had equal numbers of boys and girls. Less than 5% of the pupils were eligible for free school meals. Very few pupils had a minority ethnic background;

● *Acacia School*: a comprehensive school in an urban area, which used to be predominantly middle-class but now contained a growing number of working-class people. About 20% of the pupils were eligible for free school meals. The school had equal numbers of boys and girls. About 15% of the pupils come from a minority ethnic background;

● *Oak Tree School*: a comprehensive school in a white working-class area. About 40% of the pupils were eligible for free school meals. It had equal numbers of boys and girls. About 15% of the pupils were from minority ethnic backgrounds;

● *Banyan Tree School*: a comprehensive school in an urban area with a high proportion of minority ethnic citizens. About 80% of the pupils were of South-Asian background, less than 5% African-Caribbean, and less than 10% white. About 70% of the pupils were boys. Over 50% of the pupils were eligible for free school meals;

● *Palm Tree School*: a grant-maintained comprehensive school in an urban area. 70% of the pupils were of South-Asian background, 18% African-Caribbean, and no more than 5% white. About 50% of the pupils were eligible for free school meals. The school had slightly more boys than girls;

● *St Margaret's School*: a single-sex (girls') school which was highly selective. Information on the pupils' backgrounds was not available, because the school did not require pupils to supply it. It was
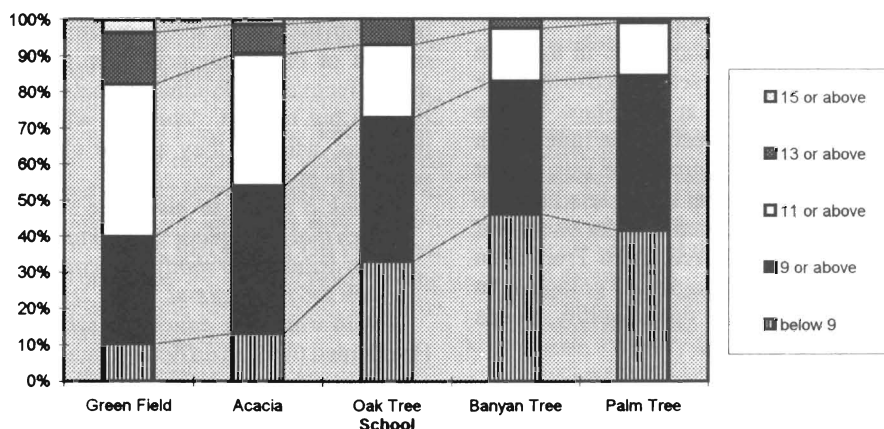
observed, however, that about two thirds to four fifths of pupils were white.

As to school size, St Margaret's was the smallest (about 570 pupils) whereas the other schools ranged between 800 and 1300 (Banyan Tree was the largest).

Pupils' attainments on entry seemed to correspond to the extent of their deprivation. The chart on page 47 shows the reading ages for the Year 7 pupils in the state schools. Reading age data in St Margaret's were not available, but an English teacher stated that all the pupils had a reading age at least their actual age, that the reading ages of the majority were above their actual age and that the highest reading areas of the pupils would be 14 or 15.

The key interviewees in Green Field, Acacia, Oak Tree and Banyan Tree schools were very supportive of comprehensive schooling, whereas the headteacher in St Margaret's argued against comprehensive schooling and the headteacher in Palm Tree seemed to be ambivalent. Equality among the pupils was not a major concern in St Margaret's. The headteacher said, "we try to ignore the social inequalities as much as possible; the girls are all here having done equally well in a sense to be 'selected' for this school".

The headteacher in Green Field showed a strong commitment to anti-racist, anti-sexist education, but the school had pupils from a largely mono-cultural background and it seemed difficult for teachers to recognise the need to promote 'equality'. On the other hand, in Acacia, Oak Tree, Banyan Tree and Palm Tree, teachers were more concerned about equality among the pupils. The teachers in these schools, however, employed different types of approach to promote what they perceived as 'equality'. Teachers in Acacia and Banyan Tree emphasised the importance of democratic discussion, prevention of stereotypes and development of an ethos of equality, whereas Oak Tree employed a more authoritarian approach (e.g. strong discipline). In Palm Tree, both strong discipline and giving positive role models were emphasised.

Grouping Policies

There were two kinds of grouping in each school: tutor groups and teaching groups. In Green Field, Acacia, Oak Tree and St Margaret's, tutor groups were organised on mixed ability lines, although it is doubtful whether we can call such grouping in St Margaret's 'mixed ability' since the school had selected pupils only. In Banyan Tree, tutor groups were broadly banded, and some of the tutor groups had only Muslim boys. In Palm Tree, tutor groups had been broadly streamed, but in 1996-97, the school introduced single-sex grouping at Key Stage 3, and this made it much more difficult to stream the tutor groups.

As far as teaching groups were concerned in the state schools, the time pupils were taught in sets tended to increase as they got older; but subject choice at Key Stage 4 made it more difficult to set pupils. The percentage of time which pupils spent in either mixed ability groups or sets, meant that teachers set pupils if possible; but it was less likely to be possible in those schools which had a wider variety of optional subjects (Acacia, Banyan Tree, Palm Tree) or in Palm Tree in particular which had single-sex grouping. In St Margaret's, pupils were taught in mixed ability groups for most of the time.

Teachers' Perceptions Underlying Grouping Policies

In the six schools, most teachers supported setting whether they supported comprehensive schooling or not.

Among the key interviewees, the headteacher of Palm Tree was the only one who supported mixed ability grouping. He said that mixed ability groups were "harder places for teaching", but that it was "much more rewarding" and "encouraging" for teachers to see various types of pupils. He explained his support for mixed ability grouping, on the grounds that "my social values will not permit me to label those at the bottom of their ability levels 'useless'. We must find ways and means to get the best out of everybody". Yet this school had the most rigid ability grouping of the six schools until 1995-96.

St Margaret's was the only school which used mixed ability grouping in all subjects. This was not, however, because of support for mixed ability grouping. The headteacher said, "I think it's very difficult to teach" in mixed ability groups. She argued, "in a school like this, I don't think setting or streaming is necessary", whereas "in a school where you've got the full range of abilities ... in some subjects it's virtually impossible to teach a full range all together economically". Yet she admitted there might be advantages in keeping tutor groups as mixed ability groups.

A number of teachers pointed out the drawbacks of streaming; e.g. "lot of unhappy children, a lot of unhappy parents, too much pressure" (the headteacher of Green Field), "lower self-esteem" and "lower expectations" (the headteacher of Acacia). Mixed ability grouping was preferred at the beginning of secondary education. After that, however, mixed ability teaching tended to be rejected because it was "difficult" or "impossible" to organise, even by the four key interviewees who supported comprehensive schools. Out of 18 subject teachers interviewed, only one teacher (a science teacher in Banyan Tree) supported mixed ability grouping:

> I taught in a physics group at one time, which ... had the most able pupils in the year in it, and the least able pupil opted to do physics, and there is no evidence that the most able students suffered, and there is evidence that the least able, in a group where there were more able pupils, in the case of my style of teaching, had their expectation raised, and had benefited as well. I understand the argument about teaching across the wide range of abilities, but I also understand the philosophy of self-fulfilling prophesies.

The key interviewee in Banyan Tree said that the concept of comprehensive schools "has been refined" over time, and argued that "the idea of the comprehensive school was a genuine cross-section of the community which it serves, but within that, one is able to organise children into whatever method of organisation is appropriate for them to learn most effectively". He admitted that setting was also a divisive process but he said, "children will know that anyway in the class, whether they are the clever ones or not clever ones". He argued:

> I think it is not so much the structure as the ethos in which that takes place that is important ... comprehensive ethos values everybody ... a comprehensive school is as much or more about ethos as it is about the system within which the education takes place.

He claimed that it is difficult to teach "three different levels effectively" when "you've got children who've got a reading

age of 8 with people who've got a reading age of 15, 16 in the same class". The headteacher of Acacia also thought that mixed ability grouping was "philosophically" right but that for most teachers it was "a difficult situation to have to teach at least three abilities in a group". He thought that setting enabled teachers to deliver a subject with different methodologies. The headteacher of Green Field admitted that there were dangers in setting as well as in streaming, but he said "it is up to the skill of the teacher to make sure that there are no disadvantages". He argued, "if we've got comprehensive schools, you have a greater chance of pupils growing up with the idea of belonging to one community, one society" even if there is setting in a school.

Interestingly, the English image of mixed ability teaching seemed to be different from the Japanese one. In Japan, there is hardly any argument for giving separate tasks to different groups within a class, whereas in England mixed ability teaching seemed to be talked about as involving differentiation within a class. Yet, "individualised learning is something we talk a lot about but very often fail to deliver" (the key interviewee in Banyan Tree). For example, a science teacher in Acacia described his experience:

I tried doing full differentiation within lessons in my previous school, and we ended up with the situation where we were having one lesson, we had three different worksheets, and three different sets were operated ... it was just impossible ... We tried and everybody just cracked up.

The headteacher of Oak Tree also mentioned what he had seen in mixed ability groups in maths: some pupils ended up doing worksheet number 3 while the more able pupils were doing worksheet number 20, and this was "de-motivating for the child on 3 and the child on 20".

Thus, mixed ability grouping was opposed even by the supporters of comprehensive schooling. Setting was recognised as a strategy for realising "equality of opportunity" rather than as a "meritocratic" organisation. For example:

I think differentiation is a really key part of equal opportunity because it is really saying that by the way the teacher delivers the subject, it is done in a way that meets the individual child's need and that involves teaching in a variety of ways and making the work appropriate for each child. (A senior teacher in Acacia)

The Way Forward?

As described above, setting pupils, especially in the upper part of the schools, was accepted as the right interpretation of equal opportunity in all the state schools. In St Margaret's, mixed ability grouping was chosen simply because setting was not recognised to be necessary. It seemed that schools under the pressure of the competition in the league tables were all the more keen on setting pupils in order to provide an appropriate support to individual pupils.

It is a persuasive argument that setting strengthens the support for the pupils who would have been "left behind" in a mixed ability group. In my research, it was observed that many subject teachers made lower groups smaller as a way of giving extra support for the "less able" pupils. The teachers also tried to ensure that setting did not affect the pupils' learning detrimentally by, for example, getting agreement with the pupils and the parents. Still, it can be argued that setting has some disadvantages.

First, some subject teachers admitted that different types

of learning were likely to be organised in different sets: e.g. more "autonomous" learning for the pupils in higher sets and more "conformist" learning for those in lower sets. This problem had already been pointed out in Oakes' research in the US.[4] Such differentiation can be understood as a way to promote equality in that all pupils were helped to get a better grade; but it can also be argued that it is against equality because in this way "less able" pupils were deprived of experiencing any form of autonomous learning.

Secondly, setting can de-motivate the pupils. Teachers supporting setting argued that some pupils were relieved when they moved the pupils down; but even some of those teachers argued against too rigorous setting. In some cases, setting clearly let pupils know what grades they were expected to get, and a few teachers described how shocked some pupils were at this. It would hardly be surprising if pupils stopped studying when they found out that they could get only grade F or G, although no teacher actually suggested this happened.

Setting can allow teachers to abandon their belief in educability and put the responsibility for lower achievement on the pupils rather than on their teaching. Many subject teachers showed their concern to allocate pupils to sets of the 'appropriate' level. If the tests pupils are given are not reliable, however, being in a top set does not necessarily mean that those pupils have attained the basics of the subject.

Last but not least, setting inevitably makes the school situation fragmented and unstable. In some cases, pupils were moved between sets even within an academic year. Although teachers supposed that tutor groups functioned as 'social groups' which enabled pupils to develop socially, pupils spent less time in their tutor groups as they were set more rigidly. Whether or not such fragmentation is to be seen as a problem would depend on one's understanding of the role of the school. If we understand that teaching subjects is the main role of teachers, a school is not at fault if it does not offer pupils some experiences of living in a close community. But if one emphasises the ethos of the school, it seems an important question as to how a school can improve its ethos without having pupil "community units" within a school.

