

The Integrated Day in the Primary Schools of United Kingdom: A Review

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Abstract: Integrated day, is a form of organization in which children engage in a variety of activities in a classroom that is arranged around themes, rather than different subjects. It is implemented for primary schools' children in United Kingdom in order to acquire maximum benefit from every resource at their disposal and to give children a certain amount of responsibility and to take initiative for their own learning. This review article explored one of the most important structural aspects in the organisation of primary schools in the United Kingdom: the 'integrated day'. It also focused the different approaches employed in the UK's primary schools which implement the integrated day concept. It discussed the different definitions of integrated day given by numerous researchers and educators. Furthermore, it reviewed the main advantages and disadvantages of implementing the integrated day as a strategy for achieving inclusion of special needs pupils inside the ordinary school.

Keywords: advantages, child-centred education, disadvantages, integrated day, open education, primary schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

An integrated day, is a concept that teaching is organized around themes, rather than separate subjects. In integrated day in primary school, children choose what they should to learn and how they need to present/record and also choose which part of the day they need to do this. The most ideal approach to depict this is to concentrate on 'theme work' (Waffling, 2014). 'Progressive education' as it is practised in the United Kingdom is known under different names all of which can be called forms of education. The main stream of progressive education at the current time seems to be what is known as 'open education', 'a child-centred education', an 'integrated curriculum' and 'the integrated day'. 'Open education' or 'open schooling' is used as an approach opposed to the institutional, closed practice of the traditional classroom. It is claimed to be open learning in the sense that it is not divided into rigid compartmentalised subjects. It has 'open time', meaning that it is not restricted by the timetable and it has an open space arrangement 'open plan' within the school and is open to the neighbourhood and the community. It also has open organisation in the sense that children are differently grouped for different activities. The wide range of school organisation and practices that the concepts reveal and its conceptual relatedness to other forms of informal education is clear in Horwitz's (1979) definition of open education. He defined it as "a style of teaching involving flexibility of space, student choice of curriculum, richness of learning material, integration of curriculum areas and more individual or small group rather than large, instruction".

'Open education' as being characterised by a classroom environment in which there is a minimum of teaching to the class as a whole, in which provision is made for children to pursue individual needs, interests, and to be actively involved with materials, and in which children are trusted to direct many aspects of their own learning (Stephens, 1974). 'Child-centred education' is an approach to education which sees the child and his interests as the starting point and at the centre of the learning processes. This is better expressed in the axiom 'to teach the child not the subject matter, further, this approach stresses the child's experiences and activities as essential to learning. However, an examination of 'child-centred education' theories and practices reveals that it shares common assumptions with 'open education', 'integrated day', and other practices of informal education (Khunji, 1983).

The 'integrated curriculum' is meant to be a unity of parts organised into a whole. On the practical level, it tries to bring together - to integrate - different subject matters under a theme or a project based on the assumption that integration rather than segregation is more relevant to the child's 'whole' experiences and, thus, to his 'whole development'. In simple terms, this means that what we teach children must be worth learning, and that the curriculum can only be acceptable and desirable when it is used as a motivational device for the child's intrinsic interests. The integrated curriculum is sometimes linked with the integrated day, and although the integrated day may require some curriculum integration, this needs not always be a necessity. The grounds for asserting their value is that the integrated curriculum or cross disciplinary method is thought to be educationally more fruitful than separate subject studies (Khunji, 1983).

2. DEFINITION OF THE INTEGRATED DAY

The earliest definition of the integrated day was given by Brown and Precious (1968). They described it as; a day which is combined into a whole has a minimum of time-tabling and has no subject barriers. The Plowden Report (1967) makes no direct reference to the integrated day. Much of it involves descriptions of the rapid trends towards child-centred education, the discussion about the uniqueness of every child intellectually, psychologically, physically, his innate propensity for discovery which requires individualised work all of which could be said to reveal features of the integrated day. However, Weber (1971) using classroom observations, found that planning for the integrated day follows from the way a child approaches the environment, cutting across subject -areas as it pursues its own interests and searches for answers to its own questions. From her observations, she formed the view that the absence of a timetable was a key factor in implementing the integrated day approach which stresses the free flow and wholeness of school living. Weber's statement is both descriptive and evaluative in the sense that integration implies 'unity' or 'wholeness' which is a state to be described and approved.

