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ABSTRACT

The main trends in urban education, particularly in England and the United Kingdom, are reviewed and analysed, along with descriptions of a series of projects and interventions. In particular, the paper: reviews the relevant research evidence about the current state of urban education; considers the scope for change; reports on worthwhile initiatives from the United Kingdom and other countries; and recommends steps to promote successful urban education. In many of the developed countries of the world, urban education is seen predominantly as a major problem, characterized by unsatisfactory attendances, patchy standards, and high underachievement and dropout rates. Scope for "bucking" these trends is limited by the impact of poverty and disadvantage and the structure of some aspects of the current educational system. Having discussed these limitations, the paper then goes on to discuss possible opportunities, reviewing early childhood programs, ways of improving classroom practice, ways of improving school management and organization, innovative school programs, school-linked projects, and creation of new learning environments. This review shows that: (1) programs for children under 5 years old are clearly worth investment; (2) the structure of the learning environment appears important at both primary school and secondary school levels; (3) links with parents, the community, and business are important; and (4) some innovative programs such as reading recovery and the cognitive acceleration in science project deserve close attention. Includes 34 references. (JB)

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Bucking the Trends: Promoting Successful Urban Education

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Why should the trends have to be bucked? Why is current urban education not considered to be successful? Why does it have to be promoted? Of course, it can be misleading to generalise about the standard of urban education. Much of it, already, is successful. Like the cities in which they are located and which provide their environment, however, there is much variation in the quality of the schools, projects, colleges, institutions and administrations that make up urban education services.

In this paper an attempt will be made:

- to review the relevant research evidence about the current state of urban education
- to consider the scope for change
- to report on worthwhile initiatives from the UK and overseas
- to recommend any steps that, in the light of this review, could promote successful urban education.

In endeavouring to meet the brief, information and advice from researchers in this country and abroad has been sought, and reports of different types of educational projects and interventions consulted. The recommendations are only tentative as there is a vast amount of information available on numerous projects. The selection made can only represent a fraction of the whole. Even if full information about procedures can be obtained (which is rare), details of true costs can seldom be uncovered. Moreover, evidence of their effectiveness - judged in terms of either concurrent or long-term outcomes -is rarely available.

The practical focus of the review prevents a discussion of theoretical questions. I am conscious, however, of the comments of Gerald Grace (1984) that:

> "... those who have engaged with the close detail of policy and practice in urban education abstracted from wider issues have laid themselves open to the charge of producing naive school-

centred solutions with no sense of the structural, the political and the historical as constraints." (Pxii).

With such a caution firmly in mind, I will comment on the main trends in urban education today and describe a series of projects and interventions which urban schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) may find interesting. These projects cannot be blue prints or panaceas: schools and urban societies as Grace has pointed out - are too complex to allow such easy translations but, if they measure up to the tests of quality, cost effectiveness and educational effectiveness, should be worthy of further exploration.

Trends in Urban Education

In many of the developed countries of the world, urban education is seen predominantly as a major problem. The 1991 OECD report, for instance, on youth in urban areas in the cities of Barcelona, Hamburg, Metz and Glasgow found considerable evidence of underachievement and commented that, all too often, the policies designed to contain this had been fragmented, temporary and reactive rather than pre-emptive and preventative.

The situation in the United States is particularly serious and the recent review by Boyd (1991) includes a catalogue of the problems of urban schools associated with poverty, homelessness, crime and family breakdown. He quotes the views of business leaders that unless the 40 per cent of school pupils that are estimated to be currently at risk of educational failure can be dramatically reduced, the United States faces a national disaster.

In the United Kingdom, the situation is far less bleak and there are numerous examples of successful schools serving urban communities. In the absence of standardised measures, it is difficult to estimate the average levels of achievement being reached in urban areas and to compare these systematically with those of suburban and more rural localities. Statistical reports of the examination achievements of school leavers

produced each year by the Department of Education and Science only provide national, regional and LEA aggregations of results and it is not possible to break these down into smaller units as it is, for example, with census data.

