

The Bullock Report

A Language for Life

Each of us, since we all attended school at some time, feel we have a divine right to pontificate on educational matters. We make broad generalisations and statements on the evidence of a report; few of us read the original. We apply our experience of one school to the other 32,999 schools in the Country, and we blatantly fly in the face of educational research, because we 'know' we are right.

Another 645 page, £96,000 report was published last week, and it already has its bar-room critics. "*I had to teach my child to read, the school wouldn't.*" "*Standards are dropping.*" "*Kids can't spell nowadays.*" "*You should see his writing.*"?

Naturally it wasn't like that in *your* day was it? You did as you were told, or else. It's all because of the left-wing, laissez-faire attitude of modern educational theory. Really?

Messrs Vickers report '*... great difficulty in obtaining junior clerks who can speak and write English clearly and correctly.*'

Boots remarked, '*... teaching of English in present day schools produces a very limited command of the English language.*' But these complaints were made 50 years ago!

Well, the evidence is here, if you think £5 is not too much; and even the library wouldn't reserve me a copy of this report.

1. The Report does NOT say, as quoted on BBC TV news, that there is no decline in standards, what it does say is:

'There is no firm evidence upon which to base comparisons between standards of English today and those of before the war. The comparisons ventured are sometimes based on questionable assumptions.' (conclusion 1)

'... and in terms of today's problems, it is questionable whether there is anything to be gained from attempting it.' (conclusion 10)

2. *'Standards of reading and writing need to be raised to fulfil the increasingly exacting demands made upon them by modern society.'* (conclusion 1)

'The level of reading skill required for participation in the affairs of modern society, are far above those implied in earlier definitions of literacy.' (conclusion 7)

3. And what of television? We all know it's the reason why children no longer read at home. *'There is little empirical evidence to show whether television has had any adverse effect upon standards of reading.'* (conclusion 9)

4. *'There is no evidence of a decline in attainment over the years in the lowest achievers among 15 year olds.'* (conclusion 14)

5. *'There is no significant change in the reading standards of 11 year olds over the decade 1960-1970.'* (conclusion 15)

BEWARE

You may feel that you have a good grasp of the Bullock Report. Have you? Disraeli once said, "*There are lies, damned lies and statistics.*" There are another 327 conclusions and recommendations to digest, I've only picked out the ones I want, to make my point, you can pick out others which will make *your* point. I merely ask that we arm ourselves with the facts and not with subjective opinions.

For those who are not thoroughly confused, let me try to sum up this report as honestly as I can in one sentence.

There is no evidence that standards in literacy have dropped in the last 30 years, but since the amount of knowledge has doubled in the last 20 years, and the pressures of modern life are greater, it is necessary to raise the standards of literacy.

The greater part of the report's Conclusions and Recommendations, deals with how this might be achieved; '*... recommendations with financial implications ... for the time being ... must be postponed.*' (Reg Prentice, Secretary of State for Education and Science)

Howard Brayton

March 1975