

A day in the life of ... a democratic secondary school teacher

Democratic approaches to learning are a rarity in the British education system. However, for the last few years students at the school where Lesley Browne teaches have been given the opportunity to choose how they learn Advanced Level Sociology and Advanced Level British Government and Politics. Students have been invited to choose the syllabus they study, areas of study, whether to opt for courses based on 100% examination or coursework components, and how to organise their learning. What follows is an example of a typical day.

8.00 a.m.: Arrive. Sign in. Clear pigeonhole. Sort out materials for duplication for Jane's 'A' level Sociology presentation. Sort out resources for simulation after break.

8.35: Two students arrive to arrange the furniture in the classroom for their presentation.

8.40: As usual, I stay in the tutor room so that I am available to discuss any pressing issues. Zoe arrives to explain that she is going into hospital. Richard follows, delighted at UCCA's offer. Gareth is worried about his 'A' levels.

8.55: Tutor period and register followed by Assembly.

9.20 - 10.30: 'A' level Sociology lesson. Kerry and Kate have prepared one of a series of introductory lessons on Social Stratification. They are focusing on apartheid as an example. Kate and Kerry distribute handouts and explain the changing system to the group. A discussion follows and draws on the group's existing knowledge. Kate introduces a photo pack they found in the resource base on apartheid. We have to select and put our name on the three photographs which are of most interest. We now have to pair up with someone who has chosen the same picture. Each pair chooses a photo and has to explain its choice. Kate and Kerry debrief and add further points. They set homework for the group on the changes in South Africa.

10.30: Break. Joanne remains behind to let me know that she intends to invite a visitor for her session on the family. This is a lecturer at the local college who is shortly going to have an

arranged marriage and move to Pakistan. The visitor also wishes to use video clips of the two engagements, one in England and that of her fiancé in Pakistan. She gives me the visitor's name and telephone number. Go to staff room via the deputy heads' office to gain official consent to invite speaker.



10.40: Go to the hall to set up the room for the second session of Star Power, which is a social stratification simulation.

10.45 - 11.45: Star Power. Teach three groups of Year 10 sociology students. This is not a democratic session. However, as the simulation develops the students decide that the mini-society that has been created in the hall is totally unfair. The 'Squares' are exploiting their position of power to such an extent that the two other groups move their chairs to form one large group and refuse to play any more. Their mini-society has broken down. Students get into three groups and debrief themselves on their experiences during the simulation and how it relates to the real world.

11.55 - 12.45 p.m.: Lunch followed by extra revision lesson with upper sixth 'A' level Sociology students.

12.45: Drop off notes for reproduction at 'resources' and book the video camera for next week. These are organisational tasks which students have requested I carry out on their behalf, because they are not allowed to do them themselves.

12.50: Speak to parent on the phone. Collect register and attend tutor period.

1.00 - 2.10: See Vicky about her session next week. She is concerned about her lesson plan. Reply to letter from M.P. concerning Nicole's request for the British Government and Politics group to visit Parliament in the next holiday. Fill in insurance forms in triplicate, book mini-bus and collect parental consent forms from deputy.

2.10 - 3.20: Year 13 'A' Level British Government and Politics session. At the start of the session I enquired what they did in Tuesday's lesson when I was absent. Instead of taking the time off as usually happens, the majority of the group had attended. As one student commented, "We'd have felt guilty if we'd have just gone home. We knew Sharon had prepared the work and I'd have been really cheesed of if I'd done all that work and the teacher was away." Another student, however, did not feel such a strong sense of motivation. He said he hadn't attended. When I asked why, he said "I was told you were absent, so I thought we wouldn't have a lesson, as simple as that. So I had a lie in, stayed in bed." Nevertheless, the rest of the group said they felt he had let Sharon down. Another said "We had to attend, because Sharon had prepared the lesson, she had all the leaflets and everything. We had an obligation to her." The group members were quite annoyed with the individual who didn't turn up and he said that he felt awkward now he realised that the lesson went ahead as normal. After this initial discussion Tina took charge of the session. We did a quiz on 'Women and work' which she had sent for from the Equal Opportunities Commission in Manchester. This was most enjoyable and the lesson ended with a review of statistical charts on women's position in the labour market. She suggested that the group transfer key statistical evidence on to index cards as a revision exercise for homework and for use in examination essays.

