# Issues and Events

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### Classroom Arrangement

The progressive approach to teaching outrightly condemns the type of classroom arrangement where pupils are seated in rows facing the teacher as being too rigid, assigning to pupils a listeners' and to teachers a talkers' role. Besides it impedes the creative organization of teaching and learning activities. Groupwork, to name one example, cannot be organized effectively within such a classroom set-up. Progressives, therefore, would do away with dual benches and have them replaced with tables around which pupils sit in groups. Such an arrangement, they claim, brings about more effective teaching and encourages pupils to work together in carrying out learning tasks. Emphasis, therefore, is placed on cooperation rather than competition.

Recently, however, such a vigorous claim has been somewhat contested. The result of a survey conducted by the University of Birmingham's department of educational psychology* shows that, first, pupils' work better when they are seated in rows than when they sit around tables, and, secondly, they prefer the traditional classroom arrangement.

The researchers studied two junior classes of mixed ability groups of pupils aged 10-11 in which the pupils normally sat around tables. The performance and behaviour of pupils while working at their usual tables were measured over a two-week period, then for two weeks with the pupils seated in rows, and finally, for another two weeks with the pupils back at their usual tables. The results showed that in both classes pupils performed 15% higher while sitting in rows. The researchers conclude that when pupils are expected to work independently they should be seated in rows, but, such an arrangement is not appropriate when pupils are assigned learning tasks which involve working in groups. There seems to be a need, therefore, to make distinctions between types of learning activities and then provide those classroom arrangements within which these types of activities can be carried out.

* Rows versus tables: an example of the use of behaviour ecology in two classes of 11-year-old children, by K. Wheldall, M. Morris, P. Vaughan, Yink Yuch Ng, published in "Educational Psychology" Vol. 1 No. 2.

### Corporal Punishment

Do pupils behave better when they know that their teachers are not prohibited from using corporal punishment? Many teachers are prompt to give an affirmative answer to this question. Research evidence, however, is not on their side. According to the findings of the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) pupils' behaviour does not deteriorate with the abolition of corporal punishment in schools.

The SCRE reports the findings* of six seconded teachers who visited 13 Scottish schools in 1980/81. Five of the schools had abolished the use of the cane or were phasing it out, the remaining eight formed a control group of schools where the cane was used. The conclusions of the team were based on 600 hours of classroom observation during which they looked into the ways in which teachers managed their charges.

The results of their investigations indicated that (1) different ways of exercising class control existed *within* each school, not *between* schools, and, (2) the abolitionist schools were developing new ways of maintaining discipline, such as the creation of a system for better record-keeping, better-designed courses for unmotivated pupils and greater parental involvement in dealing with behaviour problems.

However, teachers in special schools in England and Wales are reluctant to ban caning completely. THe move by the Sunderland Education Committee to ban corporal punishment in its ten special schools was declared by the National Association of Schoolmasters and the Union of Women Teachers as unconstitutional on the grounds that the teachers concerned had not been consulted. They felt that they had been deprived of

an effective means of keeping pupils under control. Colin McInnes, the Association's regional officer, said that "The long term effects of removing an important sanction from teachers and not replacing it with anything else will be very serious".

*"Making the Change", (1981), (Hodder and Stoughton).

## Luring pupils to the library

A hard task for schoolteachers is to encourage their pupils to use the library and take home books to read in their free time. For more than two decades many educationalists have been blaming the pupils' aversion to reading on television. More recently, however, television itself is being used to lure pupils to the school library. School authorities are piling up library shelves with books which are based on films and television programmes with very encouraging results.

A survey of 60 pupils aged 13–15 and their teachers over a two-year period conducted by the Centre for Research in User Studies* at the University of Sheffield shows that some television programmes stimulate pupils to read more on their own. Eventually, it is hoped, pupils will move on to read other books which have not been serialized on the media.

*"Young People's Reading: A Study of the Leisure Reading of 13–15 year-olds", by Pauline Heather.

