

Nucleate Settlements and High Rise Flats

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The Warden of the Teachers Centre in Guernsey, where I now live, invited me to speak to some fifty qualified teachers about children up to the age of five. Their interest was roused because the school age is in process of being lowered to four and even in some cases three. What the teachers already knew was unknown to me; and what the educational future for any of us may be, is at present very obscure. However, a good Froebel training directs attention to the immediate environment for points of reference. Guernsey is nine miles by five (if you stretch it a little) and has a population of about fifty thousand residents, with many, many thousands of summer visitors. It is one of a group of islands off the western coast of Normandy, and the tip of a granite mountain which just lifts its wrinkled face above the Atlantic Ocean. The coastline and the inland valleys are most beautiful. The western gales have to be experienced to be believed; but when the sun shines all is forgiven, and it shines a great deal. In one bay at least there are some of the oldest rocks in the world.

A surprising number of dolmens, menhirs and megaliths have still evaded the property developers' bulldozers; surprising, that it, unless one guesses that whoever put up the monuments chose to come here for the quality of the granite. Guernsey granite should be the starting point of what I

thought best to discuss. It would be useless to prepare a lot of facts, which the teachers might already know and which, at the end of a long day, nobody was going to remember. But if I selected some of the many virtues of the nucleate settlements which had raised these monuments, we might set up a yardstick based on man's activity which was thousands or even hundreds of thousands of years older than our present educational system. Whatever the future holds, we could return again and again, to try out in our minds whether each new educational suggestion rang true with what we know of nucleate settlements.

There is no carbon dating in Guernsey yet but experts deduce that Neolithic Man reached Guernsey about 2,500 B.C. Some nucleate settlements were here for thousands of years. But others went farther north, and some of the information about Guernsey and other Channel Islands comes from Icelandic tales. Christianity did not arrive until about 500 A.D. So firmly was Neolithic Man entrenched, that the only way to establish Christian ideas was to build churches beside the menhirs and megaliths, and rename the fountains after Christian saints. The ten parishes of today were more or less established by Neolithic men, and merely renamed by the Christians.

These nucleate settlements clustered round arable land and fountains. Land that could

be used for farming was too precious to use for monuments. The monuments were set up in wastelands. The Guernsey settlements in the high south were for crops; but the land slopes down north to the sea, and here the settlements were for fishermen. The farmers and the fishermen used to meet periodically in a wasteland, to exchange their wares. That area is still called *Lande du Marché*, although the modern market has long since moved to one of the ports.

What did these late stone age people have that might be familiar to us today? They had, of course, boats; and they had tamed the dog; they had seed for farming, though the wooden farm implements have vanished along with the forest from which they cut the wood. Nevertheless, Forest is still the name of the parish where the old trees grew. They had fish; and they also had pigs and chickens which gleaned communally once the harvest was gathered. They had weaving and pottery and a gaiety of colour in design which speaks to us with the authenticity of the cave paintings. Compare the life the neolithic children had with the isolated little children driving their mothers to desperation at the top of high rise flats. Ask small children in a city what their fathers do and most will say, "He goes to The Office", having no idea what an office is, other than a synonym for vanishing by train. The stone age children knew for sure what their parents did because they were there and helping. Moreover, the work areas were surrounded by natural adventure playgrounds. When they left off work, they could rest and play. In these circumstances, the parents would not underestimate the capacities of their children from two years onwards.

One might think that this is about all that we can deduce about nucleate families. But there are other ways of seeking relevant information from those far off times. Occasionally travellers come across small groups of people who have not advanced to the next stage of using fire with metals. These stone age people appear intelligent

enough. Psychologists brought a bright girl from such a group in America to a British university and she obtained a degree — not more than a pass, but nevertheless a degree. Whatever stimulated the brains of some animals and made them increase to far outstrip other creatures in cleverness happened before the stone age. The ways in which the nucleate families tackled the circumstances in which they found themselves are much as we might tackle them, if the pressing of a button left no more than a handful of people still living.

