

Campaign for Real Education

www.cre.org.uk

“Freedom to teach, freedom to learn, freedom to choose”

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NEWSLETTER

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Since our Spring Newsletter the flow of education initiatives from Government and its agencies has continued, unabated. Disputation and rancour have become the order of the day. Nevertheless, much of what is on its way is supported by the CRE. The proposals for a more knowledge-based National Curriculum may help us to bridge the gap between educational performance in this country and the performance of competitor economies. However, the gap has widened in recent years and there is a long way to go if we are to restore some parity. As always, the devil is in the detail. Our exposition in this newsletter of how the Government’s original proposals for history have been subverted serves as a warning for all subject areas.

Sadly, the Government has climbed down on its plan to replace the discredited GCSE examination with GCE O-Level. It is, indeed, extraordinary that we have continued to produce O-Levels in this country, but only for export to our economic competitors such as Singapore. They are, effectively, ‘banned’ here by not being placed on the list of Government’s ‘approved’ qualifications. We must hope that the Government’s promise for tougher GCSEs, with end-of-two-year exams, will not be undermined. Already, we have evidence that ‘tougher’ does not mean ‘harder to pass’. Ofqual has agreed to make GCSE English more demanding for 2014 but hidden in the small print is the reassurance that the pass mark will be lowered in order to bring standards into line with previous GCSE English exams. Things are not really what they seem in this educational world of mirrors and illusions. Recently, an exam board mark scheme indicated that a mark of 20% secured a Grade C pass on a Chemistry module!

‘Special Needs’ and ‘Dysteachia’

Around a quarter of boys and just over an eighth of girls in maintained schools are classified as having special educational needs, according to recently released DfE figures. In addition to providing schools with extra funding, this classification provides schools with a ready excuse for failure. These statistics are a further indictment of failed teaching methodologies. Alongside over-used terms such as “dyslexia” and ‘dyscalculia’, it is time for the special needs ‘industry’ to recognise that the most accurate diagnosis for many cases of ‘special needs’ is ‘**dysteachia**’. Too many children are being failed by teaching strategies, promoted as part of teacher training, that do not work. Some youngsters, such as those with severe autism, really do have special needs. They need specific help. Many pupils described as having special needs will benefit most from being well taught. According to Ofsted, around half a million pupils fell into this category back in 2010. Its findings seem to have been ignored.

The Butterfly Effect

Evidence that challenges the mindset that educational achievement is irredeemably constrained by family background can be found in the track record, longitudinal research study and anecdotal evidence of the 14-year-old Butterfly Saturday Reading School. It was created in 1999 by the independent educational charity, Real Action, specifically in response to the educational needs of children living on the Mozart Estate in north Westminster and more than 2,000 children have now learned to read the Butterfly way. Their documented success testifies to the strength of the method.

[We have to declare an interest here. The charity's co-founder and education director (Katie Ivens) is one of the CRE's long-standing vice chairmen. And Irina Tyk, the author of the outstanding Butterfly literacy programme is also a distinguished member of our board.]

Briefly, what the long-term educational record tells us is that if you teach literacy the Butterfly way to young children from families subject to even the most extreme level of 'child deprivation' they will improve their reading levels on average by 12 months in just 20 hours' teaching. Real Action calls this the Butterfly Effect. The 5-12 year old children are placed in classes graded by reading attainment level. They sit in rows facing the teacher and are taught the scripted, structured, course of synthetic phonics set out in *The Butterfly Book* by direct instruction. They attend enthusiastically, bring their friends and clamour for their weekly reading and dictation in class. They move swiftly up through the six classes as their reading levels rise.

The *Butterfly Book* has special characteristics that match and cultivate the children's natural intelligence and logic. They are not, for example, taught a string of 44 freely dangling, apparently unrelated letter sounds before eventually fitting them together to make words. As Irina Tyk mentions lightly in her introduction to the book, 'It is essential that children *blend* sounds from the very beginning of the course.' This they do. Within a few seconds absolute beginners have blended a+n to make 'an'; and a+t to make 'at'. The course builds up cumulatively from there. It's quick, simple, logical, didactic. And it works for virtually every child. It consists of just 62 lessons, bringing the child – of any background – swiftly to reading age 8+, and able to read independently. It should therefore be within the power of every primary school to bring virtually every child to this level after just one year of full-time schooling. No excuses!

The longitudinal research study, "Learning to Read, Reading to Learn", was carried out by the Educational Research Trust in 2011. It looked at the long-term educational performance of the cohort of children who attended the 2-hour Butterfly classes on Saturday mornings in term-time in the early 2000s, and compared their results with those of a control group composed of children from the same background who had remained on the waiting list for the over-subscribed classes.

The results speak for themselves, with the achievement gap most marked among children who started the classes when aged seven or under. 83% of this group achieved a Level 4* or higher in both English and Maths – twice as high as the local children who had not attended, and 11 percentage points above the statistic for pupils nationally. Former attendees across all age groups were, compared to the control group, 90% more likely to achieve Level 4* or higher in both English and Maths at Key Stage 2 (** national benchmarks for 11 year olds*) They also did well when it came to GCSEs: They were more likely than their peers nationwide to achieve 5 GCSEs graded A* – C.

