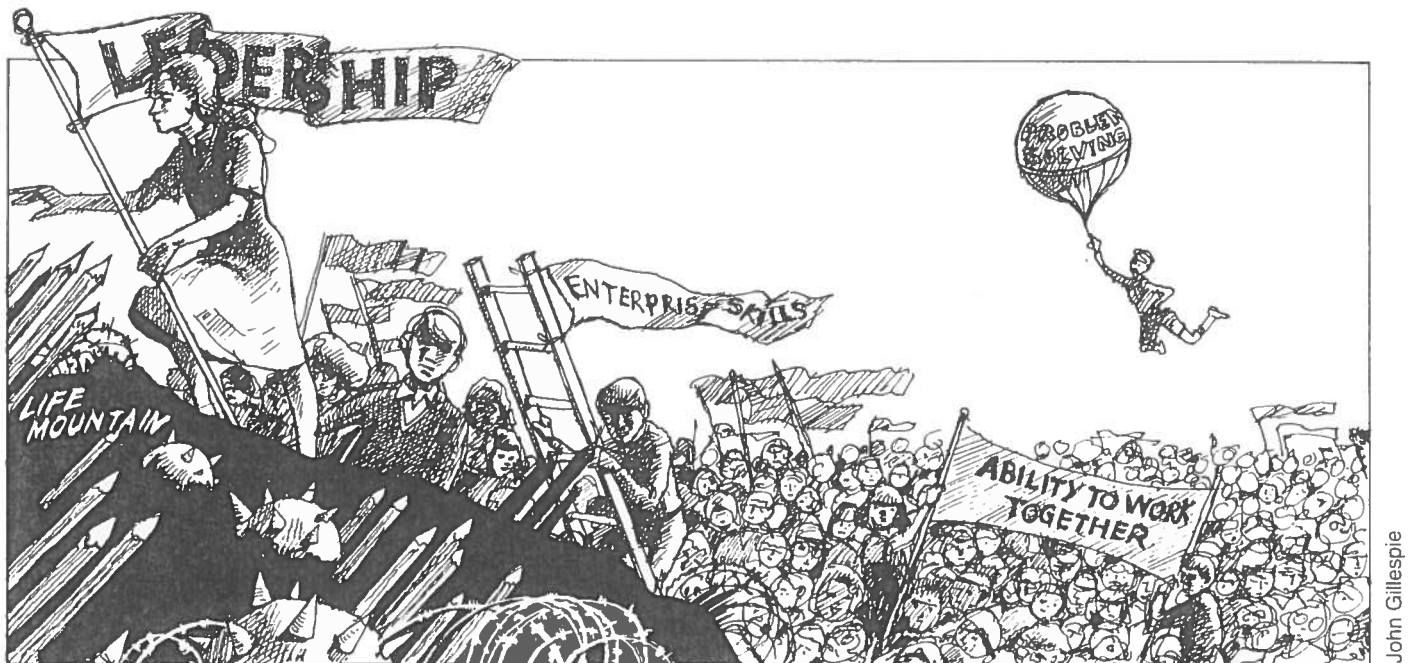# THE CRISIS IN EDUCATION

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IN THIS ARTICLE it will first be demonstrated that those who think that the educational system should be fostering the competencies which make for enterprise are correct. Thereafter the often surprising barriers which must be overcome if educational programmes which foster such qualities are to be more widely introduced are discussed.

Overview: fostering competencies

Education involves fostering competencies rather than conveying knowledge.

Most official documents which specify the goals of general education emphasise

(1) problem-solving,

(2) the ability to work with others,

(3) enterprise skills,

(4) leadership

(5) the ability to understand and influence what happens in society.

This is true for the UK, the US and other countries. (References are given at the end of this item.) Readers of *set* will know of Australian and NZ equivalents too. These views are echoed in surveys of the opinions of teachers, pupils, parents, employees and employers. The opinions of all of these groups are supported by research into the qualities which are actually required at work and in society.

The five qualities which have been mentioned, and others like them, are required by machine operatives, navvies, bus drivers, small businessmen, civil servants, doctors, scientists, managers, and by politicians. They are also required to use leisure in a satisfying way and for economic and social development.

