Scottish Child

December 1990/January 1991 £1.50

New Writing
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Language Learning
Children's Rights
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Childminding

finding a voice

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Scottish Child

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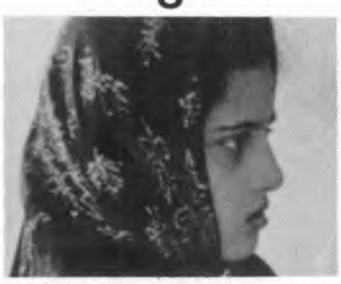

Talk is that come 1992 we're going to have to be better at languages. **Rosemary Milne's** been taking some soundings about young people and foreign languages. They all speak English over there don't they? **Ann Lorne Gillies** speaks about the reestablishment of Gaelic.

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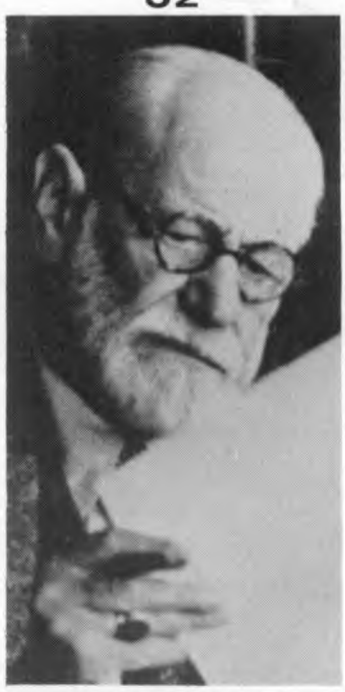

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We welcome a new diarist, **Alison Prince**. She's been flying and pondering the soul.

Sheila Ramsay has after many issues stopped having Afterthoughts. We discontinue this column. Sheila will continue writing features for **Scottish Child.**

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CONNECTIONS

Colin Chalmers

Is pinching good for the soul?

EDITORIAL

Do you ever get that feeling, in trying to take in what's going on in the world, that you have to pinch yourself? So incredible do things seem, that surely they cannot be real!

Children Come First is the pious sounding title of the recently published government White Paper which aims to introduce measures in the age of high levels of marital and relationship breakdown, which ensure that absent parents (fathers) pay for child maintenance. A Good Thing.

Even the Opposition (and that's become hardly real) saw through the true accountancy approach to social policy here when shadow Minister, Michael Meacher renamed the document, **The Treasury Comes First.** Setting aside the massive personal implications (they don't count in the real world) of the establishment of the proposed new child support agency, the effect will be to police millions of absent fathers and their previous partners, many of whom just happen to be living on state benefits. To make them responsible.

Pinch!

Then the seasonal indulgence of charity fund-raising now reaching its peak - BBC's annual Children in Need appeal and other telethons and stunts which, even if in doubtful taste, are said to be "all in a good cause". Adding onto the normal loss of reason and good judgement at this time of year, through the door comes an announcement from EPOCH, the campaigning body to end the physical punishment of children, that 31st December to 6th January is to be No Smacking Week.

There is no doubt that the way parents brutalise their children (62% of mothers admitted in a big survey to smacking their baby before the age of 1) should stop. It should even be against the law. But this promotions manager approach to marketing No Smacking...? The children are invited to "collaborate". And what happens after the week? Time for another...

Pinch.

Then there's the renewed enthusiasm in egalitarian democratic Scottish education (correction, in the government of education at the Scottish Office) for testing 8 year olds. To improve standards. Didn't we have this before at 11-plus and it was abolished because it was divisive and dismissive of most of the child population? Pinch.

The photo above? Oh, that's a protest by a project in a Glasgow housing scheme that wants to stop its funding being stopped. The project, amongst other things, provides food parcels to about 60 teenagers in Drumchapel who have no source of income since Income Support was abolished for 16 and 17 year olds. According to one councillor, it's illegal for them to pay out money to feed teenagers, even if they have no other source of food. Pinch! - it's the only way your going to get to eat.

You know, there has to come a point, when your reserve of incredulity is bankrupt, where the pinching has to stop. When the passive absorbtion of received values - like staring at the TV news - has to be brought in check, switched off.

After basking in the glory of a record level of advertising revenue in the form of birthday support messages in the last issue (thanks to all), we at **Scottish Child** have had to return to the cold draft of "reality" again. Independent voices, contrary to another prevailing and pinch-inducing wisdom, don't attract the corporate sponsors or the queue of commercial advertisers. Truth is, in our society, the child - the one who wants to engage and shout and make a mess of and actually change the world - has to be at best ignored, at worst punished.

In this issue as much as any other, **Scottish Child** expresses a voice. The voice of homeless teenagers on the streets of our towns and cities is heard in our publication **Homeless Voices** (£2.50 plus £1 p&p) featured here.

Some young people in an Edinburgh college speak to us about language and, in contrast to the Euro-opportunites-driven urge to learn foreign languages to "compete in the markets", they reflect on language as finding first your local voice in the world.

We include a **New Voices New Writing** feature - writer Braïn McCabe and Livingston teacher Tony McManus presenting full-some examples of school students finding expression in words, explore the dynamics of writing and of creativity. We extend an invitation for other young people of ages both within and without schools and colleges to write in for publication.

The **Craigmillar Portraits** by photographer Tim Curtis - forming part of **Scottish Child**'s 1991 calendar - give expression to day to day experience in the Edinburgh housing scheme.

All this and we welcome a new dairy columnist, Alison Prince who's been flying, and writing about what's good for the soul.

Now that feels better than a pinch on the backside! Merry Christmas. ■

Derek Rodger

IN BRIEF

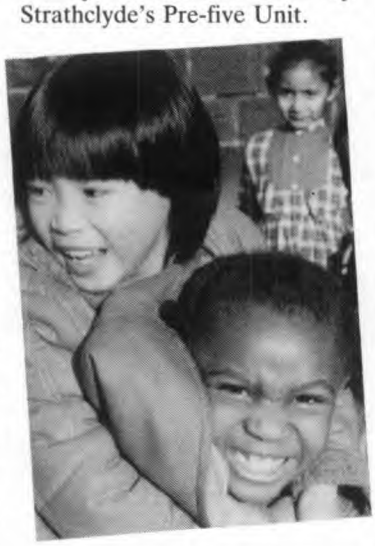
We know he must have seen it. The Scottish Office library does take **Scottish Child.** But Michael Forsyth, now back with the Education portfolio after his recent promotion by the Prime Minister, doesn't seem to have understood Chris Searle's account in the October number of the mistakes of **multiculturalism** in England and Wales.

How do we know this? Well the Minister issued a circular to education authorities on October 29th on the subject of **Religious Education and Observance.** "Scotland's tradition is Christianity," says the circular, "and we must build on that." Weekly or daily religious observance, especially in secondary schools is called for, presumably conducted under the terms of Scotland's Christian tradition.

Which Christian tradition one wonders? We are assured that "other traditions must be respected". But this has a familiar air to it. It is 1988 and then Secretary of State Kenneth Baker is introducing the National Curriculum and unitary state values about things like history and... religion.

Devolved power, the self-determination of peoples, the breaking up old power blocks across Europe - none of it! We're seeing the same values of post-imperial Conservatism passing through the Scottish Office. ■

Another different approach to our **race** and culture is evident is a recently published document. Playing in Harmony is the report of the first phase of the Anti-Racist Workpack Project commissioned from Save the Children Fund in conjunction with Strathclyde Community Relations Council by Strathclyde's Pre-five Unit.



In advance of the publication of a workpack of educational ideas and practices, the report gives a synopsis of race relations and tensions in Glasgow in the mid-eighties, reports on the action research in several Glasgow nurseries and under-five facilities, and gives pointers to how education starting with the earliest years can explore race awareness.

Playing in Harmony is available (Price £3.00 + 95p p&p) from SCF, Block 1 Unit C1, Templeton Business Centre, G40 1DA Tel 041 554 8822. ■

The subject of **childcare,** it has to be said, is a bit of a conundrum. Everyone seems to talk about it, about how little there is of it, how the Europeans have got more of it, and how we should have it. These pages are no exception. We've ground on these months with childcare features - see this issue on the subject of childminding - about nursery schools and creches and private nurseries and playgroups and the Childcare Now! campaign and the advent of childcare in the workplace.

In an affirmation that publicity itself does not make things happen necessarily, a new report for the European Commission's Childcare Network, **Caring for Children 1990** confirms the shortfall. Report author Bronwen Cohen of the Scottish Child & Family Alliance (SCAFA) said that "the gap between publicly funded provision in the UK and most other European countries is widening." And this in the face of increased demand from the increase in working mothers in this country.

Caring for Children may be more words, but they comprise an extensive up-to-date survey of Britain's childcare patterns. Copies are available from SCAFA (see address on Bronwen Cohen's article in this issue) at £4.95. ■

The Report of the **Child Care Law Review** has now been published and is obtainable from HMSO bookshops, price £5.50. The Review Group was appointed by the Secretary of State in Februray 1988. Their task was threefold: to identify options for change and improvement in child care law since the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 had been implemented; to look at the resource implications for any changes they might propose; to report on both these matters to the Secretary of State.

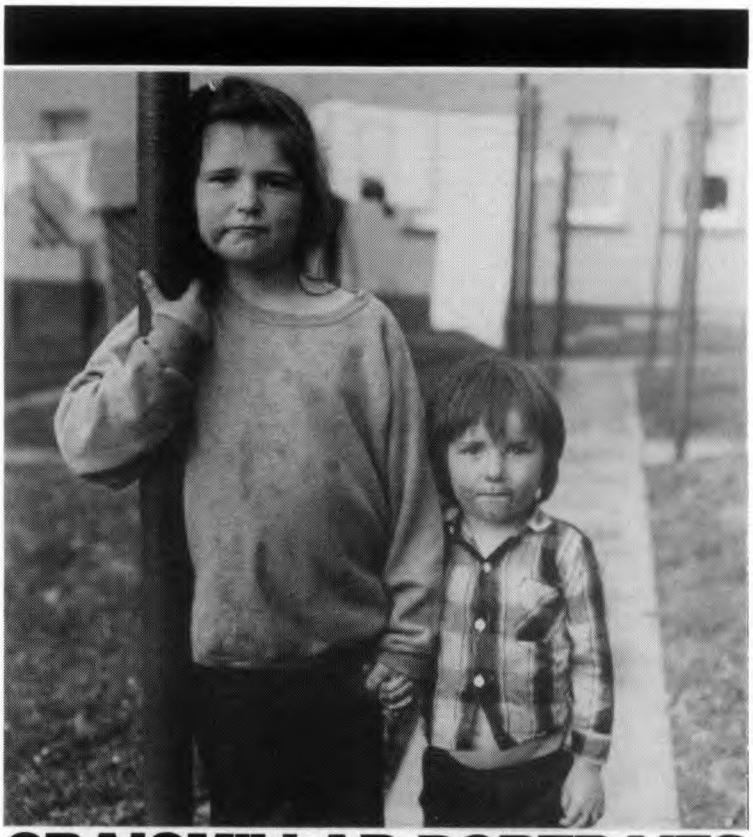
The publication of the report signals the next, and presumably final, round of public consultation with professionals and other interested bodies before amendments and additions to the legislation are drawn up. Time is short to get your views into Scottish Office but you have until mid-December to send in a response on all or some of the ninety-five recommendations put forward by the committee. ■

Science in the public imagination in this country is something that we have views about. Yet there is no area of the natural, physical or social world that cannot be considered in a scientific way.

For the last two years, the Edinburgh Science Festival has been staged in the capital in an effort to generate public interest in science. Funded by Edinburgh District Council and one other commercial sponsor (at the time of going to press, yet to be named), next year's science festival, which runs in the capital from April 1st to 14th, will cover a lively range of topics.

Scottish Child has been invited to take part, and we will be running a day long event under the theme of **"Tears and Protest".** We will hear one or two keynote speakers, have workshops and discussions, and ever mindful of the common creative link between the arts and science, we plan an evening programme of readings and music.

Provisional date, if you want to book your diaries, is Saturday 6th April 1991. Details will be announced in the February issue.



CRAIGMILLAR PORTRAITS

Photos by Tim Curtis

A Calendar for 1991 from

Scottish Child

This is your last chance to buy the SCOTTISH CHILD calendar for 1991. We'll post it to you - or to someone else as a present - by return of post. Don't miss the chance of getting this beautiful limited edition calendar - hurry while stocks last!

Please send me _____ copies of **Craigmillar Portraits - the Scottish Child Calendar for 1991.** I enclose £6.50 (plus £1 p&p) for each one (cheques payable to Scottish Child). If you want to send one to a friend or relative you can put their name and address below, send us a card we can put in with the calendar, and we'll post it straight to them.

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ADDRESS _____

Please return to SCOTTISH CHILD, 347a Pilton avenue, Edinburgh EH5 2LE.

Exceptional Early Entry

OUT-LINE

My daughter started primary school this August - at the age of 4 years and 4 months. She joins a small, but growing number of mainly middle class Scottish children who have started school under the provisions of Scottish Education Department circular 1108 (since withdrawn last July, replaced by circular 15).

