



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! 82 Developmental in action: a senior room of a two-teacher school (1987) – the holistic before the fall Part 5**

In physical education, the children are able to choose the activities they wish to be involved in. I have photocopied manuals: Kiwi Sports, Jump Rope for Heart, and so on, covering a range of levels – cut up the photocopied pages and boxed them. An associated activity-chart outlining what is available, and an appropriate sequence is displayed. Children are always engaged in some fitness work. This is not the dominant activity, however. I believe it is more important that children be encouraged to take part in as wide a variety of game situations as possible, but first developing the skills necessary to take part with enjoyment.

The threat to less skilled children is reduced by this. I have found, for instance, two very poorly co-ordinated children setting out to work through a progression of small-ball handling activities on their own initiative. They selected the appropriate cards, discussed them, told me what they hoped to achieve, and chose the time they would use to undertake the practice.

It was a simple matter for me to note when they went outside and to act as a reinforcer and encourager as they progressed. Eventually they became confident enough to select a game and organise a whole-class activity.

I am often asked 'How do you know what is going on?' I have found that I need to have some record of identified needs, changes in children's behaviour and learning, and significant items discussed during conferencing. At present this simply involves making hurried notes for individual children (I have found the backs of outdated official circulars ideal for this.) Of course, I am always looking for the 'main chance' to identify the need, and deal with it as soon as possible on an individual basis. This can involve short-term individual contracts to boost a particular area, in say, handwriting, tables, or direct one-to-one teaching.

I have tried various other means of monitoring children's progress and their completion of set tasks – check-lists, colouring of squares as tasks are completed, and so on. The effectiveness of methods such as these is relative to their outcome. Often the method devised has assumed greater significance than the children's tasks undertaken, and the supervising has taken up more of my time than could sensibly be spared.

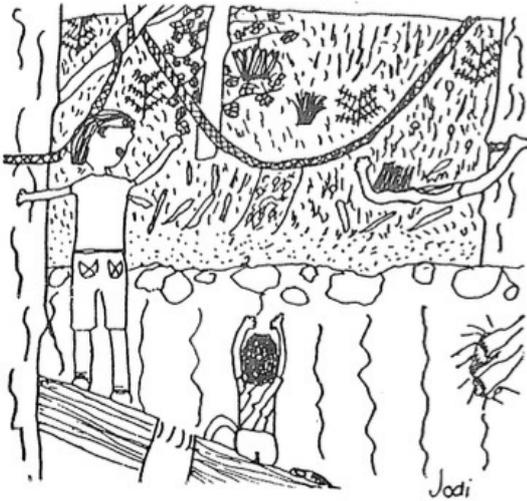
As an example earlier this year I thought a log would be the answer. This is what I wrote to the children: 'This letter is going to be a weekly communication of my thoughts and plans – a sort of log. I would like you to keep a log too – expressing your thoughts and feelings, and recording activities undertaken. This will help me keep a track of what you are doing. Please don't make it a shopping list of what you have done: 9.00 a.m., writing, 10.00 a.m., reading, 11.00 a.m., physical education, and so on. Make it interesting – include notes, drawings. Remember! I don't want to have to say to you ...'Where is your ...?' 'Why haven't you done ...?' 'When are you ...?' 'Don't...until ... .' If you keep a reasonably full log I will be able to see what you have done and let you get on with what you want to do.'

I wince at reading this now. However, it served a useful purpose in actually confronting me with some of the negative aspects of my teaching, and my desire to dominate the way programmes proceeded.



Why a log? I had visions of a notebook with neatly organised ideas – drawings, and so on, all in one place for a change, not on scraps of paper blu-tacked up on the wall, buried in desks, stood on, or lost. Ah! I would be able to say. Here it is. What's this person up to? I'll read it at my leisure after school. It was some time before I realised that the method devised was not only redundant, but also obstructive. Picking up a log book one day I saw a cryptic entry for week 7: 'Read, read and went to play.' (f. 1 girl)

'What on earth does this mean?' I asked. I hadn't bargained on the reply.



'Well, that was the literature week. You knew what I was doing that week. I was too busy reading because Karen lent me thirteen Trixie Beldon books and I wanted to finish them before Friday because her cousin wanted them back, and the torch batteries had run out and I couldn't read them in bed. I wrote about that. I was working in the library and you gave us a heap to do about refugees – too much in fact. I did a poster to sell reading, and I listened to you reading *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*. I saw how neat Lee and Deon's grass prints were, so I did a few of those, and I spent quite a lot of time outside observing which were bee flowers, and I saw an ant flower which I drew. I told you we didn't have any flowers at home. The f. 2s kept interrupting me to ask me whether I wanted to have *Jump Rope for Heart* this year, and what I thought about fitness. I forgot to practice my handwriting too, and I did extra this week. I looked through the Library Review and found a book which I have requested. I listened to your talk about Emily Dickinson. I wrote a caption. (She led me to the board and read me a sensitive paper strip statement under the heading: 'When refugees arrive in their new

country they ...'). I read the journal and I felt happy that she got her freedom but I could see the problems she would face here. I didn't even get a chance to make a disguise kit. I want to do that this week!

I haven't exaggerated the response to my question, and can't really convey the feeling with which it was expressed. I have repeated it as much verbatim as I can because it made me really consider my programme (and I felt appropriately chastened).

Once again I had confused the issue which was to have a library and book week. I hadn't firmed the contexts in which this was to take place. I had what I thought was a great unit about refugees arising from my current reading of *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, and I had jammed this on to a requested and proposed book week. (The newsletter setting up this particular week can be found below; it is the second in the series of three.)

After general questioning about this week, the results became obvious. Most children had been confused by the richness of the 'smorgasbord' and had tended to pick a range of activities rather than work in-depth on books which, after all, had been the agreed core. Activities seemingly connected in my thinking were confused in the children's.

Children almost always have a reason for doing or not doing something, and it is worth taking the time to unravel what at first glance appears to be lazy, disobedient, mischievous, or disruptive behaviour. It can be salutary experience because it usually has to do with the way the programme is set up. Of course, there are the occasions when children snap or are being plain naughty – all the more reason for taking time out to consider matters carefully.

The problem of trying to find out what is going on inside all those different heads is, in my opinion, the key to teaching. You rarely get close to finding out, of course, but the effort is all important, and very enriching for all concerned.

Continued in Part 6.