3.20: James remains behind to discuss a comment on Mike's profile. After repeated requests for this student to complete a long overdue essay, and many comments from other members of the group, I had made a comment on Mike's profile. James felt that this was wrong. James argued that although the group had moaned about Mike not doing his work, I did not have the right to use my power as the teacher if we were truly involved in a democratic learning environment. He felt that in such an environment the student should be able to choose to fail. I had to explain that I would find it very difficult to allow an individual to fail in a school environment, although I actually believe that we should all have this choice. I tried to explain to James that I found situations like this very difficult because they represent a contradiction between my own theoretical position and practical application. I found it upsetting to be accused of 'selling out' on fundamental principles. But when we try to develop educational innovations we still have to operate in the world as it is and not as we would wish it to be. I had to conclude by saying that whether it is right to make compromises and how far to do so, remains a dilemma for me.

3.35 - 4.40: Meeting of Heads of Subjects.

4.40 - 5.15: Meet Richard in room to help with his assignment. Show him how to computer spell-check and print out his work.

5.15: Arrange furniture for tomorrow's lesson and take Year 10's books home to mark. Then go home!

The above summary of a typical day highlights the fact that democratic learning environments do not run themselves. They require a great deal of organisation and commitment on the part of both the students and the senior learner. Many sessions are unpredictable. This can be quite stressful when compared to the so-called 'safe' method of the teacher delivering a session.

Perhaps the hardest thing to do is to be able to listen. I often find myself wanting to make a contribution, but if I wait, another member of the group often makes the same point. Other work which is involved includes counselling students, reviewing lesson plans, and directing students to useful resources. It has also been necessary to develop an extensive range of materials in the form of a resource bank as well as a list of people who are prepared to help students.

As each group progresses through the year, the students seem to co-operate more and more and provide each other with mutual support and encouragement. They often clap when a presentation is particularly good. I too have found helping students prepare their presentations particularly rewarding, especially as most of the presentations are very successful.

The democratic learning environments have provided an opportunity for students to contribute to their own learning and to experience the process of democracy. This has encouraged them to use their own initiatives, and allowed them to develop a sense of responsibility. Just as importantly, it has also enabled them to develop a sense of responsibility for each other. It has helped their development and given members of the group the mechanism for coping with a variety of problems. Values, like those of democracy, tolerance, and responsibility, grow only as they are experienced.

Lesley Browne

Congratulations to Lesley Smith, as we all previously knew her, on her recent marriage to Michael Browne. Best wishes to both of you!

Next in the series: A day in the life of... a home educator.

Under the Umbrella

Derry Hannam represented Education Now at the first full meeting of the Secondary Umbrella Group (SUG as it has decided to call itself) on 24th November. The Group consists of representatives from a wide range of parent, governor, teacher, subject and issue organisations concerned with secondary education, and meets at the National Union of Teachers Headquarters in London. The Group intends to be a forum for airing and sharing ideas and perspectives, rather than a policy-making or influencing pressure group.

The topic for the first meeting was 'The Ten Level Scale'. Professor Paul Black argued for it and Professor Alan Smithers against. The debate was interesting and wide-ranging.

Derry also attended a SUG Steering Group meeting in December to plan future topics for the Group's consideration. The next full meeting in March will look at current controversies over teacher training. On behalf of Ed Now and Human Scale Education, Derry suggested that 'democratic themes in education/pupil involvement' should be on the agenda for a future meeting of SUG. This was accepted.

Connecting with Australian RASCLs

Connect magazine's passion and purpose is 'supporting student participation'. Published in Victoria, Australia, it reports on initiatives, reviews resources, describes practice and publishes students' work. Recognising a commonality of interests with Education Now, *Connect* devoted four generous pages of its June 1993 edition to descriptions of all Ed Now's key books.

Connect can be subscribed to and otherwise contacted at:
12 Brooke Street, Northcote 3070, Victoria, Australia.

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Also, 13th-14th August 1993 saw the birth of RASCL (Regional Association for Student-Centred Learning) at the Freemantle Education Centre, Western Australia. *Co-Link*, the Centre's newsletter, reports: "*RASCL, so far, is a loosely linked network of people who have some things in common: they believe that students should be involved in the planning, organising and evaluating of the work they do in their learning process. They believe that students learn better when they are consulted and considered, and when their self-esteem, creativity and motivation are enhanced by working in partnership instead of in servitude with their teachers.*"

Two of Education Now's Directors, Sharon Robinson and Paul Ginnis, are contributing to the second RASCL conference in March, so we'll expect a report from them in the next newsletter.

Freemantle Education Centre's own emphasis on student-centred learning is largely due to the appointment, in April last year, of Dr. Donna Brandes as Director. Her inspirational work in this field for many years in America and the UK is well known, and Education Now wishes her every success.

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Meanwhile, Helen Webb has written from Tasmania to ask for copies of some of our 'great books'. She tells us that she is a keen home educator who is a member of the Home Education Advisory Council set up by the current Minister of Education.