The evaluative interpretation is also clear in Howes (1974) definition of the integrated day approach which he prefers to call 'open education'. His concept of the term also includes a wide variety of classroom organisation relating to the theoretical as well as practical considerations. He states that open education is a way of thinking about children, learning and about knowledge. It is characterised by openness and freedom which engenders responsibilities and trust in children. Learning is not divided into disciplines or subjects, experience cuts across all areas. There is always a wholeness to the day. Allen *et al* (1975) claims that the integrated day means, in effect, the freeing of the school from an organised timetable, apart from such periods as affect the whole community, such as assemblies, hall periods, and periods where classes combine and make time-tabling essential. The integrated day encourages flexibility in ways of teaching and of learning, to the advantage and satisfaction of both teacher and child.

Fran (1976) asserts that the integrated day appears to be an idiosyncratic practice whose organisation and structure depends upon the whim of the classroom teacher. However, Dreaden (1976) being aware of the ambiguity of the term, suggests what he calls 'the minimum concept,' by which he means that the integrated day is, at least a school day so organised that there are no, or very few, uniform and formalised breaks in the activities of learning, but rather a variety of such activities going on simultaneously and changing very much at the choice of the individual child, or perhaps of the group. Besides, Walton (1971) affirms that the integrated day is a form of educational organisation which presents as many situations and opportunities as possible to the child which he can explore with easy access to both human and material resources. The aim of integrated day is the development of the whole personality. This of course is useful for improving the special needs child.

Simon and Willocks (1981) described the integrated day situation as children no longer set in rows facing the blackboard and the teacher giving a formal lesson. Instead, learning is based on experiences and not on subjects. Children work on topics they choose from a range carefully prepared by the teacher according to their individual needs. Likewise, Taylor (1983) insists that the integrated day is essentially, a form of organisation in which the child exercises a greater degree of choice about what he is going to do and when he is going to do it, and the teacher integrates his daily programme, so that learning and progress take place. It can be outstandingly successful and it can be dismally bad. Rathbone (1988) claims that the integrated day is a system of organisation involving children in a class working on different curriculum activities at the same time. The children may work in groups, or as individuals; in the latter case, they may change from one activity to another as and when they choose. By the end of the day, children are supposed to have participated in all the activities provided. Some teachers work an integrated day which allows the children to discuss with the teacher their work programme for the day, and then to follow it as individuals, choosing their own order of work. The integrated day system

needs to be carefully monitored to ensure that children follow, especially those special needs children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

3. ADVANTAGES OF INTEGRATED DAY

On an empirical basis, it appeared that the philosophy behind the integrated day is that, through freedom, children are enabled to derive the maximum benefit from every resource at their disposal, and from every discovery which they are encouraged to make, guided by those who teachers. However, it is generally accepted that freedom in this sense must never be confused with licence to employ their time exactly as they wish. Disciplines are necessary if the children are to gain a basically acceptable standard of education within the framework of the integrated day, which permits them ample opportunity to develop their interests. Such disciplines are in the main accepted. Teachers feel that most children understand that there is certain work which they are expected to undertake, and to which they will be expected to devote a reasonable amount of their time, that these tasks are considered by their teachers to be both important and desirable and that teachers, on their part, will present them as attractively as possible (Allen *et al*, 1975). Moreover, the integrated day gives the children a certain amount of responsibility for their own learning, and as a result they have to use their own initiative. They learn how to gather information and get into the habit of persevering in their work. The learning can be tailored precisely to their own needs (Rathbone, 1988).

More individualised learning in contact with others working at the same pace makes for more interest and involvement. When curricula and methods are more precisely tailored, success is more likely, and it is hard to imagine anything at this stage more powerfully creative of favourable attitudes towards learning than success in it. But securing this advantage requires considerable organisational competence from the teacher, as well as suitable resources and straight teaching skills (Dreaden, 1976) and (Walton, 1971). Since much learning must go on unsupervised while the teacher is restrictedly occupied with teacher-demanding activities, the children must, in consequence, be trained in learning how to learn for themselves in those parts of the curriculum where this is in fact possible. At the primary stage, this principally means acquiring various information-getting skills such as using reference books, using libraries and writing to relevant people. It also involves acquiring habits of initiative and persistence, so that available opportunities to find out for oneself are not shied away from, either out of timidity or out of the perception that it will involve going to some trouble (Walton, 1971).