The normal minimum age for primary school entry is four and a half, based on a February 28th birthday cut-off. However, circular 1108 stated that school entry requests from parents of children born after that date should be given "proper consideration" as placement requests under the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act. That meant they would be treated in a similar fashion to requests for places in a school other than the local one. The Conservative government sees it as a "parental choice" issue.

Scottish Regions' education departments are not run by Conservatives, and they do not like such provisions. They oppose them both on ideological grounds and because they see them as yet another central government edict not backed by money.

This, however, has not stopped some of them filling empty Primary 1 places with children of nursery school age for whom they have not provided nurseries. And there I believe is the real issue - Scottish Regions have been far too slow to provide the nursery places that elected councillors are always quick to claim they support.

Fife Region prides itself on the "best" nursery provision in Scotland - the chair of the education committee recently claimed that all urban dwelling 4 year olds have access to a nursery place. There are two main problems with this claim. Firstly places are based on part-time attendance (two and a half hours a day with start and finish times that are difficult for most and impossible for parents who work outside the home). Secondly the definition of being four is based on the school qualification date of February 28th.

I have a full-time job outside the home and my daughter's birth date falls on the "wrong" side of February 28th. After receiving advice I decided to request a full-time nursery place. My correspondence with the Region emphasised the following:

1. the needs of my daughter - she had attended a workplace nursery/playgroup since she was 2 and both her health visitor and the head of the workplace nursery supported the view that she was ready for primary 1 or nursery full-time.

Colin Chalmers

2. my own needs as a "working mother". Indeed my request for a full-time nursery place was quite consistent with Fife's policy on equal opportunities.

It was made clear to me that our case was not even to be seriously considered by the Region. Full-time nursery places are for "priority" children only and she did not come under the definition of a priority. Indeed Fife have a policy of keeping nursery places empty rather than considering **any** exceptions to their priority classification. Despite having the surface appeal of justice, this system of priority classification is used to keep children out of nursery, both full-time at four and a half, and part-time at three and a half. A number of parents have failed to gain part-time places for children who are three and a half a few weeks too late - again despite places being available.

Like most bureaucracies, Fife Education Department has its "rules" and is very adamant it cannot be flexible. Also like most bureaucracies it appears to deal with people who challenge these rules by trying to ignore them. In the end the use of circular 1108 on early entry to school was a method of trying to get something done.

I had first written to Fife Region in early 1989; it was now over a year later and it was clear that without some legal clout (or a demonstration outside Fife House) letters would slowly work their way back and forth until my daughter was legally entitled to go to primary school in August 1991. Eventually her father and I, along with the parents of another child of the same age were granted an interview with the Senior Assistant Director of Education.

A month later the two children were "assessed" by the educational psychologist, and half way through July we heard that our daughter could start school the following month.

A few months earlier I would have used this decision to back up the claim for a full-time nursery place but now my daughter had other ideas. She had suffered months of uncertainty and she was keen to start school like many of her friends. Fortunately it appears the right decision was made for her as she has settled in happily. Sadly the outcome for the other child is less satisfactory.

She had not been lucky enough to have the type of pre-school experience that my daughter enjoyed and this, it was felt, would make it more difficult for her to settle in school.

Early school entry raises serious issues both political, and for the education of the child. The popular consensus is that with some exceptions, early entrants tend to perform less well in their school careers. This is as true of children who are legally qualified to start at four and a half as it is of those who "just miss". The exceptions - those who gain from the experience - do appear to be those who have had a good pre-school experience.

It has been suggested that a way out of the dilemma would be for all children to start school the year after they are five, but that all children should have the right to a nursery place for at least a year prior to this. But central government at present appears willing to offer paper choices to the few, while not backing them up with resources for the many.

A number of Regions are in theory supportive of good nursery provision. Unfortunately they are not willing or able to provide it. Public sector nursery provision is inadequate throughout Scotland, putting those who can afford the private sector at an advantage. I am sure this suits the present government. It does not suit me. ■

Eileen Cook

OUT-LINE *is a regular feature where readers can contribute on any aspect of Scotland growing up. Send suggestions to the editor.*

LANGUAGE LEARNING

Foreign language learning, with the opening up of European borders in 1992, assumes greater significance. Rosemary Milne went back to college to talk about language learning.

Jamie, Gillian, and Barry from Edinburgh and Odwa and Tumi from South Africa, students at Edinburgh's Stevenson further education college, seem to agree. You learn a language - your own or a foreign one - to be able to communicate.

Barry's thoughts about communication in his old school though, are short and to the point -

"I don't remember ever being asked for my opinion on a subject. You answered questions."

Barry, Jamie and Gillian all did French in first year at school but dropped it, with relief, at the end of second year. Jamie had plenty to say about how he found things.

"The teacher I had in second year wouldn't speak a word of English. She used to come into the class and if you didn't know what she was saying, she would say it over and over again. The first few days I remember she would come in ranting a load of French. You were supposed to know what she was saying and if you didn't know she'd stand over you until you looked it up in your wee phrase book.

"She gradually got a bit easier when she realised that none of us could really speak a word of French. It was 'je m'appelle' and that was it - 'je m'appelle' - you can't get very far on that!

"I remember feeling afraid in language classes, when I went into the classroom. Scared in case you got asked to speak. You didn't want to get picked out. It was the way she asked the question. Everybody in my class hated it. The only good times were when someone else was up at the front of the class and they were getting it wrong and everyone was laughing.

"I remember one of my friends in the German class. He ended up throwing a chair at his teacher. The teacher started banging the desk with his finger, it was really annoying. He kept repeating the question. My friend started shouting the question back at the teacher because he couldn't think of the answer. So the teacher told him to get out. My friend had been in a lot of trouble, so he asked the teacher if he could just stay and have one more chance. The teacher said no and my pal threw the chair at him."

What you could call a breakdown in communication - in a language class!

Odwa's listening to all this - feeling that it wasn't so much the authority of the teachers that was his problem as the languages they had to learn at school.

"You have to do Afrikaans - and English. All the African languages are treated as irrelevant. If you fail one of them, it makes no difference because Afrikaans and English are what count. We did Zulu but we couldn't do Xhosa, our own language, because the school didn't have a Xhosa teacher. The mad thing is that Afrikaans is really like dead. It's just a dialect of Dutch. It's off the side. But that's the power of the government that insists on it being taught right from the start of school."

Is there a connection to be made between the situation of the Xhosa, Sotho and Zulu speaking Africans and the Gaelic and Scots of Scotland? There's no mistaking the sense of identity Odwa and Tumi have with their own language.

"There are parts of South Africa where people only speak Xhosa. It's a kind of identification. If you come across someone who speaks Xhosa, you feel you're meeting someone from the same place. Someone who speaks Zulu, well you don't identify with them so well. I'd say language is a way of uniting people and dividing them."

But the connection with the position of Gaelic in Scotland's not that real to the sixteen and seventeen year-old Scots.

"Gaelic wasn't really ever a serious choice. I'd say we got swayed away from it in school. I remember when we had to make our choices in third year getting given half an hour of what Gaelic would be. I couldn't understand a word of what the wee man was saying even though he was speaking in English. That was all the picture of what you'd be doing for the next two years. No thanks.

"No-one wants to speak Gaelic in Scotland any more. There's no use for it. Nobody apart from the very north would have a use for it.

"I had a sudden urge to learn some words for some Gaelic songs but that was about it. How could I use it unless I was going up north?"

If it's not down to learning a language because it gives you a sense of your cultural or national identity, what other purposes are there in learning a foreign language? Gillian doesn't think there's much point at all -

Native Language

Anne Lorne Gillies, patron of the Gaelic Playgroup Association, talks to Scottish Child about learning and living with Gaelic.

My parents wanted their children to learn Gaelic, (writes singer, broadcaster ANNE LORNE GILLIES, patron of the Gaelic Playgroup Association). I remember being terribly disappointed to discover that Gaelic was not taught at my local primary school in Oban, although several of the teachers were Gaelic-speaking.

Looking back on it after having done some research into language learning, it occurs to me that even if we had been given Gaelic in school, I might still not have learned to speak it. The teaching methods in those days did not seem to encourage little children to communicate in any language. I was belted in Primary 3 - for asking the girl beside me which page we were on - and if I had been rather frightened and quiet before, I was even worse after that.

I was quite sure that when I had children of my own I would raise them bilingually. This was not as easy as I thought, in a predominantly English-speaking city (Glasgow). Even Gaelic-speaking relatives could be negative, let alone monolingual neighbours and official people like health visitors, doctors, and nursery school teachers. All too often people like that seemed to have one set of standards for, say, Asian families, accepting the importance of their culture and mother tongue, and another for us, who were trying to raise our children with their own father's native tongue - and an important and rich part of the indigenous culture of Scotland.

But perhaps we should not have been surprised at these reactions. For many centuries the Scots have been prevented from feeling confident about their own culture. From the Reformation, Gaelic culture was classified in legal statutes as being "one of the chief causes of barbarity and incivility".

Until fairly recently Gaelic was consistently neglected by the Scottish Education Department, even in areas where it was the first language of 100% of the population. Children were severely punished for speaking Gaelic, even in the playground, well into this century. There were high levels of absenteeism among children in many parts of the Gaidhealtachd. Of those who did survive the system to go on to Higher Education outside the Gaidhealtachd, few returned. Some became the staunchest in fighting on behalf of the community from without; but many expressed the opinion that "Gaelic is the one thing that will hold the Highlands back". English is associated with "getting on".

I have noticed a tendency for some newspapers to use at best a humorously condescending tone whenever Gaelic is mentioned - and I have even seen irrational diatribes against Gaelic culture appear in reputable correspondence columns.

But now in places like Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness large numbers of non-Gaelic speaking parents from all walks of life are opting to send their children to Gaelic-medium primary school units, wanting their children to enjoy all the insights and advantages of being bilingual, and to be educated about their own Scottish heritage.

It is important to take a historical perspective. It gives a context to, for example, the work of Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich (CNSA - the Gaelic Playgroup Association) which has played an absolutely vital role in strengthening the position of Gaelic in Scotland. There has been a quite meteoric rise in this movement since it started in 1982 - over 1000 children now in Gaelic-speaking playgroups all over Scotland, and even one group in Canada.

It's the involvement of Gaelic-speaking parents - and especially mothers - which has been so crucial. And for parents learning Gaelic the playgroups provide an ideal situation for trying out the language. In the past, many parents have been in awe of the system, not feeling they have anything to contribute to their children's education. Gaelic now swims with the tide of increased parental involvement, and CNSA has helped to give parents the confidence and interest to take part fully and express their desires for Gaelic-medium education to be continued into the state primary school.

Using Gaelic as a medium through which to learn other subjects is a far cry from the experience of the monolingual grannies and granpas who were submerged in English! ■

For further information on Gaelic Playgroups contact Cei Scammel, CNSA, 109 Church Street Inverness Tel 0463 225469; and on Gaelic Bilingual Primary School Units contact CNAG at the same address Tel 0463 234138.

Anne Lorne Gillies and daughter Rachel

Fiona Lindsay

"I mean you can't even really say it's for doing business. Anyone wanting to do business with British people can speak English. They know they have to and not just for speaking to people over here either."

There's lots of laughs about not wanting to look like a "complete tourist" when you go abroad but both Barry and Jamie wish they had got on better with their second year French than they did.

"I hated French at school but I'd really like to speak another language. I've even tried quite a few times. I've not got the willpower though. It's sort of like learning English all over again. That took me years and years and I'm still finding it hard."

The problem seems to be a whole mix of things: the teachers' attitude, especially in second year, the status of English as an international language and the fact that learning a second language is left until secondary school.

"I think if you got some basic foreign language in primary school, like you do English and Maths, it would be easier. I mean the younger you are the easier it must be to learn to speak another language.

"It goes back the fact that English is an international language. A man in his castle and all that - the castle and the empire. The whole colonial thing. Whether we like it or not we're in with that. I mean they talk about Scotland having a different and a better education system than England but it's just the exact same."

Tumi can't see the hang-up. "Surely living in Europe and being part of a generation that wants to keep things running with Europe, you need at least some French, some German? I mean you can see why in America you wouldn't want to learn French because you could drive for days and hear nothing else but English. But if you live in Britain nowadays it's bound to be better to speak a foreign language."