From Across the Atlantic

In the USA, the National Home Education Research Institute works to support the cause of home-based education by undertaking research, presenting findings to political and public audiences, providing expert testimony in court cases, identifying methods and resources. NHERI also publishes a quarterly academic research journal *Home School Researcher* which is available for US \$25 per year (four issues), plus 20% for countries outside the US (or \$25 plus 50% for air mail) from: National Home Education Research Institute, Western Baptist College, 5000 Deer Park Dr., SE Salem, Oregon 97301, USA.

Dr. Brian D. Ray, President of NHERI, has written to encourage readers of Ed Now's newsletter to submit research manuscripts to HSR...and maybe even subscribe to it!

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Bruce Lofquist of Eco-Praxis Inc, Canada, "*would like to exchange information with you people regarding our common interest - democratic schooling. Essential to the Greening of society, is the creation of a socially and ecologically informed critical and active citizenry. Change through democratisation is the key.*" Eco-Praxis Inc. has a Centre holding over 2000 books and periodicals relating to Green issues at: 1326 Bronte Road, Oakville, Ontario L6J 4Z3, Canada.

Comparing Sands School with Other Democratic Schools

David Gribble reports:

In June 1993, there was a small conference of democratic schools at Hadera, in Israel. Schools represented were Sudbury Valley school from Massachusetts, Sands school from Ashburton in Devon, the Freie Gesamtschule from Vienna, the Barbara Taylor School in New York and of course the Democratic School of Hadera, which was hosting the conference. I was there representing Sands School.

The Hadera School was breathtaking. It takes children up to the age of eighteen. Until the age of eight there are no lessons at all, and thereafter lessons are voluntary. There is a comprehensive system of self-government. The children are self-evidently radiantly happy. It is a state school of three hundred pupils, and it is patently successful with a long waiting list.

At first all I could do was admire. Sands is an independent school, and although it is totally self-governing and the children are happy, there is a certain amount of pressure to attend lessons. It was only after long reflection that I realised that there were two things that are better at Sands than Hadera.

The first is that at Sands the care of the ground, the cooking of lunch, the washing up and all the domestic work are done by the students and teachers. This means that the children have real responsibility for their surroundings; they have work to do that has obvious practical implications, and are not surrounded by an artificial tidiness created by gardeners and domestic staff.

The second, and I think the more important, is that at Sands there is no system of punishment. At Hadera there is a Discipline Committee that deals with offences and decides on punishments if appropriate; at Sands it is assumed that most people want to behave responsibly, and that inconsiderate behaviour is usually regretted; consistent irresponsible behaviour or single serious misdemeanours are dealt with by the school meeting, even then there is hardly ever any punishment.

Sands has had several exchanges with Sudbury Valley, which is even more extreme than Hadera in that there are no lessons at all unless the students themselves arrange them. Sudbury students who have come to Sands have fitted in easily enough, occasionally going to lessons when they wanted to; some of the Sands students who have been to Sudbury have felt that there was something missing. The Sands students who went to Hadera, on the other hand, were completely at home, and the Hadera students at Sands felt somewhat neglected, because they were offered little special entertainment outside lessons. Whether this was because of differences between the schools or differences between the students is not yet clear.

What is clear, however, is that at Sands the children have decided that they want organised lessons but no punishments, and that at Sudbury, Hadera and indeed Summerhill lessons are entirely voluntary but there are systems of punishment administered by the children. That such differences can exist in schools that are united in the extreme forefront of the battle against authoritarian education demonstrates that even when the battle is won, there will be no uniformity.

Some Principles of Educational Reconstruction: Part One of a three-part series

In the UK the school system is in disarray. Parents, teachers and pupils are in a state of confusion as random changes are imposed on them week by week. Now that the skills of Sir Ronald Dearing as the ship's deck-chair re-arranger have been applauded, can we remember that the Titanic was a doomed vessel?



In this situation there is an urgent need to try to establish some principles of reconstruction. These principles are taken from the books *Flexischooling* and *Anatomy of Choice in Education* in particular, and the special reports published by the Education Now Co-operative, which was established in 1988 precisely for this kind of reconstruction task. It is not 'back to basics' that is needed so much as ... *back to fundamentals*.

Principle One: The modern world requires behaviour flexibility and competence in all the three forms of discipline: authoritarian, autonomous and democratic

Schools in the UK work almost exclusively to an authoritarian model of behaviour. Being comfortable with the logistics of authoritarian behaviour is necessary because there *are* situations in which this is the appropriate pattern, so the authoritarian form of discipline has a modest part to play in the scheme of things, but **only a modest part**. Other types of discipline are necessary at other times. Autonomous behaviour and discipline are more appropriate much of the time. Indeed, we live in a world that increasingly expects people to manage their own lives in an autonomous way. In other situations, co-operative or democratic patterns of behaviour and discipline are appropriate. Until schools become more flexible in providing the variety of behaviour patterns necessary, they are doing their pupils a disservice.