Teachers at St Margaret's pointed out the benefit of teaching which takes advantage of pupils' interaction. A maths teacher told me that mixed ability teaching had become more difficult after the revision of the National Curriculum. The need for setting has to be examined alongside the discussion on syllabuses and teaching styles. Recently, Jo Boaler investigated the experiences of pupils learning maths, comparing those who were taught in sets and those taught in mixed ability groups with 'progressive' methods.[5] Such evaluative research in all subjects will be necessary if we are to truly understand the effect of ability groupings on pupil performance.

Notes

[1] Benn, C. & Chitty, C. (1996) *Thirty Years On*. London: David Fulton.
[2] Some parts of the transcription have been altered for the sake of clarity, although maximum efforts have been made to keep the original wording of the interviewees.
[3] All the names of the schools are pseudonyms for the sake of anonymity.
[4] Oakes, J. (1985) *Keeping Track*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
[5] Boaler, J. (1997) *Experiencing School Mathematics*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Post-16 Provision: the next battleground for comprehensive education

Caroline Benn & Clyde Chitty
In this article, Caroline Benn and Clyde Chitty argue that reform of post-16 provision is the next priority for those who believe in comprehensive education.

Introduction

Much of the interest aroused by the first edition of our book *Thirty Years On* published in 1996 centred on our findings and proposals with regard to the 11-to-16 age group. But by far the longest chapter in the book (119 pages) is the one dealing with post-16 provision; and it is this sector which could now benefit from a truly radical re-structuring. In fact, the structural change towards which all current developments are pointing is a reorganisation of the 16-19 system in a way that brings schools and colleges much closer together – in effect, a common post-16 system in each area.

Including further education colleges as an integral part of our research project was absolutely crucial, for one of the bedevilling problems of education in Britain today is the division between institutions catering for the same age group. The best known one is between private and state education – the old issue of the so-called 'public' schools – but much more significant and widespread is the division between the further education sector and school sixth forms.

At the present time, the further education sector in this country is made up of 444 colleges comprising six main types of institution: general further education, tertiary, sixth-form, agriculture and horticulture, art and design, and the performing arts.[1] In addition to these colleges, there are some 50 higher education institutions that deliver further education programmes and some 300 other providers known as 'external institutions' that are mainly local authority adult education centres.

Participation by 16-18-year-olds is higher in the further education sector than in either schools or higher education. According to the latest FEFCE figures, 22% of 16- to 18-year-olds are in school sixth forms; 28% are following full-time further education programmes; 6% are in full-time higher education; and 8% are on part-time programmes, predominantly in further education. This leaves 36% of youngsters who are not in any form of education (see *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 14 November 1997).

In our own 1994 Survey of comprehensive schools and colleges, we could see that both sixth forms in schools and the 16-19 years in general further education colleges were offering A levels and both were offering vocational education; but the vocational courses available in the schools were often limited in nature and sometimes the A levels offered in the FE colleges were also rather restricted in scope.

In expenditure terms, students in sixth forms are heavily advantaged over students in the further education sector; while students who are part-time or on training courses have few of the legal rights enjoyed by those in full-time public education.

The divisions are also clearly *social*. Looking at sixth form colleges, which are often referred to as 'A level academies', we could see that most were predominantly 'middle-class' institutions – and highly *selective* as well, with 67% of their entry in the top 20% of the ability range. The sixth forms in many comprehensive schools probably conform to much the same profile, though not necessarily those in the inner cities.

The general FE colleges, on the other hand, were the most 'working-class' of all the 'comprehensive' institutions we looked at – more so, in fact, than the inner-city secondary comprehensive schools in our Survey – with clear evidence of the adverse effects of selection shown by the fact that only 13% of the top 20% of the attainment range was represented in their intakes.

Why should this division – akin to the grammar and secondary modern division of old – be allowed to continue? And how can we act in ways that do not jeopardise the life-chances of teenagers living in the more deprived areas of our major cities?

The Tertiary Solution

Among the most interesting of all the institutions in our Survey were the tertiary colleges which had a distinct profile growing out of their long-standing commitment to bringing 'vocational' and 'academic' work together in a truly integrated way. They had high numbers proceeding to institutions of higher education (in the way that was true of sixth form colleges); but they also had the rich array of vocational courses common to further education colleges, as well as a commitment to their part-time students and to those in work-related education.

Fifteen years ago, the conversion of sixth form colleges to tertiary colleges was proceeding apace – as was the granting of applications to start tertiary colleges from scratch in many areas – on the grounds that this represented not just the most 'cost-effective' form of 16-19 education, but also the most 'comprehensive'. Almost overnight, the Conservative Government stopped approving these welcome developments, followed by the introduction of an 'opting out' policy which had the effect of allowing schools to leave the control of their local authority if their

sixth forms were seen to be 'under threat' from post-16 rationalisation plans.

Today we are cursed with the inevitable result: a plethora of uneconomic and under-sized sixth forms, competing wildly with one another and with the larger colleges. Half the comprehensive sixth forms in our Survey were below the size that is normally assumed to be truly viable. The Year 12 (or lower sixth) average size for an LEA comprehensive was 96; while the same year in a tertiary college had an average of 915 students.

The Effects of the Market

It is clearly crucial that students of 15 and 16 know about *all* the choices on offer in their local area – and worrying that many are still kept in relative ignorance. The operation of the market, which is usually justified on grounds of choice, actually *denies* choice by pitting institutions against one another and making it dangerous for any school or college to encourage its students to take up subjects or courses – even a single A level – elsewhere. Dangerous because any institution risks losing funding wherever real choice is exercised.

The market 'structure' is out of place in a public education service which is there to serve the whole community and all age ranges, for its chief purpose is to protect some institutions at the expense of others.

What is clearly required is a structure of co-operation for the 16-19 age range, where either tertiary colleges are developed more widely or the sixth forms of schools are encouraged to co-operate with one another and with local further education colleges in some form of common system.

In some towns in this country, a common 'pooled' system has already been established. In our Survey, we found that large numbers of schools and colleges with 16-19 students were already collaborating with other local schools or colleges for various aspects of their work. And this, despite the fact that it is very difficult for institutions trapped in a 'market' system to develop mutually beneficial partnerships: there are obvious timetable constraints, there are financial and organisational problems, and there is absolutely no official support – or funding – to help these plans succeed from central government.

The Way Ahead

It is time that we examine the whole issue of post-16 provision and that we undertake some coherent and rational planning of the system to ensure a 'pooling' of education for older students – and a financing of the system so that individual schools and colleges do not lose funding when students move between institutions, and, in particular, so that the issue of the very small, demonstrably uneconomic sixth form can be addressed. If this does not happen, the appropriation of resources by these small sixth forms at the expense of classes in the lower years of schooling will continue, resulting in the very reverse of what the Government says it wishes to see: smaller classes in the younger years. We also need to tackle the imbalance of expenditure between sixth forms and further education colleges – a problem well high-lighted in *Learning Works*,

the FEFC's recent Report on expanding and funding further education chaired by Helena Kennedy.

Above all, there should be a major re-distribution of funding within the nation's education system so that more is concentrated on those who have always had less than their fair share of education, including most adults who have not been served by the system at all, and especially those who are unemployed or unqualified or who have 'dropped out' because of circumstances that made it difficult or impossible for them to take up their education 'entitlements'.

Life-Long Learning

The nineteenth century saw the introduction of universal comprehensive primary education; the twentieth century has witnessed a long and at least partially successful campaign for universal comprehensive secondary schooling; and the twenty-first century will surely see a battle for universal education for adults – or for 'life-long learning', as it is often called. We will be fighting for a system which is there to help people study when they want it and in the way they want it, organised so that it is easy for adults to start on courses and get the help they need to promote their learning – and where they are rewarded for progress made by having education available on terms they can afford.

Far from the battle for comprehensive education being over, it is still very much in its infancy. Because the fallacy of 'fixed-potential' is far more entrenched for adults than it is for children. We are always willing to say that children are 'starting out'; we must get them 'started right'. With adults, there is much more of a spirit of defeatism: many have not had good educational experiences; many will have convinced themselves that they are useless and not worth educating; and society itself will continue, as it always has, to tell the majority of people that education is not for them – simply by not *providing* it for them. The hidden or not so hidden message is that certain people are *worth educating*, but that most are not.

In the past thirty years, while comprehensive secondary education has been advancing across the country, comprehensive education for adults has also moved steadily ahead. On hundreds of access courses throughout Britain those who had previously 'failed' have been helped to qualify for university entrance – which is why so many university entrants are no longer 18-year-olds coming direct from sixth forms but 'mature' students who have played such a major part in undermining the doctrine of 'fixed educational potential'. In fact 'mature' students who once 'failed' and are now achieving great success in advanced courses provide the greatest proof of all that potential for educational achievement is limitless, provided we as a society provide a democratic education service of high standards and equitable structures.

Note

[1] There is a further category of specialist designated colleges – including the Northern College of Residential Adult Education and Ruskin College – where recruitment is on a national basis, in contrast to the predominantly local or regional recruitment of most other colleges.

The Primary Curriculum: state of the art

Sue Cox
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There has been an understandable flurry of anxiety amongst primary teachers, and the wider community, since David Blunkett's announcements about the slimming down of the National Curriculum. They are concerned that the extra time to be given to numeracy and literacy will squeeze the other areas to a token presence in the curriculum. For all its prescriptive detail and bulk, the National Curriculum does, in fact, enshrine a fundamental principle which teachers can accept and to which they can relate. It is the ideal of entitlement. The National Curriculum represents a basic right for children to be educated in a broad and balanced way.

It is this ideal which now seems to be under threat from a view of learning as thoroughly instrumental as was ever presented by the previous government. This view was expressed in January by David Blunkett himself, who claimed that children must become literate before they can learn history; he implied that the basics have priority over everything in both a logical and chronological sense. Teachers will have given little credence to this over simplified conception of how children learn. It is very far removed from their own professional understanding – based on their experience of working with children – their realism and their knowledge of how the curriculum on paper is transposed into practice. Whilst Mr Blunkett's remarks might have a certain linear logic, they almost lack common-sense to teachers who know that literacy is developed in context. The material through which children learn to read must have content if 'learning to read' means what most teachers take it to mean – the process of constructing meaning through decoding text. This material is related to a whole range of genres and 'subjects'. Teachers also know that the reading material that children are given, not only helps them to learn to read, but can arouse curiosity and extend knowledge and understanding in a vast range of human interests – across all of the 'curriculum areas'.

It is heartening to hear literacy project co-ordinators, at least, acknowledging this and stressing the value of linking the learning of literacy to other areas of the curriculum. They have emphasised the risks of failing to continue to make these links. But the politicians seem to have less awareness. Whilst it has been made clear that teachers will still be required to teach the National Curriculum and that inspectors will be ensuring that this happens, those other areas of the curriculum are being talked about as if they exist in isolation from literacy and numeracy. They are to be fitted into the time remaining outside the literacy and numeracy hours.

The problem with this kind of talk from the centre, is that it can so easily become the received, unquestioned wisdom. Teachers – subject to that instrument of control,

the OFSTED inspection – have become used to having to bow to the centralised agenda. But teachers must not 'throw out the baby with the bathwater'. They must hang on to their professional understanding as to how the 'basics' are integrated across the curriculum. What is learned about number and writing, for instance, in the process of carrying out a historical, geographical or scientific investigation, must not be neglected. The importance – indeed the necessity – of providing a context for acquiring basic skills has got to be recognised.

