

# FORUM

**for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education**

**Volume 41  
Number 3  
Autumn 1999**

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SIMON CAULKIN. **Work: learning to count what really counts**

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## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

(Volume 42, Nos 1-3, 2000), post free  
 Individuals, £18.00 (US\$30.00)  
 Schools, £24.00 (US\$38.00)  
 Libraries, £35.00 (US\$60.00)

This journal is published three times a year, in Spring, Summer and Autumn. Those three issues constitute one volume. ISSN 0963-8253

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# ‘Honey, I just shrunk the curriculum’

And the teachers. And the children. Each in their own way are being, to use an overfamiliar Americanism, ‘dumbed down’ by present government initiatives. Subject specialists, for instance are concerned that the new curriculum proposals will make for a merely simplistic approach rather than establish the desired simplification; young children’s potential, despite the occasional conciliatory nod in the direction of social and creative development, is still merely reduced to achievement in certain 3R and clerical skills and teachers are identified as a group for whom payment by results is perceived as appropriate and sufficient motivation.

In business, the phrase ‘dumbing down’ has been frequently used as a derisory term in the context of firms that have shed workers and resources in a claim to become ‘lean, mean and hungry for challenge’, the fatal attraction of the short term answer being hard to resist. In the event, they have often shed invaluable experience and know-how and as a result become less ‘intelligent’ as an organisation. As educationalists are only too aware, there are a great many indications that these and similar events are happening in education too, because the business model, in official eyes, is becoming coterminous with a model for education. Not for nothing is *FORUM* reprinting an article by Simon Caulkin in this edition that originally appeared in the *Observer* business section. On first reading it may not seem to be about education. On second reading it is inescapably so.

It evidently appeals to bureaucracy to think of education in business terms: we are only too familiar with expressions such as targets, quality management, appraisal, product etc., and in some ways it may have helped to clarify some otherwise fuzzy areas, but being able to speak the language does not necessarily mean one wants to take out citizenship. We still have a sense of unease and misgiving, of being somehow ‘taken over’. The Government sees this rather negative reaction as just one more example of predictably Luddite recalcitrance on behalf of teachers, yet could the misgivings be based on the fact that while we hear tell of business methods, there’s very little talk of business ethics?

It doesn’t need a long memory to recall what happened when market forces were allowed free rein under the Thatcher government and for market forces in education nowadays read ‘privatisation’. There appeared, then as now, little talk about any other underlying ethic than the one of becoming very rich, preferably very quickly and by whatever means available. Even today, scan the business and management shelves of a large bookshop, as I did recently, and only two out of approximately four hundred volumes so much as mentioned the word ‘ethics’ in their title. Anita Roddick, of Body Shop, interestingly herself once a teacher, has been sufficiently concerned about this trend to establish an Academy of Business based at the University of Bath which serves to promote the study of business ethics.

Why should this concern us though, when schools, we are assured, are secure in their moral base? They are frequently quoted as being the most moral context in which many children will ever find themselves. QCA is valiant in its attempts to secure a place for and recognition of, moral values in education. But if the base is shifting, if ‘edu-business’ is to become to schools as ‘agri-business’ is to farming, then conflict is unavoidable and pupils will be the first to sense a discrepancy in values that are stated and values that are acted upon. Public exam results equal profits, test results equal measurement and league tables remind them and their teachers that it is the weakest (and most vulnerable) that go to the wall. As a ‘Best Buy’ index they are a crude but effective way of introducing business ‘values’ into education. Schools are not favoured that value cooperation over competition and streaming – and let us remember that five is the recommended starting age. Can’t start too early knowing you’ll never make it to manager.

The name of the game then is competition. In casting around for a reason to justify an overwhelming need to control, Chris Woodhead has consistently reminded us that the baseline is to make Britain, as, if not more, competitive than other countries. In business though, firms that are unsuccessful conveniently disappear, are taken over and never heard of again. Inconveniently for society, however, schools that don’t make it and in particular pupils that don’t make it, become more rather than less conspicuous.

We are reminded *ad nauseam* that competition has to have losers as well as winners. The losers in this case are these very children but by extension it is also society itself. In one of the neatest pieces of statistical evidence ever to come the way of education, exclusion rates began an inexorable rise from the introduction of the National Curriculum to reach an unprecedented level once the league tables began to be published. The Government, being made aware of the high proportion of the excluded that were involved in juvenile crime etc., have recently ordered schools to cut back on exclusion. In other words, the losers were seen as starting to cost society money in terms of disaffection, court and police time and unemployment. (Inconveniently, the business manuals never mentioned this as a possible outcome.)

The cost to the lives of individual children is incalculable but rather than showing a sudden and inexplicable rise in naughtiness or lack of application, it might be nearer the mark to suggest that schools, who used to give time and resources to such pupils at risk, now, often against their better judgement, find they can no longer do so. They are placed in an unenviable and invidious position as the Government vainly tries to have its economic cake and eat it without cost.

The wholesale adoption of this particular, and in the opinion of a number of management specialists, rather outdated business model, is thus proving

counter-productive. The more modern business gurus are now starting to talk in terms of trust, mutual confidence and cooperation. Simply put, it seems this makes money.

To the majority of educationalists though, these values have always made the kind of ethical sense by which society

as a whole eventually profits, albeit in a rather wider and less materialistic sense. To many their adoption as official education policy can't come too soon.

Annabelle Dixon

## Foreword

This edition of *FORUM* has a particular focus on the English curriculum and the ways in which literacy is becoming increasingly perceived by government as simply the acquisition of a utilitarian tool. Spoken language too, as Roy Corden also points out, is being seen as far less important than it was then or fifteen years ago. In a careful examination of the primary SATs tests and the National Literacy Strategy, both Pat D'Arcy and Judith Graham see a move away from reading for meaning and a narrow concentration on the secretarial aspects of writing and reading.

Other articles touch on a variety of topics which are also the subject of current discussion. For example, the role of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) in promoting teaching as a research-based profession. Philippa Cordingley, who is responsible for the management of the TTA network of policies promoting such research, writes in this edition from the official point of view and we invited Paul Hammond, who was a recipient of a TTA grant, to write about the research he was consequently able to undertake into the strategies used by effective heads of departments to positively influence classroom practice.

The articles by Sarah Borden, Trevor Kerry and Mike Johnson also concern school-based research. The latter describes his own investigations into the availability of textbooks in secondary schools, noting the knock-on effect of inadequate resourcing in more deprived schools. Trevor Kerry and his colleague, Brent Davies, report on a survey they undertook amongst two groups of students in order to gather their opinions about the feasibility of a five-term

year. Looking further afield, Sarah Borden is concerned in her article with the ways in which media images of third world countries affect the perceptions of primary age children with regard to global food injustices.

Colin Richards invites teachers to move into a nottoo distant future world in which an imaginary schools inspector makes observations in relation to performance management that have a certain sense of *deja-vu*.

This return to nineteenth-century utilitarianism is also picked up by Vic Kelly in a powerful article that describes how the ideals and even the idea of comprehensive education is being undermined by successive government initiatives. Neil Selwyn is also concerned that industry and business are making inroads into educational management, particularly with reference to the National Grid for Learning. As he puts it, is the NGfL about earning or learning?

Simon Caulkin, in a reprinted *Observer* article, demonstrates how business is shot through with muddled thinking. This has obvious implications for this present Government's approach to education which seems to support a strangely uncritical view of a simplistic business model that, as Caulkin points out, is already deeply flawed. If the Government is going to take the business model as its touchstone, it would be as well for them and us to know what they actually mean by 'business' and which model they are adopting.

# Comprehensive Threats

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## Vic Kelly

Vic Kelly is Emeritus Professor of Education at Goldsmiths College, University of London. His numerous publications, both his own and those written with colleagues, are now standard references. In this article he describes the very real and not always recognised dangers facing comprehensive education, as its very rationale is threatened by government initiatives that are based on values entirely inimical to its existence.

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We tend to think that the main threat to the future of comprehensive education is to be found in the fact that many of its long-term opponents have now come into the open and many others who may once have been uncertain have had their doubts strengthened by the constant rubbishing of educational standards, which was the essential prerequisite to the introduction of the National Curriculum, and the criticisms of current standards which continue to be asserted by the ‘Yes, minister’ persons of OFSTED. In short, it is easy to see the problem as extending no further than an overt reassertion of elitism (as in the ideologies of the privatisers, the minimalists and the pluralists to which Denis Lawton [1989, 1992, 1994] has drawn attention), and/or of those purely pragmatic concerns which have dogged the movement from the outset.

The main theme of this article, however, is that the changes brought about by recent policies, established by a Conservative Government but now – sadly – endorsed by ‘New Labour’ (or, perhaps more accurately, ‘New Tory’) have not been restricted to changes in methodology, however sweeping, but have altered the very ideological foundations of our educational practices in such a way as to render them undemocratic – as I have argued at length elsewhere (Kelly, 1995) – and, in a fundamental way, inimical to the ideals of the Comprehensive Movement. For that Movement has from the start been founded on a particular set of educational ideals and principles, while current policies, whatever their accompanying rhetoric, are not based on ideals or principles of any kind; they represent at root a rejection of the notion that educational planning should begin from principles derived from social ideals and a capitulation to the view that it must be geared to the attainment of short-term political and economic goals; a rejection of the view that education must be of value to the educand, what the Crowther Report (CACE, 1959, para. 83, p. 54) called ‘the right of every boy and girl to be educated’ and a total commitment to the notion of education as ‘a national investment’ (ibid.). The Crowther Report described these two aims of the educational system as of equal (and interlinked) importance; current policies have rejected the former in favour of a massive concentration on the latter.

Any system of education must have its aims. What is crucial is whether those aims are translated into objectives, targets, short-term goals, ‘bite-sized’ chunks of knowledge-content, or into underlying moral principles (Kelly, 1989, 1999), whether the system is technicist or moral in its thrust. It is thus on this root problem that the Comprehensive Movement is currently stumbling, and it has two major aspects which we need to identify and recognise – the policies and practices themselves, as they are encapsulated in the National Curriculum and its

associated structures, and the discourse in which those policies and practices are presented for action and ‘discussion’.

## A Comprehensive Curriculum

It may be argued that a major reason for the lack of success of the Comprehensive Movement, even when, in the 1950s, 1960s and into the 1970s, the social and political climate was much more friendly towards it, was that it proved incapable of generating a comprehensive *curriculum*. Comprehensive schools were built or created, but too little effort went into seeking to devise a curriculum to reflect the principles underlying their establishment, so that the emergence of such a curriculum was a very slow process – too slow to enable it to fight off its opponents.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a number of developments which were taking us towards the translation of the comprehensive ideals and principles into an appropriate form of comprehensive curriculum – the spread of mixed-ability groupings, the development of integrated studies of many kinds, the reconceptualisation of many traditional school subjects (new mathematics, Nuffield science, humanities, classical studies, geography for the young school leaver and so on), the emergence of the ‘open school for the open society’ (Bernstein, 1967), and an associated freeing up of assessment procedures to support such developments. It is not unreasonable to see some kind of culmination and official blessing of this movement in the assertions of the HMI documents on the ‘entitlement curriculum’ (DES, 1977, 1983). For ‘entitlement’ was what the whole movement was concerned with, and this was allied to a conviction that such entitlement cannot be achieved by offering everyone the *same* curriculum. Equality of entitlement is a far more subtle notion than that. Hence it began to be defined in terms of ‘areas of experiences’ (DES, 1977), a notion which not only stressed the educational importance of genuine experiences but also opened up the possibility of seeing these experiences as tailor-made to suit individual needs and not off-the-peg ‘ready-mades’ intended, but ill-fitted, to suit all. To change the metaphor, appropriate forms of nutrition are not to be attained by offering everyone an identical diet.

## The National Curriculum

All of these developments were halted by the carefully orchestrated train of events which led up to the 1988 Education Act and the establishment of the monochrome National Curriculum. Whatever a comprehensive curriculum might look like – and it is my view that it would display many of those features just described – the National Curriculum is its mirror-image. And it is so because it reflects none of the ideals of comprehensive education;

indeed it denies all the most fundamental of them. For all its rhetoric of 'entitlement', it palpably does not offer equality of entitlement in any but the most minimal sense. For all its rhetoric of 'developing the potential of all pupils', it manifestly interprets 'potential' in a far from comprehensive form. For all its rhetoric of 'the same good and relevant curriculum', it is clear that 'relevance' is also viewed in a narrow sense – relevance to job-acquisition and the 'needs' of the economy, rather than to individual development, enhancement or enrichment. Its fundamental utilitarianism renders it essentially elitist. It thus represents a rejection of those ideals of social justice and equality which are at the root of the Comprehensive Movement and thus a rejection of that Movement itself, so that the Movement cannot regain any of its lost momentum without a root-and-branch overhaul of the school curriculum.

### **The Legitimated Discourse: National Curriculum speak**

Such an overhaul, however, were it ever to be undertaken, would be handicapped by a much more serious and insidious threat, which needs to be identified and exposed – the threat that stems from the form of educational discourse which has current legitimacy and which has been imposed upon us by successive governments in the promotion of their educational policies. That discourse has been largely accepted by the media (and thus by society at large) and, sadly, by a large proportion of the teaching profession. But, if the comprehensive ideal is to survive the many current attacks upon it, we need to continue to alert people to what has been, and still is, going on.

The problems created by the new discourse stem not merely from its rhetorical style – its use of 'buzz' words (many of them 'hijacked' from the very ideology it is seeking to oust) – nor from its deliberate blurring of the important distinctions between statements of fact and assertions of value or opinion, nor from the macroscopic commercial metaphor by which it has manipulated the schooling system into taking on the form and the practices of industry, seriously misconceived as all of these are. The underlying problem is its deliberate failure to acknowledge a number of important conceptual distinctions and its consequent denial of a number of significant choices.

The current discourse of the educational 'debate', especially as it is employed in all the official documentation of the last two decades (since the demise of HMI as a professionally independent body and the corruption of the office of HM Chief Inspector of Schools), is conducted in language designed to offer a unidimensional view of education, schooling and curriculum, a view which corresponds to the ideology of official policies and practices and excludes even the possibility of alternatives. Hence, those alternatives are progressively removed from our attention, as we are subtly guided into what we may say, do and even think in relation to educational practice. Pre-eminent among those alternatives is the comprehensive ideal, and the loss of several crucial conceptual distinctions constitutes a major threat to that ideal.

Education theory has always been under attack – from teachers themselves as well as from those external to the profession who have wished, for whatever reasons, to manipulate their thinking. And that has made it easier for such manipulation to be implemented. For an important element in education theory, arguably more important than the products of empirical research (important as much of

that has been), has been its attempt, through conceptual research, to provide subtle insights into the nuances of the educational debate, insights which have, in turn, opened up options for more effective practice. Thus we have been offered insights which have taken us beyond simplistic forms and practices in areas such as assessment, evaluation, curriculum planning and, above all, in our understanding of the complexities and the potential and possibilities of the education process itself. These insights and understandings are crucial to the development of comprehensive education in the full sense of that term. Their loss by deliberate removal from the current 'debate', therefore, constitutes a fundamental threat to that development.

Thus, for example, we have progressively been deprived of important conceptual distinctions such as that between assessment and testing, so that we seem to have forgotten about the potentials of those more subtle forms of assessment, such as profiling, which, until quite recently, appeared to open up possibilities of gaining some ground on our elusive comprehensive ideals, precisely because they were matched more closely to a comprehensive form of curriculum. We have lost also the important distinction between management and leadership, so that, at all levels of the education service, we see institutions being managed by people who, if they were effective managers, would surely be earning far larger salaries and perks in commerce or industry, while those same institutions lack the kind of academic and professional leadership which would encourage a raising of standards more effectively and in a more sophisticated sense than any commercial model of management. And we continue to witness the conflation of aims and objectives into aims-and-objectives, which, as I suggested above, has deprived us of a conceptual distinction which is quite crucial to the maintenance of the comprehensive ideal.

This kind of loss – or deliberate fudging – of important conceptual distinctions, then, is leading to a limitation on our awareness of the choices which we might otherwise be able to see as open to us, not only as individuals but also as a society. And that is the very purpose of this kind of political control of our discursive practice. For those responsible for the current political orthodoxy do not wish the existence of those choices to be drawn to anyone's attention. And they have two reasons for this: first, they do not wish us to hanker after any alternatives to that which is imposed; and, second, they do not wish to be required to produce reasoned justification for the choices they have made on our behalf. To persuade us that the monochrome curriculum they are offering is the only choice, is to avoid both of these potentially nasty consequences.

The major loss is the loss of a conceptual distinction which I wish to claim is crucial to the maintenance of the comprehensive ideal – the loss of the conceptual distinction between *education* and other kinds of teaching activity, such as instruction and, particularly, training.

Without restating Richard Peters's (1965, 1966) famous analysis, it is important to remind ourselves that there is a form of teaching, for which we tend to reserve the term 'education', which is characterised, amongst other things, by being intrinsic rather than extrinsic or instrumental in its focus, qualified by its presumed value to the pupils rather than mere economic or even social ability and by being concerned with its contribution to the development of the individual recipient of such teaching. Some of us

have been consciously and deliberately engaged for years in teaching which is not the mere 'delivery' of subject knowledge or training for 'employability', but has been focused on providing our pupils or students with something we felt might be of intrinsic value and might enrich and enhance their lives in more subtle ways than by the mere provision of a means of livelihood. And there are several reasons why it is important to maintain the conceptual distinction between this form of teaching and those which would be better designated as instruction, training, even indoctrination.

Yet not only has this distinction disappeared from current discourse; those of us who wish to maintain it are regularly castigated for attempting to do so. Only recently, we were urged (by someone whose intellectual stature is such that I'm afraid I have forgotten his name) to recognise that teaching is of course a science and to cease from foolishly claiming it to be an art. When reading this kind of thing and especially those documents which continue to emerge from officialdom, one is tempted to adapt the description of the writings of de Selby attributed by Flann O'Brien (1967, p. 95 in 1993 edition) to 'the eccentric du Garbandier' that 'the beauty of reading a page of de Selby (for 'de Selby' read any recent official or Right Wing assertion or publication on education) is that it leads one inescapably to the happy conviction that one is not, of all nincompoops, the greatest'.

However, the dangers which accrue when this kind of inadequate thinking becomes central to the official discourse and thus creeps into the minds of those who are content to allow their thinking to be manipulated are wide-ranging and extremely damaging. For they lead precisely to where their authors want them to lead – to the disappearance of alternative ways of viewing education, especially those ways which depend upon a deeper and more subtle form of intellectualism.

### Current Policies and Practices

Thus, policies and practices are now based on (and assessed in relation to) extrinsic concerns – targets, goals, attainments, etc. – rather than intrinsic principles. This is a fundamental category error, since it misconceives education as an *instrumental* rather than as a *principled* activity. Mr Blunkett may claim that the Government's policies are based on principles, but in fact, being target oriented, they are based on instrumental objectives. The loss of a clear concept of education means that now 'education' can be spoken of in entirely instrumental terms and the school curriculum can be seen and planned in the same way. The current discourse offers us no basis for viewing teaching and schooling as anything other than training, instruction, even indoctrination. As a result, schools and even universities have become those 'teaching shops' which the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) warned us against. Quantity rather than quality is all. And the evidence for this is to be seen in all aspects of current policy and practice – simplistic, instrumental forms of assessment, appraisal, inspection and thus teacher accountability, the production of 'league tables' for institutions at every level, proposals for performance-related pay and so on. All are based on the 'measurement' of outcomes rather than an assessment of adherence to principles, so that accountability is instrumental and bureaucratic rather than intrinsic and thus democratic (Elliott, 1976; Sockett, 1976). The system from top to bottom is now technicist rather than moral. Nor will a mere reduction

in the amount of content to be included in it, as is presently proposed, in any way alter its fundamental nature.

This creates insoluble problems for the Comprehensive Movement, which is founded on principles such as social justice and equality and cannot in any way justify itself in instrumental terms. You cannot 'deliver' a comprehensive curriculum. It is not a substantive entity. It has to be conceived and planned in adjectival rather than substantive terms (Edwards & Kelly, 1998a), as 'areas of experience' rather than 'bite-sized chunks' of knowledge; it has to be defined in terms of its underlying moral principles rather than its 'intended learning outcomes'; and it has to be directed at the enhancement and enrichment of individual life chances in a much wider sense than the mere provision of useful 'knowledge, skills and understanding'. Thus a curriculum which is not based on these principles must be recognised as inimical to them.

Furthermore, unlike other approaches to the planning of the school system, the comprehensive ideal is not merely an ideology; it is an expression of the fundamental principles of the democratic social context for which we are supposedly planning and, in particular, its commitment to individual freedom and autonomy. To deny that ideal, therefore, is to deny democracy itself, and, since it is precisely such a denial that we are currently witnessing, to protect the Comprehensive Movement we must reassert the democratic values upon which it is founded, and press for the kind of overhaul of the school curriculum which will lead to the establishment of a form of curriculum which will genuinely express comprehensive ideals and democratic values.

Retaining, even extending, comprehensive schools, and resisting the resurrection or extension of the grammar school, will not by themselves achieve this. It is a comprehensive curriculum, a school structure which reflects the comprehensive ideal, that we need – and a discourse appropriate to that ideal.

