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## The Process of Curriculum Change in England and Wales during the Period 1945-1970

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Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty 25, 243-252

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1983

Artykuł umieszczony jest w kolekcji cyfrowej Bazhum, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych tworzonej przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego.

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie ze środków specjalnych MNiSW dzięki Wydziałowi Historycznemu Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

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JEAN D. BROWNE

## THE PROCESS OF CURRICULUM CHANGE IN ENGLAND AND WALES DURING THE PERIOD 1945—1970

The choice of such a recent period for the subject of a paper for a historical conference may surprise the members because they will be aware of the difficulties of making valid historical judgements when some of the relevant papers are not yet available for public discussion. However, the subject chosen does not lack documentation as official report and accounts of projects are accessible and indeed have already been extensively commented on<sup>1</sup>. In addition the writer was a participant in several of the Committees referred to and can also contribute something of the atmosphere as well as vouching for the facts. A more valid criticism of the choice of period might be the lack of historical perspective as it is difficult to see which developments are of lasting importance at this early date.

My arguments is that after a period of some very tentative changes in the curriculum in the late forties and fifties, made by traditional methods, new procedures and devices were employed by the government to influence the curriculum more directly, but the checks and balances provided by the "educational sub-government"<sup>2</sup> that is the local authorities and the teachers' unions in their relationship with the then Ministry of Education, had to be observed, so that a particular style of innovation was adopted. These checks and balances to some extent limited what could be achieved but a greater limitation in the end proved to be the shrinkage of funds available, and the opposition engendered by the nature of the innovation outside "the sub-government".

### THE IMMEDIATE POST-WAR PERIOD 1946—1956

The Education Act of 1944 decreed that all children should be educated according to their age, aptitude and ability but it did not propose

<sup>1</sup> E.g. L. Stenhouse (ed.), *Curriculum Research and Development in Action*, Heinemann (1980).

<sup>2</sup> R. A. Manzer, *Teachers and Politics*, Manchester University Press (1970).

a curriculum for the purpose. It also raised the school leaving age to 15 (not actually carried out until 1948), which of course affected the curriculum but did not itself suggest a structure of secondary schools. It was tacitly assumed that the tripartite structure suggested by the Norwood Committee, 1943, would be followed, as it was, except in the areas of a few local education authorities.

As there was no official curriculum one must ask at once what did influence what was taught in schools and what methods were used. Both are deeply affected by the social climate of the time and the aspirations of different classes and groups but it is possible to isolate certain more directly influential factors.

### *I. Examinations*

At this period the curriculum of the primary school was largely determined by the secondary selection examination at 11+. Although in many local authority areas attainment tests in the three R's had been replaced or re-inforced by intelligence tests this had had less effect than might have been expected. The curriculum of the secondary grammar school was strongly affected by the School Certificate Examinations run by the University examining boards with some teacher influence. This examination in groups of subjects was replaced in 1951 by the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.), a single subject examination with no overall requirements, although Universities and professions might lay down the number and character of subjects to be taken for entry. The result of the change was a free choice for individual pupils in the school leaving examination. The secondary modern school pupil took no outside examinations until the establishment of the Certificate of Secondary Education (C.S.E.) in 1961.

### *II. Government Advisory Committees*

Maurice Kogan, a professor of Government and Social Administration who was previously a senior civil servant, has commented that although some believe such committees to be mere instruments of procrastination or at best assimilators of criticism, he sees them as legitimising new thinking. "The defeat of assumptions about the accuracy of educational testing, and the viability of selective systems with the corollary that badly needed talents were being wasted [...] all these assumptions were written, made acceptable and put into the policy bloodstream by official reports"<sup>3</sup>.

Two of the reports of the former Board of Education's Consultative committee were still influential in this period. As far as curriculum is

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<sup>3</sup> M. Kogan and T. Packwood, *Advisory Councils and Committees in Education*, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1974).

concerned, the Hadow report on the primary school, 1931<sup>4</sup> which described the curriculum in terms of "activity and experience rather than facts to be learned or material to be stored", and the Hadow report of the education of the adolescent, 1926<sup>5</sup>, which stressed the need to match the curriculum and the style of the school to the mood of adolescence, and its social, emotional and practical needs. By the 1944 act a Central Advisory Council was set up but its first reports, *The School and Life*, 1947<sup>6</sup>, and *Out of School*, 1948<sup>7</sup>, did not affect policy to any great extent. By contrast, its later reports under the Chairmanship of Crowther, Newsom and Plowden were much more productive of change.