By aggregating LEAs into three clusters of 'London', 'other metropolitan areas' and 'non-metropolitan areas' it is possible to show that in the non-metropolitan LEAs approximately 28 per cent of school leavers have five higher grades in the public examinations in comparison to approximately 23 per cent of the leavers from London and the other metropolitan areas. However, since some non-metropolitan LEAs include sizable cities and, on the other hand, some of the London boroughs and the metropolitan LEAs contain mainly suburbs - the 5 per cent difference clearly masks enormous variation. In the thirteen inner and twenty outer London boroughs, for instance stark contrasts occur between one LEA with only 11 per cent of such school leavers, and another with nearly 39 per cent. Individual schools present an even greater range of achievement.

What is clear, however, is that Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) in inner city school inspection reports have drawn attention to the unsatisfactory attendance and patchy standards found in such schools. Interestingly, HMI frequently stress that pastoral care and methods of dealing with behaviour problems are often the greatest strengths of urban schools. HMI, however, also recognise the multiple disadvantages with which many pupils in urban areas have to live and the implications of this for staff time and energy as well as - in recent years - recruiting and retaining heads and teachers.

My own views about urban education, drawn from reading inspection reports and the research literature and my visits to a range of schools, is in broad agreement with this HMI judgement and with the statistical data available from the DES. In general, it is clear, pupils are likely to achieve less well in urban rather than in other sorts of schools. What must be emphasised, however, is that the difficulties faced by pupils and, consequently, by the urban schools are often appalling and - in terms of promoting progress - some of these schools are more effective than many of their suburban or rural counterparts. Certainly the

energy and commitment of heads and teachers in responding to (possibly elicited by) the difficulties they encounter - on a daily basis - are most impressive.

Scope for Bucking These Trends

In the light of this analysis, how much scope is there for the governors, heads and teachers associated with urban schools "to buck these trends?" Two limitations are immediately obvious: the impact of poverty and disadvantage; and, second, the structure of some aspects of the current educational system.

Poverty and Disadvantage

It is clear from innumerable studies that the relationship between poverty and educational achievement is very strong. In their book "Continuities in Childhood Disadvantage", based on the National Child Development Study data, Juliet Essen and Peter Wedge (1982) identified a sample of pupils who were socially disadvantaged in terms of housing, income and family situation at age 11 and/or at age 16. They found a remarkable overlap between these two ages. They also found that even improved circumstances at age 16 could not make up for the disadvantage experienced at age 11.

The situation in the United States is considerably more serious and, according to future projections, likely to deteriorate further with the number of families living below the poverty line and the proportion of children from single parent families likely to increase. In some neighbourhoods such children will seldom meet people who are in regular employment. Pupils from urban schools are highly vulnerable to low expectations and limited aspirations. They will be surrounded by the negative views of families and peers.

The second limitation to the ability to "buck the trend" is concerned with the structure of the English education system. In this system, most pupils are involved in public examinations at the age of 16. The examinations - currently the General Certificate of Secondary Education - as has been discussed by many reviewers - is highly competitive with only a relatively small proportion gaining the highest grades across

a range of subjects. Currently, approximately 30 per cent of the age group achieve high grades in five or more subjects; 70 per cent do not. Whilst the grade of failure has been removed from the examination, the common view - for historical reasons - is that only the top three grades are equivalent to passes. The five subject "pass" grouping stems from former School Certificate rules which defined the number of subjects commonly used for entrance into advanced level study or certain occupations. It is not surprising, therefore, that, in general, pupils with any form of disadvantage, are less likely to do well and are less likely to be in that 30 per cent of achievers than are their more advantaged peers. Coping with this situation presents considerable problems for urban schools.

If the school's intake of pupils is comparatively disadvantaged, the probability of a high proportion obtaining the five higher grades is limited. Schools, therefore, if they do not wish the public examination results to be a shock, have to gear their own internal examinations to the same norms as the external ones. This means that pupils will be confronted with failure for a considerable proportion of their time in secondary schools. These grade levels, of course, are arbitrary but they are well established in the system - a system more geared to failure than success for the majority of pupils. This situation is unacceptable. It is demotivating and wasteful of talent. Other country's systems ensure that a majority of pupils leave school feeling successful. In England, it is not surprising that so many pupils (currently 47 per cent) opt to leave education at the earliest opportunity shortly after taking these examinations. Using DES statistics for the latest year, it is possible to examine the relationship between achievement in the GCSE and the decision to leave school (and not go to FE College). Whilst, only 12 per cent of those obtaining 5 or more high grades opt to leave, 46 per cent of those with only 1-4 such high grades do so. For those obtaining fewer qualifications the proportion is 76 per cent, and for those with no graded achievements, 91 per cent. It is thus very clear that the demotivating impact of the examination is a powerful influence on young people's attitudes to education. Moreover, the economic consequences of such drop out are considerable. A recent World Bank report (Target Intelligence, 1991) calculated that an increase in the average of one year of education by an overall population would lead to a 3 per cent rise in its gross domestic product.