The absence of democratic experience is a serious weakness of present-day schools. Far more than at present, schools, homes,

and the community should be enabling pupils/students to **learn the democratic arts** of co-operatively planning, doing and reviewing all aspects of their education. This implies that they should learn to speak their minds responsibly but nonetheless fearlessly, and listen attentively to others. These skills are not merely optional or desirable, but absolutely essential to the education of people who are to be citizens of a democratic country, and creative members of a participant workforce, both now and in the next millenium. The obsessively authoritarian and competitive schools favoured by the present government cannot meet the needs of such citizens.

This participation cannot happen successfully unless the next generation, from their earliest years, becomes accustomed to it, and acquires by experience the inner strength which can empower it to negotiate responsibly, and ultimately on equal terms with parents, teachers and fellow pupils/students, with the assurance that their voice will be heard. Learners need real, honest respect. It is not enough to talk in abstract terms about how we value the individuality of our young people, if we only show our esteem in token ways, such as letting them have a school council, but only letting it discuss non-controversial subjects. This breeds cynicism and alienation in many young people.

Participation must be real, and involve the actual experience of sharing power and responsibility for decision-making, otherwise it will be rejected as mere adult manipulation.

Principle Two: Uniform approaches to all are intellectual death to some.

Next, given the fact that we are able to locate over thirty differences in individual learning styles, any uniform approach to the curriculum or to learning is intellectual death to some, and often most, of the learners, and is therefore suspect. These learning differences fall into three broad categories, cognitive, affective and physiological. A brief account appears in chapter eight of *Anatomy of Choice in Education*.

In the Golden Age of 'the Basics'...

We are faced with the paradoxical fact that education has become one of the chief obstacles to intelligence and freedom of thought.

Bertrand Russell, 1935.

For example, some learners have a style which is typically deductive in contrast to those whose style is usually inductive. Others learn best from material which is predominantly visual as against others who respond best to auditory experiences. There are contrasts between impulsive learners and reflective learners. Some learn better with some background noise, others learn better in conditions of quiet. Some are early day learners for their peak learning time is in the morning, whereas others are afternoon learners and others late-day learners. As Aviram observes in "Non-lococentric Education" *Educational Review*, 1992, volume 44, no. 1:

"In sum, we have sound empirical evidence that both individuals' motivation for learning and the effectiveness of

their learning processes vary with the ability of the environment to cater to their specific learning styles."

In *The Age of Unreason*, Charles Handy notes that another way in which individuals differ is in types of intelligence. Seven types of intelligence, (analytical, pattern, musical, physical, practical, intra-personal, and inter-personal) are identifiable. Only the first is given serious attention in UK schools. Handy declares:

"All the seven intelligences, and there may be more, will be needed even more in the portfolio world towards which we are inching our way. It is crazy, therefore, to use only the first of the intelligences as the criterion for further investment in any individual by society."

Principle Three: What we want to see is the learner in pursuit of knowledge and not knowledge in pursuit of the learner.

This is a quotation from the Irish writer George Bernard Shaw. It identifies the basic flaw in official thinking in Britain about education as something to be done to learners rather than something the learners are encouraged and coached to do better for themselves. This is not a pious hope. This is exactly how parents assist their children in learning to talk and walk, and to begin to make sense of the world around them. Thus, the most successful piece of learning we can find operates on this principle. How stupid of us to forget it, ignore it or lose confidence in it.

Seymour Papert in *Mindstorms, Children, Computers and Powerful Ideas* sees computers as another reason why we should remember the success of early childhood learning:

"I believe that the computer presence will enable us to so modify the learning environment outside the classroom, that much, if not all of the knowledge schools presently try to teach

transforming themselves into something new or wither away and be replaced."

Principle Four: Education is an octopus and not a snake.

Many discussions about education follow this kind of pattern: "What we need to do in education is to.....create small groups so that learners can work closely with a teacher and learn more effectively."

"Yes, yes, that will sort things out."

Education is a snake, you see, and now we have felt along it, we have discovered its true nature.

But somebody notices a branch at the end of the snake.

"But what should they be learning?"

Yes, the curriculum needs to be considered too.

There is another branch.

"What method of teaching should the teachers in the small groups use?"

Yes, yes, teaching methods are important too.

There is a third branch in the snake.

"Where is the best place to learn?"

Perhaps it is a knot of snakes and not one snake at all.