At the present time, these qualities are at a particularly low ebb in some countries. I find in the UK that there is very little interest in innovation, finding ways of doing things more efficiently, finding new things to do, or better ways of doing them, working as part of a team to accomplish a worthwhile goal, contributing to a public debate about what is in the long term interests of society, or working for the long term good of society. Understanding such concepts as 'participation in management', 'industrial democracy', 'management', and even 'wealth' is highly dysfunctional: participation means sitting on committees, or, doing the manager's job for him or her; not, as in Japan, contributing to the clarification of organisational goals and how they are to be achieved, or, learning through sharing the managers' thought processes how to engage in high level management activities.

Despite the importance of encouraging these competencies, values, and this understanding, most schools – at least in the UK, France, Belgium, the USA, and Australia – do not even attempt to foster them. As a result, schools are among the least developmental institutions in our society. In the USA more than two-thirds of 20 year olds say they were better able to identify and develop their talents at work than they were able at school. Not only do schools generally fail to foster these qualities, many actually stifle them. Some schools encourage inappropriate beliefs, understanding and values such as the belief that it would not be appropriate to try to find more important things to do, or better ways of thinking about things, or how to get authorities to do the things one wants them to do. Perhaps

two-thirds of the money spent on secondary and third-level 'education' is wasted. Nowhere in the world has efficient full time secondary education for all been provided. Yet OECD countries spend more than 12 percent of GNP on 'education'.

The fact that we spend so much on a useless activity is not, in itself, a bad thing: the great engines of economic development have always involved useless activities. These have included building pyramids and churches, trading in opium or gold, and building nuclear 'defence' systems, and developing a warehouse, transportation, banking and accounting system which makes up two thirds of the 'cost' of every article.

Barriers to continuing to provide 'useless' education

There are, however, vigorous campaigns against continuing to pay for a costly but useless educational system. These hinge on the public's disillusion and mistrust.

1. Public awareness
The general population is now well aware that the educational system has been unable to deliver the promised benefits: economic and social development, jobs for all, equality, and the opportunity for each pupil to identify, develop, and get recognition for, his or her talents. Despite more education, dole queues grow, the rich get richer, the poor get poorer and much talent is wasted. People who are campaigning for change in education know this.

2. Public mistrust
More and more people can see through educational talk. They know that when most educationists speak of 'developing human potential' they mean creating jobs for their own children or their colleagues. Teachers, unfortunately, engage in double talk; it lets them think that it is legitimate to have an extremely expensive system which does little more than allocate occupational position and status. The public now mistrusts educationists.

3. The certification dilemma
The third reason why it will in future be more difficult to justify useless education is that many people now understand the horns of the certification dilemma. On the one hand, examination courses do not make you more competent (no matter whether you pass, or fail). On the other hand, educational 'qualifications' are used to control entry to jobs (and thus create protected occupations whose members are able to command high salaries because of the 'shortage' of 'qualified' personnel). As a result, certificates which afford entry to protected occupations have great economic value. People are therefore prepared to pay heavily for an opportunity to compete for them – especially when teachers claim to be able to help them to compete successfully. As the public has become aware of this dilemma they have demanded a more cost-effective, 'no frills', educational system and emphasised the need for a single, clear, and unarguable criterion of merit for allocating position and status.

Despite these problems, many people still recognise that educational environments could (and should) develop skills and talents. This is why many people still insist that schools should embrace more of the wider goals of general education. In our surveys more than 50 percent of pupils wanted schools to do more to achieve the objectives we asked about. Those aims of problem solving, working with others, enterprise, leadership, influencing society... these are still desired.

4. Barriers to re-deploying existing resources
Educational policy makers want to re-deploy existing resources. But they have to do so in a situation in which there is considerable resentment at what is going on, hostility toward those responsible for administering the system (the administrators have, after all, conned the public in the past), hostility toward those who are likely to do well out of it, and widespread recognition that what is going on at present is not good education, but is, nevertheless, extremely important to those who want to get a job and 'get on'. This means that teachers who are able to work the system for the benefit of their pupils will strenuously resist change. So will those pupils and parents who are doing well out of it.