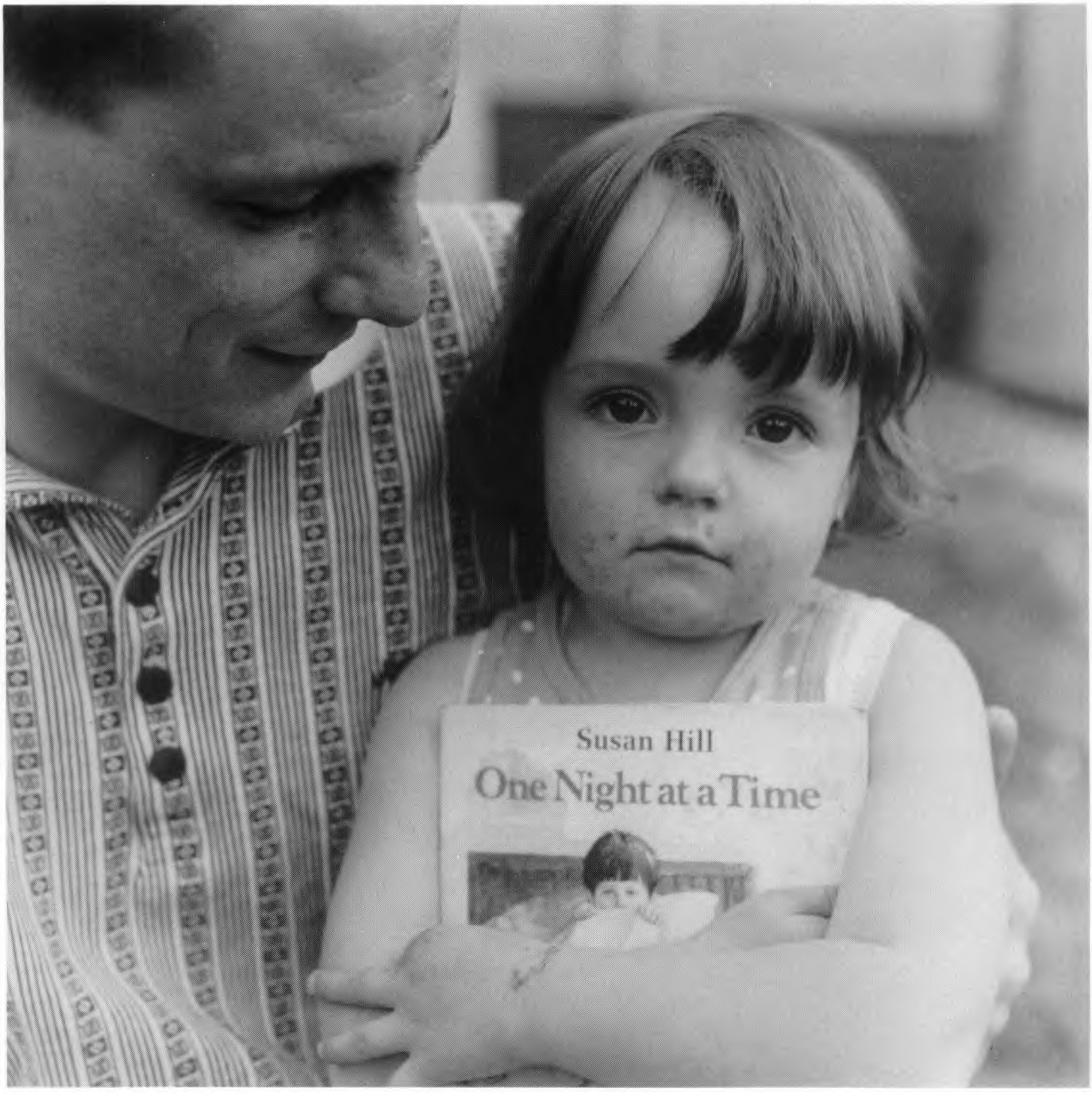
"That's right," says Jamie, " the problem's just doing it!" ■

CRAIGMILLAR PO

Scottish Child's 1991 calendar contains 12 photographs by Tim Curtis taken in Craigmillar, a working class housing scheme in Edinburgh, where the photographer lives and works.

ORTRAITS by Tim Curtis

All the portraits are of local people, and were taken within 6 or 7 streets of the photographer's home. The photos in the calendar, 4 of which we print here, are from a larger collection ▶



▶of 130 photos on rotating display in Craigmillar Library.
Tim Curtis sees these photographs almost as self-portraits. 'The people in the photos largely decided how they wanted them taken', he says. 'The idea was to take individual pictures which together make up a portrait of the area'.
The photos were taken in the summer of 1990, and the exhibition is due to continue on show until late 1991. Tim has distributed dozens of small prints of the photos to the people in

them.
Throughout this period Tim Curtis has received a total of £150 funding for his work.
CRAIGMILLAR PORTRAITS: A CALENDAR FOR 1991 FROM SCOTTISH CHILD is available price £6.50 (plus £1 p&p) from Scottish Child, 347A Pilton Avenue, Edinburgh EH5 2LE. If you wish to send the calendar as a gift, just send us a card with your cheque and we'll send the calendar out with the card. Tim Curtis can be contacted on 031-652 0738.

Derek Rodger

MINDING YOUR CHILD

In this, the latest in our extended series Childcare: urgent need for the 90s, we investigate the only childcare option available to most parents of the under-5s, finding a childminder.

"The whole thing," asserts Elizabeth Murdoch at work in her Barrhead home with her three young charges all making simultaneous body contact, "needs a lift."

"Childminding needs a more professional image. This 'I'm **only** a childminder' thing that people say when asked what they do, has to stop. What more precious thing is there than children?"

If in the occupational status ladder, housewife and mother comes low in the consumer society pecking order, the standing of those who are sub-contracted, so to speak, to look after other people's young children must be off the board.

Looking after young children seems to defy the economics of supply and demand. Not only is it a low-status low-paid job, trying to find a childminder in certain parts of Scotland is impossible.

"Most phone calls I get," an Edinburgh registered childminder told **Scottish Child,** "are from people who are desperate for someone. Suggesting that they might like to come round with the child to meet me and see the place first sounds like a unnecessary luxury. They just seem prepared to take anything. The main thing is if it's available."

There are around 7000 (almost exclusively female) childminders registered with local authority Social Work Departments in Scotland. They cater for around 20,000 children, both the under-5s and children who are looked after in the hours between school closing and parent's work finishing.

"Childminding," according to Scottish Childminding Assocation development officer and only full-time paid employee, Anne McNellan, "is an absolutely super option for young children. They go to a home like their own, in their own locality. They go to playgroups and do whatever else they do as a normal pattern. And they have the benefit of a one-to-one relationship."

Anne McNellan is talking in the Association's administrational headquarters - a small basement room in her Milngavnie home. She has part-time secreterial help from Sandra Jones, and consequently office space has spilled over into "part of a room upstairs".

The Scottish association have just formally set up this Autumn as separate from the British national body "due to membership demand to meet local needs in Scotland". Local authorities and other funding bodies also are likely to be more responsive if they feel their money is being spent in Scotland. The newly independent Scottish

body has a formidable task ahead. They plan to move into "proper" office space.

"Childminders," explained Anne McNellan, "are low paid." They 'take home' on average 50 - 70 per week if working full-time with the permitted maximum of 3 pre-five children. "They work on their own most of the time, and they can be fairly isolated. So we need to set up training and support mechanisms."

The Scottish Childminding Association plans to raise the value of childminding both for the status of its members and for the reputation of what can be offered. People are beginning to see childcare as really necessary, say the Association, and the important issue is quality. Childminders valueing themselves and being able to communicate well with parents are seen as being just as important as a knowledge of child development. Hence the push for training and support.

"Whereas five years ago," explains Anne McNellan, "we argued that childcare, childminding included, had to be seen as part of the economy, we were not listened to. All of a sudden it seems people like the Scottish Development Agency are very interested.

"The element of choice is important too. Not everyone wants to leave their young child for up to ten hours a day in an institutional setting." While the mind-set for pre-five provision may still rest on publicly subsidised nursery places, there are signs that the individual and familiar approach afforded by childminding is being valued. The Fife Partnership Nursery, for example, a joint initiative between Fife Regional Council, Dunfermline District Council and local employers, is set to employ four childminders to work from the nursery.

Because of the prevailing low level of any type of provision, and because the different childcare interests are working together on the Childcare Now! Scotland campaign, and on SCAFA's (Scottish Child & Family Alliance) Under-6s Forum, Anne McNellan sees no unnecessary rivalry between various types of facility.

She does see other problems though. Childminding, she says, is often the only cheaper resource for employers. "But male employers cannot see past offering childcare as an equal opportunity (as they would be required to do) to both male and female staff." The fact that employers would feel vulnerable to losing out - literally paying to look after someone else's worker's kids, points to the need for a government lead.

Yet it is the whole context of public and political double standards that may be the Scottish childminders' biggest hurdle.

"Young parents, just when they are most insecure and vulnerable about bringing up their children, are encouraged to take on commitments like owning a home, that mean they simply have to go out to work. People can need about 400 a month just to stay where they are. Technically what every first child is worth is the cost of childcare." ■

Derek Rodger

Derek Rodger

SANDRA CURRIE (pictured above with baby, Alison) has been childminding from her Alloa home for the last seven years. She has three sons of her own and started when the youngest was three and needed company.

As well as Alison, she looks after two year old Kai full time from 8.45 till roughly 5.15 every day. She also has four after school children, three of whom she's childminded since they were babies.

She charges 7.50 per day per child, and 1.50 for the after school hours. She reckons that after outlays on food, drink, snacks, heating bills and outings, she's left with about 25 per week net.

"I just love doing it," she explains. Her previous job as a social worker does not bear comparison in terms of demands and stress levels. "Childminding allowed me to stay at home while my own children are still young."

She does feel that local authorities could spare childminders more time and that she is not supervised as she should be. "The last course in Clackmannan District was seven years ago. Training is the big lack."

ELIZABETH MURDOCH (pictured opposite) of Barrhead in Glasgow childminds Angus (aged three) and Stewart (21 months). Registered childminders are allowed only three under-fives at a time. Elizabeth also has Laura (5), Sarah (7) and Michael (9) after school.

"Basically what I earn only supplements what my husband makes." Having worked previously as a librarian and in computers, she does childminding because she enjoys it. Her own daughter is now 13 and used to enjoy the other children around. But she now feels it as a bit of an intrusion - "not so much the children, but the coming and going of all the parents."

"The biggest thing is to get people to realise that childminding is the biggest form of full-time childcare in the country. Parents might baulk a bit at the charge, but other forms of childcare are subsidised. Childminders are self-employed and low-paid."

Elizabeth recently took part in a pilot training scheme set up by the Care Sector Liason Group Scotland with SCOTVEC. "The course raised my own self-confidence," she says. "I became more aware of my own capabilities, although to be honest, some people might be put off by the language."

"Compared to countries like Denmark and Sweden, we're very far behind. Here we don't even get sick pay or holiday pay." ■

Bronwen Cohen - making alliances

FAMILY AFFA

The Scottish Child & Family Alliance (SCAFA) is Scotland's national agency for children and their families. SCAFA is a voluntary led organisation (Chairman Lord Morton of Shuna), with a membership of some 170 voluntary and statutory agencies.

This year saw the appointment of a new Director, Bronwen Cohen. She is the UK member of the European Commission's Childcare Network. We asked her to outline the major issues facing Scotland's children and their families, and SCAFA's role for the coming years in planning for their needs.

Family policy is now high on the agenda for all political parties, reflecting a heightened awareness of the social changes which have for some time been shaping modern family life. Scottish families have not been immune from the changes.

In Scotland marriage is becoming less popular, cohabitation more so, and an increasing number of children are born to cohabiting couples. Fewer couples marry and more couples divorce. More than one in four marriages in Scotland now ends in divorce and half of these involve children under sixteen, resulting in a large increase in the number of one-parent families and an increasing number of step-families.

Social changes do not in themselves create problems but the failure to provide for these changes does. The context of social and economic disadvantage, within which a growing number of Scottish families are having to confront these changes, is one of the central issues which family policy in Scotland now has to address.

The controversy this Autumn surrounding the failure to properly uprate child benefit highlighted the inadequacies in family support policies. Scottish families with an average household income only 84% of that in England are more likely to experience poverty than elsewhere in Britain. A major survey carried out by Strathclyde Regional Council of families with under-fives in 1988 found that 27% of families had a weekly income of less than 80 per week. In areas of urban deprivation this rose to a

Derek Rodger

IRS

staggering 45% of families, reflecting a higher proportion of lone parent households and lower rates of maternal employment.

Access to jobs is an obvious and important antidote to family poverty, and women with dependent children are now more likely than not to be in paid employment. Over 50% of Scottish women with a child under 10 are 'economically active'.

But employment is not an option for some women, who are in many cases unable to find a job - unemployment rates amongst Scottish mothers are the highest in the UK. If they do secure employment, they often fail to find the necessary childcare.

The UK in general is one of the poorest providers of childcare services in Europe and Scotland has fewer services for working parents than England. And for those parents wanting to care for children themselves for a period of time, the parental care option incurs a heavy financial penalty, without access to employent provisions such as parental leave - now enjoyed by the majority of working parents in the European Community.

The changes affecting children and their families are indeed Europe wide. Addressing these issues in Scotland requires recognition of the different social, educational, and cultural context which underpins Scottish society. And a collaborative effort is needed by all agencies working with children and families to find the right solutions.

Helping our members with this is SCAFA's central task. As an autonomous Scottish agency, SCAFA's priorities are those of Scotland's children and families. A voluntary led agency, our membership of over 170 individuals and organistions drawn from the voluntary and statutory sectors throughout Scotland gives SCAFA a key role to play in helping to improve the situation of Scottish children and their families.

SCAFA's work includes an information and consultation role - keeping members abreast of developments and each other's work and facilitating a collaborative approach to policy development; a training function; and a development role. Initiatives reflect the concerns of members.