Furthermore – and here I am making a special plea – we must not forget the interdependency of skills and understanding in literacy with that other subject which does not, so obviously perhaps, provide a context for their development as, say the humanities and science. It is, however, integrally related to the development of the kind of cognitive abilities that enable a child to become a reader and a writer. I am talking about 'art'. The child's first experiences of the way marks on a surface can be made to carry meaning occurs through their early drawings and paintings. When children draw they are finding out how their thoughts and ideas can be represented 'in the world'. They learn that the marks they make 'say' something. They are creating a new artefact which works for them in at least two ways. On the one hand, the drawing helps them to organise and externalise their thoughts; it can help the child record the way in which she or he is making sense of her or his experience. The child intentionally encodes the idea in symbolic form. On the other hand, the artefact, invented spontaneously from the variety of schematic forms which the child can make, is intentionally given a meaning. This is a reciprocal activity of both writing and reading. It allows the child to cognitively engage in these processes well before the child has any detailed knowledge of the conventional forms of letters and words and allows them to continue to exercise and develop those abilities as they become more skilled readers and writers.

I would also argue that it is through this process that the child develops the imaginative capacity to construct text. The child's intentionally encoded ideas can be re-interpreted once they are externalised. Likewise, the child's spontaneous marks and combinations of marks once interpreted by the child, feed his or her imagination, leading to new ideas to be encoded. It is an on-going process that anchors and records the child's developing ideas, at the same time being an entirely flexible vehicle for interpretation and re-interpretation.

Take Alex, for instance, who has just turned five. He has made a painting of various colours and shapes in complex combinations. As he makes a shape in the top left hand corner of his painting, he says: "This is a telescope". Later,

after he's made a blue line at the bottom of the paper he says: "There's water- under this telescope". After he's put his brush down he wants to talk about his painting. He says: "One day, a long time ago, there was a bear and he walked up here." [He follows a path created by one of the lines on his painting. He points to a blob on the painting to show where the bear walked to] "and he sat here" [he points to a spot on the painting near to the mark he has identified as the telescope] "looking for his family. And he found them down here in this box." [Pointing to a yellow square shape he has painted on the far right of the paper.] I asked "Were they hiding?" "No – the man had trapped them. And the man went down there." [He points to a green area in the middle of the painting and makes a movement with his finger to indicate the man going into or through the place he has pointed to] "And the bear can't see him." [He points to the telescope.]

The introduction to his story shows that Alex has had stories read to him. His painting helps him to apply his knowledge and to stimulate and record his own ideas. He controls a powerful means of getting to grips with how a chronological text is constructed; of creating a narrative.

Through their art, children are also experiencing the way a text is crafted. The process of re-interpreting and changing the marks is essentially one of 'drafting' and 're-drafting'. A drawing can be changed and developed swiftly and creatively as the ideas are formulated and re-formulated, to realise new intentions as they emerge and to capture new ideas from images as they appear on the paper. For example, when 'rising fives' Leanne and Josie are working on independent drawings – occasionally talking to each other and myself whilst doing so – different elements of the drawings take on new meanings as the drawings progress. At first, in Josie's drawing, the curved shapes are bananas, but when she adds swirls, which she identifies as smoke, they become a cave. Through the conversation it transpires that "You can escape from the smoke in the cave and a tunnel will take you to Turkey". She talked about her holiday in Turkey. "And did you know they didn't have television in Turkey and I had to play". Leanne points to a mark on Josies's drawing and asks "Is that me coming out of that little hole?" Josie says no, but that she will draw Leanne right now. She says she will draw a television too. Pretty soon the figure of Leanne is changed to another television, because adding one more mark to the figure will make it exactly the same as the image of the television. This process can continue almost indefinitely. When the child 'finishes' it is as likely that she has had enough of drawing, as that the drawing itself has reached a stage that adults might describe as completion.

When children do some 'art', then, they are not making pictures in the conventional sense. One of the things they are doing is exercising the cognitive processes that are fundamental to becoming literate.

When such activities are so closely connected to development in the 'basics', it becomes very clear that teachers need to resist the rhetoric that might encourage them to see the drive to raise literacy (and numeracy) standards in isolation from other aspects of the curriculum. It's essential that teachers retain their sense of the value of these areas.

I think we also need to consider *how* we value these areas. As I have described it, art activities might seem to be justified in the *service* of literacy; that they are valuable instrumentally in relation to the goal of raising standards in reading and writing. I have no intention of confining art activities to this functional role. That it might come across that way is a result of having to defend the 'non-core' areas of the curriculum given the vulnerable position they now occupy. There is another way of looking at it. Learning to read and write could equally be seen as instrumental to the development of *visual* literacy and the fulfilment that that brings. It is this kind of reciprocity that is important, in the interests of – dare I say it – the whole child.

Forty Years on

Target-setting: a case of missing the point

D. A. Howard
Dr D. A. Howard is Headteacher of Ferndoun Upper School in Dorset. In this article, he argues that 'target-setting' as envisaged by the Government is authoritarian in purpose and essentially a 'con-trick'.

In the Forward to the latest government consultation document (*Targets for our Future*) the Secretary of State informs us that the National Targets of Education and Training have two principal justifications: 'they can mobilise and focus everyone's efforts on clear goals, and give us benchmarks by which we can measure how well we are doing'. The rhetorically positive language almost veils the fact that there is a dual purpose for targets, which must serve both as aims to look forward to (surely the normal purpose of a target) and as a means of judging past performance. This is not the only paradox.

In *Excellence in Schools* there is a direct contradiction between, on the one hand, the rhetoric of the exhortation to schools to take ownership of targets and, on the other, the imposition of requirements. In paragraph 3.12 we read the following: "If schools are to take their targets seriously, it is important that they should take direct responsibility for them". However, in the following paragraph (3.13) schools are told what their targets should be based on. The same paragraph refers to the national targets, and when we see the imposition of the NTETs, despite the seeming consultation of *Targets for our Future*, it is clear that the whole process is really about government directive, and has little if anything to do with choice or ownership. The only choice that you have is whether to do what the government wants you to do, which is, of course, no choice.

As a new Headteacher, some years ago, I supported the idea of targets. I thought then, as the Government does now, that the setting of targets would 'focus' and 'mobilise' efforts. I quoted enthusiastically the old cliche: 'If you aim at nothing, you're sure to hit it'. The School Development Plan set targets which we optimistically believed were within our compass. They now seem a distraction.

There is a distinct problem about extrapolating a process which can work for individuals and small groups into one that must work for larger cohorts and even for the nation as a whole. I have little doubt that the process of target-setting with individual students (and staff), involving feedback on previous performance, open discussion, and negotiation of an action plan for the future (including details of the support to be provided which will enable goals to be achieved) is valuable, and, if entered into willingly by all concerned, and then nurtured over time, can be extremely effective. After all, there is sufficient experience from the student profiling process (when it was not distorted either by checklists, navel-gazing, or the vagueness of countless "I will try harder" statements) for us to know that it can work. The same is true of effective appraisal for staff. Most practising teachers would also agree that this can

work for groups of individuals too, particularly where the group can agree a common purpose or direction. For years, skilled teachers have achieved this with particular groups of students, though they always knew that it had to be worked for, and could never be simply assumed. The same was true of groups of teachers, who came together for a particular project, learned from working with each other, and produced results which reflected their joint commitment and enthusiasm. I use the past tense advisedly here, as the scope for such cooperative endeavour has been diminished significantly as teachers have been reduced to 'deliverers' for a pre-packaged curriculum.

If the process can work for some groups, there are important questions which need to be asked once you wish to extend it. There are, inevitably, questions about how any process can retain its integrity once the numbers involved go beyond a certain limit. Enough has been written about group size for effective working for us to be instantly suspicious of any suggestion that you can reach effective consensus with large groups. How large can any group seeking to agree a common purpose be before it loses cohesion? Do large groups not inevitably find that the purposes to which they subscribe become diffuse, and perhaps so wide as to be meaningless? How can, then, large schools come to agreement on targets particularly when these are to be defined in narrowly arithmetical terms?

If you extend the process beyond small groups to schools, to the local education authority, and then to the country, one cannot but wonder whether what is more important is not the process of target-setting but rather the targets themselves. It is the difference between education in its true sense and a certain level of politics.

As many commentators have noted, the setting of targets is all part of the politicisation of education, where politicians, aided by a voracious media, like to be seen to be taking credit for the successes, and strong action to rectify failures. We recognize, of course, that the failures are never their failures, but always those of others, and in this context, notably teachers (though parents are increasingly feeling the weight of the government big stick). The public setting of targets, ostensibly about 'accountability', is, in fact, a means of management of guilt. The present government, like the previous one, believes that if it can make everyone in schools feel sufficiently bad about themselves, they will automatically be inspired to do better. It is particularly sad that our 'masters' have understood so little about good management practice. It is fortunate that the majority of schools understand so much more.

One more point needs to be made about public accountability. If we want standards to rise, then we must

encourage schools (just like teachers within schools) to share good practice with each other. That is the best way of achieving long-term gains. Target-setting and the associated bench-marking have more to do with competition between schools than cooperation. The competitive attitude encouraged by publicity may produce the occasional spectacular firework, but after the show there is just darkness and a memory. Schools should look to the long haul, to the embedding of worthwhile practices, and be properly wary of the "can't wait" attitude of politicians whose eye is on the next election.

What makes everything to do with target-setting so incredible is the mystical belief that there will somehow spring into being a seamless web of targets, for students, year groups, schools, LEAs, and the government, all coherent and matching. All the chords and colours of this *Gesamtkunstwerk* will harmonise in the creation of the New Jerusalem. It is the dream of dictators throughout the ages. It is of a piece with the government's desire to reduce every student to a number on a computer file, so that every one can be 'tracked' and the school's contribution measured. W. H. Auden's poem 'The Unknown Citizen' described it years ago. Big Brother is watching you from Sanctuary Buildings.

What, though, might it means for a school to announce that one of its targets was to raise the percentage of students gaining 5 grades A*-C from, say, 47% to 55%? (We will leave aside the question as to why '5' is the magic number, and the arbitrariness of such a marker.) What factors might be involved? One could think of a number of 'areas': staffing, resources, environment, attendance, parental involvement, for example. Each area could be further sub-divided. Staffing could include such topics as the general level of staffing, contact ratio, staff development, match of staff to classes, to name but a few. But such rational divisions, which may well suit the design of a school development plan and its associated targets, miss the core features of a school: the myriad relationships which give meaning to all our work. Every day, there are thousands of interactions between teachers and students, students and students, teachers and teachers. In a school like ours, with 1300 students and over 100 staff (teaching and support) the web of these interactions is infinitely complex. School is unpredictable. Every aspect of the life of a school interacts with every other aspect, and because it is a complex system, with hundreds of individual human beings each doing their own thing, any push in one direction is as likely to produce an unexpected results as the desired and logically predicted result. That is what makes working in schools both delightful and stressful, but it will give little comfort to the control freaks who seem to have been in charge of educational policy for the last twenty years.

Let us, though, assume that we will use targets. We are assured that attainment in KS3 tests is a good predictor of GCSE grades. Let us leave aside the question, for the moment, of the halo effect of such predictions, and assume that a school is using this method. The school looks back, after GCSE, at the KS3 tests, and establishes that, while most students achieved what was predicted, 15% did better than expected, and 10% did worse than expected. The school is delighted. Overall, the school is 'adding value', and can expect a favourable position in the new-style league tables. It can continue with current practices, as they are

clearly having the desired effect. There is no reason to lose sleep over adverse publicity in the local press. However, this only goes to show what a blunt instrument target-setting can be. The immediate question which springs to mind is: What about the 10% who underachieved? That could be 20 or more students. Do they not matter? Are they dismissed as those who could not have been helped whatever: the inevitable casualties? The point is that the school mentioned above does not have to even think about them, or re-examine its practices.

