

## 1990 BERA Conference Reports on Symposia

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### Negotiation and Competency Based Curricula

The symposium offered a more varied presentational format than is often found at BERA conferences with short presentations of four more extended papers, videotape of Norfolk schools piloting assessment in the national curriculum, a draft of an INSET — focussed negotiation simulation and some agenda setting by the audience. However, the audience for the symposium was small and must cast doubt on the advisability of having so much choice in one time slot.

The main issues raised by the group's work at the Development Centre, Ivory House centred on the practice of negotiation in school and College curricula and upon the development of a mission statement in a college. Action research and research experiences were culled from a wide range of backgrounds and these suggested that whilst the rhetoric of negotiation was currently fashionable, the evidence for its happening was scanty. Teachers and lecturers seem inadequately prepared to negotiate with students within their professional practice.

Whilst it was difficult to isolate the many reasons for the non-existence, ineffectuality or inauthenticity of negotiation strategies by teachers and lecturers, the following seemed to dominate:

- education has little history of negotiation, therefore teachers and lecturers, who are products of that history, find it difficult to change deeply rooted convictions about practice, despite their rhetoric
- in competency based curricula (and it is arguable that the national curriculum is itself competency based) there are strong, apparently rational moves, towards self-assessment, group work, and student-driven agendas relating to all aspects of teaching and learning. A prevailing staff cynicism aligns this rhetoric with cost cutting and student cynicism with staff abdication of responsibility.
- the practice of negotiation has far more implication and consequence for deep-seated change than staff realise — and they draw back into safer roles and strategies.

However, there was some optimism in the schools sector with the demands for assessment on practice. Teachers were being impelled to use negotiation to satisfy assessment demands and pupils, at the start of their educational lives, were been given the experience of power in decision making. An action research group in Norfolk, THIL, has developed INSET materials to help teachers understand the subtleties of negotiation, too. But experience suggests there needs to be INSET support on a wide scale.

Rob Fiddy, Graham Peeke, John Smith, Jack Sanger

The Development Centre, Norwich City College

## **Peer Tutoring**

The Peer Tutoring Consortium meets each year at the British Educational Research Association Annual Meeting. This year a small group discussed the extent to which theories, particularly Psychological theories, cast light on the process and practice of Peer Tutoring. Peter Kutnick had interesting data on the difference in the outcomes for pairs opposed to threes working together and Keith Topping participated on the basis of his extensive work in designing Peer Tutoring Systems for a wide variety of tasks and a wide variety of situations.

Numerous theories are available in Psychology which can be used in the interpretation of, or in the design of, Peer Tutoring Projects. For example Attribution theory, Piagetian theories, simple theories of arousal, the effect of verbalisation, notions of generative learning and so on and so on. Furthermore, the topic of helping behaviour is apparently something of a growth area in Psychology at the moment and certainly Peer Tutoring is one aspect of helping behaviour.

Work in progress at Newcastle University on Peer Tutoring in Science Education was described briefly. Anyone wishing to receive the Newsletter of the Peer Tutoring Consortium should contact the organiser of the symposium: Carol Taylor Fitz-Gibbon, School of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, St. Thomas' Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU.

Carol Taylor Fitz-Gibbon, University of Newcastle upon Tyne

## **BERA/LMS Task Group**

Local Management of Schools is in its early days and, as was apparent from the opening statement in the first plenary session, it is not being implemented without stresses and conflicts. With Gwen Wallace, the convenor of the Task Group, in the chair, the contributors to the symposium papers had set out to tackle some of the emerging research issues.

Jane Broadbent and Richard Laughlin began with a paper which located change firmly in the context of theoretical developments. They were working on 'middle-range' methodologies which would reveal insights into organisational change. Based on Laughlin's (1990) argument that Habermas' societal model could be adapted to the organisational context, they argued that if equilibrium for the societal system required congruence between 'steering media' and 'life worlds', then the same could be claimed at organisational level. Where the two are not congruent, then one will try to change the other. The LMS initiative can be seen as a 'kick' by the DBS 'steering media' to change the 'lifeworld' of the school. The discourses of accounting practices are entering the discourses of schooling and changing tasks and relationships at administrative level. Emerging divisions between the discourse of 'LMS' staff and the lifeworlds of classroom teachers raise questions about future conflicts within schools. Will the steering media colonise the lifeworld of the classroom or will basic classroom values prove strong enough to resist?

Coming from the Industrial Relations Unit at Warwick, Ewart Keep was in a position to enlighten the symposium on commercial practice. In a detailed critique, he examined two of the implicit assumptions underlying the development of a market model of education: whether schools were being asked to replicate real-world competitive, commercial practice of its 'idealised', text-book

model, and whether school activities replicated those of business. Arguing that, in practice, companies place a variety of limitations on competition through, for example, strategies of cooperative interdependence and national wage bargaining to minimise uncertainties and risks, he noted similar attempts by schools to establish local consortia and cooperative arrangements. Similarly, evidence suggested that, in practice, a tradition of informality persisted in the recruitment of personnel to commercial enterprises. This was not the text-book, meritocratic model of a rational match between employees' skills, attitudes and tasks, which schools were being asked to emulate. Other anomalies included offering schools examples of good 'market' practice which drew on the experience of large, multi-national companies, whilst the school system was being fragmented into the equivalent of small, local businesses. In brief, the whole scene was much more complex and diverse than the assumption of a simple market model implied. Processes applicable to one form of successful commercial business do not transfer readily to another. Yet along with many other aspects of the schooling process, 'the national curriculum is the result, not of market forces but of political decisions. Such decisions set tight limits on the strategies available to any school management.

