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British Education: Infant and Junior Levels

by

Ann Bucken

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for
the
Professional Diploma in Education
or the degree of Master of Science in Education
Bank Street College of Education
March 24, 1977

British Education: Infant and Junior Level

This paper is a study of British Education on the Infant and Junior levels. It includes accounts of observations in sixteen different Infant and some Junior schools. These visits included five Inner London Education Authority Schools, a Settlement House in East London, a private school in Roehameton, (the outskirts of London), a school in Hemel-Hemested, (50 miles north of London), a school in Essex, (70 miles north of London), a school in Kent, (50 miles outside of London), a school in Chipping-Norton, (50 miles outside of London), and a week spent in seven different schools in Oxfordshire, (60 miles north of London).

A history of the changes in British Education is also included. It investigates how the Plowden Report outlined the foundations of a new way of thinking about what school should be like involving new conceptions of the role of the teacher, the organization of the classroom, the nature of children's learning, how the school day should proceed, and what constitutes a proper curriculum for young children.

It finally examines the role of the Headteacher and how their role is quite different from that of an American Principal.

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History

"In 1967, a British governmental body called the Central Advisory Council on Education published a report, Children and Their Primary Schools. This report is usually referred to as the Plowden Report because the chairman of the body producing it was Lady Plowden."[1] This remarkable official document called attention to the fact that the British Primary Schools were regularly ignored in policy debates and short-changed in budgets. "The Plowden Report outlined the tentative foundations of a new way of thinking about what school should be like involving new conceptions of the role of the teacher, the organization of the classroom, the nature of the children's learning, how the school day should proceed, and what constitutes a proper curriculum for young children."[2] "It testified that many British headteachers (principals) and teachers are coming to think of a good school as one in which children are taught to work, independently and in small groups, in an environment thoughtfully planned to permit choices from an array of materials --- water, sand, clay, pottery, kilns, pets, practical maths apparatus and science equipment, all kinds of reference books and books for individual reading, private word books and free writing notebooks, powder paint, easels, puppet theatres, 'home' corners."[3]

Teachers and children in such schools are given choices, so there is no longer a completely fixed curriculum or set

timetable. The British call this method of working in such schools the integrated or free day. Children move around the classrooms at their tasks and within reasonable limits they are encouraged to talk for that is one way in which learning goes on. The teacher's role in this setting is no less central than in formal classrooms; in some respects it is more important and teachers who alter their approach in these directions say that while they enjoy teaching more, it also means more work this way. The teacher is the organizer, catalyst, and guide but does not try to take over the whole job of learning from the children.

In speaking of the British Schools it seems their practices are not startingly novel or even very different from practices of good teachers everywhere. An informal classroom will reflect the character of the teacher who presides over it. Within a common framework of informality, there can be relaxed or sleepy classrooms as well as classrooms run as very tight ships. "Techniques and organizational changes are important, but never as important as the basic relationships between teacher and children."[4] There are 23,000 primary schools in Britain. The Plowden Report estimates that 109 of them are outstanding in quality, and that about 10 per cent are doing superb work in some particular area of the curriculum. (maths, art, 'movement', children's writing, and so on.)

"In all, the report suggests that about a third of the country's primary schools are doing good work along informal

lines. (It is perfectly willing to concede that good formal schools also exist.) Of the remainder, the Plowden Report estimates that a third have been touched to some extent by the changes, and the rest tend to be still frozen into rigid patterns of learning and teaching. But these judgements were made some years ago and there have been further developments since."[5]

Although this sounds impressive, it is easy to exaggerate the extent of change. British primary teachers come from kinds of social background similar to those of American school teachers. They are underpaid, classrooms in city schools are more crowded than in the U.S.A., and buildings are often very old though many--perhaps a third--have been built since 1945, and show exciting developments. However the prospects for stable change throughout Britain are threatened by rapid turnover in teaching staff---at a rate much worse than in U.S. schools. The spread of informal practice is as uneven as the quality of work. The best work is going on in a handful of local education authorities where reform has taken solid roots and is becoming a new orthodoxy. Most of the 109 outstanding schools mentioned in the Plowden Report are in localities that have conspicuously led the way in primary education. Some of them include Bristol, the West Riding of Yorkshire, Leicestershire, and Oxfordshire.

Presently the informal approach has been most used in schools dealing with fairly young children. Primary schools are often divided into 'infant' schools, which take children from the age

of five to seven or, in some cases, eight, and 'junior' schools, which take children from seven or eight to eleven or twelve. Many schools have, however, put infants and juniors together in one unit, as in American elementary schools.

The transformation from formal to informal teaching is more often found in infant schools. There are many, many infant school teachers doing good work in informal teaching. There are some junior schools in local authorities doing excellent work. But on a national level, education at the junior level is still fairly conventional. It too often resembles the standard dreary fare of the later years of the American elementary school. British practitioners offer qualitative rather than quantitative examples of first-rate work, in the junior schools, but nothing on the scale of the infant schools.

This is partly a matter of chronology as reforms developed first in infant schools, and then moved up to the junior schools. In the junior schools, there is not as yet, the rich backlog of tradition and materials found at the infant level. There is also a problem of organizing active learning for older children. In Experience and Education, John Dewey pointed out,

"Those who deal with the pre-school child, with the kindergarten child, and with the boy and girl of the early primary years do not have much difficulty in determining the range of past experience or in finding activities that connect in vital ways with it. With older children both factors of the problem offer

increased difficulties to the educator. It is harder to find out the background of the experiences of individuals and harder to find out just how the subject-matter already contained in that experience shall be directed so as to lead out to larger and better organized fields."[6]

The most essential task becomes selecting and organizing good, open-ended curricula. The best junior schools are working on these and other problems which include the appropriate use of specialist teachers in informal settings. Unfortunately many junior schools are far from finding solutions to their problems. Intellectual thinness and aimlessness in much of the work of older primary children are common to both sides of the Atlantic. There is, all the same, a lot that can be done for older children in maths, art, music, writing, science, and environmental studies.

