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# Some recent initiatives in road safety education

Road safety training has, from its earliest days, suffered from being too sensible an idea. Since almost all agree that it is needed, since the ways of alerting children of the dangers of road traffic seem so obvious and commonsense, it has become and may well remain an area of chronically low status. It is not untrue to say that to be a teacher of "road safety" or "traffic education" (TE) is generally considered by colleagues as rather quaint, but not really the stuff of education. It is perhaps not entirely trivial to point out that there have been many more Board of Education circulars concerned with the celebration of St. David's Day than with road safety, and that in 1955 the Administrative Memorandum 492 concerned with the use of flavoured milk tablets in schools was of greater length than that bringing teachers' attention to the Highway Safety Campaign (473) — this in a year when 124 children died on the roads and a further 12,491 were injured. Whilst the teaching profession has never accepted that ignorance and prejudice are endemic to society, it seems to have accepted that death on the roads is — or at least that patently inadequate measures to combat it are acceptable.

### Growing concern

It is, of course, true that the protection of children on the roads is not the schools' or teachers' responsibility alone, yet neither, for that matter, is the state of their health, and much of the justification for Physical Education has centred around just this. If we consider the road casualty statistics, even briefly, we find

that as early as 1926 1,232 children were killed on the roads, the figure reaching its early peak in 1934 when the toll was 1,438. To consider child fatalities alone is misleading; careless children, if they survive, are likely to become careless adults. The overall road accident figures for 1973, for example, were 346,374 injured and 7,406 killed, a quota which includes 913 deaths in the 15-19 age bracket alone. By 1962 accidents had become the commonest cause of death for all males under 35, with road accidents a major proportion of these. It has recently been stated that the motorcycle can now be considered the most serious "killer disease" of the under-25's in Britain; it is seriously suggested that it be treated as any other epidemic.

It is probably true that the apparent increase in the proportion of road deaths owes as much to the elimination of other dangers and diseases as to an escalation of accidents. In fact, the roads themselves are proportionally safer — 6,502 deaths for 2.5 million vehicles in 1934 compared with 6,876 deaths for 17 million vehicles in 1974. Even so, the numbers of children, let alone adults, killed on the roads each year since statistics were first kept in 1926, have prompted a number of initiatives in education. The history is not long — the earliest stirrings were in 1916 and cannot really be said to begin until the late 1920's. There followed a period of growing concern, both national and, to a lesser extent, educational, brought to the fore in the late war years and developed in the 1950's, with a change of identity in the

early 1970's and an accelerating educational involvement since then.

### **"From platitude to practicality"**

Perhaps the financial aspect has been significant in the breaking of the log jam in recent years. In 1978 the total cost of road accidents was estimated as £1,614 million, with each fatality costed at £89,300 when all losses are accounted for. Accident statistics continue to make gloomy reading; successive 'tightenings' such as the so-called "Breathalyser" have come, lost their impact and been accordingly tightened again. Within Colleges of Education and Universities there is little interest, save for the cases of Reading, Salford and Clacton where major research projects have been funded, usually by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory. Nevertheless, some 25% of all secondary schools in Britain now operate TE schemes or courses, most of these involving some form of driving instruction. If this is compared with the 1965 situation, something fairly dramatic must have taken place to turn platitude into practicality. In fact, it is suggested here that the change has taken place as a result of a coincidence of forces and interests, involving active, enthusiastic and self-directed teachers with a central focussing agency.

This is not to say that road safety education — or "traffic education" as it has emerged from its sea-change — is now a high status, high intellectual content subject, appreciated by parents and universities alike. Its origins are quite different. The Newsom Report of 1963 was concerned in part with — or was interpreted by many as involving — more practical, realistic activities for the less able. Paradoxically the old area of road safety training and instruction became seen by some as a suitable site for this. Thus, articles began to appear such as that by F. Bowry of Stanchester School, Somerset (in *Safety Education*, Spring 1968) entitled "Car Driving for Newsom Children" in which he tells of teaching science through the medium of the motor vehicle. Not long after this ROSLA

became a reality, and its imminence caused a number of schools to look towards motor vehicle work as both a source of valid scientific and craft work for fourth and fifth year classes and also as a device to hold their interest as long as possible. The blossoming of option schemes in schools can be interpreted as a method of control, and the only way that motor vehicle work can find its way into most curricula is via such optional activities through which, it might be said, the awkward and the dull can be controlled while the able and aspiring get on with it. This process, of course, fitted well with the increasing number of comprehensive schools at this time.