Until recently, it looked as if reform of the English examinations system would come about as a result of the introduction of the assessment of the newly developed National Curriculum. Using the results of the first Key Stage Assessment in Mathematics, Science and English and the assumptions of the underlying model, it is clear that a major calibration of levels of success would have taken place. The many changes to the model, however, make this now appear less likely to occur.

These two limitations to the scope of "bucking the trends in urban schools" cannot be ignored. As the World Bank Report makes clear, such a situation is wasteful of talent. It is also unjust. The concern for equality (not of outcome - who can deliver that given the differences in talents and in motivation - but of opportunity) should not be lost in all the rhetoric about quality schooling.

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These are the limitations; what are the opportunities?

Interventions and Projects

There is a vast literature on various interventions and projects from which to draw in the search for ideas which work. Yet, paradoxically, the most dominant impression of schooling is its similarity. Or course, many new ideas have been adopted and later rejected. A common feature of such a pattern is that a new idea quickly becomes popular gaining supporters as a result of a "band waggon" effect but, equally quickly, then loses support and is forgotten.

This is a fate that has befallen many innovations in the world of education and, as a result, contributes to both the impression of constant change but also to that of inertia.

Michael Fullan of Toronto University (1991) has identified a series of endemic barriers to educational change. He stresses that a time frame of years, rather than months, is essential.

Barriers to Change

Overload

Complexity

(in) Compatiblity

(lack of) Capability

(limited) Resources

Poor Change Strategies

Fullan, 1991

In contrast to these barriers, Seashore Louis and Miles (1990) have developed a series of incentives for change which they claim must be implemented in order to achieve successful outcomes.

Incentives for Change

Clarity

Relevance

Action Images (exemplifications)

Will

Skill

Seashore Louis and Miles, 1990

It is interesting to examine if the reforms introduced in England in 1988 fall more in line with Fullan's barriers or Seashore Louis and Miles' incentives. Whilst it is too early to judge the efficacy of the reforms, it is already apparent that a number of them are running into difficulties. The lack of consultation prior to their introduction, their top-down nature and the consequent lack of ownership by heads, teachers and

local authority administrators and the rather punitive tone in which they are being pursued, all contribute to the difficulties of successfully implementing the reforms.

Given, however, the statistics on examination results and pupil drop-out, it is abundantly clear that change is needed - especially for urban schools. It is for this reason, therefore, that a review of promising initiatives has been carried out.

The innovations have been organised into six groups dealing with

- early childhood programmes
- ways of improving classroom practice
- ways of improving school management and organisation
- innovative school programmes
- school-linked projects
- the creation of new learning environments.

Early Childhood Programmes

There now exists clear evidence of the positive effects of a number of early childhood programmes. According to Sylva (1989) approaches such as "High Scope" not only work and are cost effective, but appear to provide most benefit to those with the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

There are also different emphases amongst the programmes. Athey (1990) has pioneered a highly structured "enrichment programme" for disadvantaged pre-schoolers. This approach demonstrates that not only can the children make considerable progress, but that the gap between their performance and that of an "advantaged group" can be reduced. The benefits of a good start to the subsequent school career has been demonstrated in much educational research.