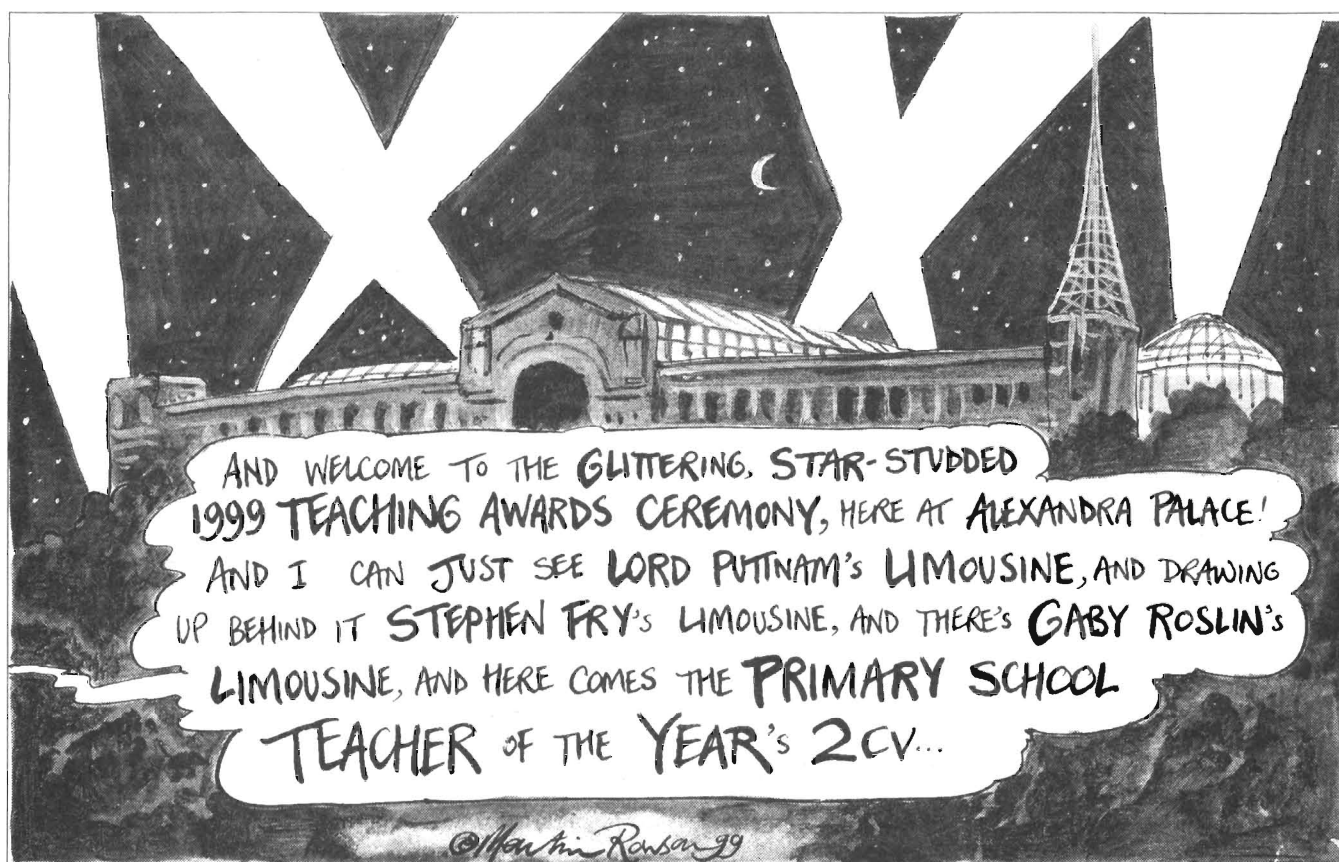
Neither the practice nor the discourse of current policies is compatible with the comprehensive ideal. And not only do both represent major threats to it; they reflect its complete overthrow and replacement by a system which is totally detrimental to it. The comprehensive ideal cannot be attained within the present system. It has to be recognised as an alternative to that system.

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Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 16 July 1999.

# Work: learning to count what really counts

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Reprinted from the *Observer*, 16 May 1999. It is something of a departure for *FORUM* to reprint an article from the business pages of a national newspaper but readers are invited to substitute 'DfEE/OFSTED' for the word 'companies'.

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One of the early promises made for computers was that unlimited information, available instantaneously, would improve the quality of management decision-making. Except in a few scientific cases – such as oil exploration – this hasn't happened. Computer makers are poor adverts for their own products. IBM in the eighties, then Digital and now Compaq have all fallen flat on their print-outs. For all companies' colossal spending on computers and information systems, experts are hard-pressed to identify any impact on white-collar productivity.

The reason for this is that most companies are trussed up in their own measurement systems. It's not that they don't have enough information, they have too much, and most of it is useless because they can't distinguish what is important from what isn't.

One consequence is that, despite their many reports, most firms cannot reliably tell whether success is due to their own brilliance or (as is often the case) outside factors such as the business cycle.

This explains why so many companies lauded as 'excellent' by the experts one moment turn into duffers the next. Like M&S or Sainsbury, they don't realise when they are running on empty.

'The two most common sins of management are not paying attention to the right things and/or paying attention to the wrong things', says consultant John Seddon of Vanguard Consulting, a specialist in performance measures.

Measurement has a strong impact on behaviour. People know that under or out-performing the measures bring punishment or reward, and act accordingly. Hence the management cliché that what's measured gets managed – 'You get what you count', says Seddon.

But few managers realise that this is precisely what makes measurement such a two-edged weapon. Wrong measures equals wrong behaviour. Moreover, not everything should be measured anyway. As Einstein put it, 'Not everything that counts can be counted. And not everything that can be counted, counts'.

Quality guru W. Edwards Deming, a hard-headed statistician, believed that 97 per cent of what mattered in a business couldn't be measured – qualities such as intelligence, integrity, imagination, genuine customer friendliness. Unfortunately, the unquantifiable is harder to manage than budgets, targets and standards – so managers spend almost all their time managing the numbers.

Measurement gives management the sense of control, though control is often an illusion. Managing purely 'by the numbers' – whether league tables, benchmarking, waiting lists, punctuality or productivity targets or standards – is always always counter-productive.

Why? Because if the numbers are what's important, that's what people manage. Almost all work performance depends overwhelmingly on the system rather than the individual worker – from 80 to 95 per cent, according to some estimates. Unable to improve the system, individuals 'improve' the numbers, because that's what managers want to hear.

In one company Seddon looked at, managers couldn't understand why, when the sales, production and delivery departments were meeting their targets, customers were up in arms and costs were still going through the roof.

On investigation they found out that to meet their monthly targets, salespeople would hold orders back or move them forward, or even book 'dummy' orders from friendly customers, cancelling them later.

Manufacturing scheduled production to meet its numbers irrespective of previous delivery promises. It often 'ignored' the cancellation of dummy orders and produced them anyway. Finally, delivery also had monthly targets – which it again met by delaying or advancing shipments, or sometimes delivering uncompleted goods.

All this happens, Seddon insists, not because people are bad but because that's what a bad system invites them to do. As in this case, they are proud of making the numbers – even when the cost to customers and the company is horrendous. Such behaviour is common even in sophisticated companies.

The same phenomenon is rife in the public sector, where short-term political imperatives for service improvement run up against systems which can only be changed in the long term. So people manage what they can: the numbers. Train operators lengthen journey times to meet punctuality targets, hospitals concentrate on easy operations to reduce waiting lists, schools coach bright pupils and exclude difficult ones to improve exam results, and academics churn out papers and books because that's how they win promotion. The numbers improve – but not the service.

For all the same reasons, one of the most damaging measurement obsessions is with profits. Short-term profit figures are as malleable as any other (plus or minus 20 per cent, according to one estimate). They are backward-looking, internally focused and encourage financial engineering over improving customer service.

Choosing and using measures for their primary purpose – as Seddon says, to understand the present and throw light on the future – involves equally important decisions about what *can't* and *shouldn't* be quantified. Otherwise, as strategy guru Igor Ansoff once put it, 'Corporate managers start off trying to manage what they want, and finish up wanting what they can measure'.

**Simon Caulkin**

# A Grid over Troubled Waters?

## The Role of the National Grid for Learning in UK Schooling

Neil Selwyn

Neil Selwyn is a Lecturer in the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol.

As the recent flurry of media interest would indicate, the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) is now beginning slowly to be established. In November 1998 the Government's financial commitment to the initiative was clarified, with a cumulative total of £700 million set to be allocated to the NGfL by the end of 2002 (DfEE, 1998). The content of both the 'official' Virtual Teacher Centre and its commercial counterparts are being substantially augmented and individual schools are now beginning to receive help with the actual management and day-to-day use of the 'Learning Grid'. Nevertheless this still leaves just under three years for the Government to achieve its ambitious aims. By 2002 all the country's 30,000 schools should be connected to the Internet with 75% of staff and 50% of students provided with e-mail addresses (DfEE, 1997). Moreover, a parallel scheme will train 500,000 teachers to 'generally feel confident' with the new technology and, perhaps most vaguely, every school leaver will have a 'good understanding' of information and communications technology (ICT). As the scope of these targets suggests, the Grid has a considerable way to go before it is to be judged a success.

Unlike more contentious policies such as Education Action Zones and the multifaceted 'New Deal' programme, the NGfL appears to be riding high on a wave of political consensus and goodwill. Few, if any, have dared challenge the wisdom and salience of such a project – with any dissenting voices drowned out by a pre-millennial anxiety that UK education must keep up with the ubiquitous yet illusive 'information age'. Aside from a lack of constructive opposition, more worrying is the increasing trend for those in government and industry to present the Grid as a 'technical fix' for UK schooling. Although only comprising a fraction of the Government's much mooted £19 billion set aside for education in its first term of office, the Grid seems to have assumed a disproportionate importance within Labour's programme of reform.

Not only is this a dangerous trend in the short term, obscuring as it does wider implications of the Grid for UK education but, as the remainder of this article will argue, could also prove damaging to the long-term success of the initiative as it begins to be integrated into a previously ICT-resistant education system.

Much previous presentation of educational computing has adhered to a strictly techno-utopist and futurist viewpoint, where virtually all of society's problems, be

they economic, political, social or ethical, are subject to a 'technical fix'. In this way 'seizing the assumed promise of the 'micro-electronics revolution' we are proffered a technological paradise against which our apprehensions and fears seem absurd. No matter how entrenched and worrisome, IT, adroitly managed and rapidly accepted, is the solution' (Robins & Webster, 1989, p. 30). Societal trust in the technological fix has been well established (Weinburg, 1966), ranging from medicine to the environment to education, and has increased immeasurably since the advent of computerised technology. Indeed, as Postman (1992) argues, the overriding 'message' of the computer is that the most serious problems that confront society require technical solutions through fast access to information otherwise unavailable.

What is most concerning is that, with the National Grid for Learning, ICT continues to be treated in a naively deterministic fashion by most in education – in spite of the large-scale reluctance over the past two decades for schools to effectively integrate educational computing into their day-to-day practice (i.e. Watson, 1993; Stevenson, 1997). In this way, as it currently stands, the NGfL looks in danger of repeating many of the mistakes of previous failed educational computing projects, unless a more rounded and objective view of the scheme can be initiated.

### Presenting the Learning Grid as 'Technical Fix'

Since its inception the NGfL has regularly been presented to schools and colleges by the Government, and indeed the IT industry (see Selwyn, 1999), as a universal panacea to their supposed woes. Central to the initial rhetoric has been the benefits to 'employability' and economic effectiveness the Grid will bring; producing a technological workforce for the global age. However, this has also been coupled with the far-reaching effect the NGfL will have in the classroom. On one level this has entailed the compelling picture of the Grid 'modernising the classroom', complementing the popular notions of bringing education into the 21st century and the 'information age'. Moreover, this has also been extended to the notion of the Learning Grid leading to an improvement in 'educational standards'; New Labour's mantra of the moment. On the one hand, this has been expressed in broad terms of increasing students' attainment, whilst also being linked with more specific improvements in numeracy and literacy. The Grid, it seems, will achieve wonders in the classroom, above and beyond

the present capabilities of the distinctly non-technological educational system.

Nevertheless, the discursive construction of the NGfL has not only concentrated on students, with the role of the Grid in assisting teachers also actively promoted in government rhetoric. As well as helping teachers access resources via Virtual Teacher Centres, the Grid has also been touted as creating 'virtual communities' of teachers sharing ideas and good practice in the mould of Rheingold's (1993) 'on-line brain trusts'. In this way the Grid is seen as providing a national forum for teacher debate and discussion. Such visions at least appear tenable, but all too often are extended further into less plausible realms. Thus the NGfL has been linked to solving much wider educational problems; from saving rural schools from the threat of closure to lessening teachers' paperwork and administrative burden. Such rhetoric may be compelling, yet until the Grid actually takes shape for most schools and teachers these promises remain as far-fetched as they are forward thinking (Selwyn, 1998a).

Although a degree of optimism is needed to 'kick-start' the NGfL, the hyperbole that has quickly engulfed the initiative threatens to hinder rather than assist its progress. The discursive construction of the Grid is important inasmuch as it makes an 'ethereal' initiative a tangible concern, shaping expectations among the educational community and consequently influencing the future effectiveness of the policy. However, the danger remains that such wildly enthusiastic promotion of the Grid as a 'technical fix' will obscure the longer term implications of the initiative. Can the Grid realistically be expected to be all things for all people?

The way that technologies are described shape what we do and do not see in them, and how they are ultimately used and treated in society (Bromley, 1997). It is therefore important to ask what such 'stories' omit (and therefore imply as insignificant) and question the assumptions presented to us as 'fact'. Bryson & de Castell (1988) extend this line of analysis when they contend that the burgeoning discourse of educational computing defines and delimits how technology is used in the classroom. In this way we can begin to understand how technologies come to occupy the position they do in society (and therefore education) and reveal the structures of power and real shaping concerns behind the ostensibly bland face of educational computing initiatives.

### Asking Wider Questions of the Grid

So what is this overtly positive presentation of the NGfL currently omitting? Aside from short-term concerns such as the minutiae of funding plans and the potential for students to access 'undesirable' material, the Grid has profound implications for UK education. Fundamentally, the NGfL is highly ideologically significant in terms of educational policy-making. It is crucially reliant on a fusion of public/private cooperation and, alongside schemes such as the University for Industry and Education Action Zones, heralds a significant shift in education policy-making – marking a convergence of education, technology and market-forces. As an emerging policy initiative of this type the Learning Grid would, therefore, appear to reflect the growing influence of market and technological forces in UK education over the last ten years, potentially constituting a 'new educational form' (Kenway et al, 1994). In this way

the National Grid for Learning can be seen as a substantial educational signpost for the new century.

The level of industrial involvement in the initiative is also of key significance. Although the looming presence of multi-national companies such as Microsoft, Fujitsu and Sun has caused some consternation among educators, triggering alarmist accusations of Bill Gates trying to 'take over' schools, the situation is a complex one. A scheme the size and scope of the NGfL could not expect to operate without the IT industry lending its technical expertise and capability. Yet there remains a fine line between philanthropy and profit-making, leaving the typically non-corporate educational system understandably feeling vulnerable. The underlying question will continue to be asked: Is the primary purpose of the Grid one of *learning* or one of *earning* (Selwyn, 1998b)?

Moreover, the implications of the Grid in terms of altering the autonomy of schools needs to be considered. As was pointed out at the time, the consultation document that launched the NGfL was certainly more of a prescriptive blueprint than a genuine attempt at debate (Kenny, 1998); belying a top-down approach that has been at the heart of the last two ineffectual decades of education computing policy. One of the more widely voiced concerns expressed thus far by teachers and educators is that the Grid threatens to be more a technology of dissemination than communication. Unless the NGfL can be seen as moving away from a centralised, one-way model of information diffusion then persuading those at the chalkface to whole-heartedly embrace the initiative may prove to be difficult.

The Grid also has ambiguous implications for local education authorities (LEAs). In the immediate future LEAs are responsible for the initial distribution of funds to schools and, later on, the development of 'local grids for learning'. On the other hand, recent guidance from British Educational Communications & Technology Agency (BECTa) recognises the 'threat' that the Learning Grid poses for LEAs and the potential restructuring of local governance of education. As BECTa (1998, p. 9) points out, 'once the NGfL is in place, schools will be able to obtain on-line guidance and advice from any source which offers it. Distance will be less of an obstacle and schools will have more choice'. Finally, the Grid also has a wider role to play outside of education. Along with the development of a 'People's Network' of museums and libraries, a similar 'Health-Net' initiative in the NHS and the tentative moves towards 'electronic government', the Learning Grid can be seen as an integral component of the UK's emerging 'National Information Infrastructure', mirroring similar highly publicised drives in the USA and East Asia.

Considering all of these issues, it is clear that present discussion of the NGfL is lacking any wider long-term perspective of the initiative beyond the myopic view of the Grid as some sort of technical fix. That the initiative has been promoted along these lines should therefore come as no surprise. As Winner (1994) argues:

*There has been a great outcry during the past decade that there is an emergency in our schools, worrisome indicators of falling achievement test scores and a decline in basic verbal and mathematical skills. A common response has been to attack the malady with a blitz of electronic information, spreading computers throughout the schools, in the hope that this would provide a remedy.* (p. 192)

Nevertheless, it is now essential for educationalists to develop a more concerted response to this potentially far-reaching policy and adopt more realistic expectations of its role and significance for UK education. Unlike previous educational computing initiatives, the Grid has wider implications for many aspects of schooling above and beyond merely enabling students to log onto the Internet. It would be a tragedy if the educational community did not have a hand in standing up to, and shaping, its future.

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# Payment by Performance? Some Inspection Evidence

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## Colin Richards

Colin Richards is a former HMI and OFSTED Specialist Adviser for Primary Education. He is now Professor of Education at St Martin's University College, Cumbria, Honorary Professor at the University of Warwick and Visiting Professor at the Universities of Leicester and Newcastle. In this article he offers some 'evidence' from the files of the surely soon-to-be-established Department of Life Long Learning (in the absence of any put forward by OFSTED) to inform the current debate about the possible implications of performance-related management.

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## IN CONFIDENCE

Secretary of State, Department for Life Long Learning

### Effects of Performance Management on Standards and Quality in Primary Schools

As a result of having to answer parliamentary questions related to the current teacher recruitment crisis you asked for inspection evidence related to the effects of performance management in primary schools introduced by the previous New Labour administration ten years ago in 2001. The inspection evidence comes from two main sources, each raising disturbing issues about a system linking teachers' pay to pupils' performance.

The evidence will be cited in parallel, from OFSTED sources, collated by Arnold Matthew HMI in 2010 and written freely in the spirit of the post-Woodhead reforms, and from Committee of the Privy Council on Education sources, written by Matthew Arnold HMI 'reporting without fear or favour' a hundred and fifty years earlier.

Both report how concentration on a prescribed minimum level of performance has had a constraining effect on the quality of primary education:

*School grants earned by the scholar performing a certain minimum expressly laid down beforehand must inevitably concentrate the teacher's attention on the means of producing this minimum and not simply on the good instruction of his school. The danger to be guarded against is the mistake of treating these two – producing of this minimum successfully and the good instruction of the school – as if they were identical. (MA, 1869)*

*Focusing on getting the maximum number of children operating at Level 4 as 'measured' by national tests has concentrated teachers' minds wonderfully, but has distracted them from wider consideration of the overall quality of education in their schools. The danger has been one of equating the meeting of targets with successful education. The two have not proved identical. (AM, 2010)*

Both comment on the deleterious effects of performance-related pay on the quality of teaching:

*The mode of teaching in the primary schools has certainly fallen off in intelligence, spirit and inventiveness. It could not be otherwise. In a country where everyone is prone to rely too much on mechanical processes, and too little on intelligence, a change in the Department's regulations, which by making two-thirds of the*

*Government grant depend upon a mechanical examination, inevitably gives a mechanical turn to the school teaching and a mechanical turn to the inspection, is and must be trying to the intellectual life of a school. (MA, 1867)*

*Teaching in primary schools is not as creative or as lively as it once was. The Government's insistence on 'driving up' standards as measured on pencil-and-paper tests of dubious validity and reliability has led to too much mechanistic teaching and to too much mechanistic inspection where judgements of standards by OFSTED Inspectors have been determined almost entirely by test scores rather than by professional judgement. All this has adversely affected the intellectual life of the schools and the intellectual vitality of their teachers. It could not be otherwise. (AM, 2010)*

Both report on the dubious evidence of pupils' performance on which judgements of teachers' performance have been largely based:

*In the game of mechanical contrivances the teachers will in the end beat us ... it is now found possible, by ingenious preparation, to get children through the Revised Code examination in reading, writing and ciphering, without their really knowing how to read, write or cipher. (MA, 1867)*

*Because their professional futures and the futures of their schools depend on it, primary teachers have become extremely skilled, even devious, at preparing pupils to take the annual tests ... so skilled that they can get pupils to achieve Level 4 on the tests (as they did in the year 2002) even though the children may not be operating at Level 4 in other aspects of the subjects tested and may well regress within a week or so of the conclusion of the testing process. Testing can never be teacher-proof. (AM, 2010)*

Both comment tellingly on the adverse effects of performance-related management on teacher morale and teacher supply:

*At a moment when popular education is at last becoming a matter of immediate public interest, and when the numbers, spirit and qualifications of our teaching staff will have a great call made upon them ... the present educational movement finds us ill-preparing for it, in so far as our teaching staff is less vigorous in spirit, is more slackly recruited and with weaker recruits than it was a few years ago. (MA, 1867)*

*After a decade of New Labour policies and the recent debate about the need for further educational change teachers face fresh challenges. However a decade of performance-related pay, ten years of treating teachers as operatives rather than as professionals and a 'dumbing down' of the requirements placed on new entrants have led to a feeling of demoralisation amongst all but advanced skills teachers, and to a particularly acute recruitment crisis, both in terms of numbers and in terms of intellectual quality. Able graduates, it seems, no longer wish to join a de-professionalised profession. (AM, 2010)*

Many other parallels from the inspection evidence could be cited.

The evidence from both Matthew and Arnold help explain some of the many difficulties the previous administration encountered as a result of its performance-management policies:

- the resistance of the teaching profession leading to damaging industrial action;
- the narrowing of the curriculum leading to complaints from middle-class parents and from children;

- the doubts over the success of target-setting leading to public disillusionment with government promises;
- the dangers of judging standards and quality on the basis of an inadequate and unreliable testing technology leading to political concern over the adequacy of expensively collected performance and 'value-added' data; and
- the acute problems of teacher recruitment and retention which have prompted your request for inspection evidence.