In December, for example, SCAFA is exploring the concerns of members including Save the Children Fund, Barnardo's, the National Children's Home, Childline Scotland, and the Scottish Council for the Single Homeless over the need for a more coherent policy framework in relation to the vulnerable group that is the teenage homeless. A conference will launch the findings of a commissioned study to be published by HMSO.

"The context of social and economic disadvantage... is one of the central issues which family policy in Scotland now has to address."

In the UK as a whole, the needs of rural areas have not received the attention they deserve and in Scotland, which has the lowest average population density of any part of the UK, there is a rising awareness of the need to improve rural services for children and their families. In an innovative project funded by the Scottish Office, developed with the assistance of Quarriers and all the local agencies, SCAFA now has a development offocer post in the Borders to explore ways of improving services to the Region's pre-school children. Next April SCAFA is organising a major conference with Grampian Regional Council which will highlight childcare needs in rural areas. This will focus on a report we are preparing on childcare services and needs in a range of communities across Scotland, as well as developments taking place in the European Community.

Two major developments in SCAFA's work are planned for next year. We are currently seeking funding for a Special Needs Initiative involving the setting up of a Forum to bring together agencies and professionals from across different sectors. It is intended that this will both promote a collaborative approach to policy and to stimulate the development of services in this area, widely seen as underserved in Scotland.

A further initiative involves the development of a Training Partnership programme aiming to promote a collaborative approach to providing training in a form that will assist smaller and more isolated voluntary organisations.

Scotland has 9% of the UK's children - a diminishing numerical proportion, but a somewhat higher share of the problems. It is vital that agencies work together in providing a supportive environment for Scotland's one million children as well as addressing the needs of their many hard-pressed families. ■

Bronwen Cohen

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homeless voices

This month Scottish Child publishes Homeless Voices, in which homeless teenagers talk about their experiences - of leaving home, of being out on the streets, of managing somehow to survive. and they tell us of their hopes - modest hopes that government and other agencies often seem determined not to see fulfilled. Here we publish some extracts from the report, and some comments on it.

Margaret, 16, Edinburgh

The last time I can remember I got a cuddle was when I was old enough to know what cuddles were. I can't remember getting a cuddle since I was about 7. I felt left out. I saw my brothers and sisters getting cuddles in front of me from their dad, my stepdad, and when I used to see them getting cuddles I used to think to myself 'Why me? Why don't I get one?' I don't feel angry. I just feel a lot of pain inside me. I've cried for them that much I can't get the tears out now. I've cried for them that many times when I've been getting battered.

She'd batter me for stupid wee reasons, because I was arguing with my brothers or my room wasn't tidy. I get depressed about it sometimes when I'm just myself. Once my mum pushed me down the stairs. So I was trying to crawl back up, hoping to make it to the toilet or something, and she just got a double adaptor plug and scratched all my eyes and my head, and she kept smothering me in the carpet because I was screaming, so she couldn't hear me, she just kept battering me.

The voices of young homeless people in this report bear witness to the real horror of youth homelessness today.

Sheila McKechnie, Director of Shelter

Another time I just never got off my mind, she went and battered me stupid, she was throwing me against the walls, pushing me and punching me. So I don't know what made me do it, I got up, I ran for the kitchen and got a knife and I said, I was so calm, 'just keep away from me, I've had enough.' So she got my brother to phone the police. The police came up , and I left that day. I was 15.

Karen, 17, Stirling

I went to the Homeless Department in Clackmannan District Council, and I would never go back. The woman, you can't really say it politely, but to me she was a bitch. Just the way she spoke to you. I went in the door and she says 'How can I help you?' and I went 'I'm homeless', and she says 'Apart from that?' She told me politely that there wasn't any places in Alloa, like bed and breakfasts or anywhere to go, in other words you're going to be sleeping on the streets. Then she told me she didn't believe that I didn't have anywhere else to stay, that my dad would refuse me to go and live there. And I said 'I'm not saying he would refuse me, but I can't live there'. And she says 'That's personal reasons, that doesn't mean you're homeless, you can still live there'. Personal reasons are what the whole thing's about.

Julie, 16, Stirling

I had no choice, I got kicked out my house. I knew about Stopover through my brother. I couldn't have got into any bed and breakfast because I was working, the DHSS wouldn't pay for me, I'd have been on the streets if Stopover couldn't have taken me.

Folk stay in the subs, the train station or King's Park, wherever they can get a kip I suppose.

Malcolm, 19, Glasgow

I could take you several places in Glasgow where people sleep outside. Anderston Quay, there's a bridge there, quite a few people sleep there. There's girls at 16 sleeping in graveyards, sleeping in carboard boxes, on parkbenches, in bus stations.

Andrew, 16, Aberdeen

My dad was an alcoholic. He didn't hit me all the time, but when he did do it it was pretty bad. Like he broke both my arms when I was 10 year old, he banged the doors on me. I got sent to a psychiatrist after that. I was on anti-depressants from

Nowadays the state punishes the victims of its own social/economic policies. Elected representatives at municipal, regional, and national government level must stand guilty; having been so little heard in the past they are nowadays barely seen at all. Even more shameful is the indecent haste with which many of those in a position to oppose or condemn the situation rush to rationalise the punishment, frequently vilifying those who attempt to defend the victims.

when I was 12 up to about a month ago, I'd keep trying to kill myself.

I moved in with my mum and my stepdad when I was 15. I suppose I resented him in a way for trying to take the place of my dad. It was his house, and I had to be in at half nine, things like that. He was really, really strict. If I left the curtains shut in my room he'd take them down, if I left my light on he'd take the lightbulb out. He'd take my stereo away and say I was wasting his electricity.

He'd strangle me and stuff. He lifted me off the ground and just choke me until I was out cold. I'd go unconscious then wake up. I never saw a social worker or anything. He broke my sister's skull once. He's just a dick.

I couldn't take any more, getting battered about, I left. I never left before because there was nowhere else to go. But eventually I just left. I slept rough in a warehouse, in a park. Everyone sticks together - instead of hundreds of folk being all over the place and more likely to get jumped, if you all stick together in one place nothing's going to happen to you. There were about fifty of us, young ones. We tended to stick together, not so much during the day, they all go their own way during the day, but at night. There wasn't fighting, people looked out for each other.

It's freezing when you're sleeping rough, but it was a lot better than being at home. At least I was safe. I practically couldn't sleep in my house, I just found it a lot better sleeping rough.

Lorna, 17, Glasgow

Then they says to me 'You're getting a furnished flat' and I says 'Where is it?'. They says 'We can't tell you till you're going tomorrow morning'. And I says 'How no?' and they says 'Oh no, you're not allowed to know'. So when I goes down the next morning I says 'Where is it?' they says 'Drumchapel', I says 'I told you, I'm not allowed to go near Drumchapel'. 'Well', they says, 'You have to take it or leave it'. I felt like greeting. That was the Hamish Allan Centre.

I got moved to a flat in Drumchapel. I told them before that that if I went near Drumchapel I'd get a doing, because I know people up there and they're after me, guys, and they still put me up there. They put me up there, the Council, they said 'Well, there's nothing else we can do for you, it's either that or walk the streets'.

There's a lot of people sleeping rough. Most of them go down to the Clydeside. Frank slept down there last night, he says it's amazing how many people you see stuck down there.

Karen, 17, Stirling

You can't give opinions, like all these people who are giving opinions, people who have never been homeless, if they were my age and homeless they would have a totally different view. It's not because I'm spoilt or I'm immature that I won't go back, it's because I can't live in that house. They're talking about nothing, they don't know what they're talking about. They've got everything on a plate for them, how do they know? They're just looking around and reading magazines and thinking 'Na, it's the child's fault, she must be doing something, she must be coming in late, spending all night with boys', and it's always boys, it's a load of rubbish.

It's mostly older folk I think, it's old fogeys giving opinions on things they know nothing about. They're living in the past times, they don't know nothing about what's going on apart from what they read.

All the lassies here just now, not one of them walked out their house. They all got told to leave. I don't know anyone who has walked out their house to be honest with you. ■

This pamphlet highlights one aspect of what seems to be a war being waged against young folk by adult society. It is no coincidence that alternative methods of communication are on the increase. This is because the outlets for genuine democratic discourse are being effectively sealed off from the public. In these pages just a few of the tens of thousands of victims are allowed a rare opportunity to speak for themselves.
James Kelman

HOMELESS VOICES does for the plight of the young homeless in Scotland what few other initiatives in this area do - treat them as articulate subjects, with clear views on how their conditions could be bettered, rather than as mute objects of pity of charity, or even insensitive policy.

SCOTTISH CHILD has constantly campaigned for the legitimacy of young people's perspectives on their own lives: HOMELESS VOICES is another valuable and necessary stage in this radical project. I endorse it wholly.

Pat Kane, Hue and Cry

Homeless Voices *is available price £2.50 (plus £1 p&p) from Scottish Child 347a Pilton Avenue, Edinburgh EH5 2LE.*

new voices, new writing

Monologue

Right, okay, we'll check it out.

More fighting on Maryhill Road, John. See when I get the wee bastards, I'm gonnae jail the lot of them. I don't care if it's Ruchill or the valley mob, I'm just gonnae get a van and jail them. We've got tae go along tae the Viking pub there, fighting up there again. I hate this, by the way John, cause see when they see us comin, the wee shites just run away. Ye can never catch them. Wait a minute - who's that?

Here, you lot! Get over here NOW. Whit's youse doing hingin aboot here? Just stannin aboot ma arse. Where dae youse aw stey? Barnes Road, son. Have you been in trouble afore? Whit's yer name? Bratton. I'm sure I've got yer name in ma wee book. Hiv I? Aye Ah hiv! Right, John, take this one away and book the wee bastard. Where do the rest of youse come from? Whit aboot you, whit's your name? Well George, where do you stey? The Gilshy, I don't know. Jail this one as well, John. In fact, jail aw seven of them. We may as well. Youse lot are the ones that have been fightin wi that valley mob. Right John, I'll radio for a van and we'll take the wee shites up to the station.

Come in? This is Robert and John. We need a van, we caught these boys fighting. Send a van doon to the Bank of Scotland in Maryhill Road.

Stop talkin youse three or I'll boot your arse for yis. Right, I hink I'll search youse. Get your jackets open. I bet youse aw carry blades an that. Right, youse two are clean. Whit aboot the rest of them, John? Right, yis are lucky yis are no carryin or it would have been a night in the cell for yis. There's the van.

Right the lot of yis in the back. Right, take them to the station, get their names an that. Just put the shits up them and let them go.

I like this job when I can jail people.

Derek Thomson
third year
North Kelvinside

Drawings by Shiel Yule

Death and dark

I am in my bed. I just can't get to sleep. It seems like hours since I came to bed. Perhaps it is. Now I'm thinking about my great uncle Bobby. He died not so long ago. You know, just thinking about death has made the room seem darker. Now the thin crack of light coming from the slightly opened door seems even thinner. What happens after death? Who knows? Now the darkness of the night is really getting to me. I'm pulling the covers over my head.

That just makes it worse, it's darker under there. It's silent now and I feel as if the darkness is engulfing me. Is this what it's like after death? Are you stuck in a silent darkness for eternity? "I won't die for years, why am I so worried?" I say, trying to reassure myself. But that's not true, I could die tomorrow. For instance, a bus could hit me. I could die of heart failure by frightening myself like this. Is there heaven or hell?

All these thoughts pass through my mind in a few terrifying moments. Everything around me seems lifeless. I want to jump out of bed and open the door, but I can't bring myself to. Death seems to be creeping out of every nook and cranny and gathering around me. I am sweating with fear. Perhaps my imagination is running away with me. I want to scream, but I can't make any sound come out. The crack of light from the door seems to be getting smaller and further away. I am like a toy for the night and my imagination to play with.

Stuart Wilson
first year
Bellshill Academy

Monologue

Ello Mum, it's me, Jim. I've just popped along for a little visit, cause Ah'm goin to the game today. Ere, I brought you some more flowers, those ones I brought you laust week seem to ave withered up to nuffing. Anyway never mind about that, I've got some news for you. Our San's goin to have a baby, she just found out laust week, she's already over seven due. Oh wait a minute, that won't be news to you, will it, since you're up there wif d'Lord, will it? Oh well, never mind then. It ain't haulf cold today, isn't it, but you probably can't feel it. Ah can remember back when me and sis were kids. "You'll remember and wrap up warm, or I'll box your ears!" was what you used to say. You scared us that much we didn't even bother goin out when it was cold, in case you'd 'it us.