This is both the easiest and the hardest aspect of school life to change. It is the easiest in that teachers have - even today - a fair degree of autonomy over the way they choose to work in their classrooms. However, it is also the hardest to change because patterns can easily be established and habits both of teachers and pupils accepted and, because each teacher in his or her classroom is heavily constrained by the national curriculum. Interestingly, in the trawl of possible interventions, little was found that has addressed directly the work of classroom teachers. The one exception was the compendium of research information "What Works" produced by the United States Department of Education (United States Department of Education, 1987). This detailed twenty seven separate aspects of classroom management that had been positively evaluated by researchers. They range from parental involvement, cooperative learning and structured approaches, to the teaching of literacy, numeracy and the management of time, and the setting of appropriate homework tasks.

In the UK, at primary level some lessons from research including that of my colleagues and I (Mortimore et al, 1988) and - most recently, Alexander (1991) - have yet to be accepted. Topic work, despite its inherent organisational difficulties is, in many schools, still preferred to a less integrated, more structured approach. The lessons of research, with regard to the repertoire of teacher styles appear to have been unheeded as according to HMI, in a number of urban schools, teaching is too often delivered in a way which takes little account of the needs and abilities of individual pupils and too many tasks set by teachers are too undemanding.

At secondary level, the lessons of the somewhat curiously named "Low Achieving Pupils project", funded by the DES, that pupils valued being treated as responsible adults but wished to remain on the same basic track as their higher achieving peers does not yet seem to have been grasped by those responsible for national policy. Moreover, the findings from the evaluation of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative, that young people value practical activities, problem-solving approaches and greater access to

high quality information technology, have been somewhat overshadowed by the implementation of the National Curriculum.

Improving Ordinary Schools

Many of the most comprehensive research studies into school effectiveness have taken place in the United Kingdom. However, whilst the evidence produced by this research - that individual schools can affect the amount of progress made by pupils - has been welcomed, the adaptation of the characteristics of effective schools into a systematic programme of school improvement has - generally failed to materialize.

In contrast, in the United States, an amendment to the legislation governing the funding of schools, has enabled an estimated half of all school districts to implement a programme of school improvement. Similarly, in Canada and, more recently, in Australia, examples of such programmes are becoming common.

On the European mainland, the Netherlands stands out as having been involved in effective schools research since 1980. Unlike the UK, however, this research effort has also been accompanied by a number of school improvement projects seeking to improve the outcomes of schooling for minority pupils or to evaluate the Dutch educational priority policy which, since 1985, has endeavoured to improve educational opportunities for pupils from lower income families.

One distinctive approach to American school improvement is that of James Comer, a child psychiatrist who, since 1968, has worked with schools to improve the relationships between teachers, pupils and parents in order to facilitate learning (Comer et al, 1991). His nine-component model integrated within an overall school development plan has just been awarded a five year $15 million grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. His approach accepts that children and young people in urban areas undergo stressful experiences and that schools need to find ways of diverting the energy, caused by those stresses,

into learning. All the schools using his methods also adopt development plans and build in high levels of parental involvement.

A related development concerns a collaboration between Yale University and the New Haven Public Schools in which curriculum programmes in stress management skills have been developed for both primary and secondary pupils (Weissberg et al, 1989). Carefully controlled evaluations show that these programmes are effective in promoting positive attitudes and pro-social behaviour as well as in providing skill training.

Another approach has been pioneered in Ontario by the Halton School Board (Stoll and Fink, 1989). Based on British and American research, this approach to school improvement focuses on the creation, by a school team, of a school growth plan. This growth plan incorporates an assessment of each school's strengths and weaknesses; a vision of how the team would like to see the school develop; specific plans of how to move towards the vision; and a built in evaluation programme to provide feedback on progress. The school teams are assisted by academics from the University of Toronto and by researchers and consultants from the district office who specialise in evaluation techniques.

A rather different approach has been used by the OECD International School Improvement Project (Hopkins, 1987). Operating in fourteen countries for the last nine years it has sought to describe the processes of school change in a variety of different settings and to bring together many of those working in such changing schools.

Another approach to improving ordinary schools has been developed at the University of Newcastle. By providing an information system to schools and colleges predominantly, but not exclusively in the North East, Dr Carol Fitz-Gibbon is able to assist schools in self monitoring examination results, pupil attitudes and school processes (Fitz-Gibbon, 1991). Furthermore, the system is able to provide information about how each school can be compared, anonymously, to other similar schools. This facility is especially

valuable in the area of pupil attitudes where few norms of data are available and a score of, say, sixty percent could be interpreted as either positive, neutral or negative.