### III. Inspectors—national and local

The degree to which recommendations of government reports were carried out depended on the zeal and power of persuasion of H.M.I. and the attitudes and rates of expenditure of local authorities and their advisory staff.

### IV. The teaching profession

The influence of the teaching profession might be exercised through the Heads of schools, Teachers' Unions such as the N.U.T., subject Associations, such as the Mathematical Association or organizations formed to promote an idea or set of ideas such as the New Education Fellowship. Some influence was exercised by intellectual professional organizations such as the Institute of Sociology, Le Play House, which promoted, not sociology, but the environmental survey. It was a period when the Colleges and Institutes of Education exercised a considerable influence partly because of the growing number of new teachers in proportion to the rest and partly through a fairly consistent policy of trying to carry out the recommendations of the Hadow reports, particularly the 1931 report. The curriculum and methodology supported can be seen through the books used in training courses particularly M. V. Daniels: *Activity in School*<sup>8</sup>, and M. Mellor: *Activity and Experience in the Infant School Years*<sup>9</sup>.

The influence of teachers and teacher-trainers on the curriculum in the late forties and during the whole of the fifties was particularly strong as the energies of the rest of the educational sub-government were absorbed in providing places for the post-war birthrate bulge, "roofs over heads", as well as repairing war-time damage. The teachers

<sup>4</sup> Hadow Report, *The Primary School*, H.M.S.O., 1931.

<sup>5</sup> Hadow Report *The Education of the Adolescent*, H.M.S.O., 1926.

<sup>6</sup> Report of the Central Advisory Council, Chairman Sir Fred Clark, *The School and Life*, H.M.S.O., 1947.

<sup>7</sup> *Out of School*, H.M.S.O., 1948.

<sup>8</sup> M. V. Daniels, *Activity in School*, Blackwell.

<sup>9</sup> E. Mellor *Activity and Experience in the Infant School Years*, Blackwell.

began to believe that they had always controlled the curriculum which was certainly not the case in the 19th Century. The teacher-trainers rather naïvely appeared to believe that a new educational philosophy could be launched by newly trained teachers. A different approach was to be found elsewhere as, for example in France, where pilot projects were set up to test the value of new methods in the first classes of the Lycées. But whatever happened to "les sixièmes nouvelles"?

### V. *Intelligentsia*

These might be teachers in Higher Education, researchers or educational journalists. Whereas in the pre-war period educational psychologists were predominant and continued to be important in the late forties and early fifties, especially at the National Foundation for Educational Research (N.F.E.R.), a sociological analysis of the educational scene began to take over with the work of Floud, Halsey and others<sup>10</sup>. The intelligentsia did not apply its skills directly to the curriculum until the sixties.

The end of the fifties and the early sixties saw the beginning of more direct action by central authority in relation to the curriculum. At first it seemed to be following the traditional pattern just described, that of working through Advisory committees, examinations, and the inspectorate. Examples of this apparently traditional pattern were:

1. The Crowther Report, 1959<sup>11</sup>. This dealt with education from 16—18 and criticised the over-specialized nature of the sixth-form curriculum. Although change was not immediate both these recommendations haunted the agenda for many years. The school leaving age was raised to 16 in 1971 and many attempts were made to alter the sixth form examination structure—still not accomplished.

2. The Beloe Report 1961<sup>12</sup>. This committee, headed by a local authority representative proposed a public examination for secondary pupils, rather against the views of the intelligentsia but giving as a then rather novel reason that the parents wanted it. A regional structure and three modes of examination were suggested, the third of which was largely school and teacher controlled.

3. Certain members of the inspectorate in alliance with some university and college teachers began to be very active in pressing new syllabuses in Mathematics, Science and English. In the last group of studies mentioned the subject organization, the National Association

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<sup>10</sup> J. E. Floud and others (eds.), *Social Class and Educational Opportunity*, Heinemann (1956).

