

Foreword

A teacher's task is much more ambitious than it used to be and demands a focus on the subtleties of teaching and learning and on the emerging knowledge of school improvement.

This is what this series is about.

Teaching can be a very lonely activity. The time honoured practice of a single teacher working alone in the classroom is still the norm; yet to operate alone is, in the end to become isolated and impoverished. This series addresses two issues – the need to focus on practical and useful ideas connected with teaching and learning and the wish thereby to provide some sort of an antidote to the loneliness of the long distance teacher who is daily berated by an anxious society.

Teachers flourish best when, in key stage teams or departments (or more rarely whole schools), their talk is predominantly about teaching and learning and where, unconnected with appraisal, they are privileged to observe each other teach; to plan and review their work together; and to practise the habit of learning from each other new teaching techniques. But how does this state of affairs arise? Is it to do with the way staffrooms are physically organised so that the walls bear testimony to interesting articles and in the corner there is a dedicated computer tuned to 'conferences' about SEN, school improvement, the teaching of English etc., and whether, in consequence, the teacher leaning over the shoulder of the enthusiastic IT colleagues sees the promise of interesting practice elsewhere? Has the primary school cracked it when it organises successive staff meetings in different classrooms and invites the 'host' teacher to start the meeting with a 15 minute exposition of their classroom organisation and management? Or is it the same staff sharing, on a rota basis, a slot on successive staff meeting agenda when each in turn reviews a new book they have used with their class? And what of the whole school which now uses 'active' and 'passive' concerts of carefully chosen music as part of their active learning techniques?

It is of course well understood that excellent teachers feel threatened when first they are observed. The constant observation of the teacher in training seems like that of the learner driver. Once you have passed your test and can drive unaccompanied, you do. You often make lots of mistakes and sometimes get into bad habits. Woe betide, however, the back seat driver who tells you so. In the same way the new teacher quickly loses the habit of observing others and being observed. So how do we get a confident, mutual observation debate going? One school I know found a simple and therefore brilliant solution. The Head of the History Department asked that a young colleague plan lessons for her – the Head of Department – to teach. This lesson she then taught, and was observed by the young colleague. There was subsequent discussion, in which the young teacher asked,

*"Why did you divert the question and answer session I had planned?"
and was answered by,*

"Because I could see that I needed to arrest the attention of the group by the window with some "hands-on" role play, etc."

This lasted an hour and led to a once-a-term repeat discussion which, in the end, was adopted by the whole school. The whole school subsequently changed the pattern of its meetings to consolidate extended debate about teaching and learning. The two teachers claimed that because one planned and the other taught both were implicated but neither alone was responsible or felt 'got at'.

So there are practices which are both practical and more likely to make teaching a rewarding and successful activity. They can, as it were, increase the likelihood of a teacher surprising the pupils into understanding or doing something they did not think they could do rather than simply entertaining them or worse still occupying them. There are ways of helping teachers judge the best method of getting pupil expectation just ahead of self-esteem.

This series focuses on straightforward interventions which individual schools and teachers use to make life more rewarding for themselves and those they teach. Teachers deserve nothing less, for they are the architects of tomorrow's society, and society's ambition for what they achieve increases as each year passes.

Professor Tim Brighouse.

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INTRODUCTION

"If you have great talents, industry will improve them...."

Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1723-1792, 'Discourses, 2' as quoted in 'The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations', J M & M J Cohen (Bloomsbury Books, 1960)

"Everybody has the ability and can use it without being scared of being bullied because of it."

Part of evaluation sheet of an enrichment session by a Year 9 pupil, June 1996.

Why should provision be made?

For the children themselves

All children, including the most able, have a right to a challenging and appropriate education. There have been far too many instances of able and talented children being left unfulfilled, bored, underchallenged or frightened to use their abilities for fear of peer pressure. Ruth Railton, writing the story of the National Youth Orchestra, took her title 'Daring to Excel' (Secker and Warburg, 1992) from:

*The danger chiefly lies in acting well;
No crime's so great as daring to excel.*

Charles Churchill, 'Epistle to William Hogarth', 1763

Those of us in education have to ensure that able and talented children have sufficient opportunities to use their abilities and that they are encouraged to excel.

For other children

Evidence supports the view that if schools are willing and able to meet the needs of able pupils, standards are raised for all pupils (as stated by Mike Tomlinson, Director of Inspection at Easthamstead, Berkshire on 20th June 1995).