Rosalind Levacic's paper presented yet more (if tentative) evidence of the complexity of the issues; this time in a statistical analysis of the differences between historic and formula funding, using case study material from two LEAs. Her question examined the 'nature and causes of the redistribution of resources brought about by formula funding'. Using statistical methods, she had applied multiple regression analysis to test a range of hypotheses on what determined budget variances. She also set hypothetical, formula-based, budget models of schools paying the assumed average salary, against the real examples. For secondary schools, age-weighting (especially sixth formers), space per pupil, and special needs, as well as economies of scale were significant. Falling rolls put up salary costs. The sophistication of the formula each LEA used for allocating money for special needs, was highly significant in determining the pattern of distribution. Excess teacher numbers was the most significant variable at primary level. Budget modelling showed excess teachers (in formula terms) and teachers' salaries to be crucial, although the former proved more important than the latter. Overall, funding based on pupil numbers is proving a means of redistributing resources. Nonetheless, LEAs make a difference by weightings they give to specific variables, although these do not always work in the ways they intend.

Finally, with Tim Lee unavoidably absent through illness, Marilyn Leask tackled positively the issue of school development plans. School Development Plans are the means whereby schools are expected to implement policies for delivering the national curriculum and raise standards under local management in a system of 'whole school development'. Although some schools have had experience of doing this since the mid-eighties, LMS has brought a new challenge to the traditional roles of heads and governing bodies. Noting the considerable confusion which still existed in schools over LMS, Marilyn drew on the work of David Hargreaves to call for curriculum led planning, involvement of governing bodies in school change, and the need for governors to become knowledgeable enough about the curriculum to make 'sound decisions', 'based on professional judgment' over the school budget. Local Management of Schools is clearly at the centre of the 1980 Education Reform Act. In one sense it is changing the kinds of questions researchers into education can ask. In another, as some of the issues show, the historic developments may be providing us with an opportunity to test and develop broader theoretical issues. This symposium demonstrated the breadth as well as the depth of the challenge.

Gwen Wallace, Derbyshire College of Higher Education

### **The National Curriculum and the Process of Curriculum Change**

The symposium was organised by the BERA Task Group on the Curriculum. The papers addressed various aspects of the National Curriculum including an analysis of Working Group documentation and the responses of teachers at school department and classroom level. The underlying theme of the symposium was to explore the process of curriculum change and analyse the centre-periphery model which the National Curriculum is employing.

Gaby Weiner (South Bank Polytechnic) opened the symposium with a paper on "School History as a Constructed Form of Knowledge: History in the National Curriculum". She argued that the debate over the nature of the History curriculum and the subsequent document produced exemplified the broader struggles which are going on over the nature and purpose of education at the present time, and concluded that "the present government sees the solution to the economic and social ills of past decades in the values and achievements of Britain's imperialist past".

Richard Bowe and Stephen Ball (King's College, London) presented an interim report on a study of how heads of department in secondary schools are interpreting and implementing the national curriculum: "Subject to Change? Departmental Negotiations over the Implementation of the National Curriculum". They suggested that departmental responses vary enormously according to circumstances and the view that teachers have of themselves as professionals. The government may have a set of intentions but their implementation is by no means straightforward.

At this point Mary Gurney (Gloucestershire LEA) would have presented a paper reviewing some of the literature on curriculum development and suggesting that real quality in teaching and learning is much more likely to be developed by teachers working on problems which they recognise as significant, rather than by central intervention. Unfortunately Mary was ill and unable to present the paper but her argument is a reminder of how bereft of a research base is the government's current strategy.

Chris Ollerenshaw (Bristol Polytechnic) then presented a paper on "Children's thinking and the National Curriculum in Science". She focussed in particular on a case study of the problems of assessment inherent in the emerging structure of attainment targets, statements of attainment and so forth. She concluded that allocating examples of children's work to predetermined levels of attainment did considerable violence to the integrity of their efforts and that levels of attainment do not reflect the varied nature of children's learning.

Finally Marilyn Osborne and Andrew Pollard (Bristol Polytechnic) presented some very preliminary data from the ESRC-funded study of the implementation of the National Curriculum based at Bristol Polytechnic and Bristol University. Their paper, "Teachers' Response to Change under the National Curriculum" focussed on primary schools and complemented the earlier paper on secondary schools. Many similar issues were raised and discussed and many problems highlighted. They also made the point that a positive outcome of NC implementation would seem to be an increase in curriculum discussions and teamwork. This brought one response from the audience that people showed commendable spirit during the Blitz but that didn't make it a good thing!