One of the reasons for the slow progress of junior schools in Britain can be accounted for by pressures from selection tests and from inflexible secondary schools. This pressure has eased in those authorities which have successfully abolished the 'eleven-plus' examination. The number of such authorities has increased in the past few years. This 'eleven-plus' examination was used to select perhaps a quarter of British children at the age of eleven for 'grammar' schools, which prepared them for universities, and the rest for 'secondary modern' schools which, all too often prepared them for very little.

"The 'eleven-plus' is disappearing, but it is not clear what

will replace it, or whether Britain will in fact abandon its wasteful, meritocratic patterns of secondary and university education."[7]

"The rigidity of selection at the secondary and university level is a reminder to Americans not to fashion a Utopia from another nation's educational system."[8]
It is interesting that Americans now envy the British good primary schools and that many people in Britain envy the scale, openness and diversity, and the curriculum content and organization of the American university system. In both Britain and America there are strong dissatisfactions with secondary schools, but neither country has any clear sense of the proper direction for reform. Local authorities in Britain are beginning to set up 'comprehensive' secondary schools, in an attempt to erase the invidious distinctions between 'secondary modern' and 'grammar' schooling. Americans, who have witnessed the daily class and racial tensions in their comprehensive high schools, can report to British colleagues that simply putting all sorts of students together in a single building is only a very small step towards an adequate program.

My experience in talking with British headmasters and teachers was that they were envious of American schools. They seemed to think we were way ahead of them as far as high schools being 'comprehensive'. It is unfortunate that many useless myths in both countries could be dispeled if their educators could frankly

exchange ideas about common problems.

There is another aspect of British schools which American readers should be aware of. That is the relationship of British schools to the class system. There are many schools especially in slum and immigrant areas that are failing in exactly the way our slum schools fail. Unfortunately there are no movements in England to compare with American struggles over race, poverty, and issues such as community control of schools. England is just beginning compensatory education on any significant scale. It is also true that numbers of British primary schools in poor and immigrant areas are doing good work teaching poor children. Such schools do exist; they are possible. There is no qualitative research on good schools. Therefore no one can say more than that.

In America teachers and parents are eager for concrete examples of good practice. They have concentrated on the external features of good British classrooms: the stores of materials, the variety of activities going on, the absorption and self-discipline of the children, the freedom permitted teachers and children, the use of hallways, playgrounds, and other space that gets wasted in too many U.S. schools, the curricula arising from interests and activities of teachers and children, and so on.

This interest on specifics is refreshing as too much of our talk on education is divorced from pedagogy and the realities of life in classrooms. But we must also be careful that we do not concentrate only on the surfaces and neglect the underlying

pre-requisites for this kind of education, the spirit behind the whole enterprise.

We must always remember that it is not possible or desirable to transplant British practices 'whole' to American schools. America is a very different country from Britain. Its traditions and institutions are different. Good American practice along informal lines will only spread in ways unique to the American context. Looking at certain aspects of the British reforms may, however, sharpen Americans' sense of direction in which they might like to travel. Certain characteristics of the work in good British primary schools may suggest things that have been done badly, and things left undone, but it may help to make American schools more humane and more responsive to children as individuals.

One distinctive set of characteristics arises from the British tradition of 'infant' schools which should be of interest to Americans. Experience in infant classes has strengthened many teachers' conviction that young children have distinct educational needs. One example of a characteristic of young children is that they learn best in the concrete mode. They learn best messing around with the stuff. Since infant schools are separate institutions they enjoy a certain freedom to experiment. The infant schools attracted exceptionally capable women at a time when there were a few careers available to them. Infant teachers often trained together with nursery school teachers and this gave them a sound perspective on young children and their development.

The primary schools went through a long revolution worked out over the years in a handful of progressive nursery schools run by followers of Montessori, Froebel, the Macmillans, the Issacs, Dewey and Piaget. This profound influence of the best nursery and kindergarten practice on the later years of primary school is unfortunately just the opposite of what has happened in America. In America sound pre-schools have too often turned into prepartory classes for rigid elementary schools. It has been said that the British tend to treat children as children whereas Americans treat them more as budding adults. The British are more inclined to indulge children in child's play and Americans are more inclined to tune them up for Adult life. Britains, however, are not always very conscious that children, like adults, have feelings. They often discuss a child's problems in front of him as though he were invisible.

II

Observation in the British Infant and Junior Schools

My visit to England included observations in sixteen different Infant and some Junior Schools. These visits included five Inner London Education Authority Schools, (all in the city limits of London), a Settlement House in East London, a private school in Roehameton, (the outskirts of London), a school in Hemel-Hemested, (50 miles north of London), a school in Essex, (70 miles north of London), a school in Kent, (50 miles outside of London), a school in Chipping-Norton, (50 miles outside of London), and a week spent in seven different schools in Oxfordshire, (60 miles north of London).

At almost every school I visited, I was received cordially by the Headteacher (Principal). I had done extensive writing and planning before I went to England so that all the schools I visited were expecting me to visit on certain dates. In every school I either spent the morning or the whole day, depending on what had been planned ahead of time.

The Inner London Education Authority Schools that I visited were many and varied. I visited a school in East London which was populated mostly by immigrants' and dock workers' children. The East London School was built in the 1800's and was rather depressing. The lighting and ventilation was poor and the depressed feeling was felt among the children and staff. One of the

Bangla-Desh immigrant children asked me if I carried a gun in the streets of America. It was depressing to realize how American headlines reach children in such negative ways. I also visited two other schools which were contained in very old buildings. They were both located in low economic areas but were not as depressing as the East London School was. The East London School was the first school I observed in where the desks were arranged in rows, however not in every classroom.