It might be hoped that such schools would be few and far between. But we need to remind ourselves that the key issue for schools is to work with individual students, and to try to help each and every one to achieve the highest possible levels. Averages and aggregates do not help, and targets which are set in those terms can be counter-productive, as is the emphasis on only the top grades. There are many schools in the country which are experiencing considerable difficulties because of this. They are forced into talking publicly of Grades A*-C, and by doing so, automatically devalue the other grades. For some students, it is a real achievement to gain a D. Increasingly, students who see themselves, despite the school's best efforts, as unable to gain the higher grades 'write themselves off' and opt out. The resulting problems, relating to motivation and behaviour, both in school and outside, are well documented.

Every year we try to improve the education of the students at this school. We involve the students themselves, and their parents, as well as staff and governors in discussions about the path we should take. If we get this process right, if we spend enough time and effort on school concentrating on the fundamentals of teaching and learning, then eventually we will achieve higher standards of achievement across the board. This has nothing to do with target-setting as such. It is about the consistent, long-term application of good practice.

It is important where you start from. There is a grave danger that the emphasis on target-setting could divert schools from good practice. This would be tragic, as there is now a very considerable body of evidence from the Effective/Improving schools movement as to what good practice is and should be. Bench-marking and target-setting are a part of that - a feature, not the prime purpose.

If we try to impose too much mathematical certainty, if we ignore the wonderful richness and complexity of education, if we distort education by publicity, if we look for the short-term, then all the effort that is currently being expended could easily prove to be self-defeating.

Target-setting has its place, as part of what has always been at the heart of comprehensive education: helping each and every individual to achieve the best.

Target-setting, as proposed by the government, is more totalitarian in purpose and appears to have the motto: 'Never mind the quality, feel the width'. In the end, it is a con-trick, because it is trying to use mathematical descriptors for what is, ultimately, a network of relationships between individuals.

Einstein once said: "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted, counts". The government would not see the point.

Key Skills in the Curriculum: skills development, enrichment and general education

Ian Duckett
This is the latest in a series of articles that Ian Duckett has written for *FORUM* on the subject of skills development. Ian is a lecturer at Barnet College in London.

Curriculum development has, for me, always been concerned with three interwoven strands: the development of skills, knowledge and general education/enrichment. While skills like problem-solving, teamwork, study skills and communication have a crucial role to play in post-16 education I agree with the argument that the notion of either a knowledge-free curriculum or of a content free pedagogy is a manifest absurdity. As the basic skills model of Key Skills seems, at the moment at least, to be winning over a fuller, more developmental version of Key Skills comprising improving own learning, working with others and problem solving, the need for a core module on 'learning to learn', available at all levels as proposed by Andy Green [1] takes on a greater urgency.

For me this 'learning to learn' module must not only develop the core/key skills outlined in 'Core Skills at A Level' [2], but also fill the liberal/general education deficit apparent in basics skills versions be they a Dearing style Key Skills certificate, or integrated GNVQ units which all fail to recognise the role that liberal education plays in engaging in the real world, not only of work, but far beyond.

Arts and humanities are about being and becoming human and work exists only in the context of human life itself. In short, skills for employment are skills for life. The transferable skills of communication, teamwork, problem-solving and learning to learn are fundamental to enrichment, empowerment, vitality and joy and are as significant for learning about ourselves and empowering us, as they are to the world of work.

The dangers of excluding this human perspective from vocational education and training as currently proposed means that cultural and scholarly advantage accrues only to the chosen few and perpetuates social inequality. Access not only to the education system itself, but to general education is a prerequisite enhancing the quality of life for those previously excluded. The *Brave New World* model of lower social classes being denied liberal education in the name of economic necessity and opportunities to promote the kind of social engineering currently apparent in the South East Asian education systems are a real possibility in post-industrial British society.

It is worth those who legislate and claim to be for education, education, education bearing in mind that there are no cast iron laws of psychology or economics

determining what poets say, or for that matter, how they say it.

This does not mean that I am opposed to the development of Key Skills. Indeed, I believe that when presented in the context of general education and curriculum enrichment [3] the benefits of language, culture and history which accrue are a real force, not only for tackling the inequalities of economics, class, gender and race, but also for the promotion of democracy.

The development of key skills, namely communication, improving own learning and performance, working with others and problem-solving is an important feature of academic writing and academic success generally. A skilled communicator, someone who reflects on their own learning, an effective team member and someone good at solving problems cannot but become a more able scholar. For me, then, the skills versus scholarship debate is a 'red herring'. It seems to me that it is far better to possess the skills required for how to improve knowledge than to have an enormous body of knowledge at one's disposal which is seen to be finite. The only conditions under which I would favour the scholarship side of the debate is if the definition of scholarship includes not only subject based study skills but also generic learning skills.

Understanding argument, improving learning and developing critical skills are three components of core skills and scholarly habits which together underpin academic success. Three inter-related projects in the GCE programme at Barnet College are outlined, exploring their potential for other educational institutions and drawing on the lessons learning from the A Level Core Skills pilot, the English Literature Skills Module and the introduction of Thinking Skills units on Understanding Argument and Developing Critical Skills.

Those who promote the narrow definition of skills in favour at present fail to recognise that these skills cannot be developed in a moral, political or cultural vacuum and that skills, like problem-solving, for example, are about *why* as much as *how*. Good teachers, whatever else they are, do recognise those factors and spark learning through imagination and emotion and not some dull, narrow or mechanistic pedagogy. For example:

> The most important thing is finding a topic which fires the imagination of the student and then hanging a variety

of strategies for improving writing skills on the chosen subject.

The method is most effective when the 'Big idea' is a real problem which means something to the student and generally and provides greater access to the enriching aspects of the curriculum is a curriculum about *real* education. These enabling skills, while not yet anything to sing about, must be seen as going beyond the basic skills model which

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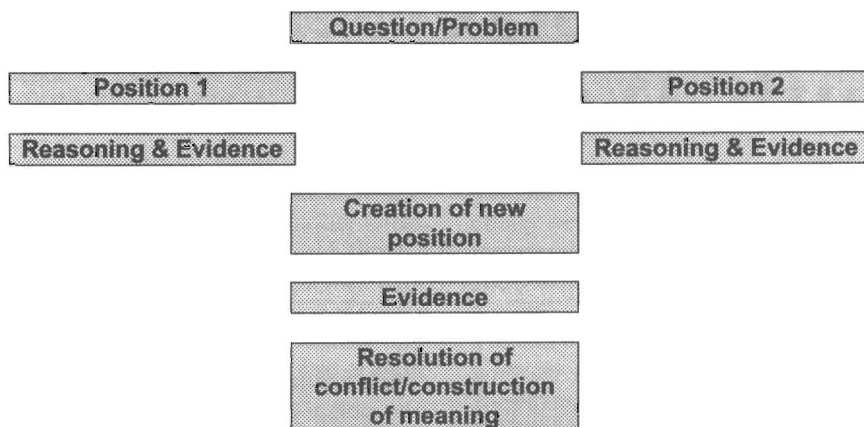
fires their imagination. The problem, say race relations in the student common room, or lack of space in the home environment, is a real one and therefore more likely to fire the imagination and provide that crucial spark apparent in the work of many published writers but sadly lacking in much student work.

One way of getting started is by adopting multiple voices (this could be real or imagined). The real problems can then be discussed round the table by, for example, students adopting the roles of a published writer, self, co-team member, community member, mentor, etc. Once dissenting views come into play, a structure for the piece of student writing is more likely to emerge. One model is shown here; it is not unlike the thesis-antithesis-synthesis approach.

An arts and humanities education, or for that matter, a social studies one, which encompasses learning how to learn promotes employability as an alternative to welfare. Skills development complements the growth of knowledge and cannot be separated from it. A more embracing discourse is required if the skills/knowledge divide is ever to be bridged.

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[3] Ian Duckett (1997) Core skills: from the heart of the matter to the keyhole, *FORUM*, 39, p. 65.

FORTY YEARS ON

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In Defence of Local Comprehensive Schools in South Wales

Stephen Gorard
Stephen Gorard teachers in the School of Education at Cardiff University. In this important article, he attacks the view of the local comprehensive school in South Wales as a school of low performance and achievement.

Introduction

The most common form of secondary school in South Wales is the coeducational comprehensive controlled by the Local Education Authority (LEA), teaching through the medium of English. For simplicity it is this type of school that is referred to throughout this paper as a local comprehensive. There are, of course, other forms of school in the area: including fee-paying schools, grant-maintained (GM) schools, single-sex schools, and schools teaching through the medium of Welsh (*Ysgolion Cymraeg*). However, the nature of their intake generally denies them the title 'comprehensive' and their scarcity makes them far from 'local' for the majority of their potential users (e.g. Gorard, 1996).

Different groups of academics, journalists and policy-makers, forming a loose alliance of detractors, have emerged to portray the local comprehensive as a poorly-performing type of school in South Wales and to extol the virtues of the other models. What these various groups have in common is that their claims are based on the artificial benchmarks of raw-score public examination performance. What they also have in common is that their conclusions are in error, and that their suggested models for the improvement of local comprehensives are therefore invalid. This paper presents a summary of the evidence both for and against their positions. Its purpose is not to decry the work of any of the alternative types of school, but to redress the prevailing balance of 'evidence' and to suggest that it may be no accident that after ten years of market-forces in the school system of South Wales, there is still little diversity of provision and no real evidence of a threat to the local comprehensives.

There is insufficient space here to do more than illustrate the 'evidence' that has been advanced to place local comprehensives at the very bottom of a hierarchy of schooling ranging from Pacific-rim models to gender-segregated alternatives (see, for example, Gorard, 1998a). Some work has suggested that British schools are being outperformed in international league tables by those of many developing nations (e.g. Reynolds & Farrell, 1996), and that Britain should therefore borrow policies from these emerging education systems in order to prevent further slippage down the scale of international comparisons (cf. Hugill & Narayan, 1995). Similar groups have maintained that schools in Wales are generally outperformed by those in England, and that children in Wales are in some respects 'schooled to fail' (Reynolds, 1995). Such views have taken such a firm hold that they are part of the discourse used by policy-makers, and instrumental in setting attainment targets for Welsh schools (Welsh Office, 1995a; Welsh Office, 1995b; Welsh Office, 1996; Welsh Office, 1997a). Even a change of government to a party, who in opposition said that they never had and never would make such 'unfavourable' comparisons with England (in Gorard, 1998b), has brought no change. In the new administration raw-score comparisons with England remain the 'research' basis for government policy-making in Wales. They underlie the important message of the White Paper put before parliament called 'Building Excellent Schools Together' which states that "standards of achievement are still far too low, progress in raising them far too slow..." (p. 2 in summary of Welsh Office, 1997b). This is justified by statements such as, "results at GCSE A*-C lag behind those in England ... 11% of pupils leave school without GCSEs, where 8% do so in England" (p. 3).

Within Wales, schools other than local comprehensives have been quick to disassociate themselves from this 'schooled to fail' message. Bodies such as the GM Authority or the Independent Schools Information Service promote the advantages of their products through raw-score comparisons of GCSE and other examination results with local comprehensives (e.g. GMSAC, 1997). Advocates of single-sex education (usually for girls) cite findings such as those of the EOC study by Arnot et al (1996) that girls perform better in girls-only schools, while Welsh language enthusiasts claim that *Ysgolion Cymraeg* provide more than an alternative medium of instruction. The Institute of Welsh Affairs claim that Welsh-medium schools are more effective than 'local comprehensives' and should be used as a model for local schools to improve (Reynolds & Bellin, 1996).

Spare a thought then for the staff, pupils and parents of the most common form of secondary school in South Wales – the LEA-controlled English-medium comprehensive. If schools in England and Wales are poor in comparison to the Pacific Rim, and schools in Wales are poor in comparison to England, and single-sex, and grant-maintained, and fee-paying, and Welsh medium schools are better than the rest, then local comprehensives must be truly awful.