In fact all the papers both separately and taken together produced lively and substantial discussion. A particular feature of the discussion was that this form of 'cross sectional analysis' could only be undertaken collaboratively; no single project or study could hope to cover all the issues raised by central intervention and local implementation. Likewise the inter-relation of curriculum, teaching and assessment was a recurring feature of the discussion, and the extent to which an objectives model of curriculum planning tied to a very prescriptive pattern of assessment would close down the 'space' for interpretation identified in some of the papers. As such the symposium provided an excellent base for the symposium on assessment which followed it.

Harry Torrance, University of Sussex

### **Developing Students' Understandings in Science**

The development of students' understandings in Science, from 5 to 16 years, was explored in four separate contexts:

*Children's Understandings of familiar astronomical events* Hilary Asoko (for John Baxter)

*A Study of students' understandings of Sound as an example of action research* David Finney and Phil Scott

*Progression in children's understandings of the variety of life* John Leach

*Learning as conceptual restructuring: Progression in children's ideas about air* Ros Driver

Discussion throughout the symposium was both lively and wide-ranging. Issues raised included questions relating to the extent to which progression data (collected from different groups of children at different ages) can be used to map out learning pathways. In some contexts (e.g. understandings of familiar astronomical events) there appears to be a developing pattern in the kinds of explanatory models used by children. This does not imply a strict learning sequence for the learner and it was suggested that the explanatory models identified might be more closely related to experience than to age. Data was also reviewed which indicates, in the context of familiar astronomical events, commonality of children's understandings across cultures.

It was generally agreed that research studies into progression of understandings, in particular contexts, is of potential value in informing teaching. Involving teachers in this work, in an action research capacity, was also broadly supported and there was some discussion about the possible aims and methods of such ventures.

The status of children's alternative conceptions was referred to at various points during the Symposium. It was suggested that children's ideas in different contexts have both differing histories and present utility. Thus children are likely to have varying personal commitment to their own ideas according to the context in which they are generated. This, it was felt, has implications for teaching approaches and in particular the extent to which we need to acknowledge and work from alternative conceptions in the classroom.

## **Social Justice and the Education Reform Act**

This symposium grew out of the concern of educational researchers that issues such as equal opportunities and social justice in education, for long a major consideration of many teachers, were increasingly being pushed off the research agenda — particularly by the research activity surrounding the recent legislation. The symposium, which was much over-subscribed, indicates that there is still much interest and research activity in these areas. This was also reflected in the numbers attending the symposium throughout the day. The symposium had three main themes: pedagogy and assessment, issues in the National Curriculum and educational policy issues. The papers were as follows:

### **1) Beverley Naidoo: Exploring issues of racism with white students through fiction and drama**

This presentation concerned an ethnographic study carried out with a class of white 13-14 year old students in a Catholic comprehensive in a predominantly white area of England. The context was an English course designed to explore students' understanding of, and responses to, racism in a variety of settings. The research findings indicate possibilities (and problems) for creating space within the English National Curriculum for addressing issues of social justice.

### **2) Debbie Epstein: Pedagogy for equality in the primary classroom**

This paper explored pedagogical approaches to equality issues with particular reference to the primary phase and within anti-racist work. Its empirical base was a case study of work undertaken as part of the Birmingham-based Education Support Group (ESG) funded project for the Promotion of Racial Equality and Justice.

### **3) Patricia Murphy: Gender difference — implications for assessment and curriculum planning**

This presentation drew on the findings of UK APU Science surveys and associated research studies on gender differences in students' performance. It considered, for example, students' self-image, expectations and out of school experiences, to emphasise the significance of the relationship between pupils' affective and cognitive behaviours in determining gender differences in science.

### **4) Sheena Erskine: Equal opportunities and social justice**

This paper explored the use of such terms as 'opportunity' and 'equality, and suggested that the inherent contradiction existing in the term 'equal opportunities' may negatively affect the educational chances of girls.

### **5) Ken Jones: The National Curriculum; working for hegemony**

The intention in this presentation was to make explicit the often implicit conceptions of 'culture' running through the National Curriculum subject working group reports. It looked, for example, at the way they become operative in definitions of programmes of study/levels of attainment and 'equal opportunity' objectives in the National Curriculum.

### **6) Ann Gold, Richard Bowe & Stephen J. Ball: Special Educational Needs in a new context: micropolitics, money and 'education for all'.**

This paper focused upon the development of SEN provision within one school in the period 1989-90. It attempted to indicate how some of the key decisions about the role of SEN in the school were arrived at, and how these decisions are likely to shape the educational experiences and life chances of SEN students in the future.

**7) Rosemary Deem: School governing bodies after the Reform Act: an analysis of their role and social composition in relation to issues of inequality and social justice**

This paper was based on an ESRC-funded study of a number of school governing bodies in two LEAs which began in October 1988. The main focus was on recent changes in the composition, responsibilities and coping strategies of governing bodies. Particular consideration was given to how and whether governing bodies are tackling areas of inequality and social justice.