The other two older schools were pleasant and well-arranged. In both schools the Headteacher was very friendly and open. They took me to each classroom, introduced me to the teacher and left me to observe and ask questions of the teacher. I was amazed at the number and organization of teacher-made materials. The teachers were interesting and all had very individualized programs. They were very interested in American schools and also went into tremendous detail in explaining their programs. In both schools there was a tremendous Indian population and both had three or four Indian teachers. It seems it is part of the English School Program that the teachers have release time each day to work on teacher-made materials. In both schools I was invited to lunch. In one school it took place in the teachers' room, in the other the teachers ate with the children. The use of space impressed me in most English schools I visited. The gym was used for P.E. (Physical Education) in the morning, also one corner of it was the school library; and then it was used for lunch at noontime,

and music and movement in the afternoon.

I also visited a beautiful and well-organized school in an affluent section of London. The children were clean, well-dressed and were excited by my visit. The teachers were very friendly and explained that their school was almost like a private school. There was more money available to them for materials due to the area in which they were located. Their classes were smaller and thus they were able to give even more individualized attention.

I visited two open-plan schools* in London, one a private and the other a state school. Open plan means different things in different schools. In any particular authority it will, to some extent, reflect the imagination, beliefs and experiences of a whole collection of people from architects and administrators to the inspectorate and the humble classroom teacher. In London, for example, the newer schools seem to have shared 'resource' areas onto which the home bases, teaching areas and classrooms open. These 'resource' areas may be enormous boxes or smaller more intimate bays. In any open plan school the emphasis is upon the creation of a physical environment which will allow children and adults to mix freely, to flow through the building with the minimum of fuss and noise. This sometimes results (because of savings on doors and corridors) in the provision of furniture and fittings which are less institutional than those commonly used, or on expensive floor coverings (for example, carpeting and easy chairs in the library and home corners, quarry

*See Appendix, Figures 1, 2, 3.

tiled bays for ceramics, carving and plaster work).

The teachers in these "open plan" schools are the ones working with the children and must make it come to life. For whatever educational system is embraced in a school system, the teacher is the hub around which all will revolve. In working in an open plan situation as a teacher, it means that one must consciously sink oneself into a 'team', being prepared to share experiences, knowledge and skills much more than has been the case before. "My class" which was regarded by many teachers as a God-given unit to be tampered with on peril of eternal (educational) damnation- becomes a thing of the past.

In changing to the "open plan", the gain is tremendous. There is a chance to share skills. The teacher, for example, who has a particular interest in mathematics working with two others who have an interest in the graphic arts, music, movement, poetry and prose can give to all the children something of his or her enthusiasm. This sharing is supported by the knowledge that through developing and extending the teacher's interests a much greater number of children will benefit.

Sharing common working areas also means that the less experienced teacher--or the one who has disciplinary problems--is supported by his or her colleagues. The spread of children over several working areas also means that teachers do not have to be bound to age groups but can create learning situations which are right for children irrespective of the number of years

they have spent in school. Therefore six year olds and nine year olds can work together. In this way a six year old from a rich verbal background might well enjoy T.S. Eliot and a backward nine year old be fascinated by a recording of Beatrix Potter's "Peter Rabbit."

The facility which open plan working can give in grouping children according to their emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical needs is important. A child who is intellectually stimulated and emotionally content is much more likely to make the progress of which he is capable in this atmosphere.

It is interesting to note that many of the really gifted nine year olds (IQ's 125 and above) in this school spend a large part of their lunch time playing with wooden bricks, sand and water. In a more conventional school such basic materials would rarely be available for this age group and if they were, playing with them would probably attract derogatory comment.

In this open-plan school the headteacher stated that the teachers share the work in which the children are engaged. This means that they no longer thought of the teacher-child ration as 1-40, but rather 2-80 or 3-120. This headteacher felt the staff needed to assess how best to employ the teaching force they had. Part time teachers, students, the headteacher, and the music specialist can all be brought easily into these terms, to circulate amongst the children and to work with small groups. The head-teacher felt this would reduce the adult-child concept to

irrelevance. In this school mothers were also encouraged into the school to work on a voluntary basis. Sometimes if the mother worked in her child's classroom she would distract her child and the child's teacher. So in this school mothers were sometimes used in other classrooms and helping in cooking, or dramatic play corner, and this helps the adult-child ratio become smaller.

Everything that went on in this school pre-supposed some sort of prepared structure. At this particular open-plan school, they had a staff-meeting daily. This usually occurred a few minutes during every lunch time where the work that was just done was discussed and plans were made for the following day. These forecasts were invaluable. They meant that the staff was continually thinking in practical terms of the learning situations that they were trying to create.

The headteacher felt that the informal nature of these get-togethers did much to break down a feeling of individual status on the staff. And by staff he included the secretary and ancillary helpers. The headteacher did not regard himself as being apart nor did his deputy head see herself as a pale interpreter of his views to the staff and students, or of their views to the headteacher.

This freedom to express personal beliefs, hopes and aspirations added to the fact that the curricula were not written down (but grew and developed daily) and meant that the youngest member of the staff could feel personally involved and was not

merely a machine for teaching. The daily meetings were recorded in an individual diary and a note was kept of activities undertaken.

The headteacher did not expect the staff to make long lists of marks or stars gained (they gave neither) or prepare copious notes on the development and evolution of teaching groups. He felt that there was not time and that teaching was far too important a task to strangle it to fit the whim of an administrator or inspector. This headteacher encouraged the keeping of child studies and he checked reading progress periodically. (Holborn Scale) Every term typical examples of each child's work (writing, free expression, number) was mounted into a personal folder and the date was stamped on it. He felt that this would show the pattern of progress that the child had made and if the reading Quotient was recorded on the front cover he felt that a very useful 'educational' history could be built.up.

