

Encyclopedia of Primary Education

Denis Hayes



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Contents

Foreword	vi
Acknowledgements	viii
List of entries	ix
Introduction	xv
Encyclopedia of primary education	1

Foreword

Contrary to the views of some self-styled ‘experts’ primary education is not just about corralling young children inside classrooms, sitting them down (on the carpet or behind desks) and telling them things which they have to remember. Whatever else this encyclopedia does, it stresses the fact that primary education is an extremely complex enterprise, whether considered in theoretical, practical, research or policy terms.

Scanning the entries alone should be enough to convince the skeptic that educating primary-age children is not just a matter of instructing children in clearly defined ‘basic skills’ or getting them to acquire the competences necessary to achieve particular levels of performance on tests. It is much more complicated and demanding than that. Like this encyclopedia, primary education is an amalgam of so many different elements – interpersonal, emotional, academic, physical, moral, even aesthetic and spiritual. It involves all sorts of thorny questions which are far from easy to answer and are themselves controversial: ‘What is education for? What is “basic” to primary education? What aspects of our culture merit being taught to the young? How should teachers and children treat one another?’ This encyclopedia is not afraid to raise such questions, even though it does not claim to provide definitive answers. Throughout it reinforces the powerful notion of primary education as a moral and emotional enterprise, as well as a practical activity – one in which, as the compiler says, ‘learning

is rooted in relationships, motivation and desire, as much as in methods, structure and equipment’.

Primary education both uses and teaches a multitude of concepts – not just technical ones such as ‘ability grouping’, ‘assessment for learning’ or the inevitable and omnipresent ‘phonics’ but more general, and arguably more fundamental, ones such as ‘nurturing’, ‘caring’, ‘relationships’ and ‘emotions’. A multitude of such ideas are discussed here along with the more mundane, but necessary, aspects of primary education such as ‘break time’, ‘desks’ and, of perennial concern, dealing with ‘naughtiness’!

A variety of other entries capture the realities of everyday teaching – its joys, frustrations, surprises and disappointments. What comes over clearly is the enormous interpersonal complexity involved when twenty-five or more human beings have to interact for five or six hours a day in the confined space called a classroom. Nor does the compiler neglect the uncomfortable dilemmas facing primary teachers – do they stress competition or cooperation, independence or conformity, present or future needs, process or content? Such dilemmas have to be resolved daily but their resolution can never be final or decisive. Readers seeking recipes for sure-fire educational success will not find them here (they cannot be written, let alone acted upon) but they will find insights and information to help them make informed professional decisions, whether they are

teachers in training (an unfortunate phrase!), qualified teachers undertaking further study, teaching assistants with aspirations to further their careers or governors trying to grapple with their multiplicity of responsibilities.

Thirty years ago so many books and articles not only failed to add to our understanding of teaching but actually obscured the dilemmas, uncertainties and difficulties which characterize it. There was a tidy, uncomplicated world where everything fitted neatly into place, where everyone agreed as to children's 'needs', where heads and teachers worked 'harmoniously' towards shared goals and where teachers intuitively 'knew what was best'. It was never so, it is not now – given the contentious nature of education, made more so by a welter of political initiatives in the last two decades. This encyclopedia illustrates how far writing on primary education has come since then as a result of the work of

those featured in the various entries, the work of those mentioned by name in the introduction (with one modest exception!), and not least the work of the compiler himself as he has introduced successive cohorts of students to the intricacies and mysteries of primary school teaching.

Writing in 1980 Professor Brian Simon commented that 'primary education has been in a state of almost continuous transition throughout its short history.' It will continue to evolve. As users of this encyclopedia you will play a part in this evolution but hopefully some of you will want to contribute to the future literature of primary education. Who knows? Your insights might well form part of a new encyclopedia of primary education to be published in 2030!

