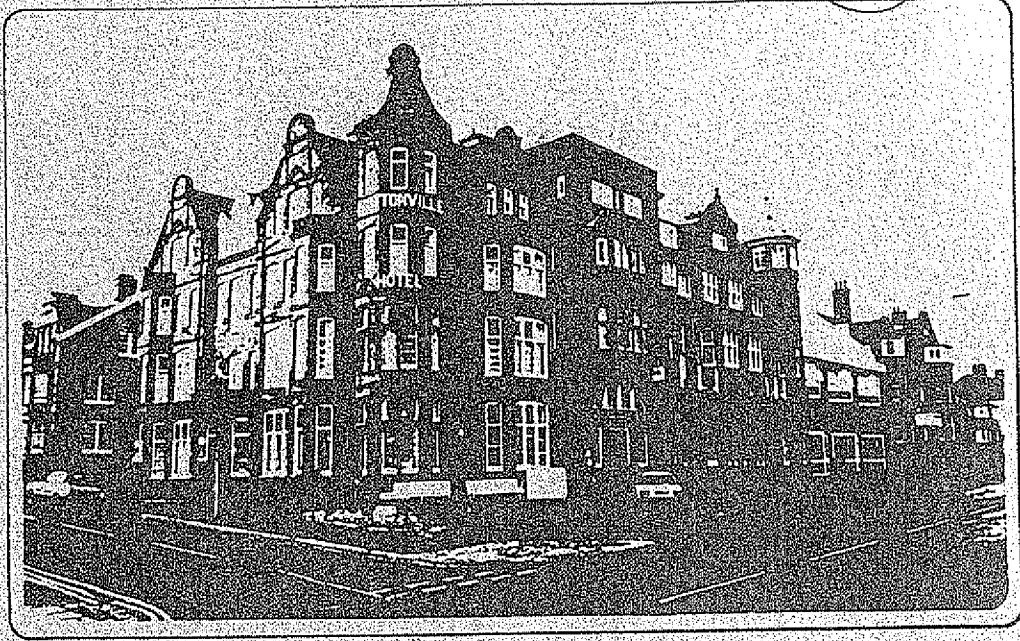


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RECORD

of

THE FIRST C.A.R.E. CONFERENCE
THE IDES OF MARCH

to consider

'THE STATE OF EDUCATION TODAY'

The Cliftonville Hotel
Cromer
Norfolk

March 1987

Centre for Applied Research in Education
School of Education
University of East Anglia
Norwich NR4 7TJ

THE IDES OF MARCH CONFERENCE RECORD

"Welcome to Cromer and the Cliftonville. We hope you feel, like we do, that this is a suitable context for a CARE Conference and will find the weekend conducive to comfort but intellectually and physically bracing! We can almost guarantee the last if you venture to step outside - the second is up to you, while the hotel staff hope to ensure the comfort."

So the Conference Programme set the welcome to the weekend. Only you, as reader, can tell whether the weekend fulfilled any of these specific aspirations it outlines. This record may serve to revive a few ideas that struck you at the time, or may introduce you to some you missed. We have tried to reflect the structure, events and issues of the programme and participants in this record so editorial comments are limited to process!

<u>Friday 13 March</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Place</u>
9.30pm	Opening Address Barry MacDonald Director of CARE	Lounge

'THE STATE OF EDUCATION TODAY'

Barry MacDonald

So rapid is the pace and so high the profile of educational reform that perhaps the easiest way to get an overall sense of what is happening is simply to listen to the news. Here, for example, are a few items you may have missed from the latest bulletin.

Addressing the Church of England synod today, the Secretary of State for Education, Mr Kenneth Baker, assured the assembled churchmen that his recent appointment as God was purely temporary, until more satisfactory secular arrangements could be made. Accepting the reassurance, Archbishop Runcie said he hoped the appointment would not get in the way of Mr Baker's career.

