

# Commercial curriculum development

Clyte Hampton

The writer describes the development of a secondary-school pack ('The Child, the Family and the Community'), and the in-service support that is also being offered by the publishers. "Perhaps the intervention of qualified private enterprise, in a time of reduced state financing and apparent indifference in the public sector, may be one answer in the field of personal relationships."

The interview with Richard Whitfield, printed in the May 1984 edition of *Education and Health*, would have made discouraging reading for my colleagues and me, had we then just been embarking on our first venture in having our material published. Professor Whitfield speaks of the disappointing lack of response to his report<sup>1</sup>, not only from Government and civil service, but also from LEAs and teachers, even from those who had been involved in his descriptive survey.

Fortunately, by May 1984 we were already receiving the response from LEAs, advisers, inspectors and individual teachers to our publicity and published secondary school pack<sup>2</sup>. An interesting picture was emerging. In numbers that overwhelmed us, they were asking for details of our training in methodology, and responding enthusiastically to the proposed practical workshops/seminars – as developed in SCHEP 5–12 and 13–18 dissemination – as well as to those we had by then already managed to provide (for example, in Hertfordshire, Somerset, Kent, and Newham).

The type of response reinforces one of the Whitfield Report's conclusions, namely that the most significant factor in the incorporation of 'preparation for parenthood' within the curriculum is the

individual teacher's aims, experience and skills. I had already learned the truth of that from my own work, first as a team member of the SCHEP 5–13 project<sup>3</sup>, and then as an advisory teacher in the Inner London Education Authority. There, my role, and that of my colleagues, was to help teachers recognize that new or better resources were not necessarily the answer to their problems. We needed to help them formulate clear teaching aims and develop their own skills, and to provide a back-up, by teaching alongside them in whichever phase of schooling they were serving.

## Reopening curiosity

I had also come to the firm conviction that children's sense of themselves as sexual beings begins at the beginning. This was based chiefly on these experiences, despite the paucity of research evidence (but see now Goldman and Goldman<sup>4</sup>), and in the face of some hostility to this idea from the academics, politicians and others. It is not something of which schools should only begin to take cognizance at the pubertal or secondary stage. However indifferent local authorities might appear to be, children themselves are keenly interested and aware of sexual matters, though this

interest may be disguised or suppressed in school or home situations. Teachers in secondary schools had long ago found that a topic such as *child development* could reopen curiosity and enthusiasm in that failed, bored group stigmatized as 'early leavers'. In my own work in primary schools (for example, in an Inner City Roman Catholic school), I found that there was a richness of experience and interest that these younger children could offer for development in curriculum terms that would, in the secondary sector, be classified as sex education, education for family life, personal relationships, or child development, but which was often not recognized at this primary stage.

Failure to tap this rich source at whatever stage of education — failure to educate alongside, and as part of, children's maturation — is like missing the 'great wave' when surfing. Knowing this, we have tried to use our experience of in-service and school sessions with many teachers, to write a pack which will help others. It encourages teachers to look at their own philosophy, to work out a set of practical aims, and to introduce individuals or groups to some workable classroom approaches which will create a momentum of curriculum development. We have been conscious of the need also to assist the school to *negotiate with its local community about what could and should be included in this area, and how it should be taught and by whom it should be taught*, as noted in the Whitfield interview.

### A broader programme

Following the Whitfield Report, we now have a report produced by a working party of the National Council of Women: *Sex Education: whose responsibility?* (1984). This also calls for a 'programme of personal and social development in the schools, including health education, sex education and education about parent-hood'. This broad programme, the report urges, 'should be an essential constituent of the curriculum for children of all ages and abilities and both sexes'. Both these reports, and others,<sup>5,6</sup> draw attention to

the need for teacher training in the field of health education.

This is more encouraging and timely, for following the response to our first pack we are working on a second, with a similar format, but intended — with some daring — to provide support for teachers and others working with children and young people between the ages of 5 and 18, with the intention of providing the kind of 'sequential programme in sex education and personal relationships' recommended by Goldman and Goldman. However, the NCW working party considers there is an urgent need for more commitment to the provision of in-service training. Most needs in the field of education are described as 'urgent'! However, it is quite evident from the number of occasions on which national reports have stressed the importance of sex education and education for family life, without securing any urgent response from any colour of government, that by and large there is not the public or other major pressure for specific arrangements. Nor has there been the investment of money that there has been in the Youth Training Scheme. It could be that government view accords with that position taken up in the Plowden Report,<sup>7</sup> that 'the proper people to answer children's questions are their parents'.

Without any such special programmes, in-service training will be left in the hands of the LEAs, supported by other agencies such as the Health Education Council, Family Planning Association, Health Education Officers, and so on. Ideally, such programmes should involve teachers and other professionals working in parallel fields, such as youth workers, social workers, and health visitors drawn from all cultures. It is to be hoped that some of these teachers will be able to co-ordinate the teaching in schools, involving parents where possible, and establishing long-term policies which then become part of the school's curriculum and which encourage staff training. Our own workshops are intended to follow these recommendations made again by both Whitfield and the NCW reports.

### 'The pupil in context'

Our techniques are based on the new 'professional development' used successfully in the dissemination of the SCHEP materials, but also combine the expertise of a number of professionals from various disciplines who run the workshops, and these are tailored to suit the needs of particular groups. Teachers who continue to regard what goes on in the classroom solely as something they organise and provide, often see in-service as a means of finding out about new resources which they hope will solve problems. What is taught centres on the resources. In the broad area of health education, resources are numerous and varied.<sup>8</sup> Our seminars concentrate on the teacher as his or her own best resource, together with the 'pupil in context', who is bringing a variety of experience and is already living a programme of personal and social development, planned or not! Pupils are actively engaged upon it, irrespective of what the school is, or is not, doing.

It is unwise to go on thinking of the teacher as the 'expert', choosing the moment to intervene with a sophisticated 'injection' of basic information. The teacher is now, and perhaps always should have been, heavily dependent on the development of good relationships and trust, within the changing profile of the school population. Only then can there be any influence on the intellectual, social, and emotional development of the pupils. In the curriculum field of personal relationships, the teacher is guided and assisted by the needs of the pupil.

Our pack, *The Child, The Family and The Community*, (and subsequent others), provides both pupil material and ideas for in-service and workshops. We have been made aware of the need for these by the number of replies we have received showing interest in them. We have also realized that many advisers in LEAs have now taken on responsibility for a widening range of curriculum areas, as well as general responsibility for groups of schools. In such circumstances they are finding it difficult to provide the specialist

training programmes needed, and they are bound to look for help and assistance from any agency that has credibility and experience.

Perhaps the intervention of qualified private enterprise, in a time of reduced state financing and apparent indifference in the public sector, may be one answer in the field of personal relationships. It may be thought of as comparable to a management course in industry, or to the many counselling courses that are available. I hope I have indicated that, provided we consult the latest research, are not at odds with the conclusions of major reports, and aim to support and develop the teacher's own initiative and not replace it, the commercial curriculum development team or unit is not a threat but is helping to 'keep the pot stirring'.

### References

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5. Central Advisory Council for Education, *Half Our Future*. (The Newsom Report.) HMSO, 1963.
6. *Coronary Heart Disease Prevention — Plans for Action*. (Conference report.) Pitman, 1984.
7. Central Advisory Council for Education, *Children and their Primary Schools*. (The Plowden Report.) HMSO, 1967.
8. *Health Education Index*. B. Edsall, 1983.