Perhaps the most disturbing feature of all was OFSTED's inability, perhaps unwillingness, under its previous management to garner or access inspection evidence before the New Labour administration embarked on its performance-management policies. We now know that at least some very compelling evidence was available. Matthew Arnold HMI had provided it a century and a half before.

E. Holmes

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, May 2011



Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 30 April 1999.

# 'Primaries Turn a Crucial Corner'

Unsurprisingly, many in education disagreed with the opinions expressed by the writer of this *Guardian* leader article of 9 July 1999 but few got their objections heard, and letters of dissent published. We are pleased that **Derek Gillard**, a long-standing member of the FORUM Editorial Board, was among the fortunate ones, and his letter follows a reprint of the *Guardian* leader.

## An Upbeat School Report Primaries Turn a Crucial Corner

Who says the public sector cannot change? Just one day after the Prime Minister excoriated public services for their resistance to reform, even the Chief Inspector for Schools, the most implacable opponent of ineffective teaching, conceded a major shift in primary school culture has taken place over the last four years. His comments coincided with the most upbeat report from his office since it began work seven years ago. It followed a four-year review by his inspectors of 1,250,000 lessons in 18,000 primary schools. Where four years ago the proportion of classes judged unsatisfactory or poor was 1 in 5, it has now fallen to 1 in 14. Over the same period the proportion of schools failing to reach a satisfactory standard in English fell from 18% to 4% and in maths from 20% to 3%. Primaries are steaming towards the bold but correct targets which ministers have set – with a 15% increase in the proportion reaching the expected levels in English and maths tests – but will still need to accelerate if they are to meet the 2002 deadline.

A 25-year-old education cycle is coming full circle. Spurred by the best of intentions, but producing the worst results, the Piaget era of child-centred primary education is drawing to a close. The theory was persuasive – children should be taught only when they are 'ready' – but there were no objective checks: no tests, infrequent inspections, no national curriculum. We claimed to have the best primary education system in the world, but international research showed our children lagging woefully behind our competitors in literacy and numeracy. The three wise men, appointed in 1991, quoted this at length in their 1992 report. They caught a mood. Secondary school heads were grumbling about the increasing proportion of children moving up from primaries needing intense remedial work. A consensus emerged across the major political parties of the need for more focus on literacy and numeracy and more use of 'tried and tested' methods.

In the last five years there has been a switch from 'fuzzy' topic work, more use of direct whole-class teaching, and a greater readiness to group pupils by ability. Major challenges remain: the gap between the best and worst schools, the poor performance of boys, class sizes. But ministers should celebrate this public service success and give the battered teachers the praise they deserve.

*Guardian* letters, 10 July 1999

Sir,

Ofsted says that the quality of lessons in primary schools has improved significantly in the past four years. What Ofsted actually means is that more of the observed lessons now display the characteristics (teaching styles, pupil groupings etc) which Ofsted and the government want.

For you to suggest (Leader, 9 July) that it is good that 'child-centred primary education is drawing to a close' is sad. What we are witnessing in our schools is the dawning of a new era of utilitarianism, one which, by promoting a culture of failure, is already causing disaffection, alienation and higher levels of truancy.

I have no doubt that the 'education cycle' will come full circle, but only when teachers are once again allowed – even encouraged – to consider the way children learn and the purposes of education and to develop a philosophy to underpin their practice. The young teachers now entering the profession have been denied such opportunities and we shall pay dearly for this omission in the years ahead.

Of course children must learn to read, write and add up. But education is about much more than that. It is ultimately about personal and social development – something, I suggest, the world could do with rather more of at the moment but which, regrettably, is not easily measurable by Ofsted.

Sincerely,  
Derek Gillard, Oxford

# Shameful Neglect: speaking, listening and literacy

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## Roy Corden

Roy Corden is Reader in Language and Literacy in Education at the Nottingham Trent University. He has taught in a wide range of schools and was a coordinator for the National Oracy Project and an English consultant for SCAA. In this article he recalls the work and research once devoted to speaking and listening and contrasts it with its neglect in the present National Literacy Strategy.

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In 1965 Andrew Wilkinson called for speaking and listening to be given much more prominence in the classroom and included in our conception of literacy. Spoken language, he said, had been 'shamefully neglected'. In the 1970s, projects led by linguists and educationalists such as Halliday et al (1964) and Rosen & Rosen (1973) illustrated the importance of classroom talk, and the work of Barnes et al (1969) and Tough (1977) drew particular attention to aspects of teacher-pupil discourse. Three major National Curriculum Development Projects took place between 1987 and 1993: the National Writing Project, the National Oracy Project and the Language in the National Curriculum Project. These were all government approved, funded initiatives undertaken by thousands of teachers working in schools throughout the UK and supported by regional coordinators and national directors. The projects were unique in bringing together teachers, LEA advisors, HMI and academics. This potent combination resulted in the identification of effective classroom practices. Collectively, the projects constituted collaborative action research on an impressive scale and should have had a major impact on educational policy and practice. A recurring message was that talk has a central role to play in developing children's knowledge and understanding.

Classroom research, conducted by teachers themselves, therefore, confirmed the theoretical stance of sociocultural psychologists such as Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1986) and Wood (1988) and supported the call by educationalists such as Wells (1987) for the recognition of speaking and listening in the National Curriculum. Successive HMI reports also consistently highlighted the importance of classroom 'talk'. Plowden (1967) echoed Wilkinson's call for more emphasis to be placed on spoken language, and Bullock (1975) stressed the need for more collaborative group work and use of exploratory language. The Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) was established to refine, categorise and encourage the development of talk for a variety of purposes and audiences. The introduction of an oral component in GCSE examinations was hugely significant, and as Frater (1988, p. 36) states, 'secured an irreducible place for the spoken word in the English curriculum'. The inclusion of speaking and listening as a distinct National Curriculum Attainment Target in 1989 seemed to confirm the importance of spoken language as an important facet of the English language and an integral and essential part of *literacy*. It is somewhat alarming, therefore, to find that despite heavy financial investment, current educational theory and 30 years of

classroom research, speaking and listening are excluded from a *National Literacy Framework*.

## The Literacy Strategy

The National Literacy Strategy is supposedly, 'underpinned by research and related evidence from a variety of disciplines' (Beard, 1998, p. 6) and the Framework for Teaching derived from the National Literacy Project and 'successful initiatives in the USA and Australasia' (Beard, 1998, p. 4). The evidence suggests that literacy is enhanced by children being part of a community of practitioners where:

- they experience literary activity around them and see literacy skills being used by experts;
- they are offered literary models;
- skills and processes are demonstrated;
- they examine, critically evaluate and deconstruct texts;
- they are encouraged to participate and to monitor their own progress;
- participation occur within a positive, structured and secure environment; and
- there are opportunities to work in a variety of learning situations such as individually, with peers and with teachers.

A major aim of the National Literacy Strategy is to place literacy at the centre of the primary curriculum and to secure time for focused language study. The National Literacy Framework is intended to:

- offer a cohesive and consistent approach to teaching literacy within the primary school;
- provide a systematic breakdown of the knowledge and strategies children need to develop in order to become independent readers;
- demand dedicated teaching and learning time; and
- direct the teaching and learning focus during this dedicated time.

Ironically, although the Framework (1998, p. 3) recognises the importance of speaking and listening as, 'an essential part of it [literacy]', it does not address the issue. Nor does it include speaking and listening in the planning of work for literacy, despite the fact that shared and group reading and writing and independent group work (major features of the Literacy Hour), depend heavily on the quality of *interactive discourse*. As HMI have pointed out:

*Successful teaching, whether with the whole class, smaller groups or individuals, depends on certain essential factors. These include the quality of the teacher's explanations, clarity and structure of speech,*

*the skilled construction and use of questions, and the ability to engage children in intensive discussion of increasingly complex ideas. (The Teaching and Learning of Language and Literacy, HMI, 1990, p. 32)*

### Interactive Discourse

The learning theory underpinning the Literacy Strategy emphasises the *interactive* process of teaching and learning and is particularly concerned with social discourse, collaborative learning and the joint construction of knowledge. The Framework highlights the importance of effective teacher intervention strategies, such as:

- modelling: showing learners examples of work produced by experts;
- demonstrating: illustrating the procedures experts go through in producing work;
- scaffolding: supporting learners as they learn and practise procedures.

Guided reading and writing time offers teachers an opportunity to interact with a small group of children, to intervene and to scaffold their learning in a way envisaged by Bruner (1986). Indeed, a basic tenet of the literacy strategy is that children's learning will be enhanced through well-focused, uninterrupted interaction with a teacher who can offer support and guidance and can scaffold the learning.

Such scaffolding occurs through interactive discourse between teachers and children. It is an essential teaching strategy used to move children beyond what they may achieve by independent problem-solving, to the level of potential achievement possible through problem-solving under expert guidance. Scaffolding is a highly interactive process, with an onus on continuous interplay between teacher and pupil in the joint completion of a task. Effective dialogue is crucial because this is how support is provided and adjusted. This *interactive discourse* is central to interventionist techniques such as 'Reciprocal Teaching' (Palinscar & Brown, 1984), which uses scaffolding strategies to support individuals in group activity until they are capable of working unaided.

The concept of scaffolding is important, and particularly useful, because it neither places teachers firmly within an instructional role, nor marginalises them but 'represents both teacher and learner as active participants in the construction of knowledge' (Mercer, 1995, p. 74). The essence of constructivist learning is that pupils will gain through social interaction with others, where they share perceptions, extend their knowledge and develop conceptual understandings through being exposed to other ideas. Interactive learning often involves conflict but through the sharing of adverse ideas or the clash of perspectives, children may be brought to new levels of understanding and their intellectual horizons extended. Such 'creative conflict' can occur in whole class shared reading sessions, or during guided and independent group work. The point is that focus, direction and teacher intervention do not have to result in 'instruction' or drab learning contexts that produce pupil passivity. As the DfEE points out:

*Literacy instruction is not a recipe for returning to some crude or simple form of 'transmission' teaching. (The National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching, 1998, p. 8)*

### Speaking and Listening Excluded

It is regrettable, therefore, that having emphasised the centrality of talk, the DfEE chose to exclude English AT1

from the National Literacy Framework. Given the general acceptance of a constructivist approach to teaching and the vast amount of empirical research conducted over a 30-year period, much of it state funded and approved (National Oracy Project) if not officially published (Language in the National Curriculum Project), the exclusion is disappointing. It is what Andrew Wilkinson, over 30 years on, may well have described as *shameful neglect*.

The Literacy Framework states that the most successful teaching is characterised by high quality oral work discursive but it offers no practical examples, no exemplification and no real demonstration of what this means. A searchlight model of teaching is presented, where reading strategies are taught in context and through the shared reading and investigation of texts. Proponents of the National Literacy Strategy argue that the teaching approach includes major elements of constructivist learning, such as modelling, demonstrating and scaffolding. However, speaking and listening (interactive discourse) which is the very essence of constructivist learning, is not dealt with. The Literacy Training Pack offers suggestions for teaching but the accompanying videos present some dubious examples of teacher-pupil interaction, more redolent of the asymmetric discourse pattern so soundly condemned by educationalists as being ineffective and inefficient.

Although the DfEE claims that talking is inseparable from reading and writing, its exclusion from the Literacy Framework may result in speaking and listening becoming marginalised. In an educational climate where target setting and league tables are dominant, although lip service may be paid to spoken language, it may remain tangential. The constant criticism of teachers by the press, fed by OFSTED's 'deficit' approach and negative style of reporting, is hardly designed to encourage professional conscientiousness and commitment. Disillusioned and disaffected teachers and a prescribed framework, supported by 'official worksheets', may result in arid, instrumental teaching. Whole class lessons that should be 'discursive and interactive' are more likely to resemble lessons characterised by teacher dominated discourse and low order questions, as reported in the ORACLE Survey (Galton et al, 1999).

When I attended a TTA Regional Literacy Strategy Conference in 1998, I asked why speaking and listening had been excluded from the Framework and was told, 'the Framework cannot include everything'. One third of the National Curriculum for English, 30 years' substantial classroom research and three expensive National Curriculum Development Projects? Some exclusion!

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Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 26 March 1999.

# Achieving Literacy: widening the perspectives for primary education

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## Pat D'Arcy

As English Adviser for Wiltshire, Pat D'Arcy has been well known in this field of education for many years. Her influence has been widespread and she has written extensively on the subject. In this article she makes a very persuasive case for the considerable expansion of what she sees as a disturbingly narrow interpretation of the term 'literacy' as made evident by the SATs tests and the National Literacy Strategy.

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In mid-October 1998, the latest 'reports' on the KS2 SATs for reading and writing have led to statements about pupils' performance which offer the information that 65 per cent of the intake have achieved Level 4, the level at which, by 2002, 80 per cent of the intake will be expected to achieve at that level if the Government's stated intention to promote 'higher standards' is to be reached. In addition, from September 1998, the Literacy Hour has been introduced into primary schools across the country with the stated intention of improving the performance of all pupils in reading and writing as an important part of this effort to raise standards.

I, too, am totally in favour of creating contexts in both primary and secondary classrooms which will enable every child to develop their reading and writing abilities. However, I have serious reservations about the way in which development is being promulgated. In this article I will set out my reservations and suggest ways in which 'literacy' as it is presently interpreted could be extended both in teaching situations and in the assessment of pupils as readers and writers.

## Literacy and the Literacy Hour

The *Framework for Teaching* document, produced by a 'Literacy Task Force' set up by David Blunkett, and published in May 1997, states that 'The concept of literacy can be defined very widely'. Be that as it may, the authors of this document immediately proceed to give a specific definition for literacy: 'as a unitary process with two complimentary aspects, reading and writing'. There is no reference in this definition to the purposes for which reading and writing can be used, nor is there any reference to the part which both activities play in the thinking of literate people.

The Task Force states that 'literate' primary children should:

- read and write with confidence, fluency and understanding;
- be interested in books, read with enjoyment and evaluate and justify preferences;
- know and understand a range of genres in fiction and poetry, and understand and be familiar with some of the ways that narratives are structured through basic literacy ideas of setting, character and plot;

- understand and be able to use a range of non-fiction texts;
- be able to orchestrate a full range of reading cues (phonetic, graphic, syntactic, contextual) to monitor and self-correct their own reading;
- plan, draft, revise and edit their own writing;
- have an interest in words and word meanings, and a growing vocabulary;
- understand the sound and spelling system and use this to read and spell accurately; and have fluent and legible handwriting.

I have no quarrel with the first and second of these aims, although it seems a little premature to expect primary children 'to evaluate and justify preferences'. Nor do I have any disagreement with encouraging pupils 'to plan, draft, revise and edit their own writing', or to 'have an interest in words and word meanings', especially as this is the first time that meaning has been mentioned in this document in relation to literacy.

However, as is also the case with the approach to reading and writing in the English Orders (DfEE, 1995), although lip-service is paid to encouraging pupils to read and write 'with confidence, fluency and understanding' and indeed with enjoyment, nevertheless the main focus of both these documents in the primary years is concentrated on the ability to decode and encode written language correctly and on knowledge about its construction. Reading and writing are not conceived as mental activities so much as so many words on the page. The detailed work schemes set out for the Literacy Hour from the Reception Year right through to Year 6, demonstrate these emphases very clearly at 'text level, sentence level and word level'.

## Teaching Methodology

The *approach* that teachers are now required to use in the Literacy Hour is largely prescriptive:

*There should be a clear focus on literacy instruction throughout the hour.*

This purports to be about the content to be covered rather than how it should be taught:

*The framework objectives have been carefully designed to relieve you of the burden of planning what you should be teaching in order to concentrate on planning how to teach it.*

Nevertheless, if teachers are required to spend 60 per cent

of their time in direct class or group teaching, the scope for 'how' has already been imposed. In the list of teaching strategies, most of the opportunities for involvement appear to favour the teacher rather than the pupils. It is s/he who directs, demonstrates, explains and asks the questions. Maybe pupils will have a chance to get a word in when it comes to 'investigating and exploring ideas' and 'discussion and argument', but with the dice so heavily loaded in the teacher's favour and with an explicit emphasis on 'direct instruction' and 'whole class teaching' the odds are heavily on many children remaining passive rather than becoming active members of the class for the duration of the hour.

### Key Stage 2 Tests for Reading and Writing

These are the tests, on the outcomes of which dogmatic generalisations are made about the progress of children as readers and writers. The percentage of children achieving 'Level 4' on the basis of their results in these tests alone, without reference to their work throughout the rest of the year, is used as a performance indicator for the rise or fall of 'standards' – and consequently as a performance indicator for effective teaching. Comments such as the following appear constantly in press reports and are rarely challenged. The following quotation from *The Guardian* (14 September 1998) about this year's SAT results for reading and writing takes the form of a categorical statement:

*The [literacy] strategy received a blow last week when figures showed that the rate of improvement in English has slowed...*

Not surprisingly, therefore, there is increasing pressure on teachers to 'teach to the test'. An article in *The Observer* (11 September 1998) reports under the headline 'Infants Crack under Stress of Tests':

*Research on seven-year-olds to be published later this month by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority which sets the tests, found that 'more teachers are now telling children that they are doing tests rather than pretending they are doing normal schoolwork'.*

If the efficiency of their own practice and the good name of their school is to be judged solely on these test results, then of course teachers are going to make sure that pupils know as far as possible exactly what to do under testing conditions by practising lots of examples in the amount of time they will be allowed for the actual examination. The extent to which these 'practices' will improve children's development as readers and writers is debatable. It is quite possible that it will have quite the opposite effect in 'dumbing down' their capacity to think about what they read or how they write!

### The KS2 Reading and Writing Tests, 1998

If we examine the expectations for pupil performance in the 1998 Tests for Reading and Writing, the following features stand out. In the Reading Tests pupils are expected chiefly to *retrieve information* from a text and to give reasons for what happened. There is little opportunity for them to explain what the text *means to them*. In the Writing Tests, the performance criteria focus predominantly on construction at text level, sentence level and word level; the meanings that the children create are largely disregarded in favour of a *skill-based analysis* of what they have written. Markers come to both the reading and the writing tasks having *already decided what to look for*. This leaves little scope for paying close attention to *what is already there*.

There is no space in this article to exemplify these points

in any great detail but let me illustrate briefly the extent to which the pupils' opportunities to create meaning or to respond meaningfully are limited in each of these Tests.

### Information Retrieval and Logical Analysis in the 1998 KS2 Reading Test

The text in this test was an extract from *A Candle in the Dark* by Adele Geras, in which two young children have to part from their mother in Germany in order to be evacuated to England. The themes running strongly through the excerpt are those of the grief of separation, confusion and loneliness. There is plenty of scope for primary age readers to empathise with the children's plight and to imagine what it would have felt like to be in that kind of miserable situation. Instead, the opening six questions of the Test (which cover the whole story, for which no additional reading time has been given) require children to tick the 'right answer' out of a choice of four. Most of the other questions require readers to give reasons for various occurrences in the story, for example:

9. *Explain the reasons why Clara was pretending not to be upset.*

13. *Why were the children smiling and shouting when they reached Holland? Write down two reasons.*

It is only in the 15th question that readers are asked to 'Explain how you think Clara feels...' and only in the final question (18) that readers are asked to write down (for three marks) 'what you think about the *Leaving Home* story...' and even then, they are asked to 'give reasons' for their ideas.

### Focus on Construction and Correctness in the 1998 KS2 Writing Test

I have taken as my example the performance criteria for story writing at Level 4 which are set out under separate headings for 'Purpose and Organisation' and 'Grammar', the latter subdivided into 'Punctuation' and 'Style'.

#### Purpose and Organisation

The writing is coherent and well-paced, with the beginning, middle and end of the story suitably distinguished and events logically related. Characters are created and there is some significant interaction between them. Characterisation is evident, for example, through direct and reported speech. The writing is lively and seeks to interest the reader through, for example, the ways in which characters or events are developed and commented upon.

#### Punctuation

Most sentences are correctly demarcated by full stops, capital letters and question marks. Within sentences, there is some evidence of the correct use of commas to separate elements of a sentence such as short phrases, clauses, or items in a list. Inverted commas are used to clarify where direct speech begins and ends.

#### Style

Meaning is extended through the use of grammatically complex sentences, showing, for example, different types of sentence connectives (if, when, rather than, although, however) and the expansion of phrases before or after the noun. Well-chosen phrases (such as adverbial phrases) or attempt to use adventurous vocabulary

contribute to the effectiveness of the writing. Pronouns and tenses are generally consistent throughout.

I quote these criteria in full in order to show how closely focused they are on construction at text and sentence level and on correct punctuation. The only reason that there is no reference to spelling is due to the fact that at KS2 there is a separate spelling test.

I am chiefly concerned that any opportunity for the assessor/reader to respond directly to the meaning of an individual story, to what it evokes in the way of thoughts or feelings or visual impressions, is totally disregarded. The writing can only 'seek to interest the reader' through the way in which the writer has employed particular techniques. If 'meaning' is considered at all, it is only with reference to its extension 'through the use of grammatically complex sentences'.

In the Reading Test, the kind of questions that were asked ('choose the best word', 'give reasons') both guided the child in a particular direction and governed the expectations of the assessor as to the appropriateness of the child's response. In the Writing Test, what is required of the writing is not made so explicit. The story writing options in the 1998 Test, for instance, appeared to be centred on the creation of meaning:

You're in charge!

*Now I'll only be out of the room for a minute and I'm leaving you in charge until I get back.*

Write a short story using this idea to help you.

or

Changes

*I looked around. Everything was different from usual.*

Write a short story using this idea to help you.