5. Other barriers
If these were the only barriers to introducing a more developmental and cost-effective educational system, those interested in promoting it would have a hard enough task. But these are not the only barriers. One of the other barriers is that the good education is most easily provided at home, in communities, and in the workplace – not in school. By good education I mean that programmes that foster qualities like: the ability to make one's own observations; the ability to identify and solve problems; the ability to take initiative; and the ability to get other people to work together effectively. These demand educational processes which schools find difficult.

Fostering competencies in workplace and school

1. Individualised learning
If one is to foster the abilities just mentioned, or the five similar qualities mentioned at the beginning, one must create situations in which people can practice doing these things (and thus learn to do them more effectively). Yet these are all difficult, demanding and frustrating activities. No-one is going to make the effort required to practice them unless what they are doing is important to them. This means individualised educational programmes – each child getting a programme that engages his or her values, priorities and talents. It also means that the 'learning' tasks must be important to society, not unrelated drills or exam cram.

2. Learning by example
Practise is not the only way in which qualities like initiative, adventurousness, and leadership can be developed. People can also learn from the example of others. But you have to be around people who are doing important things. And that includes being alongside them in such a way that you can share in their thought processes, their feelings, their anticipations, and their reflection on things which have gone wrong. In this way you can learn to be sensitive to the cues which beckon and point toward an activity which is likely to pay off, which tell you when corrective action is necessary, or which tell you that things are getting out of hand and you had better either get help or stop. You can learn how to turn a chance observation to advantage.

3. Learning on the job
Two sorts of experience are special: experience gained in the course of working on tasks which are personally important, and experience gained when working with other people who sha   ur own concerns. Researchers like Lyle Spencer have   own that effective supervisors and managers think ab it their subordinates, place them

carefully, and develop their talents. Being competent this way distinguishes effective from ineffective supervisors and managers. Our own research shows that managers in Japan and Singapore do these things as a matter of course. No-one other than supervisors and managers can provide such assistance throughout life; it follows that supervisors and managers, have a crucial (if non-conventional) role to play in the process of developing the talents of young people.

4. School-based programmes

Fortunately for ordinary teachers, work is not the only setting in which such qualities can be fostered. If teachers adopt appropriate forms of interdisciplinary, competency-oriented, enquiry-based, project work, then educational environments can be made more developmental. This teaching curriculum must be grounded in the environment around the school and it must explicitly set out to embody the important features of work – a *real* task to do, variety, and tapping a wide range of alternative talents. In this context it is of great interest to note that more effective teachers, like more effective managers, are the ones who think about, harness, build upon, and develop the talents of their pupils. And they are also more likely to share their own thoughts, their own strivings, and their own feelings with them.

Unfortunately such teaching is threatening to many of those who have dedicated themselves to traditional forms of education.

The resources required by teachers

A major barrier to introducing competency-oriented education into schools is that, if teachers are to foster such qualities, they need to be able to assess each student's concerns, interests, and talents, invent an individualised developmental programme for each student, monitor his or her reactions to those experiences, intervene to take corrective action when necessary and, at the end of this difficult and demanding process, identify the particular competencies which each student has developed in such a way that they will stand to the student's credit when the time comes to scramble for a job. This is an extraordinarily demanding set of activities. Our research suggests that only about 5 percent of teachers manage it effectively.

To implement education to nurture high level competencies it is necessary to devote a great deal of time to guidance, counselling and appraisal. It is also necessary for the teachers to have both a good theoretical framework to enable them to think about the talents which might be developed and the ways in which they are to be developed, and tools to help them.

Such demands may seem unrealistic. But the reality is that such diagnostic and prescriptive tools are required if teachers are to foster even such fundamental competencies as the ability to read. This may strike you as an absurd statement – until it is acknowledged that very few children – particularly those who have learning difficulties – learn to read at school. In Britain as Tizard has shown, it is parents (not teachers) who, in general, provide the sensitive help and encouragement which is required to enable children to find material which interests them and who provide the individualised help which is required to identify the child's specific difficulties so that remedial action can be taken.