Another View

The thread running through these various criticisms of local schools in Wales is the continued use of raw-score indicators despite the growth of research into school effectiveness using (over-) sophisticated models of partitioning variance

between structural, socio-economic and school effects. On closer examination every one of these claims to superiority can be seen to fall apart, so that the most alarming aspect of this story is that despite their weaknesses the claims are still pressed and they still play an important role in policy-making. The purpose of this section is therefore to rehearse the arguments against in the hope that they can reach a wider audience of influential practitioners. It is important to recognise that this is not simply a debate about Welsh schools. The themes of careless or ideologically-motivated comparisons leading to messages of gloom and calls for policy-borrowing from elsewhere all have analogies in regions of England and further afield.

The standard argument runs like this:

Taiwanese/English/Grant-Maintained/Fee-paying/*Ysg olion Cymraegh*/Single-sex (delete as necessary) are more effective than LEA comprehensive schools because they have a higher percentage of pupils obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above.

The argument therefore ignores a simple truth. The league table GCSE 'benchmark' of any school is primarily a function of the socio-economic characteristics of its pupil intake. This is not to say that schools do not make a difference. They do, but in order to assess that difference one must start with an evaluation of what one would expect the results from each school to be. There are variations on this theme, but in general a model can be built around the linear relationship between examination results and indicators of poverty such as the proportion of children eligible for free school meals. Add a few other variables such as parental occupations and local population density, and it becomes possible to predict the results of schools in general with near total accuracy. This model then becomes the basis for making comparisons about school effects, and it takes into account that Kensington and Chelsea is generally a more wealthy LEA than Blaenau Gwent for example (Gorard, 1998a), or that a school like *Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera* has less than half of its fair share of the pupils eligible for free school meals in Neath Port Talbot LEA (Gorard, 1998b).

Regression analysis can be then used to calculate the difference between what one would expect each school to achieve and what each school actually achieves. Once these socio-economic factors are taken into account, the standard version of the relative effectiveness of schools in Wales and England changes significantly. There is no evidence that schools in Wales perform any worse than schools in England, and no evidence that local comprehensives perform any worse than Welsh-medium or any other type of school. In fact many comprehensives, such as Ferndale in Rhondda Cynon Taff which was cited by the Institute of Welsh Affairs as a relatively poorly-performing school (Jones, 1996), are actually doing significantly better than might be expected. On the other hand, several GM, fee-paying and Welsh-medium schools are doing rather worse than might be expected given the nature of their pupil intake (e.g. Gorard, 1997a). In the case of single-sex provision, the purported analysis by Arnot et al. (1996) is a nonsense. At the end of a chapter which established that girls do rather better than boys at GCSE, they claim the fact that girls-only schools do better than mixed schools at GCSE is related to the form of school rather than the higher proportion of girls. In fact the evidence, such as it is, points the other way (Gorard, 1998c). Girls do better but not in single-sex schools.

The outcome of raw-score comparisons has therefore been to make some schools unnecessarily despondent and other schools unjustifiably complacent. Despite this the local comprehensives still dominate the secondary school scene in Wales. Perhaps the parents and children know something that the academics and policy-makers do not?

Conclusion

Claims of the inferiority of schools in Wales may have encouraged the setting of unrealistic performance targets, such as those in the People and Prosperity, and the Bright Future publications (e.g. Welsh Office, 1997a). The comparisons also matter to parents within a system of school choice because although there may be valid reasons for choosing one of the alternative types of school to a local comprehensive, school-effectiveness is not generally a good reasons for doing so. For example, a parent might choose a school in England if it is nearby, or to avoid the Curriculum *Cymreig* perhaps (Gorard, 1997b). They might choose a fee-paying school for its range of extra-curricular activities, or choose a Welsh-medium school because they want their child to be taught in Welsh, but they should not assume that their child will get better GCSE results at any of these schools than they would at the nearest comprehensive.

It is also important to point out the harmful and divisive effects of this negative discourse for teachers and students. Claims that most schools in Wales are not doing a good job, deny these people the credit that they deserve.

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Reforming the Study of Education in Higher Education

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On the surface, new undergraduate degrees in Education Studies may not seem very significant for the teaching profession. However, these developments have very exciting possibilities for three areas; initial teacher training, continuing professional development and educational research.

At undergraduate level, courses in Education Studies are offering students an alternative route into teaching. Rather than committing themselves to a four year B.Ed, some are choosing a Combined degree, taking Education Studies with a National Curriculum subject, before applying thereafter for a PGCE. Students comment that they enjoy the greater flexibility which this route offers, particularly in the way it responds to their own interests, and in the degree of choice that such programmes can offer them. As the B.Ed becomes increasingly controlled by the demands of TTA, the Combined route is a way of retaining study in the chosen subject area at degree level and developing knowledge in and reflecting critically upon a wide range of educational issues.

Of course the Combined route does not, of itself, award QTS. But when a National Curriculum subject is taken in combination with Education Studies it can offer a more appropriate and relevant preparation for a PGCE than a single honours degree.

The profession has known for a long time, although government agencies currently seem unaware of this, that teachers don't (just) teach subjects, they (also) teach children. Even in secondary education, where the emphasis on knowledge of subject matter is heavier, children are still the most important consideration if teaching is to be effective. So much of teaching effectively is about who you are as a person and about the nature of the relationships which one can form with children and with young people. Whilst the B.Ed fights for space within its overcrowded programme for 'the reflective practitioner', the Combined route has as one of its goals the reflective person. Reflective people make the most reflective teachers. A Combined Course can ensure that PGCE applicants are thinking people before they become thinking teachers.

The growing popularity of Education Studies is evidence that students take seriously the Combined route. The course on which I work at King Alfred's College has moved Education Studies away from its traditional reliance upon the disciplines of sociology, psychology, etc. Instead it seeks to locate education much more within the ancient tradition of education as practical wisdom, where living and learning, or society, culture and education are seen as an integral whole. We concentrate on the modern and post-modern themes of power, gender and 'race' as well as offering modules in child development, curriculum, literacy, spiritual education, special needs, etc.

This reforming of the study of education has important implications also at postgraduate level. Professional development has over the last twenty years, been built around the idea of 'professional' courses, the most progressive of which work with the idea of the teacher as researcher. However, this restricted view risks patronising the profession, limiting its development within short term policy making. Such courses have underestimated the real needs that many teachers have to reflect upon themselves as persons and not simply as practitioners. Many teachers wish to place themselves in the wider social and cultural picture when reflecting upon what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. A revised definition of Education Studies at postgraduate level can offer the profession the chance to think about itself within the larger social and political context of which it is a part. It can move beyond the usual educational theory offered in continuing professional development, by drawing in issues and perspectives from outside of education. Teachers can bring their own understanding of recent developments in social and cultural perspectives up to speed, and then take these new perspectives back to education to develop innovative and exciting research possibilities.

This leads to the third point and perhaps the most significant in the long term. The study of education has, for many years now, separated the practice of education from the community which it serves. The era of box ticking, of measuring performances and publishing league tables is a far cry from seeing education as the activity by which society looks at itself to understand itself, and then to reproduce and or re-form itself through its coming generations. Sadly, I think, education is no longer seen as the means by which to realise the spiritual, moral, philosophical and personal re-forming of society. That task has been removed from the profession in favour of a 'training outlook' (but that has not stopped teachers being blamed for social problems!).

The most powerful example of this separation of education from the community is the way that the idea of teaching as a vocation has disappeared. I meet students who want to teach because they want to serve, to give to others that which they have themselves received, to work for and on behalf of others. Equally, many feel that teaching is a way of working which will help to re-form society for the better. They are taking the social, political, spiritual and ethical responsibilities of education seriously, but are currently denied a language in educational theory and practice in which to locate these responsibilities.

The development of courses in Education Studies, at undergraduate and postgraduate level has the potential not only to re-form how the profession thinks about itself, but also to re-establish education as a form of social and cultural critique and, above all, to re-affirm the ethical and spiritual dimension of teaching as a vocation.

Prisoners ... of Time and Summer Learning Loss

Trevor Kerry & Brent Davies
Professor Trevor Kerry is Professor of Education of the College of Preceptors, and is a research officer with the 'Schools for the Future' Project at the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside School of Management in Lincoln. Professor Brent Davies is Director of the International Educational Leadership Centre at Lincolnshire and Humberside University's School of Management in Lincoln. He is Director of the 'Schools for the Future' Project.

It was impressive to take one's place among the thousand delegates who had gathered for the National Association for Year-Round Education (NAYRE) in Houston, Texas. Many were converts to year-round education; some had come to investigate and plan. Almost all American States were represented; as well as Canada and several Pacific Islands.

Year-round education (YRE) is almost unheard of in England, though it now encompasses school districts in 41 US States, and embraces some 2 million school students, predominantly in elementary and middle schools (Ballinger, 1998). It means, simply, that instead of schools following a three-term calendar involving significant periods when buildings are closed and virtually deserted, they operate through most of the year. Students, however, attend only for the conventional number of days, and teachers generally work only conventional numbers of hours. Year-round calendars are not the significant issue of YRE, but it may be clearest to begin with these.

The starting point of the YRE rationale lies in the insight that, while learning is a continuous process, schooling – traditionally – is not. Schools generally operate on calendars which are based on out-moded agrarian models: they refer to decades when students had to come out of school to assist with the harvest. But there is no logical reason why there should be adherence to a pattern more suited to the Victorians than the new millennium. So YRE schools adopt a range of rather different calendars.

For simplicity, this article illustrates only two common examples: the 45-15, and the Concept 6. Of these, the first is simply a system in which students attend school for sessions of 45 days/nine weeks; and then have a 15-day/three week break – the pattern is repeated throughout the year, with a short winter holiday and a modest summer vacation. Concept 6 is similar, except that the time blocks are 8-week sessions and 4-week breaks. However, there are many other variations, and effectively a school/district can choose its own pattern.

The idea of YRE is not new: examples can be traced back at least to 1904; the NAYRE organisation itself is thirty years old. But the movement is growing; and it is growing because there is an increasing body of research evidence of its efficacy.

Glines (1998) sets out an eight-point rationale for YRE. He maintains:

- *learning should be continuous, and long interruptions are linked with 'learning loss';*
- *YRE has positive benefits for students who have learning difficulties or are at-risk;*
- *calendar revision encourages broader curriculum review;*
- *modern life-styles provide for greater flexibility, making the agrarian calendar inappropriate;*
- *employment realities (e.g. the growth of the leisure, tourism, and other service industries) militate against families being together for a long summer vacation;*
- *parents and communities like the twelve-month cycle better;*
- *school districts can adopt a range of calendars to suit a range of social needs;*
- *the YRE calendar, in multi-track mode (see below), can create space in schools for improved learning.*

This rationale is worthy of closer scrutiny.

Several of Glines' eight points imply improvements in learning which can be achieved through YRE. These issues have to be at the heart of any argument in its favour. There are two main strands to the argument. The first is that learning is a continuous process: and that can hardly be denied. The adoption of a YRE calendar means that, since schools are open longer, there are enhanced opportunities for students to use the library and resource areas, attend additional classes (such as those for literacy and numeracy piloted in 1997 in England during the long summer vacation), or consult teachers informally.

The second strand of Glines' argument relates to the negative effects of interrupted learning: what has become known in the USA as 'summer learning loss'. The underlying belief here is that youngsters leaving school for an extended (i.e. traditional summer) break lose ground educationally.

What was most fascinating to hear at the Conference was the growing body of evidence for summer learning loss, and the selective ways in which it disadvantages students. In fact, this research is part of a three-pronged overview of learning which was investigated throughout the five days.

1. *The effect of school year length on learning.* In an excellent exposition of a piece of longitudinal research Julie Frazier (1998) of Purdue University, California, outlined a study into extending the school year from 180 days (common in the USA) to 210. She was able to demonstrate measurable learning gains from simply having students engaged with learning for longer.