**8) Rob McBride: Social Justice and INSET and Good Hippopotamuses**

This paper considered the nature of GRIST, the development of INSET generally, the rise of professionalism, and the present government's approach to different kinds of professionals as manifested in GRIST. After looking at some approaches to the question of social justice, it concluded that through 'professionalism', we might reconcile the needs of individuals as people and workers, and the organisations in which they work.

**9) Kate Reynolds: Education in London after ILEA; equal opportunities and social justice**

This paper investigated some of the likely effects of ILEAs abolition on inequalities in the education system in London through examination of the plans emerging from the 13 newly formed LEAs. It argued that it is likely that the abolition of ILEA will further increase class, 'race' and gender divisions in education in London.

**10) Geraldine McDonald: If you see the waves: educational reform and social justice in New Zealand**

This paper described and discussed the implications of recent reforms in the administration of New Zealand education which combine elements of equity and social justice alongside free market principles.

**11) Geoff Whitty & Tony Edwards: Urban Education after the Reform Act**

The authors of this paper explored the implications of current changes in educational structures and processes for social justice in urban areas. They also considered whether alternative approaches being proposed by critics of government policy can be seen as consistent with an enhancement of social justice.

Gaby Weiner, Polytechnic of the South Bank

**Education Reform — the Agenda for Research**

"A new era in education has just begun" (Kenneth Baker, 1988). The aim of this Symposium was to examine in detail the agenda for research that BERA members need to consider in the light of the

passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act. The reforms introduced into the education systems of the United Kingdom — as in many other countries — have rarely been planned and evaluated systematically before being implemented and, accordingly, researchers have a duty to describe their enactment, estimate their impact and, where relevant, identify any seemingly unintended outcomes.

Four major areas of the legislation were selected for detailed discussion following a general introduction on the political, social and economic context of the Education Reform Act. The introduction was given by Sir Peter Newsam, Director of the Institute of Education, London. He drew attention to what he described as 'a decline in the quality of evidence used in public debate'. He also raised the question of how there was a blurring — in public debate — between ways of interpreting available evidence and generalisations deriving from such evidence.

Sir Peter made clear that he supported the central aims of the Act but was concerned at three interpretations of the current situation which, he felt, were implicit in the legislation. These were: an alleged general decline in standards; a failure to trust those in responsible positions within the education system; and an unquestioned reliance on competition to bring about the hoped for improvements.

The National Curriculum paper was given by Professor Paul Black of King's College, London. In this paper Professor Black identified a series of research questions emanating from the introduction of the National Curriculum. Drawing on his background as chair of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing and on his current part-time role as deputy chairman of the National Curriculum Council, he described a series of research initiatives being carried out by NCC staff as a preliminary to inviting proposals for research. Finally, Professor Black raised the question of whether existing methodology was appropriate and adequate for a situation in which multiple innovations were taking place.

The paper on Assessment was presented by Dr Caroline Gipps of the Institute of Education, London. Dr Gipps focused on seven issues covering both technical matters to do with research and those concerned with the impact of assessment. The seven issues were: criterion-referenced assessment; graded assessment; organisation and pedagogy; hierarchies; the use of results and equal opportunities.

Brian Knight, an honorary research fellow from Exeter University (and as ex-head teacher) presented a paper on Local Management of Schools. For his paper he identified a list of research questions that practitioners needed answering. These questions ranged from relatively trivial matters to fundamental ones. In his view, local education authority officers and head teachers progressed through a set pattern of phases and, depending on the particular phase, required answers to the questions he had outlined.

The final paper in the symposium 'New choices, new types of school' was written by Professors Tony Edwards and Geoff Whitty from Newcastle University and Goldsmith's College, London. It was presented by Geoff Whitty. The authors concentrated on the various measures in the Act that had been designed to provide consumers with a greater choice of schools. They thus focused on providing a research agenda related to open enrolment, Grant Maintained Schools and City Technology Colleges.



The general discussion that followed the presentation of the papers was wide-ranging. It dealt with such fundamental questions as the need for coherent theory and flexible methodology as well as with the more political questions of who pays for the research and what conditions are imposed upon researchers.

Whilst a Symposium of this kind — even when lasting for three hours — cannot be expected to illuminate completely the areas under discussion, those giving formed papers and those participating from the floor deserve praise for their contributions to the formulation of an agenda that is likely to dominate educational research for the foreseeable future.

Peter Mortimore

### **The Changing Quality of Teacher Performance in Schools in the New Educational Era**

The BEMAS symposium on the changing quality of teacher performance in schools surveyed the impact on teachers' working lives of the complex and unstable environment which is being constructed by Central Government through a series of Acts, Statutory Instruments and Circulars since the early 1980s. The first paper, by Mike Wallace, looked at how schools were responding to the pressure upon them to make multiple innovations. The strategies they devised were far removed from classical theories of managing change, since schools were unable to change only one variable at a time. A major impediment to rational planning in this turbulent environment was a shortage of information on which managers could base their decisions — e.g. departments in secondary schools having to implement curriculum innovation before they were sure of the exact National Curriculum guidelines. One consequence of this was that school development plans became increasingly out of date in the months subsequent to their inception as new guidance and information from central and local government emerged.