### **Birth of the training schemes**

These educational influences would probably have had less lasting impact had it not been for certain external circumstances. In the late sixties the accident rate for motor cycles, particularly among young riders and passengers, was alarming. Seeing that their very success in attracting the young to their products was in serious danger of killing the goose that was laying their particular golden eggs, the manufacturers, in conjunction with the Institute of Motorcycling (basically a trade association) and other commercial undertakings, agreed to fund a training scheme to cut the casualty rate before the Government were forced by public opinion to take more drastic action. Now, it is a feature of motorcycle riding that only a minute proportion (even now about 15%) of riders take any form of training (compared with about 90% of car drivers), as there is little incentive to do so, and even less for the newly-created class of 16-year-old moped riders. The training schemes in existence in 1972 (predominantly RAC/ACU) were of high quality, but sparsely situated and usually inconveniently timed. In addition, much of the training took place on the roads, on riders' own machines; however, once a youth had his own 'bike and a licence he was not very interested in training. A further coincidence was the 1974 reorganisation of

the counties and in particular the statutory duty laid on them for furthering road safety in their areas. This was done through the Road Safety Officers, whose new responsibilities and enhanced status made them receptive to fresh initiatives.

### **The funding of STEP**

The time was thus ripe for the introduction of the Schools Traffic Education Programme, always known by its acronym STEP. By a voluntary levy on all motorcycles sold in Britain, money was raised to float a limited company, non-profit-making (some say it just safeguards profits made elsewhere). After development of initial programme materials — quite a bit done by otherwise unemployed teachers — the first moves were made on April Fool's Day 1974. The absence of government funding or any, 'say, Schools' Council involvement, was no embarrassment. Later, in 1977, Norman Fowler, Minister of Transport, was able to endorse the 'free enterprise' spirit of STEP, likening it to the Shell initiative since 1950 in West Germany. He stated that it "achieved a sensible partnership between government and industry" (the reader may notice the absence of the word 'education'). The money raised — and there seemed no shortage — was used in particular to purchase training machines and equipment, a plan already followed by STEP's predecessor, the Institute of Motorcycling (IMC) which, coincidentally, used precisely the same logo. Herein lies one of the first clues to the success of the STEP scheme: each participating county would receive a number of brand new mopeds, donated by the trade through STEP, for use in schools. The machines

would be handed over by STEP, via the county RSO, at the completion of a week's residential teacher training course. The possession of the machine, with full encouragement by counties to make use of it, played a large part in the successful dissemination of the project. In fact, the whole process of dissemination is worthy of comment.

### **The STEP training scheme**

In the first place, entry by a school into the scheme could only proceed via its LEA. The timing of the launch to coincide with county reorganisation ensured active co-operation from RSOs and so the foothold in the authority was firm. The training programmes were highly structured (and, in fact, still are — many schools are now on their 'third generation' of teachers on such courses), took place in school time and encouraged an atmosphere of eagerness and purposefulness. The high priesthood of the road safety world were in attendance and in charge. The majority of the STEP officials were ex-police driving instructors; their tone was often similar to that of an RSM demonstrating Bren-gun disassembly. Yet these people were undoubted and unchallenged professionals and experts. The approach was direct, assertive, occasionally brutal or even rude. Furthermore, in the field of driving instruction, most teachers are absolute novices and were in part treated as such: their ability to teach, interestingly, was not questioned. At the end of the course, the expensive machine was theirs to use. The induction courses have been dwelt on here because they make a lasting impression on the STEP teacher. The standards of the instructors are high and the teacher is encouraged — expected — to emulate them.

The next stage of the operation is equally interesting. The teacher is largely left to go away and get on with it. The county RSO usually keeps in touch and arranges seminars, provides some teaching materials and communicates with head teachers. STEP Management Services Ltd are not heard from again, except as

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mediated by the RSO. By and large, the actual programme of instruction is left in the hands of the teacher. In this lies a further strength of the STEP scheme. The programme's magazine *Traffic Education*, which schools receive termly, abounds with home-grown variations on a theme. The impression is one of teachers in sympathy with a good cause, able to incorporate it into their own schemes of work or use it as a vehicle for other subject matter, encouraged by county RSOs, funded by industry and supported by central government. The magazine provides a constant running commentary on the progress of "the faith", with articles ranging from the immensely practical doings of infants to the pronouncements of the "saints", such as Dr Sheppard of TRRL, Professor Stina Sandels of Stockholm and Dr Ken Jolly of Reading (the first UK doctorate to be awarded in traffic-related research).