2. *The effect of YRE on students of all abilities, with no*

increase in the school year. Winters (1998) has drawn up an array of evidence from nineteen studies which tends to show that students engaged in YRE schools make better progress than students following conventional timetables for the same length of time.

3. *The Phenomenon of summer learning loss.* Harris Cooper (1998) and his associates have looked at the data from 39 studies of summer learning loss, reprocessing them to discover the key messages. They have concluded that there is clear evidence that all students suffer from this phenomenon, that:

> it is most acute for those at-risk and with learning problems; that it affects procedural knowledge to a greater extent than conceptual knowledge; and that it is clearest for mathematics and for spelling, becoming more acute as students proceed through the grades from 1 to 8.

So research bears out Glines' arguments about learning continuity and learning loss. His arguments about social issues are, in our view, more contentious. The simple fact is that no one school system will ever please every member of the school community: each is a compromise. Perhaps this can be illustrated from an English context. The only schools of which we are aware to have experimented with the calendar are a handful of City Technology Colleges. They advance arguments just like those of Glines for their decisions. In one such College we were given access to students to seek their opinions. The strong feeling to emerge from students was that they did learn better; but the calendar changes diminished their social life. Many would normally mix outside school with peers who attended schools with traditional calendars. This was hardly possible during their school vacations.

In the USA, an influential piece of work is that by Karen Heisinger. Heisinger (1994) asked school superintendents in California (a State where YRE is widespread) for their opinions of YRE. Her findings are very significant:

> 90% thought YRE benefited students' learning;
> 95% thought students' retention rates for learning had increased;
> 58% thought YRE students scored higher on tests;
> 53% reported improved attendance rates;
> 71% reported improved behaviour in school;
> 79% reported teachers were less stressed;
> 90% thought parents responded positively to it;
> 92% wanted YRE calendars to continue.

There were also positive mentions, thus:

> over-crowding in schools was lessened;
> less revision was needed;
> students with special needs benefited;
> communities were well disposed to YR schools.

So Glines' arguments of the positive perceptions of YRE seem to be borne out, at least in part. His third cluster of arguments related to effective use of school plant. Davies (1997) has argued that many British schools are used for only 13% of available time. According to the education press many are over-crowded and have class sizes which are too large. YRE provides some solutions, provided it is combined with multi-tracking. Multi-tracking means taking an intake of students and dividing them into (say 4) parallel groups. Each group follows the same pattern of calendar (say the 45-15); but the tracks have staggered start dates, so that only 3 groups are in school at any one time.

Multi-tracking can be used creatively in three main ways:

● where there is pressure on a school to take more

students than its current capacity, it can provide increased capacity by using the building for more time each day/more days in the year. This in turn may obviate the need for a new school building: a considerable saving;

● where a school's accommodation is stretched, multi-tracking can free up a proportion of rooms each day, so allowing scope for re-modelling the space, e.g. to accommodate an IT block or for other specialist usage;

● a school can operate with the same number of students overall, but use multi-tracking to decrease class size.

So YRE and multi-tracking together can be powerful tools to increase learning opportunities and reduce learning loss.

Others would claim additional advantages: the most common being a lowering of stress for both teachers and students due to the shorter working sessions and more frequent breaks.

Of course, YRE is not without its critics. Some of these have financial interests which they feel are threatened. In a famous incident in America, a school district was strongly criticised in the press – in a series of expensive full-page advertisements - for its plans to go YRE. On investigation, the so-called 'parents' association' fronting the campaign turned out to be the owners of the local leisure centre, who feared revenue would drop! Teachers, too, have fears. The rare headline about this kind of issue in the UK almost always contains a scare: *teachers to work more for less pay,* or some such. In fact, YRE means that teachers may work conventional numbers of school days and hold down full-time posts; or they may have increased flexibility to undertake part-time work of a kind which suits their individual life-styles.

In 1994 the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, a US government body, submitted a report on YRE known as 'Prisoners of Time'. It concluded:

> Unyielding and relentless, the time available in a uniform six-hour day and a 180-day year is the unacknowledged design fault of American education...
>
> [traditional calendars] should be relegated to museums... The key to liberating learning lies in unlocking time.

These are powerful sentiments from a movement worthy of further consideration as the means to solve some of the current issues in British education.

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Helping Young Children to Read Mathematics

Sheila Farmer
Primary Mathematics Adviser for Hertfordshire for many years, Sheila Farmer has also run numerous courses for the DfEE and is presently an independent primary maths consultant and course organiser who works alongside children whenever possible.

Much of the documentation for guidance with mathematics for the young child assumes an instant appreciation of the recording of numbers. The Desirable Outcomes states that "through practical activities children understand and record numbers". But what about the process of coming to know that mathematics is a subject which *can* be represented? There seems to be a simplistic view about the whole issue of children's learning when it concerns the young child and their coming to know about mathematics. The word 'simple' is used quite recklessly when describing the mathematical ideas of the young child – simple for whom? one asks and does this mean that the teaching and learning issues are so simple that they do not demand rigorous interrogation or deserve theoretical accountability? I regularly come upon nursery children who show that their making sense of mathematical notions is far from containing 'simple' ideas. I was recently working with some nursery children exploring the learning objective of quantity. I had presented them with an 'amount', which was a full box of buttons. I was teaching the ideas of many, few, more... all the children declared that they thought there were 'loads' of buttons. In order to encourage the children to engage in the development of their reasoning skills and to probe their formed ideas I used my probing question... "How do you know that?" The surprising response came from Jack... "Cos its got lots of bottoms"! As is so often the case with children the reply puzzled me [it was not an expected comment]. Jack came towards the button-box and placed his hand on the underneath of the box and declared ... "See this is the bottom and [whilst raising his hand up the height of the box] there's lots of them". Jack had just given me one of the best descriptions for measuring an amount in volume terms that I have ever heard. Had Jack a 'simple' idea of amount? Who is to judge the degree of complexity? And if that is what one rising-four is capable of thinking, then what about all the others and will we know if we are continually being reminded that young children are capable of only 'simple' ideas?

Within this knowledge that young children can and do have ideas forming at a complex level there needs to be a curriculum which adequately reflects this. I believe this curriculum to be the one which pays particular attention to the development of learning objectives which start from the premise of their mathematical origins or rather, Back to Basics. I return to my original premise, that is, that young children should be taught the true nature of mathematics. That it is a real happening and that it can be represented and can, therefore, also be symbolised. It is a subject, which

can be represented on paper with 'mark-making' symbols and is therefore something that can and should be "read".

The Desirable Outcomes states that "children begin to use their developing mathematical understanding to solve practical problems". I would suggest that they are *continuing* to use them because mathematical situations have been present in their lives in real terms, since birth and maybe their development therefore depends on the continued acceptance of the mathematics that presents itself in our everyday life. Young children have a sharpened knowledge of fractioning when sharing a pizza and are also bumping into the action of division too. So when the Desirable Outcomes document states that number operations, such as addition and subtraction should be explored. I would suggest that all four operations are present and available for development. When the plate of cookies comes round the children's circle there is a very real view of the diminishing aspect of subtraction, getting fewer and fewer along with multiplication. A nursery child asked "How do you always know that there are enough snacks for us all?"

The emphasis on the language of mathematics in the Desirable Outcomes is in need of a more expansive interpretation. Being mathematical does not rely on a spoken language. This is not to say that it does not have a vocabulary and that indeed we need to encourage the children to communicate their mathematical ideas in all respects including orally. Mathematics is a means of communication, a language that takes the form of images and pictures in the mind, modelling and symbolisation. If these are to be developed fully and their form appreciated it demands that the teaching and learning activity needs to reflect this nature. Young children will be 'doing' addition when they are enacting and observing an addition happening ... here's a group of children let's add some more from the other group ... this type of illustration of the operation will also graphically show its inverse action when the children that are added to one group leave their group with fewer members as a consequence! This action can be symbolised and graphically represented on paper to enhance and illustrate the meaning... then it can and should be READ.

The following is by way of illustration of these principles. It describes some of the kind of work when I have been engaged with nursery children focusing on the development of the notion that mathematics can be represented with symbols. It is naturally in a practical situation because there is no other way that mathematics is the real situation. If we are to raise children's awareness of the marks and symbols that can represent the mathematical situation then the marks used by the children must be within their reach and I regularly

use fruit to model a mathematical situation and I then use tally marks, 'kisses' and 'rings' to represent the particular mathematics. For instance there could be, say, four oranges and three apples in a bag and as the fruit are taken from this they are recorded with an orange or green "ring". When
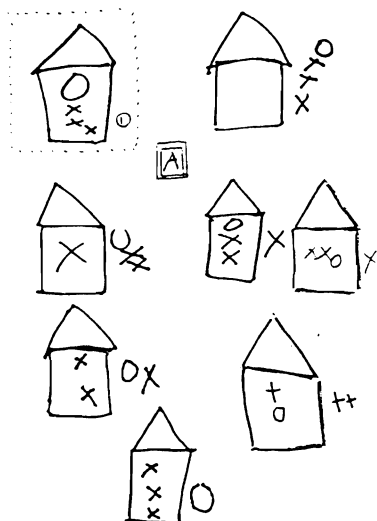

teaching I always have a large piece of paper by my side because I want the children to appreciate that the marks made on the paper record the mathematics in a manner which graphically describes it. This mark making is always negotiated with the children so that it is they who have ownership through the process of inclusion in the creation of the representation.. e.g. "will this be alright for an apple?" After I record the first representation of the fruit the children soon carry out this process for themselves adding the fruit symbols to match the mathematics. When the mathematical situation is complete, that is, all the fruit in the bag have been represented, I ask the children if they can read it. The reply is always the same... "I can't read!" I say with encouragement that I'm sure they can and point to the marks and ask "what does this say?". Immediately comes the
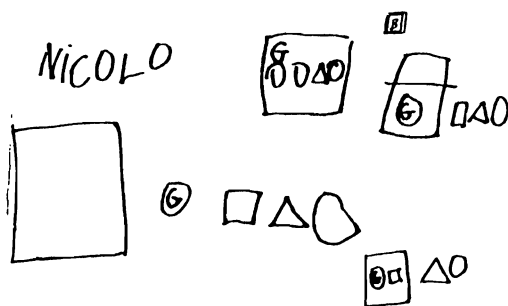

response "It's an orange"... "So you can read" is my response but it takes some convincing. Young children will sometimes want to see more detail on the representation; that can be perhaps a stalk on the 'apple', but it is the shorthand of the representation that we are teaching towards. Our conventional symbols are, after all, the shorthand for the number system and its action.

