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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkonnet.wordpress.com>

Attack! 71 Developmental in action: a new entrant room (1989) – the holistic before the fall Part 1

At the conclusion of this account, Sue Bradly, the new entrant teacher involved, says something of forlorn significance:

'I'm just one of thousands of primary teachers who think like this.'

But not now, and those that are, are considerably isolated and at risk.

I visited Sue's room in 1989, knowing that even before the Labour government had concluded the introduction of *Tomorrow's Schools* it was the end of the co-operative education system as we knew it; the end of respecting teachers like Sue and their knowledge; and the end of the holistic philosophy that had its beginning, it could be said, with the 1937 New Education Fellowship Conference – to be replaced in the *Tomorrow's Schools* years by teacher denigration and centralised control based on fear, command, propaganda, and a curriculum that could be measured, policed, tested and, above all be sufficiently simplistic to be able to be understood by those in control.

Those in governments and political parties, no matter their persuasion, have exhibited little recognition of the kind of teaching demonstrated by Sue; in the various ministries over the years those concerned have been both bewildered by the primary school holistic culture and antagonistic to anything claimed by primary teachers from it – one of the reasons being that the ministry has mainly been staffed by secondary teachers and more recently, and intentionally as far as making forgotten the holistic, not from education at all; ministers of education of both parties have been woeful, culminating in the impenetrable arrogance of Trevor Mallard and the cynical bullying of Hekia Parata; and then there is the education review office controlled largely by secondary teachers (and even with primary teachers there, how many would truly know about developmental classrooms?) and ruthless in suppressing any expression of value residing in the primary school past: how could review officers carry out their work, build themselves up to feel superior, if they had to respect schools, schools functioning to a philosophy that was subtle, beyond their experience, and not amenable to measurement?; finally, quantitative academics have ridden roughshod over teacher knowledge and culture, enthusiastically lining up to accept the mantle of expert in exchange for supporting neoliberal policy positions and participation in actively controlling teachers.

The holistic philosophy in its developmental expression as practised by Sue Bradly has been made near forgotten. The teachers concerned always isolated; sometimes cruelly treated.

In 1990, in *Developmental Network Magazine*, I can remember sitting down with the intention of committing myself to my key prediction for *Tomorrow's Schools*, I wrote:

The education of children is problematic and value-laden. For the integrity of the education system, the various groups within it need to be free, willing, and able to argue and even, at times, obstruct the ideas and actions of other groups. There never has been and never will be a set of aims and related processes that have met, or will meet, the needs of all children within a system, or be agreed to by all those within a system.

Power should be shared throughout the education system, and various checks and balances be in place to stop it becoming too concentrated. It is only in this way that children will gain some protection from the vagaries of educational and political ideas and the human drive to control and dominate. The powerlessness of the young, the fact of them being young, makes school-children tempting targets for those who want to turn schools into battlegrounds for competing visions of what society ought to be. Teachers are unsettled by the possibility of curriculum and administrative ideas being able to be passed quickly down the hierarchical chain without those ideas requiring teacher involvement at all stages of their development. The best ideas for education come from teachers and those close to teachers. The part of the education system that is

important to teachers is the part close to them. The part further away has the capacity to do much harm, but little capacity to do much good. The nature of the education system should be to protect teachers from hastily conceived ideas – no matter their potential benefits. Good ideas are only good if the process for their development has been good. The last thing teachers want is the kind of efficiency that has someone in the hierarchy having an idea, and then using the chain of command to force it on them without due process.

I had resigned from the formal education system, begun *Developmental Network Magazine*, made my cautionary prediction, then set out to take courses around New Zealand to do what I could do to preserve the holistic, to keep the lamp alight. I also determined to record the stories of teachers – teachers like Sue Bradly.