Another barrier to the wider introduction of multiple-competency-oriented educational programmes into schools is that the qualities we have been discussing are value-laden. People will only practice and develop these compe-tencies in the course of pursuing goals they value. To be competent you need a view of society and your role in it; especially you need to feel that you have a right to ask questions, a right to expect people in authority to answer those questions, and a right to seek to influence wider social constraints. Many parents, teachers, managers and politicians find this notion threatening – if we teach children to ask awkward questions, to demand answers, to take part in politics, what will come of it all? Some parents, teachers and politicians lack the competencies which are required to manage independent, thoughtful, people who identify and tackle their own problems.

Re-educating teachers and parents

One corollary of this observation is that much 'education' is directed towards the wrong people. The most important targets for educational programmes are teachers, not pupils; managers not employees; the leaders of our society, not 'the disadvantaged'; adults not children. We can no longer lay the blame for our social and economic ills at the door of the poor, the ill educated and those who are least advantaged in the educational system.

A second corollary is that any attempt to introduce genuinely educational programmes into schools will be met by opposition at all levels, from Parent/Teacher Associations upwards. Parent committees which aspire to influence the curriculum repeatedly dissolve in internal strife. All their members want change. But as soon as some of them start talking about encouraging question-asking, independence, initiative, or adventurousness, chaos ensues. Some parents, worried that they will no longer be able to control ('manage') their children, start to raise doubts. It is then suggested that their children need not join the programmes. This in itself creates problems because it challenges deep-rooted beliefs about equality and uniformity in public provision. It is feared ·that the children of the more articulate will, yet again, get the best deal.

But, before long, a more serious objection emerges. What is being said is, not that these qualities are unimportant, but that they are *too* important. If schools helped some pupils (and not others) to develop them, those children would do better in life than the others. That would be unfair. This is one example of one of the most important dilemmas facing educators: many people want their children to obtain the benefits of problem solving, working with others, enterprise, etc. But they often do not want their children to possess those competencies (e.g., independence); they do not want their children to devote their time to their careers – or even to improving society – if this means reducing the time they spend with the family. They do not want their children to become socially and geographically mobile, to work in distant cities or other countries, to change their language or their cultural beliefs. Often this is particularly so if education means that their children are likely to neglect them in their old age.

So it becomes clear that 'successful' education for modern society involves tackling some of the wider social constraints. It probably means encouraging pupils to change their ideas, and it means influencing their beliefs about society, how it is structured, and how it should work. Some parents see this as political brainwashing. (And we are all quite right to fear brainwashing). In Britain the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) has found itself in precisely the same trap. It asked schools and employers to foster those qualities which make for enterprise and personal effectiveness. This led schools, colleges, and employers to encourage their trainees to consider political processes. The MSC reacted by banning political education!

Neither the members of Parent/Teacher Associations, nor teachers in general, are equipped to handle the tensions which stem from the value laden nature of any education worth the name. As a result, attempts to introduce educational programmes which would foster these qualities simply die. Schools end up working toward the lowest common denominator in education i.e., 'working class values' ('sit still, do as you are told, learn what is put in front of you') and examination achievement.

Ironically, in Britain, the strength of private schools is that they can avoid this dilemma, can foster these more important competencies, and inculcate both values and political beliefs. Their very effectiveness in these overwhelmingly important 'non-academic' areas is precisely why they are so unpopular with parents who would refuse to send their children to them even if they could! British public (i.e., private) schools work well in strictly educational terms. They lead people to develop self confidence, articulateness, to think they have a right to influence things, to know how to do it, to think they have a right to shake politicians and public servants to get the changes that are needed.

The point is that state schools will continue to be unable to foster the qualities which most people think they should be fostering without radical changes in beliefs. If full effective education is to be introduced into schools, *adult civic education* is a top priority.

Certificating value-laden competencies

A further barrier to wider dissemination of competency-oriented educational programmes in schools stems from the fact that what happens in schools is determined by what is assessed at the point of interface between schools and society. Teachers and schools work towards exams, not towards problem solving, working with others, enterprise etc. Teachers and schools do not work at what are regarded as priorities by ministers of education, government committees, employers, parents, teachers or pupils, or employment markets. Two things are needed: (1) schools must foster the qualities we have talked about and find ways to assess them, (2) employees must be able to get credit for qualities they have developed 'on the job' (and thus become able to compete for promotion with those who enter their occupations with higher 'educational' 'qualifications') that is, some way of assessing these qualities must be found.

