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## The Primary School in the Community

During 1970 government primary school teachers in the Warragul district inspectorate of Gippsland, Victoria, met in conference to discuss the role of the primary school in the community. They listened to the various views expressed on the subject by a cross-section of local citizens—farmers, housewives, businessmen, and secondary students. What they heard suggested that the whole question of what the primary school does and should be doing deserved further study.

Subsequently, in response to a request from the district inspector and his headmasters, ACER undertook a survey with the aim of exploring the attitudes of the three main groups involved—students, parents, and teachers—towards the role of primary school.

The survey took the form of three separate but matching questionnaires. While they differed in relation to preliminary background data sought about personal, professional, and social background, the questionnaires contained similar, but variously worded, items relating to the purpose of primary schooling, children's behaviour, and the role of parents in the formal learning process. The participating groups included all primary teachers in the inspectorate, and students in Grade 6 and their parents. Only government schools were involved.

The findings of a regional survey

may or may not hold much wider significance. To learn this would require similar studies in other districts. Nevertheless the data collected in Gippsland touches on current issues of much general concern and suggests problems for further study. Recent research on classroom learning, for example, has placed a special emphasis on the nature of relationships between students and teachers as well as on the links between home and school.

The survey revealed wide differences in attitude between and within each of the three groups towards fundamental aspects of schooling. To cite one instance, most parents (70 per cent) agreed that 'we should judge the success of the primary school by the ability of its students to reach the normal standards in reading, writing and mathematics'. About 70 per cent of teachers disagreed, while students were evenly divided over the matter.

This basic disagreement extended to other major goals. Teachers tended to see the primary school as a stage of learning in its own right. They rejected the notion that their main task was 'to teach that useful body of facts every child should know'. Similarly most teachers did not believe that 'primary schools should concentrate on preparing their students for success at secondary schools'. Most parents and students, however, held contrary views.

Responses related to children's behaviour and parents' role also revealed a diversity of opinion. Statements of ideals such as 'Above all, teachers should help children to become confident, questioning and independent people' evinced a larger degree of agreement than statements of expectations such as 'The classroom is the place where children should learn discipline and good manners'. Statements of action—relating to how parents behave or schools operate—also showed wide differences in viewpoint. For example, a much higher proportion of teachers than students considered that 'parents show very little interest in what happens at school'.

These different perceptions of the school's role may indicate that a serious communication gap exists not only between teachers and parents but also between teachers and students and between parents and their children. It appears that educators may have failed to explain adequately to the community the changing nature of school curricula and classroom practice. Yet unless they have established an effective relationship with parents, teachers seem badly placed in espousing those goals not directly concerned with academic performance. In the past, such elements as creative abilities, values, and inquiry skills were usually considered to be the 'intangibles' of schooling. Now their more conscious promotion calls for closer regard for home and neighbourhood.



# COACHING STUDY

Since 1964 ACER has produced annually a battery of tests used for the award of Commonwealth Secondary Scholarships. The tests are intended to measure the scholastic ability of children with varied experience in different schools and undertaking different courses. This means that knowledge of specific facts or courses cannot be tested, and an attempt is made to evaluate ability in a more general sense.

Such ability is thought of as being developed during a relatively long period of schooling and not as something that can be acquired by short-term coaching. However, because there is a substantial financial benefit to the winner of a Commonwealth Secondary Scholarship, there is evidence that children are in fact coached at school or at special coaching colleges. If this coaching is effective, then it is clear that some children who receive coaching will gain scholarships at the expense of more gifted children who have not been coached.

