
Reports from the 1985 Annual Conference

School Effectiveness

For the third year running, the School Differences Study Group organised a full day of papers which this year included reports from virtually all the ongoing projects on school effectiveness in Britain, together with outline plans for major work in Sweden.

Peter Mortimore and colleagues began the day by outlining progress on the ILEA Junior School Study — schools were shown as having large effects on cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes but work was still being undertaken into the actual processes within school classrooms that could account for this differential effect. Substantial school effects — even after controlling for differences in intake — were also reported from the CES Scottish study by Peter Cuttance, who interestingly suggested that some schools were particularly effective for particular parts of the ability range.

A particularly effective school in South Wales was the subject of David Reynolds's contribution and the morning was concluded by John Gray and Valerie Hannon's analysis of the inadequate way in which the Inspectorate currently took intake quality into account when analysing the effectiveness of schools through their local inspections.

The afternoon included a progress report on the Oxfordshire study of secondary schools by Louise Blakey, which again shows substantial school effects, and a discussion of various statistical models for analysing data on school effectiveness which had been developed on some of the 'Contexts' data from Sheffield by Nick Longford and Murray Aitken. From Sweden also came a 'state of the art' paper by Lenart Grosin which reviewed existing research and outlined the aims of an ambitious research programme in Swedish schools.

Perhaps a few concluding comments on the day are in order. It seems clear that we have established that 'schools make a difference' yet we are still seriously weak on understanding *which* factors within schools make that difference. Since it will be some years before the results of the large scale studies are available, it will be the small scale work by practitioners and others that we must rely on for the foreseeable future. Every practitioner, LEA, adviser or Director of Education who attempts to change a school will gain information on within school

processes, since the way to understand something as complex as a school is to try and change it. More than ever in this area of research, we urgently need the accounts of practitioners to help us understand why some schools are effective.

David Reynolds
University College, Cardiff

The Personal Construction of Meaning

The view that learning involves the active making of meanings on the part of the learner is by no means a novel perspective in education. Although such a general constructivist position has been adopted by various theorists (Piaget, Kelly) and has been promoted over the years by curriculum projects and initiatives, its implementation continues to present problems in practice. This symposium was organised to explore both the theoretical and the practical implications of adopting a constructivist perspective on learning.

Despite the symbolic gesture of locating the symposium in the Fiction Library of Halifax Hall, the session was well attended. There was lively discussion in response to the papers. The last period of the symposium was devoted to discussion, in groups, of three emerging issues:

1. What is the place of 'accepted' knowledge in a constructivist pedagogy?
2. The nature of the learning environment: Is it, for example, consistent with a constructivist view of learning to encourage youngsters to change their ideas towards an orthodox view? If so how might teachers achieve this?

Lastly a political issue:

3. Can constructivism be implemented in classrooms given the current climate in education?

Various political constraints upon teachers in attempting to implement constructivist approaches were identified (including examination boards, school organisational structure, parents' and employers' expectations... etc.).

Rosalind Driver
Centre for Studies in Science and
Mathematics Education,
University of Leeds

16-19 Education and the World of Work

The symposium addressed (or tried to) the key issues of the link between curriculum planning and the labour market. The design and purposes of the recently launched National Youth Cohort Study (England and Wales) was outlined by Elizabeth Clough, and Ben Jones discussed the usefulness of the detailed qualifications data already obtained in pilot work for this study. Helen Burchell focussed on teachers' attitudes to profiling developments and in particular on the role conflict created when profiles have to be designed specifically to meet employers' needs. John Lake described a transition education project in an Australian school which, as well as painting an entertaining picture of a school dripping with tea-towels, (the project involved setting up a screen printing production line) said much about curriculum implementation. The street, of course, provides an alternative post-school route for many and Jacqueline Dunn outlined a research project which will focus on the neglected subject of girls who become delinquent, their school experiences and their perception of deviancy. Predictably, perhaps, it was this latter presentation which hit the press headlines!

Elizabeth Clough
Division of Education
University of Sheffield

The Nature and Role of Educational Research in Schools and Departments of Education

The papers presented a range of views on reasons for research being an important activity for those in Departments of Education (taken to include any unit concerned with education in universities, colleges or any other institutes of higher education) and the nature of the research considered appropriate.