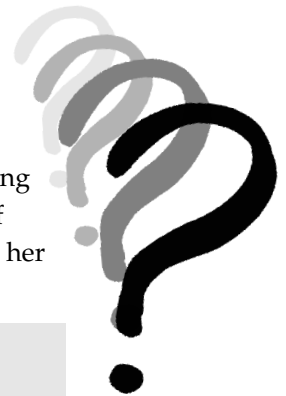
Children are the most important part of the equation. Effective provision for able and talented pupils helps not only them but their classmates as well.

For teachers

Caring for children, all children, nurturing them and assisting them to achieve what they are capable of doing is central to the teaching role. Not to do the best for all pupils, including the most able, would be to neglect one's professional duty.

For parents

The great majority of parents are anxious that their children are happy at school and that they are progressing well. Inadequate provision for children leaves them unhappy and has damaging 'knock-on' effects upon the rest of the family. As parents say, their




children only get the one schooling, which needs to be challenging and rich.

For the wellbeing of the school

In recent years schools have come under much greater scrutiny. They are certainly more accountable. All schools need a fair proportion of able pupils but to keep them and to encourage others to join them, they need to make effective provision. Otherwise many families will 'vote with their feet'. Provision for able and talented children has been included in the Key Issues for Action for many schools. This attention is one part of a wider concern over standards and school effectiveness. In what is becoming a much more market-led situation, schools have to compete for a healthy intake and one which includes a reasonable number of the most able.

What are the necessary steps in effective provision?

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- An understanding of the necessary theory
 - A whole school policy
 - Departmental policies and procedures
 - In-service work
 - Resourcing
 - Lead from a coordinator
 - Identification
 - Classroom strategies and extra-curricular provision
 - Monitoring and evaluation

All these points will be discussed in detail in later sections.

At the top of the political agenda

Provision for able and talented children was very much a "Cinderella" area in the past – not properly looked after nor valued. Often it was seen, mistakenly, as elitist. There is now a much higher national profile which is causing pressure for action.

In conclusion

Some readers will be aware of recent developments, others not. All people involved in education need to take note of these and act accordingly. The wishes of official bodies, however important, are not the real driving force behind this book and its contents. We wish to proceed further because:

WE CARE ABOUT CHILDREN. WE WANT TO SEE THEM HAPPY, BUT CHALLENGED, INDIVIDUALS WITHIN A COMMUNITY, CONFIDENT TO DEVELOP THEIR ABILITIES TO THE FULL WITHOUT FEAR OF PREJUDICE AND ENVY.

As Beverley Eley commented through her sub-title to 'The Book of David' (Harper Collins, 1996), – the story of the musician David Helfgott, also made into the film 'Shine':

"It's alright to be different"

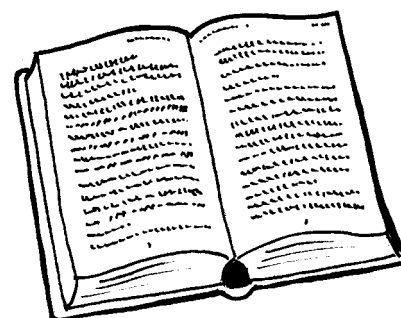
Section One

Theory into practice

In this section you will see that:

- educational practice needs to be based upon relevant theory and research evidence
- a whole school policy leading to procedures involving referrals, Individual Education Plans and a register of able pupils is needed to convert theory into practice
- lessons from everyday life often have a transfer value and an application for effective provision
- theory converted by procedures into practice should answer the needs of able pupils

Many educational writers suggest that the theoretical base for practice in this country is not as strong as it could be or should be. This book is essentially practical and the weight of text is overwhelmingly on the side of what needs to *happen*. Even so it is important that those involved with the teaching and learning of the able and talented have some theory and research evidence upon which to base their policies.



Theory

In what areas do we need to develop knowledge and expertise?

- What is meant by ability both generally and specifically?
- How do we measure ability through tests and other means?
- What are the parameters when using tests?
- How do able children learn? Is this process any different from that of the majority of children?
- What does research teach us about the most sensible ways of carrying out grouping policy?
- What do longitudinal case studies, following children's progress over a number of years, teach us about pastoral care issues?
- What is meant by technical terms such as enrichment, extension, acceleration, multiple intelligences, compacting, mentoring, differentiation?
- How large should the target group be? (i.e. How many children are we going to regard as being able and talented?)
- Are there common characteristics for pupils generally able or for those talented in a specific area?
- How do we assess the work of able pupils?