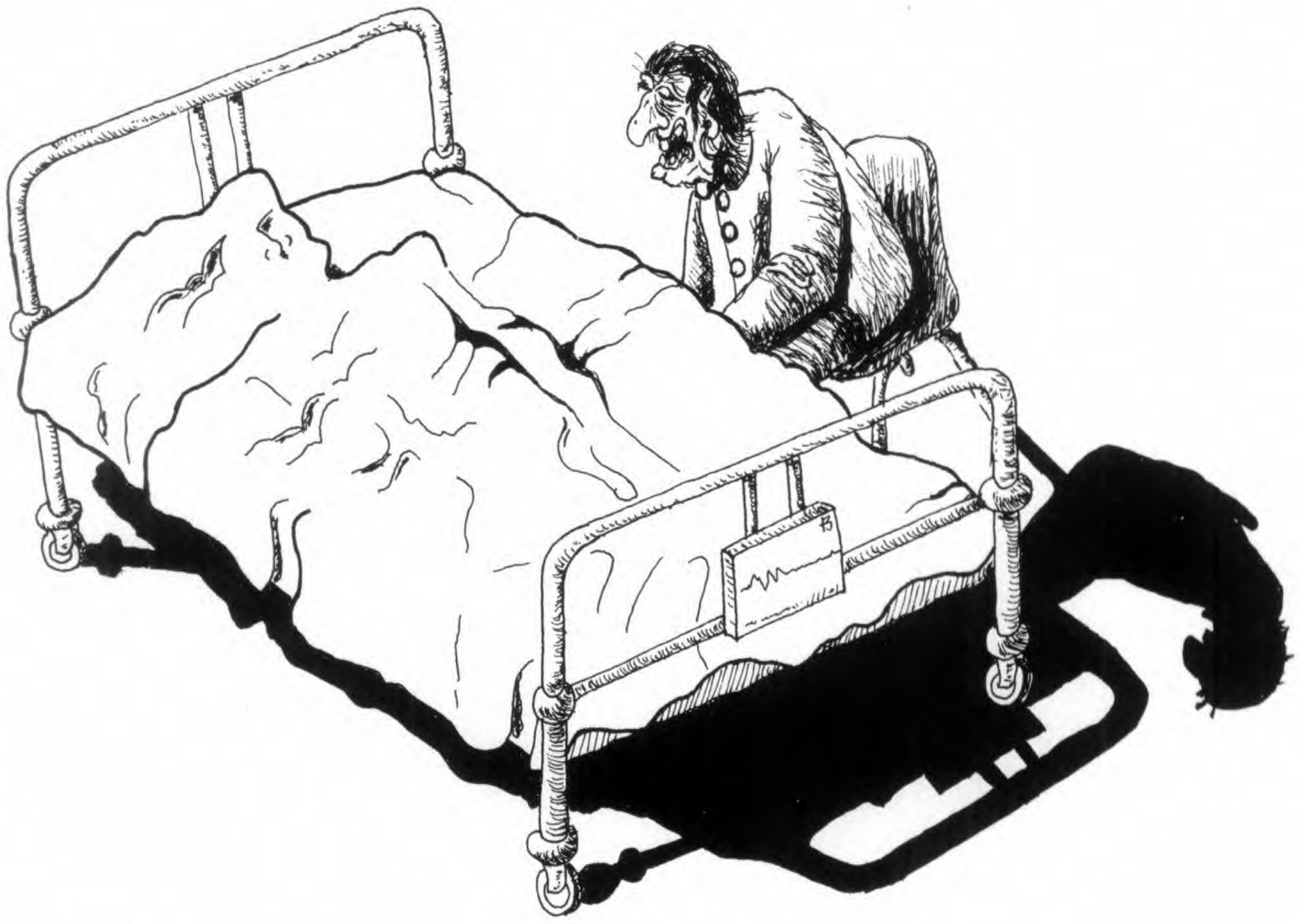
That reminds me, 'member old Mrs Rossten, who lived down the road from us, well 'er Tracy's gettin married in a couple of weeks to some big rich geezer from down Wimbledon, an he's got a bob or two, I'll tell ya. I think he's one o them yuppies cause he's got one of them Mercedes wiv one of dem big diary fings that tell you how to tie your shoelaces an all.

If you're wondering why I ain't talkin about family, it's because I ain't seen none since you passed away - well, apart from San, who wanted to tell me about the baby. Even she only stayed for a couple of minutes then zoomed off.

God, is that the time? I'll need to go in five minutes, or Ah'll be late for the game. I'm goin with Tommy Simpson, the one you don't like cause he spent time in the old nick for robbin that bank, but don't worry, he's changed now, he's even got himself a job, more than I can say for meself. No one wants electricians anymore. You're either too young, too old or not suitable for the job. There's that gardener over there. I'm gonna 'ave a word wiv 'im about the state of your grave. I think he's been on too much of the holy water in the church.

There's me bus now. I'll need to go now mum, but I'll pop in next week an have a little chat wiv you, all right? Bye mum, I'll be seeing you later... much later.

Alan Bettley
third year
Bellshill Academy



Monologue

Robert, here at last, sorry I'm late. God, the toon's jumpin wi' folk today, a' that early Christmas shoppin', got to get mine done soon. Had to wait thirty five bloody minutes for a bus, an it wis like sardines on the one I got.

That wee nurse seems really nice, dead helpful an all, hung ma coat up for me - so she did. Keepin you well too is she? Aye, I thought so. You eatin your food? An yer egg too? More than y'ever did for me. Is it okay? No as good as yer ma's eh?

How's that leg gettin on? That's great love. And yer arm? Still hurtin is it? Oh - but it'll take time - the doctor said so. See yer face has gone down a'ready.

That guy was in court today, the careless bugger (excuse my French), three times the legal limit, it was said, an he says it wisnae his fault - the bloody liar. Got one stingy month in the slammer, an a five hunner quid fine. No that it'll bother him though, looks like he's rollin in it - so he does. An that judge, fancied him rotten, so she did, wi' all his big words an fancy clothes, all eyes, she was.

A'right, a'right, what do you want t'talk about son? Yer Da was goin tae come, but he was offered overtime. Karen's lookin' after the wee yin. He's been a right darlin' through it all. Almost walkin, but dead good-natured, not the way I remember you. She's been great too, feedin the wee yin, an a' the rest of us too, sometimes. Got a letter from John, he's no liking Edinburgh, dead borin' so he says. Why couldn't he just get a job like his father did instead of this fancy University lark. Says yer cousin Kirsty's gettin' married. No, she's eighteen now, but it's still dead young. I know but it was different in my day, none of these short skirts and low cut tops, ye canny blame the boys. We took pride in how we looked.

Ye should see that Rachel next door, wi' a different boy every day. All long-haired greasy types an no a tie in sight - let me tell you.

Well, they a' send their love.

What's up wi' the wee boy in the next bed. Pretty bad, eh? Dis he know who did it? How old is he anyway? Oh, he disnae look it. I would've said fifteen.

Hello, dear. Yes please, milk and two sugars. He's gettin better, isn't he love? Is he eatin his food? OK then I don't want to keep you. What did I tell you. She's really nice, ye don't see manners like that every day. See ya tommorrow, then.

Josi Roschlau
sixth year
Woodside Secondary School

Mum, Can ah get?

Mum, can ah get that? Oh Mum, can ah, please? Ah promise Ah'll be good, Ah'll no ask for anythin again. Oh please Mum, can Ah jist have it?

It's no fair,. Ah never get anythin. Dee-Anne gets whitever she wants. Ah never got anythin when she got her new shoes last week. Ah want a new paira shoes.

Oh look, Mum, those shoes are dead nice, in't they? Oh so ur they wans oer there, no, they wans oer there are nicer. Can Ah get them, Mum? They'd go nice wi ma wee black skirt. Oh Mum, Ah've got tae have them. Please. Ah'll be able tae wear them tae Nicole's birthday party the morra. Aw ma pals are gettin somethin new tae wear. Oh please Mum, can ah get them?

Ah can! Oh great Mum! Ah'll no ask for anythin else, Ah promise!

Ah'll still need tae find a top tae wear. Ah'll probably have tae wear that auld cream top. Ah wish Ah had a new top tae wear...

Alison Hopkins
third year
Bellshill Academy

Phoebe and the salivating spider

Phoebe lay motionless on the garage roof gazing dreamily into space. It was early evening, when you catch the summer sky at its best, a fact that Phoebe well appreciated. The light breeze was refreshing after the sticky afternoon and the clouds that had glided restlessly across the sky all day were now still. A flock of birds was flying in arrow formation. Phoebe wondered why they did that and where they were going. She reminded herself to ask her father, who was a fountain of information on every subject under the sun. She looked at the watch wrapped around her tiny tanned wrist which showed a quarter past seven. She couldn't go in yet as her parents were having a "Lie Down". Her parents were always having a "Lie Down". Perhaps they had trouble sleeping at night.

A Siamese cat came slinking along the edge of the garage then stopped abruptly just an arm's length from Phoebe. She stiffened. The cat stared at Phoebe coldly with ice-blue eyes. Its manner reminded Phoebe of the Wicked Witch of the West on first surveying Dorothy complete with ruby slippers. The cat hissed, hunched its shoulders and for a second looked ready to pounce but Phoebe was too quick. She grabbed a stone and hurled it at the cat's head. She missed but the cat, who was a sensitive soul, quickly got the message and disappeared. Phoebe let a sigh escape her lips then sat up and looked around to see if anyone had witnessed the incident.

A little boy was relieving himself against a wall apparently unaware of Phoebe's brush with death. She turned her head away with a haughty dignity for she was nothing if not a lady. Her mother had warned her on many occasions of "Boys

Like That". Besides a much more interesting sight was occuring in the mouth of a nearby tunnel. A teenage couple were kissing awkwardly. It wasn't the same way her parents kissed though. That usually began with a cuddle and a smile then finally they pressed their lips together lightly but firmly. Phoebe searched for a word. It was so much more... synchronised.

The boy who seemed to be made up entirely of limbs, did not fold the girl in his arms. In fact he seemed unsure what to do with his arms and for a horrifying moment Phoebe thought he might put them in his pockets. The boy kept his eyes closed but the girl seemed almost as if she were reading the graffiti on the wall opposite. They continued bumping foreheads and exchanging saliva for a few minutes before separating, obviously to catch their breath.

The spider boy seemed to have unfolded himself from the embrace to reveal his towering stature. He was thin with a crop of black hair which seemed to be cut in no particular style and his face was coverered in spots. Phoebe thought he might have the measles. The girl was fairly pretty in a homely sort of way, thought Phoebe generously. She has sandy-blonde hair tied back in a ponytail. There was an awkward instant when both seemed to have lost the lofty air of indifference which is predominant amonst teenagers. They looked more like strangers than a couple. The girl made a suggestion which the boy rather too quickly agreed to and they disappeared into the shadows of the tunnel. A week later Charlie Tate received a sock in the eye when he tried to snatch a kiss from Phoebe in the cloakroom.

Kenneth Graham
fifth year
Abronhill High School,
Cumbernauld

When I was young

See me, when I wis young I wis bee-ootiful. Actually, to tell you the truth, I wis the most bee-ootiful lassie in Bisland Drive. See me wi ma red hair, an it went right doon tae ma back. I'd often walk doon the drive tae the shops and aw the boys would whistle at me. See ma teeth, they were bee-ootiful, cause I hardly ate any sweeties, it wis always jist fruit. See me, I never went tae bed late, cause I knew I needed ma sleep. I'll tell you one thing, I never had bags under ma eyes.

I'm no boring you, am I? Anyway, I remember once, before I wis married - no I'm tellin a lie - it wis efter I wis married. Aw aye, I remember noo. I wis aboot fourteen or sixteen. Anyway, I happened tae see a cigarette an I picked it up, an ma Aunty Bessie caught me. WELL!!! She blew her tap. She said, "MORAG McCanter, whit are you daein with a fag in yer mooth?" See ma Aunty Bessie, see the way she talked, it wis aw slang aw the time, she never spoke proper. Anyway, I said, "I wis pickin it up from the ground in case a little bairn picked it up." I wis right proper then. Everybody'd say, "Aw, here's toffy-Morag comin."

That's me just tellin you some of ma history. Dae you believe that I wis bee-ootiful at one time, an I look like a shrivelled-up prune noo? I dae. I look like a shrivelled-up prune, don't I?

Patrick Somerville
third year
North Kelvinside School

Belated Birthday Wishes!

Practical Nurturing - The Job of the Resident Writer in Schools

The popular view persists that the ability to write poetry, fiction or drama is something a few people are endowed with at birth, and for this attitude comes the prejudice that creative writing is something beyond the scope of education, that to be a writer you simply need to have talent for writing.

Let me say immediately that I'm not intent on trying to refute the validity of the concept of talent. My experience of children leads me to believe that they are indeed born with a great many inherent abilities.

The concept of the talented few, of course, militates against this, and often the notion that creative writing is an elitist irrelevance will come from the children themselves - they have been taught to think like that. Perhaps the current emphasis, in the writing of fiction at least, on literary prizes and awards, reinforces this.

My own experience as a writer makes me doubt the usefulness of the notion of talent. Any writer who believes that his talent alone will pull him through is liable to fall into the trap of thinking that anything he writes is art, that it wells from a source which must not be questioned and so must be a sacred object, not to be redrafted, not to be edited. The trouble with people who have such blind faith in their own talent is that they lack the necessary self-criticism to develop.

When I started writing I had very little obvious talent for language use. On the contrary, it was precisely because I had difficulty with words that I was drawn to the challenge of writing. Drawing and painting came easily to me; my talent for visual art was given, and in the end I didn't develop this because it seemed too easy. By the time I was leaving school, however, I had acquired the habit of creativity and that was the important thing - without that, I couldn't have become a writer. It has to be said that the examination system and, say, the English syllabus of the time, didn't help me to acquire that habit, though certain individual teachers undoubtedly did.