ACER is at present conducting a research study on the effects of coaching on students' performance in one paper of the Commonwealth Secondary Scholarships Examination. The study is confined to metropolitan Melbourne where 24 randomly selected schools are participating. In each of 12 schools, 15 third-form students are being coached using questions from past Quantitative Thinking papers from the CSSE. This is the experimental group, and students in this group will receive a total of 10 hours' coaching by qualified mathematics teachers. At another 6 schools, classes of Form 3 students are working on practice exercises for one period a week until they too have completed a total of 10 hours' work. During practice, students simply work through problems selected from past Quantitative Thinking papers which they correct themselves without any help or guidance. This represents one form of activity used in many schools to familiarize

students with the form of the Commonwealth Secondary Scholarships Examination papers. The remaining 6 schools provide the students forming the control group.

All students participating in the experimental and practice groups were pretested using a test of mathematical ability, a past CSSE Quantitative Thinking paper, and a Semantic Differential Test of Attitude. In addition they completed a questionnaire which would enable an estimate to be made of their parents' socio-economic status. The control group have not done the past Quantitative paper but have been tested with the other instruments.

## POST-TESTING

In each school where coaching is taking place, a complete class was tested before the 15 students to be coached were randomly selected. Those students who were tested, but are not being coached, will also be post-tested, allowing a comparison between children from the same class.

The post-tests will consist of three Quantitative Thinking papers and a further attitude test. The Quantitative Thinking papers will be:

- the same one as used for the initial testing, to check for gains on specific items as well as any general gain in performance;
- the July 1972 Quantitative Thinking paper (retitled 'Mathematics' this year), when it is taken by Commonwealth Secondary Scholarship candidates in Form 4 in Victoria;
- the 1973 CSSE, when the students in the experiment are themselves in Form 4.

This means that it will be possible to compare the scores of the experimental and practice groups and thus to detect any improvement in performance, while comparison with the control group will provide a measure of any practice effects from the pretest alone. Furthermore, if any improvement as a result of

coaching or practice is found, its persistence over a 12-month period (from July 1972 to July 1973) can be measured. In 1973 the students will sit for all four papers of the CSSE, so it will be possible to look for any effects on their performance in papers other than Quantitative.

The other three papers in the CSSE are Science, Humanities, and Written Expression. Of these, the Humanities and Science papers lend themselves to some form of specific coaching. Ten hours of coaching for one examination is a substantial amount, and if extended to the other two objective papers in the battery, would mean that a student would get a total of 30 hours' coaching. The time spent on coaching for one paper in this experiment seems, therefore, to be realistic in terms of the amount of coaching we might expect children to receive.

It should be noted that the two coaches working with the children are experienced teachers who are working very hard with comparatively small groups of students. Thus it would appear that the experiment is giving both coaching and practice work a fair chance to succeed. As the study is confined to the metropolitan area of one city, the degree to which the results can be generalized is necessarily restricted. Nevertheless it is hoped that the results will provide not only definite evidence on the effect of coaching, but also shed some light on the more general issue of teaching problem-solving.

Miss Merle O'Donnell, ACER's Senior Advisory Officer, was farewelled at ACER in April prior to her marriage on 12 May to Mr Richard Warry in Brisbane, where she is now living.

Miss O'Donnell joined the ACER staff in 1961, and became well and widely known in all states for the many talks and lectures she gave on the work of the Council, and on the tests and materials (both ACER and other) available from ACER. Many of our readers will recall her pleasant and vivid approach to these public assignments, and her well informed and helpful replies to questions and to correspondence.

Her position will not be filled at ACER until later in the year when Mr. Peter Jeffery will take up duty.

# ACER in the Beginning

The impetus that led to the launching of the Australian Council for Educational Research in 1930 came mainly from three men—Frank Tate (retired Director of Education for Victoria), and Professors Lovell and Mackie of Sydney University.

These three men were among the many educationists who talked to James Russell when he visited Australia in 1928. Russell—then Dean Emeritus of Teachers College, Columbia University, New York—came as Visiting Carnegie Professor of International Relations. He encouraged the educational leaders he met to seek financial help from the USA for educational projects in Australia.