The thought of assessing these value-laden qualities makes most people (including myself) extremely uncomfortable. Yet I can see no other way of preventing social vandals getting the most senior positions in our public and private sector organisations. Nor can I see any way of avoiding the problem that evaluation research tends to focus on the goals which are easily assessed (and neglects the more important goals of general education).

The costs of *not* developing new ways of measuring problem solving, co-operation, enterprise, etc., are enormous: these costs include (a) inability to create developmental climates in schools, (b) inability to develop, utilise and reward people's talents for their own benefit (and for the benefit of society), (c) inability to undertake useful evaluations, and (d) inability to keep people who destroy society out of influential positions. As well as assisting the development of means of assessing these essential qualities, we must, as a stop gap, think about how to guard against the misuse of present assessment – particularly credentialling exams. This means ensuring that their use is publicly supervised.

Innovations needed

A final barrier to the dissemination of competency-oriented educational programmes stems from the forms and procedures of accountability employed in the education service. At present, teachers are not really expected to pay attention to their pupils' needs and concerns and then invent better ways of meeting their needs. Rather, they are viewed as mere hired hands whose job it is to do the bidding of representatives (boards) for day-to-day running, and distant political representatives for curriculum and policy.

To overcome this problem we need to develop new expectations of teachers, new criteria of accountability, new tools to help us to find out whether those criteria are being met, and new structures to promote and encourage innovation.

1. Expectations of teachers
We should expect teachers to invent ways of tapping individual pupils' motives and meeting their needs. We should expect them to stimulate, and thereafter contribute to, the debates which are required to evolve new ways of thinking about society. We should expect them to contribute to the evolution of the structures which are needed to enable adults to develop the competencies which are required to manage society effectively and to enable them to help each other to develop their talents. We should expect teachers to try to influence the wider social forces (such as the expectations of parents and directors of education, and the narrow range of competencies tested by examination boards) which otherwise so much limit the competencies they are able to help their pupils to develop. We must expect them to insist on the collection of relevant information about how well their pupils are developing and how well their schools and the educational system as a whole is performing and to take the steps which are needed to ensure that good decisions are taken on the basis of that information.

Obviously no one teacher can do all of these things. But the teaching profession does need to encompass and support a significant number of people who do each of them.

2. Criteria of accountability
If teachers are to do the things just mentioned they must be able to get credit for having done so. That is, the criteria against which their performance is judged must include them. The obvious difficulty of doing this leads one to tend to recoil... until one encounters one of those elegant rare strokes of genius. Adams and Burgess have suggested that procedures developed for making statements about pupils' competence be applied to teachers. Teachers would be asked to keep logs of events which went well for them and events which went poorly, what led up to the events, what they did, and what the outcome was. In this way they would be able to get recognition for their concerns, talents and accomplishments.

3. Structures to promote innovation
The structures which are required if a more innovative and more effective educational system is to evolve must promote more contact between innovative teachers. They must also enable teachers to initiate more concerned attempts to advance basic understanding of fundamental educational processes so that chronic problems can be tackled. A network of monitoring and validating groups supported by a measurement and educational research service would meet this need. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that considerable time needs to be allotted to 'parallel organisation' activity concerned with innovation. But this does not

mean that more teachers are required. The data which were briefly summarised earlier shows that if teachers spent less time in front of their blackboards and more time managing the educational process, the benefits for pupil development would be substantial.

4. Monitoring structures

To initiate an effective programme of school improvement it is necessary to give teeth to information. We are all too familiar with evaluations which simply gather dust. The work of individual administrators, teachers, schools, clusters of schools and administrative departments, must be made much more public. The network of public monitoring groups proposed would examine the information collected and monitor the action taken. Significantly, such a network of monitoring groups would also help the public to discuss and resolve some of the dilemmas and thus promote the evolution of new ideas about how public institutions should work. Unfortunately, one does not know many people who would voluntarily devote the necessary time to such activities. It is therefore necessary to recognise that, just as such activities are essential to the success of commercial enterprises, so they are necessary for the effective operation and development of society. The implication of this is that they are truly wealth-creating activities and, as such, merit remuneration.