On the matter of whether the research undertaken by departments' staff should concern education two different opinions were presented by the speakers, both finding some support during discussion among the 60 or so attending. The view that any area of research, relating to education or not, would be a legitimate activity for university staff was defended partly on the ground of the right to freedom of choice in such matters (though this argument was not explicitly extended to non-university institutions). The contrary view was held that as well as rights of freedom there were duties and obligations to examine and improve one's practice as an educator, hence research activity should be directed towards fulfilling this obligation. More telling, perhaps, was the economic

argument that with limited research resources available any research which was not related to professional learning prevented some professionally related research being pursued.

Both the presentations and discussions of the kind of educational research which was considered to aid learning on the part of the professional as well as the learner were curtailed by the constraints of time. The subject could well be continued in a further symposium.

Wynne Harlen
School of Education
University of Liverpool

Educational Research in Local Education Authorities

There appears to be scant acknowledgement within the research community of the nature, extent and organisation of research within LEAs. The aim of the symposium was to contribute to a wider understanding of some of the distinctive features of educational research within LEAs by bringing together several researchers active in the field.

Peter Mortimore outlined the work of the Research and Statistics branch of the ILEA which is able to mount a substantial research programme including large scale projects, eg. the Junior School study. He emphasised the importance of providing up to date research evidence to policy makers *but on time*. The political role of research was also taken up by Laurie South representing the Local Education Authorities Research Group (LEARG). He identified a change in the climate of local government — "a new mood and a new mode of democracy" and a questioning of education's position as being self-evidently necessary. In his view research was increasingly needed to back up policy initiatives. The micro-politics of research within LEAs was explored by Roger Grimshaw from the perspective of a joint LEA/University externally funded project on school attendance. In his view LEAs were made up of "bureaucracies each with a stake in power and a place to defend". Researchers could therefore hitch their kites to several organisational interests in order to evolve space for the exploration of educational issues. Research, he thought, could shift the paradigm in which a specific educational issue is conceived.

Marilyn Goodman describing the conduct of research in the London borough of Harrow emphasised the importance of research addressing practical concerns and the limitations imposed on research by the tight timescales of administrative and policy actions. It was necessary to minimise the demands made on schools and she recognised that "research is only as good as their co-operation". She anticipated that recent central initiatives, eg.

Education Support Grants, would increase the amount of research concerned with various aspects of current authority-wide practice. Although impact tended to be greater at LEA level the intention was to move down from borough-wide surveys to classroom studies. Joan Garforth described a Sheffield project which emerged from a political initiative concerning schools in socially disadvantaged areas which employed a cost-effective evaluation strategy involving advisory staff, seconded teachers, and university tutors. The evaluation strategy was a flexible one which recognised the professional autonomy of teachers and minimised the imposition of centrally determined requirements. The organisation of the evaluation was inevitably influenced by the time cycles of the LEA's committee structure and the need to produce reports to a deadline.

Eric O'Hare drew on over ten years experience of the work of the Centre for Educational Research and Development at the University of Lancaster which was established to support research in nearby LEAs. This has led to a conception of a corporate approach to school focussed research in which the contributions of school, LEA and university were seen as unique and equally valuable. He outlined a tentative conceptual model in which the uncovering of deeper school issues is seen as the main intention of enquiry. Such a "generative research" approach was then channelled into appropriate INSET provisions.

The symposium contributions revealed sufficient of the diversity of practice and the range of common concerns to suggest that this aspect of educational research should be explored further in future BERA conferences.

Brian Wilcox
Sheffield LEA

Educational Assessment: Evaluating Current Initiatives

In the present climate of debate, controversy and development with regard to assessment practices in secondary schools it perhaps wasn't surprising that this year's assessment symposium had a sharp critical edge. Many debates that had been raised at previous conferences were re-visited in the light of recent developments related to DES Records of Achievement initiative, the proposed new GCSE examination system, and graded tests. Additional papers focussed on issues to do with the organisation of in-service training initiatives in relation to assessment practices in schools, the use of different cut-off point for boys and girls in LEA selection tests, the development by City and Guilds of Centre Profiles, and the development of a system of modular assessment for TVEI schemes.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this year's symposium was the range of interests that was represented in the audience and the quality of the discussions that followed the papers. As the symposium ranged across curriculum issues, implementation issues, in-service training issues and issues of national policy, there were different sections of the audience who were able to relate their own interests and experience to the debate. The narrow measurement stereotype, often associated with assessment research, has surely now been left as a relic of the past. We event managed to encompass some discussion of the finer points of qualitative evaluation methodologies! See you in Bristol?