A further consequence of schools having to cope with this turbulent environment was the increasing stress upon teachers and headteachers. The second paper by Tom Simpson and Brian Fidler addressed this issue, showing how Heads whom they had studied were exhibiting such symptoms of stress that many would be classed as medically neurotic. The degree of stress was also evident in their patterns of daily activity — the diary study which was reported in part of this paper showed how fragmented Headteachers' work patterns were, as a result of having to react to a relentless flow of routine administrative matters and unforeseeable crises that arise from schools containing many young and very active people.

The third paper looked at how teachers were being helped to cope with all the multiple innovations referred to in the first paper. Hugh Busher argued that the nature of teacher inservice education was changing from traditional personally focussed long courses for individual teachers to corporately focussed short courses to help teachers fulfil the needs of the school and so, indirectly, the needs and priorities of central and local government. He suggested that whilst the new INSET did embrace more teachers than the former model and did focus on practical problem solving — which teachers welcomed — it also constituted a quality control model of teaching that was threatening to deskill teachers by not recognising the professional expertise of their knowledge gained from experience. One way in which teacher professional knowledge is being elaborated and used by teachers to

further their own educational understanding is through clusters of schools (sometimes called families) getting together to run INSET workshops and Baker Days. The fourth paper by Rob Gwynne and Angela Thody described how two schools had established their own University accredited management development courses. As the courses were school based, teachers were able to focus on their own practice and decide how to implement change, under the guidance of senior teachers and a university teacher acting as joint tutors to the course.

Although the symposium was only lightly attended, the discussion following each paper was enthusiastic and the chair had considerable difficulty keeping the proceedings to schedule — in the end and after the last paper declaring the session to be at an end formally, leaving the discussion to flow on uninterrupted and unrefereed!

My thanks to those colleagues who attended the symposium, and particularly to those who presented papers. My thanks to BERA for allowing BEMAS to run a symposium on research in management as part of its annual conference.

Hugh Busher, Loughborough University

## **Competence based Learning and Assessment**

### **Convenors: Janet Powney and Jacki Proctor**

The symposium focused on issues arising from current, Training Agency (TA) promoted and sponsored, attempts to establish new vocational qualifications for white-collar occupations. Industry 'Lead Bodies' for each occupation are identifying the competence necessary in work environments. 'Elements' of competence, what an employee would be expected to be able to do, are being described and performance criteria, deemed sufficient to demonstrate each element of competence, specified. Together, these are referred to as occupational 'standards'. A coherent group of standards, relevant to a particular work role, will form a vocational qualification.

**Richard Winter** (Anglia Higher Education College) presented a paper which reported the first stage of a TA funded project to develop an Honours Degree level qualification in social work which will include the accreditation of work-based experience and the recognition of employers' training provision. His paper concerned the identification of competence appropriate to the caring professions at this level. He sketched the theory of work in these professions, which is concerned with emotional processes, with values and moral purposes, and with continuing learning involving both the client and the professional and went on to look at competence expected of an experienced, post qualifying worker. The major polarisation examined was that between professional practice and professional understanding.

The paper presented by **David Sharpley** (David Sharpley Associates, London) was concerned with the assessment of the personal competence of managers during assessment centre exercises. He distinguished between the marginally competent and the truly outstanding and argued that performance criteria identify marginal competence in discrete tasks (elements of competence) but that the effectiveness of the outstanding manager rests on integrated clusters of behaviour. He

presented a case for assessing competence in terms of the way in which individuals focus on the operational requirements of a role.

**Janet Powney** (London) and **Jacki Proctor** (West Yorkshire) did not present a paper but conducted a conversation in which they concentrated on issues arising from a TA funded, joint CNAABTEC, project Assessing Management Competence. They highlighted concerns resulting from two approaches to qualification: the notion of assessing a candidate after a prescribed educational experience of a monitored quality, as against the notion of assessing particular 'outcomes', particular performances, without concern as to how the ability to perform has been acquired.

**John Elliott** (University of East Anglia) completed the presentations with an alternative conceptualisation of competence, developed mainly from his involvement in teacher education but appropriate to the education of other professionals. He related the unease with which many professionals view competence based training to a suspicion that policy makers, in seeking a means of predicting and controlling the quality of professional practice, have arrived at procedures which could be used to predict and control specific actions and responses of practitioners. He described a number of non-behaviourist approaches to the definition of professional competence, distinguishing between habitual skill knowledge and intelligent skill knowledge.

The symposium was attended by twenty-eight conference delegates, indicating the present high level of activity related to developing competence descriptions and means of developing and assessing competence.