We're now hearing that we should associate low achievement with low-income life on seaside housing estates. Throughout the first decade of this century, right through to today, the low

achievement link has been made with deprived inner city estate dwellers – whether for multi-ethnic, or for indigenous (particularly male), populations. For negative educational indicators the Mozart Estate’s Butterfly children scored high: with the highest level of child deprivation in the country, for example; twice the national rate of free school meals entitlement; almost three times the national average for English as an Additional Language, and 80% higher than the national average for Special Educational Need. And the majority were boys.

In fact the Butterfly Saturday Reading School was set up by local parents and others, led by local resident, Roger Diamond, in response to exceptional negative factors. The estate – known as Crack City in the late ’90s – was plagued not only by gangs of adult criminals (‘yardies’, for example), but also, particularly disturbingly, by gangs of child criminals. They were found to be illiterate. Several of the adult gangsters sent their children to the Butterfly school. They still ply their trade. But when asked what their children are doing now they join the chorus of parents who exclaim ‘S/he’s at university!’

For more information see www.realaction.org.uk Seek help from the Butterfly school founders if you want a school for children where you are.

Sex Pistols History is on its way to a school near you

New National Curriculum for history is a capitulation to trendy teaching methods and makes most landmark events and personalities optional. The CRE can reveal that proponents of a controversial and discredited approach to school history are behind the Government’s newly revised National Curriculum for the subject. The redrafted syllabus represents a capitulation to teacher unions and to the educational establishment.

Over twice as many words in the curriculum are devoted to **how** to teach the subject, using a contentious approach (so-called “new history”), than is devoted to the content of **what** must be taught. Nearly all landmark events and personalities are specified as optional including the Battle of Hastings, Magna Carta, the Reformation, the Glorious Revolution, Florence Nightingale, World War I and Winston Churchill. Excluded, even from the optional examples, are Nelson and Wellington. Included as optional examples are Rosa Parkes, Emily Davison, Mary Seacole and “Leisure and Entertainment in the 20th Century”.

History is defined largely in terms of cross-curricula concepts (e.g. continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity and difference) and ‘skills’ that promote all knowledge as being provisional. This will lead to Sex Pistols History. Anything goes, including educational anarchy. History will be distorted because teachers will choose content to illustrate the concepts and skills not for its historical importance.

Younger children, in particular, will suffer from confusion, since the Key Stage 1 curriculum will produce chronological chaos. It requires teachers to jump around in time, e.g. between Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria, William Caxton and Tim Berners-Lee, Christopher Columbus and Neil Armstrong. This totally contradicts what is known about the cognitive development of this age group.

The chronological confusion will continue at Key Stage 2 (7 to 11 year-olds) where pupils have to jump between early history and more recent history and vice versa. For example, they might be studying “Britain’s settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots” one week and “the first railways” the next.

If we wish to see the approach to history that is being cemented in place by this new curriculum one should open the pages of school history textbooks that have been written by members of the small and 'secret' group from the educational establishment who wrote the curriculum. One such book is the hugely popular Longman textbook, part of a series, in its 11th reprint, entitled, "Minds and Machines, Britain 1750 to 1900 (ISBN 978-0-582-29500-1). Its presentation of historical knowledge and historical evidence includes 'making up your own evidence' in order to denigrate Britain e.g. referring to "the rulers and the ruled" of the British Empire the authors state (page 102): "...we have tried to imagine what they would tell is if they could come back from the dead". Chapter headings provides example of what teachers will teach to meet the concept-based 'new history' that underpins the forthcoming National Curriculum: "White Gold & Black Misery", "Fingers worn and weary", "A perfect wilderness of foulness", Pauper places", Riot and reform, "A policy of sewage". So much for Mr Gove's promise to his party's conference to stop teachers from "trashing our past".

No Comment

"Exam pass rates in Scotland have increased for all major qualifications, including the final year of results in Standard Grades." [Standard Grade Pass Rate is 98.9%.]

(BBC News website, 6/8/2013)

Politicians are scared of fixing education... When things go wrong, they think it can be fixed by doing things like "in the good old days", rote-learning dates and grammar. It's like trying to solve the traffic problem in London, there's too many cars. So the government says, 'OK, we'll bring back horses' ... I can fix the examination system in one sentence. You should be allowed to bring in an iPad," ... People are adamant learning is not just looking at a Google page. But it is. Learning is looking at Google pages. What is wrong with that?

(Professor Sugata Mitra, Professor of Educational Technology at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University, quoted in "The Huffington Post" 18/5/2013)

"19th-Century serial killer Jack the Ripper – infamous for murdering women and removing their vital organs...Who was Jack the Ripper? Find out in Miss R's introductory lesson.

*(Times Educational Supplement, History Resources for 11 to 18 Year olds, 28.6.2013
bit.ly/whowasjack)*

"Thousands of toddlers spend a whole day without a kiss or cuddle at nursery to protect staff from paedophilia accusations...Some staff even face the sack for simply comforting toddlers distraught because they miss their mothers and fathers."

(Daily Mail, 5.8.2013)