



78

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://networkkonnet.wordpress.com>

Attack! 78 Developmental in action: a senior room of a two-teacher school (1987) – the holistic before the fall Part 1

Chris Graham is principal of a two-teacher school.

*This account was in a booklet I published in 1989 – Developmental Teaching and Learning in Practice Part 2, which is a partner publication to Part 1 in which I write about Sue Bradly and her new entrant room. As for Part 1, I sold some copies, then put Part 2 away to become more-or-less forgotten. Somehow I came across the booklets and remembered Chris and Sue and thought that the booklets might be useful for an **Attack!** When I got round to reading them I was overwhelmed and wept for Chris and Sue and teachers like them, and the children who could have had teachers like them, and didn't, and myself (if you will excuse me) for a whole complex of things. Both accounts are treasures I feel transcendent to be associated with. It is dedicated to Chris and Sue and all the other teachers like them, some of whom, against the odds are still out there.*

It was 1991, I had resigned from the formal education system, begun *Developmental Network Magazine*, made all sorts of predictions about what lay ahead, and 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 Chris Graham.

There follows an account of the way his programme works. What he has written should be looked at as an example of a teacher who moved to a threshold-type timetable then beyond it.

The reader in proceeding through this account should remember that Sue and Chris's rooms are our past removed from us, derided, made forgotten, which has meant we were forced to act on others' pasts, for instance, those of bureaucracies, secondary schools, and the media, to the detriment of everything from children's reading to the use of computers. We were bombarded with the neoliberal maxim TINA – there is no alternative but you see there was, Sue and Chris's way.

MONDAY MORNING, WEEK 9

Chris Graham writes: The children are at their desks. I move about chatting to those children I haven't already greeted. There is quiet discussion – most children are engaged in reading or, in quite a few cases, re-reading a yellow foolscap newsletter. Re-reading, because some had made their way straight to their desks on arriving at school for a quick look to see what was in store. Any surprises for them? Not really – they had previously made statements and written questions relating to the topic for this week.



Fleur (s. 3) is already circling and underlining with an orange felt-tip pen and sorting out areas of importance to her. Reon (s. 3) rather tentatively sidles past, tape recorder in hand, headed for the library. New to my school, four weeks into the programme, and still not quite convinced that what he is doing is the right thing. Is Mr Graham going to object? I wink. His worried expression dissolves into a smile. As A.S. Neill says, 'Many teachers can laugh but dare not lest their children discover they are human.' Reassured he runs out.



The children gradually quieten and most begin reading with greater concentration, or reflect on previous work underway, past experience, or future activities.

At times I have said to children, 'Why are you sitting there?' 'Get on with your work!' (How often have I asked a question and given an instruction immediately following?) On those occasions when I have carefully attended to children's

responses, I have found out some interesting things; so much more is going on in children's minds, and at such tangents, that I've had to swallow hard at my presumption of slackness or inattention.

'I wonder if my rooster is all right, because Dad cut its wings last night.'

'Is Mum going to remember to pick me up for music at 2 o'clock? I forgot to bring the note. Should I tell Mr. Graham now or wait? Will he be annoyed? I overheard him say to the f. 2s that we were going to discuss something at 2.30 p.m. Did he mean me as well or what?'

'I'm thinking.' 'When will I get time to finish my painting?' 'How am I going to write about the terrible nightmare I had last night? It still seems so real!'

One child goes to the 'Sources of Ideas' box and begins leafing through the photographs – stopping now and again to study some aspect of a picture more closely. Another child joins in and they talk quietly, studying some detail or other.

Two children join me seated on the bench and, sitting on either side, begin discussing parts of the newsletter they can't understand. Someone else wanders over and becomes part of the discussion. By this time, most others are writing. Two children are completing a mathematics activity and another is busily painting. The week is underway.



The programme I am currently running requires the greatest teacher contribution to be made on a Monday and then for children to be allowed and encouraged to work at their own pace throughout the remainder of the week. What they are reading is a newsletter from me, conversational, positive, and informative, setting out contexts to be focused on, activities to be completed, and resources available. Children use this as their programme guide, which allows me to be freer to give individual help as I identify needs. Associated activities relating to specific social studies, science, mathematics, and so on, are displayed on charts or pinex boards. Children respond to these in a variety of ways – written statements on paper strips, booklets, taped or filmed reports, drawings, and jottings. Some of the teaching I do in the various curriculum areas is not featured in this account, but aspects of it surface in the daily timetable concentrated on here.



The daily timetable is still largely patterned on established procedure (from the previous year). I believe the first part of the day should be quiet and reflective, so we usually have written work flowing into reading; activities of their own choice; teacher story (a choice of listening or not but silent tasks specified for those who choose not to); mathematics; and activities of choice. However, some children are choosing to begin mathematics earlier in the day; indeed the week-long programme was implemented in response to repeated requests for greater freedom to do things when they wished, usually made in open letters written on a large sheet of newsprint and displayed. Some examples:

Dear Mr Graham

I think this term has been great so far. The newsletter is an excellent idea because you know what you are doing and have to get done. They are easy to read, but the work is quite hard. I like hard work, but NOT too hard. Please have maths in the morning and stories afterwards, because your brain is working properly then. From Anika (s. 3)

Dear Mr Graham

The idea of the letter is great. It is an interesting way of getting through to us instead of you talking too much. I get a bit bored when that happens. It also keeps us from asking you what we have to do. From Scott (f. 1)



Dear Mr Graham

I would like to make a suggestion about the shop. I think we should have a manager of the shop who pays wages to the people who work in the shop. The people in this classroom should have shares if they want and a manager pays them. I think it would be fun as well as learning maths. From Bridget (f. 1)

Continued in Part 2