JMP

#### 1. How to determine professional competences in social work

Professor Richard Winter, Anglia Higher Education College, Victoria Road South, Chelmsford CM1 2PH

#### 2. Marginally competent or truly outstanding? Using Assessment centres to identify potential

and raise standards. David Sharpley, David Sharpley Associates, 17 Chester Crescent, London E8 2PH

#### 3. Assessing management competence: the standard of qualification Janet Powney 214 Evering Road

London E5 8AJ. Jacki Proctor 9 Cemetery Road Pudsey LS28 7LW

#### 4. Competency based training and the education of the professionals: is a happy marriage possible?

Professor John Elliott, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ

### **Assessment**

On the Saturday afternoon we held a symposium organised around the Policy Task Group paper and individual contributions from Wynne Harlen and Anne Qualter, Tricia Broadfoot and Sally Brown. Bryan Dockrell acted as the discussant.

The paper by Wynne and Anne examined teacher assessment in the light of issues raised by SAT development work for Key Stage One. They addressed differentiation (i.e. how tasks are structured so that pupils can be said to have achieved one level or another), the use of criteria singly or in combination, the context of assessment and the effect on validity, and the relationship between assessment, teaching and learning. One strongly emerging theme was that formative assessment was in operation in the classrooms but teachers did not recognise it as what they thought was required for teacher assessment, hence these teachers had added specific assessment tasks rather than building on implicit assessment which was part of their normal practice.

Tricia's paper from the PACE research team in Bristol looked at teachers' reactions to changes in assessment under the national curriculum via interviews with 150 infant teachers and headteachers. In contrast, seemingly, to the findings in the first presentation the PACE research indicated that there was a good deal of formative assessment in classrooms which was recognised as such by the teachers. Teachers were using assessment more creatively to support learning for both diagnostic and formative purposes. Along with an increased emphasis on assessment and record keeping however, was considerable resentment about the time demands, bureaucracy, and unnecessary formalisation.

Sally Brown's paper turned to a consideration of what policymakers and practitioners can, and do, expect of research. She made the point that research cannot tell policy makers what decisions they should take nor practitioners what course of action they should choose. Nor can it be the conjuring trick called for when policy makers wish to achieve simultaneously two or more important, but incompatible aims. In order to establish fruitful partnerships among researchers, policy makers and practitioners, dialogues have to be established, she argues, which allow freedom of information and constructive criticism on all sides.

We were fortunate that the audience, despite the heat, stayed on for an hour and a half to discuss these papers and the Policy Task Group paper. Bryan Dockrell summed up the papers and set an agenda for discussion; a key theme to come out of all four papers was that using one assessment for incompatible purposes is unlikely to be successful. The discussion was animated, intelligent (yes!), good humoured and enormously helpful to the PTG paper authors. The messages were that we need to consider carefully our next audience (parents and teachers perhaps).

We know more than we say we do — we should now be saying "in two years' time it is likely that. .." this will focus people's minds and sharpen the debate.

We should be much more forceful in saying that SATs will not tell us about standards.

We need to provide conceptual clarification (rewriting some definitions).

We need to provide examples of good assessment practice and we need a properly defined research agenda for helping teachers.

It was a stimulating and worthwhile, if exhausting, afternoon and we extend our thanks to everyone who took part.

Caroline Gipps, Institute of Education

*Teachers in primary schools resent the amount of time they must spend on assessment and record keeping as a result of the national curriculum. Patricia Broadfoot and Marilyn Osborn from Bristol University, and Dorothy Abbott, Paul Croll and Andrew Pollard from Bristol Polytechnic, interviewed 150 teachers and headteachers.*

*Many felt the new arrangements are unnecessarily formal, and expressed anxiety, frustration and exhaustion. "The bureaucracy is unforgiveable," said one headteacher.*

*But the researchers concluded that "we might be at the beginning of a very creative phase of development in the use of assessment".*

*The paper forms part of the Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience (PACE) project, which is a three-year study looking at changes in primary schools as a result of the Education Reform Act.*

*(TES 7/9/90)*

## **Time**

The Symposium on Time presented at the BERA conference in September brought together five researchers from different organizations all with an interest in the area of time and education. The symposium, convened by Marlene Morrison and Christopher Pole of the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Warwick, explored different aspects of time in relation to the experiences of pupils, teachers and middle managers in schools.

The symposium was opened by Marlene Morrison who presented a paper on the experiences of part-time students. Using ethnographic data, the paper considered the definition of part-time in the context of competing demands for women's time. Felicity Fletcher-Campbell, of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), continued the theme of time by reporting on the NFER study of middle managers in secondary schools. This presentation considered the time constraints which are placed on effective school management and the allocation of time to different management tasks. Hilary Burgess, of Newman and Westhill College, Birmingham, presented a paper on time in the primary classroom with particular reference to community education. Taking examples from her research in Midlands primary schools, she discussed the integration of parents as teachers' helpers with the rhythms of the school day. Christopher Pole considered a different dimension of time in his discussion of Time as a tool of Power and Control in teacher-pupil relations.

Drawing on his work on Records of Achievement in secondary schools, he discussed the way in which the allocation of time for teacher-pupil discussion can act to reinforce notions of teachers' power over pupils. Finally, Barbara Adam of the University of Wales, closed the symposium with a theoretical overview of time in which she gave consideration to the ways in which time is divided and measured for education.