Colin Richards
Emeritus Professor
University of Cumbria and formerly HMI

Acknowledgements

Writing this book did not come solely out of my head and heart; it was created from countless interactions, conversations, fragments of information, attending conferences, hearing lectures, access to books, web sites and other sources of knowledge, as well as my own hard-won experience as a teacher and lecturer in education. It is not possible to thank everyone who has shaped my thinking and influenced my perspectives but I must make particular mention of colleagues on the executive committee of the Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE) and those with whom I've served on the Exeter Society for Curriculum Studies, not least its honorary secretary, Michael Golby. I have also been extremely fortunate to be influenced by a number of seminal thinkers, including Jennifer Nias, Peter Woods and Colin Richards.

I want to thank my many colleagues at the former Rolle School of Education in Exmouth, England, for their support, wisdom, insights and willingness to share their understanding of key education issues with me. In particular, I give my unreserved thanks

to Ken Lawson and Stephen Howarth for the considerable amount of time that they have spent over the years in discussing education matters and showing me the importance of valuing the person ahead of the achievement. In my role as education tutor and supervisor of trainee teachers on school placement I have gained immeasurably from speaking with hundreds of teachers about the skills, practicalities and emotions attached to the job of teaching. I offer my sincere gratitude to them all for demonstrating such commitment to children and reaffirming my belief that being a primary educator is as much a calling as a profession.

Finally, thanks to my family and friends who have allowed me the space and time to be immersed in writing this book. One of the costs of being an author is the need to become something of a recluse, especially as the deadline for submitting the manuscript approaches. Inevitably, leisure time dissolves and relationships temporarily suffer. Their patience has been greatly appreciated. I trust that I have amply repaid their forbearance.

List of entries

Ability	Bloom's Taxonomy
Ability groups	Body language
Absenteeism	Boredom
Accelerated learning	Boys
Achievement	Boys' education
Act of worship	Brain function
Active learning	Break time
Admissions code	Breakfast clubs
Adult behaviour	Bruner, Jerome
Affective dimension of teaching	Bullying
Aims of education	Busyness
Alexander, Robin	
Alphabet	Calculators
Animals in school	Capital letters
Annual meeting	Caretakers
Answering questions	Caring teachers
Assessing Pupils' Progress	Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
Arithmetic	Child advocates
Art and design	Child-centred education
Arts (the)	Child development theories
Assembly	Child welfare
Assessing children's learning	Children
Assessment for learning	Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy
Assessment of learning	2020
Assessment types	Children's questions
Asthma	Children and testing
Attendance	Circle-time
Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder	Citizenship
Attention span	Class control
Auditory learners	Class management
Autism	Clegg, Alec
Awe and wonder	Closed questions
	Coaching
Basic skills	Code of Practice
BECTA	Cognitive mapping
Behaviour	Collaboration in learning
Beliefs, teaching and learning	Collaboration (staff)
Bereavement	Collaborative problem solving

LIST OF ENTRIES

Collective worship	Dyslexia
Collegiality	Dyspraxia
Communication	
Community cohesion	Early years
Community schools	Early years teachers
Compassion	Educated child
Competition	Educational visits
Compliance	Effectiveness
Comprehension	Einstein, Albert
Computer suite	Elementary education
Computers in learning	Eleven-plus
Concepts	Emotional intelligence
Concluding lessons	Emotional literacy
Constructivism	Emotions of learning
Consumables	Emotions of new teachers
Context	Emotions of teaching
Core subjects	Encouragement and praise
Courage (children)	English
Courage (teachers)	English as an additional language
Creative writing	Enjoyment
Creativity	Enquiry
Cross-curriculum	Environmental education
Curiosity	Environmental studies
Curriculum	Environment studies (Scotland)
Curriculum flows	EPPE 3–11 project
Curriculum history	Equal opportunities
Curriculum leadership	Every Child Matters
Curriculum plans	Excellence and Enjoyment
	Excellence in Cities
Dance	Excellent teachers
Daydreaming	Exercise books
Debate	Expectations
Debating	Extended schools
Decision-making	External agencies
Deep learning	Extra-curricular activities
Design and technology	
Desks	Failure
Detention	Fairness
Dewey, John	Faith schools
Dialogue	Falling out
Dialogue for learning	Family and culture
Didactic teaching	Fantasy
Differentiation	Feedback
Dilemmas for teachers	Festivals
Disability	First and middle schools
Discipline	Forest schools
Discovery learning	Formative assessment
Discussion	Foundation schools
Displays	Foundation Stage
Distractible children	Foundation Stage assessment
Drama	Foundation Stage Profile
Dress code	Foundation subjects