The flexibility of the integrated day gives teachers a chance to stretch the children to their full capacity and at the same time provide for their development as personalities within various social groups. There is more chance for development without the anxieties of being expected to submit to undue pressures or to a feeling that they may fail or be left behind. The pressure is applied only by the children themselves (Allen *et al*, 1975). The teacher who is willing to work an integrated day may find that he or she has gained much from the experience. Her or his knowledge of and contact with children will be increased by increased opportunity for free communication and the varied activities of his or her school day will help him or her to extend his or her own horizons. The anticipatory sense of discovery which emanates from a well-run integrated day situation is a very effective safeguard against monotony and the consequent waning of enthusiasm. The achievements and progress made should give the teacher added satisfaction, for they will have come about through the active co-operation of the children (Allen *et al*, 1975). The integrated day makes possible for the teacher an individual approach that enables him or her to take greater account of each child's needs and interests, and its rate of progress. She or he can cater more easily for differences in the speed at which children work and in the length of time which they can effectively concentrate. The teacher can take advantage of the fact that most people work to more purpose and with greater enjoyment at something they have chosen to do. By allowing the child to choose its activity, the teacher may encourage it to develop its initiative and its sense of responsibility and the teacher can often make use of momentum and enthusiasm which may have evaporated a little later (Taylor, 1983).

The integrated day and family grouped approach places the accent on communication the whole time, and younger and less able children and those from linguistically deprived homes, are obviously richer in this atmosphere, being able to hear and savour new language. The able children too, being allowed to work on an individual basis, can be extended in spoken and written work by the teacher (Walton, 1971). Children in an integrated day seek help and advice from each other and usually select their own foreman, who may be not necessarily the dominant personality one would expect him to be. Of course, they seek help from other members of staff, recognising strengths and expertise in certain fields, and bring help from parents also (Walton, 1971). In the integrated day, the children work willingly and, within a weekly programme, each child experiences basic maths and communication skills as well as full selection of other activities. However, in the integrated day or family grouped situation, teachers too gain considerably, for they see wide age ranges, maturation,

interest and attainment range, and having the children for a longer than usual period of time, gives the child who needs it a greater security. The slow learner fits in as well as the able child and discipline problems are rare. All children and their work are accepted as being of equal worth and every child's 'bests' are displayed. With this type of organisation, personality difficulties can be avoided and the 'devils' can be spread around. In the unusual case of the child and teacher who do not get on with each other, problems can be tackled without loss of face to either teacher or child (Walton, 1971).

4. DISADVANTAGES OF INTEGRATED DAY

There are also disadvantages in implementing an integrated day in primary schools. Rathbone (1988) and Brown & Precious (1968) identified some disadvantages which are as follow:

Because of the flexibility and freedom of an integrated day; children who are not highly motivated achieve less in the basic subjects than they do in a more formal teaching system. If the teacher's records confirm this, it is possible to use a more formal approach for part of the day. For example, certain periods can be used when all the children in the class work on language or mathematics; the remainder of the curriculum can still be taught using an integrated approach. However, if the curriculum is being taught through a thematic approach it is not possible to compromise in this way.

Moreover, the teacher can often become bored or dissatisfied after a period of teaching where they have employed a formal approach and begin to recognise that group or individual teaching may be more effective. If the teacher does not have basic sympathy with the child, understanding and recognition of its individual needs, respect for its dignity and awareness of its personality, he or she will not be successful.

There is a danger in moving too quickly into the integrated situation without real understanding and thorough preparation. When all the barriers are first removed the teachers usually have an attack of insecurity. It is necessary for them to take a long objective look at the school and the children, and feel assured that this anxiety is mostly self-engendered. Once they gain a more relaxed attitude, forget their anxiety for a while and begin to watch the children, there will be a gradual improvement and teaching will become challenging, interesting and exciting. The main problems here arise from the fears which come from within the teacher. External pressures will cause fear of criticism or fear of failure and this will undermine the teacher's self-reliance and great determination will be needed to continue in the face of these.

When no timetable is provided by the Head of School, some teachers will feel insecure and find security in making their own programme for the day, probably with the adverse effect of withdrawing children from some absorbing activity to work with the teacher. The teacher needs to understand just what is involved in the child's spontaneous learning. There are also children who feel insecure if they are free to choose all day. Wide choice is too much of a challenge to them and some children will avoid anything needing effort.

In the free environment, the introduction of too many new materials and ideas in a short space of time may lead to over-stimulation and the children will react by becoming boisterous and overexcited or satiated and lethargic. With the new pupils, this over-stimulation is a common difficulty and it often becomes necessary to limit the activities available at first. Teachers can also be over-enthusiastic to provide every possible type of experience for their class and the room could then become a melee of disorganisation, overcrowded with materials and equipment and over-stimulating for the children.

In the integrated day, the formal classroom organisation will have to be changed. It will need a great deal of thought to decide how to arrange the furniture in order to accommodate all the activities. The rooms must be divided off into smaller work areas. If the teachers are able to accept the challenge of finding ways and means to cope with the difficulties, they will be enthusiastic about devising ingenious ways of arranging and storing materials so that they are available to the children at all times. When the classroom has been rearranged there will be actual places available for about two-third of the class, and here a problem arises, the ideal is for each child to have a drawer, but there is no longer a place for every child. As new children come into the school, they will adopt the prevailing practice.