The children found no difficulty in quickly adapting to a day which began with them coming into school immediately when they arrived, having assembly during mid morning, lunch at tables with teachers and no set play times. The day was full he hoped, rich in interest and variety. Topics on which older children are engaged are not terminated at the ringing of a bell, and the younger members are not bound. The headteacher felt that purposeful involvement has superceded timetabled conformity.

In all the 'open-plan' schools I visited I saw one thing preserved in each one (especially for the younger children). This was the linking (at the beginning and end of each day) of teachers to a particular teaching space. It is here that a child begins his school day, moving out from the security given by a trusted adult into the greater challenge of the school community. It is to this group that a child returns to listen to a story at home time or perhaps to discuss the activities which will be attempted the next day. If teachers need to know what will happen tomorrow, children need to know too!

The fact that children in the open plan situation are not confined to any one room or any one area does mean that they become quickly aware of the sorts of things that other children can do. This includes seeing the way materials behave, how books and equipment are handled, how facts and information can be recorded, and so they learn much from being closely involved with those older than themselves. In the field of arts and craft the examples are numerous. I saw five year olds making collage and montage pictures using acrylic paint and six year olds printing with a screen. One of the headteachers told me he felt we have not paid sufficient attention to this aspect of the learning process, which is as old as Mankind.

This same headteacher explained to me how he saw this structure developing. He said he was not particularly worried about curricula content or this or that approach to childrens'

learning. He felt that it is essential to show children how to use books, how to learn, and set down the information they wish to record. He felt it essential that no child should leave an infant school at eleven unable to read, write and speak fluently, or lacking in the essentials of simple computation. Neither should a child leave an infant school unaware of the social graces. The headteacher felt that beyond this it is part of a teacher's duty to make sure that the child's natural enthusiasm for books, painting and music, for handling and touching, for seeing and exploring, for making and enquiring does not atrophy and die. The headteacher wanted to pass to the secondary departments children who are alive and vital, and for whom school is an exciting place rich in experience unobtainable elsewhere.

The headteacher felt that all the well established virtues (like perseverence and tolerance) should not be thrown overboard. He felt that we must examine afresh such basic things as teaching methods, class and age group structure, curricula content, the role of the headteacher and even school hours. He has, for example, introduced an extended day (on a voluntary basis) for some of the older children. He decided that swimming (a vital skill) did not merit the vast amount of time it sometimes consumed (the journey to the baths,(showers), the waiting time, the swimming time, the dressing time, the return to school, can fill the best part of a session) and that it would be better organized as a 'club' activity. Also he decided that there was a case for some

members of the staff working different hours from others. In this way he felt the staff would be better able to deal with specialist activities which might not appeal to or be appropriate for all the children in the group. He was thinking of such things as dance, formal games, chess, life saving and visits to places where small groups are an absolute essential. He referred to such places as The Wellcome Medical Museum, the cross of St. Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of Peterborough as some places where small groups were essential.

The headteacher also had parents playing a much greater part in school life than they had in the past. He had parents working as aides to the teachers where appropriate, helping when children went out and providing those much needed hands for such things as library maintenance, the repair of books and toys, and the laundering of aprons and tablecloths. The help parents give helps to relieve teachers from the mundane chores which seem to fill their day. The headteacher felt it far better for a teacher to hand over these tasks and keep in touch with the realities of the actual teaching situation.

From here the headteacher began to talk about his building. He felt that his ideal building would always be something of a dream. The building in which this headteacher worked was the nearest to his ideal of all the schools he had visited. There was ample space, three large resource areas, (one of which is a library) and easy communication between home bases through

curtained doorways. There were sinks in every teaching area, indoor toilets and floor to ceiling display space throughtout the building.

The furnishing was attractive. They had attractive carpets and the curtains, easy chairs, and occasional tables were nice. There was an excellent range of movable classroom furniture with tables and chairs of different sizes, color-coded so it was easy to identify them and there was ample storage space. Some of the classroom units had a dual purpose with a display space, bookshelves and cupboards on one side and a chalkboard on the reverse. With this furniture one can create bays, divide teaching areas, and in fact make the space within the exterior walls meet almost any imaginable need.

The headteacher felt that this type of furnishing within the large barn type open plan building seemed to meet the needs of both teacher and the children rather than the fixed partitions which are built into some new schools. If approach to learning is to be fluid, according to the headteacher, the building and the furniture must surely be adaptable to meet the greatest possible number of teaching situations.

He also felt that if a teacher wants to be entirely open, it then becomes essential to provide small rooms for activities which require quiet (such as choral speaking or percussion). The headteacher stated that these small rooms could be used for a dual purpose, being furnished for parents' work parties or

medical examinations as well as for teaching.

Sound can be a distraction, although he did not feel it was the biggest bother when working in an open situation. He found the biggest distraction as a classroom teacher stemmed from movement outside the group. Such as a head trailing through with a group of visitors while the teacher was reading a story. Thus for story times it was important to create a visual barrier between the child and the school flowing around him. This can be accomplished with curtains or portable screens. In this headteacher's school he had done away with the staff room to make a music room and the headteacher's room had become a general purpose room. It catered to almost everything from making tape recordings and looking at slides to meeting parents and reading stories. It was everybody's room and was probably used more than any comparable area in the building.

This headteacher planned and had started to devote some space to specific curricula subjects. Centrally stored math apparatus means that expensive pieces of equipment need not be duplicated and a teacher always knows where to find rulers, scissors, stop clocks and the like. He felt it might be desirable to extend this idea to cover many other expensive items. He did it also with books, P.E. (physical education) apparatus, oral and visual aids and expensive tools.

The headteacher told me he is often asked to evaluate all that is implied by his school. He answered by saying that he

observed that the children in his school were happy, keen to come to school, loath to leave, shared the materials and equipment that they have at their disposal without quarrelling, respected each other as people and had a natural thirst for books and sums and paint and clay. He felt his staff did not seem unduly under strain, they did not complain of the parents who passed in and out or of the numerous educational visitations which the school had in the course of a term.