Roger Murphy
Assessment and Examinations Unit
Department of Education, Southampton University

The Assessment of Pupils: Contributions from APU Surveys

The first of the four sessions discussed new approaches to practical testing developed for mathematics (Derek Foxman) and for science (Richard Gott and Patricia Murphy). This was followed by a session devoted to the development of oracy testing for English (Tom Gorman) and for foreign languages (Peter Dickson). The papers in these sessions showed how commitment within APU teams to be faithful to the broad range of aims in their subjects had led them both to development of new techniques and to new explorations of the features affecting pupil performance in practical and oral work. The third session featured a set of reports on surveys in mathematics and languages in which pupils' attitudes and interests could be related to performance (Foxman, Gorman and Dickson). There followed a review, by Sandra Johnson, of background variable effects across all surveys and of across-subject influences and links with out-of-school activities for the science surveys. The fourth session concentrated on the research contributions, implications and needs of APU work, introduced by a paper from the chairman (Paul Black). He pointed out that APU instruments and data formed a substantial research resource to which access could be allowed for bona fide research purposes.

Paul Black
Centre for Education Studies
King's College London (KOC)

Making Small-Scale Research More Powerful

Meta-analysis is a recently developed and now widely used technique for summarizing the results of quantitative research about the effects of an

intervention, or the relationship between two variables. That is, it is a technique for synthesizing the research literature on a particular topic. In introducing the discussion at BERA, to a group of about 25 people, the point was briefly made that the would-be meta-analyst comes up against some very difficult problems, problems spelled out in an accompanying paper. It was suggested that these problems could be overcome if research studies were designed from the start to be ready for meta-analysis. Hence the call for 'multi-site field trials' or 'pre-planned meta-analyses'. But whence, in times of shortage, can we obtain the person-power for, say, 20 or 30 field tests of the effectiveness of selected interventions? Hundreds of students a year undertake carefully supervised research studies in UK universities. With prior planning these could produce valuable data, ideal for meta-analysis. Furthermore, the small scale research which is within the reach of individual lecturers could also add up to important contributions to, say, a monograph based on pre-planned multi-site trials.

The discussion in the group touched on the rationale for experimentation in education, on what might constitute suitable topics for experimentation and on how multi-site field trials might be conducted.

Based on the interest shown by round-table participation, by attendance at an earlier ESRC-sponsored workshop in Edinburgh and on comments made informally at BERA, the organisers of the round table open plan to go ahead with plans for multi-site field trials. Persons interested in participating or in having students or teacher-researchers participate, are invited to contact Bryan Dockrell, Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St. John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR; or Carol Fitz-Gibbon, School of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU.

Carol Fitz-Gibbon
School of Education
University of Newcastle

Priorities for the Funding of Small and Medium Sized Research Projects

HMI Alan Gibson emphasised that there was no deadline date for submitting research proposals to the DES — it was "open season all the time". The procedure was the same irrespective of whether the proposal was for a large project grant or for a small one. However only research which was related to policy could be funded. Research is the responsibility of the various 'policy' branches and researchers should therefore negotiate with the appropriate branch. In addition individual branches could commission research. He advised the researchers interested in submitting proposals should first sound out the appropriate HMI informally. A letter and an

outline of the proposal 'to test the water' would be wise before submitting full details on the DES form P4.

Peter Healy commented that the ESRC research policy was now more proactive than formerly and that over 50% of proposals were in response to opportunities for specific tenders. The appropriate Committee of ESRC for education proposals was Education and Human Development (EHDC) of which he is the Secretary. Small projects were those less than £30k and there was no closing date for submitting proposals for those. The success rates for small project proposals were greater than those for large ones. ESRC was concerned with the support of fundamental research, ie. having wide significance and impact and well located theoretically. Policy was less caught than formerly in one research paradigm, eg. there was more sympathy towards ethnographic research, and a less rigid distinction between research and development. Funds for educational research although relatively stable over time would be under intense competitive pressure over the next 18 months. Would-be proposers were advised to consult the EHDC Secretary in the first instance.