The final project to be noted is concerned with school development plans (SDPs). These plans are being promulgated by the DES and the first booklet prepared by Cambridge-based academics has been widely disseminated (Hargreaves el al, 1989). In many ways, SDPs resemble the Canadian School Growth plan or the Comer Development plan. In each case, a process has been undertaken whilst the plan is being written. How the process is managed, who is involved and what criteria are used for drawing up priorities and formulating action plans are all relevant questions - questions which my colleague Barbara MacGilchrist and I will be investigating over the next two and a half years as part of an ESRC-funded research project.

Special Programmes

A number of special programmes have already been introduced into schools. Some, like the Dutch Education and Social Environment project, the Lower achieving Pupils Project or the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative have already been undertaken and evaluated. Interestingly, in most cases, according to the evaluations the message from pupils was similar: far more adult treatment, more practical activities and greater use of information technology.

Other programmes worthy of attention span the full age range: the New Zealand-based Reading Recovery project and the Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE) project from Kings College, London.

Reading Recovery was devised by Professor Marie Clay of Auckland University as an intervention project for children who were experiencing difficulties with the early stages of reading (Clay, 1985). It relies on the meticulous training of teachers to recognise reading problems. It adopts no particular reading method and tailors a personal programme for each child. It has been used widely in New Zealand, Australia and

the United States. Detailed evaluations of the project have been undertaken and have led to very positive outcomes. From October 1991, a programme has been operating from the Institute of Education where Professor Marie Clay has been appointed to oversee a joint University/LEA partnership.

Operating with secondary pupils, the CASE project (1990) has been designed to improve pupils' ability to learn. Based on a set of principles drawn from the work of Piaget, Feuerstein and others, it embraces a method which enables pupils to learn to think in different ways (including the ability to reflect on the way they are thinking). Through systematic in-service work with teachers and the use of specially prepared materials, the project team piloted its methods in science lessons in comprehensive schools in various parts of England. In comparison with the carefully selected sample of controlled classes, the pupils who had experienced the CASE approach gained considerably higher grades in Science, Mathematics and English in the 1990 GCSE examinations.

School-Linked Projects

A number of school linked projects are now well established. The Haringey experiment, for instance, developed by Professor Jack Tizard of the Thomas Coram Research Unit demonstrated the efficacy of parents involvement in the reading progress of their children (Tizard et al, 1982). An offshoot of this programme 'Pact' was pioneered in the Inner London Education Authority. Influenced by the Haringey study, the 'Pact' staff endeavoured to involve parents with the reading of their children. Parents and teachers would both sign a Pact stipulating the level and amount of involvement.

The Sheffield Early Literacy Development Project (Hannon et al, 1991) combines a distribution of special resources into the homes of under fives with a programme of home visits by special project workers and parents group meetings. An evaluation of the project shows that it had impact on children's experience of 'environmental print', early writing and the use of books.

The IMPACT project was started at the Polytechnic of North London (Merttens and Vass, 1990). Its aims were to make the teaching of mathematics more accessible to parents by the setting of complementary work for pupils to take home. Initial evaluations have been positive.

Compact Schemes were first pioneered in Boston, Massachusetts. The idea was brought to England by the Inner London Education Authority and piloted in East London (HMI, 1989). The schemes use a mixture of individual and schools goals including examination results, homework, attendance, records of achievement, work experience, special courses in personal, social and health education and careers study and community service. Initial evaluations showed that the offer of a job provided by the business and industry partners which provided the stimulation for the extra pupil effort was only taken up by one out of five of the compact achievers.

A different sort of programme has been disseminated by the Eric Clearing House on Urban Education (Ascher, 1989). This endeavours to reach students who would normally not go to higher education and especially those from minority ethnic groups. Under this scheme higher education provides information on courses, special tutoring and some financial aid as well as organising special college courses, visits etc. This project does not appear to have solved the problems of differential entry to higher education in as much as disadvantaged pupils have not started to go to College but it has improved links and supported those students likely to be wavering over whether or not to enter higher education.

These initiatives by themselves are unlikely to solve the problems of urban schooling. However, they represent ways in which urban schools can use outside links in order to further their goals.