The headteacher felt that in the final analysis he really needed time; time to see whether by giving children back something of the wonders of childhood (which mass housing, mass entertainment and mass education are slowly stifling almost from birth) to see if he was laying a more secure foundation upon which our secondary colleagues can build.

Most of the schools I visited outside London were considered open-plan schools. My week in Oxfordshire was spent in some very interesting schools. Most of the building structures were fairly new but even in the older buildings the feeling of openness prevailed. The thing that impressed me the most throughout all the schools that I visited was the friendly and open manner in which I was received. Hopefully I will remember this throughout my teaching experiences and receive interested visitors in the same manner.

III

The Headteacher's Role

The headteachers with whom I met seemed to look at their roles quite differently from American principals. They expressed a strong belief that they bear responsibility not only for the administration of their schools, but also for the development of a definable philosophy in terms of which staff and children also function. They saw the role of headteacher as being that of an education specialist whose task was to shape what would work educationally, rather than primarily administratively. Their focus was not on procedures but on individuals. They felt that to have taught for a substantial period of time is really a pre-requisite for becoming a head. Most heads I talked with saw themselves foremost as teacher-trainers, as supports for staff, as catalysts, as innovators, as educationists. They all gave priority to their role in the classroom, alongside the teacher. They all had a framework within which they wanted teachers to work, a definable direction, a philosophy.

One thing which impressed me over and over again in all the schools that I visited was the headteacher's ability to articulate a thoughtful philosophy of education. They could discuss long-term goals and the work in their schools reflected these goals. Unfortunately this contrasts sharply with developments in American education. There seems to be a more haphazard approach to

educational goals, and many principals allow programs based on radically different philosophies of education to exist side by side within their school. English heads believed that their overall educational goals needed to bo backed by long term practice and solid research and were not prepared to experiment with children so freely.

The heads felt that they must be educationists who can lead a team of teachers who themselves must grow. They felt they should be with the teachers looking for growing points and helping them develop. One head told me he set his target as helping all people in the school to become the best people they can.

Most heads felt that there was no point in pouring facts into children. They thought it important to deepen the child's awareness of the world. A child must be shown how to find the information he wants. A teacher must give a child as many meaningful experiences as possible, and help him to communicate these experiences to others.

One head said he tries to establish good personal relationships in his school. There is care taken for the integrity of each person whether he is the smallest child or the oldest teacher. This head worked on children caring about other children and teachers caring about children, and children caring about teachers.

A head must also be able to relate well with adults. He must be a good teacher, have confidence in himself and also be a

person who can see things in a larger sense. Heads must continually visit classrooms and comment on things that are going on and provide some helpful information about how things might be followed up. Most heads felt that, to attain a professional level of staff competence, they must be responsible for providing almost continuous inservice training.

A head does this by being in tune with current developments and being able selectively to feed in new ideas to the staff. He or she gives the teachers very clear ideas of what are acceptable standards. The head must convey to the teachers in what areas he think they are falling down. The head is constantly looking at the children, watching relationships between teacher and child and being available to the teachers so that they have the feeling that there is someone they can turn to. Ideally the head must be someone in whom the staff has confidence, someone they can trust, someone to lean on in times of trouble.

A head thinks of the total school, what's going to happen next year, how to keep good staff and how to develop their work. The head is not only thinking about the individual children, but also about the teaching personalities available, and how to help them grow and develop along with the children.

The headteacher's office is a room available during certain times of the day to children, so that they can come in and be in a quiet place and have the attention of one adult. The office is also used as a place where children can find more kinds of

material available than there are in the classrooms. And this becomes a way to introduce new material into the school. This idea of not using the head's room as a punishment room is very positive to me. Unfortunately I have seen it used as a punishment room in too many schools in America. The positive use of this room seems like it would be a lot more fruitful.

The most important aspect of the head's job is the head's role in relation to staff. Teachers don't start where you want them to start, they are at their own level, and however much one wants to change a school, one can only change it in relation to the staff one has. The head must be there to back the staff up, to take the responsibility when things go wrong and to be calm when things become disruptive. He must be the one person in the school who appears confident when everyone else is worried and a little confused.

A head creates an atmosphere in the school which allows each individual to work in a cooperative way and develop to his capacity.

The people in a school are the ones that make it function as a community. A head has to be very much seen and available to everyone. It is almost taken for granted that the head can go into any classroom at any time and work with anybody. If things are working in the right way, the staff should not, feel that he is there to judge them, but rather that he is with the teacher, and that they are working together. It is very

important for the teacher and the children that there can be constructive criticism.

It is very easy, and I have seen it in many American schools, to turn a blind eye to problems in a school and pretend that everything is all right, when there is tension or trouble or something is not going right. A head's job should be to be open-minded and bring such things to the surface. When things are slipping or not going right, the head must be able to bring these out into the open in a good-humored sort of way. And a head should be able to deal with problems not through directives but by involving everyone in a solution.

The head's job is to be a leader, chairman, and co-ordinator of a team of people who work together. He is also a sort of liaison between officialdom and the school, filtering through the things that must be done and then applying them in the actual situation on a human level. A head must create the feeling that he is someone with experience and the chairman of a team.

The head tries to foster an atmosphere in which everyone in the school can be used and involved. Ancillary staff is included-cleaners, cooks, and secretaries. These people must be made by the head to feel a part of the school community. The heads do not want the children to feel a hierarchy of staff and so he must handle these people so that they belong.

Tremendous difficulty can be caused by grading people, by being 'friendly' according to one's rank. One head said that

he felt if the cleaner does not clean the school well, he is as bad an educational situation as if his deputy head drinks and his schoolkeeper is asleep all day.

This head felt there should be no head separate from the staff, separate from the ancillary staff. He felt they were one group of people, working with the children.