Free play	Initial Teaching Alphabet
Friendship	Inspections
Friendship benches	Instruction
Fulfilment in teaching	Integrated day
	Integrated learning
Gender (pupils)	Intelligence
Gender (staff)	Intelligence Quotient
General Teaching Councils	Interaction
General Teaching Council (England)	Interactive teaching
General Teaching Council (Northern Ireland)	Interactive whiteboard
General Teaching Council (Scotland)	Intervention
General Teaching Council (Wales)	Invisible children
Geography	Isaacs, Susan
Gifted and talented	
Girls	Janitors
Good teachers	Job interviews
Governing body	Job interviews (leadership posts)
Governor shortage	Job satisfaction
Governors	Juniors
Group work	
	Key stages
Hadow Reports	Kinaesthetic learning
Handwriting	Knowledge
Happiness	
Head teacher	Large space activities
Health and safety	Learned helplessness
Health and safety (adults)	Learning
Health and safety (computers)	Learning and teacher influence
Health and safety (physical activity)	Learning climate
Health and safety (science)	Learning context
Healthy eating	Learning difficulties (origins)
Healthy Schools	Learning objectives
Hearing impairment	Learning outcomes
Higher-level teaching assistants	Learning styles
History	Learning styles and teaching approach
Hobbies and interests	Learning support assistants
Home background and learning	Left-handedness
Home education	Lesson continuity
Home-school	Lesson management
Home-school agreement	Lesson organisation
Home schooling	Lesson pace
Homework	Lesson planning
Humanities	Lesson planning (joint)
Humour	Lesson plans
	Lesson review
Imagination	Lessons
Inclusion	Life Education
Individual education plan	Life skills
Induction of pupils	Listening
Induction of new teachers	Literacy
Infants	Literacy hour
Information technology	Literacy Strategy (the National)

LIST OF ENTRIES

Looked-after children	Open questions
Lower case letters	Oracy
	Organising for learning
Maintained schools	Out of class
Marshall, Sybil	Outdoor education
Mathematics	
Mathematics Primary Framework	P scales
Mealtime assistants	Paired work
Medication	Parent communication
Memory and memorising	Parental involvement
Meta-learning	Parents supporting learning
Metacognition	Parents' evening
Middle schools	Passion in teaching
Minority ethnic children	Pedagogical framing
Minority ethnic group underachievement	Pedagogy
Misbehaviour	Peer coaching and review
Mistakes and misconceptions	Peer mediation
Mixed ability teaching	Peer mentoring
Modelling behaviour	Personal education plan
Modern foreign languages	Personal intelligence
Monitoring	Personal, social and health education
Moral choices	Personalised curriculum
Moral development	Personalised learning
Morality	Philosophy for children
Motivation for learning	Phonics
Motivation for teaching	Physical comfort
Motor skills	Physical education
Multiple intelligences	Piaget, Jean
Multiplication tables	Planning
Music	Play
	Play (older pupils)
National Curriculum	Playfulness
National Governors' Association	Playground
National Primary Strategy	Playtime
Nature-nurture	Plenary
Nature study	Plowden Report
Naughtiness	Poetry
New entrants	Political involvement
Non-core subjects	PPA time
Non-verbal communication	Praise
Numeracy	Primary National Strategy
Numeracy hour	Primary reviews
Numeracy Strategy (National)	Primary school
Nursery school	Private education
Nurturing children	Probationary year
Nurturing adults	Problem solving
	Professional development
Observing children	Professionalism
Office for Standards in Education	Progression in learning
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills	Project work
Open evening	Punishment
	Pupil numbers