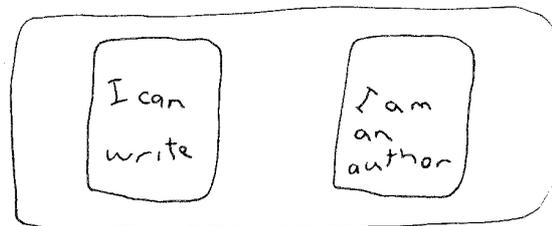
The description of the new entrant room (1989) begins

When I arrive at Sue Bradly's new entrant room at 8.25 a.m., eleven children are already at various activities. One child is doing carpentry, one is holding two dolls to comfort them, one is reading with the teacher, one is painting, one is carrying around what I thought was a doll but I subsequently found to be a live rabbit, one is reading a story he has written.



'This is a long book,' Stuart says.

He proudly holds up a stapled newsprint booklet. Inside the booklet (which did in fact have very long pages) are pasted two small yellow memo tabs on which he has written seven words.



Sue told me later that those seven words represented a breakthrough for Stuart. He has succumbed, as had the other children, to the blandishments of the 'I can write' confidence that pervades the room.

Two children are reading in the reading corner, one of them rests on a cushion, the other on her friend. The sun slants onto their sprawled limbs.

Two children are talking.

'I'm writing about the new baby.'

'Oh – what is it?'

Another two children are writing – one in a newsprint booklet, the other in her exercise book.

There are twenty-three children on Sue's roll. As a class they are a representative mixture from the various cultural and social groupings. Most of them have been at school about two months, some only a few weeks.

The room is interestingly organised – full of angles, corners, hide-aways and possibilities. There is a reading corner (already mentioned), a play house and a supply of dress-up clothes, a display of shoes for language experience, an overhead projector set up with some children's stories ready to show, a filmstrip projector showing the opening frames of a picture story, an oven with catering utensils beside, a writing table with alphabet charts and various language activity cards, a settee, a table for displays (at this moment showing some outcomes of the social studies *feeling for* approach), and an art and craft area with materials readily available for the children to use. Outside there is a carpentry table, large building blocks, and water and sand play equipment.

Other resources are available to the children. Prominent is a shelved stand holding the children's boxes of independent reading material. Also available are mathematics and physical education equipment.

Three large junior tables for the children to work at are in the centre of the room.



And, of course, on the walls, and strung across the room are examples of the children's current work.

By now all the children are involved in some activity. Whether the day has officially begun is difficult to decide. Whatever the situation, the programme in Sue Bradley's new entrant room is gathering momentum.

Sue is now doing 'running records'. These are taken fortnightly with every child. Sue said later she found the developmental atmosphere allows her to take such records at various times during the day.

A parent arrives to help in the classroom. The functioning of a roster means there is usually a parent present, especially in the mornings.

When I talk to the parent she tells me that to help her carry out her role, she had attended two meetings. At these Sue had explained the nature of the programme, and ways parents could contribute. She remembers Sue being particularly insistent on the need to listen carefully to children, and not to cut across children's efforts to solve problems for themselves.

Another parent comes in to discuss a matter with Sue. After doing this she goes over, hugs her child, and leaves.

Sue has two or three children around her. They start singing a song. The rest of the class drifts over.

I'm introduced to the class.

'This is Kelvin. He's writing a book!'



'Put up your hand if you're an author too.'

Very quietly Sue starts to read a story about a taniwha (*Terrible Taniwha of Timberditch*). The teacher leaves silences, which are followed by surges of responses by the children. A rhythm develops between teacher and class. A kind of oral cloze procedure is used, not for teaching points, but as part of the story-telling. Pictures are discussed, and so are key parts of the story, but the momentum is always maintained.

stands up and sits by the teacher and looks back at the children in a teacher sort-of-way.

The children are asked to mime certain parts. A girl



At an exciting part of the story the children mime spontaneously. The teacher moves location, the children swivel and follow pied-piper-like. The teacher's voice lowers to a whisper; the atmosphere is hushed and expectant. As the teacher rises, the children rise; when the teacher paces, the children's heads turn-their eyes alight with excitement.

The story ends. There is a moment of reflection - then the children move away.

Two children pick up the taniwha book and read it together.

Five children go to the art and craft area to make a taniwha with flax, or to continue with some other activity.



Continued in Part 2