A head must keep up to date with current trends in education in order best to support his teachers and pupils. There are courses held for heads as well as for teachers. This puts heads in touch with others in the field and leads to continous stimulation and reassessment. It also guards against isolated self-satisfied stagnation.

In this way once the head finds something of interest, it is his job to stimulate his staff to the same interest so that they will want to go look too. For it is only by sharing ideas and observing other people working that one can broaden one's own horizons.

Administration

One of the biggest differences I noticed in the British Infant and Junior Schools compared with American Schools was the emphasis placed on paper work by the head. Almost every head with whom I talked accepted the duties of paper work as a necessary responsibility, but always of secondary importance in relation to other aspects of the job. In many cases administrative duties are undertaken during the head's own time, so that they can be free to be with teachers and pupils during the school day. The attitude to administrative chores is perhaps best expressed in one head's comment:

> "One always has to have time for people. You must never let a piece of paper dominate your day. You must never let a form come between you and a teacher, a child or parent. It must always be people. If you can always be concerned about people, many problems become manageable."[9]

It is important to know that administrative responsibilities do exist and must be dealt with but very often such work is related to the educational aspects of the job. For although a head should be a good teacher and should establish good relationships with children so the children will think well of the head as a person, he must also enjoy the administrative work which is a necessary part of the job. If a head falls down on the administrative side a teacher will fall down on the teaching side as well. For the staff in the school won't have the material to do their job well if the head falls down on the requisitions and

things. It is the head who knows how the equipment, the paper and the pencils, should be used.

A head has also got the responsibility of relating to the local education authority. The teachers have a definite function with the children so the head must keep himself as free as possible from this kind of function. When a head takes on a school, he must be firmly committed to taking hold of the administrative business, and the relationship with the community so as to keep the others free to do their jobs.

A head must also keep good records of all the children in the school so that a parent can get a clear picture of what their child is doing. This is also important for the school since the more they know about an individual the better job they are able to do.

Teacher Training

Many heads felt that the only way to work with the staff is by example. They felt that a teacher should be able to go into his or her classroom, take a piece of work and discuss why it was done and how and find the value of it.

Every two weeks most heads had an evening staff meeting. The head was usually asked to discuss a particular aspect of school. For example if it was maths the staff would discuss various schemes, materials, what they thought about different approaches, and so on. One head found it more valuable for him

to go into the classrooms, while the children were working, and talk with the teachers individually about what they were doing. He also helped teachers to see other schools and they talked constantly about what was happening.

Almost every aspect of the learning environment is eventually dealt with in head-staff conferences. These aspects include the observations from classroom visits, the introduction of new materials into the school, and the discussions about a particular child, or parent or problem.

Another idea which I liked very much was that after a certain piece of work had been going on for some time, the teachers leave their plans with the head and he studies them. Perhaps at lunch time the teacher and the head have a conference on it and discuss how it has worked. These conferences vary enormously. With inexperienced staff the head gives much help and experienced teachers learn quite a lot from talking about what they are doing. This helps the head also in sensing what is going on in the teacher's mind and helps when he goes into the classroom to help with a group of children because he is familiar with the stage they have reached and what they are doing.

"One can almost regard the head-staff relationship in the same way as the teacher-child relationship: the head setting an atmosphere, specifying goals and direction, while allowing the individual to develop his or her own style and strengths within that framework."[10]

Teachers are allotted two days a year to visit other schools

and the heads make a tremendous effort to see that the staff get out and visit. The heads feel that working with staff is a matter of maintaining excitement and interest oneself; reading what's current, knowing what's going on, keeping an eye open for what's happening in the educational world. One head told me he tries to have a positive frame of mind, admiring things he sees, and trying to notice anything that's different, even if it is simply a flower on a table or a new picture that he's just mounted. He said that he tries to admire something and praise the teacher for he feels that we all need praise.

Once a term, the school may close and the staff goes off as a group to see other schools. The heads feel this is very important because there is dialogue since they are together as a group.

"The point is that there are many different ways of doing things, and for us to think that we can't learn anything is all wrong. We must come up against other people's ideas all the time, and share concerns, and get new ideas."[11]

There was much attention given to the head's role in relation to parents. Although the political pressures and educational accountability are not as strongly articulated issues in England as they are in the U.S.A., the potentially supportive or destructive role which parents play was a primary concern. Every head I met with felt that parental support was extremely important and it was evidenced in their use of parents in the schools. Most had an open-door policy and encouraged parent participation

in a variety of activities ranging from escorting small groups on trips, doing cooking with children, reading and listening to children, to filling paint pots and threading needles for the sewing corner. The heads felt that they had an obligation both to communicate about the philosophy of the school and to relate the progress of each child to its parents.

The heads felt that a parent should know that the children's work is important to the staff and the heads felt responsible to see that parents understood this. The head's role is to see that parents are educated; to hold parents' meetings to which speakers are invited, and at which parents come to feel part of the school.

Several ideas which sounded wonderful to me were to have workshops in which parents 'played' with the manipulative apparatus in the classroom, and to have lectures on aspects of child rearing and psychology.

In English schools it seemed that the participation of parents had become or was becoming an integral part of the total school life. Parents were being increasingly regarded as additional staff who could fulfill a variety of functions. The most significant aspect of the relationship was the care and thought given to utilizing the mothers and fathers in ways which benefit the children and draw on the parents' own interests and capabilities.

One important difference between the English and American practice of training parents is that Americans train parents to

'teach' specific skills whereas the English build on already existing strengths which suggests a more practical and meaningful approach to parental involvement.

> "In short, Americans tend to build 'professional' roles for parents to fill, while the English prefer to professionalize parental participation."[12]

One of the observations that I made was that heads in England seem to get few directions from the bureaucracy, and are allowed considerably more independence than their American counterparts. It almost seemed that there were no rules or regulations with which the heads must cope.