Pupil personality and attainment	Shared reading
Pupil perspectives	Shared writing
Pupil questions	Singing
	Skills
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	Slow learners
Questions and questioning	Social constructivism
	Social development
Reading	Social and emotional aspects of learning
Reading aloud	Social learning
Reading debate	Spatial-temporal reasoning
Reading records	Speaking and listening
Reading Recovery	Special educational needs
Reading schemes	Special events
Real books	Special school
Reception	Speculative questions
Recess	Speech
Recording	Speech clarity
Reflection	Speed of work
Reggio Emilia	Spelling
Relationships	Spiral curriculum
Religious education	Spiritual education
Reporting	Sport
Reputation (teachers)	Sports days
Restorative justice	Staffroom
Retention in learning	Starting school
Rewards	Statemending
Rising fives	Steiner Waldorf
Rose Curriculum Review 2009	Stepping stones
Rote learning	Stereotyping
Rules	Stories
	Subject leadership
Sanctions	Success
SATs	Suitability for teaching
Schemes of work	Summative assessment
Schiller, Christian	Superficial learning
School attendance	Sure Start
School climate	Suspension and exclusion
School councils	Synthetic phonics
School library	
School life	Tactile learners
School secretary	Talk
Schoolyard	Target setting (adults)
Science	Target setting (children)
Scottish Curriculum	Taylor Report
Scottish Curriculum Framework 3–5	Teacher behaviour
Seating arrangements	Teacher Learning Academy
Security	Teacher–pupil interaction
Self-esteem (children)	Teacher retention
Self-esteem (teachers)	Teacher role
SENCO	Teachers' beliefs
Setting and streaming	Teaching approach
Sex education	Teaching assistants

LIST OF ENTRIES

Teaching methods	United Kingdom Literacy Association
Teaching profession	
Teaching skills	Value-added
Teaching stance	Values
Teaching strategy	Visual aids
Teamwork	Visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning
Television	Visual learners
Tests and testing	Voice care
Textbooks	Voluntary aided schools
Thematic learning	Voluntary controlled schools
Think-pair-share	
Thinking	Warnock Report
Thinking skills	Welcoming environment
Three Wise Men	Wet playtime
Time allocation in lessons	Whitehead, Chris
Time management	William Tyndale controversy
Time-on-task	Workforce reforms
Time-out	Wragg, Ted
Topic work	Writing
Trainee teachers	Writing frames
Transitions	
Trust	
	Yearly class systems (UK)
Understanding	
Uniform	Zone of proximal development

Introduction

I consider it a privilege to have been asked to compile this encyclopedia of primary education and enjoyed immensely the formidable but stimulating task of putting together such a volume. The concept of primary education is wide-ranging and far from easy to pin down, but I've done my best to be faithful to the topic and not be tempted to deviate from the path and indulge my interest in related education matters. One of the challenges of writing an encyclopedia is to provide sufficient information such that each entry can 'stand alone' yet avoid repetition. In doing so I have had to make certain assumptions about the reader's knowledge while adding short explanations and definitions where I consider it to be necessary for clarity. The majority of entries are cross-referenced to provide an indication of where else it is worth looking for information relating to the principal topic.

One of the key factors when writing an encyclopedia is not only deciding which topics to include and exclude but also how much detail to provide for each one. Some subjects are so vast that whole books have been written about them (e.g. bullying); others may seem less important but have great significance for educating and nurturing our children (e.g. friendships). In addition, there is the challenge that every writer faces in keeping pace with current legislation and the latest 'big idea' in education that is often superseded by new initiatives and requirements before the book is even published. Elections sometimes result in a reshaping of the political landscape and a

new government or legislature might take a different direction in its education policy from its predecessor, revise old systems and modify existing ones. To offset the impact of these inevitable policy changes, I have avoided focusing too much on legislative matters and tried as far as possible to concentrate on the educational issues that they represent.