In any case, nothing comes of talent if it is not nurtured, and as a visiting writer to schools, I feel that much of the true talent has to be exhumed before it can be nurtured. It should also be said that my aim, in providing creative writing courses in schools, is not to find the one or two individuals who might possibly become writers in later life.

Assignments in creative writing may exercise a pupil's imagination, his sensory awareness, his communication skills, his powers of observation, his critical faculties - and such things are important in many fields of work. So I go in with the belief, some would say naively optimistic, that any pupil can benefit from creative writing.

I give class presentations, in which I might read and talk about my own work and do my best to answer any questions the students ask me about writing, publishing and broadcasting in Scotland. I run short "courses" - though they are less structured than that suggests - in creative writing for smaller groups who are interested. I set the group various assignments and each tends to focus on one particular aspect of writing.

I would like to outline one such assignment I have given to various groups, not because it has resulted in the most accomplished pieces of writing, but because it seems to provide a challenge the pupils haven't previously encountered. It has been felt to be a liberating and enjoyable experience of writing, as if a whole new area of language previously designated as "out of bounds" is suddenly made accessible.

The basic assignment is to explore spoken language in a piece of writing and to attempt to capture an aspect of real speech. If you are interested in writing poetry, fiction or drama, an awareness of spoken language is crucial. It seems to me that this is an aspect of language use which is almost comprehensively ignored by the teaching of English.

For the year of 1990, Brian McCabe has worked as writer-in-residence in Strathclyde schools. Here he describes how he brings writing down to earth.

Within this broad area of interest, there are various "assignments" which can be offered: monologue; dialogue; a poem using a speaker; a poem using a speech-rhythm; a short story with a strong narrative voice.

The preliminary discussion begins with the question: Why do we speak to each other? Or: What is speech for? The group put forward their theories and I note them down: to communicate; to discuss mutual concerns; to pass the time of day; to express our feelings; to entertain each other; to overcome lonliness; to make our opinions and views public; to try to make others see things the way we do; to persuade others to do something we want them to do; to dominate others; to tell stories, gossip etc; to argue; to avoid communication.

Note that the functions of speech become progressivly less noble as the list goes on, and often this is the way the list has looked at the end of the preliminary discussion. The important thing to arise from this is that speech has many diverse functions and in their piece of writing the pupils might focus on one of these rather than attempting to cover the entire spectrum.

The discussion then proceeds with the question: What are the features of spoken language which differentiates it from written language? Or at any rate features which are more common in speech. The resulting list might look something like - use of swearwords; repetition; individual speech habits/ favoured words and phrases and ways of putting things; people don't speak in sentences; interruptions; digressions; exclamations; pauses, hesitations; tone of voice/ gestures/ facial expressions come into play in spoken language; dialect; accent/ words peculiar to a particular area/ syntax and rhythm; use of colloquialism; exaggeration; inconsistencies e.g. of tense.

I normally read a few examples of writing which displays several of these features, and I ask the group to identify them. I may use my own work, or writing by pupils from other schools. If the pieces of writing are to take the form of monologues, I would certainly have read the group at least one example of a monologue. I would ask the group to think about the situations in life in which monologues might actually occur.

So this assignment is approached in a practical way without making too many specific demands on the pupil - the subject of the piece is left entirely open - and without asking them to adopt any formula.

The way short story writing is taught in schools seems to me to smack of this formulaic thinking, and before I ask children to write a short story, I find that a lot of groundwork has to be done just to clarify what fiction actually is. Pupils are often surprised to discover that the materials of the fiction writer are the humblest, being the concrete details of our sensory perceptions.

When children grasp this, that a trembling eyelid is better than the abstract statement of a character's anxiety; that it is better to leave the reader with a visual image in the mind as opposed to a well-argued conclusion, then the pupil begins to have some sense of how fiction operates. But often it is uphill work to establish this, since the pupil is in effect having to unlearn everything he has been taught about essay writing.

The fact that the writing of fiction is utterly and profoundly different from the writing of essays is something which has not been realised in schools. If the work of a visiting writer or a writer-in-residence can do something to undermine such misconceptions about writing, perhaps this is one trend in education which gives some small ground for hope. ■

Brian McCabe's latest novel **The Other McCoy** *is published by Mainstream.*

"the notion that creative writing is an elitist irrelevance will come from the children themselves - they have been taught to think like that."

The Ploughman's Euclid - Creative Writing and the English teacher

"Creative writing" is not a term I like using. All writing that is worthwhile is creative. So, if I am going to talk as a teacher of English, about "creative writing", then pupils' poems and stories are only part of what I mean because, for me, the word "creative" is a fundamental word and, what is more, recent trends is education have made it a more controversial term also.

Let us try to start from a position with which most people would agree. Across all the different educational theories, opinions, systems and ages is there a general definition of what teachers do? Whether they are in a Lanarkshire comprehensive, a Zen monastry or a tribal gathering, let us say they are "preparing people for life" - that is commonly heard, general enough to satisfy everyone. The variable here is the term "life", so what is this "life" that I am responsible for preparing generations of Scottish New-Town children?

"Life" seems to me to happen on two broad levels - the socio-personal level of day-to-day living, and the level which transcends this, where the individual reflects on things. This reflective experience is brought back to everyday life by the thinking subject and, in turn, affects that level of experience. "Life"then, is a creative experience; it is to do with what one **makes** of things.

Or ought to be...

What characterises modern western society is a tension (sometimes disruption) between these two levels of experience, a tension which we call "alienation". Attempts to solve this problem have tended to focus on the socio-personal level; they have been political and psychoanalytical, attempting to fit people into preconceived worlds. Perhaps a more effective remedy could be found in shifting the focus towards understanding better the nature and function of the subjective-reflective experience, towards freeing the creative ability to conceive the world for oneself.

So much, briefly, for the "creative". Let us now turn to the "writing". School pupils write a great deal and it could be said to fall into three main types:

1. writing as a means of recording and communicating (re-creating) experience;
2. writing as a way of ordering and shaping (making their own) knowledge they have acquired;
3. writing to become accustomed to forms of communication required for pupils' socio-economic futures.

These types have common elements, but the first two, which are "creative" in the sense outlined above, may be termed "educational"; while the third type is to do with "training". All three are, of course, elements of an education which is "preparing people for life" but we could say that if we neglected the third type of writing we would still be educating our children, while if we neglected either of the first two we would not.

That means that the teacher is one who prepares people for life principally by attempting to develop their intellectual/ reflective functions to bring out in them the ability and the habit of thinking about the world, of making sense of things for themselves. It means also that the classroom teacher is a very important person.

How is all this reflected in the school and in the provision made for school by those in power locally and nationally?

It is not.

Let us look (cursorily) at aspects of two broad areas by way of illustration: finance and the curriculum.

Money, through the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) programme is being poured into areas which can submit, for **central** government scrutiny, a justification in **vocational training** terms for that money. In one of those feats of lexical gymnastics which characterise this philistine age, this process is called "enhancement". There is nothing wrong,

Tony McManus is a teacher in a community school in Livingston. Here he reflects on the task of finding a creative voice and writing it.

far from it, in rendering improved resources and esteem to the training side of the educational process. But while that is happening, the intellectual-creative-reflective side is suffering from chronic cutback so that a fundamental shift in the nature of education is taking place (reflecting a fundamental shift in society), and, in the light of arguments I have been putting forward here, it is utterly misconceived.

In the curricular field, documents now systematically divide education into categories: Language and Communications; Mathematical Studies and Applications; Scientific Studies and Applications; Social and Environmental Studies; Technological Activities and Applications; Creative and Aesthetic Activities; Physical Education; Religious and Moral Education. The drift is obvious, and the idea of "creativity" within these curricular guidelines is clearly a paltry one, which one suspects will find its niche in the "leisure" industry.

Creativity as we have been discussing it here ought to be at the heart of all elements in anything purporting to be an education system, and while categories might be administratively useful (and, by the way, what happened to Literature?), the truly educated person would want to break them down so that scientific, artistic and philosophical perception, creatively deployed, become interacting parts of a unified awareness. Physics, remember, used to be known as natural philosophy.

Meanwhile there are compulsory courses in "Personal and Social Development" with modular sub-headings such as "Skills in inter-personal relationships" and "Caring". These reflect a shift in what used to be called the "hidden curriculum" towards the perceived socio-personal needs of the children. Obviously some conflict appears to be possible between the vocational-training impetus and the exploration of the socio-personal field but it is, in fact, an illusory conflict like the differences between Conservative and Labour in the political field.

The trend in today's schools is to prepare children for "getting on" in a world **which is supplied to them.** This is advanced training and is, to some extent, useful, but education ought to be about opening up the creative powers of perception and reflection which would allow them to **make something of the world.** In newspaper letters pages the voices of one or two brave teachers, parents and writers have attempted to raise the alarm, but to little avail. The shift towards an education which belittles the reflective-creative intelligence is well underway supported by both central (Conservative) and local (Labour) governments.

But teachers are, by definition, "subversive" (though perhaps few would admit to it). Having suggested the anti-creative context in which teachers who did the accompanying work operate, the results show what's possible.

I close with an anecdote. A friend was telling me recently of a school book found among his grandfather's possessions: Euclid's **Principles of Geometry.** His grandfather was a ploughman in the North East. The school-leaving age for his caste and class in those days was twelve. Evidently he lived in a society where the intellectual capacities of **all** children were respected and where true "usefulness" was seen to reside in the reflective level of experience - what more useful for the man who measures the earth with his plough than the very principles of earth measurement?

"Useful" though, not in the training sense, not because it was something he needed to know to do a job, but because what identifies human beings is the ability to make their own worlds out of day-to-day experience through the transcendent powers of their reflective natures. I would never argue for the return of the old schooling, but if we really cared for our children, we would insist on an education system which was informed principally by a similar respect for their creative intellectual capacities. ■

" a fundamental shift in the nature of education is taking place... and it is utterly misconceived."

The Snow Goose

The Blue Goose has yellow-stained feathers. It gets the yellow because of the iron salts in the water.

She looks ahead and spies the vile turbulence of the storm whipping up great chunks of ice, snow and water. She finds herself being inevitably dragged towards the storm. The rain batters on her wings, the wind throws her about like a ping-pong ball...

The process is quite clear in the task of producing a piece of writing for which the following preliminary steps are set down. The children are asked to use atlases and gazeteers in the (indispensible) school library to try to pinpoint where Paul Gallico's THE SNOW GOOSE takes place. The place names are fictional so they have to use the book's descriptive passages to home in on a likely area in their map.

The ideas in the mind accompanied by contemplation of the map can produce, eventually, an excited moment of realisation - at which point they are asked to draw a map of the area they have identified, filling in the topographical details and taking the time to make a good, attractive job of this. Then, and only then, having amassed a set of ideas and made them their own, having spent time contemplating the material, they are asked to write something of their own - a descriptive piece attempting to evoke a place as well as Gallico evokes the Essex marshland and estuaries.

Of course, the resulting work is diverse and, in many cases bears little resemblance to what they were initially asked to write. In some contexts the teacher would want to avoid this happening, here it part of the process. Also descriptive writing is very difficult and young children have a heavy narrative pull so what you can expect is descriptive focus within a narrative frame.

One girl, embarked on her writing, found herself retelling the story in ballad-form. For another the story's lighthouse became the central point of interest, and a couple of jotter pages of sentences and phrases finally compressed themselves into a six-line poem.

Some wrote prose passages and spent some time cutting off the fat before reaching what they were heading for:

The skies of the great marshland are dark... The rocks are blackened and made smooth from floods... Every so often a bird brings its head triumphantly out of the water with a fish in its beak.

Some, seeing friends forge poems from their jottings, started off trying to write verse but finally broke through to prose. Whatever form it took, all of them produced pieces of writing which attempted to be descriptive as required and which showed evidence of having benefitted from their original model, and of attempting to use words to create an image which they possessed in the their minds. One last example from a girl who, from a mass of sentences, notes and ramblings in her jotter was encouraged and cajoled into picking out what was live and fresh and ended up with fewer than twenty words:

Rivers, Birds and Marsh
Lovely swans swimming

in the trickling rivers

Birds flying upwards

To the clear, blue sky

The "painterly" title is a clear indication that she had begun to SEE something and I think see it too.

This writing was "creative" then, not because it took the form of verse or story - form, rightly, was the last element in the process to surface - but because it resulted from a creative intellectual process in which the acquiring of knowledge, and time spent reflecting on it, were allied with a fair amount of sweat. All of the pupils at some point or other resented the work involved and the refusal of the teachers concerned to accept inferior work which had not been adequately researched and reflected on. But none of them failed to make something worthwhile of it all.

And when their teachers were visibly pleased at reading their work, then they had a new experience to reflect on: the potential POWER that resides in intellectual independence and activity. Which is why, perhaps, there are those who would have them designing egg-boxes in Art (i.e. "design") classes, making telephone calls in English (i.e. "communications") classes and, for intellectual relief, discussing in "Social Education" classes what people say to them that makes them feel good (week one), or bad (week two) - these are real examples. ■

new voices, new writing

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Copy to The Editor, SCOTTISH CHILD, 347A Pilton Avenue, Edinburgh EH5 2LE by 31st March 1991. All material selected for publication will appear in a special SCOTTISH CHILD - NEW VOICES NEW WRITING supplement with the issue of the magazine out on June 1st 1991. Manuscripts written on one side of the page should be clearly marked with the author's name and address. Copies should be kept as we cannot guarantee to return the originals.