Sociologists and psychologists are now taking a very careful look at nucleate families, as they are living today. Moreover, they are gathering data which startle us into making a much more radical appraisal of our notions of the nature of progress than would have been imaginable at the beginning of the twentieth century. Now we have to equate our style of living with theirs, and the balance is by no means clearly in our favour. With our high rise flats and cloverleaf highways making cities impossible dwelling places, we see all too clearly the trouble we are in. There is a cycle of poverty spiralling down, so that the poor become poorer; and there is a cycle of wealth which spirals up in unsatisfiable neurotic search for security. Security is on a different 'wave-length' from acquisition. Neither ambition nor possession of worldly goods can in themselves bring security or wisdom.

As soon as the first cave paintings were discovered, people realised that there had been a remarkable society much earlier than had been suspected. Long before neolithic man had set up his unbonded stones by arable land and water wells, palaeolithic man had gone high into the mountain caves beside rushing torrents, where migrating herds periodically charged down the valleys below. Because feeding was not a full-time struggle, art reached the breath-taking, magical quality which speaks instantly across thousands of years. For a long time the creation of such art seemed incomprehensible, coming from such "primitive" con-

ditions. Since these archaeological discoveries, many young people — possibly with clearer vision than their elders — have gone off to try to duplicate the imagined simplicity of living. Society calls them drop-outs, and some have come back to think again about simplicity of living. Society has little to be proud of, in the industrialised world it is handing on to them. Our couple of centuries of mechanisation is nothing to the many millenia that the old and new stone ages endured. We have to seek out what activities man found so richly rewarding that he survived in fulfilment for so long. If our education programmes can be based on such activities, the children will be able to mature. Should this seem too formidable a task for our leaders, then it is up to us to find leaders in another way.

In addition to the specialists now carrying out research in the present day nucleate settlements, there are people who were brought up in the neighbourhood of such settlements and heard their legends with the unwinking eyes of enthralled children. Through them we can learn what the granite stone cannot tell, the sounds, the smell of the feasts, the dance and song, the affection and humour. One such is Laurens van der Post, born and reared on his mother's farm in the heart of Bushman country. Indeed, his nurse was a Bushman. So entranced was he by the tales he heard, that he vowed he would seek out the Vanished People, if any were left. In 1958 he published an account of the journey in *The Lost World of the Kalahari*. He found several small groups and, with immense sensitivity, gained their confidence. Most were still living in caves, at least for part of the time, but some had lost touch with the cave people. Game was very short and they had to travel far for what food they could find. Many were in the transition stage between old and new stone age; that is to say, shortage of food had compelled them to come down and they would soon be settling by wells to grow their own food.

With one group van der Post finally felt

sufficiently trusted to show the young adults the pictures that he had brought of cave paintings. They broke out into excited conversation, and told him they had thought the tales told by their elders were the imaginings of old age. When they showed the pictures to the grandparents, the old Bushmen just put their heads down on their arms and sobbed. Against this background, the following extract has particular poignancy. Van der Post was returning to the camp one evening and in his band was a Bushman called Nxou. They were so late that they did not expect to meet any Bushmen about; but they came upon a group of four or five children who had been out seeking food, small though they were.

“. . . on the edge of the Bush, a mile from our camp, we overtook a brave little procession . . . all up to their ears in thorn and grass. A little boy, grubbing stick in hand, led the procession with a bundle full of roots, tubers, caterpillars, and succulent grubs in his hand.

“A small girl, whose name meant ‘Spoor of Gazelle’, followed with a bundle of wild and sun-dried berries and rare groundnuts. She was already clearly a little mother to her companions because, although she followed the boy in front dutifully, she made sure by constant backward glances and affectionate exhortations that the youngest of all, who was in the rear, stayed close to her. He carried a large tortoise in a hand held level with his shoulder, and he was breathless with the conflicting efforts of supporting it and keeping up with his elders.