I have included some information about influential figures in primary education, past and present. The selection of such 'giants' in the field has been a particularly difficult task, especially deciding who to include from those still living. I could easily have filled the book with details about the impact that many committed and dedicated people have made in the field of education – and primary education in particular – some of whom I've been privileged to meet. The problem is in knowing where to start and where to end such a list. In truth, many of the most powerful education thinkers are found among 'ordinary' primary school teachers and head teachers, who may never have their names in lights but have been a positive influence on thousands of children and practitioners down the years. These are the real heroes, selflessly working for the good of children and trying desperately to maintain their principles in an increasingly politicised system. There are, of course, many politicians who have also genuinely striven for the good of the child but the rapid turnover of government ministers makes it hard to distinguish commitment from ambition.

A few of the entries may surprise you, not least that of Albert Einstein – though his inclusion probably reveals my predilection for people who turn away from the trappings of fame and choose to devote their efforts for the common good. Some of the influential figures operated outside the strict parameters of primary education but have proved to be vastly influential; I refer here to notables such as Bruner, Piaget and Dewey. I have also devoted a number of pages to seminal historical events, such as the Hadow Reports during the early years of the twentieth century and the Plowden Report of 1967, plus a mention of the William Tyndale Junior School debacle in 1974, all of which triggered a rethink of education policy and practice.

Much of the information provided in this encyclopedia is ‘generic’ in that it pertains to primary education generally; however, some entries are rooted in the education system that operates specifically in the individual countries of England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the USA. The political shape of the United Kingdom, with various powers devolved to constituent countries, has made the task of referring to ‘the government’ much more complicated, as it may refer to the whole of the UK or (increasingly) to an initiative or perspective unique to a particular country (e.g. Scotland). One of the most obvious examples of countries in the UK adopting different approaches to an issue is with respect to testing, where arguments about the value of national curriculum tests (‘SATs’) has split and riven opinion in England but has largely been resolved elsewhere. In this example, as in many others, the *issues* surrounding testing are endemic but the *practice* varies from place to place.

Like every author, I have tried extremely hard to give credit for every source of information that I have used; in such a complex undertaking, however, there are bound to be occasions when I have inadvertently failed to do so. For any such errors I offer my apologies in advance and welcome clarification. I have freely drawn information from my previous

books, notably *Foundations of Primary Teaching* (David Fulton Publishers) and *Primary Education: The key concepts* (Routledge). I must express my indebtedness to general web sites such as Wikipedia for bits of information and links to various sources of data. I have also discovered other snippets of information in long-forgotten files on my computer but their origins remain a mystery.

I agreed to write this encyclopedia because I wanted it to be useful to a wide range of people interested in primary education. Of course the danger of trying to reach such a diverse audience is to end up pleasing no one! However, I trust that I have avoided such a fate and that teachers in training, qualified teachers undertaking further study, teaching assistants with aspirations to further their careers, parents, governors and academics will all find material of value.

Most significantly for me, writing this encyclopedia has reminded me of two fundamental truths: first, how much knowledge I have accumulated about primary education down the years; second, the humbling realisation of how much I still have to learn. In using the book, I hope and anticipate that you will experience something similar.

Primary education

The phrase ‘primary education’ has been in use since the 1930s to describe the formal phase of schooling for pupils (‘students’, USA) aged between five and eleven years in the United Kingdom; however, the process of educating children takes place from the moment a child enters the world and even, some would argue, prior to birth. Parents are therefore the first educators; teachers and other professionals contribute to the process and help to structure learning within an educational setting but cannot hope to do the job unaided. Though schools can provide equipment and resources that few parents could ever afford, learning is rooted in relationships, motivation and desire, as much as in methods, structure and equipment.

There have been many changes in the field of primary education over recent years. In fact ever since the incoming British prime minister, Tony Blair, announced as part of the Labour Party's 1997 election manifesto that 'education, education, education' lay at the heart of national policy, huge sums have been invested in the sector. Early years provision for children aged 3–5 years has been expanded considerably; every primary school has teaching assistants to support qualified teachers, some of whom (appointed as higher level teaching assistants) take an active role in supervising and teaching groups of children and whole classes. This particular innovation has been controversial to say the least, viewed by sceptics as a cheap way to provide substitute ('supply') teachers; viewed by supporters as a way to utilise expertise and release teachers to plan lessons and assess pupil progress.