Somebody feels another branch in the snake.

"How can we best motivate the learners to learn?"

No, it is not a knot of snakes for all these branches are joined up. It is an octopus! We have to face up to the fact that education is a complex problem and not a simple problem at all, **however inconvenient this may be.**

Roland Meighan

Education Unlimited

For some time there has been talk of Education Now offering consultancy and training services. This is now becoming a reality with the creation of Education Unlimited, a division of Education Now Ltd and run by a small group of Directors. Bryn Purdy, Arthur Acton, Derry Hannam and Kevin Holloway and others are currently working on the mechanics of the project and will report in the next newsletter.

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**The Labour Party Consultative Green Paper on Education :
'Opening Doors to a Learning Society'**

It was agreed by the Directors and Associate Directors that Education Now should reply to this document. A sub-committee was formed to produce a response which was duly sent to Ann Taylor, Shadow Secretary of State for Education. We have already received an acknowledgment which states that we may hear from her again in the near future regarding a possible meeting between Ann Taylor and a group from Education Now. A copy of the sub-committee's response can be obtained free of charge from the Education Now Office.

with such pains and expense and such limited success will be learned, as the child learns to talk, painlessly, successfully and without organised instruction. This obviously implies that schools, as we know them today, will have no place in the future. But it is an open question whether they will adapt by

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Home education: are there by-products?

One of our aims in home-educating our two daughters was to give as much time as possible to their musical development: a fairly straightforward aim, and one in which we have succeeded. It could be said that their 'academic' education has

progressed happily alongside: but what about their wider development?

I refer largely to social and moral issues, which I have not tried deliberately to teach. The girls are nine and seven-and-a-half years old and discussions with them have been stimulated by a variety of sources - books, radio, television, friends, relatives - one unusual one being *The World At One* on BBC Radio 4. Whilst protesting through mouthfuls of lunch at having to listen to 'Mummy's favourite programme', they nevertheless began to explore with me such subjects as the IRA and why it exists; coal-mining and pit closures; the James Bulger murder trail; the M40 school minibus crash. The social and moral implications of that short list have taken a long time to discuss, and I am repeatedly forced to return to them when further news items are heard or the children have another idea. In consequence their vocabulary has developed as has their perception of 'right' and 'wrong'. That there is a massive grey area in between is beginning to sink in.

'But what about sex?' I hear people cry. Well, the surprising source for us has been the study of painters and their paintings. Their biographies are littered with such words as *mistress, lovers, erotic, illegitimate, brothels*, as well as *alcoholism, neurotic, insanity, suicide*. Such words and their meaning have led to lengthy discussions of a sexual and moral nature before any appreciation was attempted of the paintings themselves!

But why is it important that these discussions should take place at home? Apart from feeling more sure of themselves in familiar surroundings, I think it is important for my children, when they are struggling to make sense of what appears at times to be a senseless world, to try out their views and opinions privately first, at home, not in the 'public' environment of a classroom.

I certainly used to think that these areas of discussion were by-products, but within two years I have changed my view and now consider them to be essential elements. Long may the conversation flow.

Katherine Trafford

Book Review

The Theory and Practice of Regressive Education

by Roland Meighan

Published by Educational Heretics Press, 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ Price £6-00 (postage & packing included).

Four years ago I read and retained a letter to *The Guardian* by Clive Harber entitled 'Subservience that lies at the core of the National Curriculum'. Commenting on the findings of a report that only four percent of teachers believe the Education Reform Act wrong in principle, it resonated with my own feelings that

What are the community's educational needs and how can they be met? The answers given in this new book challenge many taken-for-granted assumptions. A community curriculum can be an educational response to community need, sensitively designed to the clients' specification. The demographic, social and economic features of a local community shape both the pattern and take-up of provision.

Bilston Community College is responding to the challenges of an area typical of urban Britain in the 1990s with its poverty; social class, gender and racial disadvantage; unemployment, and industrial recession; low standards of formal education, outdated skills, and minimal training opportunities.

The innovative practices at Bilston are widely applicable to other institutions and provide an insight into the complex features of a rapidly changing further education curriculum.

Price £10 (120 pages)

the National Curriculum is, in addition to other failings, an 'exercise in knowledge control'.

The Theory and Practice of Regressive Education has fulfilled my need for further reflection in this area, examining in a thoughtful, lucid and at times darkly humorous way, the 'regressive' orthodoxies which have become particularly prevalent since 1979 but which seem to have deep and long lasting roots in our thinking about the world.