“Nxou's face when he saw them was instantly warm with affectionate delight. He went on his knees beside them, peered into their bundles, and uttered such sounds of astonishment and appreciation that the children, who clearly loved him dearly, stood shaking with laughter of sheer joy despite their fatigue. When Nxou took up the tortoise he made a great fuss over it and . . . told the little boy that if he gave that to his grandmother she would certainly tell him a bed-time story that would last well into

the night”.

It will not surprise us to hear from van der Post that these people loved games. They marked a kind of chequers on the sand and they played a kind of badminton with a pinion feather attached to a piece of leather. They told stories and danced and sang songs of different kinds. Pottery would have been too heavy to carry in their journeying lives. Had they some luminous felicity with children, that they could get chuckling laughter out of exhausted little bodies which had been on adult work? Or have we crowded ourselves so close and made ourselves so lonely in our self-contained homes, that frustrated beyond endurance we hit out at the children as well as at everything else? The Bushmen said in puzzled tones, “You don’t mean to say that you go out and kill men you have never even seen!”

In the words of van der Post, members of Bushmen nucleate settlements are ‘shy breeders’. This is true of stone age peoples in other parts of the world. They just do not have many children. Where van der Post did catch sight of a young mother feeding an infant, she looked so lovely breast-feeding it that he could almost see the halo about her head. May be our overwhelming conurbations have upset our metabolism and made us over-fertile; may be, when some people accuse other races of breeding too fast this is just a projection of our unconscious realisation that city life makes all of us unbearably fertile. In that case, family planning should be seen as a healthy corrective for disadvantaged civilisation.

At the beginning of the twentieth century educationalists saw that stone age people might help children in some way. So they printed books about those far off times and schools could have fifty or sixty copies to ‘do stone age history’ with a class. Now we know that what children have to do is discover about the world by working in the age-old ways of stone age man. This covers growing crops for food (mustard and cress?), flowers for beauty, and tending domesticated

animals (if only hamsters); it also covers the world of art and craft, with all its brilliant forming of media to colour and design; and that other world of movement, dance and music. The Bushmen apparently classed music as high as food and water and fire. They made their own instruments and, not knowing the drum, beat the rhythm by explosive mouth sounds within semi-cupped hands. Now we begin to see how knowledge of the way of life of the earlier settlements might serve as a yardstick against which to measure innovations in educational work. It is as if we had to try out in our minds innovations by asking ourselves, “Is this in accord with stone age activity? If so, it is bound to awaken the children’s enthusiasm to learn more about their world. If not, think again”. Such thinking does not just apply to art. Stonehenge was a precision instrument for record of the sun. And so we come to the final point.

The ancient cultures groomed their leaders very carefully. Today, with our thinking about equality in a muddle, we have tended to leave leadership to self-appointed over ambitious people. For the sake of the grandchildren of the children now in our primary schools, we must now do better than that. We are unable to imagine in detail the decisions they will have to take; but we do know how to foster balanced development. So what we have to find out immediately is how to select potential leaders and how best to prepare them. Nobody should lead who does not know the humility of obeying. Wise leadership is for the benefit of all. The decisions of such leaders will have to be about what man at present does not know how to control: the poverty and the wealth cycles, the arms race with its *reductio ad absurdum* bid for security; and on the positive side, how to develop the inseparable twin-aspects of living which we call art and science.

L’auteur a été invité à prendre la parole devant un auditoire d’enseignants dans l’île de Guernesey (où elle réside actuellement). Comme cette île abonde en

vestiges néolithiques, elle a comparé la cellule tribale d'alors avec les immeubles de grande hauteur pour l'éducation des enfants. Elle considère que les modes d'apprentissage qui, durant des centaines de milliers d'années, donnèrent de bons résultats à l'âge de pierre, reposaient sur des activités dont on pourrait encore aujourd'hui s'inspirer dans l'éducation des enfants modernes. A cause des importantes décisions que les responsables auront à prendre pour régler les problèmes des décennies qui vont suivre, il est impératif que nous mettions au point de meilleurs critères de sélection et formation de ces responsables.