The introduction of government guidelines for literacy and numeracy in the late 1990s – viewed by the vast majority of teachers as requirements – and changes in the structure of lessons as a means of improving standards in English and mathematics, became so embedded in practice across the curriculum that concerns were raised about the repetitious nature of pupils' learning experiences and the accompanying loss of creativity for both teachers and children. A variety of reports and studies were produced in the first decade of the twenty-first century, warning the government of low morale among staff and tedium among pupils (or 'learners' as official documentation increasingly began to describe them), resulting in a series of initiatives to encourage greater flexibility and innovative teaching and learning. The response among primary teachers was mixed: on the one hand, they were pleased, if somewhat suspicious, about the relaxation of external impositions; on the other hand they lacked confidence about changing their teaching approach for fear of adversely affecting test results. In fact, it is fair to say that arguments about the relevance and helpfulness of national tests in literacy, numeracy

and science for primary aged children have been a political conundrum and a bane for government. The listing of national test results, school by school in England, has placed considerable pressure on everyone involved in education, and at the time of writing (2009) there appears to be a strong move towards replacing the tests (popularly known as SATs) with a more flexible form of assessment, thereby following the example set by Scotland and Wales.

Other important policy decisions include a renewed emphasis on considering the 'whole child', rather than separating education from welfare. The Every Child Matters initiative has been particularly influential, as the education service provided through local authorities in England have combined forces with social services to try and ensure that children are protected from harm, as well as given every opportunity to succeed academically. Other political initiatives involve additional information for parents about their children's progress, extended school provision beyond the normal working day and a huge expansion in information technology.

Despite the plethora of initiatives and tightening of political control, the heart of primary education remains largely unchanged. In particular, the crucial relationship between teacher and taught; the camaraderie between the many adults working in school on behalf of the children; the dynamic links between home and school; the daily routines; and the thousands of interactions and conversations that take place between adults and children. I try to capture the essence of the intricacies of school life in my book, *Foundations of Primary Education* by focusing on two children's experiences:

Both Monica and Charley enter the school. Both remove their coats, chat to classmates, walk towards the classroom door. They notice teachers, assistants, parents, pictures on walls and familiar objects. Their noses tingle at the intoxicating mixed scents of floor polish, electronic equipment, damp

clothing and toilets that greet them. A random set of sounds impinges on their consciousness: chattering voices, clatter and thud of feet, doors creaking and adults talking animatedly. Their eyes light up as they enter the classroom and glimpse the familiar, reassuring sights. They sit down on a carpet or line up at a door, answer to their names, respond to a request or command. The familiar sounds of teachers' voices issue instructions; the children are sensitive to tonal patterns and intonation. They recognise when teachers are cross, sad, bored or pretending, and modify their behaviour accordingly.

The day begins and the bum-numbing effects of registration and, perhaps, class assembly are replaced by work sessions and activities. Playtimes and mealtimes provide relief from their toil. The children disappear into the frantic world of games, chasing, arguments, intensive relationships, erratic behaviours and unpredictable weather. They wonder about the paradoxes of school life: why teachers insist that they wear a coat when it isn't cold or enthuse that going outside is good for them when it is obviously miserable and damp. They see the teachers disappearing into the warmth and security of the staffroom and catch the odd snippet of conversation, wave of laughter, smell of coffee.

As each playtime ends, a few children hanker for a turn to knock on the staffroom door, return a teacup and inform the disappointed teachers that Miss Jenkins says that it's in-time (an expression used only in primary schools). The day continues. A hall-time offers chance for some fun – if teacher allows. Laces are tied, buttons fumbled and socks tugged. The end-of-afternoon story or sharing draws children and teacher together, and soon home-time heralds the end of another school day. Coats are pulled off pegs or scrambled for on the floor; odd gloves mysteriously disappear and reappear; accusations over property and other disputes reverberate down the corridors. Mothers, fathers and grandparents are there to pick up the children, ask brightly about the day, exchange a word with the teacher, flash a smiling 'thank you' and head for home.