In talking with English heads they stated that they felt autonomous and acted accordingly. However after talking for awhile with them I discovered it wasn't that the local education authority did not make demands and insist on rules or regulations for them, it was the response of the head to that authority. It is amazing how English heads can be at once assertive and at the same time subtle. Most heads felt secure enough in their philosophical committment to open education, and confident in their own expertise to do what they felt was educationally sound, even if it were not officially sanctioned.

There are two distinct sides to a head's relationship with the authority. One is the inspectorate who are actually advisors who help the heads in general terms. Of course it doesn't solve all the little problems of life in school, but the inspectorate does support and give help about policy. The second is the

divisional officer from the county hall who try also to help. However, as one head put it,

> "my necessity and my interests are not the county hall's and theirs are not mine."[13]

This head did recognize that there is a certain amount of form-filling to be done, but that this aspect of his work could be lightened.

Naturally, differences of opinion do exist within the English education system. However one thing which seems to exist throughout is an underlying humanity. There exists a respect for individual differences and they accept diversity and build on it. It seems to me that this strength of such attitudes is basic to the development of a dynamic effective educational system.

> "This tolerance and respect for another's point of view is something probably unique in this country. It's quite possible to be very friendly, and visit one another's schools, and yet run schools with totally different approaches, even philosophies."[14]

It seems that the chief education officer trusts the heads to do their jobs, and the heads trust their staffs. In turn it is hoped that the staffs trust children. This is a rare commodity in education because many administrators don't want to trust anybody and want everybody to do exactly what they say should be done. It becomes a prison for everyone to do the same thing.

My experience of visiting the British Infant and Junior Schools was wonderfully enlightening and enjoyable. The morale of the schools, the openness of teachers and headteachers to share,

and the friendliness, left me with many warm and pleasant memories. I hope together in the future we can share and learn from each other.

Footnotes

[1]Featherstone, Joseph, Informal Schools in Britain Today: An Introduction, (Citation Press, New York) 1971 p. 9

[2]Ibid. p. 10

[3]Ibid. p. 10

[4]Ibid. p. 13

[5]Ibid. pp. 13-14

[6]Ibid. p. 15

[7]Ibid. p. 16

[8]Ibid. p. 16

[9]Cook, Ann, and Herb Mack, Informal Schools in Britain Today, The Headteacher's Role, (Citation Press, New York) 1971 p. 28

[10]Ibid. p. 44

[11]Ibid. p. 48

[12]Ibid. p. 69

[13]Ibid. p. 76

[14]Ibid. p. 76

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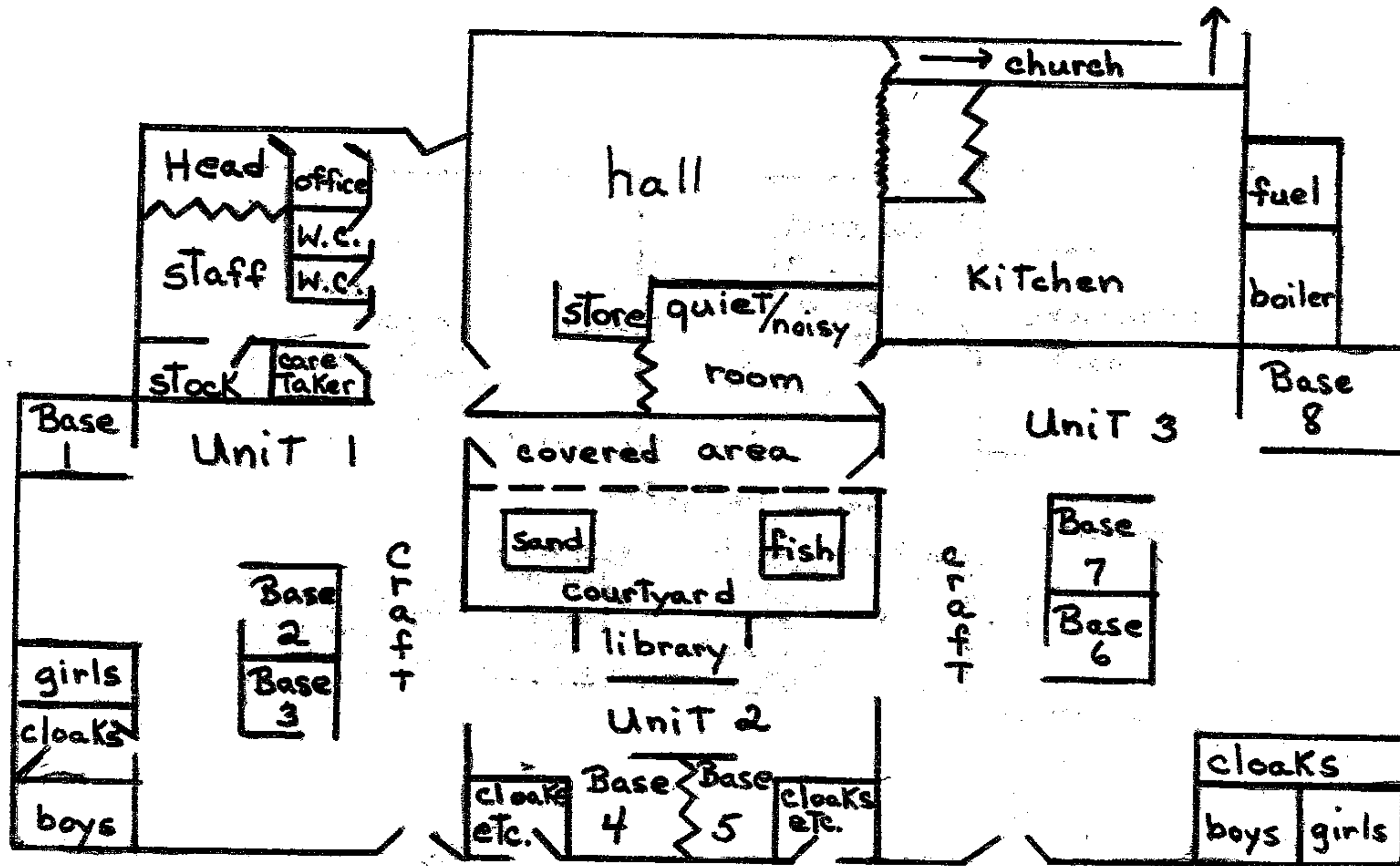
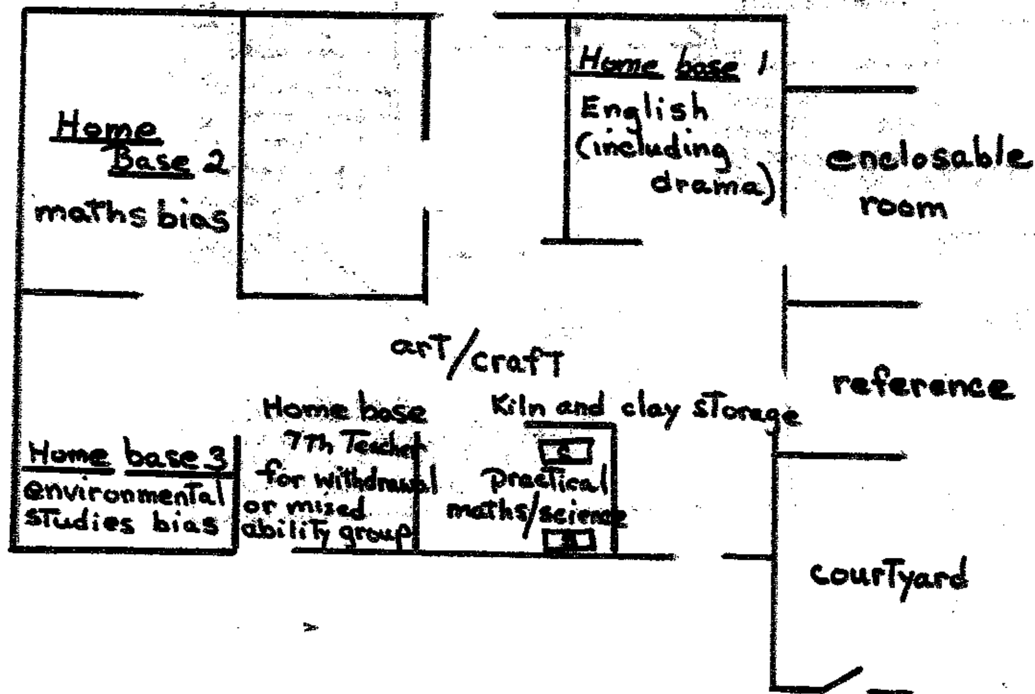
APPENDIX

