
EDITORIAL

'Accountability' has become the educational touchstone of the 1990s. Some might say that, in the absence of new ideas, we have resorted to disparaging past successes: in place of innovation we have testing and appraising, research ratings, quality assurance, and league tables. Often, it seems, we are so occupied with accountability that we have no time in which to do anything worth being accountable for!

Renewal in education does not mean abandoning values: its characteristic is the search for more effective ways of achieving what we all want for our schools – the best. The 1970s were not years of trendy irresponsibility, as politicians now would have us believe: it was a time of high ideals. In reality there can be no innovation without conservation. Arid accountability is not the answer. True professionals are concerned to maintain high standards, but they also carry their vision with them.

Idealism and originality were never more needed in education than they are now when, increasingly it seems, we are inclined to accept direction from the centre. There is no such thing as a recipe for good education; any more than there could be for a musical composition. A prescribed curriculum has to be personalised and interpreted: therefore we should see it as a programme for elaboration; a challenge to every teacher's imagination.

In this issue Pat Gane looks at the possibilities for such interpretation, as she envisages stronger links between the National Curriculum and instrumental teaching. Carol Richards and Roy Killen ask some pertinent questions about teachers' professionalism: notably, what do those entering teaching think they are doing? What preconceptions (prejudices?) influence them in their lesson planning? And what do we learn from this about the kind of teacher education we should be providing? Janet Mills examines the quality of teaching and what might reasonably be expected from the system. On the basis of some thought-provoking glimpses of what can happen when secondary teachers and pupils meet for the first time she discusses the potential for improvements in music education at that crucial stage of transfer from the primary school.

Christopher Naughton and Trevor Wiggins explore the theme from wider cultural perspectives; surveying alternative views of learning in music, the nature of expertise, the values that are being inculcated, and the ways in which understanding and progression may be ensured.

Finally, Desmond Hunter and Michael Russ, in their report of a project at the University of Ulster, offer us fresh thinking on assessment: specifically, encouraging students to take some of the responsibility for evaluating the musical performances of their peers. Perhaps, it is in such shared staff-student enterprise that we find a route towards sensible accountability? Looking at new possibilities whilst, at the same time, learning to have a proper regard for excellence, never did anyone any harm.

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