## Seminar on Language Teaching

The Matriculation Board of the University recently organized two seminar sessions on "Language Testing at Matriculation Ordinary and Advanced Levels". The main participants were members of the Examination Boards involved in language testing and members of the University Staff lecturing in the various languages. The first session was mainly taken up with a discussion on some basic concepts such as reliability and validity of examinations and the relative merits of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests. These discussions provided a background for the second session which centred mainly on the mechanics of examining. During the second session participants discussed some of the test forms which are being used such as essay-writing and comprehension tests and translation exercises as well as variations of oral examinations. Marking procedures were treated at length with special reference to impression and analytical marking as well as the model answer technique. Another topic which was studied was the writing up of reports on examinations especially as regards the generality of specificity of the examiners' recommendations.

## Seminar on General Pedagogy

In December the Faculty of Education held a Staff Seminar on General Pedagogy. Participants included lecturers in Education Theory, Curriculum and Methodology and other staff members. Its objectives were: (i) to identify common elements, (ii) to suggest new effective ways of coordinating work and, (iii) to evaluate sequence of topics.

The discussion, which was conducted by Professor C.J. Farrugia, Head of Faculty, Mr J. Fenech and Mr K. Wain, lecturers in the Faculty, focused on the objectives, content and instructional procedures of the General Pedagogy units in relation to the units offered in the Early and Middle Years and Main Subject Methodology.

After a brief introduction to the General objectives of the Pedagogy units by Professor Farrugia, the seminar leaders moved on to identify the aims and elaborate on the procedures of the units "Introduction to School Experience", "Instructional Design" and "Curriculum Development".

Topics brought up for the discussion which followed included: (i) the integrated approach to curriculum planning; (ii) the development of the Curriculum; and, (iii) coordination between the lecturers involved in the General Pedagogy area and those teaching subject methodology in the Early and Middle Years.

At the end of the Seminar participants recognized the educational validity of the integrated approach, advised the postponement of the Curriculum Development unit to a later stage in the course and recommended better coordination between (the various lecturers in) the Faculty of Education and the schools.

## Teaching Practice: Expectations and Constraints

In June the Faculty of Education organized a half-day seminar with the aim of examining the expectations of and the the constraints on Teaching Practice. Participants included Education Officers, Heads of Schools and Staff of the Faculty.

The Seminar was chaired by Mr. D. Cuschieri, Senior Lecturer in Pedagogy and the speakers on the panel were Professor C.J. Farrugia, Head of the Faculty of Education, Mr. C.J. Xerri, Education Officer in the Department of Education and Ms M. Puli, Headteacher of Msida Primary School. Mr M. Morgan, External Examiner and principal of Froebel Institute, gave the concluding talk.

Professor Farrugia, the first speaker, identified the opportunities which Teaching Practice

provided both to student-teachers and tutors in the Faculty. Teaching Practice is a time for students to put into practice theoretical models, ideas, concepts, skills and principles explored in lectures, seminars, tutorials and individual study and to test and evaluate their practical applicability in teaching and learning situations. It offers students an opportunity for socialization into the schools. They will be able to see how the school as an organization works, to interact with the staff of the school and the pupils and to internalize those attitudes which help them build up their image as future teachers .They will be able to demonstrate their commitment to the teaching profession by the care they show for the pupils under their charge, their preparation of work, the way they tackle pupil problems and the willingness to learn from their own experience.

Teaching Practice also offers students a chance to try out new ideas and see how they work in actual practice. Students are expected to be innovative, and their attempts at innovation should not be stifled. At this point, however, the speaker put in a word of caution: students must not be expected not to commit mistakes. Indeed, it would be very unreasonable on the part of those who supervise them to expect students at the initial phases of their carrier to be faultless in their practice.

In conclusion, Professor Farrugia drew attention to the human aspect in the educational situation. The activity of education involves people: pupils, student-teachers, supervisors and others - whose needs should not be disregarded. It is also important to attend to the morale of all individuals concerned

Ms M. Puli, the second speaker, looked at Teaching Practice from a headteacher's point of view, She identified those qualities which she considered to be essential for the student-teacher to have. She included among these: the basic skills of planning work, familiarity with the school syllabuses, preparedness to face a class and, lastly, an ability to adapt to the assigned class.

She moved on to identify the problems in the allocation of classes to student-teachers. She expressed the view that 'A' stream classes should not be offered because this woulc be to the detriment of the pupils in these classes. However, she also emphasized that the lower streams were not suitable either, because unmotivated pupils presented considerable problems to the new teachers. She indicated that the middle streams were more appropriate. Ms Puli also stressed that examinations were not making the difficulties of assigning student-teachers to classes any easier.