Maria Pinschof indicated that each MSC division had its separate research budget. The arrangements for her division (Training) were similar to those for other divisions. Proposals costing above £15k needed decision 'up the line' and by the chairman himself. Some required ministerial approval. All research proposals had to be oriented to the priorities of the appropriate division and were judged in terms of their practical value. They also have to relate to the very tight delivery schedules of division initiatives, and this meant that projects tended to be short term ones. The research policy was a proactive one of going out to tender. It was therefore useful for researchers to indicate their interests so that they could be put on the 'MSC books'. Tight control of the project was a condition of funding. Several priority themes in the Training Division include help to implement the New Training Initiative; improving access and training of school leavers; adult training workshops.

Margaret Reid stressed the different position of the NFER compared to the other agencies represented, ie. it carries out research but does not sub-contract it. The Foundation's funds come from three sources: (i) outside sponsors (DES, MSC, FEU, etc.); (ii) LEAs as a direct deduction from the Rate Support Grant; and (iii) the joint publishing venture with Nelson (NFER/Nelson). The second of these sources allows the NFER to be responsive to LEA needs. The NFER Board approves proposals. The concern is not with theoretical research and the emphasis is on the researching of practical issues.

The Nuffield Foundation has a Trust deed which can be very broadly interpreted. Antony Tomei was concerned with those proposals falling under the headings of science, medicine and education. Support is given to proposals concerned with *innovative* projects. Projects are essentially pump

priming rather than long term, i.e. usually less than 3 years in duration. The foundation will not support proposals which would be suitable for consideration by other agencies. "If the proposal has gone to ESRC then it is not for us." The Social Research and Experimental Programme funds small scale projects up to £3k in the social science field. There is no closing date for submission and only a brief application is required. The Education Programme (approx. £500k) is available for the support of educational experiment. Initially a brief outline should be submitted before sending in a full-blown proposal.

The School Curriculum Development Committee (SCDC) was the newest of the agencies represented at the symposium. Alan Siddall described the SCDC as essentially a curriculum development operation rather than a funding agency. A rolling programme of projects had been largely determined up to 1987. Projects would generally operate within a 3 year period in which development, evaluation and dissemination would be closely integrated. Details of projects were publicised and LEAs invited to take part. A fund (£150k) had been established to support curriculum development in individual schools with sums of up to £1,000. In the first round 1,350 schools had applied and up to a quarter of these have been supported.

The agencies represented had different but overlapping criteria for the selection of proposals for funding. One consequence of this is that a wide variety of types of research could find funding if the appropriate agency is approached.

Brian Wilcox
Sheffield LEA

Teacher Appraisal

The symposium consisted of six presented papers and two of which were tabled. These ranged from a consideration of conceptual issues to a discussion of some schemes currently in practice in schools. Two major aspects which clearly emerged for me from the symposium were the variety of functions that teacher appraisal may serve and the diversity of practice already in operation which, interestingly, seemed to be linked in format to the management style of the headteacher.

The symposium identified a number of concerns regarding the current move towards more formal and systematic schemes of teacher appraisal. Whilst many participants noted the potential benefits which might arise from the requirement for school to implement such schemes, there were also a number of very real difficulties involved. Most participants appeared to feel that schools should be allowed to develop schemes tailored to the individual institution rather than the element of professional development rather than have a universally prescribed system imposed, and that the element of professional development within such schemes should receive the greatest emphasis. However, some felt that this might well prove to be unacceptable to current DES

thinking and did not sufficiently take account of the importance of teacher appraisal as primarily a management task.

Chris Kyriacou
University of York

Action-research on staff teaching load in the Department of Education Studies at Trent Polytechnic

Three stages of this ongoing research were presented. The first enquiry demonstrated that from 1980 to 1984 the expectations on a member of the academic staff increased from an estimated 35 hours per week to an estimated 43 hours per week. One proposal for reducing teaching time was developed in the second enquiry — TRUST, standing for teaching reduced by undergraduate study time. Several case studies of this were made and it was recognised that it could contribute to students becoming more active in the processes of their own learning. The third stage of the research was the development of a system of timetabling with notional definitions of the time required for preparing, teaching, marking, administration and research. The system reported on entails a computerised procedure whereby teaching time tables are cut back in order that the overall notional time per week does not exceed thirty hours. It is recognised, of course, that although staff are employed on a thirty hour contract, in practice everybody works a considerably longer week than this. Where contact with students is reduced, their notional study time is increased.

