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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://networkkonnet.wordpress.com>

Attack! 113 In which Pooh looks for a 21st Century Education Part 3

In Part 2, Pooh, apparently disillusioned with his experience with a *21st Century Education*, announced to Piglet that though he didn't know what it looked like, he was just going to try and catch a *Good Education* because the century mightn't matter.

The First Two Years at School 1950 (YouTube)

A movie was produced in 1950 as 'An exposition of modern methods of teaching the very young, showing the purpose behind the methods now being used, and contrasting them with past procedure.'

It can be found on YouTube at this link: <http://bit.ly/2rh0iri>

This article expands on the points made in the movie.

Please note: statements by the narrator judged as organising values have been highlighted.

The pure, uncomplicated expression of education values that follows has its origin deep in our culture. But, particularly from the mid-thirties, there was a coming together of events, ideas and people including the depression, the election of a Labour government, the political education leadership of Peter Fraser, the ideas of John Dewey, progressive education thinkers from England, the influence of New Zealand educationists like Clarence Beeby and, tellingly for what follows, Gwen Somerset, a New Zealand-born primary teacher and infant mistress. These came together in the New Education Fellowship conferences, held around New Zealand in 1937 – stirring events that put education in the headlines and provided a sense of infinite possibility. After that the war and the return of soldiers and a sense of new beginnings.

By 1950 there had been a change of government (election 1949) but the film project was allowed to proceed. Beeby, appointed as director of education when Fraser became prime minister in 1940, continued as director for a time under the new government. Of significance is the Fraser-Beeby policies being put to the test when the National Party came to power, but the new minister, after making extensive visits to schools and consulting parental opinion, endorsed them.

The holistic had struck forming a crucial part of our education culture and history.

I am impressed that Douglas Lilburn composed music for the film; an indication of the importance placed on the project.

Introduction

After the puzzled mother who wanted less play and more learning – something for children to get their teeth into – the narrator announces, voice deepening, **that there is a new order in the infant room.**

We want children who are lively and eager and full of wonder.

There is always the danger of cramming classroom subjects into them before they are ready.

Children's natural pleasure of learning should never be blunted.

Children grow by learning and experiencing: by seeing, feeling, and understanding.

Play is a way of children's own natural way of learning to understand the world around them.

It was clear there were a number of audiences for the film: media, public, parents, and teachers.

I noted the architecture of some of the schools: the Labour government architectural design of glass-framed doors on one side of the room opening to the sun and the playground, the inviting steps down. The openness an expression of the openness to ideas and the link between the classroom and the outside world.

In the free play that starts the day, the narrator says, the children are reliving experiences from their home understanding of the adult world.

How lively and eager the children are, so full, of wonder.

The free play is a direct introduction to the idea of community living; their own way of understanding and controlling the world around them.

It is a way of children learning that they can get more out of playing together than playing separately.

The film shows a boy crying and comments that for some children playing together and sharing can be uphill work.

Children learn to organise themselves.

For teachers it is away for them to learn about the behavioural characteristics of the children.

I liked the way when the end of free play was due, the teacher instead of using her voice held up a notice that said: TIDY UP PLEASE. The teacher was sensitive to the idea that a teacher's voice can be pervasive, ever-present, signalling that he or she was there and in control; using her voice less indicated leaving more room for children's sense of individuality, responsibility, and shared control.

The concept of free play, the narrator said, is a way of tying together many threads of learning without the children really knowing they are learning.

A successful adult life stemmed from the rich and varied world of childhood.

Play in the Infant Room

We now see the hour of free play being set up to begin the day: the hour of free play was the standard not so many years ago, but with more children having early childhood experience, the free play idea remained but in different expression. In the contemporary example of a junior room to follow, that will be demonstrated.

Sand and water play is still common in schools. The working together and the experimenting with water play still teaches and delights.

Construction materials, dress-up, and many other props and play things were available in the free play hour and were continually varied.

The narrator comments again on the relevance of school to life at home and the adult world.

A child sitting on a chair balanced on a desk with the dentist poking a ruler into the patient's mouth is something unlikely to be seen in classroom nowadays but note the deep involvement.

The child smacking the doll (letting out pent up feeling of anger and shame comments the narrator), and the girls busy being housewives both in the Wendy House and outside might cause some cringe, but that was their home reality.