The Home Secretary denied today that the new prison building programme was in any way connected to plans for teacher appraisal. Scorning the suggestion, Mr Hurd pointed out that the design of the prisons could not meet the essential requirement of separate accommodation for members of different teacher unions. Confirming this, Mr Baker added that he saw no need to change the existing provision, whereby those who fail the appraisal are offered posts in teacher training.

Lord Hanson, Chairman of Hanson Trust, sponsors of one of the new city technology schools, said today that they would fight a takeover bid for the school from Playboy Enterprises, whose spokesman claimed yesterday that the service industries held the key to the future prospects of young people. Addressing a conference of GCSE candidates in insider trading, Lord Hanson called for market restraint. The continuity of education in the schools would be severely undermined by constant requirements to change the advertising on school uniforms. Answering anxious questions from the candidates about the forthcoming examination, Lord Hanson assured the students that the five times a night performance criterion was only a guide.

Officials from the DES and DHSS reached agreement today on plans to reconcile Mr Baker's opposition to sex education with Mr Fowler's insistence that the AIDS campaign be extended to the schools. Guidelines for teachers will ensure that all children are warned to avoid contact with gooseberry bushes and low flying storks. The programme will be co-ordinated nationally by Mr Baker's nanny. Opposition reactions to the announcement poured ridicule on the initiative. Giles Radice, for the Labour Party, said it took no account of the environment of inner-city children, while a spokesman for the Alliance said they would continue to argue the case for the French defence system.

Pressed by reporters today about growing university concern about the brain drain, Mr Baker said it was a lot of fuss about nothing. It had been, he added, a very minor operation from which he was now fully recovered.

The Government's Youth Training Programme is once again to be extended. From next month unemployed pensioners will be eligible. Announcing the new initiative in a surprise appearance on the television programme, *The Price is Right*, an excited Lord Young said it represented another step forward in the regeneration of the economy. The scheme is entirely voluntary, he added. Those who volunteered

will be allowed to retain their pensions. Lord Young told the equally excited compere that the scheme would combine retraining with the export drive. It would be located in the Falklands, where the pensioners would be trained in mine detection, and be given every opportunity to earn their return fare.

Lord Young also featured in the results of a public opinion poll published today. A substantial minority of respondents named him when asked to identify the Secretary of State for Education. Mr Baker, however, dismissed the poll on the grounds of bias, pointing out that DES officials had been grossly over-represented in the sample, and that in any case the majority of respondents who replied, "God knows" almost certainly had him in mind. An excited Lord Young was unavailable for comment.

The opinion poll also sampled public views on the issue of competitive games. An overwhelming majority said that it was a reasonable description of TVEI.

Regional news now, and the University of East Anglia is pressing on with the export of academic services. The Vice-Chancellor announced today that all New Blood posts had been sold to the University of Transylvania. However, the Dean of the School of Education, which faces a thirty per cent cut in resources, denied that his recent visit to Beirut was related to the problem of disposing of redundant staff.

Sub-postmasters throughout the Eastern Region staged an angry protest this afternoon in Norwich at plans for them to take over the functions of the Local Education Authorities. A spokesman said they had quite enough London mail to deliver already without the additional burden of Whitehall circulars.

The Humanities Curriculum Project, whose team formed the nucleus of UEA's Centre for Applied Research in Education, is to be revived under contract to the Ministry of Defence. Professor John Elliott, who will direct the project, said it would concentrate upon revamping the War and Society theme, which is to replace Peace Studies in the new national curriculum. The materials, he added, would be derived from a contemporary case study of conflict, concentrating largely upon relationships between CARE and the Cambridge Institute.

And finally, news has just come in that the rooftop protest by teachers at one Norfolk school ended late this afternoon when the governors promised to look into their grievances. However, there is to be no reprieve for the ring-leader of the protest, who has repeatedly told reporters that there is no education going on in the school. He is to be charged with breaching the Officials Secrets Act.