Opening with a chapter explaining the nature of regressive education, Roland Meighan goes on to explore through a series of 'articles' its pervasive and largely accepted ideology and the deadening consequences of such thinking on our education system and lives. Disturbing black comedy in the form of 'The New National Curriculum Initiative: Teaching the Telephone Directory' is accompanied by illuminating and informative articles such as 'When Regressive America Began to Recapture Schooling'.

Additional contributions provide interesting insights into particular areas of experience affected by regressive ideas: Professor Sir Hermann Bondi's 'Why I Don't Like Religion' explores the price we pay for the imposition of dogmatic views; and Janet Meighan's 'The Hijack of Young Children's Learning' reminds us that even at an early age children are 'learning how to be taught' rather 'learning how to learn' in most British schools.

Reading this book has brought my thoughts into focus on the nature of the impositions we have witnessed in education since 1979 and the nature of the challenges we now face. I find it disturbing, but I am hopeful that the contributors' feelings will find echoes in the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens.

Josh Gifford

New Education Now Special Report

COMMUNITY NEED AND FURTHER EDUCATION The practice of community-centred education at Bilston Community College

by Frank Reeves and colleagues

Book Review

Early Childhood Education: Taking Stock

Edited by Philip Gammage and Janet Meighan.

Published by Education Now (1993) at £5-00.

This book invites the reader to consider the many issues confronting early childhood educators today, due to the implementation of the National Curriculum and other government policy changes. These issues are vigorously addressed as the audience is required to take stock, not only of the philosophical beliefs which underpin the conceptual framework of early childhood education, but also the valuable work of the 'pioneers' and the vast amount of research already undertaken which supports their points of view.

Marian Whitehead's chapter, "Why not happiness? Reflections on change and conflict in early childhood education", explores the changes in language that have affected social policies, attitudes and opinions towards the very meaning of education and the role of the teacher. She refers skilfully to the 'new' metaphors being tossed around by the media and in the political arena. These are a throwback to the educational system of the 19th century and are not in line with present knowledge and understanding of how children actually learn and develop. Such metaphors send shock waves to early childhood educators as we come face to face with differing ideologies. She examines the notion that children are seen as 'empty vessels' and 'passive learners', where knowledge is imposed from without, in sharp contrast to the teacher as facilitator and the child as an 'active learner'. Marian Whitehead firmly points the reader in the direction of research studies which "*defend a holistic curriculum which respects children and presents knowledge as generalised sets of representations which must be shaped by individual sense making strategies,*" instead of "*obediently working with imposed 19th century conceptions of distinct subjects, correctness and social control.*"

The second contribution, from Jenefer Joseph, examines four-year-olds in school and presents straight away the stark reality of the situation with facts and figures. These highlight that, "*four is now the unofficially acknowledged and accepted age at which children start formal schooling in England and Wales.*" She considers carefully the needs of children and then takes a close look at three different types of provision on offer: nursery schools; nursery classes; and the reception class. Vast differences can be found in the quality provided, often as a result of certain constraints outside the control of the teacher. In addition, the paper explores the specialist knowledge and skills a teacher of four-year-olds needs to have to be able to maximise the children's potential for learning. Jenefer Joseph brings to the forefront research evidence relating to the different types of provision and children's achievements. We are then asked to reflect on the fact that parents are often seeking places for their four-year-olds in reception classes, in the misguided belief that this will enhance their child's chances of success in the Attainment Targets. Finally, she appeals to us all to assert ourselves more by persuading local authorities to take action and oppose "*State edicts*" which are "*detremental to the education and welfare of young children.*"

Iram Sirag-Blatchford, the third contributor, examines the challenges and constraints which face early years practitioners as they strive to achieve and maintain a professional identity. The audience is given much food for thought as she investigates the benefits of working in a wide range of settings, thus

providing the opportunity for practitioners to operate within a multi-professional sphere which offers a wider professional identity than normal. In seeking a professional identity, the writer directs the reader's attention to the impact of the National Curriculum "*where early years teachers have been on the front line*", yet their concerns have, by and large, been disregarded. Teacher education reforms, resulting in a cut in the length of training, further undermine the professional status of the early years teacher.

The last chapter, by Philip Gammage and Rosalind Swann, points the reader towards the global situation by giving us a clear insight into how different countries perceive early years education. What emerges are 'the roots' of the kindergarten tradition which are firmly embedded within their systems. It is interesting to note that 19th century educationalists did not separate their ideas about children learning into distinct age phases. The writers are quick to point out the dangers of formal curricula in the elementary school putting pressure on kindergartens to formalise their curricula. This line of thought is developed further as the authors highlight the importance of continuity and progression, and argue for the view that childhood should be a smooth and continuous process to accommodate growth, development and learning. Many other issues are taken up, such as the curriculum, the purpose of schooling and the benefits of psychology for the design of early childhood curricula. The audience is then drawn into a discussion on the importance of "*developmentally appropriate practice*", where the work of Elkind is noted. We are left in no doubt at all of how children best learn as "*internationally, early childhood educators are in clear agreement over what they see in children. They see children as active operators upon the environment and already actively 'programmed' to learn.*"

In conclusion, this concise, timely, and very accessible book examines many significant issues and positively reinforces well researched, informed understandings of how children learn and develop.