However, these stories are assessed (and by implication the child's development as a writer), solely on the basis of a set of requirements that the marker must look for. If I read a story, any story, with this kind of checklist in mind, which directs me to pay conscious attention to sentence construction as well as to narrative construction and simultaneously to the inclusion or omission of appropriate punctuation marks, I know that inevitably, my attention will be quite distracted from whatever meaning the writing may offer because I come to the text with a set of expectations which set up a barrier which makes any *transaction* with the text quite impossible. This is likely to have a concomitant backwash effect on the expectations that children bring to their understanding of why they should undertake any writing tasks and for what purposes.

### **Achieving Literacy: some proposals for widening our perspectives**

Now that I have expressed my reservations about current approaches to the teaching and assessment of literacy at primary level, as these are evidenced either explicitly or by implication in the English Orders (DfEE, 1995), in the Framework for Teaching (1997) and in the 1998 Key Stage 2 Tests for Reading and Writing, I want to propose what I regard as some positive suggestions for ways in which 'literacy' as it is presently conceived, could be extended both in teaching situations and in the assessment of pupils as readers and writers.

### **Extending the Perspectives for Assessment**

I shall begin with assessment because, as they say, it's the

tail that wags the dog, or less picturesquely, what is tested and how it is tested is bound to influence classroom teaching. What the Tests look for in pupils' performance as readers and writers will affect what teachers look for, which in turn will affect pupils' understanding of what reading and writing is all about. If the Reading Test emphasises information retrieval and logical analysis, these aspects of what reading involves will be to the foreground in the classroom. If the Writing SATs emphasise constructional techniques and correctness, then these aspects of what writing involves will also be in the foreground.

In either case, meaning – what the reader 'makes' of another's text or what the writer 'makes' in the creation of a text – is in danger of being pushed on one side in view of these other considerations. I would like to see changes in the Tests which acknowledge the *meaningfulness* on the one hand of the pupil reader's personal responses to the text of another writer and on the other hand the *meaningfulness* of a pupil writer's text to another reader. In brief, I want to make a case for the extension of our present forms of assessing a pupil's performance in reading and writing to include *interpretative* as well as *analytic* assessment.

The Reading Test, for instance, could easily reduce the number of questions (18 this year) requiring short answers in order to allow for some more extended responses which invite readers to offer their own thoughts, feelings – and for stories – visual impressions of the text. Such change would allow for the reader's attention to be directed inwards to the mental processes that were brought into play inside their own heads, alongside other questions which refer more specifically to the writer's handling of the narrative. As they are put forward in the Reading Tests of the past two years, the questions only serve to fragment the reader's response as they point to specific moments and demand specific responses, for example:

At the station, Clara's mother says, '*Look after Maxi. He will be sad later*'. (A) Why was Maxi not sad at first? (B) Why was Maxi sad later?

Segmented in this way, there is no opportunity for the responsive reader to explore the relationship between Maxi and his sister in the context of the situation in which they find themselves. It would not be difficult to effect a change in the scope of the questions for assessing reader response by including questions directed to the reader's own imaginative involvement such as:

*What kind of thoughts do you imagine going round and round in Clara's head as she sits in the train beside her younger brother and tries to cope with the different kinds of feelings that Maxi experiences along the journey?*

In the Writing Test, the performance criteria could be extended to direct the assessor/reader's attention more specifically to what the pupil's text has evoked in the way of thoughts, feelings and for stories, visual impressions. The inclusion of such criteria would help to ensure that the unique meanings and import of an individual piece, in the sense that they could never fully be replicated in any other piece, were given serious consideration, rather than sinking out of sight beneath the weight of the pre-ordained criteria already filling the assessor's mind.

My own research [1] has shown that responses which involve interpretative assessment are directly focused on the text that the child has produced and can be closely related to the writer's handling of the narrative. They are

subjective in the sense that they take into account, in specific detail, the effect of the story on the reader but in this respect they pay regard to the meaning in a way that generalisations about techniques and sentence construction signally fail to do.

I would suggest that criteria for the assessment of story writing in this year's Test could have included, for instance, such questions as, 'What details in the story succeeded for you in creating a sense of panic or surprise? Could you relate to what the central character was feeling or thinking? Were there any significant details which increased your sense of empathy or sympathy? Were you gripped by what happened, could you picture it in your mind? Through which narrative techniques did the writer enable you to engage with the story?'

### Extending Perspectives for 'Literacy' and the 'Literacy Hour'

If the current emphases in the KS2 Tests continue to direct attention to aspects of reading and writing which focus predominantly on information retrieval and logical analysis on the one hand and elements of construction and correctness on the other, then it is all too probable that teaching in the Literacy Hour, particularly as the Tests draw closer, is bound to follow suit. Children will be given lots of practice in answering 25 questions in 45 minutes if this year's Reading Test is anything to go by. They will learn how to select the 'right answer' and how to spot some of the narrative techniques that writers use. But opportunities for involving themselves as readers in the text will inevitably be negated. Thus the possibilities for *interpretation*, which is surely what intelligent reading of another's text demands, will be sidelined.

If I were teaching for the current criteria on which a child's own performance as a story writer is to be assessed, I would be very tempted to adopt a 'writing by numbers' approach. Pupils would be encouraged to make sure that they always included a short dialogue in which a change of speaker was clearly signalled by starting a new line, and everything that was uttered out loud was carefully enclosed in speech marks fore and aft. I would emphasise the need to end every sentence with a clearly demarcated full stop followed by a very clear capital letter at the start of the next sentence. For their writing in the Literacy Hour, children would be encouraged to write in paragraphs – and basically to think in terms of the traditional American '5 paragraph essay' – one for the opening, one for the ending and three in the middle. They would have lots of practice in producing finished pieces in 45 minutes flat which complied with these demands.

I am fully aware of how sterile the experience of writing in that way can be, particularly if that is the 'plan' which is always followed. No risk taking, no setting out imaginatively to find out where the writing will take you, because there is no time; you might not reach a conclusion and your paragraphs might go to pot.

If children are given time for extended writing, these pressures are not so great and there is space for reflecting on the meaning at the revision stage, as well as for proof-reading, when paragraphing as well as punctuation and spelling can be reviewed. But currently there is no such time in writing for the Test, although the progress children have made in writing will be judged (and then generalised about) by what they can produce in 45 minutes with 15 minutes' planning time.

I would suggest, therefore, that both the Reading and the Writing Test are open-ended to allow children whatever time they need for completing their reading and their writing. Alongside the introduction of interpretative as well as analytic assessment, these changes should give pupils more scope to demonstrate their development as readers and writers.

I would also suggest from a teaching point of view, that it would be educationally helpful if the activities of reading and writing could be viewed more explicitly from the inside as mental processes which involve the thoughts and feelings, the past experiences and the imagination of each pupil, as well as their capacity to handle written texts with accuracy and precision. Surely, as I pointed out at the start of this article, we read and we write because both forms of expression are powerful forms of thinking. If, instead, they become exercises in construction and correctness, divorced from the desire or the need to reach for meaning, then much of the motivation to develop as readers and as writers will be diminished or in danger of being lost altogether for many children.

I would like to see the Literacy Hour taking these 'internalised' aspects of literacy more fully into account, which means, of course, taking a more balanced and flexible approach to those activities which take place within it. If individual readers and writers are to become truly literate, in the sense that they develop their capacity to reflect, to speculate, to imagine, to interpret, then they cannot possibly all be taught to march to the same tune, in 15-minute segments, from day to day, week to week, month to month and year to year. That way only boredom and frustration lies. It will certainly not raise standards, rather the reverse.

I would also like to see the move from one 'Level of Attainment' to the next, for both reading and writing development, to rely more explicitly on increasing complexity of meaning, either in the reader's response to a text or in the writer's creation of a text. The importance of meaning – what a reader or writer makes, through a thoughtful and dynamic interrelationship of form and content, should be restored to the centre, the core and the heart of what reading and writing are about, not ultimately but from the moment that children start to engage with the written word.

In a recent article [2] Mary Hilton comments that:

*So far the Government's reforms have stopped short of abolishing the right of teachers to question its educational policies.*

I believe that it is high time that many more challenges to these policies were made and publicised in order to encourage further debate. This article offers one such contribution.

### Notes

- [1] P. D'Arcy (1998) *The Whole Story*. PhD thesis ([www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw](http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw)).
- [2] M. Hilton (1998) Raising literacy standards: the true story, *NATE Journal*, 32(3).

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# Inference and Deduction: its place in the English curriculum in primary schools

## Judith Graham

Judith Graham is Principal Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the Roehampton Institute, London and in 1983 co-authored 'Achieving Literacy' with Margaret Meek. Her most recent book is *Cracking Good Books*, published by the National Association for the Teaching of English. In this article, taking a point that was raised in Pat D'Arcy's overview of the subject in the previous article, she argues that the National Literacy Strategy and the primary SATs could well be proving counter-productive in helping children to be anything other than decoders of text by their failure to address the needs of children to become skilful at inference and deduction.

I love inference and deduction. I love recognising when an author is inviting me to exercise it. I love realising that I'm doing it. As a schoolgirl, I copied into a diary the anonymous lines, 'Christ if my love were in my arms/And I in my bed again!' and was much taken by the racy implication. That delight is echoed by many children when they come across poems such as Shel Silverstein's, *Not Me*.

*'The Slithergadee has crawled out of the sea.*

*He may catch all the others but he  
won't catch me.*

*No you won't catch me, old slithergadee,*

*You may catch all the others, but you wo-'*

Roger McGough's *Bully Night* is similarly beguiling, where one has to infer that the complaint against the night is interrupted when sleep overtakes the speaker.

Without the reader's effort, lines such as these stay on the page and remain inert. But continue with the line of thought given by the writer, and you know that you've been paid the greatest compliment: the author is telling you that you can think. That is immensely flattering, as Laurence Sterne told us in *Tristram Shandy* two centuries ago.

*... no author, who understands the just boundaries of  
decorum and good-breeding, would presume to think  
all: the truest respect which you can pay to the reader's  
understanding is to halve this matter amicably, and leave  
him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.  
For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments  
of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep  
his imagination as busy as my own.*

The examples of invitations to infer that I have quoted in the lines above are particularly clear. But inference is all around us and we could not operate in our social lives if we were not competent with this skill. John Stuart Mill places it at the pinnacle of human intellectual endeavour. 'To draw inferences has been said to be the great business of life', he says and a moment's thought convinces us of this. The baby who watches his or her mother disappear through a door will, quite soon in life, deduce that it is from there that she will appear again. The toddler who hears the doorbell ring will deduce that the person who comes into the house was the person who rang the bell. Within a few short years of birth, children who have had stories told and read will know, when they hear the mirror on the wall declaring that Snow White is still the fairest, that Snow White has evaded her stepmother's scheming. And so on.

However one defines inference and deduction, and whether we should try to distinguish between them, we can be grateful that this ability is recognised by the compilers of the National Curriculum (English). Inference emerges clearly, particularly at Key Stages 3 and 4 of course, where we find that pupils are to be taught to 'extract meaning beyond the literal, explaining how choice of language and style affects implied and explicit meanings' but also quite explicitly at Key Stage 2, where 'pupils should be taught to use inference and deduction' and at Key Stage 1 where 'contextual understanding, focusing on meaning derived from the text as a whole' is mentioned more than once.

In the assessment of the National Curriculum through the end of Key Stage tests we see that this ability is regarded as pivotal in sorting out those who earn high marks and those who remain at or below their expected levels. Here are some extracts from the QCA reports from the last three years.

## 1998 KS1

Many children found inference questions difficult. For instance: *How did Emma know that Lamb wanted to go back to his mother?* The text describes what Lamb did, but the child is left to interpret the significance of these actions.

The report insists:

*Children need to be taught to draw inferences from what they have read. They need practice in reading beneath the surface of the text, learning how to recognise the words on which the meaning hinges and exploring the different ways in which ideas are expressed.*

For those KS1 children who sat the extension Level 3 reading comprehension test, almost half the questions required interpretation of the literal text to make inferences about meaning. Thus, in the Charles Keeping story, Jack Ratty painted sparrows and deceived people by selling them as make-believe birds from far away. This is gradually revealed as the story unfolds, though it is never stated in as many words. The report states:

*The story moved between the actions of the two main characters, and children had to keep the whole story in mind in order to make successful inferences..... Those who attended too literally to the immediate text missed the emerging meaning.*

The report concludes:

*As children progress through level 3, they show a growing ability to retrieve information over a span of several pages. They become more skilled in inferring meaning*

*beyond the words in the text and in expressing opinions supported by their reading. However, they have limited skills in cross referencing between different parts of the text to check or extend their understanding. They need to learn how to scan texts to find the information they need, and to sharpen their comprehension by discussing the inferences they make.'*

## 1998 KS 2

Children here were asked questions about an extract from an Adele Geras story. The ability to answer 'inference questions' was again seen to be the mark of a Level 4 candidate. Thus a question about why the child Clara was pretending not to be upset was only answerable if you could imagine this sensitive child wanting to preserve a fragile equilibrium in the face of an impending evacuation.

## 1997 KS2

Here the children were given a folk tale about the Asrai, mermen and mermaids of a sort who live at the bottom of a lake and exert a strange power over the villagers nearby who decline to fish in the lake's teeming water. The report states:

*To understand this story fully, children had to relate the beginning to the end and appreciate the twist in the tale – that the story-teller was himself the young man who had encountered the Asrai. This was not directly stated and again dependent on the child's ability to draw an inference, connecting the reference to the glove in the final sentence to the injury to the hand that formed part of the narrative.*

Another question, asking children what would they have seen if the storyteller had taken off his glove at the end, again required inferential understanding to work out what might be the result of the injury described in the text.

## 1997 KS1

In this year, an optional reading comprehension test was offered in which the final two questions in the story section, *What was the surprise?* and *Who knew about the surprise from the beginning?* asked for an overview of the piece. The second of these questions required the inference that the character William knew about the destination from the beginning, which was not stated. Once again, those children whom their teachers judged competent, could take a further Level 3 test and again, (in the face of a 'why' question – *why did the donkey run towards the horses?* – where there is no answer directly stated in the text), responses which showed children interpreting the situation and expressing it in their own words ('because he wanted to be friends or to talk') were rewarded. Such answers were few and far between apparently.

## 1996 KS2

A very clear example of the ability to infer was given in this report. One question asked children to *'explain why candles, clocks and sandglasses were more useful than sundials.'* Children needed to re-read the sentence *'All had an advantage over the sundial, however, in that they could be used at night or on dull days'* and then answer the question. Only about a third of the children achieving level 3 were able to answer this question clearly compared with 90% of those achieving level 5 overall, confirming that less experienced readers and/or writers find inference slippery to detect or explain.

Now we have a bit of deductive reasoning to do ourselves. SATs tests are, for better or worse, increasingly prominent on the educational scene and great score is set by them, not least, and personally, by David Blunkett. But the National Literacy Strategy is dominating the teaching of English and even ousting the National Curriculum and is likely to dictate the shape of the new National Curriculum. So it might be expected that the NLS would focus on the inference and deduction that is so manifest in the SATs and in the NC. In fact, the words 'inference and deduction' do not occur anywhere in the NLS and, in many of the term-by-term stipulations, there is nothing to suggest that teachers use anything except the most straightforward and literal texts. The most we find, in Year 1, Term 2, is 'discuss reasons for or causes of incidents in stories' and in Year 2, Term 1, children are to 'identify and discuss reasons for events in stories when linked to plot'. Term 2 does not build on this. The instruction to 'predict story endings/incidents' is promising, though unnecessarily limited by the example which follows, 'e.g. from unfinished extracts, while reading with the teacher'. Inference and deduction have a much reduced chance of being stimulated on incomplete extracts. Term 3 has nothing so children go in to take their SATs with little support for the very skill the tests are interested in.

In the 12 terms' work that makes up the Key Stage 2 programme, you would expect to find more emphasis on inference and deduction. In only three of the first seven terms is anything mentioned that could reasonably be construed as an invitation to read at depth, make connections and deduce. In the last five terms before the KS2 SATs, there is nothing about inference and deduction. Once again, children sit their SATs with no or little help from the NLS to develop this skill.

There are several explanations of why such a key area is all but overlooked in the NLS. Firstly, it may have been taken for granted – after all, 'inference is the great business of life', we can't get by without it. Secondly, it may be that it is not regarded as 'key' at all and there may, for all we know, be an intention to bring the SATs more in line with the NLS; thus emphasis in the tests on inference and deduction will be reduced. Thirdly, it may be that the NLS compilers are convinced that the business of reading is more to do with decoding than it is with responsive reading. Despite the SATs, their emphasis, in all three levels, word, sentence and text, is on breaking down and analysis rather than the appreciation of unfolding meaning in whole text that is requisite for inference and deduction. Lastly, there may be a genuine understanding that the only way to *teach* inference and deduction is to give time for reading aloud, re-reading, reflection and discussion of whole texts, time which is not there in the literacy hour as it is currently constructed. Thus it is irrelevant to put it in the requirements.

There are arguments one would want to employ to refute these explanations. The NLS is clearly not a document where anything is left to chance and one has to say, even if inference and deduction were mentioned frequently, it would still only appear in the text level work, which is only a small part of the literacy hour (and a part that is to be squeezed further once additional support materials for phonics are introduced into Years 3 and 4 in the coming autumn term). As far as modifying SATs is concerned we can only watch that space. Points three and four above can be taken together and one can but mourn the wilful neglect

of children's developmental needs to make sense of the world, so much facilitated by discussion time, quiet reading time, literature circles, conferences with children about their reading and the whole range of drama work that gets children really deep into textual meaning.

My personal sorrow is that picture books, which have been the start of so much deductive thinking for children, have not been acknowledged as the place where inference begins as well as the place where the realisation that books can be enjoyable can be formed. I think of one of the most popular and enduring texts for this age group David McKee's *Not Now Bernard*, which from its opening pages has in abundance the ambiguity and challenge that can teach about 'reading below the surface'. It is not too extreme to say that this is why it is so popular. A new title, *Emma's Doll*, with a text by Brian Patten and illustrations by Alison Jay, demonstrates perfectly how picture books teach inference and deduction. This book only becomes a significant and rewarding story once the implications in the pictures have been realised. Otherwise, the help in some cases and the obstruction in others that Emma receives from various creatures whom she encounters in her efforts to heal her doll, is purely arbitrary, leaving the whole story without significance. Look also in a picture book for older readers, *Power and Glory*, by Emily Rodda and Geoff Kelly, how the characters in a video game have, in Kelly's pictures only, sinister connections with the player's family. Such books, I suggest, teach the thinking necessary for unillustrated texts.

This summer, hundreds of thousands of children (and adults) are reading their way through one or more of the 'Harry Potter' books. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* opens with the words:

*Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.*

Children who have been fortunate in their earlier reading experiences have no problem deducing all sorts of information from that '*thank-you very much*' and can 'hear' this couple protesting their normality and, in doing so, their superiority. If readers' eyes then flick back to that '*Privet Drive*', much more can be inferred.

The fact that so many are enjoying these books suggests that authors who are treating their readers with Laurence Sterne's type of respect – and look how Philip Pullman and David Almond do this also – are delivering readerly satisfaction to children in ways that the NLS, with its disrespect for the global and its obsession with fragmenting, may well be sabotaging.

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When teaching fails...



...try learning

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# The Declining Use of Books in Schools: the implications for effective teaching and learning

**Mike Johnson**

Mike Johnson is presently Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Successful Schools at the University of Keele. His wide experience of teaching includes fifteen years as deputy head of a large comprehensive school in Staffordshire. He was seconded to the Department of Education in 1990 to work with Tim Brighouse and has since collaborated with Margaret Maden and Michael Barber on school improvement strategies. In this article he turns his attention to the perceived effects of textbook availability in different kinds of schools and its possible implications on pupil attitude and attainment.

*I consider it essential that all pupils have suitable course books in all subjects so that they have the best possible chance to make good progress. Equally teachers will be more effective and less stressed if they have the 'tools' to do their job. Having teachers write worksheets is not necessarily the best use of their time and they may not have the skills needed. Headteachers need to prioritise the school's funding in such a way that it is possible for children to have books. (Secondary School Headteacher, April 1999)*

## Use and Availability of Books: the pupils' view

The findings of recent research carried out at Keele University show that many children and parents think they have insufficient access to books in support of pupil learning. Of a sample of almost 3000 pupils, almost 40% say they are not provided with text or course books that they do not have to share with another pupil or other pupils in lessons.

As can be seen from Figure 1, there are substantial differences in textbook availability between curriculum areas. In the mathematics sample, for example, over 79% of the pupils have text or course books available in lessons. In modern languages, too, text or course books are the

norm, with 76% of the pupils having an unshared book. In science, 63% of pupils have a textbook for lessons but in other curriculum areas surveyed, namely English, history and geography, the figure is no more than 50%. In most subjects the availability of text or course books is markedly greater for the more senior pupils in Year 10, and in the sixth form, where a substantial majority of students are likely to have access to a text or course book. In Year 8, however, only about a third of the pupils have a course book for English lessons and less than 50% of pupils have course or text books in history and geography.

The numbers of books available for pupils to keep with them and take home to help with additional study and for homework purposes is even smaller than the number of books available in lessons. Overall, only 47% of pupils say they have access to books on extended loan and which they can take home for independent study.