A second illustration is exemplified on the occasions when I use a soft toy house which contains Goldilocks and the three bears, to model the mathematical situation of 4. I'll represent the house on paper with a conventional house mark and the bears with crosses and Goldilocks with a
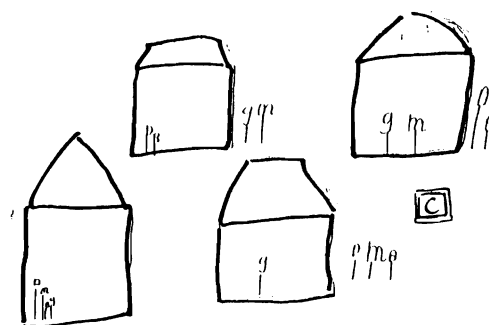

ring. The children are encouraged to read the recording and then to create another from the rearranged model (illustration A). Different ways of arranging the bears and Goldilocks in and outside the house demonstrates the composition of 4. The mathematics is clearly represented by the bears and Goldilocks along with marks the children have used for themselves to record their thinking on paper (illustrations B, C, D). On one occasion a nursery child
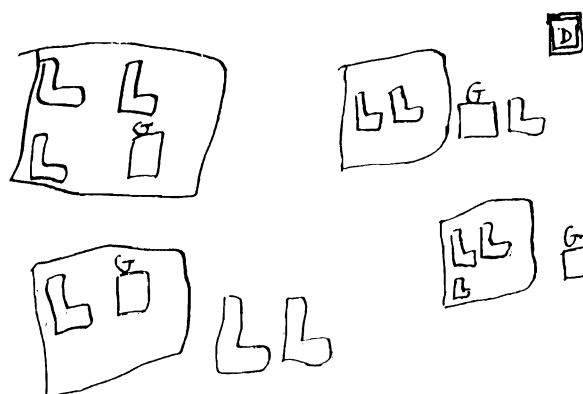
did some more recording at home and brought it into school with the gleeful comment that she had wanted there to be lots of bears (illustration E). Notice that she was able to 'let x be a bear' but the house wasn't in similar shorthand it had to have a chimney and smoke, but then this confidence in the shorthand of symbolisation is something which needs time to develop and time to teach.
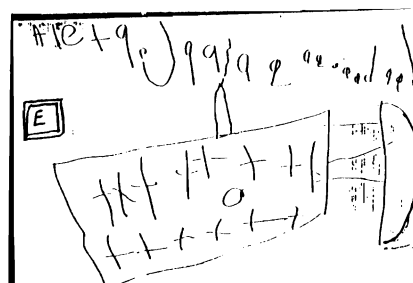

I have often worked with children for whom English is a second language and with the help of the mathematical language of marks and symbols along with gesture and models of the mathematics, we have been able to explore the mathematics together without necessarily a word having been spoken. Of course, I talk a fair amount but there are always other ways to present the mathematics to the children;

with models to be *read*, actions to be *read* and marks and symbol representations to be *read*.

It would be more powerful for the understanding of mathematics if children of all ages were taught and constantly reminded that when mathematics is represented in symbols on paper that it is something to 'read' and to be questioned. I would like them to be asking of it... What is this telling me? What is happening here? I remember very well when I was at school a teacher advising me to read the maths exam paper very carefully before starting. If only I had appreciated that mathematics was something to be read and made sense of in realistic terms rather than something you just did I may well have extended my own mathematics at the time instead of later. September 1998 sees the beginning of the National Year of Reading, so one can hope that the 'reading' of mathematics will be high on the reading list.
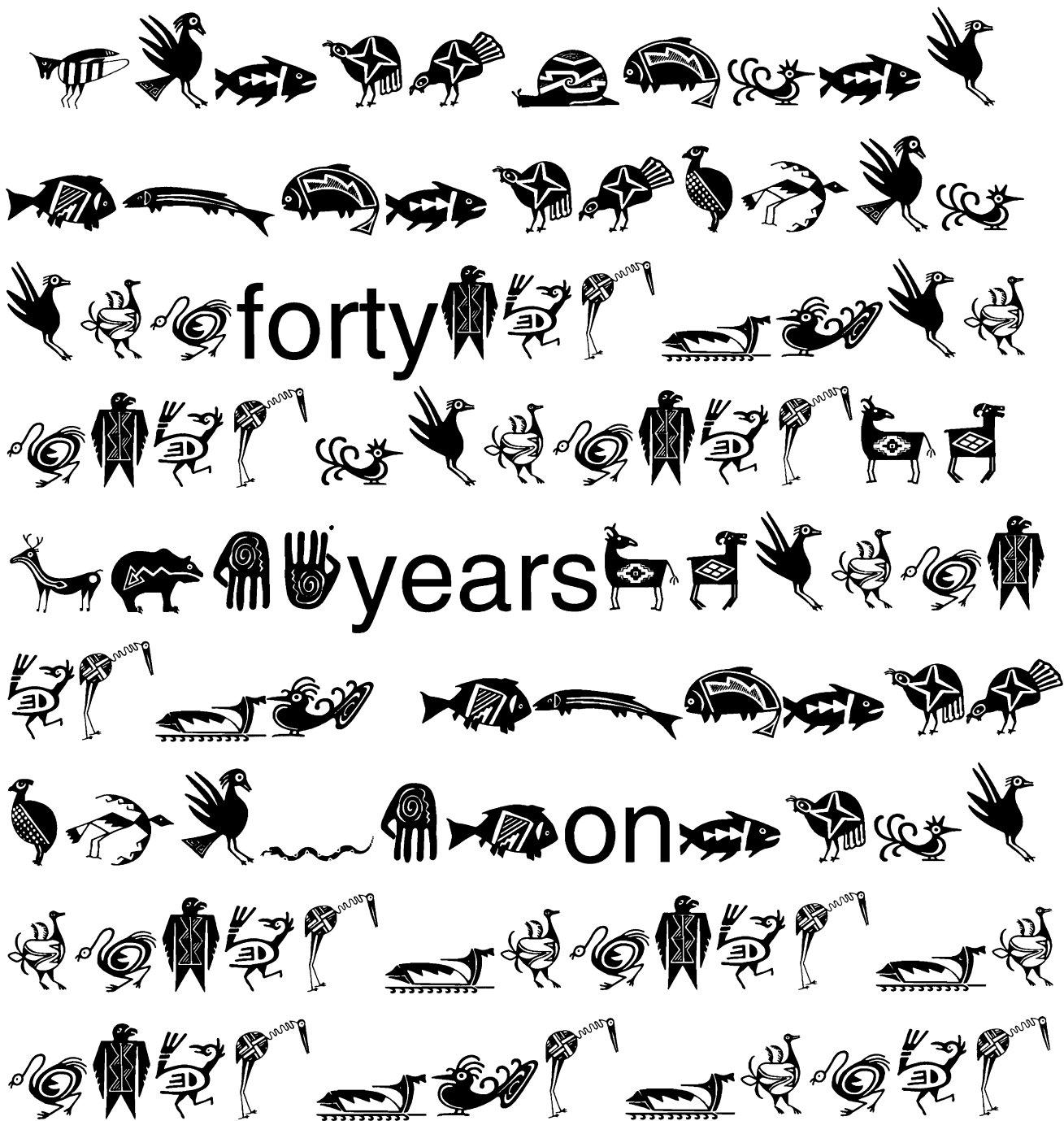
Letters

Dear Editor
Back in 1988, a number of us working at the Institute of Education produced a book on the National Curriculum in which we argued that because of its hasty implementation, its disregard of current curriculum debates and the lack of genuine consultation with teachers and other professionals, the new curriculum structure had little chance of lasting success. Ten years later, the Curriculum at Key Stage 4 has been more or less discarded; and we are now told (Report, January 14th) that pupils under the age of 11 will no longer be required to stick to the detailed national syllabuses in history, geography, design and technology, art, music and physical education. It really is a national disgrace that for nigh on a decade so much time, energy and money have been spent on such a short-lived and ill-considered enterprise. We may still have a set of syllabuses for certain pupils at certain ages, but we do not have a national entitlement curriculum in any meaningful sense.

Yours faithfully

Professor Clyde Chitty
Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths College, University of London

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Creation first

David Blunkett and Chris Woodhead (*TES,* January 16) both speak as though literacy and numeracy are pre-conditions of creativity and imagination. First, they imply, children must learn to read and write and count; later they will be able to apply their hard-won skills to creative effect. They are mistaken. Unless the imagination is critically engaged from the outset in the business of acquiring literacy and numeracy, literature and mathematics lose their value no less than their charm. Imagination is central, whatever the subject matter, however young the child.

Letter by Michael Armstrong, published in *The Times Educational Supplement,* 6 February 1998

To: Rt Hon David Blunkett MP
5 March 1998

Dear Mr Blunkett

I wonder if you have read Peter Newsam's article 'How can we know the dancer from the dance?' in the current issue of *FORUM* magazine? In it he argues that we cannot separate the issue of standards in schools from that of the structure of secondary education in this country. Whilst I do not agree with all his conclusions, he certainly makes a strong case for looking again at the effects of the diversity of provision and in particular at the position of comprehensive schools, few of which are genuinely comprehensive because of the wide range of selective schools – independent, grant-maintained and grammar – which cream off the more able pupils.

I was personally very disappointed that you changed your position from 'no selection' before the election to 'no more selection' after it. It seems to me – as a teacher of thirty-one years' experience, twelve of them as a Head – that we will never have genuine equality of opportunity in education in this country until a government is prepared to address the problem of selection.

I should be grateful to know your views on this subject.

With thanks for your attention
Yours sincerely

Derek Gillard
60 Oxford Road, Marston, Oxford

Your Reference 1236M   17 March 1998

Dear Mr Gillard

Thank you for your letter of 5 March to the Secretary of State the impact of selection in schools. I have been asked to reply.

I can assure you that Ministers very much share your concern about the problems which have arisen in some areas as a result of the piecemeal growth of partial selection. All too often the result has been confusion and uncertainty for parents. That is why they are seeking, through the School Standards and Framework Bill currently before Parliament, to prevent any school from introducing further partial selection by ability.

I can also assure you that the reference to the Bill to existing partial selection as a 'permitted' form of selection does not necessarily mean that it will continue in all cases. The Bill provides that decisions about whether existing partial selection should continue will be determined locally, via the new admissions framework. This means that schools and LEAs will be required to consult each other annually about their proposed admission arrangements and for any disagreements to be referred to the adjudicator. The adjudicator, guided by a statutory code of practice will have the power to rule out existing partial selection.

The aim is to give responsibility and freedom to those at local level to determine what works best in their area.

I hope this is helpful.
Yours sincerely

P. A. CONNELL
Admissions Team 2

To: Rt Hon Andrew Smith MP
2 April 1998

Dear Mr Smith

National School Tests

As the annual round of 'SATs' approaches, I am becoming increasingly concerned about the pernicious effects of the present arrangements for the testing of pupils in schools and the publication of the results in national league tables.

I acknowledge, of course, that assessment of pupils' progress is essential to the process of education. Indeed, schools have always tested children to provide information for:

- Teachers – so that they can evaluate and improve the quality of their teaching;
- pupils – so that they can be advised how to improve their work;
- parents – so that they can have accurate knowledge about how their children are progressing;
- local authorities and other stake-holders who have a legitimate interest in the effectiveness of the education service.

However, it seems to me that the present arrangements have become a sledgehammer to crack a nut and that they are producing some very unpleasant side effects. For example:

- The Children's Society reports (31 March) that exclusions are rising rapidly as schools, understand-ably, try to remove children who may lower their tests scores;
- I know personally of a school where the Special Needs teacher has been told by her Head not to allocate resources to the children who most need them but to target children who might be expected to move up a Level in the SATs;
- I know secondary school Heads who say some of their brighter students – especially boys – deliberately do badly in the tests because 'it's not cool to be bright';
- I have seen for myself the effects of stress on young children as the SATs approach;
- The curriculum is becoming distorted as teachers concentrate on the content of the tests. Important though reading, writing and maths are, they are not the whole of education – the development of personal and social skills is vital but not easily testable;
- The organisation of schools – especially primary schools - is being distorted by the increased use of streaming and setting to maximise test scores – resulting in a lowering of self-esteem among the 'failures';
- There is now plenty of evidence of the negative effects of the league tables on schools in poorer areas.

It seems to me that the present arrangements for testing are reinstating some of the more pernicious outcomes of the now discredited eleven-plus. Would you please bring these concerns to Mr Blunkett's attention and ask him how he intends to eliminate the unpleasant effects of the present testing regime?

With thanks for your attention and best wishes
Yours sincerely

Derek Gillard

Telling

Tell-tale tit!
Your tongue will split
and all the dogs
will have a little bit.

I did not tell
and held shame's flood behind my eyes,
when Danny Young and Micky Price
stole my lunch and ate my cake,
thumped my arms and made them ache.

If you tell,
we'll give you hell
and squash your face
all over the place.

I did not tell
for ash of anguish parched my tongue
when hulking, grinning Danny Young
snatched my anorak by the hood
and trod it deeply into mud.