Russell's enthusiasm captured the interest of Tate, Lovell, and Mackie. Tate, after consultation with his conferees, wrote to the Carnegie Corporation in July 1928. He said there was scope in Australia for an organization promoting and carrying out educational research.

The reply was propitious. The Corporation would consider the request 'if and when it is possible to perfect an organization capable of administering funds and directing scientific investigations'. But there was this rider—that such an institute should be independent of control by any university, state system of education, or political party.

Various meetings were held during the next twelve months, and Dr G. E. Phillips of the NSW Department of Education made a trip to the USA in the early part of 1929 to study the working of a number of educational research centres.

The culmination of these events was the August 1929 conference in Melbourne of the interested bodies around Australia, addressed by Phillips. All the states were represented, and Tate, Lovell, and Mackie were there. The participants eventually agreed on the key elements of the constitution for a research council, and put them before the Carnegie Corporation.

The response was prompt and

pleasing. The Corporation made an appropriation of £50,000 to support the activities of the proposed council. The amount was to be paid in ten equal instalments of £5,000. A little later, they voted another £12,500 for administration expenses, to be spread over five years.

The first regular meeting of the Australian Council for Educational Research took place in February 1930. A constitution was adopted and Dr K. S. Cunningham was appointed Executive Officer. The Council's formal activities began two months later on 1 April.

## ACER'S OBJECTS

The objects of the Council, as adopted in the constitution, were:

- (a) to promote generally, as far as possible in co-operation with existing institutions, the cause of research and investigation in education in Australia;
- (b) to make grants to assist in carrying out any research or investigation approved by the Council;
- (c) to publish in suitable form the results of research and investigation approved by the Council;
- (d) to nominate, or to advise upon, students of education qualified to carry out research either at home or abroad;
- (e) to take such action (including the making of grants) as in the opinion of the Council may afford suitable and effective assistance to any educational experiment or development.

ACER still operates with these objects very much in mind. It is only the emphasis that has varied from time to time during the last forty years.

The *ACER Newsletter* is published quarterly by the Australian Council for Educational Research, Frederick Street, Hawthorn, Victoria 3122. Communications should be addressed to the Editor, Ian Fraser, at this address.

## Programmed Reading Kit

The first edition of the Programmed Reading Kit has been widely used by teachers in Australia as an aid in the teaching of reading in infant departments, remedial centres, and special schools. Now the first edition has been revised in the light of Dr Stott's recent work with children with reading difficulties; it has also included ideas suggested to Dr Stott by teachers who have used the first edition.

The number of cards overall has been greatly increased, providing a wider range of activities for each 'game' and thus increasing reinforcement of the principles being taught.

It became necessary to rewrite the manual. It now includes a valuable section which discusses the basic principles involved in learning to read.

Many of the original 'games' have been retained, some of which have been adapted to fit in with the overall revision. But five completely new activities have been incorporated in the kit:

- *First Letter Bingo*. This is an exciting game which promotes phonic fluency of initial sounds.
- *Post Boxes*. This activity replaced the Bat and Duck Cards of the first edition, and helps overcome 'b', 'd', and 'p' confusion.
- *Pattern Bingo*. Basically Pattern Bingo is the same as First Letter Bingo; however, it promotes fluency in consonant/vowel blends.
- *Fable Cards*. There are seven well known fables included, each fable divided into seven parts. The child is required to place the cards in their correct sequences, and in doing so, becomes accustomed to common, irregular words.
- *Snakes Games*. This activity is designed to reinforce the classification of phonic conventions and irregular blends.

Readers wishing more information about the Programmed Reading Kit—or about Dr Stott's new Learning-to-Learn Kit (now available from ACER)—are invited to write ACER's Advisory Services, Frederick Street, Hawthorn, Victoria 3122.