In considering the practical implications of the classroom becoming a workshop, there may be many problems which at first seem insurmountable. The provision of room dividers, the geography of the room itself, the furniture etc., must be considered. Improvisation may be necessary, particularly in an old building. The children's desks may be of the old type which are difficult to put together to make a flat surface. If the head and the staff are prepared to think around even a very difficult situation, with regard to organisation of space and furniture, some ingenious and interesting modification will be produced.

When some of the children are working creatively all day, the provision of sufficient materials becomes a problem and a large amount of wood and paint and other materials is used. There is also a tendency for the room to become cluttered and untidy.

When the teachers can no longer follow a scheme of work they may feel insecure and unsure if he or she is doing the best for the children. There is obviously the need for some sort of guidance about general aims and about the stages of child development.

Teachers who are about to embark on the integrated day will find the situation far more demanding than a formal one. If the classroom is to be a library and workshop with the children working at every type of activity, it is difficult to see where the teacher starts. The formal class of forty or more working under direction is peaceful and quiet. This is a very artificial, unnatural and sterile environment for children between the ages of five and eleven years, for it is almost impossible for the child under eleven to keep its thoughts to itself. Movement about the classroom, children talking over the noise of hammering and sawing is the order of the day, but after a while, this does not intrude upon the privacy of the individual mind. There will be a transitional period before the new way is really established when the hangover from the previous way of working causes many problems.

Difficulties arise if other schools in the area are not working in the same way therefore, the new relationship between child and teacher should be brought to their notice that a child's loyalties are soon divided by parents showing disapproval of school or vice versa, with the result the child begins to feel insecure.

A fully integrated day situation includes non-streaming and vertical or family grouping. This also needs to be explained to parents because they do not understand if the child stays in one class for two consecutive years, or if younger children are in a class with older children. Difficulties arise if other schools in the area are not working this way and parents tend to question this. They often seem to approve of a more formal approach because of their lack of knowledge and because of their own school experience. Parents also find it hard to understand that the child can be learning if it is happy and enjoying school. They sometimes seem to think that school should be an unpleasant experience as it was for many of them. Many parents are worried at first by the apparent lack of competition in this system when they think ahead to the highly competitive values of the adult world in society.

The experienced teacher who can provide an interesting and stimulating classroom environment may be satisfied with his or her first efforts but will soon become aware of the need to make day-to-day and even hour-to-hour adjustments. The teacher must be prepared to make the environment adaptable to the demands of the children's interest. There will be some teachers who are unable to make any kind of adjustment towards this way of working and they would be well advised to consider a move to a school where the philosophy is more consistent with their own.

An integrated day will fail completely if the teacher does not provide a rich and stimulating environment. Also, it will fail completely if he or she is not enthusiastic and spontaneous in his or her involvement with the children and the development of their activities.

A real problem exists if the local authority does not understand or co-operate in the organisation of the school.

Special needs children, and especially those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), may not benefit by this approach if they have not been supervised and observed all the time by the teacher.

5. CONCLUSION

The current study explored the integrated day which is implemented to primary schools in the United Kingdom. Integrated curriculum in primary schools brings together different subject matters under a theme based on the assumption that integration rather than segregation, is more relevant to the child's whole experiences and thus, to his overall development. This review suggested that by the introduction or implementation of an integrated day, pupils learn how to gather information and get into the habit of persevering in their work. Their learning can be tailored precisely to their own needs. Additionally, the integrated day provides the children a certain amount of responsibility for their own learning, and to use their own initiative, which is important for personality development. Children in an integrated day seek help and advice from each other and usually select their own foreman, who may be not necessarily the most dominant personality in the class. Also, the pupils seek help from other members of staff, recognising and expertise in certain fields, and demand help from parents also. This flexibility in integrated day gives teachers a chance to stretch the children to their full capacity and at the same time provide for their development as personalities within various social groups. There is

more chance for development without the anxieties of being expected to submit to undue pressures or to a feeling that they may fail or be left behind. However, it has also been stated that an integrated day will fail completely if the teacher does not provide an interesting and stimulating environment or if he or she is not enthusiastic and spontaneous in his or her involvement with the children and the development of their activities. Furthermore, special needs children, especially those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may not benefit from this approach if they are not supervised and observed constantly by the teacher, as they need constant supervision and guidance for learning from the teacher.

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