Organisations and individuals interested in sponsoring or supporting the NEW VOICES NEW WRITING initiative in any way should contact the editor.

Colin Chalmers

Children's Rights

Because of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990 will be remembered as 'Children's Rights Year'. In introducing a series of Scottish Child workshops on the theme of rights, Rosemary Milne expands on the importance of seeing the context for the establishment of rights in personal-professional relations.

Not that this year children suddenly acquired rights they didn't have before - children's rights so far have very little to do with children themselves - but the rights issue has made it big with the professionals in the child care and legal fields in the last twelve months.

The ratification of the UN Convention partly explains the surge in interest, and possibly the continuing nag in the back of people's minds about the disparity in wealth between the rich countries and the poor, the pictures of crying babies and hungry, begging children.

But where, it is legitimate to ask, after the year's conferences and seminars, has it got us so far? Can we say with any conviction that we have found a language in which to discuss the question of the rights of children and the relationship of those rights to the rights of parents and other carers?

In Scotland we might have done worse than begin our discussions by reflecting on the text of the 1964 Report of the Kilbrandon Committee. Except that - a sign of the times? - unfortunately, the Scottish Office has allowed the Kilbrandon Report to go out of print. Not that Kilbrandon said it all by any means. But that committee did give us the philosophical framework which has formed the basis of child care law in Scotland since 1968. It shaped our thinking with phrases like "measures appropriate to the needs of the individual child". It advised the setting up of "a procedure which seeks to establish the individual child's needs in the light of the fullest possible information as to his circumstances, personal and environmental". And it gave mature consideration to the developmental aspects of childhood in relation to personal responsibility and self-determination.

However, just as, in the years since 1964, we have made little progress in examining the relationship of mutual dependency between child and parent, we haven't got very far either with the relationship of needs to rights. And if we are to be honest, institutions of public care and education are scarcely more geared up now to "meet the needs of the individual child" by inter-professional sharing than they were when the 1968 Social Work (Scotland) Act first came into force.

In searching for a language in which to discuss children's rights, we need more than words like "duty" and "responsibility", and even "needs". Children's rights are mostly defined by adults using phrases such as "the best interests of the child". The values and feelings tied up in adults' views of what is "best for children" are thus of quite critical importance to an understanding of what gets attention in the children's rights debate.

This has been the pattern of the children's rights debate in general. In Scotland as elsewhere, professionals, not children nor parents, are the instigators of the debate. Its origins lie as much if not more with concerns about the status of child care professionals and specialists in child law as with children themselves.

Of course, these two questions are not unrelated. The status of child care professionals closely reflects that of children, so children do stand to gain some benefits indirectly if the position of their carers improves.

But that kind of gradualist, incidental improvement to the lot of children is a very far cry from what we make out we are discussing in children's rights. What we discuss when we take part in the existing debate about children's rights is a way of looking at the needs and rights of children **within a broadly unchanging system.** A professionally-driven debate about children's rights is almost inevitably bound to be like this, because it is not in professionals' interests to cast serious doubt on the very system which sustains them both economically and ideologically.

Jim Kelman made the same point in an article **Scottish Child** ran earlier this year:

"The educated classes have more access to information than the vast majority of ordinary men and women but it is very rarely in their economic interest to seek it out and see what it amounts to. This does not have to imply a deliberate policy, let alone the existence of a conspiracy."

To make these criticisms of professionals is not to dismiss their contribution, but to suggest that reexamination is needed of their role in relation to those whom at present they classify either as their "clients" or as their non-expert "helpers". The relationship of adults to each other is as critical a factor in the children's rights movement as the relationship of adults to children. In both cases there are important, potentially beneficial, mutual dependencies but in both cases there are also imbalances of power which perpetuate injustices. They pervade much more than personal/professional relationships. Unequal opportunities for different groups of the population exist in every sphere - in the housing market, education, health, care and employment.

A serious concern with the rights of children means therefore more than, for example, providing child advocates at Children's Hearings, or allowing the child in care to attend his or her review. Important and worthwhile as these questions may be, they are the icing on the cake of children's rights when considered alongside such questions as the economic and social inequalities of contemporary Scottish society. ■

Review

A book, recently published by OUP, examines the limitations of the duty/responsibility approach with regard to the rights of children. Priscilla Alderson's CHOOSING FOR CHILDREN examines the dilemmas facing parents of children with life-threatening heart disease.

She describes how she found that parents who had to choose surgery or not on behalf of their child, wanted to build in a number of factors other than the likelihood of "surgical success" in assessing the right course of action for their child. They had questions about the child's likely quality of life, about how one operation might lead to another, about the welfare of other children in the family and crucially about the comfort and well-being of their sick child in the period surrounding the operation.

The doctors on the other hand, tended to define their duty in terms of saving or prolonging life at whatever cost. Severe discomfort and nursing difficulties were often viewed by senior staff as necessary evils in the surgical plan for the child.

The doctors' world view tended to treat the feeling dimension which parents brought to bear when choosing for their child, as morally inferior to the so-called universal values of an abstract medical ethics.

"Parents' distress tends to be seen as a disadvantage, crippling their thinking and understanding". But, says Priscilla Alderson, "Moral feelings, such as of anxiety and compassion, need to be seen as a vital part of informed proxy consent. They deepen understanding. Indeed, parents who do not show any emotional response to their child's dangerous condition would imply that they do not have any clear rational understanding."

It is not uncommon for parents and for other non-professionals, to find themselves ill-prepared for moral debate of this kind with professional experts. Their attachment to the child makes them use a different set of terms to describe their reasoning and they find themselves unable to counter effectively the detached, ethical arguments of doctors, lawyers or others. That does not of course, render the arguments of the "non-experts" invalid. It has merely tended to ensure that they are heard less clearly. ■

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS WORKSHOPS

Scottish Child will run workshops and discussion groups throughout 1991 on the theme of children's rights.

The first of these will take place on January 30th 1991 at The Planning Exchange, 186 Bath Street, Glasgow, from 10am to 2.30pm.

Workshop staff: Rosemary Milne and Derek Rodger.

The cost will be £15(waged), £5(unwaged).

Coffee and sandwiches will be provided.

Places will be limited to 25 participants so you are advised to book early.

Please fill in the form below and return with your fee to Scottish Child, 347A Pilton Avenue, Edinburgh EH5 2LE.

Details will be circulated in future issues about workshops to be held in other regions in Scotland.

Name _____

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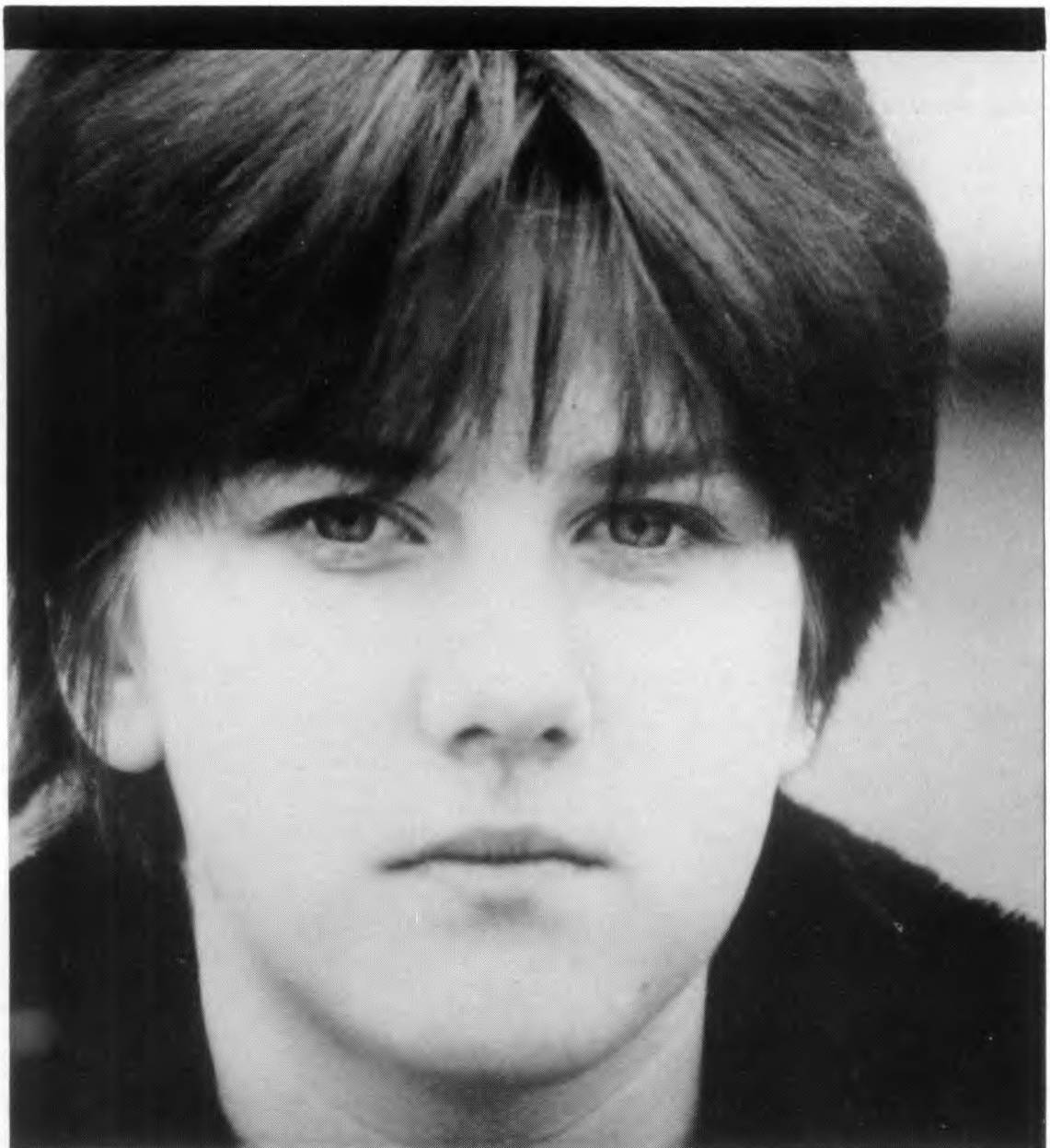
Fee £15/£5 - Cheques payable to **Scottish Child.**



homeless voices

the experience of homeless teenagers in Scotland

Scottish Child

"It's not because I'm spoilt or I'm immature that I won't go back, it's because I can't live in that house'

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Julia Morris

School Boards - Passing the Test?

School Boards were introduced in Scotland a year ago and some considerable publicity has been given to their first anniversary this Autumn. But have they benefitted the education system? Are they effective or do they exist as passive statutory creatures? Cathy Marr passes a lawyer's eye over their affairs to date.

Some 2300 School Boards have come into being over the last year, representing 80% of Scottish local authority schools and 96% of secondary schools. Bearing in mind that generally every parent seeking election needs a proposer and seconder and every parent of a child at the school has a right to vote, this suggests an expression of considerable interest from parents.

In fact though, many parent members of the new Boards were elected unopposed. In a school of 500 pupils for example, which would require four parent members, a maximum of twelve interested parents would be required to establish the Board. The statistics do not therefore necessarily reflect the level of interest.

Once formed, the Board has certain powers. These include the power to require the education authority to provide information relating to its own school, or more generally to the provision of education in the area. Armed with such information, the Board may make representations to the education authority who must take account of them.

It appears that the bulk of such representations to date relate, not surprisingly, to the provision and improvement of facilities, whether buildings or equipment. The education authority has a duty to consider these and to reply to the Board, but no duty to act upon them. The responsibility for spending lies with the elected councillors - and they are constrained to an extent by central government - and so requests from individual School Boards must be examined in the context of Regional and Island Councils' total spending needs.

No doubt even in the first year, the exercise of this power has been beneficial in raising councillors' awareness of problems and feelings, and this in turn may help determine future spending priorities. But equally it could be argued that the power has no teeth and so leaves the Boards powerless.

A further statutory power is to be involved in the appointments of head teachers, deputies and assistant head teachers with the emphasis on the participation of lay members of the Board. As a result of this provision there have been appointments of the Boards' preferred candidates. This can be seen as a positive measure, allowing parental choice in the calibre and personality of senior staff who will influence the running of the school.

It is however, a restricted parental choice as, unless there is full and frequent contact between parents and Board, the majority of parents affected may be unaware of the Board's recommendations. In terms of the Act, a Board is only obliged to report to parents annually, unless parents themselves request a meeting with them.

Nonetheless, if this power is seen as a positive involvement, it can still be argued that it is limited. Most parents will be concerned about the quality of all teachers, not only those in the top positions. But there is no Board involvement in the recruitment of ordinary teachers, nor a voice in any proposed dismissal ot transfer of staff.