Ros McKean

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801 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, Manchester M20 8RG.

View from the condemned cell

As we look out at the world of education in England and Wales, we two teacher educators are conscious of our past errors. The principal of these is a sin of omission, rather than commission. We did not recognise soon enough the creeping influence of the neo-fascist tendency inherent in some of British educational policies. Had we done so, when the Black Papers were being written, when the myths and ideologies about teaching and teacher education were hot off the press, we might have said more, perhaps even fought for our beliefs. But since the gallows now await us, it is time to reflect and set the record straight.

Presumably, the history of British Educational legislation is full of exemplars of failed initiatives; Hadow, the 1944 tri-partite system, Plowden, James; these and many others spring to mind. Perhaps it is that the British have a talent for perverting and misrepresenting educational ideas; perhaps it is even simpler, that the British do not like either children or education. Certainly we have heard that said in other countries. How else could the notions of developmentally-based practice (as in Plowden) now be so vilified and misrepresented by the extreme right? How else could HMI have wantonly talked of **delivering** a curriculum (in the 1970s) and thus encouraged the notion that education could be packaged, weighed and meted out in identical quantities? How else could the language of education have gradually been perverted over the last two decades, such that we now talk in terms of the market place, rather than in terms of excitement, serendipity, co-operation and motivation? How is it that some people now talk of 'marketing the education industry'? Yes, we have much to regret.

Most serious of all has been our compliance in the debates about education being simply practice in the classroom; the presentation of agreed knowledge; encouraging children to answer chosen questions, rather than permitting their eager questioning of our answers. Too late, we are now aware of our ignorance of the impending dangers when we permitted the media (and even some of our profession!) to talk of 'barmy theory'. Now it really is too late. For teacher 'trainers', as it pleases them to call us, are to be swept away, to the gallows or whatever. Who cares?

The teaching profession is about to reap the whirlwind of its neglect. They will become operatives, and a noble calling will be reduced to that of delivering the whims of politicians, almost from jottings on the back of an ideological envelope. History will consist of this, will stop here; Shakespeare will be taught thus. Competencies will be defined as these. There is no end to the list and we will spare you the boredom. The national curriculum (whose nation?) is here. It will be tested at every turn despite all the well-proven lines of research evidence which show that too much testing narrows the educational endeavour and perverts the teaching. We will have the singular pleasure of providing a curriculum almost as rigid as anything which appeared under the Weimar Republic or under Stalin.

Moreover we will no longer have those 'turbulent priests' involved in teacher education. We shall have disposed of them by the lie, often repeated in most of the press, that they consist of dishonest men and women who could not teach; that they were wedded to out-dated left-wing theory. (And who, may we ask, is wedded to out-dated right-wing ones?) Most important of all, the rubric runs, teacher educators are an unnecessary encumbrance to the delivery of what teachers are told to deliver. When we have disposed of them, then indeed will the country enter into its inheritance. 'Barmy' theory will be no more and we shall all enjoy the fruits of being a country singularly out of step with almost any other country in the civilised world - since most countries in the western world, and some of those in the developing world, are actually **lengthening** their teacher education courses, establishing them **ever firmer** in higher education. But no matter, England is safe, since politicians and their advisers can simply assert that they know best, especially now that the former colleges of education have been (and the university departments are about to be) swept away.

No more can teacher educators de-stabilise the profession by encouraging reflectivity and questioning; no more will there be arguments about the most desirable content, or the most desirable process. Indeed, process will rarely be mentioned in case anyone should form the idea that pedagogy or child-development were serious matters for teachers to think about. As for the clarification of values, the worries about whose culture we are concerned with, the anxiety that failure in tests might demotivate, well, all that will have been got rid of, especially now that we can pretend we can compare different schools in different catchments as though they were identical units of analysis. Down with professional training. 'Good riddance to it!' we hear you cry.