New learning environments

Several projects creating new environments for schooling have been pioneered in the United States.

A number of high school academies (Archer and Montesano, 1990) have been established in various states. These are mini schools of about a hundred pupils running a series of academic and vocational courses. These courses are frequently supported by industrial and commercial sponsors. Characteristics of the academies are the small classes and individual tuition coupled with the high expectations that are held by the teachers working within them. Extra funds from industry are used to provide enriching material and apparatus. In some academies mentors from the world of work are used to support the student motivation. Evaluations show improved attendance, completion rates and college applications. Whilst the evaluations for these projects are positive, the costs are considerable.

A second American initiative is the accelerated schools movement (Levin, 1987). These are usually transitional elementary schools that provide a period for 'catching up' for students moving from elementary to secondary schools. Characteristics of the programme are that parents are involved with the management of the schools, clear goals concerning academic development are stipulated and, frequently, there is backup built in from health professionals. Many of the accelerated schools focus on direct instructional strategies involving peer tutoring, co-operative learning, extra homework and an extended school day. In the United States these accelerated schools are seen as hopeful (and rather like good British primary schools) but, as yet, no firm evaluation data exist.

A third American initiative is the alternative schools movement. Both primary and secondary schools have been established with small numbers of teacher and pupils. These schools frequently offer a reduced curriculum with an emphasis on individual project work. They capitalise on the family setting (Meier, 1989). Such schools are very similar to those described by Meighan (1988). Meighan's flexi-schooling offers considerable scope for parents' involvement with the education of their children.

A further American initiative is the magnet schools movement. These schools specialise in different aspects of the curriculum. They frequently enjoy enhanced funding. Their genesis was in the anti-segregation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The aim of the movement is to ensure that schools in predominantly black areas are so popular that white students voluntarily enrol within them. Whilst there

is considerable evidence of success of such schools in American cities, there is also considerable concern about their impact on neighbouring 'non magnet' schools. A similar British project is the City Technology Colleges initiative. This was designed in 1986 as a policy initiative by the government. Such schools were designed to give a science/technology orientated curriculum a high profile. It was envisaged that such colleges would attract a high proportion of funds from private sources. This has not come about and the main proportion of the resources for the colleges is supplied by government. There are currently thirteen such colleges in England and a further two are likely to be opened during this academic year.

Like their American magnet school counterparts, City Technology Colleges are likely to be well-resourced, in new or refurbished buildings. They are likely to contain a lot of new technology equipment and to attract very keen students. They have the opportunities for the innovative use of staff and management methods. The critical question will be whether such colleges can act as 'beacons' to other schools that do not have the same level of resourcing.

These new learning environments are the least constrained that have been described. Heads and teachers have opportunities to develop innovative methods and to break the mould of traditional school approaches. Urban educationalists can undoubtedly gain a great deal by studying them but such initiatives need to be judged by their likely efficacy in relation to the problems, strengths and needs of English urban schooling.

Overview

What then are the lessons of this review? First, the area of provision for the under fives is clearly worth investment. Second, the structure of the learning environment appears important at both primary and secondary level. Third, links with parents, the community and business are important. Fourth, some

innovative programmes should be immediately investigated. In particular reading recovery schemes and the cognitive acceleration in science project deserve close attention.

An important question is whether schools can adapt better to suit urban areas and urban pupils with their particular needs and problems by adopting some of the strategies connected with these projects or whether completely new environments for learning are needed. In my view, primary schools - with some major changes - can be adapted to be made appropriate for the present and indeed the future. I am not so sure that urban secondary schools - as we know them - can be adapted in this way. The problems caused by the examination structure of the British system not only create problems for older pupils but reach down to the younger ones and encourage a very passive type of learning. As has been noted, the examination system also causes fifty per cent of the age group to reject education at the earliest opportunity. The system traps teachers as well as pupils, local education authorities as well as schools. It perpetuates a particular view of intelligence. This has powerful effects on pupils. According to Meighan (op cit)

> "... pupils ... are usually ... working in large groups under threat of sanctions, competing for marks, listening for long periods of time, with the outcomes of memorizing or believing conventional doctrines. The enthusiasm, activity and involvement of earlier years is rarely in evidence" (page 6)

At a time when most societies need a better educated workforce and to lift the average skill levels, the question as to whether the examination system acts to increase or diminish levels of achievement has to be faced and debated.

