

Alternative Education

This exhibition looks at the development of progressive education in the UK using the deposited collections held by the Institute of Education Archives.

More information on the Institute's Library and Archive collections can be found at www.ioe.ac.uk/is

What is Progressive Education?

It has been generally defined as education which focuses upon the needs of the child rather than the curriculum content or the teacher's pedagogy.



Children from Eynsham Primary School drawing wild flowers on a field trip. From the Baines Collection (DC/BA/1/11)

Origins

In *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693), John Locke supported moral education and believed that children were not essentially malevolent but learnt cruelty through bad example. In his 18th century fictional work *Emile*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau stressed that a child should be allowed to develop in his own manner to have a healthy sense of self-worth and morality as an adult. This was contrary to the contemporary belief that all children were essentially 'wicked' and needed strict guidance to be 'good'.

These theories were put into practice in the 19th century by European educationalists, such as Johann Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel, and further developed by educators like John Dewey and Maria Montessori in the 20th century.

Children at Eveline Lowe Primary School. From the photographic archive of the Architects and Buildings Branch of the Ministry of Education. (Ref: DC/ABB)



Two Main Approaches of Progressive Education

- 'Child-centred', giving children the freedom to develop naturally in a democratic environment
- 'Social-reconstructionism', focusing on a curriculum highlighting social reform as the aim of education

The New Education Movement

From the late 19th century, privately funded schools opened in the UK who applied tolerant discipline, encouraged arts and crafts, used manual work as an aspect of physical education and emphasised simplicity of living in what later became known as the 'New Education Movement'.

The Garden School

The Garden School, opened by Winifred White in 1917, was based upon the principles of love, freedom, brotherhood, cooperation and service. At the girls' school music, rhythmic movement, drama, art and handicrafts were considered to be as equally essential as academic subjects.



Pupils at the Garden School helping to dig the foundations for the new swimming pool, c1932. From The White Family Collection (Ref: DC/WF/4/251).



New Education Fellowship

Created in 1921 in the atmosphere of change and uncertainty which followed World War One, the Fellowship grew into a national and then an international organisation. It was re-named the World Education Fellowship in 1966. It focused upon child-centred education, social reform through education, democracy, world citizenship, international understanding and the promulgation of world peace. *The New Era*, journal of the New Education Fellowship, 1928. From the records of the World Education Fellowship (Ref: DC/WEF)

The First Two Years by Susan Isaacs. From the papers of Susan Isaacs (Ref: DC/SI/E)

Malting House School

Susan Isaacs was the Head of Malting House School, Cambridge, a psychologically-based elementary school, which fostered the pupils' individual development. Children were given greater freedom and were supported rather than punished. The teachers acted as observers and the children were treated as research workers. Isaacs later became the first Head of the Child Development Department at the Institute.

THE FIRST TWO YEARS

By
Dr. Susan Isaacs



Impact on Post-War State Education

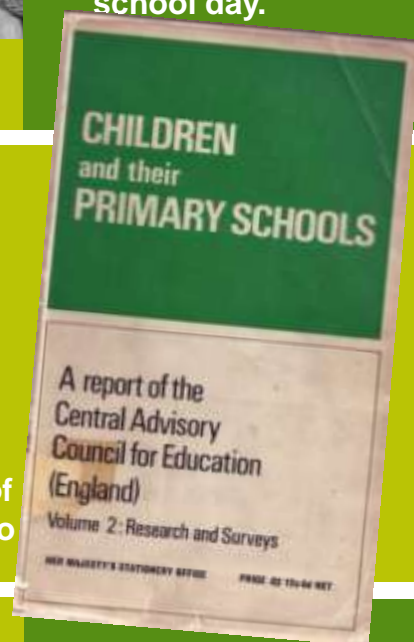
After World War Two, aspects of the 'New Education Movement' were applied to state education, as the Ministry of Education encouraged new teaching methods, and more imaginative use of space in schools.



Photograph of drama activities at Steward Street School in Birmingham, 1947, taken for the Ministry of Education publication *Story of a School*. From the Christian Schiller papers (Ref: DC/CS/J/1/1/16)

Steward Street School

This Birmingham school carried out a ten-year experiment, where the children were involved in dance, drama, art and craft activities for a large part of the school day.