Finally, the speaker suggested that it would be to the benefit of pupils and student-teachers alike if the latter were not assigned classes during their first teaching practice. Instead dur ng the 5 1/2 month period, student-teachers would gain experience of a variety of classes and be allowed to take up guided teaching sessions. She envisaged this guidance to come from the staff tutors, headteachers and other teachers on the staff of the school. She suggested that student-teachers be allowed to handle a class on their own throughout the whole work-phase only in the third, fourth and final years. It was also important for student-

teachers to aquire the ability to teach pupils at all levels of schooling - Infant, Primary and Secondary - and of all ranges of ability. This would help the future teachers to adapt better to the requirements of the educational system.

Mr. Xerri said that it was important to study carefully the parameters which determine the present system of teacher-education. It was equally important to assess the particular objectives of teaching practice and also the way in which student teachers gain their work experience in schools. An appreciation of the way the system operates as well as an awareness of the objectives of teaching practice are essential to ensure that student-teachers gain maximum benefit from their experience in schools.

After the break, seminar participants separated into groups which were co-ordinated by members of staff. They were asked to discuss how the work-phase was fulfilling the objectives of the Faculty vis-a-vis Teaching Practice, what the policy of the Department of Education in the utilization of the student-worker services should be, and how the schools and the Faculty could collaborate to make the work-phase a mutually beneficial service.

The following tentative recommendations

emerged from the discussions:

1. The objectives of the Faculty would be better attained if student-teaches were not assigned a regular class during their first work-phase.

2. Other duties, besides teaching, should be identified for student-teachers to carry out during their first work-phase in schools.

3. Communication between the Heads of Schools and the Faculty of Education should be improved.

In his concluding remarks, Mr M. Morgan shared the views of the previous speakers and sympathized with the concern with which the various people involved - Education Officers, Head-teachers and tutors in the Faculty - looked at the problems encountered. He was of opinion that the three parties concerned - The Education Department, The Schools and the Faculty - should get together and issue a jointly approved statement regarding the suggested ways in which the expectations of Teaching Practice would be more satisfactorily fulfilled and the constraints on it dealt with.

*The above reports are by Joe Fenech. "Seminar on Language Testing" is by Joe Falzon.*

# CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

"A good teacher is a good classroom manager. Whatever mode of teaching he is employing, and whatever subject matter or skill is being explored, a teacher has the major task of managing the classroom. This involves control of the group, the manipulation of time, the teacher's own voice and manner. THe book argues that this craft is a necessary one for the teacher, and one about which much can be taught and learnt. The craft of the classroom is something at which you can work and at which you can get better. In doing so you will not only increase your control of the classroom, but, perhaps paradoxically, you will also find yourself giving less attention to class management, getting closer to the pupils, teaching more helpfully, and, above all, enjoying the pupils more. Good relationships are to some extent an ingredient of successful classroom management, but to a considerable degree they are also the result. There is more crossness, shouting and criticism in a badly run classroom than a good one. The well-organized teacher is in a better position to be pleasant to his pupils. A mastery of group management techniques frees a teacher from concerns about group control.

Some of the procedures I have outlined in this book are easier to describe than to do. Practice will make them possible but you will find the task

easier for pre-planning. One of the paradoxes of classroom management is that some initial fuss often reduces subsequent fuss; that some apparently complicated initial procedures actually simplify procedures in the long run; that formal routines free the sessions for close relationships. To be organized and firm is to have cleared the decks for variety of activity and friendliness, but to be slightly confused and wavering is to produce a muddle that will lead only to frayed tempers, cross words, less pupil enjoyment, and less learning. All this is especially true with less well-motivated and with 'difficult' children. For them your techniques must be impeccable. I have seen teachers trying to muddle through for years: it doesn't work. If, on the other hand, you analyse an aspect of classroom management to establish what makes it difficult, you will usually see where the difficulty lies, and be able to go a long way towards avoiding it next time around. For instance, contrary to many of our easily adopted attitudes, it isn't the presence of two or three troublesome pupils that makes it difficult to get a lesson started. It is an inherently difficult task whatever the composition of the pupil group, and some teachers would run into difficulties with a hand-picked class of obliging pupils. With any pupils, your class management skill must be as polished as possible. Have no doubt, though, that this is a skill, can be learnt, and does matter."