# The Bougainville Case

On the whole, social science curriculum development at the secondary level in Australia has not departed far from the paths of established, conservative orthodoxy. A tendency to adopt rule-of-thumb procedures has characterized most projects. The 'classical model' of curriculum development has guided thinking. In this, curriculum developers determine overall objectives, state them in an appropriate form, devise suitable learning experiences to implement the objectives, and suggest the evaluation that might be used to test pupils' terminal behaviours stemming from the learning experiences.

This article has been contributed by Brian Bullivant, who until February of this year was the Senior Research Officer in charge of Social Science Materials Development at ACER. He is now a lecturer in education at Monash University, but continues to be involved in the Social Science Curriculum Project in a consultative capacity.

Consequently projects have tended to follow a global approach and design sequential courses from Grades 7 to 11, together with broad guidelines for implementing them at the unit level in the classroom. However, there has been little emphasis on designing stimulus materials to support the units, or cater for pupils who may have varying interests and needs. Yet discussions with teachers indicate quite clearly that this is where the deficiencies are most keenly felt. Teachers also feel they need training in some of the newer social sciences and in using stimulus materials to best effect.

## TRIAL KITS

For these tasks an applied research and developmental approach seems more suitable. It involves the production and trialling of pilot materials in schools, and the collection of feedback from the trials as a basis for modifying the materials, prior to their wider publication. Applied research can be carried out on a limited scale, which contrasts

with the often cumbersome and costly global approach. Trial kits can have an 'action' component by helping to train teachers and bring about changes in classroom procedures. More importantly, they are able to gauge the reactions of the pupils using them. This implies a conscious attempt to assess pupil needs in determining objectives rather than take them for granted.

## APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

The rationale for this emphasis stems from the applied sociology of curriculum development. This entails the application of sociological principles and insights to the analysis and solution of a concrete educational problem. In this case it is how to best cater for the needs of pupils from the differing socio-economic and cultural backgrounds characteristic of a pluralist society such as ours.

We may define a curriculum as a set of normative decisions about the experiences or succession of such experiences to be purposefully organized by such formal educational agents as schools, and implemented, usually sequentially, through syllabuses and their various subdivisions. The practitioners concerned with the initial set of macro-level decisions constitute one type of those 'dominant groups' found in the structure of any pluralist society. The values on which practitioners base their decisions are likely to differ from the values of the pupils, their ultimate clients, for whom the curriculum has to be implemented in the school by teachers. The pupils may also hold different values, but it is more likely that they will be similar to those of the practitioners.

In a pluralist society with a number of constituent socio-economic and cultural (ethnic) subgroups, it is inevitable that there will be a lack of congruence between some clients' expectations, based on their values or preference scales, and practitioners' provisions, based on different values. The size of this

differential value gap will vary according to the degree of social distance between practitioners and clients. We assume that it is educationally desirable to bring about some congruence between the different sets of values involved so that provisions partially match expectations. To cater effectively for their clients, practitioners should take more account of their expectations, and try to work within the parameters of an adopted set of values rather than their own.

## A CASE STUDY

One phase of the Social Science Curriculum Project at ACER culminated in trials of *The Bougainville Case* pilot kit in September-October 1971. It tried to take into account the implications for curriculum development of the differential value gap. The multi-media stimulus materials in the kit were selected to match what was known or could be surmised about the interests and needs of a range of secondary school pupils.

To test pupil reactions the kits were tried out in a variety of schools and grades.

Outcomes of the trials are discussed elsewhere (ACER *NICSSE Bulletins* 6 and 7), but sufficient has been learned already to suggest that they fulfilled the hopes of those engaged in the program. More importantly, they confirm that an applied sociology of curriculum development can provide guidelines for future research and its implementation in the classroom.

## PUBLICATION

To gauge interest in a published version of *The Bougainville Case*, we have sent all Australian secondary schools a letter describing the kit and a brief questionnaire seeking information about whether schools are likely to want to purchase a kit on formal publication in 1973. However, publication of *The Bougainville Case* by ACER is dependent on a favourable response.