And now to the gallows...but why not a public execution? Since we are returning to a mode of teacher education (now really to become training) that was popular in the early nineteenth century; since we are now to ignore the strictures of writers on pedagogy, such as William James, at the turn of last century, why not embrace real Victorian values. Think what fun it would be for leader writers in papers like the Daily Mail or the Telegraph, to attend a public burning of all teacher educators! Now that would really be a splendid end to a questing, thinking profession. Market forces would no doubt publish broad-sheets of us recanting in the flames; and as teachers return to their old monotorial traditions and touch their mental forelocks to their political masters, vice-chancellors could use up all the old buildings (formerly faculties of education) and house the new profession of thinking, educated nurses. Plus ca change. As one profession falls, another rises... But we must go; they come for us now.

Philip Gammage and Ros Swann

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In the next issue of the Newsletter

Articles already planned include:

- A day in the life - of a democratic secondary school teacher.
- View from the condemned cell.
- Principles of educational reconstruction.

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Editor's note: The editors are always keen to consider material for inclusion. For the third edition, please send your articles, news, views and letters to us before 31st December.

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"The 1988 Education Act is a very dangerous development for it has politicised schooling in the direction of fascist thinking. It is the worst development in the world at the moment."

Professor Eugenia Potulicka
University of Poznan, Poland

Review : Dumbing us Down

Dumbing us down : the hidden curriculum of compulsory schooling by John Taylor Gatto

Published by New Society Publishers (Philadelphia 1992)
- available in UK at £6-95

It is hard not to draw parallels with *Dumbing Us Down* from the USA and *Compulsory Schooling Disease* by Chris Shute published earlier this year in UK. Both are teachers with over twenty years experience and neither is impressed with schools as currently organised. John Taylor Gatto began to wonder if he had been hired as a teacher to enlarge the powers of children or to diminish them. He concluded that it was the latter.

"I began to realise that the bells and the confinement, the crazy sequences, the age segregation, the lack of privacy, the constant surveillance, and all the rest of the national curriculum of schooling were designed exactly as if someone had set out to prevent children from learning how to think and act, to coax them into addiction and dependent behaviour."

He decided to change his style of teaching, to give children space, time and respect and to see what happened. What happened is that the children learnt so much he was nominated teacher of the year for the New York State several times.

John Taylor Gatto recognised that what he was really paid to teach was a hidden or unwritten curriculum. He decided it was made up of seven basic ideas:

confusion; class position; indifference; emotional dependency; intellectual dependency; provisional self-esteem; you cannot hide.

The consequence of teaching these seven lessons regularly and incessantly is the kind of youth we have around us:

"Young people are indifferent to the adult world and to the future, indifferent to almost everything except the diversion of toys and violence."

School, Gatto concludes, is a twelve year jail sentence where bad habits are the only curriculum truly learned. School 'schools' very well but it hardly educates at all.

However, my main reservation with this book is that there is more to it than this. We need a new vision of how schools could be and how John Holt's idea of schools as places people choose to go to when they see the need for help in their studies, can be realised. Likewise Charles Handy in *The Age of Unreason* has indicated the urgent need to re-invent schools suitable for the modern age on the model of Learning Resource Centres rather than custodial institutions. As a management consultant, he reports that schools as currently organised have more in common with concentration camps than places of education.

The families adopting home-based education have pointed the way to how a flexishooling model can work starting with flexi-time programmes. The most developed examples appear to be in California under the guise of the ISP (Independent Study Programmes) system. But then you need imagination to work on such an idea, and schools in the UK have successfully eradicated that for most people.....

Roland Meighan

BOOKS BY EDUCATION NOW

Learning All the Time by John Holt £6-50
...quintessential Holt; readable, accessible, kindly, immensely observant... Professor Philip Gammage

Flexishooling by Roland Meighan £6-00
...a great pearl in his writings.... Professor Aleksander Nalaskowski

Never Too Late by John Holt £10-00
I applaud this book heartily.... Sir Yehudi Menuhin

Anatomy of Choice in Education by Roland Meighan and Philip Toogood £10-00
...precisely what is needed to clear up present confusion and set coherent, purposeful, productive patterns for the future... Dr. James Hemming

Learner-managed Learning edited by Paul Ginnis £5-00
...learners really start to explore and exercise their potential only as they take charge of their lives.

Democratic Learning and Learning Democracy by Clive Harber £5-00
Democracy is the worst system of organisation - except for all the others! Winston Churchill

Learning From Home-based Education edited by Roland Meighan £5-00
...the rich diversity of the home-based phenomenon is demonstrated..

Issues in Green Education by Damian Randle £5-00
...it certainly succeeds in provoking thought... Chris Hartnett

Sharing Power in Schools: Raising Standards by Bernard Trafford £5-00
...our students are becoming more effective, self-confident and imaginative learners and workers. examination results are improving...

The Charnwood Papers edited by Bob O'Hagan £9-00
....essential reading for community education practitioners

All prices include postage and packing.