The art work around the room is boldly expressive: evidence of confident, engaged, and imaginative children.

The narrator says the children regularly experience things by accident which they subsequently build into their planning, they [and what a concise expression] 'use to intelligent purpose'.

There was no direct reference to drama being organised but I noticed that the children's deep and concentrated involvement in their devised activities, for instance, use of dress-up props, the dentist's chair, or housekeeping, sand play, and using paper and cardboard constructions – all had drama elements.

There is reiteration by the narrator of the children learning how to be social beings and learning to share.

The narrator points out that the teacher plays a delicate role: settings things up, letting the children explore, intervening judiciously.

Learning to read

There is a guiding principle for reading, the narrator says, and once it is in place, everything comes together.

The children are shown looking at picture books and 'reading' the books

The teacher stands at an easel and the children discuss a sequence of pictures.

Pictures, the children are told, tell a story that can be expressed in words.

Enjoyment is gained from getting meaning from pictures.

Pictures are displayed with sentences below.

The interrelationship of pictures and words provides meaning [the origins of the 'I can read' idea can be found in this].

Reading, the narrator says, is not just a collection of letters but something that is alive and interesting.

Reading is finding the meaning behind whole words and sentences [which I take is the guiding principle for reading the narrator refers to].

Pictures can be dispensed with and the words and sentences carry the meaning.

The way to develop education understandings is by closely observing children [the basis for teacher-developed knowledge].

Reading from first to last should be [another wonderfully concise expression] 'a thought-getting process'.

Reading should be a happy experience for children [is that to be found in written comprehension?]

Reading broadens and enriches their thoughts.

Pleasure, interest, and enjoyment in reading carry forward into their lives a love of reading.

Number works

Number works, the narrator begins, is more than figures and sums.

It involves what number means in the world outside the school.

It is conceptions of measurement, size, space, weight, and shape.

Connects with the outside world.

Involves activity and experience.

Leading to such things as practical ideas of capacity, telling the time, shapes and sizes, and counting.

Activities around the room are changed from day-to-day.

Number games widely used.

Number is continuing experiences gained from outside the classroom and from home.

Only after children build up a wealth of experience from first-hand knowledge should they concentrate on what number means; should they get down to more abstract book-work.

Because of the understanding of practical number the children will then very likely display rapid improvement.

Living and Learning

The children are sitting before the teacher as she reads a story.

Their eyes shining with wonder through the black and white film and the decades.

A lot of what the children do, the narrator says, is extended make-believe from experience.

Their activities organised around something that interests them.

Can link a great range of children's experiences, giving them social meaning.

Those experiences need to be vivid and stimulating whether a story, exploring nature, or gaining knowledge in other ways.

A love of learning is the birth-right of all children.

With stories, the children can identify with characters in the world of fantasy.

Catch their concerns and sympathy.

A peg to hang other activities.

Activities, projects, science investigations.

The children's art work is bold in colour and scope meaning their imaginations have been stirred.

Children studying a farm grow wheat.

Hand-crafted cardboard models used for drama games.

Imagination links experiences.

The overall aim is to establish a vivid and stimulating environment to retain children's love of learning and sense of wonder.

And thus concludes this film that inspires: inspires because we see an education system in which system and classroom values are in harmony, and the values concerned are so holistic – the values begin with children in classrooms and end with the system, on balance, seeking to support those values. Yes – it is more complicated than that because there is an interaction between classroom values and social and political expectations to shape those values (which is as it should be), and the values in various classrooms can vary greatly, but in the complex and value-laden world of education, we can see something exceptional, integrated, democratic, and beautiful happening here.

In Part 4 we move to a 1989 glimpse of those values.

Piglet came to the edge of the river where the bridge let you get across. On the bridge was a big brown furry ball. When he touched it, the furry ball moved and it was Pooh. He was leaning over the edge of the bridge, a pile of fir-cones beside him.

Before Piglet had a chance to ask, Pooh said. 'I'm doing number because I caught a *Good Education*.'

'You drop in one then another and two come out the other side.'

'That's called number.'

Piglet wagged his tail in admiration.

'You drop in a large one and a small one to see which comes out first.'

'That's called investigation.'

'If you want to clap,' said Pooh, 'now is the time to do it.'



Continued in Part 4