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Central Advisory Council, Chairman Geoffrey Crowther, 15 to 18, H.M.S.O., 1959 and 1960.

<sup>12</sup> Secondary Schools Examinations Council, Chairman Beloe, *Secondary School Examinations other than the G.C.E.*, 1961.

for the Teaching of English (N.A.T.E.) was established in 1963 and played an important part.

Other factors were at work. Major revisions of the curriculum were being undertaken in the United States on the discovery that the citizens of the U.S.S.R. were well educated enough to produce a space programme. British civil servants and academics were not so immediately influenced by this development but were impressed with the massive financial, technological, and intellectual resources it called forth in the U.S.A. Successive Ministers of Education at this period, notably David Eccles and Edward Boyle were apt to enquire what was actually taught in school as well as how schools were organized and financed. Some deep and intractable problems, such as those of inner city schools and the education of pupils whose mother tongue was not English demanded resources and expertise.

In 1961 the Minister of Education set up the Curriculum Study group to give information and advice about what he called "the secret garden of the curriculum"<sup>13</sup>. It was made up of civil servants, administrators and some outside experts and was to identify, analyse and publish accounts of curriculum development. One of its members thought that Eccles was very ill advised to refer to this group as a "Commando unit"<sup>14</sup>. The teachers were not having anyone parachuting into their territory. Their opposition was only stilled when a working party chaired by Sir John Lockwood of the University of London<sup>15</sup>, recommended the setting up of the Schools Council.

The Schools Council was set up as an autonomous body funded by the Department of Education and Science: it combined some of the aims of the Curriculum Study group with those of Curriculum developers and the work of the Secondary Schools examinations Council. It brought together government officials, central and local, Universities and Training Institutions and most heavily represented of all the organized teaching profession which insisted on a majority on all committees. The spread of interest was reflected in successive appointments to the position of Joint Secretary and in the Chairmen—a senior civil servant, the Head of a College, a woman President of the N.U.T. and a Chief Education Officer. It was not the aim of the Schools Council to determine or control the curriculum but to affect it through projects which usually made available a wide range of materials and suggestions that schools might adopt or adapt<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> A. Corbett, *The secret garden of the curriculum—who should hold the key to the door?*, T.E.S., July 13, 1973.

<sup>14</sup> M. Kogan, *The Politics of Educational Change*, Manchester University Press (1978).

<sup>15</sup> Report of the working party on *School's Curricula and Examinations* (1964).

<sup>16</sup> *The Schools Council—the first ten years 1964—74*, H.M.S.O., 1975.

Although most areas of the curriculum were eventually covered... (my compatriot Dr. Szreter mentions one that was not) emphasis tended to be on the needs of the average child, and the curriculum changes to be made to meet the Raising of the School Leaving Age and the new Middle Schools recommended by the Plowden Committee, 1967. The problems of inner city areas and the needs of immigrant pupils received special attention. The integrated studies programme sited at the University of North Staffs, Keele, and Project Technology at the Loughborough College of Education are examples of the former need. Science 5—13 Bristol University catered for the Middle school as did more specifically Social Studies 8—13 London Institute of Education; the project that produced the series of text books entitled *Breakthrough to Literacy*, London University, both tackled problems of language inadequacy and embodied many of the beliefs of N.A.T.E., while SCOPE Leeds University provided material for teachers in areas of high immigration<sup>17</sup>.

Local authorities were usually willing to provide "trial schools" for project material though this did not necessarily mean that the project workers were well received. A penetrating and amusing account of one such project can be found in Marten Shipman, 1974<sup>18</sup>. Some notable examples of rejection of materials by the Teachers' Organizations can be found, notably the refusal to let the Race pack of the Humanities project go forward<sup>19</sup>. This was less because of the nature of the material which they said, with some truth, was too difficult for the pupils for whom it was intended, but because they objected to the neutral role assigned to the teacher. Though I personally encountered some of the hostility of the teacher at the chalk face for the supposedly theoretical "trainer" I also found that sincere and assiduous work on the reading of project material for steering and publication committees could always win over teacher opposition. Any civil servant worth his salt must have found the same thing, and in fact the seconded civil servants who were usually powerful among the officials of the School Council knew how to manage most of the participating groups. The tension between teacher, researcher and civil servant was productive rather than destructive.