5. New administrative concepts and tools

It is worth making explicit a message embedded in the last few paragraphs. This is that to run modern, information-based, societies effectively we need new concepts of bureaucracy and democracy and new tools to administer them. One of the most important functions of education – significantly not one emphasised by parents, teachers, or employers – is, therefore, to promote the evolution of these new concepts, new understanding, and new tools.

Concluding Comments

I have described some of the causes of the chronic crisis which has persisted in education for the past 25 years and discussed the many non-obvious steps which need to be taken if that crisis is to be tackled. The suggestions which have been made in many ways contradict conventional wisdom. The philosophy of ministers of education and their departments has been that if teachers are told to do things they will do them. If they do not, that demonstrates a lack of ability or goodwill. Such incompetence or insubordination, when discovered, indicates a need for tighter curricula, or harsher staff appraisal systems. 'The lashings will continue till morale improves.' Our work shows that this is naive. The problems in education have multiple and deep-rooted causes. To overcome them we need new ways of thinking about the issues and new ways of doing things. In most cases a great deal of fundamental research is required. However, the research which is needed must be carried out in an action context and must address issues which at first sight seem far removed from the problem.

It is a symptom of the deficiencies in the system, that neither developing better ways of thinking, nor the execution of fundamental research, attract funds. The Technical-Rational model of research (as contrasted with the Reflection-in-Action model of the professions) has become deeply embedded in researchers' thinking. Research is not seen as a route to the solution of pressing problems; rather (in line with the educational system in general) it is seen as a route to personal advancement; not 'What problem are you researching?' but 'What is your PhD topic?' The research establishment has also to put its house in order.

Given that taxpayers have seen through both the educational and the research rhetoric, how can a more appropriate set of expectations and structures be created?

Notes

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The ideas in this set item originally appeared in an article, 'The Crisis in Education' in the magazine *The New Era* Vol. 68, No. 2, 1987, and this is a re-written 1992 version.

Overview: Fostering Competencies
Official documents which specify the five general goals of education include

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That schools actually stifle competency, or in fact promote incompetence, can be found detailed in:

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Chomsky, N. – see above.

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The resources required by teachers

My research showing that only 5 percent of teachers manage the demanding list of teaching skills was concentrated on the topic of 'projects'. It can be found in

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Re-educating teachers and parents

The Manpower Services Commission's experience of trying to foster enterprise and effectiveness, which lead to banning political education, can be followed in

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Concluding Comments

Our work which shows that it is naive for administrators to believe that through central prescription and testing teachers will do exactly as they are told; and that the problems in education have multiple and deep-rooted causes, is detailed in

Raven, J. (in press) *Managing Education for Effective Schools*. New York: Trillium Press; Oxford: Oxford Psychological Press.

Raven, J. (1990) The barriers to achieving the wider goals of general education. *The British Educational Research Journal* Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 273-296.

The Technical-rational and Reflection-in-action models come from Schon, above.

Further References

Other topics broached in this article are worth pursuing. These references may help.

Why Teachers Neglect Their Goals

Fraley, A. (1981) *Schooling and Innovation: The Rhetoric and the Reality*. New York: Tyler Gibson.

Raven, J. (1980) The Most Important Problem in Education is to Come to Terms with Values. *Oxford Review of Education*. Vol. 7, pp. 253-72.

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The Damaging Effects of Assessment

Broadfoot, P. (1979) *Assessment, Schools and Society*. London: Methuen.

Raven, J. (1991) *The Tragic Illusion: Educational Testing*. Oxford: Oxford Psychological Press.

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Burgess, T. and Adams, E. (1980) *Outcomes of Education*. London: MacMillan.

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Berlak, H.; Newman, F.M.; Adams, E.; Archibald, D.A.; Burgess, T.; Raven, J.; Romber, T.A. (1992) *Towards a New Science of Educational Testing and Assessment*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Stansbury, D. (1980) The Record of Personal Experience. In Burgess, T. and Adams, E. *Outcomes of Education*, Basingstoke: MacMillan.