### Progress and acceptance

The progress of the programme has been strong. By January 1976 23 counties and 413 schools were involved; by late 1977 nearly 1,000 schools; by late 1980 (the most recent figure available) over 1,700 schools were participants. By the end of 1981 2,300 teachers had been through the induction courses and over 70,000 pupils were involved in STEP schemes of one kind or another. If we return to the suggestion that motor vehicle work is a good motivator of otherwise awkward pupils, most writers in *Traffic Education* would heavily endorse this.

But STEP has not remained on the lowest status rung. All subjects, if they are to gain wider acceptance, must seek some form of validation or certification. The usual process is via Mode III CSE, and this was the course followed by STEP. Again, the teachers remained firmly in control, even if following guidelines proposed by STEP. As each Mode III was accepted the syllabus was published, with the effect that almost all CSE boards had accepted some such scheme by 1978. The "aims" of the courses were quite varied, but clustered around the

development of responsible attitudes to and awareness of the implications of motor vehicle usage. It has been suggested that the whole thing "took off" once road safety educators managed to break away from the boring old goal of reducing accidents. Another milestone was reached in 1980, when the Southern Region Examination Board accepted "Road Traffic Studies" as the first Mode I examination in this field.

STEP has recently gained acceptability in another sphere. The 1981 Road Transport Act has made sweeping changes in motorcycle licensing and in particular has the stated intention of raising the incidence of motorcycle rider training to that of car driver instruction. There are, however, virtually no motorcycle driving schools. The burden of the training (which the industry believes will have to reach at least 75% within three years if compulsion is to be avoided) will now fall on the National Training Scheme — run by STEP, outside schools, with paid instructors, various awards and incentives. Thus, in eight years, STEP has assumed the mantle both of co-ordinating authority for Traffic Education in schools and chief public trainer for the driving test (of which it will, in fact, also conduct the first part).

### What will it achieve?

It is not the intention here unduly to dwell on or glorify STEP. It is, nevertheless, a valid example of an externally, commercially inspired scheme coinciding with appropriate changes within education and favourable attitudes amongst teachers and public. Whether it has an educational value beyond the field of accident prevention, and whether it will in fact make any contribution to accident prevention, (motorcycle casualties continue to rise) or achieve the transformation in driver attitudes at which it is aimed remains open to question. A number of recent studies have suggested that safety education has little effect on accident figures and that the only observable effect of training motorcyclists has been to reduce their accident liability

## VIEWPOINT

One of the "accidents" which teenagers are nowadays taught to avoid is the unwanted pregnancy. No one would deny the importance of this, yet it rarely leads to death or serious disablement. The fact is that the biggest single cause of death or serious injury to teenagers is the road accident — yet comparatively little is done to prevent this by educational means! Why is this?

Undoubtedly, part of the reason is curriculum pressure. Accidents are, mercifully, comparatively rare events — but then so are most other health-related problems, so this excuse holds little water. I believe that the main problem lies in the view of accident prevention held by many teachers. They do not see the subject as a part of the health-education process, and many of them hold it in low esteem. Too often it is linked to the occasional harangue at assembly or a talk by a visiting policeman or road safety officer. Good (or bad) as these might be, they are no substitute for a structured educational programme, which is the only sure way to success.

I look forward to the day when safety education will be seen as a necessary and vital element in the health-education programme of all secondary schools. To this end, ROSPA is actively promoting and producing educational material which will assist teachers in integrating safety education into the school curriculum. The inclusion of the topic in this issue of *Education and Health* is most welcome, and is, I hope, only a taste of things to come!

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simply because it reduces their inclination to use their machines. The same was found of the Cycling Proficiency Scheme.

However, the acceptance of elements of TE in the Schools' Council Health Education Project, begun 1977, and the Schools' Council Moral Education Project, the inauguration of the British Institute of Traffic Education Research (BITER!) with its graduate membership and conferences at Warwick University from 1977, and the negotiation taking place with the Open University concerning the inclusion of TE in teacher training will all have contributed to the morale of teachers involved in the work. There are certainly anxieties about the future of TE and, in particular, its place in the curriculum — should it return to the 1928

banner of Health Education? — and its vulnerability to cuts in expenditure. Even so, Road Safety will never seem so simple an idea again:

*When you cross the road by day or night,  
Beware of the dangers that loom in sight.  
Look to the left and look to the right  
Then you'll never, never get run over.*

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