Michael Bassey
Department of Educational Studies
Trent Polytechnic

Action-Research, Science and Professional Development

Wilf Carr's paper identified three approaches to action-research (the empirical, the interpretative and the critical) and developed the thesis that each had its corresponding view of professional development, social science and the nature of the theory/practice relationship.

The lively discussion which followed the reading of the paper concentrated less on the detail of these three approaches and more on the possible justification of the whole enterprise of categorising action-research in this way.

This meta-level of criticism was of interest to both action-researchers and what might be termed

'action-research-theoreticians', providing a fine counter-point to the symposium that followed.

Peter Gilroy
Division of Education
University of Sheffield

Information Resources for Research

John Vaughan first addressed the fact that introducing educational research students to the literature was as a co-operative task — one shared between faculty and librarians. A hierarchy of involvement with the research literature was proposed. Vivian Johnston and Joan Marder gave brief history of the British Education Index (BEI), as a basis for describing the major changes just now taking place with it. These included moving ownership of the BEI from the British Library to the University of Leeds, hiring a new editor, and changing the format to be more user-friendly. The present size and frequency of publication, and rates of subscription, will be largely maintained. Ideas for improvement to the BEI, within its modest budget, would be welcomed. Robert Tauber concluded with an overview of the American-based Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), a reference to its two indexes (Resources in Education and Current Index to Journals in Education), a statement pointing out the vast ERIC holdings of the British Lending Library, and a plea for researchers to make more use of the system — both in their own research *and* as a vehicle to disseminate their research. A spirited 20 minute audience-participant discussion followed.

Robert Tauber
Penn State University

Interviewing

Full in the conviction that the last methodological word has yet to be uttered about interviewing in educational research, this symposium invited papers, comments and discussion on interviewing as a research tool. Each of the five presentations derived from roughly similar perspectives — there was little, for example, about standard 'market research' type interviewing. Rather, the general tenor of approach was of using interviews to gain access to people's understanding of various issues, their own opinions and perspectives. The presentations included exploring the disparities in the responses of an interviewee made during an interview alongside those she made when watching a video replay of the session; the notion of interviews as 'conversations' in ethnographic research; the non-verbal components of communication in interviewing; interviewing as an art form, and a discussion of the many factors to be considered when undertaking interviewing within research.

The final discussion session picked up a number of

issues within the presentations. How, for example, do we treat the data-base that accrues from interviews — as 'fact' or 'fiction'? How are confidential accounts given by respondents to be treated and who is the final arbiter of confidentiality and sensitivity? What is the role of the interviewer — disengaged 'facilitator' or fully embroiled participant? Both the presentations and the discussion were lively and enjoyable, and well appreciated.

Mike Watts
Centre for Educational Studies, King's College (KQC)
Janet Powney
North East London Polytechnic

Issues in Mathematics Education

The aim of this symposium was twofold: to present four different focusses of research in mathematics education; and to stimulate general discussion of current developments within this curriculum area.

The first paper (Linda Dickson) was concerned with cognitive aspects of learning mathematics. An account was given of ongoing research which is monitoring the mathematical knowledge and learning processes of individual pupils before, during and after a period of teaching aimed at a specific formalisation. The second paper (Alan Bell) described some teaching experiments related to applications of numerical operations. These were based on research findings of common misconceptions in this conceptual field. The particular role of conflict and discussion was raised. The third paper (Celia Hoyles) briefly reviewed the two main types of research into the use of programming within the mathematics curriculum — as a tool for modelling mathematical processes. The presentation described current research using Logo which synthesises these two approaches by focussing upon the powerful mathematical concepts (such as function, variable) embedded within Logo programming and the situations provoked by teacher, pupil, partner or computer interaction which lead to a pupil's enhanced awareness and understanding of these ideas. The fourth paper (Marilyn Nickson) reviewed research which has focussed attention upon the social context in which the teaching and learning of mathematics takes place. The influence on the classroom situation and the learner of mathematics of teacher/pupil perception of mathematics and the institutional and cultural norms were considered.

In the final discussion concern was expressed about the general 'push' towards presenting school mathematics within contrived situational contexts as a means to aid understanding. Evidence strongly suggests that though some contexts may be helpful for some groups of children they may at the same time be inappropriate for other groups.