This "open plan" school has been designed to accommodate 280 children aged 5 to 11 years in eight class groups with a pupil/teacher ratio of 35:1.



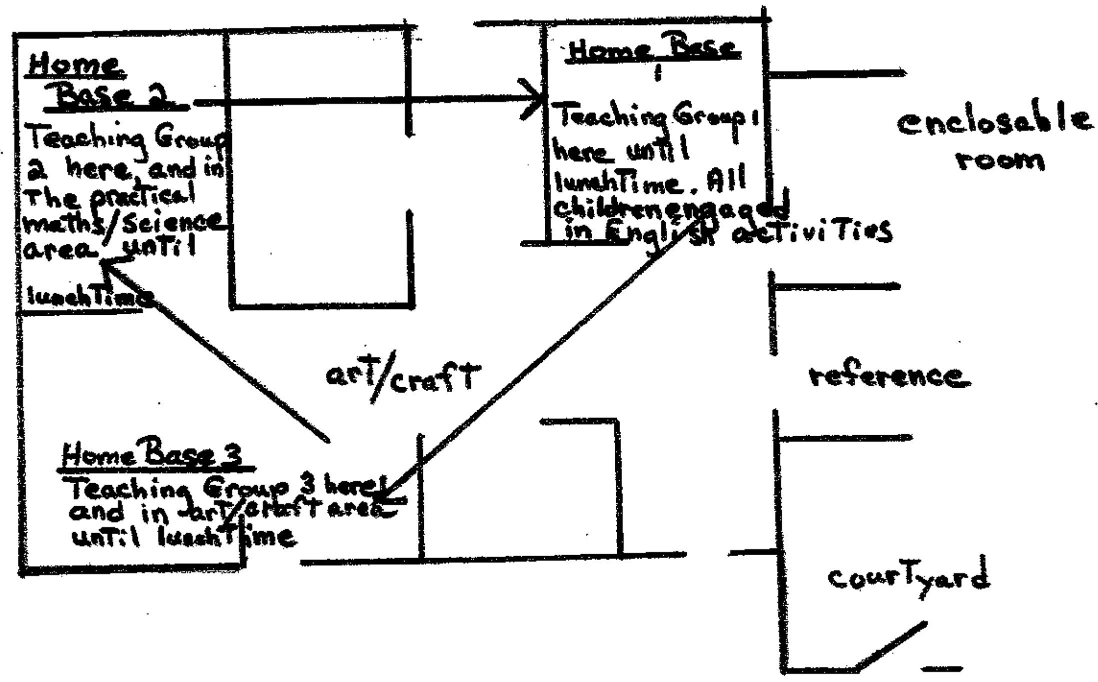
* Figure taken from Open Plan Organization in the Primary School, K. Rintoul and K. Thorne p. 58.

3 class junior unit, for third and fourth year juniors



* Figure taken from Open Plan Organization in the Primary School, K. Rintoul and K. Thorne p. 72

3 class junior unit, for Third and fourth year juniors



* Figure Taken from Open Plan Organization in The Primary School, K. RinToul and K. Thorne p. 59