That's the state of education today, and I mean 'state' in both senses. And it reflects, as education always does, the state of society. And what kind of state is that? It's a state of butter mountains and wine lakes in which old people can end their lives with a stomach full of cardboard, a state in which popular capitalism has vastly extended the franchise of greed, and turned the fearful upon each other, a state in which the politics of competitive advantage are exploited to divide and rule. Divide the country, divide the labour force, divide the schools and the universities, which provide the most pathetic spectacle of all. The university sector is one of the most powerful bargaining groups in our society, and the government has gone through it like a bullet through a soufflé.

And what is even more dismaying, such politics continue to be electorally successful. It is no use looking to a general election for a policy reverse. One looks in vain anyway at other party manifestos for persuasive evidence of a counter culture backed by resource commitment, for persuasive evidence that the educational policies from which we now reel would be radically changed under a different government. That is not surprising, and not just because the success of this government has cowed the opposition into compliance with the major tenets of the restructuring that is underway, but because it is evident that what we are seeing now in a rapidly accelerating and maturing instantiation, is a culmination of post-war trends in the control and management of education that cross party lines, and indeed national boundaries. We are faced with the enormous task of opposing not just this government, but quite possibly any conceivable government to the end of the century. We have to oppose in some important respects a consensual political threat to quality and standards in the institutionalised educational experience of children and young adults.

What are these post-war trends? Well, we know what they are, we have labels for them. Technocratic centralism, educational engineering, bureaucratisation, managerialism, technicism, and all the other 'isms' of the machine metaphor that is increasingly invoked to justify the new, and palpably anti-educational structures now rising from the ashes of our community aspirations. Inadequate though they admittedly were, the mediating institutions and relationships of the school sector are being systematically dismantled as the State changes from orchestrator to sequestrator of its educational assets, from indirect mediated control to direct customer/contract.

And these efforts no longer lack the sophistication that was absent from their prototypes in the early seventies. What we now see taking shape, through categorical funding combined with prescriptive accountability, is the centralisation of control interlocked with the decentralisation of blame. We see forms of evaluation and assessment at the local, institutional and individual levels that are a parody of the aspirations towards self-monitoring and professional self-development that we ourselves have conceptualised and cultivated since the sixties, a parody because they are divorced from the professional determination of ends.

Who talks now about schooling in terms of an internal logic of client development, of emancipating the young from submission to the interests of others? Not now, not with the tumbrils of central accountability rumbling already outside the classroom window, and soon outside the classroom door. A utilitarian mythology has replaced a libertarian one in the curriculum. It is of course essential to remind ourselves that both are mythologies, that the current economic nonsense in which the seizure of schooling is clothed is no more nonsensical than any pretence that the experience of schooling that preceded it did not degrade in significant ways most of us who were subjected to it. But different mythologies support and nourish different visions of what schooling might become, and that is of fundamental importance. It is our hope that schooling could become a truly educational experience, and our task to secure the conditions under which such a hope might be feasible.

I believe that through the traditions of collaborative enquiry and development which we have been pursuing over the last twenty years we have begun the task of building a platform of knowledge and understanding of schools and their processes upon which such an aim could be launched, given administrative resource frameworks designed to foster it. But our movement has been overtaken by events to an extent not fully anticipated by any of us. We are now apparently helpless witnesses to the deprofessionalisation of the key institutions and personnel of schooling, and the destruction of educational discourse. And to such an extent that, with policies that know the cost of everything and the value of nothing, we cannot even be sure whether the government is moving into schooling or moving out, jettisoning responsibility for expensive institutions, restricting their functions to basic services, and offering the reins of compliance to individual school governing boards under their new, beefed-up powers.

Is that the logical outcome of current restructuring? We do not know, but we are right to fear. It is certainly a reasonable analysis of government-backed moves to community-controlled schooling in some Australian states. And, while we are on the topic of international comparisons, which Mr Baker has lately been invoking in support of central curriculum control, we should take note of the effects of technocratic centrism on the American public school system, which is being deserted in droves by those who can afford to go private. And Japan, continually held up by our political and industrial leaders as a model of scholastic achievement to which we should aspire. Should we also aspire, along with the good mathematics grades, to match Japan's adolescent suicide rate, the highest in the world. Are we prepared to pay their price of productivity, who incarcerate thirty times more of their population in mental hospitals?