Celia Hoyles
Institute of Education

Philosophies, Teachers and Researchers

This symposium was intended to follow up issues raised in the April seminar 'Philosophy, Research and the Improvement of Educational Practice' (see *Research Intelligence*, May 1985, p.12), in particular the identification of an acceptable philosophical underpinning to action-research.

George Lowe opened with a summary of his paper 'Philosophy of Education — truth and objectivity' in which he contrasted the so-called 'London Line' of Peters, Hirst, et al with that of Philosophical Pluralism, arguing that the former was unable to answer a number of telling criticisms, whereas the latter, although not beyond criticism, could more easily deal with its attackers.

Andrew Cartledge ('Can teacher-research improve educational practice') followed this by applying Philosophical Pluralism to work he had carried out as a Teacher Fellow, arguing that he (and, by implication, other education-researchers), could only relate the educational theory he produced to practice by relying on some form of Pluralism.

Finally, Jennifer Morrison summarised her paper 'The theory/practice relationship and the usefulness of philosophical pluralism' by showing that in her particular field of Health Studies recent moves to produce new curricula were seriously flawed in that they were philosophically unsound, whereas some form of pluralism provided a base which more adequately reflected the day-to-day concerns of nurses and nurse educators.

These three summaries were interspersed with stimulating and wide-ranging discussions. The question as to whether or not Philosophical Pluralism was effectively 'sold' by the symposium is, however, one that only those present can answer. Nevertheless, it was perfectly consistent with Pluralism that those who had prepared the papers were not academic philosophers, but rather teacher-researchers who had found such philosophy relevant for their own purposes.

Peter Gilroy
Division of Education
Sheffield University

Issues in Science Education

Three very different approaches were embodied in the work presented. David Swift's concern ('Has science education got an identity crisis?') was with the problem of developing a theory of science teaching, at a time when the philosophy of science offers "no semblance of orthodoxy" on what constitutes scientific knowledge. Examining the options available, he rejected solutions which take

the 'monistic' approach and promote one theory at the expense of the rest. Pluralism was also rejected, on the grounds that it would create confusion on the minds of pupils. This left him arguing the case for a 'technical eclecticism'. As a novice, I translated this to mean that the test of a theory's use-value for science teaching, has to rest on whether or not it works in practice.

York and Goodwin ('science education in Manchester') reported on a longitudinal study which began in 1977 and covered 6,777 pupils of 10+. Science test and attitude data were collected and the exercise repeated at second year secondary level for attitude data only. A 10% sample (678) was followed up for detailed analysis and in 1982, 580 of the sample entered at least one public examination. With the bonus of LEA data on examination performance, the authors could test their earlier data against results. Resource variables, attitudes and test performance turned out as "three almost perfectly orthogonal factors." While these data offered no connection between attitude and performance, IQ variables were pervasive predictors of performance, and the boys' (but not the girls') entries for science appeared influenced by resources. The boys' preference for physics and the girls' for biology showed again!

Malone's paper ('Ethnomathematical education and the Australian Aborigine') provided fascinating glimpses into the cultural 'world views' of the Australian Aborigines, complete with colour slides. However Aborigine culture creates problems for those who aspire to tertiary education in an industrialised system, and mathematics offers a case in point. Currently answers are being sought in the individualisation of work programmes, with the emphasis on individual progress through criterion-referenced sequences of work. Aborigines, it was claimed, have to be orientated towards goal-centred achievements, as individuals, in direct counter to their cultural leanings, or they will not be successful in a competitive, goal centred world.

Gwen Wallace
Derbyshire College of Higher Education

Action research, educational theory and the politics of educational knowledge

The aim of the symposium was to inform participants of the activities of members of the South West Action Research Network. We began by clarifying the principles of action research through their use in descriptions and explanations of teachers' classroom practices. Video tapes were used to show what the teacher/researchers were concerned about in their classrooms. Their research reports contained claims to know something about the nature of their work with their pupils.

The English Adviser for Wiltshire contributed to the discussion and explained how a number of the teacher/researchers were receiving in-service support from their county in the form of time to conduct their investigations. Academics from Bristol and Bath Universities discussed their in-service support for the teachers in helping to explicate the standards of judgment which could be used in the validation and criticism of their claims to educational

knowledge. They also provided case study material on the politics of educational knowledge which contained insights into the kind of opposition which such claims might expect from those with the power to sustain the propositional against a dialectical form of educational theory.