If you tell,
I'll give you hell
and squash your face
all over the place.

I did not tell
though flames of anger scorched my face
when oily, rat-eyed Micky Price
gave my work his admiring look,
then squirted ink across my book.

If you tell,
I'll give you hell
and squash your face
all over the place.

I only told
with rocks of sorrow in my heart,
when Danny Young and Micky hurt
poor Lee, although he swore he'd lost
the coins that getting past them cost.

Tell-tale tit!
Your tongue will split
and all the dogs
will have a little bit.

After I told
and Dan and Micky left our school,
the sun continued shining still.
Nothing dreadful happened. In fact,
so far my tongue is still intact.

From *Rainbow*, poems by Barrie Wade
(Oxford University Press, 1995)

Book Reviews

Developing Pedagogies in the Multilingual Classroom: the writings of Josie Levine

MARGARET MEEK (Ed.), 1996. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books. 140 pp, £12.95, ISBN 1 85856 067 5

Josie Levine was a memorable teacher – of children, students and fellow teachers. She died on the 4 August 1996 after a long fight against cancer. This book brings together some of her writings which reflect her experience and work with learners and teachers in multilingual classrooms. The chapters chart the progress of Josie's own learning, first with immigrant children in the secondary school where she worked in Birmingham in the 1960s; later through her involvement in developing materials for teaching English and bilingual pupils through the Schools Council project *Scope Stage 2*; and finally her work with teachers and the search for concepts to articulate comprehensive, meaningful and accessible theories of teaching and learning..

Although all the pieces in this collection have been published elsewhere, Margaret Meek, the editor, has created a framework by using quotations from Josie's writings in *Bilingual Learners in Mainstream Classrooms* (Falmer Press, 1990) to preface each chapter. This device provides both continuity and commentary and underlines the clarity and unity of the book as a whole.

The title of the book will be seen by those working in multilingual classrooms as of direct relevance to their practice. I would however, wish to commend this book to all teachers concerned with language and learning; for the issues that Josie raises about the need for structure and rigour are as relevant to teachers in monocultural areas as they are to those who work in multicultural, inner city schools. Her belief in the need to focus on language development through the functional use of language is set out in chapters 3 and 4, which are concerned with an analysis of the Scope 2 materials and the need for teachers to consciously develop appropriate pedagogies for their classroom contexts. The criteria she used for assessing classroom practice (pp. 61 & 62) are as relevant today as they were in 1981 and provide all language teachers with useful pointers for the creation of good learning environments. Her concept of hospitality to diversity is one which I believe still has resonance today; particularly for those teachers who believe that it is their responsibility to create contexts for learning which acknowledge and recognise where the learner comes from, both in socio-cultural terms and in relation to their experience and knowledge of language.

The book also includes her critique of the Kingman Report, which is not just a critique but is also a clearly articulated exposition of the need for a language model that "is designed to inform, to promote discussion not uncritical acceptance, to bear possible transformation – even rejection – if it cannot respond to the questions being asked of it" (p. 70). The last section of the chapter sets out just such a model; a model which is informed by the theories of Halliday and Vygotsky and by the practical experience and understanding of those teachers who worked with Josie to produce the response.

This close relationship between active theories and the action/practice of teachers is very evident in chapter 8, 'Pedagogy: the case of the missing concept'. Early in this chapter, she raises a question, which is particularly apposite at the present time:

In this society, we certainly did not, and still do not, grant the study of teaching the standing of a science, nor the practice of it, the standing of an art form. Indeed, historically, we have defined the study and practice of teaching narrowly and, even unconsciously, we have arranged things so that the profession and its practitioners have every possible kind of low status conferred upon them, When teaching is so complex a set of practices, when it is so important to the development of individuals and of society, when it is culturally and economically of such importance, how is it that it can be so negatively positioned? (p. 97)

She goes on to provide a clear account of what the concept of pedagogy includes and why she has 're-appropriated the word pedagogy'. She says:

It is always difficult to work against dominant assumptions, especially when these are held by many within the profession as well as more widely in society. However, if pedagogy is an area of reflective study, practice, analysis and action research seems still to be a missing concept within the dominant construction of education, the pedagogy principle itself is not missing. It exists, developed over a period of some considerable time by a minority of teachers and educationalists, who have a mind for the intellectual, moral and political commitment to greater equality of opportunity and to greater equality of outcomes in education. The pedagogic medium for the growth and nurture of this praxis within teacher education has been a continuing developmental interaction, with teachers as theory-makers in their own right in reflexive partnership with teacher educators. The product of this dialectic relationship between teachers and teacher educators, and between theory and practice, is an increasingly recognisable area of practical and theoretical knowledge at once integrative and autonomous. (p. 103)

Developing Pedagogies in Multilingual Classrooms is a thought provoking book which takes us on a journey through episodes in the lifetime of someone who was articulate analytical, creative and constructive.

During the last few months of her life, Josie was involved in collecting and making decisions about what to include in the book. She was delighted to think that her writing would become accessible to new and future generations of teachers; for, although she had worked assiduously to support the publication rights of teachers, to give them a 'voice', she had, as Jean Bleach says in the postscript chapter, neglected to protect her own publication rights. Sadly she did not live to see the published book, but the force of her writing is such that the power of her work will live on in the minds of those who knew her and for those who encounter what she has to say for the first time.

Liz Thomson

Exclusion from School
and Racial Inequality

AUDREY OSLER, 1997
London: Commission for Racial Equality. 86pp, £5.00,
paperback. ISBN 1 85442 196 4

The continuing rise in the number of permanent exclusions
at both primary and secondary level (at 12,500 in 1995/6
an increase in 13% over the previous year) has generated
considerable debate in the media, frequently centering on
the "pupil from hell" scenario. The fact that the vast majority
of those excluded were boys (8 out of 10) and that, in
relation to the excluded population at large, black pupils
are being exluded at seven times the rate of their white
counterparts has also been widely publicised.

This report, based on research by Dr Osler and her
colleagues from the School of Education at Birmingham
University, is an important and considered contribution to
the discussion. The report examines the background to the
rise in exclusions but more importantly "seeks to identify
good practice at both school and local education authority
levels which might reduce the number of excluded pupils
generally, and particularly address the current
disproportionately high representation of African Caribbean
pupils among those excluded from school." It is based on
empirical research carried out in 450 primary, secondary
and special schools in Birmingham LEA and supplemented
with interviews with school staff, pupils and LEA officers.

It also includes good practice case studies of six schools
from two West Midlands LEAs which were actively tackling
the issue of exclusion.

After a thorough examination of the statistics, which
acknowledges the problems in relation to incomplete data
and inconsistent definitions and looks at the profile of the
cohort of excluded pupils, including reasons for exclusion,
the report concludes that "The statistical evidence does not
throw much light on why African Caribbean pupils,
particularly boys, are more likely to be excluded than their
white peers".Even in schools which have reduced the number
of exclusions overall the ethnic disparities remain.

The empirical evidence is treated cogently and with
clarity but the main strength of the report lies in its attempts
to isolate those aspects of good practice at school and LEA
level which seem to make a positive contribution to the
reduction of exclusions. Although much of what is reported
is equally relevant to white or black pupils – clear and
consistent behaviour policies owned by all, effective pastoral
care, relevant curriculum, improved home school liaison-
certain strategies such as the use of mentoring programmes
and the establishing of equal opportunities programmes
which address issues of racial harassment by both pupils
and staff may be particularly efficacious in relation to African
Caribbean pupils. One head teacher is quoted as saying
"We've tried to develop equal opportunities practice and
have tried to be very open about it, for instance, inviting
someone in to work with and support African Caribbean
boys, taking them off their timetable for an hour a week".

The report also cites the success of the KWESI project,
a community based scheme run by black men concerned
about the crisis in the education of African Caribbean boys.

In order to fill out the picture of approaches to exclusion
in the case study schools the pupils were asked to give
their views on discipline and related matters. Teachers'

attitudes were identified as being a major contributing factor
to how pupils felt. One African Caribbean boy wrote:
"If the teachers could be more fair and understanding
with the kids (it would help)."

Involvement in the decision making processes of the
school through school councils or similar forums was also
seen to have direct benefits.

LEAs are also seen as having an important role to play
in the reduction of exclusions and the promotion of good
practice. This includes requiring schools to keep accurate
records of both fixed term and permanent exclusions to
include ethnic monitoring and to adequately support schools
who take in excluded pupils. The research indicated that
there was "an urgent need for LEAs to promote open
discussion on behaviour issues, racial equality and a child's
right to education in order for the high proportion of African
Caribbean pupils being excluded from school to be
reversed."

The last section of the report is devoted to a series of
good practice recommendations for schools and local
authorities which if put into place would help reduce the
level of exclusions and make schools better environments
for all pupils. These should be pinned up in all staff rooms
and LEA offices. They should provide the basis for INSET
programmes and be on the agenda of governors' meetings.

What makes this report particularly helpful is the
combination of easily understandable empirical data with
concrete suggestions for practice. It is a relevant and
powerful contribution to a debate too often mired in
prejudiceand unsubstantiated assertions. Furthermore the
suggestions for good practice which it provides could, if
implemented, have a real impact on all those pupils, black
or white, for whom the educational experience is an unhappy
and negative one.

Jenny Thewlis

The Emerging 16-19 Curriculum:
policy and provision

JEREMY HIGHAM, PAUL SHARP &
DAVID YEOMANS, 1996
London: David Fulton Publishers. paperback, £14.99

There is a need for a comprehensive, critical and
forward-looking analysis of the 16-19 curriculum. This book
misses the mark. It starts out from a limited outlook. First,
the authors explore the 16-19 curriculum in relation to
schools – and sixth form and further education colleges
are mostly mere shadows on the stage. Secondly, and partly
because of the school-centred nature of the research (data
from schools in six LEAs – Leeds, Bradford, Kirklees,
Calderdale, Wakefield and North Yorkshire), significant
elements within the 16-19 curriculum get short shrift. NVQs
do not get much coverage. TVEI post-16 gets a page. Modern
apprenticeships get a line. Thirdly, there is no underpinning
theory, model or analysis of the dynamics of change within
the 16-19 curriculum. Fourthly, there is not much policy
prescription. The authors are coy about what should be
done with the 16-19 curriculum. They speak for greater
input from teachers and students in the design of 16-19
curricula and breaking down the academic/vocational divide
– long advocated by many others. Fifthly, there is no
substantial analysis of the youth labour market, which

periodically rebounds on the authors (for example, in attempting to explain rising staying-on rates in Chapter 1).

Basically, all that is left is historical analysis, description and the reporting of research findings. On the first two counts the book scores highly. Despite working to the limitations pinpointed above, the authors provide a detailed contemporary history of change within the 16-19 curriculum and how policy developments impacted on school sixth forms. Some of the descriptions of policy formation processes (for example, on GNVQ) are authoritative and of lasting value. In terms of reporting research findings, the 'voice' of the student (as opposed to the teacher or head teacher) is all too rarely heard. But when it is (in Chapter 8 especially) the book really comes alive.

The first two chapters outline some of the external influences on the 16-19 curriculum and provide an overview of developments. Chapters 3-4 centre upon A-levels as the dominating element in 16-19 education and training. Various attempts to change A-levels (such as modularisation) are described. All of them ultimately founder on the Conservative Government's determination to maintain A-levels as the 'gold standard' in post-16 education. Chapters 5-6 are concerned with the vocational curriculum, though this is largely about the rise and rise of GNVQs. Chapter 7 outlines moves towards forging a core curriculum. Chapter 8 – a very well-structured and informative chapter – is on careers guidance and information. The book ends with a chapter which signals a discussion on the direction in which the 16-19 curriculum is headed, but this discussion never gets going.

As a reference point the book is of great value: extensive bibliography, good on 'whens' and 'whos'. In terms of its analytical insights I remain unconvinced.

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