O.K., I'm engaging in simplistic cause and effect, but only to provide counter-examples of the kind of simplistic rhetoric that increasingly passes unchallenged because we are all too busy fighting our own corners, fighting each other, defending our economies to the neglect of our obligations. And that is a major issue for this conference this weekend. But, just to continue for a moment with the international scene, we might ask why is it that Japan itself is looking for ways to promote creativity in its schools, why so many countries with equally pressing problems of international economic competitiveness, like Spain, like Norway, like Malaysia, with long histories of central control by specification, are looking to change teacher status from operative to professional responsibility as a means of generating a more effective curriculum. Why is central control now seen as the solution rather than the problem in this country?

I do not want to pre-empt the discussion on which we are about to embark, and I realise that what I have offered is a totally pathological analysis of the state of education today. I do hope that, when we look, as we will, at what is happening in the schools and in the classrooms with those of you who are caught up with these changes at the point of impact, that we will find some room for manoeuvre, some room for hope, and even some promising developments. I have not entirely lost faith in the law of opposite effects. Bad instruments can be turned to good purpose, I know.

But let me begin my conclusion by reminding you of the point at which the more elderly of our number began, back in the optimism of the mid-sixties, when our mediating institutions were still strong. Here is the famous quote from Working Paper Number Two, published in 1965 by the now, of course, defunct Schools Council, a paper which set the tone and the climate for developments like the Humanities Curriculum Project, which set out two years later.

The problem is to give every man some access to a complex cultural inheritance, some hold on his personal life and on his relationships with the various communities to which he belongs, some extension of his understanding of, and sensitivity towards, other human beings. The aim is to forward understanding, discrimination and judgement in the human field - it will involve reliable factual knowledge, where this is appropriate, direct experience, imaginative experience, some appreciation of the dilemmas of the human condition, of the rough hewn nature of many of our institutions, and some rational thought about them.

That still remains the aim, even though we have as a nation allowed a deterioration of circumstances to threaten even the legitimacy of what is only, after all, a basic human entitlement.

Perhaps, in the present circumstances, defeated for the time being by force majeure, we need to construct a theory of educational resistance, perhaps a black economy of inadmissible enterprise and undeclared outcomes. We may need to cultivate the arts of creative compliance, as subject peoples have learned to do. Certainly we need to repair the damage done by divide and rule strategies, to rebuild old alliances and forge new ones, to reconstruct the checks and balances of a severely disabled infrastructure. And just as certainly we must not concede to simplified definitions of the teaching/learning task or to forms of control that cannot take its complexity into account.

Perhaps most importantly we must maintain and nourish the language of education and of schooling that we have generated in these last twenty years. Perhaps we should form a Society for the Protection of Educational Language and Literature. With an acronym like SPELL, and a little creative interpretation we might get a basic skills grant from the DES to launch it.

Let me finish by saying, to myself as much as anyone else, that we are still in the first century of mass schooling, still in the first century of mass democracy, and that we live in a world of material abundance for the first time in human history. It is a matter of getting the distribution right in all three areas, and the connections between them functioning effectively. Those of you who know my rhetoric will no doubt be surprised that that is the first time in this address that I have used the word democracy. Let me now repeat it. A liberal democracy is still, I believe, the best damage limitation strategy available to us as a form of political organisation and power. We have to try to make it work, and it is just a shell without the value of individual empowerment for all. Education is an important contributor to and sustainer of that value.

I have a recurrent nightmare located sometime in the future, perhaps not too far away, where in an un-numbered room in Whitehall a political leader meets with his chief adviser in social engineering and his chief adviser in genetic engineering to make decisions about the manpower needs of the nation. No-one else is there, and it is not reported on the news. When that happens, we will all, in education as elsewhere, have failed. I hope to keep waking up.