Collectively the papers stressed the importance of time to the success of management and the development of innovations in education. The papers showed that time can often be a taken for granted element in education which, apart from complaining about the lack of, researchers have as yet given little attention to.

Chrisitpher J Pole, Marlene Morrison, University of Warwick

### **Action Research in Schools**

The whole day symposium on action research in schools was attended by a large number of delegates, including a reporter and photographer from the TES. This resulted in good press coverage (see report that follows) and enabled Jack Whitehead, Ann Davis and Jon Pratt to make their debut in the first edition of the TES' new monthly feature Research Focus.

The morning was taken up by individual teachers presenting the results of their action research in primary and secondary schools.

The presentations included accounts of work at both classroom and management levels, other participants being pupils or colleagues on the school staff.

The early part of the afternoon was given over to researchers working within the remit of the PALM project who presented the perspectives of both area coordinators and teachers from individual schools.

In the final part of the day Jack Whitehead chaired the sixth session in the now well established Annual Conference Feature on *Action Research, Eduational Theory and the Politics of Educational Knowledge*.

Jack writes:

The purpose of the seminar was to examine the value of school-based action-research groups for improving the quality of pupils' learning, the professional development of teachers and the institutional development of schools and for generating and testing a living educational theory.

Jack Whitehead introduced the seminar by describing how Peter Mortimore had introjected a sense of panic in the previous days symposium on Teacher Education on the grounds that researchers should, as a matter of urgency prepare a case, based on research, to inform the imminent national debate on teacher education. Jack placed the practitioners' research within this political context and stated his view that an educational theory for professional practice was now being generated by the descriptions and explanations which the teachers (as individual learners) were producing for their own educational development. The development of such a theory should, he believes, form a research-base for continuing teacher education in this country.

Erica Holley's paper described her research in progress at Greendown Community School in Swindon. In embracing action research as an appropriate way of conducting her enquiry and at the same time showing how she continued to hold onto the integrity of her feminist values, Holley answered Weiner's questions concerning the relationship between action research and male-hegemony (BERJ, Vol 15, No.1, 1989). She explained how her colleague Andy Latter was supporting her enquiry in the context of the Greendown Action Research Group. She described how an understanding of this positive support had emerged from a process of learning through trial and error of what constituted appropriate support for different members of staff. A paper from Andy

Larter describing this process of trial and error in forming and supporting teachers in a school-based research group was available at the seminar.

The contribution by Kevin Eames has been well reported in the two page spread prepared for the TES on 6/9/90 by Caroline St. John Brookes, (thanks to the efforts of our Press Officer Janet Powney). Kevin described the progress of his PhD research into an explication of the nature of the educational knowledge which can be generated through action research. The Wootton Bassett Action Research Group have produced a report on their school-based work which shows how the teachers are using an action research approach to answer questions of the kind, 'How do I improve the quality of my practice in relation to the quality of my pupils' learning?' (this is available for £3.50 from Kevin Eames.

## **AND FROM THE PRESS**

### **TEACHERS' DAY**

Dinner ladies, microcomputers for five-year-olds, and the theory underlying action research: Saturday at the BERA conference was teachers' day, and the discussion raced from the severely practical to the highly abstract and back again.

Seven teachers (three from primary schools and four from secondaries) read papers based on their own investigations. They were all involved in "action research" projects: analysing their own practice in class and aiming to change it for the better.

John Loftus, deputy head in a London first school for children aged three to eight, had a management problem common to many primaries: bad behaviour in the playground when the dinner ladies were on duty. Realising that the meals staff were expected to play a key role in the school day though completely untrained, he set up a four-month programme designed to improve relationships between the teachers, the dinner staff and the children.

His account was full of the nitty-gritty of school life — especially the difficulty of carving out time. He finally managed to find 25 minutes one week (when the head was "doing country dancing" with the children) to talk to the dinner ladies and hear their point of view. Questionnaires revealed that they did not feel part of a team with the teachers, and would like help in handling the children.

The next step was to discuss with the teachers how they could involve the dinner ladies as fellow workers and present a united front on discipline.

Then, in an assembly on dinner ladies, the children were asked how they had been helped by school meals staff ("Mrs X cut my potato up for me"), and whether they themselves had been helpful. A questionnaire to the pupils elicited some rules for behaviour in the lunch hour. ("No fighting. Do not swear. Do not throw food.")

The pupils collaborated in a wall display to show the important part dinner ladies played, and on mothers' day sent them thank you cards. At the same time, teachers and ancillary staff met and worked out for the dinner ladies a job description and guidelines on how to cope in the playground. They now meet regularly once a week, and discuss problems as a team.

This strenuous programme resulted, said John Loftus, in more self-esteem and job satisfaction for the meals staff, better relationships among children, teachers and dinner ladies, and a stronger sense of unity throughout the school.

Such research looks straightforward when written up, but recognising problems, systematically exploring them and then devising strategies to deal with them can be hard without the support of an outside institution — in this case Kingston Polytechnic, where John Loftus was signed on for a diploma. Dr Pam Lomax, his supervisor there, emphasised the importance of a structured approach which moved forward in a repeated cycle: plan, act, evaluate, replan. Other students and the staff acted as "critical friends" in helping John to build his project and evaluating it when it was finished.