Where a School Board feels it is appropriate, it may request the education authority to make a delegation order by which it delegates additional powers to the Board. Such an order could be for a specified period only or without limit of time. This provision to increase powers is also restrictive. The authority must not, for example, delegate matters relating to employment and dismissal of staff, regulation of the curriculum, assessment of pupils or determination of admissions policy.

If a School Board requests additional powers and cannot reach agreement with the Education Authority, the matter may be referred to the Secretary of State. So far, more than a year into the working of the system, no such referrals have been made.

In effect, the establishment of School Boards has created a degree of parent involvement in their children's education which may vary from school to school depending on an individual Board's contact with non-member parents. Their powers are however, so limited that a Board in reality may be nothing more than a pressure group.

If this leaves Boards frustrated, then they have an alternative course offered to them in the Self-Governing Schools etc (Scotland) Act 1989. An initiative to opt out of the state system must involve the School Board, either by the Board itself deciding to seek a ballot of parents on the issue, or by the requisite number of parents requesting the Board to do so. This may be seen as a drastic measure and a far cry from the Boards' present powers.

The fact that so far in Scotland, only one school has come close to following through with opting. This may indicate that the pressure group involvement is preferred by most parents.

If as recently reported in the press, there are to be financial inducements to choose self-governing status, then doubtless School Boards will think again. The question of control rather than influence will have to be addressed.

To date, it appears that the introduction of School Boards has made little impact on the education system in Scotland. If the aim of their introduction was to involve parents (and a duty of Boards is to promote contact between the school, parents and community,) then perhaps they have been successful. But in strictly legal terms, little has changed since the School Boards (Scotland) Act was introduced. ■

LETTERS

Julia Morris

Community Nursery Action

Dear Editor,

We have read your article on community nurseries and thought your readers would be interested in what we are doing.

We are a group of parents who got together in 1988 to look at the childcare provision in our area. We investigated existing provision for pre-5s and out of school, adult education, parent education and family support networks.

All revealing to our dismay that no such provision of any kind existed. So we decided to take this into our own hands by forming a group called P.I.C.N.I.C.C. (Parents in Community Need Independent Childcare) to resolve the situation. We decided that we would look for funding for a project that would encompass all of the above offering parents in community a one door approach to all facilities which they may need.

The only funding we could apply for is Urban Aid funding through the Urban Renewal Unit at the Scottish Office. We have submitted our application which is presently going through the process. It will probably be the middle of next year before we find out if it has been successful.

If so we will be offering 50 full-time equivalent pre-5 places and 40 out of school places, which will operate during school hoidays. We hope to develop education programmes geared towards family and parenting, assist women returners to the labour market to prepare for interviews for jobs, brushing up on existing skills, encouraging them to learn new skills and assist them to gain access to vocational and further education training. We will also provide an updated information service on childcare and will be linking up with voluntary and statutory agencies which can offer professional advice and information to users of the project.

In order to achieve our aims we ourselves are undertaking training in management, financial management, employee relations and monitoring and evaluation skills for the project. This has taken a lot of time and effort and energy on our part.

We as a group feel it all to be worthwhile and encourage other parents to do the same.

Isobel Nelson
89 Glencoe Street
Glasgow

Being Original

Dear Editor,

Alison Prince, in her interesting and pessimistic article **Being Original** (August/September) comments that current trends in education mitigate against an increase in the number of teachers who encourage creativity in their pupils.

This may be so, though I would be less inclined to point the finger at teachers, since many of those I have worked with in schools would easily qualify as what she calls "the exceptions", and I have yet to meet a teacher who feels that his or her training at college had adequately equipped them to teach. So Alison Prince may be right to suggest that the way teachers are trained is at fault, and perhaps it is time to review the nature and content of teacher-training programmes.

But if genuine creativity is not only neglected but supressed in our schools, I think the reasons are more deeply entrenched, both in the educational system and in the status of creativity in society itself.

"Current trends" in education may have reinforced a general attitude to creativity, as she suggests, though here again, there may be exceptions which give one grounds for hope. The fact that at Standard Grade level and in Sixth Year Studies, creative writing is no longer assessed on the basis of the pupil writing something under examination conditions, but on the basis of a portfolio of work, is a significant step in the right direction.

In itself, of course, this may do nothing to counteract the inhibiting influences Alison Prince warns us of in education, but it does provide a situation more conducive to the possibility of genuinely creative work taking place.

Brian McCabe
Writer in Schools
Strathclyde

Iron Fists

Dear Editor,

The concerns expressed by Fiona M. Johnston (October) are shared by many social workers in Strathclyde.

It would be fanciful to suppose, however, that any heed will be paid to Mrs. Johnston's plea for a fundamental change in managerial attitudes.

Duncan Macintyre
Greenock

SCOTTISH CHILD welcomes readers' letters. Please send your letters to The Editor, Scottish Child, 347A Pilton Avenue, Edinburgh EH5 2LE.

Freud Bashing

Dear Editor,

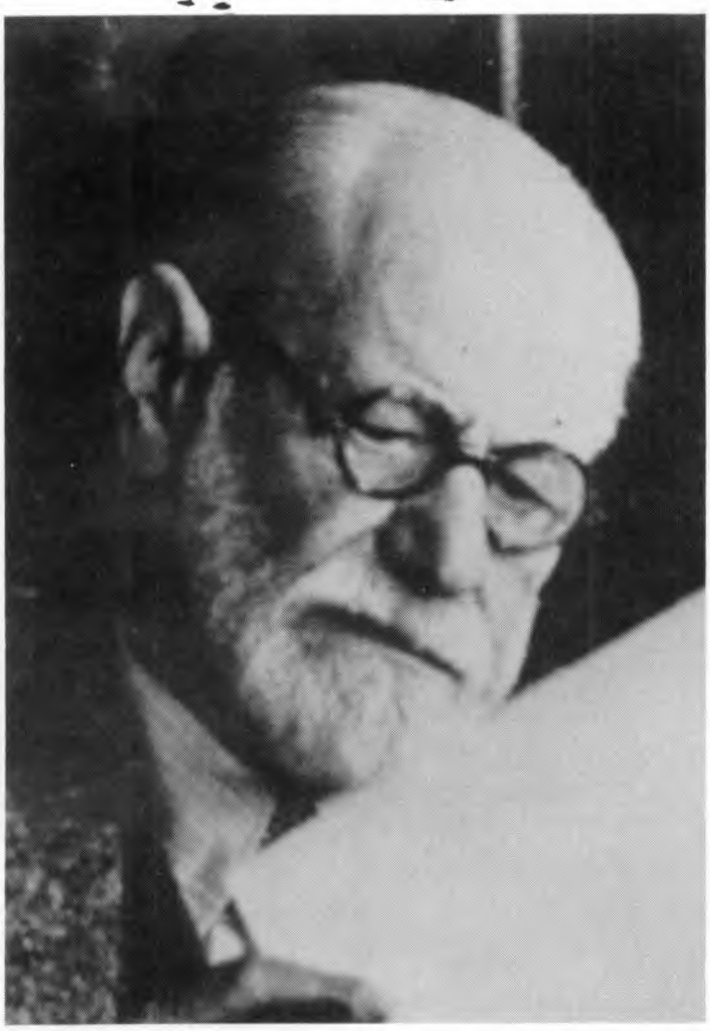
I feel I must respond to Colin Chalmers sweeping and misleading statements about psychoanalytic thinking and practice, as expressed in his review of Alice Miller's latest book.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapists are centrally concerned with enabling their sexually abused clients to express and find a way to live with rage and anger, as well as love sadness and loss. They are **not** intent on brutally informing sexually abused people that they wanted to be raped, as the review states. I find this allegation simplistic and dangerous.

Present day Psychoanalysis encompasses an international network of therapists, who feel free to express many different, often hotly disputed viewpoints. Freud started his work, which he constantly reviewed in the light of clinical experience, in the 1890s. A great body of valuable clinical practice has developed since then, which whilst upholding some of his theories, refutes others. Surely this is the process of all scientific and cultural development, not just Psychoanalysis.

Over the past ten years the child care professions have had to radically change their approach to and understanding of sexual abuse. Could I suggest that a moratorium be called on this pointless Freud-bashing so that we can concentrate on hearing and truly receiving the cries of the children that Alice Miller so powerfully describes.

Monica Lanyado
Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist
Scottish Institute of Human Relations
Edinburgh



NEXT ISSUE - FEBRUARY/MARCH 1991

TAKING CHARGE - with election fever ever mounting, we investigate how we learn to participate in the political process.

NEW VOICES NEW WRITING - continuing the interest in finding a voice through writing, we feature a new story by James Kelman, who also describes how he came to writing.

WHO'S SPECIAL? - special needs provision, who gets it and why? Results of a revealing new study.

TEARS AND PROTEST - flagging Scottish Child's event planned as part of the Edinburgh Science Festival programme in April, Kay Carmichael author of an important new book on the subject, writes about crying and power.

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The Trouble with Flying

Dipping down towards Glasgow on a flight back from Orkney last week, the plane suddenly surged upwards again. The pilot's voice came breezily over the intercom.

"Just a little problem with a smaller plane ahead of us on the runway. Nothing to worry about."

And we zoomed about in the thick cloud with a collective think-bubble coming out of our forty-odd heads - If There Was Something To Worry About, They Wouldn't Tell Us. That's the trouble with flying; it's the feeling of helplessness. You sit there holding a crumpled peanut packet and an empty plastic glass, waiting for the stewardess to come and collect them with her bright smile. The official comforts have been received like a communion with British Airways and your faith has been established. Or should have been.

Personally I'm always glad to get out of the contraption and walk under its wing and across the marvellously solid tarmac to the airport building, even though at that point I feel curiously vague and rather empty headed. The Aborigines say that if you go too far and too fast, you have to wait for your soul to catch up. A bit like the luggage really.

I wish there were more people around who would talk about their souls. Russians are great about it. "In my soul I have always been a writer," says my friend Tanya, sending me a story to translate. What's more, in her soul she claims to be an expressionist writer, and all her stories are full of strange happenings which may or may not be actual, taxing my rather primitive understanding of the Russian language to the uttermost.

But this is a friendship of souls which sprang into being during a brief visit to Rostov-on-Don, and such things are not affected by linguistic difficulties. They even manage to survive the appalling postal services between here and the USSR. Surely, if the remaining shreds of the politburo want to totter into any real relationship with the West, wouldn't a free flow of letters be a good thing?

Sitting in the kitchen with a couple of members of the Rostov String Quartet and a bottle of Grouse the other night, we mulled over such questions well past the wee sma' hours. Would the lure of material goods destroy the spirit of Russia? Was emigration to America an answer to the whole dilemma? On Arran, where I live, we tend to regard the mainland as a general insanity, and Russians feel the same about Moscow as an administrative centre - but they have no islands wherein to create havens of trust and kindness. Governments, we concluded, do not cater for the soul.

Increasingly, there's a feeling that it's no use putting any trust in Them, whoever they are. The Post Office puts up the price of its stamps and then runs out of twopenny ones so that you can't convert the old ones. And they don't even bother to offer any explanation of this grossly inflationary move. They are hugely profitable, and yet the cost of stamps has been jacked up twice within a year.

As always it's a levy which falls more injuriuosly on the poor than on the rich. The money-trawling exercise is one which leaves us feeling a little more helpless, sitting in the metaphorical aeroplane. It knows where it is going, so it doesn't matter whether we do. Have another Airmail label - they come free, like the peanuts.

Children have got the right idea. They hate being plonked into vehicles and jiggled up and down for hours, specially when they can't see out. "Are we nearly there?" they demand, five minutes after take-off. "No," says dad, "and don't keep on about it." But they do, and there is a truculent running commentary about how this plane is boring, and why has that man got his eyes shut, and is this salt or sugar? And if all else fails, they are sick.

Everyone else is looking suave and indifferent (except, of course, for the exhibitionist who is doing something frantic with a lap keyboard). Children, the weary raising of an eyebrow indicates, will grow up and learn to behave themselves decently. We who are mature have proper powers of endurance, which we use as a sign of our worldly wisdom.

It's a weird idea, when you come to think of it, equating maturity with endurance, but the conventional assumption is that the more you can put up with, the tougher and more stoic you can consider yourself. Or, in the child view, the stupider.

Children have no intention of putting up with anything if they can help it. They want to be interested in what's going on here and now. If the surroundings are so repressive that people are saying "Do sit still" or "It won't be long now," then the child simply wants to be somewhere else. As I get older, it seems increasingly to me that they are perfectly right. Life should not be frittered away in endurance.

That's the best thing about learning to read, of course. It's nothing to do with this dismal stuff they hand out about being able to read an Income Support form - reading gives you an escape route from endurance. William McIlvanney's **Walking Wounded** stories turned a routine domestic flight (as the professional endurers call it) into a series of extraordinary insights. His account of a prisoner explaining patiently to the Prison Governor why he objected to the serving of turkey roll rather than the real thing at Christmas will remain long in my mind. "That's the real world, sur?" he demands. "Broken promises? Synthetic turkey?" Well, is it?

Dad, when is this plane going to stop? I want to get off. ■

"Life should not be frittered away in endurance."

Alison Prince

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