*I don't think that enough money is spent on books at school.... I was only issued textbooks after year 9, when really they should have been given to us when we started at year 7. (Sixth Form Pupil)*

Figure 2 shows that only in mathematics (75%) and modern languages (65%) do more than half the respondents have

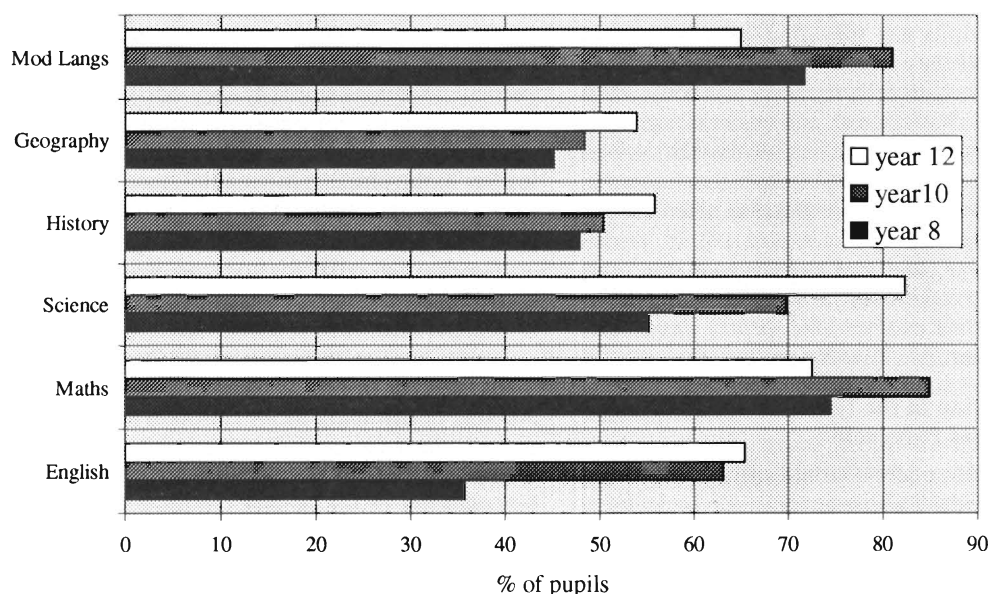


Figure 1. Pupils having books they do not have to share in lessons, by year group.

their own course book. As was the case with books for use in lessons, there is clear evidence that the more senior the pupil, the more likely it is that the books are made available for use outside school. In English about three-quarters of sixth form pupils have books which they perceive as theirs for the duration of the course, in Mathematics and Science the figure is over 80%. On the other hand, only 15% of Year 8 pupils have a text or course book in English and geography that they are allowed to keep with them

In marked contrast to the relatively small number of pupils who have access to books in lessons and to take home, the numbers of pupils who think that access to text

and there is common agreement about this among headteachers, subject leaders and parents. Most of the subject leaders and senior school managers involved in the Keele research project agree that lack of provision is a pressing factor. The cost of sets of books and the consequent need for several teachers to share them with multiple groups of pupils makes it imperative that the books remain available for classroom use on a daily basis. Since it is beyond the means of state schools to buy multiple copies of several texts, this precludes the possibility of pupils retaining copies of the relevant texts to support homework and/or extra-curricular study sessions. However, inadequate

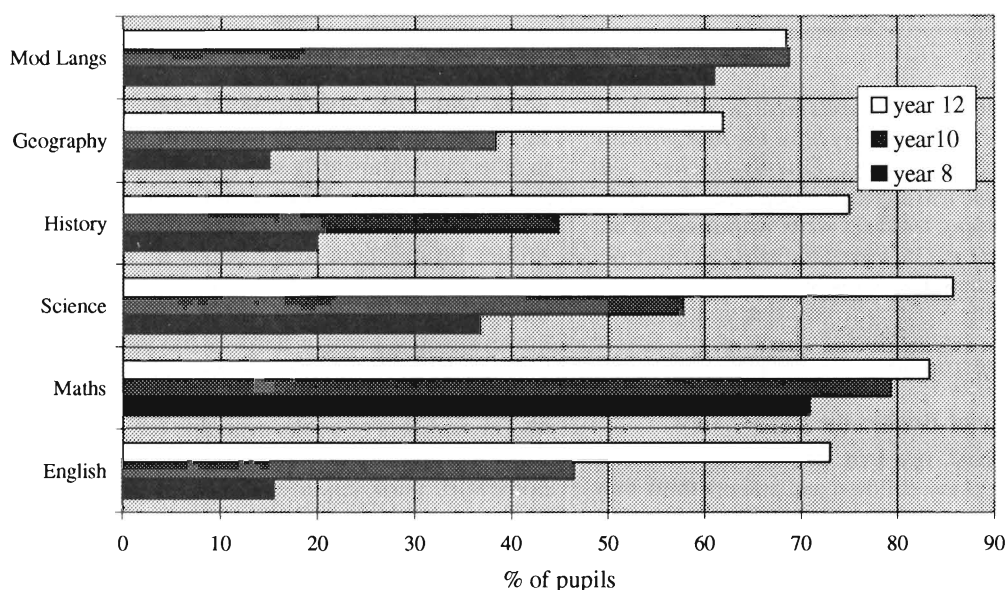


Figure 2. Pupils having a textbook to keep with them, by year group.

or course books makes their work easier to understand, is very high. More than four out of five pupils believe that having their own book in lessons helps their learning.

Only for English does the number of pupils agreeing with this proposition fall substantially below 80%. More than two-thirds of pupils say they find their homework easier to understand if they have access to a course book to help them. In mathematics the number rises above 80% and is almost as high in both science and modern languages.

This evidence shows that pupils believe that they would benefit from more extensive usage of books in the classroom, for supported self-study in the school and as reference for their work at home.

*I think it would be a good idea to have your own book at school and one to take home for homework and future reference because we are not able to take any school text books home hardly. (Year 8 pupil)*

### Why is there a Decline in the Use of Books? The School Perspective

The question we need to address would seem to be, 'Why, at a time when the New Labour government is devoting considerably increased funding to 'Education, Education, Education', is it the case that there is such a dearth of textbooks and course books available to pupils in secondary schools?'

A lack of targeted funding is certainly an important reason for the lack of availability of textbooks and course books,

funding is by no means the whole answer to this question. There are a number of other considerations.

The absence of a specific school policy on the purchase of textbooks and a consequent lack of benchmarking or guidance from senior school management on the appropriate level of funding for textbooks seems to be the most common situation in most schools. The allocation of funds to each curriculum area is invariably decided by senior management, but the disposal of the funding and the proportion of funding allocated to book purchase is the responsibility of the subject leader. In the absence of national norms or specific school policy the spending priorities are set according to the perceived needs of the individual department.

*Funding – cost for consumables, exercise books, chemicals and equipment comes first. Funding for course booklet next, then printing materials. Finally text book replacement with anything left. (Secondary School Head of Department)*

Another determining factor common to most schools is the perceived need to cater for a range of teaching styles. Only a small number of teachers would suggest that available texts are not of the quality required to meet their needs, but a substantial number think that textbooks and course books lack flexibility when compared to materials prepared by the department or individual teacher. This is particularly true for pupils in the earlier years. The high quality of modern reprographic facilities and extensive use of photocopying equipment (possibly infringing copyright in

some cases) enables the teacher to produce a wide range of source materials, closely targeted on his/her scheme of work. The cost of this process is often borne at the expense of full sets of books for lessons.

*Usually books are shared one between two. On some occasions, relevant pages have to be photocopied and used instead. We do not allow text books to be taken home because they are in use in school by other classes. Homework activities can be devised which do not need text books, sometimes pages are photocopied to go home. (Secondary School Subject Leader)*

Some of the factors influencing the use and availability of textbooks and course books appear to impact much more on some schools and some categories of school than others. The research provides evidence of a correlation between the size, academic attainment and level of disadvantage of the school and the availability of textbooks and course books. Fewer pupils from small, low-attaining or disadvantaged schools say they have an unshared book in lessons and fewer pupils say they are able to keep books for additional study.

Small schools are less likely to benefit from the economies of scale, which enable them to provide a range of texts for every year group in each curriculum area. Pupils in such schools are more likely to have to share. Small schools, non-selective schools and schools located in areas of social and economic disadvantage are more likely to have to cater for a greater range of abilities in a single classroom. It is unlikely that the additional books required to facilitate the differentiated teaching styles necessary in such circumstances will be available.

The fear of loss or damage to books, which cannot be replaced, is an abiding concern to many teachers. Pupils do not always enjoy the confidence of their teachers in respect of their ability to look after these important resources. Retaining textbooks on the school premises is a widespread response to this fear across a range of schools but it is more in evidence in inner city schools than elsewhere.

*Even if we could afford a text book for every child to take home, with the catchment area we have it would involve the loss of too many books.*

Lower attaining pupils are less likely to be trusted with books to take home than higher attainers and part of the teachers' reluctance to allow books out of school is based on the belief that less able pupils do not have the necessary study skills to benefit from textbooks or course books without the support of the teacher.

More than four out of five headteachers and subject leaders believe that there is a significant link between access to text/course books and attainment. Given additional funding, most would place a high priority on the provision of books. However, greater priority is placed on the provision of books for lessons than on the provision of books for pupils to keep and take home.

### **The Parents' Point of View**

Parents see books as the most important element in supporting children's learning at home. Nearly nine out of ten respondents to the Keele research survey consider that their child works better at home when provided with a textbook or course book. Parents naturally want to help and support their children in understanding homework they may be finding difficult and the DfEE is doing everything in its power to encourage them to do so. The availability of books is essential for them to be allowed to do this.

*I think there has been a serious decline in some aspects of education provision since my own school days, when books were available to be retained by the pupils for the duration of the term and could be taken home for homework as required. Prior to my son beginning his GCSE coursework he did not really have access to bringing text books home from school. Therefore, clearly there needs to be more accessibility to textbooks in the lower years. In previous years, as a parent, I found difficulty in helping my son with his maths homework as there was no textbook to refer to. Therefore, I lacked confidence in helping him with his education, as quite often I had been taught a different method. (Parent)*

Parents tend to have less faith in worksheets and photocopies provided to support the children's extra-curricular learning. There is a perception that the work sheets and photocopies that replace the text/course book are not always adequate for the task:

*I feel that too many times my son has brought work sheets home which are badly printed. Many are almost illegible. This does not encourage the pupil. He has to spend so much time trying to read it that he cannot be bothered. There is also the problem of too many loose sheets floating around. My experience of children working from books showed their interest was greater. (Parent)*

Where books are not available from the school to support the child's homework, parents feel increasingly obliged to buy books for this purpose, although most, 'think on principle that books and material should be provided by schools'. Well over a quarter of the families responding to the Keele survey say that they have insufficient books in the home to support their child's study. A high proportion of these families live in areas of social and economic disadvantage where, as previously stated, the schools are more reluctant to allow pupils to keep books from which to work in the home. A situation arises, therefore, whereby the parents least able to afford to buy books are those least likely to have books in the home and whose children are least likely to have access to books from the school.

### **The Impact of Alternative Teaching and Learning Strategies**

A particularly strong influence on the ways in which schools make decisions about provision for teaching and learning materials has been the increasing shift towards alternative sources of knowledge and information. Most influential of all, of course, have been the new technologies; the vast expansion in computer-based learning and the increased access to the Internet. The extension of technological provision has been made possible by massive injections of additional funding and has not been achieved directly at the expense of textbook purchase. There have been knock-on effects, however, in terms of the purchase of materials to support new methods of pedagogy and the diversity of learning styles.

As schools move from traditional, predominantly paper-based sources of information acquisition into a digital culture, it will not be possible to claim unequivocally that restricting the availability and use of books necessarily detracts from the quality of education offered to our children. A balance of source materials will eventually reflect a rich and powerful diversity of pedagogical techniques. It is the case at present, however, that parents and pupils are not

yet sufficiently confident of the new technologies to let go of books.

*I think spending all the money on computers is a bit silly. We should spend some money but not thousands of pounds. I think better books would probably be more useful. We do need more and better books, some of them are just so tatty, it's disgraceful. (Year 8 girl)*

We seem to be in a transition period where there is general acceptance that information technology is a powerful vehicle for raising standards of education, but where the technological advance is outstripping the ability of teachers – or parents – to make best use of it. Until the majority of homes have adequate computer access and parents have sufficient expertise to help their children's study in this medium, they will be unable to support their work at home

and they will become increasingly frustrated that schools are not providing books. Until the overwhelming majority of teachers acquire the pedagogical skills to harness the power of new technology to support pupils' learning – which currently is far from the case – they will not make best use of the considerable resources being channelled into technology.

During this period of transition there is evidence that teachers are committing funding away from books and into alternative source materials. It may be considered a matter of concern that they do so, even though predominant teaching styles continue to be dependent on paper-based materials and textbooks, which become less and less readily available in the classroom and even rarer for use in the home.



Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 9 April 1999.

# A Case Study into Children's Understanding of Global Food Injustices

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## Sarah Bladen

Sarah Bladen teaches at a primary school in Shepherd's Bush, West London. In this description of her case study, undertaken as a PGCE student at Goldsmith's College, University of London, she examines the media influences that might be affecting the way primary school children perceive the causes of world hunger.

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As we approach the end of the millennium the world faces two contrasting situations: one quarter of its people enjoy an unprecedented amount and choice of food, according to a recent Oxfam leaflet, while 'every night 800 million people go to bed hungry, lacking in energy and vulnerable to disease'.

If you are lucky enough to be born into the 'right background' and to be living in the 'right place' you are guaranteed access to our basic human need and even have the option to waste it.

Hunger and malnutrition exist throughout the world where poverty and inequality are found. In the richer, more advanced capitalist countries, the problem of hunger exists in the poorer areas. In this article I will focus upon hunger found in the so-called developing countries or the Southern countries. The highest incidence of malnutrition is found in countries in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia. I will refer to famine but I am most concerned with the persistence of chronic hunger that causes many more deaths on a daily basis.

I wanted to do some research on global food issues, as I feel it is unbelievable that we are nearly into the year 2000 and there are still humans who are underfed and dying of malnutrition. We have achieved great technical advances yet have gained no ground in tackling basic food issues. There is no good reason why anyone in the world should be short of food as there is more than enough to go around. Many of the advanced industrialised countries have access to more food than they can consume.

In order to take the first step towards positive change, society needs to be accurately informed about the causes of the problem, and we must make a start with the children we teach in our primary schools.

## Classroom Research

The research for this article was carried out with a Year 5 class of 30 children. Some of my questioning and work was carried out with the whole class, but I also talked individually to children and gave them some individual questionnaires to fill in.

My research was carried out in several formats including participant observation in my lessons, taking the lesson myself, questionnaires and interviews. I took lessons with the whole class (30 children). The questionnaires and interviews were conducted with a smaller number of children. In addition I asked a teacher I know to give the

same questionnaire to pupils in her classroom to give me a broader perspective.

During the class lessons I used the brainstorming technique to find out how much children already knew about the origins of food. I acted as scribe and wrote down the children's answers on a large sheet of sugar paper. This way I could record what was said. The questionnaires were given to several children to fill in in their own time, without consulting anyone. I interviewed pupils in a quiet room, in a relatively informal atmosphere.

When I conducted the questionnaires which had answer choices, some of the answers given may well have been guesses. However, it still indicates the trend of thought amongst that age group. I also provided questionnaires without any choice of answers available to give me a wider picture.

My aims were to find out how much knowledge children already held about the origins of food in the supermarkets, about the idea of 'fair trade' and about the causes of hunger itself. I wanted to find out where the children gained their information from – what sources. How influential is children's television in forming children's global ideas?

I was aware of the need to be as sensitive as possible when talking about this subject. I realise that the interviews were focusing on an emotional and sometimes negative subject – that of hunger. However, I did my best to remind children at the end of the interview that starvation is only a small picture of developing countries. I explained that many diverse people lived there, many who eat healthy, varied diets. I challenged the stereotyping of place by showing them positive photographs of people in developing countries cooking delicious meals for their family.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges was to resist and avoid engaging in indoctrination. I was very aware of the need to try to avoid going down this path. It is practically impossible to avoid asking any leading questions in order to extract information. Nevertheless my overriding aim was to encourage genuine discussion with open-ended questions.

## Where Does Our Food Come From?

I began by doing using a brainstorm technique with all of the class to find out where food comes from. My first questions were, 'Do you all like lots of chocolate, bananas and vanilla ice-cream?' and 'Do you drink tea or coffee?' The overall response was yes and a very loud yes when I mentioned the chocolate!

The learning aims of this lesson were to find out how aware the children were of the countries of origin of the above food. When I asked where they thought chocolate came from, the response was mixed. Fifteen guessed it was from North America, places like New York, and the other half of the class thought it might be from Spain or France or England. Only one child suggested Africa. I asked why they thought North America and they said they associated this area with 'junk food'. The children mentioned Cadburys and felt this meant England. Only about four children were aware that chocolate derived from cocoa beans. They were surprised when I told them that chocolate cannot be grown in Europe and that cocoa was transported from countries in the South, such as Brasil and West Africa, to Europe.

The class were all clued up about the origins of bananas; the majority were sure that they could not be grown in England and believed that Jamaica was the country of origin, rather than other islands in the West Indies or Central/South America.

The origins of vanilla tricked the class, who felt it was from the Sainsburys Savacentre!

When we discussed tea, I was pleasantly surprised when the children guessed that it came from places like India, Africa and South America. We discussed the idea of tea being typically 'English'.

Again there was slightly more awareness about coffee, although five children felt it was grown in England. At one point a few boys started singing the Nescafe advert tune, which again reinforced the influence of the brand names on television, which clearly had more impact on the children than any ideas about coffee beans in Brasil. Images in the advertising media are very real to children as they are more likely to believe what they can see on television rather than what might be the reality. It is as if the glamour of the Nescafe or Cadbury's chocolate advert hides the reality of the cocoa and coffee bean growers who often work very hard in unacceptable conditions and with very little pay. By using a map the children were able to see where popular drinks like tea and coffee came from. A child was able to say near the end of my lesson that it seems that it is other countries making the food/drink for our enjoyment. I read out a caption from a Christian Aid leaflet, describing an 11-year-old boy who works in a cocoa bean farm in Brasil. The boy revealed how hard he worked in the fields and how he had never tasted chocolate before. One of the boys in my class commented:

*I feel really sorry for that boy. I feel like going over to get him some chocolate.*

Clearly the children were able to empathise with the boy, partly because of the similarity in age and because I think the class do have a sense of justice. This can be used in a positive way by teachers to inform children about wider global issues.

### Unfair Trade

This gave me the incentive to look at inequality within the trading market and the idea of fair trade. I used an activity pack called *Go Bananas* (from Oxfam) which was an excellent way of introducing the notion of 'unfair trade' to upper primary pupils. The pack contains a set of visually superb photographs showing the different stages of the banana process, beginning with the banana grower in the Windward Islands and finishing with a fruit seller in Brixton market, London. Oxfam have ensured that *Go Bananas* has clear curriculum links which include:

- speaking and listening, reading and writing – English.
- knowledge and understanding, skills; chronology empathy, enquiry, different interpretations – history.
- knowledge and understanding of distant places, mapping skills – geography number – maths (looking at market shares)

For the first activity, every child was either given a photograph or a caption which might read 'Washing freshly cut bananas in the field'.

The aim was to match the photographs with the captions and then put the photographs in the correct sequence (this activity helps sequencing skills required by the National Curriculum). The lesson was successful as I was able to differentiate by giving the easier captions/photographs to the 'less able' children and the more challenging ones to the 'higher ability' pupils.

The stark contrast between the banana grower photographs and the picture of two smiling English children eating bananas provided for a written piece of work showing the comparison between the two photographs. The whole class pointed out the fact that the English children appeared to be having fun whereas the banana grower was probably hot, tired or even miserable. It was evident that the banana growers were working hard physically. To show the market inequality, I drew a big banana on sugar paper and asked two children to represent the banana growers and two more to represent the shipping and importing company and another group to be a large supermarket chain like Sainsburys. The groups were able to discuss their jobs from role cards and decide how much they thought they should gain. When it was revealed that the group with the least profit share or wages was the Caribbean banana workers, the class felt this was unfair.

### Class Assembly

As the class enjoyed debating their case, I decided to expand this activity and incorporate it into an assembly with a short drama about the different people involved in the banana process and asking whether they are paid fairly. It was clearly shown by the role play that it was the 'middle-men' who profited and the banana workers who were being exploited. One boy demonstrated this by holding a bottle spray which was meant to be pesticide which many banana growers use (without protection) and can really irritate the skin. One boy and girl gave the conclusion of the assembly stressing the injustice of the situation and their belief in buying fair trade bananas and other products such as coffee from Cafe Direct, a company that pays the plantation workers more money with better working conditions so that the large food industries gain less profit. Through the drama the children were able to get a better understanding of the plight of the Caribbean growers and what action may be taken by the children themselves.

After the role-play, there was further discussion of the scenario. Brendan, who acted out the part of one of the banana growers, verbalised this notable comment:

*That's where all my money is going, into their pockets! (whilst pointing at Simone and Matthew playing the part of shipping company directors)*

The children were able to comprehend the idea of someone getting paid less in order to provide more profits for the middle-men. Suggestions from the children were to:

*Take some of the profits from Simone and Matthew and give it to the banana growers.*

The children felt the need to distribute the money fairly

and take into account the amount of physical work carried out by the producers compared to that of the 'fat cats' in the multinational companies.

### Questionnaires: hunger

I carried out the second part of my research with 12 children in the same Year 5 class. My aim was to find out why they thought some people in the world did not have enough to eat. I gave six children a questionnaire to fill in which had a question such as 'Today many people in the world are hungry because':

- (a) they are poor;
- (b) they do not get a fair price for their goods and so do not have enough money;
- (c) people have too many children;
- (d) in the past the farmers' land and wealth was stolen from them;
- (e) nothing grows in countries where most people are hungry. It is too hot and never rains;
- (f) the countries where hungry people live face debts from the richer countries;
- (g) there is not enough food to go around.

The six children had to tick all the statements they agreed with. The responses from the questionnaire were all quite similar. If we take the above question, the responses given show that children do feel that the overriding reason for hunger is poverty.

However, five out of the seven children felt that the weather caused hunger and four out of the seven children felt the overpopulation statement was a relevant factor. Four out of the seven children ticked the fair trade answer b). This response was positive although it is likely to have been influenced by the previous lessons on the banana trade and the assembly about the producers not receiving a fair wage. Even so, this clearly demonstrates that the children were able to learn from the discussion about the bananas and the role-play.