Ann Davis a primary teacher from Norfolk, was taking part in a project directed by John Elliot at the University of East Anglia aimed at developing "pupil autonomy in learning with microcomputers" (PALM). Using a BBC Master, she found that programs such as LOGO (through which children control the movements of a "turtle" on the floor) increased the independence of her five and six-year-old pupils, including their ability to "explain" and "instruct" as required by the national curriculum.

Word processing programmes encouraged them to look closely at their work. "If a sentence didn't seem to make sense they went back, read it again, and corrected their mistakes," she said. In looking out for evidence of independent learning, she found she was emphasising it more and more as a goal of her teaching.

Over 100 teachers are involved in the PALM project, which is coordinated by Bridget Somekh. Nearly half have written up their experiences, some as "project reports, and some simply as a way of reflecting on what happened. "Action research is about learning more about the teaching process, and acting on what you learn," said Bridget Somekh.

John Pratt, a PALM project officer, chipped in with a quotation from a Cambridgeshire teacher he had worked with: "The project hasn't exactly changed me, but I've redefined myself as a professional." The thought was echoed by Steve Busby, a primary school teacher who did a diploma with John Loftus: "The Kingston course has reminded me that I have got skills and knowledge as a professional teacher."

Kevin Eames, seconded to Wiltshire LEA to work on assessment and records of achievement, was until last term head of English at Wootton Bassett comprehensive near Swindon. A group of teachers there formed the Bassett Action Research group to try to improve their teaching through action research. "It's a methodical, common-sense approach to classroom practice," Eames wrote in a report the group published last October.

"It assumes that teachers have a professional responsibility to give their pupils the best education possible. Since no two classes or pupils are ever the same, this implies that the teacher will be continually reflecting on his or her practice and adjusting it in the light of his or her own past experiences."

Their document reported on three teachers' efforts to improve their teaching in English and craft, design and technology. In particular, Kevin Eames explored how children could become more critical of their own writing by comparing what they had intended to do with what they had actually achieved. As a result of his research, he told the conference, the whole English department had



experimented with ways of getting pupils to review their own work, concluding that "hot writing" — against the clock and without too much time for reflection — produced the best results.

This became a regular part of English teaching in the school. And the Bassett research reports have spread to other schools and even LEAs. Last summer, they formed part of the in-service training in neighbouring Avon.

The Bassett group are all signed on at Bath University for PhDs, M Phils and advanced diplomas. This link with higher education is important, according to Jack Whitehead, lecturer at the university, because it offers a context for teachers to discuss their experiences and recognise their own skills and educational values. "We can pass on the insights we have had in our own reading and thinking so that teachers can use them in practice," he says. "And it is important to question teachers' claims about what is happening in their classroom. What evidence do they have? How do they *know*?" The educational knowledge which teachers develop through their own practice and can pass on to others, he says, "is a living form of educational theory".

(TES 7/9/90)

### **SCHOOL GOVERNORS**

It's a commonplace in education that research is too theoretical and comes too late to help the practitioners. Will things be any better in the field of school governorship? There were a few clues at the Annual Meeting of the British Educational Research Association when Michael Golby of the Governors Support Centre convened the Symposium on Research into School Governors.

It was clear at the Symposium that the total effort of the research community is always going to be miniscule in relation to the commitments of the governors themselves. Upwards of thirty thousand practising governors, should we even try to cost their time, represents a massive social investment in local participation in the schools. Yet the investment in systematic research is minimal. The Leverhulme Trust funded the Exeter work on parents as school governors in 1988 and the Economic and Social Research Council is funding current Open University work. In Scotland the Scottish Council for Research in Education supports enquiries into the School Boards north of the border. There is also a miscellany of individuals working in universities and LEAs on personal research. But the overall effort is unco-ordinated and addresses no common agenda.

At the Symposium Michael Colby's paper suggested that rather more cohesion would be desirable. Governors were a social experiment needing validation. Pamela Munn from SCRE argued that as far as Scotland is concerned greater parental involvement in schools is a means of devolving management to schools while tightening central government control. She speculated that parents may find an important mechanism for concerted pressure on government. Rosemary Deem, Kevin Brehony and Sue Hemmings from the Open University gave a preview of some of their findings following observation at governing body meetings. Questions of relationships among the professional and non-professional parties, including gender aspects, were to the fore. Merc Boix from the University of Barcelona gave an account of the new arrangements for school governorship in Catalonia and the Symposium considered whether there are European-wide moral and political values needing collaborative exploration. Finally, Stephen Brigley gave an account of the key

concepts of democracy, participation and accountability with examples from the continuing Exeter work.

The Symposium was lively and full of issues of principle mixed with the real life of governors' work as observed by committed researchers. It played its small part in building an agenda for further work. It became absolutely clear that there are questions of very great social importance in the work of school governors. Research deserves the maximum of time, energy and resources that can be afforded.

Michael Golby, University of Exeter