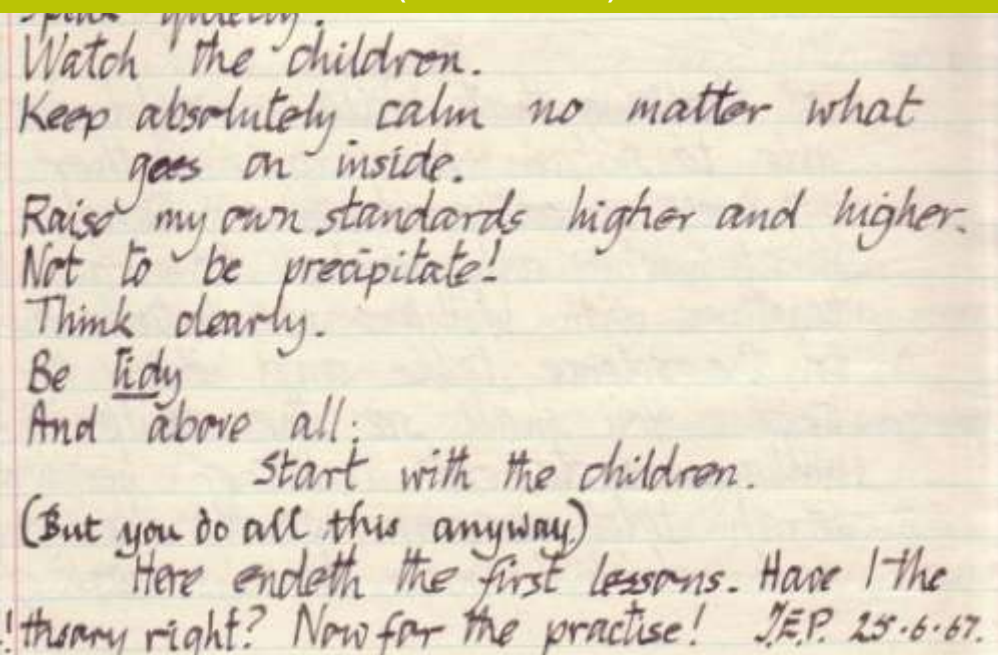


Official Reports

The 1963 report *Half Our Future* (also known as the Newsom Report) recommended that school curriculums should be made 'more relevant' to the needs of pupils of differing abilities.

In 1967 *Children and Their Primary Schools* (also known as the Plowden report) praised child-centred education and recommended that schools should connect with the needs of children. The Archive holds the papers of Lady Plowden who chaired the Committee who wrote the report.

Page from the Teaching diary of Judith Baines (nee Purbrooke), 1967. From the Baines collection (Ref:DC/BA/1/1/3).



Eynsham Primary School

Here George and Judith Baines pioneered new teaching methods in an open plan environment, including learning through the environment, 'self-directed' learning and project-based work from 1967-1983.

Obstacles to Further Development

From the 1970s, despite official endorsement at the end of the previous decade, progressive methods were criticised in the press. There was a political backlash and high profile cases, such as the William Tyndale Primary School, saw progressivism fall out of favour in the UK.

Angus M a u d e:

The Egalitarian Threat

Taking a long view, one must conclude that the most serious danger facing Britain is the threat to the "quality" of education at all levels. The motive force behind this threat is the ideology of egalitarianism.

It is this that drives nearly all the people who seek to 'reform' education - its organization, its institutions, its curricula and

Typescript extract from the first volume of the Black Papers taken from the papers of George and Judith Baines (Ref: DC/BA/1/7/5).

The 'Black Papers'

The 'Black Papers', published between 1969-1977 as a answer to the government's White Papers, criticised what they saw as the excesses of progressive education and called for the return to traditional teaching methods in state schools.

State Controlled Curriculum

The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 gave central government more power over the education service, limiting the possibilities for progressive education to flourish in state schools. 'Child-centred' education was later officially discouraged by the 1992 report *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools*, which dismissed discovery learning and recommended more subject-based lessons and whole-class teaching.

Progressive Education Today

Independent organisations, such as the Forest School Camps and the World Education Fellowship still promote the ideas of progressive education.

In 2006, the renewal of state interest was signaled by the official report of Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group which supported 'personalised learning'.

Issue of the Forest School Camps staff magazine, ORG 4, Winter 2003. The camps, directly based on the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, cater for children of a variety of ages and are heavily influenced by progressive education. From The Forest School Camps collection (Ref:DC/FSC/3/2/44).