From other responses it was clear that all the children thought that the hungry people did work very hard to grow food for themselves. The majority also felt that they did not have enough good land to grow their food on. All the children felt that the hungry people relied on aid from the richer countries. When I asked the children to write on the back of their questionnaires the main reasons for the existence of starvation, here are some of the written answers:

*They don't have much food because they have no money but they do work and it never rains so it is dry and hot. People in the Third World don't want to starve and if people put money in funds, they won't.*

*I think they don't have lots of food because some people don't care as long as they have food.*

*I think that there is not enough rain in some parts of the world to grow crop and food.*

*Why do they suffer so badly? Wish I could do something about it.*

I feel these statements say a lot about the children's thoughts on the subject.

To help gain a wider picture of children's views, I sent a similar questionnaire to a Year 5 class in a Roman Catholic school in Putney. Fifteen children were given individual questionnaires.

The answers given were similar to my own findings. The majority thought the origins of chocolate were in Europe,

mainly Belgium and Switzerland. Only one child mentioned Africa. Not one child knew what colonialism meant.

When I asked what programmes they had seen on Television about hunger, the *News* and *Blue Peter* were high on the list. When I posed the question, what do you remember these programmes talking about? written answers given included:

*How to help other countries have more food.*

*Help those people, give some money.*

*How Africa is poor and that they need our help.*

*Just how there is not enough food.*

*How they were starving and didn't have enough water to grow their crops.*

*About giving money to save the people's lives.*

It is clear that the message children appear to be getting from the television is simply negative, sometimes even inaccurate. These so-called 'informative' programmes convey the idea that Britain is somehow 'superior' to so-called developing countries. This negative portrayal of other countries may well help form prejudices against the people living in these countries, which, in turn, could manifest itself into racism against non-whites in Britain. Interestingly, the only child in my class to have a positive attitude towards the African continent was a girl who had spent her early childhood in the Congo. The images mentioned by this particular girl were '*pineapple, sunshine and my family*'.

### Interviews with Children

I interviewed two children, Sade and India. When I asked why they thought that some people did not have enough food to eat, they both referred to Africa in their answers. They felt that there was not enough clean water and that wars in Africa contributed. When I asked where they got their information from they said *Blue Peter* and the *News*. When I asked about hunger in Britain, the replies included:

*some people's houses might have burnt down and they are on the streets.*

*they might drink too much and spend too much money on lager.*

When I asked about possible solutions to the problems of hunger in Africa: 'try and make peace in the wars'; in Britain: 'build more houses and homes for people on the streets'. I also interviewed Luke, Jhourdan and George separately. They came up with the ideas of 'dirty water', 'hotness' as key factors in the causes of hunger. The *News* and *Blue Peter* were sources of their information. None of the children interviewed had heard of colonialism or of 'British rule' in Africa. I feel this is quite worrying since it can be argued that the causes of food shortages in Africa do go back to colonial times. When I asked the pupils if they thought there were any solutions to the problem of hunger, I got these responses:

*I don't think there are any solutions really.*

*The Government should help the poor.*

*Food should be shared out evenly.*

All the children said they felt it was important to talk about global issues and that they wanted to know more about the outside world.

### Analysis of My Findings in the Classroom

During the lessons I was sometimes surprised at the response from the children and at other times felt that my preconceptions were confirmed. One positive feeling I gained from the experience was that children between the

ages of 7 and 11 are more capable than I imagined of really empathising with what is 'fair' and what is not.

I think the children were more aware than I thought about the origins of products like tea, coffee and chocolate. Some children clearly knew that chocolate came from cocoa beans. Others, however, did believe chocolate came from places like Belgium. I felt this answer was influenced by the media, primarily advertising on television. We discussed the impact of brand names.

The use of the photographs in the *Go Bananas* pack was very effective in increasing the children's understanding about the concept of unfairness and inequality. It is easier for children to grasp global concepts through a visual medium as it is a primary source of evidence. The children did manage to use the skills of empathy, critical thinking and enquiry. The role-play played a key part in helping the children develop their skills of empathy.

When you are discussing a topic with the class, you are referring to the topic at a distance. It is only when pupils begin to talk, argue and persuade 'in role' that they are forced to consider other people's points of view and feelings.

The feedback after the role-play indicated to me that the children had all learnt something about the banana trade that they did not previously know. They were trying to relate to other people's way of life and increase their skills of empathy and global awareness at the same time.

### **Influence of the Television**

What this research with the children confirmed to me was the huge impact of the television as a learning tool. It was clear that the television shaped their attitudes towards race, as it does with many adults. When I questioned the children about where their ideas came from with reference to the causes of hunger, their answers included: *Blue Peter*; *Newsround*; the BBC, ITV, Channels 4/5 *News* and the majority of responses mentioned *Blue Peter*.

### **Biased Blue Peter**

It has been argued that the media is consistently biased in a manner that restricts our information and therefore distorts our knowledge of the real world. Television is a medium that invariably interprets information in the interests of the Establishment. This distortion of reality actually becomes a reality for an audience who have no alternative sources of information and understanding. This is especially relevant to younger children who are clearly susceptible to believing the information they receive. Children between the ages of 8 and 14 watch approximately 23 hours of television a week – more than any other age group.

The viewers often get given one-sided, biased explanations which ignore the significant causes of the problem. Instead the existence of malnutrition is attributed to natural causes or violence or war in the particular country.

The danger is that children simply associate notions of hunger and poverty in terms of unchangeable forces – the weather and internal country problems. From what I have seen of *Blue Peter* and from what I hear from the children, despite the good intentions of various children's programmes, the stereotype of the 'helpless, African victim' is reinforced and we again are seen as the 'saviours! Ironically the children do not realise that it is countries like Britain who have exploited Africa in the past and continue to do so in the existing international trade system. It is already well documented that children hold negative images of countries in Africa. Research shows that words

such as 'deserts', 'suffering', 'crying' and so on are foremost in children's minds when thinking of this continent.

### **Teachers' Opinions**

I had some informal talks with several teachers concerning their views about teaching global injustice issues with their class. I got a mixed response, but the majority of teachers seemed concerned at how to fit such a topic into the curriculum. The pressures of the National Numeracy Project and the Literacy Hour appeared to be common obstacles. Most teachers felt discussing the causes of hunger or fair trade was a 'good idea in theory' but felt unsure about it being carried out. I asked why this was so and one teacher felt that it was a sensitive issue and it might be taught badly. I agreed with his comment to some extent but racism is an equally sensitive issue and I feel it should be tackled in the classroom, not simply 'swept under the carpet'. One teacher commented, 'it's something you learn at secondary rather than primary school, isn't it?'

### **Literature in the School Library**

I failed to find any library books for children about the causes of hunger, unfair trade or any similar topic. However, there were approximately 15 books on environmental issues such as pollution and saving the rainforest. I counted 20 books for children from late KS1 to the end of KS2 on relationship issues such as bullying. It is clear where many schools' priority lies, with the environment and relationships between children within Britain only. I feel there is a need to have information available to children explaining the issue of food distribution.

### **A Review of Some of the Many Resources**

I do not intend this article to be a promotion for Oxfam, but when I did visit the Educational Centre in Victoria I was pleasantly surprised at how many activity packs about global concerns were aimed at primary school children. Here are some brief examples of some useful resources:

*Making a Meal of it!* is an activity pack from Oxfam (with superb photographs and ideas) for 7–11 year-olds. It looks at food issues around the world. It challenges the narrow perceptions of countries in the South. It focuses upon the inequalities between food producers and consumers and can be taught through science, geography, English and the PSHE curriculum. There are positive images of hard working, dignified people in the photographs and these challenge the stereotype of the 'passive, helpless starving people' which is frequently portrayed on the television.

There are ideas for teaching focusing on the celebration of food in countries in Africa.

*What's for Lunch?* is an activity pack from Christian Aid (8–11 year-olds) that explores the issue of food in Ethiopia. The image many children have of Ethiopia is of a poor desert country torn by famine and war. This exciting resource will help to give children a bigger, more holistic picture of Ethiopia. Through doing the activities and studying the photographs, pupils will be able to develop skills of understanding and empathy.

There are several organisations such as Unicef, National Geographic and Save the Children, that all provide ideas and classroom activities about global development education.

### **Conclusion**

*The most lasting way Northern countries can help the*

*Developing World is to change public opinion in their own countries. (Julius Nyerere, Ex-President of Tanzania)*

The most fundamental change needed is that of attitudes and that is achievable. Attitudes form public opinion that, in turn, can sway governments to change their policies. I feel that it is imperative that we introduce elements of global development education into the British educational system in order to encourage real positive action and at the same time develop skills of critical thinking within the learners.

My findings in the classroom have confirmed the need for children to be aware of the real causes of global problems such as hunger and the need to give a wider understanding of such an issue. Evidently, the pupils had a sense of 'justice'. It is clear from my questionnaires and interviews that the children at 9–10 years of age are already aware of global issues through the influence of the television. They have already formed quite strong views at ages 9 and 10 years. It has almost been drummed into the pupils by programmes such as *Blue Peter* that Africa is a place where droughts and war cause all the problems. Furthermore, the pupils sincerely believe that the 'British' can help and save 'them'.

In an era where so many children watch an unprecedented amount of television, it is essential that teachers challenge information received by children that may lead them to forming narrow, biased and sometimes inaccurate views of the world.

History and geography are both subjects with a rich potential for putting into practice equal opportunities. This was shown through the lesson about fair trade. It is patronising to suggest that children at Key Stage 2 will be unable to comprehend global issues.

The Dearing Report emphasises the need:

*to have respect for other people, other cultures and other beliefs; become good citizens, think things out for themselves ... develop an appreciation of the richness of our cultural heritage and of the spiritual and moral dimensions to life.*

The young children today will be our future citizens and so they will hopefully be part of the solution to many global problems. However, they can not really be effective moral citizens if they are unaware of the truth about global inequality.

If change is to occur in the so-called Third World and there is to be a reduction in poverty and hunger, society

must develop a greater awareness of the real causes of hunger. Therefore it is partly the responsibility of teachers to help fulfil this task and educate children about what is happening.

I would argue that after a year doing a PGCE, some students may not feel fully equipped to deal with the realities of unequal trade and debt in the classroom. Nevertheless, it is perhaps necessary to take risks sometimes and find out about alternative resources and teaching strategies. Teachers with vision are surely more effective than teachers who avoid raising controversial issues and refuse to question the *status quo*.

History has been 'whitewashed' for too long and we must not be afraid of tackling misconceptions about the past. Too many people or unfortunate calamities of nature do not by themselves cause hunger. This is a problem we have created which can be resolved by the citizens of today and tomorrow.

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# Teachers and Research

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## Philippa Cordingley

Philippa Cordingley is Chief Professional Adviser to the Teacher Training Agency for research and also manages the TTA network of policies for promoting 'Teaching as a Research Based Profession'. Her article is thus paired with the following one by Paul Hammond, who was a recipient of a teacher research grant by the TTA.

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In promoting teaching as a research- and evidence-based profession the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) is not suggesting that many teachers do not already explicitly base their practice in research; nor is it suggesting that no teachers ever make use of research in a variety of usages. Rather, it is expressing an aim for *all* teachers and a belief that although many teachers are already interested in making use of up-to-date knowledge and understanding about what makes teaching and learning more effective, there are many obstacles between this aspiration and its implementation. Traditionally, active teacher involvement *in* and *with* research has been thought of in the context of teacher 'action research'. Whilst the TTA sees many strengths in high quality action research with its solid foundations on which to build, its aims in relation to research and evidence are broader: they complement some aspects of the action research tradition, challenge others and build on the remainder.

The cornerstone of the TTA approach is a belief in three basic principles:

- all teachers want and need a strong and rigorous knowledge and evidence base for their practice;
- such a knowledge and evidence base cannot be satisfactorily developed without the active involvement of teachers; and
- interpreting the implications of research and theory for specific pupils, subjects, communities and teachers stage of development is a challenging pedagogic skills.

### An Agenda for Action

In trying to promote research- and evidence-based practice, the TTA always tries to work on both supply and demand. In terms of supply the Agency tries to press for significantly more classroom-focused research into teaching and learning. The establishment of the ESRC-administered Teaching and Learning Fund will focus over £12m in this direction; an important good start. To help ensure that this programme and other publicly funded education research is focused on the core contribution of teaching and learning in raising standards, the TTA, in partnership with the DfEE, is also establishing a Teacher Advisory Panel. This Panel will provide an informed teacher perspective on the research policies and priorities of the TTA, the DfEE and other government agencies. HEIs, LEAs, subject associations and other interested bodies will help to identify a core panel of teachers with an interest in and experience of national education research issues and a group of specialist teacher advisers to support them. The arrangements for identifying and selecting the Panel, for supporting it and for making use of its outputs are themselves being developed through the advice of a group of teachers. This group, we hope,

will help researchers and policy-makers probe more deeply their understanding of teachers' needs and interests, whilst demonstrating in practice the powerful contribution which a group of skilled practitioners can make to policy and to the broad research agenda.

But, of course, another \$64,000 question remains. Can we convince the majority of teachers who are not involved in the Panel or indeed in undertaking education research, that research, evidence and scholarship have something to contribute to practice? Can we convince them not only that research and evidence are interesting, but that they can be credible enough to make it worth teachers' while working through and even learning existing approaches in order to take on board new ideas and concepts?

The TTA is trying to both create debate and gather evidence about this in several different ways. It provides modest teacher research grants to encourage high quality small-scale teacher case studies which are deliberately pitched, from the start, at creating interest amongst their colleagues in research and evidence. Increasingly efforts in this scheme are being focused on making sure that these case studies are cumulative, building upon each other or upon a larger-scale evidence base. The teachers involved are encouraged to experiment with different ways of attracting their colleagues' attention and all are required to produce on four pages a summary to whet teachers' appetite for finding out more. And there are some notable successes. For example, one teacher has had over 1000 enquiries about her study and has even had her work reported as far afield as Khasakstan! Another, having persuaded all her colleagues in her own school to work with her findings, threw open the school doors to enable over 60 other teachers to observe the changes in teaching being studied in action and remained open in the evening to enable discussion with these teachers about what they had seen. This led to a second year project which both deepened understanding and produced longer term and yet more convincing learning gains. Now LEAs from all over the country are inviting the school to share their findings with local teachers.

Of course change across the profession as a whole requires something on a much larger and more systematic scale, if more sceptical colleagues are to be involved. To this end, the TTA has funded four pilot school-based research consortia. These consortia will work over three years to:

- engage all the teachers in the school in or with research;
- to develop long-term data sets about teachers and teaching to complement the increasingly strong data about pupils and attainment; and
- to enrich the process of bidding for research funds by providing funds and incentives for teachers to be involved in appropriate ways at appropriate stages.

An evaluation of the first pilot year has just been completed and this and the first round of annual reports will be used by TTA's Research Committee to decide whether and in what ways to take this initiative forward. For the DfEE's recent review of education research has recommended such consortia as an important part of the Government's agenda for building on research as part of its strategy for raising standards.

### **Tackling Supply**

There is, however, little point in creating an interest in the capacity of research and evidence to improve teaching and learning if there is not enough rigorous, accessible and relevant research and evidence to meet an increasingly widespread and discerning demand from practitioners. The TTA is attempting to influence demand in several ways. It:

- puts pressure on other funders to increase the supply of class-based pedagogical research;
- commissions larger scale studies in areas where it identifies particular needs (summaries of studies of effective teachers of numeracy and literacy can be obtained from the TTA Mailing House, telephone 0845 60 60 323); and
- tries to encourage teachers to take a more active role within the process of developing the research

agenda, for example by establishing the National Advisory Panel and by gathering evidence about their perspectives on what they want from research. A pamphlet summarising this evidence was prepared for publication by Easter 1999.

### **Taking Forward the Debate**

As I hope this article makes clear, the TTA is attempting to take forward its agenda through class consultation with practitioners. It also wants to work in partnership with those educational researchers interested in and committed to extending research- and evidence-based practice. In a short article there is not room to explain the full range of TTA strategies and activities. Work on providing MA and PhD work undertaken by teachers, the commissioning and dissemination of larger scale academic research and the development of partnership conferences for teachers are just some of the other initiatives undertaken by the TTA in this field. But if you would like to know more about this work, have comments on this article or would like to read more academic or more practical articles about TTA's research work please do write to me, Philippa Cordingley, Chief Professional Advisor for Research, The Teacher Training Agency, Stag Place, London SW1E 5TT.

# The Influence of the Head of Department on the Quality of Teaching and Learning

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## Paul Hammond

Paul Hammond is Deputy Head at Tring School, Hertfordshire. He is head of the science department and recently received a Teacher Research grant from the Teacher Training Agency to investigate the strategies used by effective secondary Heads of Department to positively influence classroom practice.

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### About the Project

This study involved working with the science departments of four secondary schools – two in Hertfordshire and two in Bedfordshire. Each of the four HoDs nominated three colleagues within the department who had built reputations as effective classroom practitioners. These were the subject of focused attention, with each choosing two classes to be interviewed and surveyed for their opinions on what makes an effective science teacher.

### Tensions in the Role

The study showed that the range of expectations and demands on Heads of Department (HoDs) gave rise to a perceived conflict of roles. Firstly within the HoD's roles and secondly between his/her own roles and those of other school personnel. The conflict exhibited itself in a number of key 'tensions', which the HoDs in the study had clear strategies for dealing with.

### Class Teacher or Subject Leader?

The HoDs sought to influence the quality of teaching of others and found it a challenge to devote enough time and energy in preparation for his/her own. The HoD was not thought to have the moral authority to monitor standards if his/her own are lacking in rigour.

The effective HoDs spent much of their time establishing systems that organised teaching more effectively – including their own. Discussion at department meetings included, for example, ways of teaching photosynthesis; the outcome of monitoring the marking of exercise books and homework ideas for the schemes of work. All of these measures directly supported the quality of teaching in the department, including that of the HoD.

### Urgent Tasks or Important Tasks?

Short-term 'urgent' tasks make it harder for HoDs to work on 'important' long-term planning tasks. To counter this, HoDs took explicit steps to deal with urgent tasks that were often administrative in nature. They jealously guarded the agenda of department meetings, shielding them from unnecessary administrative items which could be dealt with by the publication of a departmental bulletin.

### Maintenance or Development?

The time and energy expended by the HoD on maintenance tasks did not make the optimal use of their abilities. At the same time as 'keeping the wheels rolling' the HoD also had to be the 'source of propulsion' to ensure progression with implementing the development plan. HoDs in the study explicitly developed 'maintenance' structures and procedures such as:

- publishing a fortnightly departmental bulletin;

- calling interim meetings of key personnel between the regular departmental meetings;
- committing procedures for reoccurring events in the school year to paper so that implementation becomes reassuringly predictable;
- a regular scrutiny of the school calendar in order to anticipate upcoming events;
- using a range of proformas designed to allow information to be easily recorded and accessed;
- the establishment of well-managed paper and computer filing systems.

All of these measures were unspectacular but effective in the streamlining of day-to-day tasks. It was a feature of all departments that 'yesterday's development' quickly became 'today's maintenance' with the latest innovations building coherently upon those that had gone before.

### Whole School view or Department View?

There were times when representing the department and 'fighting one's corner' won support for the HoD from his subject colleagues. On occasions this was a *necessary* action for the effective HoD, for example, when an unworkable scheme is being foisted on the department. However, it was felt that the effective practitioner also needs to be able to see proposals (even those that might disadvantage the department in the short term) from a whole-school perspective, despite criticism 'back home'. One example of good practice involved senior management and departments working to a common agenda on training objectives. The senior team led whole-school INSET sessions into preferred learning styles and the department incorporated the ideas into measures designed to meet one of their own development objectives – namely the broadening of homework learning styles.

### Monitoring or Surveillance?

Two main difficulties arise here. Role confusion leads HoDs into thinking it is someone else's responsibility to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. However, this may have concealed a deeper role conflict. HoDs found the tasks of observing colleagues teach and inspecting mark-books threatening to departmental relationships.

In the four departments studied, there was little formal monitoring along the lines of systematic classroom observation or efforts to check on adherence to departmental policy on the setting of homework. Rather, the HoD monitored the quality of teaching and learning through regular informal observation opportunities. A combination of both formal and informal approaches would appear to be ideal. For example, one department had plans to introduce the monitoring of marking through a sampling of books from across a year group. The anonymous reporting of

outcomes at a departmental meeting promised to be a subtle method of nudging teachers towards the expected norm. The culture of trust built up by the HoD in question suggested that the introduction of a more formal monitoring regime would be quite acceptable to his colleagues.

### The Importance of Vision

'Vision' is a term often mentioned in connection with effective leadership. The study revealed that those with a clear view of the direction in which they wanted the department to go had firm ideas on how the vision is best implemented in the context of their department. Interviews of HoDs and their colleagues revealed very clear views on:

The nature of science as a discipline ...

*I have a commitment to the idea that scientists have a responsibility to let kids know that science isn't the truth – that science is speculative – knowledge is therefore always provisional ... I think that enables kids to see it as a creative activity.*

The manner in which it should be taught ...

*In as active a way as possible, with students doing as much as possible practical work wherever there can be. In the ideal world as much as can be going on outside of the lesson.*

A wider philosophy on education ...

*There are values that are inside me – every opportunity I can see I manipulate things so that we get there – students as individual learners and the importance of thinking as opposed to traditional learning of facts and information.*

Views on leadership ...

*When you stop thinking and challenging what you are doing and why you are doing it – then there's a danger of dying professionally.*

The way that the department should be run ...

*I think the way he brings the staff together at department meetings – he's not a dictatorial leader – he's very much a person who listens to what the staff have to say but at the same time listens with more of an overall picture of the school – where the school's going.*

And a personal commitment towards living out these values

...