It was intended from the beginning of the work of the Schools Council that Teachers' Centres in every area should assist with dissemination and training, but it is true to say that more attention had to be paid to dissemination as the Council's work progressed. At first,

<sup>17</sup> Stenhouse, *op. cit.*, and *An inquiry into the impact and take up of School Council funded activities*, First interim report 1978.

<sup>18</sup> M. D. Shipman, *Inside a curriculum project*, Methuen (1974).

<sup>19</sup> Further Research on the topic was commissioned through the National Foundation for Educational Research (N.F.E.R.)

funds were always provided for testing and evaluation but dissemination was left to supportive local authorities. The establishment of publicity organs, e.g. "Dialogue", and various types of liaison officers and field workers did something to close the gap between project workers and teachers in school. This was still being referred to in 1972 as "not geographical though better communications are needed; it is a gap in understanding which is harder to bridge". In later projects subject associations which were often close to the teacher, in secondary schools particularly, began to have greater influence than at first. Some projects for example "Mathematics for the Majority" asked the L.E.A.s to release teachers actually to write the material with the project team advising on principles and design.

It should be added that the Schools Council decided not to publish direct but to set up an organization which received tenders from independent publishers.

The other side of the Schools Council's work was concerned with Examinations and its innovatory contribution was in trying to reform A level examinations to make them less specialized, and in attempting to devise a common examination to replace G.C.E. and C.S.E. Neither of these two problems have been solved and an interim solution for a sixth form follow up examination to the C.S.E., the C.E.E. has also been left in mid-air.

Its work as a whole has been critically assessed and has come under fire both for not being radical enough<sup>20</sup> and for being deficient in underlying theory<sup>21</sup> and a coherent policy for the curriculum as a whole. The predominant position insisted on by teachers has been the subject of adverse ministerial comment. Some of these official comments seem to the writer to bear an air of unreality. There is little possibility in England and Wales of not giving considerable weight to teacher opinion. To read some comments one would think that teachers had been very obstructive, holding up the policies of a far-seeing inspectorate closely in touch with enlightened public opinion. This in my experience was very far from the truth; the teaching profession often provided a common sense view against extremes of policy; their opinion was not usually far from average parental opinion. Moreover, they accepted quite strong intervention by civil servants and University research workers into the curriculum. The teacher in the classroom was glad of practical assistance rather than hortatory advice. They showed independence in their adaption of project material, but that

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<sup>20</sup> C. Richards *The Schools Council—a critical examination*, „Universities Quarterly”, Summer 1974.

<sup>21</sup> M.F.D. Young, *The politics of Education Knowledge*, „Economy and Society”, 1972.



was a sign of health not hostility: they also complained of the vast amount of new material and innovatory methods to be considered in a short period—with some justification.

Some of the projects undertaken by the Schools Council were funded by the Nuffield Foundation<sup>22</sup>. The availability of funds and guidance for the school curriculum from private foundations was a new feature; as the Nuffield intervention was by far the most significant it is this one that will be described. It first responded to the initiative of the Science Masters and Association of Women Science Teachers to try to improve O level physics, chemistry and biology syllabuses. The work carried out at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was influential in its thinking, and it tended to work closely with the scientific and educational hierarchy. Later, funds were made available for a primary French project following work in the area of two local authorities. Contact was made with the Centre de Recherche et d'Etude pour la diffusion du français (C.R.E.D.I.F.). This project was eventually set up in conjunction with the Schools Council as were those related to the teaching of Mathematics and the Humanities. A *Resources for Learning*<sup>23</sup> project was established under the direct auspices of the foundation with a steering committee drawn from teachers, administrators and research foundations. Close personal contact with the latter project enabled the writer to see the scope and excellence of much of the material provided with Nuffield resources but it is true to say that neither the resources provided nor the quality of the teachers continued at the same level when the projects ended. Nevertheless a shot in the arm was provided when it was most needed, and revolutionized teachers' ideas of what resources ought to be available. Teachers did not appear to feel themselves threatened by the intervention of the Foundation.