In a similar way, is it possible to continue the current 16-19 muddle? Currently in England, young people are torn between academic and vocational courses. Whilst this problem is being addressed through the development of diploma proposals, the structure of education for the age group, perhaps, needs to be rethought. Furthermore, young people are currently paid (about £26 per week) for the Youth Training Scheme involvement, but not for further education. This does not seem likely to encourage an increase in the staying-on rate.

It also appears sensible to propose a forum for the debate of new educational ideas. In the United Kingdom, there used to be such a forum in the Schools Council but this body was abolished by government and no adequate replacement has been found.

In conclusion, therefore, what radical proposals for structural change can be put forward. I shall probably be accused of tilting at windmills but if British urban schools are to be enabled to "buck the trends", there will have to be some structural changes. I propose:

- an increase in the years of primary schooling
- an abolition of the General Certificate of Secondary Education
- separation of pre from post 16 education
- a rationalisation of the school year

Obviously, these ideas need to be thoroughly thought-through. In the past there has been too much 'on the hoof' reform. The implications and consequences of future change have to be weighed carefully. Change can be destructive and its benefits have to be considerable in order to justify it.

Taking each of these suggestions, in turn, the extension of primary schooling could help schools deal with the full range of the curriculum and provide specialist teaching in the final two years. This proposal would keep pupils in smaller school units for a longer period. It would clearly have implications for capital programmes and some primary schools would need extensions to cope with the extra year of pupils.

Indirectly, the proposal would help secondary schools by breaking the years of schooling into more manageable lengths. Thus secondary schools could consist of two phases of two years. This would have the effect of removing the difficult year 9 which, currently, is difficult for many pupils coinciding, as it does, with adolescent change and being too far removed from the end of the course. The breaking up of

secondary schooling into more manageable units would remove some of the 'military academy' feel of such schools.

The abolition of the General Certificate of Secondary Education in favour of a graded assessment system should ease the problems of grouping pupils. It could reduce the strict chronology which currently affects schools and causes entire age cohorts to follow their schooling at identical times. This would enable pupils of similar achievements to work together in a way which avoided the negative impact of streaming. By avoiding the formal failure of two thirds of the age group (and the consequent opting out of half the age group) the abolition of this examination would be likely to increase the staying on rate. Whilst, in some schools the break at age 16 would seen as negative, the evidence from sixth form colleges is that such a break would improve the staying on rate and help entry into higher education.

Furthermore, it would be helpful to provide a new examination at age 18. Experiments with a British Baccalaureat offer a possible alternative. Under this system, core subjects and academic and vocational options, together with work experience, would be taken by all students. Support for such an idea is widespread (Finegold et al, 1990; Cassels, 1990; Ball, 1991; Royal Society, 1991).

The final proposal is for a change in the school year. Currently in English schools, the year is divided into three terms fitted around public holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Because Easter varies from year to year, the terms are of uneven lengths and do not fit easily into school planning. There have been a number of attempts to create a four term year in order to provide a greater flexibility but these have frequently been stymied by the timing of Easter and by parents' holiday plans. A five term year with five sessions of eight weeks, each separated by two weeks holiday (and four weeks in the summer) would enable greater flexibility to be used by the school. A longer day or a continental pattern with scope for work experience would provide considerable flexibility for schools.

Conclusion

English society needs a new-look education system. The current reforms are not working well enough and new approaches are needed. The experience of educational reforms suggests that for reforms to be successful, agreement of goals by all concerned is essential. A system which enables the talents and motivations of a greater number of students to flourish is required. However, change to any system needs full planning and pilot trials. Such change should not be top-down nor carried out in a punitive, fault-finding way. It should build on existing strengths, drawing on the capability of parents, young people and business and community interests as well as on heads and teachers. It must involve central and local government and the teacher associations in playing their part.

The evidence from the school effectiveness studies suggests that urban schools could have a major part to play in the regeneration of urban society. The suggestions made in this paper go some way to providing scope for urban schools to "buck the trends".

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