*He's very enthusiastic – he also leads by example – he's got lots of ideas that he can actually bring across at department meetings – the way he does that – he can get other people involved as well, feeling ownership of it.*

### Effective HoDs and the Sharing of Good Practice

The students' views on effective teaching agreed with the findings of other researchers in this field and could be categorised under three broad headings:

- appropriate understandings and beliefs about social and interpersonal interaction with young people;
- a firm grasp of subject knowledge;
- understandings of how children learn and application of appropriate teaching methods.

More specific examples of good practice in these three areas were identified through an analysis of interview data obtained from students and teachers. Distinctive actions and attitudes displayed by the HoD led to this good practice being identified and adopted consistently across the department. Three common strategies are outlined in the following comments of HoDs:

Developing comprehensive schemes of work:

*They form the basis of the lesson we deliver: a list of the learning outcomes; topic broken down into a sensible order; suggestion of resources; experiments; risk assessment and homework.*

*The schemes of work – all the materials we produce for these – are the bottom line. The standard below which things should not drop. I am quite happy for people to explore other ways of delivering things as long as they don't fall below this standard.*

Making effective use of department meeting time:

*I do think that is a HoD's job – think out ways that the department meeting should not get clogged up with administration or discussion of specific points that don't apply to everyone.*

*That probably is my most important role in the meeting – to keep focus on the issues and in advance of the meeting it is to be selective – to filter and decide what are the key things we need to deal with at this time.*

Shaping the culture of the teachers' workroom:

*The great strength of it is that people are constantly in a dialogue about the work they are doing – they are taking the tips and advice and basic strategies that make for successful teaching.*

This particular channel for the sharing of good practice was a surprise finding of the study. Conventional teacher wisdom tells you that departmental kettles are a threat to staff unity but in the study schools the workroom acted as a forum where good practice became common practice.

It is not logically inevitable that the workroom will have a positive effect. Our evidence suggests that the leadership role of the HoD was very important here – if he/she acts as a positive role model in this respect, the tone which department members are likely to follow is set. The workroom can influence the attitudes of teachers towards students as much as it can inform them about the best resources to use for different activities.

*In the room we do talk about pupils and we hear how people react to certain situations or certain pupils and there is a sense of caring here – you're not always down on them – that obviously affects you and your relationship with the pupils. This feeling is established in the department and you are part of that.*

### Capacity for Change

Effective practitioners realised when their vision for the department was not fully shared by their colleagues so that the capacity for change was quite low. This required a management strategy that was 'tight' with little room for deviation:

*When I started, the scheme of work was the only mechanism for making sure that the people did what I wanted them to do. It was the engine that was going to change what was being taught and the tests were the mechanism for ensuring that people had taught that – instead of just carrying on what they had been doing for the past ten years. It was crucial that the SoW were focused and directed. If you take the framework away; what you get is eight people doing completely different things.*

However, when the same HoD had achieved a greater unanimity of purpose with his team a few years later, he realised that the department had a greater capacity for change and development and hence a different management style was more appropriate:

*I'm able to say 'this is a good idea, try this' in the knowledge that it's probably going to get tried, whereas in the past, I would be conscious that if I didn't write it into the scheme of work it probably wouldn't happen.*

### Conclusion

HoDs exert a positive influence on classroom practice where they:

- ease the tensions that arise firstly within the HoD's roles and secondly between his/her own roles and those of other school personnel;
- generate opportunities for good classroom practice to be identified in classroom observation, shared in department meetings and recorded in schemes of work;
- appreciate the current capacity of their department for change and development and adopt a suitable management style;

- develop a trust and respect from colleagues, thus providing the social dynamic necessary for the introduction and maintenance of quality assurance measures.

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Martin Rowson, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 29 January 1999.

# Anticipating the Five Term Year: the students' views

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**Trevor Kerry & Brent Davies**

Professor Trevor Kerry is a Research Fellow at Lincoln University Campus and Vice President of the College of Teachers. Together with his colleague, Professor Brent Davies from the University of Humberside, they undertook to investigate the opinions of two samples of students about the desirability of a five term year, given the recent public debate about the issue. The results suggest that the students had a much more creative approach to schools and the way they operate than do many adults.

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Our research project (Schools for the Future, at the International Educational Leadership Centre in the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside) has been investigating the possible introduction of the five term year into a wider sample of schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) than at present supports this form of school calendar organisation.

The fundamental thinking that underlies this form of school calendar argues that learning is a continuous process; that students learn better when schooling is less interrupted; that, in particular, the long summer break leads to 'summer learning loss'; that this 'summer learning loss' affects the most disadvantaged students the most; and that learning gains for all students can be achieved through a change in the school calendar. Our own research has suggested that all the stakeholders in schools with five term years (i.e. students, teachers and parents) tend to prefer it. Below, we list some Project publications that set out these issues in more detail, along with some of the evidence for the assertions made.

Currently only a handful of schools, all City Technology Colleges, and no LEAs have adopted this balanced approach to the school year, but interest in it is now widespread. Several individual schools and a wide variety of LEAs are pursuing the possibility or have already put in hand consultation with parents. The five term year consists of five even terms each of eight weeks, with two week breaks between them except in the summer, where a four-week break applies.

We have acted as consultants to most of the interested groups, talking formally and informally to councillors, officers, heads, teachers, parents and students. In this article we draw together the results of two consultations we have undertaken with groups of students.

Though during consultations with adults we have chosen to use presentation combined with extended question-and-answer sessions as the main means for raising the issues generated by school calendar reform, we deemed it appropriate to use an alternative method with students. We decided to use a three-stage process to capture their involvement in the debate:

1. To explain the purpose of the session.
2. To put four open-ended questions to them.
3. To use the outcomes of the questions to begin to discuss the nature of changes that could be made to the school year.

The four questions that we hoped would engage their interest were:

1. What do you like most about school?
2. What would you most like to change about school?
3. Do you think that the summer holiday is too long, too short, or about right – and why?
4. What will schools be like in 30 years' time?

We used this method with two distinct groups of students, which we will call here Sample 1 and Sample 2:

Sample 1 consisted of about 40 members of the School Council at a then Grant Maintained secondary school in the North West of England, with ages from 11 to 17.

Sample 2 consisted of 55 students from a range of schools in a Scottish city ranging in age from primary 1 through to the sixth form.

To undertake the exercise students were divided into groups of about six, when necessary with older students acting as scribes. Each question was put, and then time given for group discussion and the recording of answers on to flip-chart. A plenary session picked up the key points in the answers.

## Outcomes

### Question 1: What do you like most about school?

*Sample 1* produced a list of some 11 items that students liked about school. These included:

- ☐ the range of extra-curricular opportunities offered in the school
- ☐ school trips
- ☐ the long lunch times enjoyed in this school
- ☐ sports facilities
- ☐ a recent change to co-education
- ☐ vending machines in appropriate areas
- ☐ inter-class events
- ☐ the tuck shop, and
- ☐ participating in the College Council.

There were a few mentions of the *status quo* of the three term system and the value of the long summer break, too.

*Sample 2*, perhaps reflecting the greater number of students and the wider range of ages, found more things to like about school. These included almost all school subjects. Other factors to feature were:

- ☐ meeting friends and socialising
- ☐ teachers
- ☐ school lunches
- ☐ sport
- ☐ school trips

- ☐ the sense of achievement in school
  - ☐ free periods
  - ☐ access to common rooms
  - ☐ computer access
  - ☐ access to the arts
  - ☐ extra-curricular activities generally
  - ☐ reading
  - ☐ activities week
  - ☐ project work.
- One or two individuals only mentioned the preference for the long summer holiday.

### **Question 2: What would you most like to change about school?**

Sample 1 generated a longer list of desired changes than did Sample 2. Sample 1's list included:

- ☐ a more relaxed approach to school uniform
- ☐ better food
- ☐ shorter detentions
- ☐ the lunchtime arrangements
- ☐ the length of the school day (to make it shorter)
- ☐ introduction of free periods
- ☐ move to a 'continental day' (earlier start/earlier finish)
- ☐ permission to leave school at lunchtime
- ☐ more frequent breaks between lessons
- ☐ introduction of (mixed) football to replace rugby
- ☐ a wider range of option courses
- ☐ a Year 11 common room
- ☐ improved furniture in classrooms
- ☐ more trips and social events
- ☐ more areas in which to congregate and socialise
- ☐ less homework
- ☐ removal of mobile classrooms
- ☐ all local schools to move to the five term year

The changes for Sample 2 were generally modest in comparison. They mirrored the points about uniform, school food, better classrooms and furniture, improved options, and more flexible break times. To these they added:

- ☐ cafe-style catering to be introduced
- ☐ a longer Christmas break
- ☐ more accessible reading and textbooks
- ☐ better organised homework
- ☐ more approachable teachers
- ☐ school hours linked to changes in the seasons
- ☐ smaller class sizes
- ☐ more recognition for achievements
- ☐ better teaching methods to make lessons more interesting

### **Question 3: Do you think that the summer holiday is too long, too short, or about right – and why?**

Here, the feelings of both samples were mixed, with all three answers being recorded and reasons given.

Sample 1 included:

Just right because:

- ☐ there's time to travel abroad
- ☐ there's time to see the family
- ☐ it is possible to enjoy the local leisure facilities
- ☐ the length is a good balance

Too long because:

- ☐ they become boring
- ☐ we forget things
- ☐ returning to school after a long break is a 'shock'

Too short because:

- ☐ anything less would not feel like a break
  - ☐ some countries have two months
  - ☐ we are so exhausted we need this time
  - ☐ any change to the system may cause family problems
- Sample 1 members also volunteered the comments that 'one week half terms are pointless' and 'Christmas is too short a time to recover'.

Sample 2 also contained a range of views that included:

About right because:

- ☐ it's long enough
- ☐ it relieves stress
- ☐ the weather is good
- ☐ there are leisure opportunities timed for this period
- ☐ 6 weeks mean two to wind down, two to have fun, two to 'gear back up'
- ☐ it gives a flexible period in which to book holidays

Too long because:

- ☐ we get bored
- ☐ we forget work

Too short because:

- ☐ we need time to see friends

Sample 2 also commented: 'we could lose a week from the summer and add it to Christmas'.

### **Question 4: What will schools be like in 30 years' time?**

Generally, both samples were quite imaginative on this issue, though Sample 2 perhaps more so. Indeed, one of the older students commented spontaneously after the consultation that she was amazed at the quality of ideas produced by the primary students present.

In Sample 1 most of the students interpreted the question fairly literally and looked for in-school innovations. They produced this list:

- ☐ no set uniform
  - ☐ lessons via computer programmes
  - ☐ increased use of communications technology generally
  - ☐ laptops to replace exercise books
  - ☐ more science/engineering in the curriculum
  - ☐ more emphasis on foreign languages for global communication
  - ☐ electronic registration
  - ☐ electronic tracking of students and their progress
  - ☐ faster pace of activity
  - ☐ learning by hypnosis
  - ☐ use of 'virtual teachers'
  - ☐ interactive computer lessons
  - ☐ school buildings will be mechanised (elevators not stairs)
  - ☐ in-school MacDonald's and other commercialisation
- One group, however, went further and suggested: 'schools will disappear; students will have to log on to the Internet for five hours of lessons a day'.

Sample 2 grasped the same issues, but were often more adventurous in the ways in which they added to this kind of basic concept:

- ☐ there will be computerised lessons for bad weather days
- ☐ fewer people will walk to school
- ☐ there will be moving walkways
- ☐ there may be robot teachers
- ☐ handwriting will cease
- ☐ food will be genetically modified for taste by the canteen

- blackboards will be replaced by computer screens
- classes can be bigger  
fewer teachers will be needed
- schools will amalgamate to provide educational services
- options can be increased in range
- the best lessons will be available via video-conferencing
- schools will be sponsored as the norm

### Summary

The openness of students to thinking about the revolution in schooling that may be brought about in the next few years, along with their views about the summer breaks, were used in a final plenary session to suggest that changing the pattern of the school year is really not so revolutionary a concept as it appears to many of the older generation. The first reaction of many teachers who are faced with this idea for the first time may be some kind of knee-jerk response to conditions of service issues, characterised by some professional associations (cf. Five-term rejected, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 16 April, 1999). The first – and very proper – concern of many parents is to wonder about the downside of changes to childcare arrangements. By contrast, students grasp the reality of even revolutionary change in school procedures and practices with relative ease. While many parents and teachers may have vested

interests in retaining the *status quo* of schools and schooling, students come to the topic with agendas of change already half-formed. This is heartening news for those schools and LEAs far-sighted enough to consider significant change, of whatever kind, to their provision for education.

### Publications on the Five Term Year from the Schools for the Future Project

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- Davies, B. & Kerry, T. (1998) Summer learning loss: the evidence and a possible solution, *British Journal of Learning Support*, 13(3), pp. 118–122.
- Davies, B. & Kerry, T. (1998) Prisoners of time and summer learning, *FORUM*, 40, pp. 61–62.
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- Davies, B. & Kerry, T. (1999) *Making a Break: a report on the Tardis Project*, The Funding Agency for Schools, January.
- Davies, B. & Kerry, T. (1999) The role of calendar innovation in improving learning in schools' topic. Windsor: NFER.
- Kerry, T. (1998) Two million students in the USA do it – so why not us?, *Primary School Manager*, May.
- Kerry, T. (1999) The future for schools and schools for the future, *Education Today*, 49, pp. 3–16.

# Book Reviews

## **Lessons in Class: a fresh appraisal of comprehensive education**

DICK COPELAND, 1998

Newcastle: TUPS Books. 369 pp., £9.95

ISBN (paperback) 1 901237 060

Dick Copeland is a strong believer in comprehensive education. He has had long experience as teacher, deputy and finally headteacher. He has thought through the leading theoretical and philosophical issues at stake and takes nothing for granted. This book is the product of his experience and thinking over the last 40 years. It is an outstanding contribution to the literature on what has been the leading educational initiative of this century.

*Lessons in Class* is subtitled 'A Fresh Appraisal of Comprehensive Education', and that is what it is. Such an appraisal is needed now, *both* because over 30 years have passed since comprehensive education became 'national policy' resulting in profound changes in the social, economic and political context in which comprehensive schools have to operate, *and* because there is now a rich fund of experience which allows just such a 'fresh appraisal'.

Dick Copeland's experience has been central to this whole movement. For many years Deputy Head of a well-known, purpose-built community school – Wyndham School in Cumberland – he was appointed Head of Ryhope School in Sunderland in 1969, holding that position until the school was closed in 1988 due to falling rolls. He has used the whole of that experience most fruitfully in this book, published ten years after his retirement. This experience included facing a powerful media and 'establishment' attack on all he was doing at Ryhope in defence of comprehensive principles as he saw them. This is documented in Part 5 of the book, 'Powerful Forces: extraordinary happenings', which includes a blow-by-blow account of his experiences. This is an historical document of some significance.

The book is divided into six parts. Part 1, 'Setting the Scene', presents the political, historical and social influences affecting public education generally. The second, 'Comprehensive Education in Context', deals in four chapters with the emergence of comprehensive education, the new, positive thinking about the nature of human potential which fuelled this movement, and new attitudes and ideology underpinning the curriculum. Part 3, 'Comprehensive Values', contains the core of the argument, in particular the author's belief in what he calls 'non-selective practice' – that is, establishing an all-inclusive approach to teaching, learning, guidance and planning. Copeland rejects the term 'mixed-ability' teaching, holding that it perpetuates an outmoded and discredited ideology, implying the inflexibility of 'intelligence' (or whatever). In this he is surely right. The argument is carried through into Part 4, 'Creating a Non-selective Environment', which deals with all aspects of comprehensive schooling. There is then Part 5, concerned with the sustained attack on his leadership of Ryhope School which, incidentally, went down with all flags flying, and a final Part 6 focusing on 'Current Issues and Campaigning Strategies', titled 'Comprehensive Education: key to the future'.

There is a fine foreword by Caroline and Tony Benn which stresses the importance of this book in the continuing, ever sharpening struggle to defend and develop comprehensive ideals. At a time when the leadership of the Labour Party continues to support and even initiate measures which undermine comprehensive education, it is all the more important that actual experience at the grass roots is made widely known.

This is an important book which teachers, governors and parents will all find immensely useful, but also a real stimulus in the long, continuing struggle to transform our secondary system on genuinely comprehensive lines. **Brian Simon, Leicester**

## **Transformations: children's meaning making in a nursery**

KATE PAHL, 1999

Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books. 110 pp., £12.95

ISBN 1 85856 098 5

The author, Kate Pahl, states at the outset of her book that 'literacy is a much deeper concept than the simple equation with the alphabet and reading and writing'. Throughout this accessibly written book Kate Pahl draws on her insightful observations of children in a nursery setting and of her young son at home to illustrate how young children explore and communicate ideas and meanings through a range of modes of representation. Readers of this book will be left in little doubt that the prolific and purposeful model-making, drawing, painting, cutting out, costume-making and role play that young children engage in is of fundamental importance. These activities play an essential role in helping young children make sense of their worlds and construct meanings and they are moreover key activities in promoting literacy development.

Each of the chapters provides vivid examples of young children experimenting with ideas and exploring the multiple ways in which these concepts and ideas may be symbolised, transformed and explored afresh. Chapters 3 and 4 highlight the importance of enabling children to express and interrogate ideas in a range of modes and dimensions. Chapter 5 emphasises the need for educators to be sensitive to the way in which a child's cultural experiences and knowledge will play a part in shaping understanding and perceptions. The penultimate chapter explores the possibility that there may be a gender-based difference in children's routes to literacy and suggests that teachers need to respond positively to many boys' preferred modes of expression and in doing so will be better placed to nurture boys' literacy development.

The publication of Kate Pahl's book coincides with the publication of a number of government-led initiatives (e.g. the National Literacy Strategy and the Review of the Desirable Learning Outcomes) which may be instrumental in significantly eroding opportunities to play and explore within the school environment. In the Review of the Desirable Learning Outcomes consultation document (QCA, 1999) 'language and communication' are discussed as a discrete area conveying the message that communication through *language* is of prime importance. The need to provide opportunities for children to 'explore and share their thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of art, design, technology, music, drama, movement, dance, and imaginative play activities' is mentioned only as part of the last element of the teaching programme, creative development (p. 12). There can be little doubt that readers of Kate Pahl's book will be constantly prompted to reflect upon the consequences of recent policies and initiatives in early years education which appear to place so little value on children's own methods of exploring, interrogating and creating meanings.

Kate Pahl's sensitive observations of children's play, writing and drawings analysed within a sound theoretical framework provide an insight into the complexities of very young children's thinking and her book powerfully illustrates how supporting young children's literacy development requires one to acknowledge, value and respond to children's skills and capabilities as learners and explorers of meaning.

**Naima Browne, Goldsmith's College, University of London**

## None But Our Words: critical literacy in classroom and community

CHRIS SEARLE, 1998

Buckingham: Open University Press, 172 pp., £14.99  
ISBN (paperback) 0 335 30237 X

This book traces the various stages of Chris Searle's career as a controversial teacher of English. At each stage he faced a confrontation with established authority, for it was Searle's habit to get his students' work published and brought to the attention of a wider world. *None But Our Words* goes through these publications, not just to illustrate 'ordinary' students' extraordinary talents, but just as important, his own approach to literacy in the working-class inner city, African or Caribbean contexts where he has always worked.

After a start in the Caribbean, in 1970 Searle came to an ancient church school lately gone comprehensive in the East End of London. He saw the clash between the vitality of the language pupils used and the repressive structure of their schooling, and so insisted pupils get out and look at their own area and write about the life they saw there. The result was the well-known *Stepney Words*, critically acclaimed but leading to dismissal by the governors, who had not given him permission to publish.

As his students and supporters in education worked for his reinstatement, Searle was glad that at least he had disproved that dictum of W.H. Auden's that he so disliked: 'Poetry makes nothing happen'. In this case it had.

He soon found himself teaching English in a Lambeth primary school when tenants of a local halfway house began a campaign of protest at the conditions under which they were forced to live. In *The Dangerous Fires* pupils demanded council action and Searle wrote simultaneously that 'the teacher should support and affirm any such struggle of the pupils or their parents', for this was the 'critical literacy' he sought to practise – 'with its organic link to critical action'. The result was strong professional disagreement in educational journals about getting pupils to write politically-slanted poetry.

After winning reinstatement to his first school, in 1976 came *Classrooms of Resistance*, poems that recognised the wider political struggles like anti-apartheid and Northern Ireland that affected local East End lives. Searle saw these poems as writing not just by individuals but representing 'a collective sense of students working together'. *The Times* characterised this latest volume as 'teaching revolution in the classroom'.

Soon the hounds of *Mail*, *Telegraph* and *Sun* were also in full pursuit – at a time when the Right was in the ascendant as society approached what Searle calls the years of 'conservative restoration, the new barbarism of a market system of education'. But Searle stuck to his guns, proclaiming that 'there is no true objectivity without a political perspective'. It was just that his was different from theirs, demanding as it did 'an understanding of class in education'. As John Pilger remarked, Searle's work and his students' poetry 'reveals something the ruling class does not want revealed'.

At Langdon Park School, his next East End post, came *The World in a Classroom and the People Marching On*, the latter tapping the historical struggles of waves of immigrants feeding in to the East End: literacy leading to history. More public criticism, of course, but also defence in equal measure, including one pupil who said Searle was 'the best teacher in the school. He encourages us to argue back at him ... he insists on good behaviour and proper punctuation'. How maddening such tributes must have been for the Rhodes Boysons and Lady Olga Maitlands still hunting him down.

At the end of the 1970s came two years in Mozambique where local people 'looked towards language and literacy... (to help) propel their new nation out of centuries of poverty, naked exploitation and imperial rule'. Here is what Searle says he learned: 'Language and Action: for my teaching the two became inseparable', as they had earlier for Paulo Freire, whose literacy work Searle so much admires.