There was some overlap of personnel between the Nuffield Foundation and the National Council for Educational Technology<sup>24</sup> whose advent was another example of the changes in strategy that I am trying to describe. It was set up as a substitute for the National Centre for Educational Technology which, financial considerations apart, may have been thought of as too direct a central planning operation. The proposer for a National Centre, Brynmor Jones, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hull, was however appointed as Chairman of N.C.E.T. The ministerial backing of N.C.E.T. was wider than that of the Schools Coun-

<sup>22</sup> M. Waring, *Social pressures in curriculum innovation—a study of the Nuffield Foundation Science Teaching project*. There is an excellent account of the primary French project in: Stenhouse, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> L. C. Taylor, *Resources for Learning*, Penguin Educational Special.

<sup>24</sup> Report of the National Council for Educational Technology, *Towards more effective learning, 1967—1968*. Second report: *Educational Technology—progress and promise, 1968—1973*.

cil as it was under the sponsorship of the D.E.S., the Scottish Education Department, the Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, the Department of Employment and Production, the Ministry of Defence, the Nuffield and Gulbenkian foundations and the Schools Council. Actual membership included those with expertise and technique in educational technology as well as experienced teachers and administrators but the organized Teaching profession was not represented as such. Organizations that had previously dealt with allied matters in schools such as the National Committee for audio-visual aids were represented but this cannot be said to have been successful as this organization and its powerful sponsor, William Alexander, the secretary of the Association of Education Committees (A.E.C.) took the line from the beginning of the Council's life that it was unnecessary.

Its early work seemed to prove that this was not so, as a study was set up immediately on a common classification system for non-book materials, including a proto-type multi-media catalogue on Physics, and an investigation of problems of copyright in relation to educational use, and of standardization and compatibility of equipment, all unsolved problems which had been encountered by people using new methods of teaching.

More controversial were the attempts of the N.C.E.T. to define the meaning of Educational Technology. To some it was a trendy name for audio-visual aids, to others it embodied a mechanistic future to be guarded against. The most accepted view, laid down at a N.C.E.T. conference held at the Royal Navy College Greenwich in 1968 was that it represented an attempt to rationalise the whole structure of education and training in terms of improved methods of allocating and using both human and physical resources. There was always someone present to point out that the science of learning was not very fully developed and that its very complexity made the evolution of a technology difficult. N.C.E.T. was able to refocus many teachers' viewpoint from concentration on the hardware to consideration of the quality and purpose of the software, and to emphasise the needs of the learner learning rather than the teacher teaching. These particular changes in outlook had an important effect on some major training establishments where educational technology had been fostered by the D.E.S. direct and then abandoned to local initiative. N.C.E.T. provided much needed back up particularly in the establishment of resource centres for teaching purposes, both in colleges and schools.

N.C.E.T. worked closely with the officials of the Schools Council with whom it shared a building but did not get the general support from teachers enjoyed by that body. This may have been because for the first years of its existence the teacher representatives were knowledgeable individuals rather than representatives of organizations. This

had been done intentionally to keep teacher politics in a low key but it proved not to be an enduring characteristic and was reversed in 1973.

My concern has been to describe the new procedures by which innovation in the curriculum was brought about in the 'sixties and early' seventies. These procedures were founded on the educational consensus with regard to "open schooling" and child centred learning but introduced ideas of a more structured curriculum and adopted ways of working that seemed very suited to a pluralist society, that is, allowing for some leadership and influence from the centre but depending on the expertise, support and goodwill of teachers.

I would like to end by a reference to the conclusions of research worker on the dissemination of innovatory practices. She concluded that innovation was difficult to accomplish and that there could be no effective curriculum development without teacher development. Dissemination, if it is to breed a continuing experimental attitude must depend on education rather than training <sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> J. Ruddick, *Dissemination in practice*, „Cambridge Journal of Education", Vol. 3, no. 2. See also: *Post war curriculum development, an historical approach*, History of Education Society conference papers, December 1978, especially bibliographies.