Pushchairs and a stream of young mums line up across the front of the building. Parents check lunch boxes, stare at the latest school letter and herd their little flocks towards the exit. Monica skips off happily, keen to tell mother about her successes and show off her new reading book. Charley edges out of the room, casting a hopeful glance at the teacher, before moving away to pick up her younger brothers and sisters, and usher them along the pavements to the local shop to buy them a snack for tea. The teacher gives Charley a reassuring smile and wink: *Take care, Charley. See you tomorrow.* Charley can hardly wait for tomorrow to come.

(pp. 7–8)

A good primary education does not guarantee happiness or success in life but it offers a chance for the Charleys and Monicas of this world to make the best of their abilities and opportunities. Adults in school can only do so much; legislation can only provide a framework and support system; policies can only give an overview; the real hope for children lies in providing the right conditions for learning: (1) knowing they are loved and appreciated; (2) being set a sound moral example by adults; (3) given clear guidelines for behaviour and conduct; (4) provided with knowledge and information; (5) encouraged and trusted; (6) allowed to enjoy learning; (7) shown how knowledge is relevant to life; and (8) led into deep rather than superficial forms of learning.

There are different perspectives on what constitutes an educated child, but a shared belief is that education consists of more than passing examinations and being 'top dog'. It is a continuous life-changing experience that has the potential to benefit all humankind. As such, the affective dimension of education – touching the emotions – is more significant than most politicians and policy-makers seem to appreciate, so you will discover that in addition to the extensive amounts of information in this encyclopedia, the human and personal elements are liberally threaded throughout its pages.

A

ABILITY

See also: creativity, gifted and talented, intelligence, Intelligence Quotient, multiple intelligences, slow learners

Definitions of ‘ability’ that appear on the Internet include, from Wordnet: ‘the quality of being able to perform; a quality that permits or facilitates achievement or accomplishment’ and ‘possession of the qualities (especially mental qualities) required to do something or get something done’. The ‘Wiktionary’ definition expands the definition somewhat: ‘the quality or state of being able; power to perform, whether physical, moral, intellectual, conventional, or legal; capacity; skill or competence in doing; sufficiency of strength, skill, resources ...’. These wide-ranging definitions contrast rather sharply with the use of ability in educational phrases such as ‘high ability’ and ‘low ability’ that signify, in effect, whether or not a child is capable of completing academic work successfully. When educators speak of an ‘able child’, more often than not they mean that the pupil is fully literate and numerate. When teachers refer to a pupil as ‘very able’, it is likely that they mean, in the vernacular, that the child is ‘top of the class’ in that subject (e.g. high ability in mathematics). Pupils at the other end of the spectrum (i.e. not very able) are often spoken of as being ‘slow learners’.

Interpretation of ability is significant in educational settings, especially schools, because

it is often used to organise children into different groups for learning, especially in English and mathematics. In doing so, teachers have to be aware that able pupils do not necessarily possess the full range of fundamental skills that may be assumed. For instance, Dean (1998) notes that boys, in particular, struggle to keep pace with the demands of writing and sometimes underachieve. Some very able pupils may exhibit odd characteristics that mark them out as being atypical and invite teasing from other children. Others will excel in every curriculum area (including sports) and thereby attract excessive admiration from their peers. Howe (1990) warns that although able children may not react in expected ways, close parental involvement, coupled with high expectations, offers the best way forward.

With the recent resurgence of interest in exceptionally capable pupils, the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ have tended to be used in preference to the descriptor ‘very able’ to signal that children are in the top 5 per cent of the school population, as measured in formal tests. Indeed, some authors (e.g. Bates and Munday 2005) conflate concepts of ability, giftedness and talent into a single phrase; thus, ‘able, gifted and talented’. Educators often make the point that ‘ability’ should be distinguished from ‘capability’, which indicates that a child may possess an aptitude that can be developed but is not yet fully formed. Whereas the term ‘ability’ tends to be used as an intrinsic ‘got it’ or ‘not got it’ (rather like