Se invitó a la autora a que se dirigiera a un grupo de profesoras en Guernsey, donde ahora vive. Como esta isla posee restos neolíticos, comparó las colonias en núcleos con los pisos de gran altura, en lo relativo a la educación de niños de corta edad. La conclusión es la de que las condiciones que afectaban a las edades de piedra vieja y nueva durante cientos de miles de años fueron logradas por actividades que deben constituir una forma de aprendizaje para los niños de hoy en día. Debido a las importantes decisiones que un dirigente tiene que tomar, es necesario que desarrollemos mejores criterios para la selección y preparación de futuros dirigentes, para los problemas de las décadas futuras.

Recent Publications

A new journal entitled *Child Care, Health and Development*, has now joined the ranks of periodicals relating to care of children. Barry Jones, writing in the editorial to Vol. 1, 1, outlines the programme as one of publishing practical articles on assessment and the delivery of integrated programmes of care to children. Although inevitably many of these articles will be about the care of children with handicaps, it is concerned with all children, whether handicapped or not. Articles, not only reporting original research but also expressing informed opinion, will be welcome. Queries to Blackwell Scientific Publications Ltd., Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0EL, England.

L'Éducation Préscolaire. Bibliographie commentée publiée par le Bureau International de l'Éducation, (Documentation et information pédagogiques) 48—année, no 192, 3^{ème} trimestre 1974.

A part un court article sur un projet destiné à répondre aux besoins d'information des enseignants de l'enfance inadaptée, l'ensemble du livre est consacré à l'éducation préscolaire, l'auteur présente en quelques pages quelques uns des problèmes de l'éducation préscolaire actuelle. La bibliographie commentée est ensuite divisée en 5 rubriques principales: 1) les aspects biologiques, psychologiques et sociaux; 2) aspects pédagogiques généraux; 3) Aspects didactiques; 4) Problèmes posés par les enfants sortant du cadre normal; 5) Le rôle des adultes.

Malgré ses défauts et ses insuffisances cette bibliographie de près de 400 titres constitue un bilan des travaux et recherches dans le domaine de l'éducation préscolaire. Elle constitue un instrument de travail pour les chercheurs et les éducateurs de type nouveau dont l'éducation préscolaire a tant besoin.

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Question/Réponse sur l'École Maternelle. 24 16 160p. Coll. Sciences d. l'Éducation, 1974, Ed. ESF. F. ISBN 2-7101 0064 9.

Préparé par une équipe de directrices d'écoles maternelles, cet ouvrage répond, dans une certaine mesure, aux questions les plus épineuses que quelques institutrices et directrices se sont amenées à se poser dans leur pratique quotidienne, tant sur la forme d'éducation dispensée à l'enfant, d'âge préscolaire, que sur les méthodes et techniques d'apprentissage.

Dans la première partie, consacrée aux contenus ont été analysés entre autres, des sujets tels que l'utilité de la sieste, l'expression corporelle et l'apprentissage de l'art plastique. Les sujets concernant le refus ou l'exploitation d'une culture populaire actuelle et l'existence d'une éducation sexuelle à l'école maternelle sont d'un intérêt particulier et suscitent la réflexion.

La deuxième partie met en évidence l'importance des relations maître-élève, maître-parent et la question concernant le manque total d'éducateur homme au niveau préscolaire.

Cet ouvrage ouvre de nouveaux sentiers de réflexion sur le besoin de l'enfant d'âge scolaire et l'insuffisance des possibilités mises à sa disposition pour son plein épanouissement. Il sera tel qu'il se présente, un instrument utile à l'éducateur et une source d'informations valables aux parents et à tous ceux qui s'intéressent à l'éducation préscolaire.

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