Jack Whitehead
School of Education
University of Bath

The British Education Index

The *British Education Index* is a multi-access subject index to articles on education appearing in current issues of over 250 British (and a few England language European) journals, with over 1,000 subscribers worldwide. The University of Leeds has signed an agreement with the British Library Board to take over ownership of the *Index* from 1986, and responsibility for its publication and maintenance of the database. The *Index* was initiated by the LISE Group in 1954, became a commercial publication in 1961 and since 1972 has been published successively by the British National Bibliography and the British Library Bibliographic Services Division. In 1976 computer printing was introduced, with the associated database being available for online searching in the BLAISE database host. In a time of financial restraint the British Library can no longer fit the *Index* into its primary programme of the creation of bibliographical records. The LISE Group undertook to find an alternative publisher, and a proposal from the University of Leeds to publish the *Index* as a self-financing operation has been accepted. Leeds has the natural advantages that access to periodicals is unequalled (taking into account the location of the BLLD), costs of publication are lower, hardware (including a computer typesetter) and programs are available in the University, considerable experience has been built up in the past as the editorial centre for the *Index*, and currently (in part) for the *British Education Theses Index*, and a strong support for the proposal has come from the University Library, the School of Education and the rest of the University. The present size and frequency of publication, and rates of subscription, will be largely maintained. However we shall take the opportunity to delete about 40 of the present titles indexed, and to replace them with a similar number of great importance.

An Editor (Miss Alison McNab) has been appointed for two years to select, index and input data relating to 3,000 articles from 250 periodicals per annum to the mainframe computer, where a standard DBMS will handle the data. Data will be transmitted to the Printing Section for the publication, and in batches of tape to the database host for the online service. The management and advisory structure will consist of two tiers, a small Management Committee in the University, and a larger number of editorial consultants. Initial financial support has come in a combination of grants, loans and guarantees from the University, from LISE Publications and from institutional members of LISE. The main source of income will come from subscriptions, but pump-priming grants are being sought for specific projects such as the preparation of a Thesaurus of British educational terms. Cost effectiveness has been a primary concern in the design of the new *Index*.

The *Index* will remain an indexing service — abstracts are excluded because of cost, but a statement given of the indexing terms will provide a skeleton abstract. The model for the format will be that of ERIC's *Current Index to Journals in Education*, but with shorter entries and the number of sections reduced from three to two — an author sequence of single complete records and a subject sequence of multiple abbreviated records — but with sufficient detail to permit consultation of the original or completion of an ILL request. Subject definitions and cross-references will appear only in a separate Thesaurus volume. The present Precis system of subject indexing will be replaced by a flexible system based on natural language and the consensus of academic and professional usage, to produce a publication and a database which will appear user-friendly and encourage the less experienced young researcher to progress in skill and self-confidence. A Thesaurus of British educational terms is a fundamental necessity. Of the models available the ERIC Thesaurus is the largest and most widely used. However because of differences in national usage and terminology the ERIC Thesaurus as it stands is not wholly satisfactory in the UK and we are inclined towards preparing an adaptation for British needs, such as has been done recently in Australia with the technical assistance of the ERIC Processing Facility.

The present *Index* database contains over 30,000 articles indexed between 1976 and 1985, and is currently available for online searching in BLAISE. Since we have decided not to continue the Precis system of subject indexing, the British Library Board has agreed to transfer the present database to the University, to be made available through whatever host is selected for the new *Index* database. A third database — that of the *British Education Theses Index* — is also available to be added to what we hope will be an integrated online source of information, but further studies need to be carried out into compatibility of standards and practice. It would be logical to seek in the Dialog organisation a host for the combined databases, and initial negotiations with Dialog have been very promising. The University intends to provide an online service to the *Index* before the end of 1986, and also to pursue actively the forms in which international co-operation with ERIC may best be carried out to our mutual benefit.

The *British Education Index* has become an internationally recognised source of information. Its purpose has remained constant over thirty years — to save researchers and teachers time and trouble in locating the results of research and innovation. As long as the periodical article remains the vital medium of transmission of information, the need for the *Index* will continue.

J. R. V. Johnston
Education Library, University of Leeds