Back in London's East End again at the start of the 1980s the main item on the agenda was racism. A class under Searle produced a pamphlet-play on a local Guyanese victim of racial murder (*Who Killed Michael Ferreira?*) But there were also pupils writing on the Hillsborough deaths, a collection Searle called 'a 1989 *Lycidas*'.

And so the last chapter, covering the years at Earl Marshal School in Sheffield, 100 per cent working class, 80 per cent Asian and black: Pakistani, Yemeni, Afro-Caribbean. These were the years of the Gulf War and ever more racism, but inside the school years of pride in internationalism, in the students' own languages, in making the school available to the community.

But this was not a school destined to attract the parental choice brigade from across Sheffield, and the Council tried to close it in 1991. There was a community revolt and it stayed open, followed by three straight years of student publications, the second featuring writing about themselves and their families, in particular their mothers and the women in the community. It was short-listed for the Raymond Williams Community Publishing Award.

But the New Education politics was consolidating fast and eventually the school came up against targets, league tables and competition for ever narrower forms of excellence, backed by OFSTED with its murderous new weapon of 'failing' schools. Searle was similarly ousted by Sheffield's political leadership who also removed the school logo of black, white and brown doves along with its Bob Marley motto: 'None but ourselves can free our minds'. It is said that both logo and motto still reappear regularly as graffiti in and around the 'new' school premises.

Searle's literacy lived on, however, that 'purposeful use of language and the imagination' that he meant 'to be at the centre of English teaching'. So, too, his view that 'Literacy was there to understand the world, then change it'. Although now in competition with perpetual testing, prescribed thinking, and a dramatic drop in innovation within so many of our classrooms, it still wins converts, especially for those embarking on literacy drives in the world as a whole.

But we should also have liked to have had experience of Searle teaching in the context of a mainly middle-class UK community, surely the acid test of developing language as the tool for the 'betterment of the lives of those who learn to use it'. And, lastly, since all aspects of literary publications are important, we would hope to find Searle learning from the skills of Ron McCormick, the photographer he worked so closely with in the East End and whose elegant designs for covers of anthologies are featured in *None But Our Words*. Where is that elegance and originality on this book's own cover?

For that matter why is it that academics so seldom get consulted on the covers of their own books? It is a cause in waiting. For sure, Chris Searle will get around to it.

Caroline Benn, London

## Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement

D. EPSTEIN, J. ELWOOD, V. HEY & J. MAW (Eds),  
1998. Buckingham: Open University Press

## Men as Workers in Services for Young Children: issues of a mixed gender workforce

C. OWEN, C. CAMERON & P. MOSS (Eds), 1998  
London: Institute of Education, University of London

During the past few months whilst I have been reading and re-reading these books, there has been a surge in newspaper articles, items on television, government pronouncements and policy initiatives relating to problems of and for boys, youths, men, fathers. The range of issues raised is reflected in these two volumes, both of which helped me move beyond the headlines. There are recurring themes which cut across the two books, considered from different

perspectives. Both collections are the work of multidisciplinary / multiprofessional groups. *Failing Boys?* is based on a series of seminars held by the Centre for Research and Education on Gender at the University of London Institute of Education between 1995 and 1997. *Men as Workers in Services for Young Children* is the proceedings of an international 3-day seminar convened by members of the Thomas Coram Research Unit of the London University Institute of Education in 1997.

Academic underachievement in boys is not a new phenomenon; neither, until recently, has it been seen as a cause for public concern, according to Michele Cohen, a contributor to *Failing Boys?* Drawing on a range of texts from the nineteenth century to present day, she argues that boys' academic underachievement has been consistently misrepresented and passed off as hidden potential. One version of this suggested that boys' underachievement resulted from what was seen as their characteristically casual attitude to academic learning. This was regarded as an 'index of their mental health', an adaptive mechanism, in effect, protecting them from the mental and physical 'overstrain' to which girls (being innately less able intellectually – but eager to learn and prepared to work at it) were believed to be more susceptible. Thus, mental health can be seen to equate with manliness and innate intellectual superiority, whilst overstrain connects with femininity and intellectual weakness.

Understanding of the ways in which boys' underachievement and girls' superior achievements have been manipulated by such interpretations to preserve the *status quo* is, according to Cohen, a necessary precursor to identifying and tackling the roots of the problem.

The tone of the present alarmist public debate on boys' underachievement, true to Cohen's analysis, tends to be oppositional and sexist. Implicitly, it is unnatural for boys to be outstripped by girls (since this is the first we have heard of it), therefore the causes of boys' underachievement can be unquestionably attributed to sources external to boys themselves.

At this level of debate 'boys' and 'girls', are undifferentiated by home and family background, class, culture, ethnicity and individuality; stereotypical views of masculinity and femininity prevail, as do narrow definitions of 'achievement'.

The question mark in the title of this collection is intended to nudge the debate towards a more reflective consideration of the issues, with each contributor attempting to unravel one or other of the assumptions and biases underlying the idea of 'failing boys'. Without this more reflective debate, ill-conceived solutions to misconceived problems (see below) seem inevitable.

The recently published annual report of the Equal Opportunities Commission reveals that in the twenty odd years since the Equal Pay Act was introduced, the pay gap between men and women persists. According to the Commission's chairwoman, Judith Mellor, this is partly to do with stereotyped work choices which occur on leaving school and 'feeds people into a cycle of inequality which is not limited to the first job'. This raises questions about the relationship between achievement and job prospects which in turn challenges the very basis of education systems like ours. These issues are dealt with in *Failing Boys* by Patricia Murphy and Janette Elwood. It also creates problems and tensions for advocates of a mixed gender workforce in services for young children.

Working with young children is traditionally regarded as women's work. It is publicly undervalued and consequently underpaid due to the widespread view that it is a soft option for women, involving them in doing little more than what comes naturally and (therefore) effortlessly, i.e., mothering. It was this view which led the last Tory administration into floating the idea that provision in the nursery sector could be expanded through the creation of a 'mum's (sic) army' of nursery workers and the redeployment of trained (often graduate) nursery teachers to the statutory sector – the implication being that they were wasted on under-fives.

The gendering of work with young children and the low status/low pay consequences of this are cited in *Men as Workers in Services for Young Children* as the main reasons men are re-

luctant to work in this field. Despite this, some men do choose to do so and the voices of some of them are amongst those heard and reflected in this collection.

If more men could be persuaded to enter what by tradition is arguably the most gendered of all professions, this could profoundly effect constructions of masculinity – regarded by contributors to both volumes as central to the whole debate. Depending on why men's contribution is sought in the field of early childhood, these effects could be either to further reinforce traditional views and values, or alternatively, to allow for a diversity of masculinities to emerge.

This connects with what the editors of *Failing Boys?* describe as the 'pity the poor boys' and the 'boys will be boys' schools of thought (p.6). 'Pity the poor boys' thinking attributes boys' failures to the emasculating effects of over-exposure to women in positions of power over children, such as mothers and women teachers and more recently to the influence of feminists. It sees solutions in terms of the introduction of male members of staff to act as role models and to ensure that boys can access the curriculum through appropriate methods and content. This connects with 'boys will be boys' arguments which define appropriateness as gendered, biologically given and immutable. A careful reading of these two books reveals the central flaw in such thinking which can only serve to set back the clock several years – for all of us.

Each book emphasises the idea that there are as many differences among girls and boys as there are between them. There are many samenesses too. What is insufficiently brought out perhaps is the differences which occur within each one of us. Trevor Chandler in *Men as Workers in Services for Young Children* describes the responses of male staff to questions about their experience of working with young children: they did not want to be cast in the role of perpetual rough and tumble partner by the children, on the other hand they wanted to hang on to their 'wild side'. Me too, lads!

Pat Gura, Goldsmiths Association for Early Childhood

## Experience and Education: towards an alternative National Curriculum

GWYN EDWARDS & A.V. KELLY (Eds), 1998

London: Paul Chapman. 220 pp., ISBN 1 8539 6272 4, £16.99

It is now just over two years since I retired from teaching (31 years in the profession including 11 as a Head) and I am finding it more and more difficult to write about education without becoming profoundly depressed.

The profession I entered in 1966 was an exciting one. The 11-plus was being abolished, freeing primary schools from the straitjacket of exam preparation, the Plowden Report was promoting 'child-centredness' and learning through discovery, open-plan schools were being built, middle schools and mixed-ability teaching experimented with. The heady scent of pioneering innovation was in the air. Of course the profession didn't get it all right – the William Tyndale episode was an example of poor management and what happens when you take things to extremes. But a huge amount of good work was going on. Through the 1970s and into the 1980s much research was undertaken into how children learn and on how a curriculum should be constructed.

Then, in 1988, it all ground to a halt. Kenneth Baker published his proposals for the new National Curriculum. All the developments of the past 30 years were thrown in the bin. No notice was taken of the research on children's learning or the effectiveness of different teaching styles. What we got, Richard Aldrich was quick to point out, was the reincarnation of the 1904 Secondary Regulations. Only this time, primary schools got them, too.

The National Curriculum was a disaster. Reading standards dropped for the first time in 40 years, the 'less able' became disaffected, and teachers' professionalism was destroyed as they

struggled to 'deliver' a curriculum that wasn't theirs and in which they were allowed no say.

It would have been nice to think that, when the problems began to surface, the politicians might have said, 'Sorry, we shouldn't have interfered – now we'll let the profession sort out the mess'. But, no, they decided that it was all the teachers' fault and that the way to sort out the problems was through even greater interference. So, whereas the Tories spent 10 years telling teachers *what* to teach, we now have a Labour government telling them *how* to teach it. The Literacy Hour is the latest example. I am appalled when I go into schools at how 'able' pupils are being 'switched off' by this mindless pap.

Perhaps even more worrying is that we now have a whole generation of young teachers entering the profession who have been taught nothing but how to deliver this flawed curriculum.

Now David Blunkett is about to publish his revised National Curriculum, to come into force in 2000. It is to include lessons in citizenship because, as Blunkett has pointed out, 'Americans reinforce their identity in ways we never have' (mainly by shooting each other, presumably). Blunkett doesn't seem to understand that such aspects of the curriculum – the cross-curricular themes, topics or dimensions advocated by the NCC and SCAA – cannot be 'bolted-on' as afterthoughts. As Edwards and Kelly point out, 'there is a mismatch between what these additional forms of provision are designed to do and the principles upon which the National Curriculum itself is founded'.

So, in this depressing context, it was a delight to read a book which reminds us that there really was a time before the 1988 Act when teachers actually discussed the aims and purposes of education and how children learned. However, Edwards and Kelly have provided us with a book which is much more than a nostalgic yearning for the past. It is a plea for 'a genuinely open debate which will go beyond the superficial and identify the essential components of a national curriculum for a democratic society'. The book offers 'an alternative blueprint for a national curriculum which will offer all pupils ... a genuine entitlement to the kind of curriculum which will enhance not only their employment prospects but also their personal lives, while at the same time ensuring the benefits which must follow for society as a whole if those lives are led in a genuinely participative democratic setting' (which rather begs the question whether we live in a democracy or whether the rules by which we live are now made by the Monsantos of this world).

In the introduction they outline some of the promising developments of the 1970s and 1980s. For example, during the 1980s HMI and some local authorities were developing an 'entitlement curriculum' based on 'areas of experience'. They describe how these developments were overtaken by the National Curriculum which 'ignored all thinking of this kind and adopted a content approach, listing core and foundation subjects, and, within those subjects, detailing the content to be taught and learned'.

The first chapter encapsulates the central message of the book – that real education happens only through experience. 'Everyone who has contributed significantly to the educational debate during the last two centuries has begun from the concept of education as personal development. And all have acknowledged the corollary of that, that such development can be promoted only by genuine forms of personal experience.'

They offer a summary of developments in the first half of the twentieth century. 'The general climate of educational thinking was one in which the superior importance of the pupil to the content of the curriculum was beginning to be recognized.' And they quote A. N. Whitehead (1932) who 'roundly criticized those forms of education whose focus is on education as the transmission of knowledge and its assimilation by largely passive recipients. He described the kind of knowledge purveyed by that form of 'education' as 'inert ideas', and he claimed that 'education with inert ideas is not only useless, it is, above all things, harmful', since 'knowledge does not keep any better than fish'.

They point out that 'it is impossible to offer a definition of democracy in terms of privilege or of a democratic system of education in terms of competition or divisiveness ... those who

advocate an approach to education through experience regard the educative process as essentially one of collaboration rather than competition, as democratic rather than elitist'.

There follow chapters on questioning School mathematics (Paul Ernest), Scientific experience (Daniel Davies), Design and technology: creating new futures (John Saxton), The physical: a new millennium, a new beginning? (Dave Boorman), English, fetishism and the demand for change (Alex Moore), The aim is song: towards an alternative national curriculum for the arts (Malcolm Ross), The problems and persistence of the spiritual (Lynne Broadbent), Personal, social and moral education in a democratic society (A. V. Kelly), and Political, social and economic education for democratic citizenship (Gwyn Edwards). The book concludes with a list of 'Emergent principles for an alternative National Curriculum'.

The book suggests, and I hope it is right, that there is 'a growing sense that in the context of a curriculum centrally geared to attainment targets, especially those which appear to be readily measurable, there is neither scope nor allowance for other important, if more elusive, aspects of the educational process ... we must devise a curriculum which will focus on the pupils who are its recipients as well as on the needs of the society they are being prepared to enter, and, further, on the interaction of these two factors in the curriculum equation'.

This book is an important contribution to the debate which I earnestly hope, though regretfully doubt, will inform the revised National Curriculum. I hope all teachers will read it. It will remind them that there is more to education than 'delivering' someone else's flawed curriculum. As to Blunkett, as far as I'm concerned, he's beyond redemption.

Derek Gillard, *Oxford*

## Gender, 'Race' and Class in Schooling: a new introduction

CHRIS GAINE & ROSALYN GEORGE (Eds), 1999  
London: Falmer Press. 171 pp., £14.95, ISBN 0 7507 757 7

Gender, 'race' and class, and the perceived inequalities associated with them have been the cornerstones of the sociology of education since the 1960s. Gaine and George revisit them here in the light of the shifts in emphasis and changing patterns of the late 1990s. Following a clear exegesis of the key ideas and concepts underlying thinking in these areas, the writers turn their attention to facts and representations with a historical look at the relationship between women and the economy, a descriptive account of ethnic minorities and a summary of thinking on social class.

For the most part Gaine and George keep the three strands of gender, 'race' and class separate as they provide a clear review of the relevant research and history of policy making in each area in relation to schooling. The roles of language, curriculum and the differential experience of schooling in establishing and maintaining inequality are examined.

An interesting last chapter looks at the conflicting notions of inclusion and separation around gender and 'race' and draws on illuminating interviews with parents on choice of school which encapsulate many concerns of the book.

The authors are at pains to emphasise overlaps when they occur and to guard against blanket statements. This is particularly important when looking at the educational achievement of different ethnic and social groups. They also draw attention to the fact that certain 'taken for granted' of the 1980, such as the lower attainment of girls, no longer hold true.

The book will be of particular use in initial teacher training as it provides an excellent introduction to the issues which have lain at the heart of the sociology of education for decades and which do not appear to lose their centrality, social inclusion legislation notwithstanding.

Jenny Thewlis, *London*

## Modern Educational Myths: the future of democratic comprehensive education

BOB O'HAGAN (Ed.), 1999

London: Kogan Page, 222 pp., £19.99, ISBN 0 7494 2932 1

This book is the product of a local initiative, and as such is to be warmly welcomed. At a time when central government is arrogating to itself more and more powers it is of crucial importance that those directly involved in schooling locally should formulate their own outlook and have their say, however controversial they may be. *Modern Educational Myths* is based on a series of lectures given in comprehensive schools in north-east Derbyshire where, according to the editor, schools have steadfastly maintained a collaborative stance 'despite the pressures to compete and conflict'. These provided an ideal location for a set of lectures relating to comprehensive education which form the groundbase of this fine book. The editor, Bob O'Hagan, who contributes both an introductory and concluding chapter, is himself the inaugural head of the innovative Hasland Hall Community School at Chesterfield after a wide experience of community comprehensive schools elsewhere.

The various chapters are constructed around a series of 'myths' which, in the authors' view, have a highly damaging effect on educational practice and yet continue to maintain a certain dominance. The first chapter, for instance, by Caroline Benn and Clyde Chitty, entitled 'Comprehensive Education', highlights the myth (central, of course, to 'Intelligence Testing') that 'Educational Potential is a Fixed Quantity'. This has led, and still leads, to all kinds of divisive practices both within and between schools, which act as serious obstacles to realising genuinely *comprehensive* education. The Government's recent espousal of ability setting is an example. Other myths tackled include that 'local government as a serious educational force is finished' (effectively rebutted by Valerie Hannon, CEO Derbyshire), and, more controversially perhaps, 'good management make good schools', very severely analysed by Stephen Ball. All the chapters are controversial – and the more interesting and relevant as a result. The book is a thought provoker and that is just what is needed today.

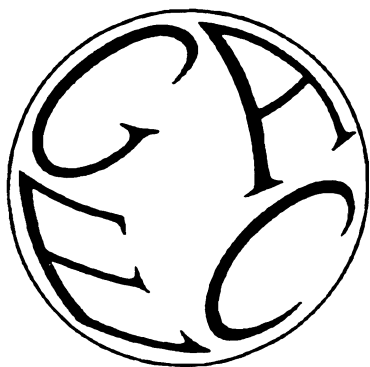
The book covers a wide field and is divided into several parts.

One of the most interesting, indeed striking, of these brings together chapters on curriculum and assessment. This includes an outstanding contribution by the Chair of the *FORUM* Editorial Board, Michael Armstrong, directly challenging the myth that 'standards are a measure of quality'. This is based on a close, highly perceptive analysis of a single 6-year-old's story written in class at school. The qualities which Michael reveals in this study undermine the validity of the drive on 'standards' to which New Labour has nailed its colours. There is a good deal more to education, as Michael shows, than simply achieving quantifiable 'levels' in the 3 Rs and elsewhere. Bob Moon follows this critique with a chapter demolishing the myth 'testing helps learning', arguing persuasively for the use of more holistic and human assessment techniques which can be used to help learning 'rather than simply to judge schools and their pupils'. Bob Moon is optimistic about the future.

There are other fascinating chapters which can only be briefly referred to – particularly that by Tim Brighouse based on his experience at Birmingham with the many initiatives directed to broadening the curriculum particularly in the home and the local community to give new, wider experiences for all. Maurice Kogan contributes a wise, and again critical, chapter on national and local government relations, while Tom Wylie, Chief Executive of the National Youth Agency, makes an outstanding contribution under the heading 'Schools and Beyond': Myth, 'good schools are all we need'. There are others too. Bob O'Hagan's conclusion, 'The Future: comprehensive education for democracy', is packed with suggestions for the transformation of these schools for the future. Now they are getting over their teething problems, due often to the context in which they originated (the selective, tripartite system), comprehensive secondary schools can now fruitfully adopt new procedures to meet the challenges of the future.

This book must be warmly welcomed and will, I hope, be widely read, promoting, as it does, creative thinking about the future. We are presently in great need of such an input.

Brian Simon



## **GOLDSMITHS' ASSOCIATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD**

The Goldsmiths' Association for Early Childhood (GAEC) was formed by staff of Goldsmiths' College, University of London, in 1990 and launched at the October day

Conference that year. It was formed at a time of great uncertainty and disruption in early education. An increasing anxiety about what might happen to quality provision for under-8s led many teachers who were working in the vicinity of Goldsmiths' to contact the College to ask if a forum could be established to promote the study of, and the exchange of ideas about, good professional practice in the early years.

During what has proved to be a troubled decade for early years education, the Association has become well-established and supported by early years professionals. Most members work in London and South East England, but the Association has an increasing overseas network. It has also extended its membership to all who are involved in the care and education of young children.

### **The Aims of GAEC**

The Association aims

- To provide a network of support and communication for teachers and other early years professionals, especially in the South East and London area.
- To promote an understanding of the particular characteristics of high quality care and education of children up to the age of 8 years.
- To disseminate current research findings, issues and educational thinking about the developmental needs of young children and how these can be supported by early years professionals.

### **The Activities of GAEC include**

- An annual conference in the Autumn
- Seminars and workshops
- The circulation of a newsletter about the Association's activities
- The publication of a directory of members and their particular interests within the early years field, to encourage the formation of networks and research groups among members.

### **How to Join GAEC**

Application forms can be obtained from The Membership Secretary, Goldsmiths' Association of Early Childhood, Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths' College, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW. Annual subscription is currently £10.00 (full), £5.00 (student).

# STATE SCHOOLS

*New Labour and the Conservative Legacy*

Edited by

**CLYDE CHITTY** Goldsmiths College

**JOHN DUNFORD** General Secretary, Secondary Heads Association

Eighteen years of Conservative stewardship ensured that the Labour Government's education policy did not begin with a *tabula rasa*, for its starting point has been defined by the previous government to a greater extent than has been the case with any other incoming government. In this book a number of practitioners discuss the micro effect of the policies in their schools. The book will make an important contribution to the continuing debate about the best way forward for state education in England and Wales.

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**Clyde Chitty & John Dunford.** Conclusion

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July 1999, 196 pages, paperback (ISBN 0 7130 0214 X) £16.50,

Cloth (0 7130 4034 3) £39.50

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The *Goldsmiths Journal of Education* is a twice-annual peer-reviewed publication from the Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths College, University of London. The editors are concerned to attract contributions from a range of scholars and professional educators, including teachers in all sectors of the educational world as well as those working in related fields. Contributions are especially welcome from previously unpublished authors, in particular graduate students engaged in advanced studies in education and cognate areas.

Manuscripts submitted to the *Journal* may comprise analyses of existing practice, methods and programmes; critical discussions and accounts of new ideas; and reports on research activities with either empirical or theoretical emphases. Contributors are encouraged to write directly about their experience and not to feel constrained.

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